

collaborate

CORPORATE MEETINGS INTELLIGENCE

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2014



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*"PLANNERS HAVE TO CREATE
INTIMATE EXPERIENCES
THAT ATTENDEES CAN'T HAVE
ON THEIR OWN."*

—BRUCE STARR, BMF MEDIA

INNOVATORS

*INDUSTRY EXPERTS FROM BEHIND THE
SCENES OF SXSW, BONNAROO AND MORE
ON CREATING MEMORABLE MEETINGS* 50

Memorable, Instagram-worthy,
5,000-tweet-per-day,
pack-the-dance-floor, participatory,
talk-about-for-a-week,
can't-wait-to-attend-next-year
events don't happen by accident.
They happen...

By Design

Five industry innovators talk about
planning events people don't forget.

Interviews by Dawn Reiss



Moment Factory's
Sakchin Bessette
helped produce this
event for Oakley,
complete with
immersive projection.



ALL FOR SHOW: Moment Factory projects include Qualcomm's 2013 Uplinq conference (top) and a multimedia show on Macy's store in New York.

Think of Sakchin Bessette as an artist of technology.

Sometimes it's cascading color and light in urban installations, like this year's Super Bowl XLVIII virtual theater, a multimedia show on the Macy's store along Manhattan's Super Bowl Boulevard. Other times it's a concert performance, like Madonna's 2012 Super Bowl halftime show in Indianapolis. Either way, Bessette knows how to incorporate technology for one-of-a-kind, dynamic experiences. That technology is known as X-Agora, Moment Factory's proprietary software, which controls and seamlessly integrates all media and content sources, based on real-time interactivity and data coming from users through their mobile devices and the Web. Capitalizing on that interactivity has been essential in creating a real-time experiential component for clients that range from the NFL to Bon Jovi to Cirque du Soleil. "We've always been about innovating technology and developing content so we can tell a story in a different way," says Bessette.

What advice do you have for planners about designing meaningful experiences?
Collaboration is key, especially with clients, as is having that communication and trust. It's having a great team and giving them space, but also guiding them well. It's never really easy. We never have enough time or budget to do what we really want to do. We always want to push stuff further. It's really important that people have the passion and dedication to make a successful project. It's fundamental to our business and is what helps us to push limits. It's also important to have really clear objectives. Sometimes we need our collaborators to help create that message. They'll say, 'We want something cool at our event.' What is it for? Why are we doing that? Who's going to be there? What type of room will it be in? If you have those clear objectives upfront, then you keep them as checkpoints when you are making creative decisions, and it comes together in a smart way.

How do you foster collaboration?
Through transparency and communication, under-promising and over-delivering—that always creates a good relationship. It's also important to clarify each person's role on the team. Sometimes, we will take different roles for different projects. We are happy to play different roles. It helps us learn and grow. We always find a way to be passionate about our projects. That passion drives the team to make it happen and push things further.

What are some of the most creative projects you've worked on?
One thing that stands out is a show we did for Qualcomm for its Uplinq 2013 conference. DJs and VJs teamed up to mix iPads and touchscreen phones with music. You could see them scratching video content and creating music live, while on the 120-ft. backdrop, you could see what they were mixing as viewed from the table. They had live cameras on their hands so you could see it on the screen.

Sakchin Bessette is creative director and co-founder of Moment Factory, based in Montreal.

Christina Sion knows how to organize a memorable event.

Her event resume includes a fake showgirl murder scene featuring the Los Angeles coroner and an event to welcome the retired Space Shuttle Endeavour with \$150,000 in in-kind donations). For more than two decades, "Chris" Sion has worked at California Science Center Foundation (originally California Museum of Science & Industry), where she learned to react at a moment's notice.

How is planning a meeting, event or conference different than it was 10 years ago?
There used to be a greater distinction between being a meeting or a conference planner versus an event planner. Now I see a greater merging of these skills. Today's meeting planner needs to know about the event planning aspects. The meeting planner needs to incorporate more event planning into their conference or meeting. The event planner used to just focus on decor and entertainment to make a party fun, and that's something the meeting planner needs to know now. Savvy event planners need to be up-to-speed on technical aspects.

