

# SOCIAL MEDIA FOR EVENTS 2010

7 EVENT EXPERTS WEIGH IN ON THE YEAR AHEAD OF US



REDDY2SPARK



### A time of Change

For those of us who have been involved in social media for the past few years, we have witnessed a true awakening. 2009 was a year where businesses got serious about tapping into the power of social media for events.

We saw an upswing of Facebook fan pages, Twitter walls, unconferences, Tweetups, hashtags and good 'ol fashion conversations online.

2010 harkens a New Year of continued evolution. A time where business professionals focus on the strategy behind social media and more importantly the cultural shifts that need to happen for it to survive and thrive within the organizations that plan events.

This shift was at the heart of this book. My goal was to facilitate a collaborative eBook with insights from event professionals who have been true practitioners in the art of social media. My challenge to the team was simple: **Provide forward-looking insights & guidance on how event planners should evolve their thinking for the future of social media in events.**

I'm delighted with results. Although each expert has brought their own perspectives, threaded throughout the book is the theme of change. I hope that as you read through you get inspired.

We welcome your feedback & encourage you to share your thoughts and opinions on our respective blogs or via Twitter (hashtag #eventprofs).

Here's to a year of positive change!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lara".

## MEET THE EXPERTS

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## CHANGING THE GAME FOREVER BY JESSICA L. LEVIN, CMP

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Companies and associations spend a lot of time, money and effort planning events. Back in the day, the tremendous amount of planning that went into an event was all to ensure that when an attendee arrived at the meeting, conference, seminar, or party that they had the perfect experience. Hundreds and thousands of dollars were spent printing invitations trying to convince

prospective attendees to show up.

With the infusion of email and the internet into our lives, we were able to reach attendees with email blasts sending them to our websites with registration information. However, all of the communication was one-way. Event organizers pushed their message out. People had to wait to communicate with fellow conference goers and chatting with scheduled speakers was unheard of. Social media has changed all of this. Events now begin long before “show time” and communication is not only controlled by the event hosts, but by many parties.

Social media is the answer to the prayers of planners that are looking for unique and creative way to enhance engagement. It is the solution to “talking-head syndrome” that has long plagued the meetings profession. It gives a new voice to participants and allows for new dimensions of communication. It enhances learning and knowledge retention. It creates new relationships – connections that are enabled long before someone steps foot on a plane or even completes the registration process. Social media gives new meaning to the term: live event.

Three categories help to articulate the impact that social media can have on

event. These are: **promotion, engagement and legacy.**

**Promotion.** Whether it’s Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn or even a blog, social media helps to spread our message. More important, it has given us the ability to empower others to spread the word on our behalf. We are no longer reliant on our own databases for marketing communications, but we now have exponential networks working to promote events. Not only can online tools help in initial communication, but can be valuable in sharing information about things such as registration deadlines, onsite tips such as where meals are being held and what time shuttle buses are running. While there is still progress to be made to get everyone on every social network, many people are embracing a least one of the major tools.

**Engagement.** Being a first-time attendee and walking into a room of people that you don’t know can be traumatic. However, introducing yourself on a social media site, like Twitter, for example, is much less scary. The ability for people to connect with each other online, prior to an event, can eliminate the awkward scene of walking into a cocktail reception without a friend in the room. With the pre-event connection, attendees now have the ability to create relationships that are strengthened through face-to-face meetings.

Of course, connections that are made with an event as a catalyst do not necessarily have to be between two people that are both attending the function. A Twitter hashtag, for example, can connect people that are both interested in the content of an event, even if one or both of the people cannot attend. This platform enables the individuals to discuss relevant content and share information before, during and after the event – even if they never meet in person. Whether they are commenting on the content, debating a talking point or sharing their own expertise, using social media as a tool connected to an

## CHANGING THE GAME FOREVER (CONT)

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event has the ability to create a greater learning experience and enhanced level of engagement for anyone that is participating in a virtual discussion.

Engagement does not have to be limited to attendees. We now have the ability to connect with speakers, read their blogs, ask questions and help refine the information that they will be sharing during their scheduled presentation. With large audiences, it can be difficult to ask speakers questions and get solid, detailed responses. Using social media, attendees can now ask questions by texting or through Twitter. Speakers may choose to respond during a session or perhaps on a follow-up blog post. Social media creates an environment for experts to share their expertise long after their presentation ends.

