



Recognizing Your Events' Personalities to Increase Their Value to Your Firm

By Elyse Stoner



Recently, I attended a virtual event hosted by one of my favorite referral partners, an organization where I've met numerous potential clients and collaborators. Shortly after logging in, I began networking, surveying the participant list to see who was there and private messaging them to say hello. But about 10 minutes into the presentation, I found myself looking at the clock, wondering how long I needed to stay before I could gracefully log off to get back to business. Why? Two initial reasons: First, while it is imperative that a presenter build rapport and a solid base of expertise for the audience, this speaker spent too much time and provided too many examples ("Here's a picture of me and X celebrity").

Second, once the presenter finally arrived at the true presentation content, I discovered I wasn't the right audience. The content didn't provide value to me. Have you ever experienced this? More importantly, has this happened to any of your clients or referral partners (professionals in other fields who send business your way) on one of your virtual events?

"I don't hold events, especially not now," you say? Counselor, I beg to differ. According to a commonwealth press release earlier this year, an event is defined as "... a temporary grouping of individuals for defined purposes, that takes place over a limited time frame, such as hours or days."



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Nowhere in this (or in the Merriam-Webster dictionary) definition does venue or purpose come into play. So if you host a webinar, bring colleagues together to discuss a pressing topic or hold a staff meeting, you are producing an event. Furthermore, when you view each of these events as a moment to engage, connect, educate or motivate your audience, are you doing all you can to fully maximize the opportunity?

There are countless ways to maximize these opportunities, but here we'll talk about

event personality. Successful events should have a foundational purpose — a personality, if you will. When was the last time you took a personality test? According to a blog posted by executive search firm Carrhure, four elements that personality tests can reveal include:

- They help you identify your strengths.
- They help you understand your weaknesses.
- They help you adapt to the environment you are in.
- They help you find new approaches to your work.

Subsequently, by understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your events' personality and through exploring approaches and environments that strengthen your audience connection, you can increase their impact and maximize their power.

According to research from Harvard Business Review Analytics Services, 52% of survey respondents say event marketing drives more business value than other marketing channels. (<https://bit.ly/2M9fNxb>). I believe that effectiveness relies on producing the "right" event for the desired outcome. You must identify what type of event you need to produce to reach your stated goals, which is why it's important to understand event personalities. I propose that most events in their natural state fit into four overarching categories:

1 Connecting

Connecting events are those that bring together people with similar interests, which can include team-building, networking and alumni events. The desired outcome is to position your organization as the one that brings together and supports this activity.

2 Educating

Educating events are those whose purpose is to teach attendees about a specific topic. In a legal setting, they can be CLE programs or information sessions for current or potential clients on a new regulation or upcoming legislation.

3 Celebrating

Celebrating events are the ones with a simple message of thank you; Thank you for your business, thank you for your referrals, thank you for your dedication to our firm.

4 Motivating

Motivating events can look a lot like educational or connecting events, but their real goal is to motivate attendees to take an immediate action. Think about most fundraising events: You educate attendees about the organization and you ask for a donation while everyone is still in the room.

It isn't always easy to identify your events' personality. Some appear pretty straight-

forward, while others don't. Just like people, events can often fit into multiple categories. Your webinar can educate and connect, and your fundraiser can educate and motivate, right? That's why it's critical to identify the innate tendency of your event and understand the "why" of your event. Think about it in Myers-Briggs Type Indicator terminology: "E" stands for extrovert and "I" stands for introvert. An "I" is energized by small groups and being alone, but can also be an eloquent public speaker with no fear of speaking to hundreds of people (an unusual "I" attribute). So, does that mean that an "I" is now an "E"? No, as the website 16personalities.com says, we all have innate tendencies (like being an introvert), but we are constantly influenced by envi-

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ronmental factors (we are in a leadership role and need to speak to a crowd). Putting this into event personality terms, when you understand your event's true "why," you can see your event's innate tendency and then recognize what environmental influences affect it. Environmental influences can enhance or detract from the marketing strength of your events. Influences that dilute your message can include:

- Casting too wide of an invitation list net
- Assuming attendees know how to access your event
- Providing an inaccurate event description in your communications.

All of which often result in confused and disillusioned attendees who wonder why they attended or logged on in the first place.

So what does an event that embraces its personality look like? Was it a successful event? Remember, defining a "successful" event must be based on your strategic goals. Here are two examples of events that achieved their event personality goals:

The Pennsylvania Bar Association Solo and Small Firm Section has been hosting monthly presentations, whose goal, according to Section Chair Jennifer Ellis, is, "Education to help lawyers with their firms during these unprecedented times." Recently, they hosted a presentation on the intricacies of the Zoom videoconferencing platform. The event was successful because it educated attendees and it met the goal of providing useful and practical information to the section membership so that they can perform the daily duties required to keep their law firms operating.



With SMART goals, you can strategically plan, market and produce your event.

In pre-COVID times, I coproduced a fundraising campaign kickoff luncheon event whose event personality goal was motivational: motivating attendees to donate to the construction fund for an independent school for autistic children. Through compelling storytelling, a musical performance by a student group and a high-profile guest speaker who shared her own experiences as the parent of an autistic child, we exceeded the client's financial, attendance and timeframe goals (it was important to the client that this lunchtime event not exceed 70 minutes).

When you take the time to understand your event's personality, you get a clearer vision upon which to build SMART goals. With these Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant and Time-based goals, you can strategically plan, market and produce

your event, effectively communicating with and engaging your attendees so that no one is wondering how long they need to stay before they stage a graceful exit and, in turn, maximizing the event's usefulness to you and your firm. ♪

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