What has contributed to that change?
There is a lot of competition today for people's time. To ask them to be present at a daytime conference is a huge commitment. Everything moves very fast. People have a lot of demands on them. If someone is going to take the time to attend a daytime conference or meeting, make sure it's worth their while or they won't commit.

What are some of the big trends in corporate meeting planning?
I am very interested in immersive meeting environments. Instead of one or two large screens flanking the podium, consider surrounding the guests with images. Instead of focusing on the tabletop, think about how to better use the space between the table and the ceiling or the floors. Build an event that surrounds your audience, and it's apt to be more captivating.
Borrowing a trend from social events, I also prefer lounge furniture to stand-up cocktail tables that are standard at post-conference mixers. Having a chance to relax on a comfortable couch with fellow conference attendees after a long day is more enjoyable and conducive to engaging discussions than traditional setups.

Why do you think corporate meetings are becoming more experiential?
Borrowing a model from the education arena, when you ask students to actively participate in the learning process, studies show that the student can have better understanding and retention. California Science Center employs a great deal of hands-on learning tools where guests are



FIRST IMPRESSIONS: The retired space shuttle is the star of the show at Samuel Oschin Space Shuttle Endeavour Pavilion in the California Science Center.

engaging with our exhibits and educational programs, not just reading plaques or watching monitors. It makes sense if someone actually builds a model rocket and then launches it, he or she would have a greater sense of understanding than if they read about it in a book. If you applied that philosophy to corporate meetings, an active participant who engages in the meeting in a more meaningful way and can take ownership of something they experienced firsthand would have a different takeaway value at the end of the day than someone who just sat and listened to a speaker discussing the topic.

How has that changed the life of corporate event planners or someone who is in marketing and trying to brand a conference?
I would challenge corporate planners to think about how they would like to engage their meeting participants beyond what is being said at the podium. What could the guests personally experience that would make an impact and be remembered long after the conference is over? Sometimes the venue can be of assistance in this regard. For example, one perk of hosting a meeting or conference at California Science Center is that meeting guests have an opportunity to see our latest artifact, the Space Shuttle Endeavour, while they are here. Nothing drives home the message about "dreaming big" or "soaring to new heights" than having a group photo under an orbiter that traveled to space 25 times.

What advice do you have for planners?
You never want to forget creature comforts. Make sure your guests are comfortable. Is the air temperature correct? Is it too drafty? Is it too stuffy? Do they have correct signage to get where they are going? Do they know where the restroom is? Is the restroom comfortable? Is the microphone loud enough? It will kill an event if any of these elements aren't correct. Before you go over the top and wow them, they have to be happy.

Chris Sion is the vice president of food and event services for the California Science Center Foundation in Los Angeles.

LEROY HAMILTON

All it took was one movie, “Almost Famous,” to make **Bruce Starr** fall in love with the music industry.

After graduating from high school, Starr moved from the Chicago suburbs to New York, where he co-founded BMF Media Group with longtime friend Brian Feit in 2003. Their experiential, full-service entertainment marketing company creates custom content, produces platform events, and manages, publicizes and books talent for major events. BMF, which stands for Brand Music Fusion, “is in our DNA to the core,” says Starr. The company’s beach-themed It’s So Miami Lounge has created buzz at events like Lollapalooza, South by Southwest, Coachella and Austin City Limits.

How is the industry changing as events become more experiential?
Brands have money again. They’re not afraid to go out on a limb and do something creative and interesting with their marketing budgets. With the structure of social media between Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, everyone’s attention spans have really changed. There are so many smartphones, and everyone is connected. Everyone is a little more distracted. So much is at their fingertips, and information is short and fast. So how you keep people from being bored nowadays is key.

How do you capture that ever-decreasing attention span?
It’s how you grab their attention. It’s not a 55-slide PowerPoint any more. Incorporate social, video, Vimeo. Have people watch things, interact with each other or snap that Instagram to develop inner connectivity. For events, it’s about how you create those exact moments for your consumer. What is going to be the Instagram picture that everyone takes? At SXSW, it’s “Game of Thrones: The Exhibition,” where you can sit in the throne. Everyone wants to put that up on social media. For the planner, you need to create a moment that everyone wants to post about during your event. Is it creating a photo booth or a beautiful landscape, or having an amazing performer and providing an experience they can’t have anywhere else? You see a lot of that now, with Jay Z and Kanye West performing for Samsung at SXSW, or Lady Gaga performing for Doritos. These are small venues. These are once-in-a-lifetime opportunities guests are going to remember and post about.