Technology has also given us another gift. We now have the ability to create both virtual and hybrid events providing the opportunity for people that could attend in person to participate. Through back-channels and chat features, those at home are no longer attending in silence. Today, someone can attend a session with both live and virtual attendees and they can comment and interact with all attendees through an online platform. This creates an entirely new dynamic for planners, speakers and attendees.

**Legacy.** In the old days, attendees packed their bags and flew home or got in their cars and drove back to their offices. Once they left, they went back to work, to busy schedules, often remembering only tidbits of what was discussed at the educational sessions that they just attended. Social media has changed that. Now, an attendee can continue a conversation on their Blackberry at the airport, participate in a post-event chat and have a more interactive follow-up relationship with people that they met during the event. Whether it is as simple as adding a new contact to LinkedIn or writing a blog post about a session that they attended, social media has created platforms for continued learning and has made it easier to stay in touch.

Social media in events is not without challenges. Many people still resist new technology and new and different ways of learning. Some things to consider:

- ▶ Buy-in from management to use new technology is critical to success.
- ▶ Strategic planning of all social media tools is a must. Your strategy should align with the goals and objectives of the event.
- ▶ Educating attendees on how to optimize the new resources that are available helps increase participation and engagement.



***2010 will be an interesting and exciting year as social media continues to immerse itself into the events world. Planners will be charged with efficiently and effectively incorporating new tools into their programs to enhance the attendee experience. But don't worry planners, just when we think that we have it all figured out, a new game-changing tool comes into play."***

## A MISSION TO KILL THE GENERAL SESSION BY RYAN HANSON

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“*I am on a mission to single-handedly destroy the General Session*”



Ok, ok so I will not exactly be able to eradicate General Sessions from meetings all on my own. And, yes, General Session will still go on at meetings for years and decades to come. Just as breakout sessions and auxiliary events will continue to happen, because regardless of the immense growth and wealth of resources technology continues to churn out to help us meet better, accomplish more (or at least be busier), human beings are fundamentally social creatures and will always seek out opportunities to get together. The “live” event will never die. It is just going to change.

It is time to re-think the meeting room. Every General Session I have ever attended has been composed of basically the same things: A stage. Lots of chairs seated theatre style. A content expert is put on stage to amuse and inspire me. PowerPoint is used (Ugh.). There is loud music or entertainment, which often isn't related, but meant to pump me up. I can see at least one of the following: a water bottle, a white towel, a Boston Fern. Now and again, some session try to switch things up, seating us at tables or doing the session in the round, but the point is always the same: content expert on stage spewing forth information to a generally passive audience.

Now while this is not too unlike my experiences learning in school to this model, is this really the way people interact or engage with one another? No, its not. I

was sitting in a session led by Gen-Y expert Peter Sheahan not long ago and he used an example which had me thinking: Think about the top 10 websites people use. Throw out Google – it's a search engine for how you access the internet. List them. Facebook-Twitter-YouTube-Wikipedia-Ebay-Amazon tops the list. What is similar about all these sites? They are each platforms to allow people to engage.

And how right was he! These sites, dominated by Social Media, have something to teach all event pros. These sites do not have content experts – they rely on their audiences for the content. They simply provide a platform that facilitates consumer interactions in a marketplace. The analogy to events was simple: switch the platform for the stage, the marketplace for the event space and the consumers for your audience. **Instead of speaking at the audience, our task is to facilitate a dialogue among them.** Why shouldn't events realize this model?

At BeEvents, we believe whole-heartedly in the notion that the purpose of event design is to facilitate that conversation. The growth in our industry is a reversal of the planning the process from task-driven planning to strategy-driven planning. It is not about finding the right color linen, booking the right entertainment, or figuring out the perfect way to process registrations and distribute gifts. And at the same time is it exactly about picking the right color linen, great entertainment and facilitating a smooth registration process. But the difference lies in knowing and understanding why you are doing it.

Far too often the planning process is thought of as:

- ▶ **Step 1:** We're Having a Meeting
- ▶ **Step 2:** Need to pick a Location and Theme

## A MISSION TO KILL THE GENERAL SESSION (CONT)

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- ▶ **Step 3:** Complete all the to-do lists, checklists, master task sheets, forms, contracts, vendors, obligations, negotiations, arbitrations, and many other ‘...tions’, until we collapse post event with a stack of evaluations that really tell us nothing, hopefully a cold meal which was left in the warmer, maybe a pat on the back from our boss or the corporate executive and tomorrow we get up and do it all again.

