

THE SUREST WAY
TO CORRUPT A YOUTH
IS TO INSTRUCT HIM TO
HOLD IN HIGHER ESTEEM
THOSE WHO THINK ALIKE
THAN THOSE WHO THINK
DIFFERENTLY

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30 NEW IDEAS FOR CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS



Rethinking the Conference

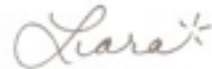
I speak at a variety of conferences around the world on the topic of Social Media. And although these conferences have recognized the need to educate their attendees on the topic, some have been slow to leverage social media for their own event.

I wanted to pull together this eBook to help stimulate ideas for 'old conferences' to think in a new way. I will stress, however, that before moving forward with any of these tactics, a few things need to take place:

1. **Make sure you have an event worth talking about.** If you garden you know that making sure you have great soil before planting is key. The same is true about have a great product or service before marketing it.
2. **Make sure you're organization is ready for social media.** Culture clash is one of the most common reasons for social media upstart failure. Understanding the fundamental shifts in culture needed to make social media work is critical before starting.
3. **Make sure you know what you're looking to achieve and how you plan to measure success.** Social media without a strategy is a lot like pots and pans in the hands of a baby. You can spend countless hours playing. If you take the same pots and pans and give them to a chef, they can create an amazing dish. Same tools - two totally different outcomes. Knowing how to use the tools, what you're looking to do with them and how to course correct if you're off track is imperative.

I hope that I've provided some good thought starters. I know I've only scratched the surface, so I welcome you to weigh in with any additional ideas on [my blog](#).

Sincerely,



30 NEW IDEAS FOR OLD CONFERENCES

To better understand the needs of attendees

- ▶ [Crowdsourcing](#) using a tool like [CrowdSound](#). To get the best results, make sure you're clear about what you're looking to discover from attendees.
- ▶ Set up a [listening tool](#) to monitor conversations using keywords or hashtags. Once you feel comfortable, start to engage with the community to gain more insights.
- ▶ Create a community for your event using tools like [Pathable](#) or [Ning](#).
- ▶ Create a hashtag and a set date/time to discuss your event (and specifically your attendee's needs) on Twitter. See [#eventprofs](#) for an example of how to do this.

To build a better education experience

- ▶ Ask attendees what their biggest business issues are and build education around this.
- ▶ Schedule open time slots after key education sessions for attendees to congregate and discuss what they learned and what they would add.
- ▶ Rethink the seminar room. Does it encourage engagement? Talk with your speakers about different conversation facilitation techniques that will help you achieve your education goals (check out the [Fishbowl](#) for one example).
- ▶ Ensure you have WIFI so attendees can bring their laptops into classrooms.

To generate buzz

- ▶ Remember that nothing spreads from person to person as well as something meaningful to them. Create and share valuable content related to your conference worth spreading.
- ▶ Think of bloggers and twitterers like the new media. Invite them to your event, give them media passes, and provide them with exclusives (in other words give them something unique and interesting to say about your event).
- ▶ Reward & recognize influential social media users that will be attending your event. Create badges and let these people wear them proudly on their social media profiles & avatars.
- ▶ Ask your speakers / entertainers to set up a [Formspring](#) account to allow attendees to ask them questions before the event.
- ▶ Create a contest to sponsor a young delegate to your event. Have applicants create YouTube videos & have attendees vote on who you should sponsor to attend.

To get more sponsors / exhibitors

- ▶ Allow sponsors to create badges so that attendees can choose which ones to incorporate onto their social media profile pictures. For example, perhaps you have a hotel sponsor. Attendees can show other attendees they're connected with that they're staying at that hotel.
- ▶ Educate exhibitors on location-based social networking sites like [Gowalla](#) or [Foursquare](#). Exhibitors can use these tools to promote visitors to their booths by offering specials, incentives and discounts.

30 NEW IDEAS FOR OLD CONFERENCES

To increase registrations

- ▶ Negotiate for speakers to create 2-3 minute videos about their topics. Put them up on Youtube & link them to your main site. Another great concept is what [Gaspedal Marketing did for their Word of Mouth Supergeniuses event](#).
- ▶ Use [Facebook Connect](#) to help potential registrants know who in their network is attending your event.
- ▶ Use registration software like [Eventbrite](#) to allow attendees to announce they've registered for your event to popular social networking sites.
- ▶ Offer unique incentives for registration. For example, ask people to @reply you on Twitter for a chance to win free registration - stipulate they must follow you to find out who won.
- ▶ Create a deal and register your event with a site like [Groupon](#).

To build awareness of the conference

- ▶ Create a hashtag! If you don't one of your attendees will. Promote the hashtag on your website, on the registration page and at the event.
- ▶ Live stream sessions via [Ustream.com](#) and use [Twebevent](#) to engage the community via Twitter (the benefit to using a site like Twebevent is that any conversations / comments people have when viewing the streamed session are sent out to all of their followers - building further awareness).

To increase engagement

- ▶ Ask registrants for their Twitter handle and include this on name tags. You'd be amazed at how something so simple can amplify the experience for an attendee. They've already invested time in building online relationships. Improve their networking capabilities by helping them recognize online friends.
- ▶ Encourage tweetups
- ▶ Have a 'Geek Squad' at your conference to help people understand the technology and use it.
- ▶ Create an iPhone application. [it's easier and cheaper than you think](#). Take a look at what [MPI did for their conference](#). It can also make your community mobile.

To increase fundraising dollars

- ▶ Get the community to vote on a charity partner. The more involved they are the more they'll be likely to donate.
- ▶ Create a charity awareness video and upload to Youtube (and link to your site).
- ▶ Engage the community to provide questions which can be answered by charity organizers or the people they're helping.
- ▶ Provide video updates to SHOW people how their money has been used. Distribute in follow up emails. Take a look at what [Twestival did for their Charity Water fundraising](#).



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