

The Rules of Engagement

Tapping into your attendees' emotions is key to engaging them, *written by* **GAYLE DUNCAN & ALISSA HURLEY**

Alissa and I are a decade apart in ages, but we both share the memory of a similar experience. Bet you do, too. Remember being in high school? It's a warm day, the window is open and your mind is wandering. The teacher is droning on, asking questions and getting an occasional grunt in reply. From the corner of your eye you watch the hands on the clock tick off the minutes...

So what does this have to do with engagement marketing? Nothing really, except reminding you how it feels *not* to be engaged.

We all know what it feels like to be completely engaged in an event or discussion. Our energy level is up, our senses are active, our attention dial is switched to "alert" and our minds are racing — maybe even our hearts. We want to contribute. We want to help shape the experience and we want to share our thoughts with others. The difference is as physiological as it is psychological. It's compelling. It's contagious.

Let's bring that feeling into the context of marketing. Engagement marketing is about creating opportunities for audiences to achieve that heightened state, to associate it with your clients' brands, and to equate the satisfaction they get from that act to the brand itself. Contrast that to its predecessor, experiential marketing, which is the equivalent of the high-school example above. The actions are passive: heads nodding to questions, smile-sheet surveys completed during the event, spin the wheel to win a prize and we feel as though we can check off the "to do" list that we have created an interaction with our audience. Yet, nothing meaningful has actually occurred.

Engagement marketing offers an opportunity that affects both the brand and the participant. At Maritz, we define engagement marketing as "engaging your audiences to interact with your brand through experiences they shape and share." For us, that means understanding, enabling and motivating the human

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dimension of business. Your participants are human beings, after all; while they are rationally motivated, they are influenced even more by their emotions. If you can emotionally engage them, then you can affect their perceptions and beliefs. And if you can affect their perceptions, you can influence their behaviour or performance.

So now let's bring that thinking into the context of meetings and events. Whether events are required for information sharing or celebrating, the ability to achieve your goals depends on engaging your audience.

To accomplish this, you need to know your participants and create an experience that will make them feel, think or do what you need them to do — not just in the meeting room, but in the long term. If they can help shape that experience, it will affect them emotionally. And if you can affect their emotions, you are more likely to

alter their perception or their behaviour. So engagement marketing is really about bringing a lot more psychology into your events.

How? Well, event logistics, for one: the registration process needs to be easy, the venue needs to be the right temperature, the seats need to be comfortable, the chicken not too rubbery. Not to diminish the importance of these elements, but they are just table-stakes. To truly engage your audience and give them things they'll talk about with their peers, you need to go much deeper.

The good news is that there are endless opportunities to engage your audience — pre-, during and post-event. At our IncentiveWorks session, we'll give you some excellent ideas on how to engage your audience to shape and share throughout the whole life cycle of your event. @

— Gayle Duncan is vice-president, engagement marketing, for Maritz Canada and Alissa Hurley is director, events. Together, Gayle and Alissa will be presenting at IncentiveWorks. E-mail: gayle.duncan@maritz.com and alissa.hurley@maritz.com.

See Gayle & Alissa speak at IncentiveWorks

WHAT

Engaging the Human Dimension

WHEN August 17; 8:30am - 10:15am

WHERE Metro Toronto Convention Centre, North Building