But how often is Step 1 preempted with the question of “Why are we meeting in the first place?” It is a question of great functional importance as budgets and staff have been cut and new technologies and virtual solutions present themselves as “cost-saving” measures. We need to question why in order to best understand what it is we are trying to accomplish (and, by default, what it is we are therefore seeking to measure to evaluate the event, its success and ROI). It is not that the logistical duties of effectively planning and producing a meeting and event are not relevant – they are critical. But first we must understand what the purpose of the project is in order to do those tasks effectively.

This is why strategy matters. The ability of an organization or an event team to effectively articulate its value proposition alongside its brand and goals and objectives, with without doubt simply produce better meetings and events. It is this organization that understands how to mix the virtual experience with the live experience in order to create learning and behavioral change (is that not the function of the meeting or incentive program, to educate and change behavior). It is this group who understands that the best spend of an event budget is on the items that most directly will cast and create the experience necessary to meet the learning objectives. This group knows that the color of the carpet or the linens does not matter in and of itself because it is pretty or because it is ugly. They matter instead because they are contributors to effectiveness of the audience’s experience.

And that is the real nugget. As event professionals we have to come into an awareness that the experience of a meeting or an event is not in its collateral or the speeches from the stage or even in the food and yet they all matter. It is like crafting a really good stage play or a movie. No actor is more important than the cast. It is the ensemble playing together which find the real notes of genius buried in the words on the page.

The meaning is in the message and the message is communicated in the experience. The lesson of Social Media is that it offers environment in which communities of people can engage in conversation. Meetings and events are intended to do the same, with a bit of shaping, of course. For these experiences are environments in which an audience of attendees is engaging in a dialogue you (as planner, or your organization, or your brand) wants them to have. There can be no distraction. The “cast” must be an ensemble and the environment crafted to keep folks on topic. And when all the elements are working together, the ability of the audience to engage in dialogue and create thoughts, ideas, and learnings multiplies. In this environment you tap into the natural expertise of everyone in the room – their experiences and their networks - expertise and ideas that hopefully track back to the office post event. That is why we have to get rid of the expert speaker and get rid of the stage and start the conversation among those in the room.

**See, I am on a mission to kill the General Session. Who is with me?**

## CHANGES COMIN' ON BY MICHAEL M. MCCURRY, CMP

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In 1982 a Grammy Award winning country/southern rock band, called "Alabama," released a new song that, when heard nowadays, seems almost prophetic. Here's a short snippet of the lyrics, summarizing the song's message:

*I can feel changes comin' on  
People still are singin' different songs  
They're searchin' for the place where  
they belong  
I can feel changes comin' on*

Well.... that change has arrived to the events business. Over the past 18 months, a tough economy, combined with the accelerated growth of technology, has altered the world of meetings and conferences. What's different? Here are the realities of 2010:

- ▶ **Travel budgets cut** - Businesses have less dollars available to spend on business travel. Subsequently, they are more closely scrutinizing travel expense for employee education.
- ▶ **New Learning channels** - Traditional Meeting Attendees, faced with less financial support for their continuing education needs, have been forced to consider alternative learning resources.
- ▶ **Convenient Learning** - With increased availability, and sophistication of webcasting and webinar technology, organization employees now have the option to enjoy a quality adult learning experience, without leaving their office.
- ▶ **Affordable Education** - Quality online education content is being offered at a very competitive price point, sometimes at no charge.

This is forcing associations and other organizations to re-think their conference business models.

- ▶ **Broader Connection Channels** - Social media tools, such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn have opened the door for business people to easily make new global connections with other like-minded professionals.
- ▶ **Information Superhighway** - With Social Media tools, exchanging information, news, ideas and best practices is fast-paced, efficient and painless.
- ▶ **Peer to Peer Interactions are top Priority** - People are embracing collaborative interaction, due to its flexibility, and transparency. Collaborative learning is less controlling and communication flow is more natural.

So how should you, as an event professional, respond to these factors? What does the future look like for face-to-face meetings? Many organizations are hitting the "social media panic button," instructing their Event teams to immediately incorporate social media into their conference plans. Unfortunately these directives, though well-intentioned, are off target.

