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You've Found the Right Speaker: Now Fill the Room!

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Chances are, the reason most of our members renew their dues each year is because they can't afford not to. Associations provide the networking and educational tools people need to be successful, and much of this dynamic takes place at the meetings.

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Tantalizing Titles

Get off to a strong start by assuring the session has a catchy title, advises Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) Chris Clarke-Epstein. "Start with a short, spiffy and clever title followed by a subtitle that explains the benefit of the session."

Successful brochures contain titles that capture attention but also immediately answer the question, "so what?" The subtitle should contain phrases such as "how to," "10 tips," "master five steps," etc. For example, here is a title from one of Clarke-Epstein's presentations: *Whatever Happened to Ward, June, Wally and the Beave? Learn How to Manage Change Creatively.*

Most importantly, make sure the session matches the description. "Hold speakers responsible for delivering what they promise," says Clarke-Epstein.

Work Your Web Site and Create a Buzz with E-Mail

Familiarity breeds attendance, and your association's Web site is a great tool to introduce your speaker to your potential audience. NSA member Jeff Blackman, JD, CSP, offers the following tips to help you make the most of your association's technologies.

Post a detailed description of the session and the speaker on your site. Photos of the speaker in action are a good addition. You can also ask your speaker to provide you with audio or video excerpts from a previous presentation to promote the program before the event. Be sure to provide your members with a link from your site to the speaker's Web site. "Members can learn more about the speaker or obtain additional content before and after the program."

When your event is over, Blackman also suggests posting audio or video excerpts from the session to reinforce the program's key points and educate members who were unable to attend.

If your association has an online book or tape store, feature your speaker's materials prior to the presentation. If you have a chat room or bulletin board, consider slating some time for your members to chat with your presenter. A professional



speaker will use this opportunity to get to know your member's concerns and questions and will customize his or her speech accordingly. Your members will appreciate the opportunity to learn and participate.

E-mail is another easy and inexpensive way to promote your event and your speaker. Use it to remind your members to register. Send them links to information and online registration forms. Generate a pre-program buzz by sending an e-mail questionnaire to your members. The responses should go to the speaker, who can reveal the findings during the presentation. Add a personal touch by having the presenter send a "welcome" message to each of your attendees.

Word of Mouth

One of the best ways to promote your speaker is to get other members talking about them, according to professional speaker and former Olympian Vincent Poscente. Find out where your speaker is going to be presenting between the time when you hire them and when they will be presenting for your group. Invite members of your board of directors or event committee to see the presentation when your speaker is in their city.

Consider having the speaker address your chapters. Often, a speaker will negotiate fees when you book them for a number of presentations. Chapter newsletter editors often need additional material for their newsletters, so look into submitting an article on or from your presenter. Send them flyers to distribute at local meetings. Chapters are often the heart of an association, so don't overlook their potential to spread the word about your presenter.

The Write Stuff

Chances are your presenter has written many articles on the subject at hand. You can also ask the speaker to craft a customized article for your group or have a member of your staff conduct an interview. Not only do these articles make a great addition to your association's publication, they might also be a good fit for the publications of other industry-related associations you are building relationships with. Provide links to the articles on your Web site as well. This builds the speaker's credibility and offers value-added information for your members.

If your speaker is published, use the speaker's book to build excitement for the presentation. You can give attendees the book when they register. For added panache, have a book waiting to greet members in their hotel room along with a welcome letter from your president. "Books can even be personalized...depending on the size of the group," says Blackman.

The Media: Get Ready

Gather everything you need to promote your speaker to the media. Request that the speaker provide you with photos. They can be black & white or color, either head shots or action shots. Have the photo scanned and saved as a TIFF file. For Web publishing, 72 dots per inch will be fine. For print, save the image at 300 dpi.

The speaker should also provide you with a short biography and a brief write-up on the program including key points, what the attendees will learn and why he or she is qualified to speak on the topic.



Prior to the event, send a short news release to the calendar editors at local daily newspapers and industry-related publications. Invite key editors to attend the event and make sure they get a copy of the program and other promotional materials. Contact local print and broadcast media to arrange interviews for your speaker and your key association leaders.

The Media: Get Set

Find out when your speaker is going to arrive and when they are available for interviews. Keep a close eye on the news the week of your event. Is there a way to tie your speaker's expertise into a current news peg? For instance, if your speaker's area of expertise is technology, perhaps they can talk about the latest hacking scandal. If you want local media to cover the speech, you must determine the news angle and pitch it hard. Think about what events would generate good photos or visuals for television cameras. Make follow-up calls to make sure the journalists have the information you sent them. Find out if the speaker has a publicist or PR firm and if so, partner with them on generating publicity. You want to get exposure for your association as well as the event, so give your speaker some short key messages to prepare them to discuss your group.

The Media: Go!

On the day of the event, messenger packages to key media. Write a media alert telling them who, what, when, where and, most importantly, why their audience needs to know about your event and your speaker. Add some goodies such as the speaker's book, a video, a program and your association's press kit and stuff it all in an attractive portfolio, preferably one with your association's logo.

Finally, be prepared for the media when they arrive on site. Have one of your staff or a trusted volunteer free to squire them around. Introduce them to the subjects they need for interviews. Have a good place in mind to conduct the interviews and take photos—try to get your association's name or logo in the background.

The Party's Over

Professional speakers know that a program is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process. They will often offer to send an e-mail to attendees with some value-added links to additional information. Your members should be able to benefit from the presentation long after it is over, and your association should continue to gain exposure as well. Look for anecdotes from your members about how they were touched or motivated by the session. How do they plan to implement what they have learned? Select the best photos and combine them with after-the-event news releases for ongoing exposure.

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