BUSINESS AND PLEASURE: BMF Media designed the It’s So Miami Lounge at Lollapalooza in Chicago.

How can planners create events that people want to be part of?
They have to create intimate experiences that attendees can’t have on their own. I’m talking about over-the-top experiences—not in terms of price, but in what they can experience. Give attendees the chance to talk to a chef and eat brunch in a restaurant with no one else on hand. It’s about doing things you would never be able to do on your own. You see that with MasterCard’s priceless campaign with Justin Timberlake. People want what they can’t have, what they can’t own. How do you bring that to them with everything you do?

How do planners make that transition into more experiential events?
Don’t do the dinner at a stodgy restaurant. Do it somewhere unexpected and new, or bring in the unexpected and new. I think chefs are becoming the next celebrities. But you don’t need to go for the celebrity chef. Just find the great local chef who creates inspiring, incredible food.

Where should planners look for inspiration for designing better events?
What is going to make you stand out is knowing what is current and what is cool. There are only two ways to do that: You have to go to events all the time, and you have to see what other people are doing. You need to see what is trending, what works and what doesn’t. It’s not copying. It’s being inspired in real time. If you can’t go to events, read magazines about what is trending. Be ahead of the curve.

Bruce Starr is the co-founder of BMF Media, based in New York.



Vincent Drolet has made a name for himself in the industry.

He’s the co-founder of Circo de Bakuza, a Montreal-based creative agency. The company, which also has an office in Paris, is known for its theatrical events, branding and experiential marketing, including the Dubai International Film Festival, the launch of Carolina Herrera’s 212 VIP fragrances, Opera de Montreal’s production of “Samson and Delilah” and various Union of European Football Associations events including the UEFA Euro 2016 qualifying draw. As “solution providers,” Drolet says that means creating a coherent “visual universe: a language of sorts with which we play, tell stories and create animation.” To design a creative event, Drolet suggests planners use both sides of the brain, part “rational inspiration” and part “organized chaos.”

What should planners ask before getting to work on an event?
Having a clear objective is really important. Knowing what message you want to broadcast and what message you want people to leave with is crucial. For instance, your return on investment in events will greatly improve if you manage to convert your guests into ambassadors where they become the vehicle to deliver your message. We believe positive word-of-mouth is very effective in the social network era. Also, we are sure to grill our clients on their wishes, thoughts and ideas. We have them answer our client brief to help us engage in constructive conversation. It always starts with the following questions: Who are we talking to? What do we want them to do? Why should they do it?

What is the key to creating a memorable conference?
An event is not just the day of. It’s before, during and after. An event is a conversation between a brand and its guests, a relationship that needs to be built over a certain period of time. Follow-up is key. The event is the high point of the program, but you need to keep building on the relationship you’ve established. Preparation and rigorous planning is also important. It’s not only about having a great concept, because execution is everything. When it comes to being innovative, remember that it’s not about breaking the rules. It’s about making your own.



SNAP HAPPY: The annual Bell Festival in Canada features Instagram-worthy moments, including the “One Night Under a Blue Sky” party in 2012 (top).

Why have you taken a theatrical approach to many of your events?
We believe in having fun and building an emotional bond with the audience. The words of poet Maya Angelou are a great inspiration for us: “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

What are some of the big trends in corporate events right now?
Video mapping is quite popular these days, and I expect it to be more and more present. It is about adapting the video content to the surface you are projecting onto. It is the equivalent of 3-D versus 2-D. The result can be quite impressive when it’s well-executed.

Where do you see the events industry going?
I think the events industry will grow larger. The growing demand for entertainment and experiential marketing will drive that. Every occasion will become an opportunity for an event, and social networks will also contribute to the growth. People want to live experiences, but also share them, so the need to provide content and an opportunity to share is essential. I also think that major sporting events will keep getting larger, and that more and more people and brands will want to get involved and partner with those events. Think about the success of the X Games and all of the Red Bull events. It won’t be long until others join the trend.

Vincent Drolet is president and co-founder of Circo de Bakuza, based in Montreal.