Face-to-Face Meetings are social, by their nature. Event professionals should be less concerned about socializing events, and become more focused on aligning event design with attendee expectations. Are you confused about how to tackle this issue? Here are some thoughts to consider:

- ▶ **Involve Attendees in Event Design** - Consult with customers to clearly understand their meeting needs. One productive approach, is the use of a "Customer Advisory Board." This group is typically

## CHANGES COMIN' ON (CONT)

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comprised of a sampling of attendees, offering a variety of customer perspectives.

Another option is to schedule a series of town hall style meetings in strategic locations to solicit the advice and opinions of your event's attendee-base. Finally, there is a new social media tool, still in pre-release, called Google Wave. This application has tremendous online collaboration potential, and may be a useful tool for event design, once fully released to the public.

- ▶ **Create and Encourage Community** - Ideally, an online community should be established to Engage attendees before, during and after the conference. Its primary goals are to build excitement for the event, post critical event information and encourage attendee networking.

A number of online tools are available to assist event professionals in promoting their events. Blogs, Twitter, Facebook "fan pages" and LinkedIn Groups are examples of communication channels used for this purpose.

More complex community building centers, such as Crowdvine, Pathable or Social Collective offer an even greater potential depth of connection for attendees and integrate the individual social media applications into their infrastructure.

- ▶ **Add "Virtual" or "Hybrid" Components to Event** - As discussed earlier, some attendees may not be able to attend a conference due to budget, or time constraints. Webcasting technology now makes it possible to offer a virtual conference experience to these individuals.

Add a Twitter "Hashtag" channel to your conference and you have create a hybrid event. A Hybrid event enables Virtual and live attendees, as well as speakers, to interact with one another in one

place. Placing video monitors in strategic locations, throughout the conference area, with a "Twitter Feed," provides convenient access to the Tweets, and creates a stronger attendee connection at the conference.

- ▶ **Collaborative is key for Education Sessions** - When scheduling education sessions pick topics and speakers that encourage interaction and collaboration. You should offer only a Limited number of "lecture-style" sessions, if at all. In 2010 most business people are not interested in "Talking heads" style presentations. Instead, they prefer to participate in sessions providing them with an opportunity to contribute to the content.

Special Note: It is acceptable to use a "lecture-style format for Keynote style sessions, assuming the selected speakers will be captivating, with a compelling story to tell. Expect, however, that many attendees will probably be buried in their smartphones during sessions, either posting tweets, or other types of online social interaction.

There is no such thing as a "one size fits all" approach to event design. The thoughts presented in this article are a starting point. In reality, some ideas expressed may not meet your organization's specific conference needs. The rules for meetings and conferences have forever changed, and will continue to evolve. The one universal truth, that applies to all events, is the "attendee is king." By remaining focused on understanding and addressing the needs of your customers, and frequently communicating with them, your organization will position itself for success.

If you have an alternative perspective you would like to share, I would love to hear from you. I look forward to meeting you out there in Social Media land!

## THE SOCIAL EVOLUTION OF EVENT MARKETING BY PAUL SALINGER

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We could state the obvious and say that events are social by nature. People are invited (so there is some kind of preliminary engagement), people gather (so there is at least some personal engagement with other people), and people have a shared experience (even if it is just sitting in a room watching a presenter read Powerpoint slides).

But events, and event marketers have been slow to take advantage of and think creatively about how the methodologies and tools of what is commonly referred to as social media or social networking can

breathe new life into the event engagement model and the customer relationship part of the sales cycle that events (at least in the business world) are meant to help drive.

We should at least revisit a couple of definitions that event marketers should take into consideration as they think about how “socialness” will be integrated into the event cycle in the coming years. Social media is really an outgrowth of Tim O’Reilly’s definitions for what makes up Web 2.0 – the internet as a platform; applications that harness network effects (collective intelligence); data as the next Intel Inside (pervasive and ubiquitous); end of the software release cycle (eternal beta) and software above the level of a single device.

We also want to look at Amy Jo Kim’s definition of social media user generated content + social infrastructure + tools for sharing. Social networks aren’t just made up of people, they consist of people connected by shared objects (such as Flickr for photos, YouTube for videos and Twitter for sharing ideas, questions and random insights).

We can now say that there is a social landscape that exists that uses internet and web based technologies to transform broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many).

So, the question becomes, **how do we evolve the traditional way of looking at events** as a part of a marketing mix intended to market a defined set of messages, or experiences that create brand engagement into some of the concepts of Web 2.0, where we take advantage of the internet as a platform, collective intelligence, using data and evolving the software and devices we use to bring “socialness” in all its capabilities into the event marketers mindset?

