

Seven ways to win with conference presentations

 By [Kelly McGillivray](#)

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Planning a kick-ass conference involves scheduling presenters to share their wisdom, brand-knowledge and make key corporate announcements. These speakers, their content and how they present are the backbone of a conference. Planning how they do it (aim for seamless and engaging) is the foundation of an event's success.

Planning a conference can start months before the event. We try to be meticulous, dot the i's and cross the t's (and pray to the weather gods). But somehow, quite often really, we end up formatting lengthy presentations (if we have them) the night before - or even on the day - which (stress levels aside) should be when you're checking the big-picture stuff is all going according to plan.

1. Who's saying what?

Decide with your client on how many presenters to have, over how many days and what the topics are. For corporate conferences most of the speakers will come from the business itself. Based on the brief, decide whether an MC is needed and suggest inspiring professional speakers. An MC streamlines run-of-show and lifts event energy, particularly if the conference is longer than one day.

2. It's all in the theme

A strong conference theme focuses presentation content and makes it look awesome. Push further than the ideas you've been briefed on. Budget permitting (you'll hear a lot of that), invite a Futurist to join your brainstorm - someone who specialises in Scenario Planning and Thought Leadership.



Establish a hashtag (#) name along with the theme, to be shared, tweeted etc. before, during and after the event. Design-wise, also think big-picture - this content may be used to plot a business strategy for the whole year ahead.

3. PowerPoint professional

Hiring a presentation professional (yes, it's mostly still PowerPoint) makes all the difference to how a conference looks. If it's too much of a stretch to employ someone to design it all beautifully, invest in having a template designed, with logos and different slide options. NB fonts and font sizes to be established on the master template and adhered to! And go easy on the animation - it can become unnecessarily complicated.

4. Speakers

Use a specific team member as a dedicated go-to presentation person. They can establish a relationship with the speakers and be on hand on event day to assist. Client speakers are often great at content, but not always at editing and making presentations look slick.

Be in communication with them as early as possible. How much assistance do they need? Can you help with sourcing great quotes or video? How experienced are they at public speaking? Do they need auto-cue and have they used auto-cue before?

5. Scheduling

In a perfect world ask for all the presentations a week before the event - time to format beautifully and send back for sign off. Make sure the presentations are engaging. Too long? Edit. Too boring? More graphics, music or source a brilliant (relevant) AV.

Having content in advance allows breathing space to build all the material together, check timings (read through each presentation and time them), download / embed videos and make (digital) copies for attendees.

6. Rehearsals & autocue

If scheduled well in advance, speakers should be able to attend a rehearsal the day (or night) before. Some execs are more confident in theory than in practice, so try to get them into a rehearsal for their benefit as well as yours! If there's autocue then rehearsing is a non-negotiable, the script and the reading needs to be seamless.

Check that the social media reminders (including the event #) appear regularly throughout the conference presentations. Getting live feedback from the audience via social media is great for presenters to share, if you can factor that in.

7. It's the little things that count

If you're filming, brief the speakers on what to wear (no spots or stripes!). Always have water on the podium and Panados in your pocket. Be gracious under pressure (there will be pressure). Put some thought into how you're going to share presentations with the attendees, avoid paper and printing where possible. Have small gifts ready to say 'thank you' to all the speakers for all their hard work.

And lastly, plan something special for yourself to look forward to on your next free weekend. You deserve it!

ABOUT KELLY MCGILLIVRAY

Putting productions of every shape and size together for over 20 years. Now CEO of TheSquad Creative Events and on a mission! Creating brilliantly planned, well executed and bodacious event experiences. Teamwork, underpinned by strategic planning with passion and expertise. That's what it's all about.

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