Chad Issaq

believes events are meant to create memorable, transformative experiences.

“We aren’t producing events. We’re creating experiences and building communities,” says Issaq, who leads the sponsorship sales and activation team for New York-based Superfly, a lifestyle and entertainment company that produces festivals like Bonnaroo and Outside Lands. Since joining Superfly in 2002, Issaq has helped produce more than 25 festivals in the United States and has taught online classes at the Event Leadership Institute. He is known for using various types of technology including RFID wristbands to encourage and increase attendee engagement at events such as Bonnaroo.

What does it take to create a memorable experience?
You are not an event planner. You are an architect of experience, and you are there to foster participation. Anybody can produce an event, but a couple things have to happen for it to be good. No. 1: participation. It’s not just being there. It’s participating, where people are beyond engaged, participating with their peers and immersing themselves in the experience. No. 2: Our passions are not siloed. If I go to a music fest, I don’t want 17 hours of music. I want something that encompasses everything I like. That’s why we have festivals with cultural events like a comedy theater, art installations, mixology bars, beer and culinary experiences. When you go, it’s much more than just delivering one thing. We all have busy lives, so if we can satisfy all those points, it makes that event all the more exciting and special.

What recommendations do you have for corporate planners?
Think about how you can look at a vertical line and make it more of an arch. That may mean making it thematic by doing drinks around crafted cocktails from some era of time. When you are creating events, you have to think about what is driving participation to get more bonding and community. At a corporate event, you have 500 individuals going and 500 individuals eating, so how are you going to get them to participate? Planners should see themselves as purveyors of participation. It should be a transformative experience. For participants, it’s not about what their experience is there. It’s what they’re taking away.



THE INTERSECTION OF MUSIC AND TECHNOLOGY: Bonnaroo has added a number of high-tech elements, including scannable entrance badges.

How have events changed since you began with Superfly more than a decade ago?
I’m seeing more and more genre-specific events with niche programing. Think about what programming does—it brings people together. People want to connect within those communities. Maybe it’s a “Game of Thrones” event. People want to see a live manifestation of what we see, so events are becoming more about how we make those things tangible. A lot of content is going to be produced out of these events with more wearable technology. At our festivals, you get an RFID wristband, you register your wristband online with a digital check-in and then you connect with other guests socially or digitally. Brands can tie into that, like Ford with a driver registration and car giveaway. Drive more social registration with incentives. For example, the more a guest checks in on-site, the more they increase their chances to win a Ford. That creates more participation and content. You are going to continue to see brands underwriting such experiences.

Chad Issaq is executive vice president, business developmet and partnerships, for Superfly Presents, based in New York.

ADAM MACCHIA; DAVID BARNUM

SEVEN REASONS TO GIVE LOUISVILLE A SHOT.

A city with great spaces, amazing food, a high “coolness” factor, and is still easy on your guests and on their wallets? Any meeting planner would drink to that. Here are seven Louisville secrets that will make your next event run as smooth as Kentucky Bourbon.

THE 7 SECRETS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MEETING PLANNERS

- 1. Be in the middle of it all:**
Pick a site where big things are happening. Louisville’s downtown boasts an incredible new arena, as well as many other big changes.
- 2. Size matters:**
You need space. Big space, small space, all kinds of space and Louisville has more than 2.3 million square feet of space in three major facilities.
- 3. Hotel choice can make or break a visit:**
From boutique to budget, Louisville has 3,800 downtown hotel rooms – 2,300 of which link to convention space via skywalk.
- 4. Don’t spend more. Spend better:**
Louisville offers more for your money than the ultra-major metros.



- 5. Wow them with the culinary experience:**
Louisville was named one of Zagat’s “Best Foodie Getaways Around the World.” Plus, it’s your gateway to the world’s finest bourbon, including the Evan Williams Bourbon Experience, now open.
- 6. Make it easy to get to, and easy to get around:**
Louisville is less than a day’s drive from half the U.S. population and easy to get around once you’re here, with an airport mere minutes from downtown.
- 7. The entertainment should be, duh, entertaining:**
Louisville has a diverse and authentic nightlife, with many local nightspots keeping the fun flowing until 4 a.m.

Louisville
It’s possible here.