In many ways this involves event marketers moving beyond the traditional roles of event planner, event designer and event implementer (all of which can be done somewhat in isolation and without much input from the intended audience for the event), to something much more strategic and collaborative where not only internal stakeholders are involved in the planning and engagement process, but external stakeholders are created and become as important, if not more important than internal stakeholders.

Savvy event marketers are already doing some basic and necessary things to start this evolution – providing concierge services through twitter back channels, Facebook fan pages, or event-specific social sites. This is good and helps attendees get questions answered and is much more personal than a FAQ on a website or having to track down an event organizer (who might be hidden away in a show office).

They are creating content that is useful to attendees and help generate buzz and excitement for an event through some of these same tools and blogs, and this helps make things more viral and social through replication of messages

## THE SOCIAL EVOLUTION OF EVENT MARKETING (CONT)

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across networks. And, they are starting to recognize the value of community management by listening to social channels and taking feedback – being more transparent and open in their conversations with attendees.

These are all good things, but they run the risk of maintaining a bit of the status quo and using these channels merely as another marketing channel where the intent is to get out a message rather than engage in social activity.

“ ***My view is that we need to get to a people-centric view of how we approach social media going forward. What does the audience need to get value from their engagement with us, whether that be on the web or at an event?***”

To truly bring “socialness” into the event marketing world, we need a fundamental shift in the way we think. We need to stop marketing and start building relationships. We need to think beyond the short term goals and metrics of an event to making our customers (or attendees) successful and influential. We need to stop thinking in terms of post event analysis and start thinking in terms of ongoing listening and feedback loops on all available channels where social activity takes place so that we can learn from the interaction and feedback provided and continue to innovate and deliver value.

This does not have to be mutually exclusive. We can deliver traditional marketing while also building on the methods needed to sustain deeper and broader conversations and relationships.

Tools aplenty exist, and will continue to evolve and change over time. What’s needed is strategic thinkers to start creatively using these tools in an audience-centric way.

This is going to be a cultural shift and a challenge for event marketers, but ultimately, done the right way will bring much greater success to organizations that embrace this shift and take advantage of their attendees collective intelligence to collaborate on world class, content engaging and networked events that surprise and delight our audiences, both internal and external.

## 10 WAYS SOCIAL MEDIA WILL TRANSFORM EVENTS BY SAMUEL J. SMITH

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Social media is changing the way that we communicate, collaborate and share.

*It used to be that you watched the news and that was it. Today, CNN.com allows you to watch the news, read the news, comment on the news and create the news. More than 400,000 "citizen" journalists are uploading videos called iReports to CNN's website. Many of these are included in news stories.*

*It used to be that you requested duplicate copies of vacation photos for family and friends. Today, you take digital pictures and upload them to Facebook or Flickr. Your family and friends comment on those photos online. Then you create a photo-book for your grandma that is automatically printed and shipped directly to her.*

Those are two small examples of the transformation that is taking place in the way that we communicate, collaborate and share. There are many others.

As attendees become more comfortable with these new two-way communication experiences, they are going to start demanding similar experiences from their face-to-face events.

Here are 10 ways that I think social media will affect events in the future:

1. **Attendees will not wait for microphones to ask questions** - They will text or tweet those questions as they think of them. Attendees will not wait until the end of a session to ask questions that came up in the first five minutes of the presentation. This does not mean that the speaker has to stop his presentation to answer the questions. Rather, there should be a mechanism to send questions to the speaker in real time.

2. **Attendees will answer questions for the speaker** - While she is talking. If the questions for the speaker are streamed through the backchannel, these questions will be available to all attendees. E-learning research tells us that it is every likely that attendees will start answering each other's questions, while the speaker (instructor) is still talking.
3. **Attendees will tell you that the speaker stinks**, the ice sculpture is melting and the croissants are stale - in real time. With Social Media, the feedback can be instant and shared with everyone. You should be prepared to adapt your onsite operations to this new reality.
4. **Attendees will expect to connect with other delegates before, during and after the event.** Time is precious. Rather than name tag surf through the crowd, attendees will setup meetings with like-minded delegates before the event. After the event they will want to keep the conversation going. It will be important that events help them stay connected and translate their face-to-face contacts back into the digital world.
5. **Virtual attendees will start using social media to engage with your content and the onsite face-to-face attendees.** Social Media and other digital technologies will help virtual attendees join the onsite discussion. They will do this from 3,000 miles away. It will be important to make the experience inclusive and collaborative for all attendees.
6. **Attendees will want a voice in the discussion, learning and decision making process.** The gap between the experts that are speaking on stage and the amateurs in the audience has never been smaller. Attendees are well educated, informed and have information at their fingertips. As this gap continues to shrink, attendees will expect to be part of the discussion, learning and decision making processes. No more speakers talking and attendees listening!

