

How to Select the Right Speaker for Your Next Conference, Convention or Sales Meeting

Content

A professional speaker should engage, educate, motivate, and entertain, and in that priority. Unless this event changes your peoples' behavior in some measurable way, you're wasting their time and your money. New skills, new information, and new insights produce new customers, new sales, and increased profits for your business.

Authority

Wouldn't you rather take advice from a published expert who has invested the time and effort to thoroughly research their field and write a book, or two, or three? Ask for autographed copies. And beware of vanity press imprints. If a major New York house published their books, you know they're the real deal.

Originality

Beginners often pirate other speakers' examples and content, sometimes even telling the story as if it had actually happened to them. I recently heard a meeting planner complain, "If I hear one more cliché I will scream." If you've heard it before, so have your people.

Delivery

Are you looking for a topical expert (who may put your people to sleep) or a stand-up comic (who could play a nightclub)? Look for a pro that can engage *and* entertain, delivering powerful content with passion and pizzazz. After all, you want your people to remember the *point*, not just the punch line.

Customization

If a speaker is going to tell you how to run your business better, they better understand how you run your business. Select a speaker who will take a *personal* interest in your industry, your company, and your people. Will they visit your office, review your collateral, shop your competition, or spend a day with your salespeople? Will they fly in early to attend the *whole* meeting? A real pro is a quick study, and will customize until they sound like they're from home office. An outsider's insight may prove priceless.

Certification

There are two conferred by the National Speakers Association: the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) and the Council of Peers Award of Excellence (CPAE). The CPAE is an *honorary* designation, a lifetime achievement award, while the CSP requires a minimum of 250 presentations over a five-year period, for at least 100 *different* clients, at a substantial minimum fee, and must be renewed every five years. The CSP is your assurance of the *highest* standards of professionalism and excellence. An elite group of veterans hold both.

Technical Mastery

The days when a speaker could just stand behind a podium and read from the notes are long gone. Top pros supercharge their speeches with multiple multi-media: computer animation, upbeat music, sound effects and video. And they bring their own computers and microphones. After all, when you take your car in to be serviced, don't you expect them to use their own tools?

Access

Does a live person answer the phone when you call? Successful speakers travel constantly, but are always accessible through their staff. They use cell phones, voice-mail and e-mail to keep in touch. The real pros check both at least twice a day, and respond promptly, personally.

Video

They *did* include a video didn't they? The pros all have at least one; or two, or more. Ask for the what-you-see-is-what-you-get version, shot live, and *unedited* (except perhaps for opening trailers). And while the WYSIWYG version may be technically flawed, anyone can look good in front of a studio full of friends.

Audition

Are they coming to your area? The pros get around, and will gladly arrange for you to sit in. If that's not an option, interview them by phone. Think of it as a live one-on-one audition. Ask them to advise you on a particular business challenge or issue, then ask yourself, "Does this sound like the kind of advice we want our people to hear?"

References

You should never have to ask for them. A professional will automatically include them in the press kit, along with a client list and multiple testimonials. Read the letters. Look at the dates; are they current? Then call at least two.

Deliverables

What will your people take away to help them recall and implement what they've heard? A textbook, a workbook, a cassette or two, an action list, a checklist, a laminated wallet card? Can they download the handouts and PowerPoint for reference? Ask. These minor extras add major impact and multiply the take-home value of the message.

Fees

A bad program is no bargain. Worry less on what the speaker will charge; worry more on what your people will get. Does the fee include pre-event consultation, research, customization, travel time, incidental expenses, handouts, workbooks, AV equipment, pens, markers or other supplies? Will the speaker write an article for your magazine, or help with event planning and marketing? If you're investing half a million dollars to host a conference, you can't afford a dud.