

# Planning a Conference

## Brief

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The first step is usually to establish a memorable, appropriate theme for an upcoming conference, along with concepts for conference opening and closing videos, suggestions for guest speakers and ideas for incorporating and blending the theme into team presentations for continuity.

You want to reinforce the key message of the conference thru all support and presentation material.

An experienced conference producer should be able to **provide a detailed production timeline starting at least 3 months out from conference to ensure smooth, stress-free, production and allocation of resources.**

## Theme

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The sky's the limit really and can take in many aspects from budget to topicality. It usually comes from the CEO's key focus for the coming year and incorporates ideas of **energy, the power of many, and empowering people to build on success.**

Suggestions-

"Moulin Rouge"- themes: passion overcoming obstacles, energy, creativity

Legends (possibly Maori)- themes: inspirational stories, power, integrity

Lord of the Rings-: fellowship, belief, (could be expensive and done to death by now, but if done well...)

Exploration- how the values and focus of great pioneers and explorers can inspire us in our everyday life

...etc.

## Presentation

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Some things to consider (courtesy of Celebrity Speakers and Screentime):

- Make sure this event includes some fun! Comedy or humour, particularly during the day, helps to break up a heavy programme.
- A full day of keynote (plenary) speeches is not conducive to sustained concentration. I presume you aim to include some interactive workshop sessions, or a panel discussion to keep delegates stimulated and interested.
- Session breakers to help delegates maintain focus- simple, humorous or thought provoking under-five-minute spots to restore energy and concentration is all it takes.
- Be innovative in the ways you deliver information. Would you consider an **interview format**, instead of yet another presentation? Perhaps an MC, or confident, extroverted team member (no shortage of those I'm sure!) to have informal 'chats' on stage with key support office personnel.
- Setting up an internet/ intranet site where delegates can access information prior to conference, and give feedback both during and after your event.
- Finally, what systems are in place to ensure that the rest of your company who aren't at the conference get as much of the conference message as their managers?

A useful method is to send out a review of the conference on video, featuring the opening and closing theme videos, *short* key portions of presentations, and graphical demonstrations of the key messages. The GM can record a simple, brief, personal introduction/ opening to these partners, from the venue directly after the conference finishes.

## Content suggestions

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**Opening video:** Establishes the conference theme and message: puts the delegates in the correct mind-frame. Includes images conveying the theme, preferably featuring team members in action.

**Closing video:** Reinforces the message of the conference, possibly recounting conference highlights in a memorable and emotional farewell to the attendees. A successful and popular concept is to video the conference and edit key messages and images into a montage celebrating the event. Feel-good.

*A good conference producer should be able to suggest a selection of appropriate theme songs.*

**Session Breakers:** Played at the beginning of session and before breaks. These help to focus the audience on the upcoming presentation or to reinforce/ encapsulate the key message of that session before going to a break.

***Often humorous, the benefit of them to your team is that they keep the audience in a good mood, get their attention quickly (always tricky after a break) and aid good retention of key messages.***

One suggestion is to use vox-pops from customers about issues to be discussed in the upcoming session followed by opinions from conference attendees on the same issues to see how close they are.

Another is to have **humorous, pre-recorded sketches parodying well know film scenes featuring** , if you were, say, Starbucks, coffee or coffee drinkers but with a nod at the message of the upcoming session ("When Harry Met Sally"- you know the scene..., "Pulp Fiction"- discussing how coffee's served in France..., "Annie Hall"- Woody Allen's take on what a good stiff coffee can lead to...; for Woolworths it might be scenes from "Clerks" or movie scenes set in supermarkets; or for a vehicle manufacturer- scenes of competitor's cars crashing in car chases, etc).

With all of the aforementioned suggestions be aware that you have to meet copyright obligations for using existing music or images. This means applying for the rights to the owner, or, more typically thru a regional music/ image clearing house such as APRA or AMCOS.

## Keeping Continuity of Theme Throughout Presentations

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A successful and effective device is to provide all presenters with PowerPoint backgrounds, fonts and templates which follow the conference theme- often going as far as getting presenters to submit there visual support content to the production company to compile, ensuring continuity.

An experience conference producer can design themed backgrounds, looped animations to fill breaks in grafix (like slowly rotating star fields for a Space theme for instance), incorporate video clips into PowerPoint, and underscore or punctuate presentations with music or soundtracks.

This task is best be handled by a dedicated presentation support person, rehearsing with the key presenters the day before the conference starts on dedicated equipment.

All these things help bring even the driest presentation to life!

## Presentation

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There are also major benefits in using a **teleprompting system** to aid presentation delivery, including. A teleprompter (often called a 'presidential display' when used for live presentations) displays the speech on small plates of reflective glass positioned on stands in front of the speaker. Only the speaker can see the words as they scroll up the screen in time with their delivery.

There are a number of benefits to this widely-used presentation tool:

Auxiliary Memory - A presenter needn't learn their lengthy speeches verbatim. The right words or cues will always be with the presenter at the right time. This **aids flowing speech, and therefore clear communication with the audience.**

Eye Contact - A presenter is able to **maintain eye contact with the audience**, whether the audience is a theatre or a video camera. With paper-based speeches, audiences can often spend a good proportion of the presentation looking at the top of a speaker's head!

Clean Edits - Speeches are often edited just before the presentation. Distracting, scribbled out lines and replaced words don't appear on the computer-driven equipment. The speaker only sees what's meant to be said.

Multiple View Zones - Say a presenter needs to look away from the teleprompter for a lengthy period, to narrate a Microsoft PowerPoint™ illustration projected on a screen. Daisy-chaining another reflector or monitor to an alternate view zone is no problem. The speaker can turn away from a primary teleprompter to read off a secondary prompt in his view line, following the same script flawlessly.

Saves Time - Having speeches or presentations written out, approved, rehearsed and timed in advance means that there's much less chance of presentations going overtime due to ad-libbing- the benefit being that **seminars and conferences can run to schedule.**

Professional Image - With the teleconferencing system lecterns and reading easels needn't feature on stage. This provides clear view lines to the speaker for audience members close to the stage and, combined with common radio mic technology, allows a certain degree of freedom from a spot on the floor. **The benefit to the conference is more animated deliveries and therefore more engaging presentations.** It also looks more professional and cutting edge.

Helpful advice - Prompt Service isn't just equipment. Always with a Prompt Service hire, you get a friendly and knowledgeable operator who can offer tips and coaching on-the-job, should you ask for it.

### **Presentation Training**

An experienced teleprompting service should also be able to give you sage advice on basic presentation, but will last-minute tips assist you effectively? It may pay to invest in training seminars on how to best use a teleprompter, including:

- optimising your performance
- monitoring and reviewing your own performance
- Voice/ Delivery training
- basic scripting and editing
- stage presence

*...and associated advice on delivering your message with maximum impact!*

These seminars are about breaking down anxiety and becoming familiar with stage or video environments. **Presenters go from nervous, uncomfortable speakers to commanding presenters in these sessions.**

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