## 10 WAYS SOCIAL MEDIA WILL TRANSFORM EVENTS (CONT)

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7. **New events will emerge from online communities.** It is easier than ever to create an online group, build an audience and start discussions. However, there is still a strong desire for members to meet face-to-face. In 2009, we saw many new events created around Twitter. In the coming years, we will see many more events emerge out of online communities. Equally important, events that do not embrace online communities will be hurt and maybe even close.
8. **Attendees will register for your event if their contacts are attending.** In the future, knowing if friends or business associates are attending an event will become part of the attendee's decision process. Social media tools that check to see if my LinkedIn connections, Twitter followers or Facebook friends are attending an event already exist. Over time, I think that we will see more of these tools implemented in events.
9. **Events will become communities that last for weeks and months rather than a few short days.** Event specific social networks, create a social hub where we can start conversations before events and continue them long after the event finished. Creating a social space where attendees can network and discuss trends, hot topics, industry (or business) challenges and best practices will be extend the life of your event.
10. **Sharable content will be the way that your event is discovered by new attendees.** Your webcasts, webinars, blog posts and whitepapers will need to be interesting, relevant and easy to share. Then, your participants and raving fans will start forwarding, tweeting and facebooking this content to their like minded friends. This will introduce new people to your event and the type of education and thought leadership that you provide. Also, this will make it easier to search and find your event.

### **Bottom Line**

*Social Media is changing the way that we share, communicate and collaborate. As attendees become more comfortable with these experiences, they will demand them from their face-to-face events. Event professionals need to be prepared for this transformation. It is coming, soon.*

## THE 4 CS OF CONFERENCES & SOCIAL MEDIA BY JEFF HURT

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Many novices and skeptics find social media confusing, much less trying to integrate social media with their events.

Why is this? First, novices and skeptics often focus exclusively on the social media tools. They think social media means playing with Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Since social media encompasses many types of tools, each with their own characteristics and learning curves, a toolkit approach to social media becomes overwhelming and perplexing.

Second, the term "social" is an umbrella term used for a lot of things like social media, social networking, social technologies, and social web. Even social media practitioners can't come to an agreement on the terms. The absence of a common established vernacular confuses people.

I suggest the event professionals take a tools- and terminology-agnostic approach. Instead of getting distracted by the tools and terminology, focus on the underlying themes of social media that are relevant to strategic event design.



I call them the Four Cs Of Conferences And Social Media: Content, Collaboration, Community and Cumulative Value. I combine those four Cs with the Four Cs Of Conference Attendees: Consumers, Curators, Contributors and Creators."

### **Content**

Every conference or event has specific content and information that is going to be shared. Conference attendees consume and curate that content. Some take the content, repurpose it, share their reflections and then distribute it via a variety of social media technologies--like blogs, Facebook, Flickr and Twitter. Some create new content about their experiences and share it with their networks. Focus on developing and sharing meaningful, relevant content.

### **Collaboration**

Every conference has an unwritten goal that the event serves as the catalyst aggregating the actions of individuals into meaningful collective results. Collaboration occurs on three levels: conversation, co-creation and collective action. If there's a buzz about the content, attendee's discuss it with each other and ultimately with their social networks. Sometimes their collaborative efforts create a tipping point and the information goes viral, on to the social web. When this happens, event professionals reach nirvana, assuming it's positive of course.

### **Community**

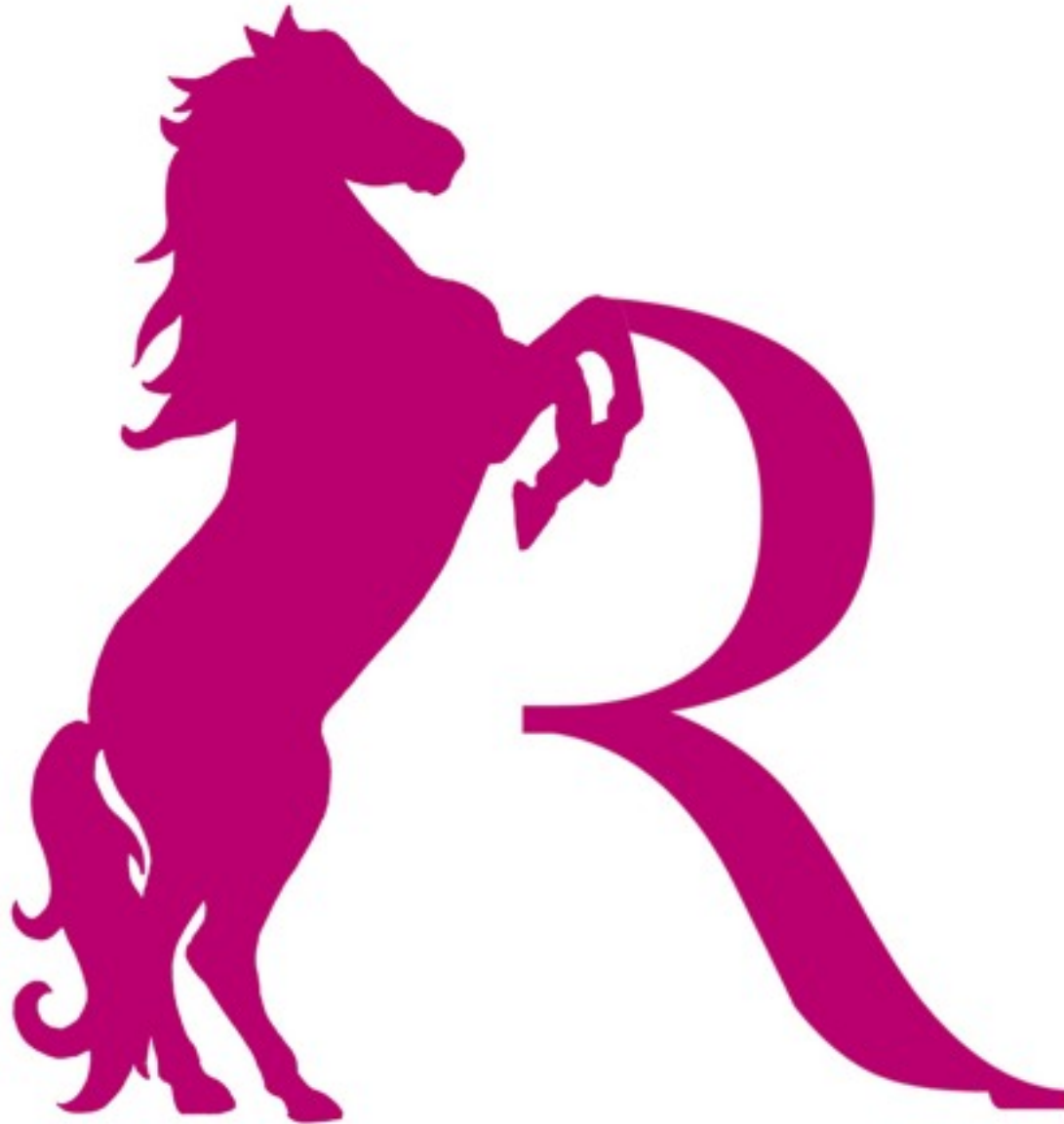
Every conference session is a dormant community. Each workshop collects the attention of attendees interested in its content and those attendees typically want to discuss it. Often that community remains latent unless ties are strengthened and engagement is welcomed. A vibrant community has size and strength, and is built around a shared, meaningful social object--like content, experiences and ideas. Tapping into the value of the community can lead to positive results.

### **Cumulative Value**

Conferences and the social web enable us to aggregate individual actions and to use sophisticated research algorithms to extract meaning from them. This collective intelligence is based on implicit and explicit actions usually through the form of reputation and recommendation systems. Amazon and Netflix measure browsing (implicit), buying (implicit) and ratings (explicit). Conference organizers can track agenda attendance (implicit) and evaluations (explicit) for example. If the collective intelligence is then shared back with the community, the members find more value in the community, and the community grows even more. Then the cycle repeats.

### **Final Thoughts**

The best conferences and social media initiatives leverage all four layers moving from content to collaboration to community to cumulative value. Consider these Four Cs in the design and strategy phase of your planning for your next conference or social media initiative before moving to the logistics and tools.



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