



Event Theming

Balancing creativity and objectives



Introduction

A great deal of importance is attached to event theming, and rightly so as a good theme can bring your brand to life, encapsulate and reinforce messages, set the mood and provide a fun and thought provoking backdrop to an event. Whether it's creating an unforgettable party atmosphere, or producing a serious business event, a good theme is essential.

The trouble is that all too often the theme takes on a life of its own, assumes overall importance and dictates the content and direction.

We're all familiar with the scenario. The need for an event is established but before even the date, venue or brief are finalised everyone is competing to come up with that succinct slogan that immediately says it all. Something catchy is proposed. Ideas and tenuous links formed. The theme is in the driving seat and whether it has any real relevance to the communication is conveniently forgotten. Inappropriate themes and "cringeworthy" executions abound.

So how do you maintain the delicate balance between highly imaginative concepts and firm business focus?

Manage the Creative Process

As well as managing the event there is a need to manage the creative process. This means taking a step back and approaching each event as a fresh communication, questioning the brief and establishing firm objectives and measurement criteria. An impartial third party, such as an event management and production company, can really add value and authority to this process.

Firstly, don't forget that whether you're producing an employee or customer conference, AGM, product launch, award ceremony, roadshow, party, incentive, teambuild or hospitality event, it's for a business reason.

We've all seen briefs that simply ask for a party which has "wow factor" and quite clearly state there is no business objective - it's purely "fun." But obviously there is an end objective - to reward, recognise, retain and attract employees - and to deny this is to miss an opportunity. It also makes it harder to justify a decent budget if the event is not measured against business criteria. So by all means come up with amazing effects, novel entertainment and create that "party with a difference" but ensure the guests attribute it to being a reward for hard work and the perks of being employed by a great employer.

Objectives

With a conference or customer forum, objectives are usually more clearly stated and business orientated. However, all too often these become forgotten when the theme and the content are developed. As the deadline for the event approaches and input comes from multiple sources and levels, event managers can find themselves pulled in a number of conflicting directions. It's easy to dance to the tune of the theme and lose sight of objectives - particularly if the two don't conveniently match up.

But supposing you have followed best practice procedures:

- Your objectives have been clearly articulated
- A live event has been agreed as the best communication channel
- It's role in the communication mix defined
- A clear brief has been produced with accompanying budget and project plan.

Creative Process

First consider - do you have an existing theme or initiative you can build on? All too often event organisers think they have to introduce a new theme for each event. Good ideas are not built on. Money is wasted as creative ideas, staging, displays and collateral have to be produced afresh. Each conference sees a new theme and there is no message reinforcement or continuity.

But if you have considered the above and decide to develop a fresh theme, how do you then evaluate and choose that winning concept that captures the imagination, yet is firmly aligned to your objectives?

Before you even begin to think of catchy or memorable themes consider the following:

- What is the single main purpose of the event?
- What do you want every participant to take away from the event?
- What are the other key messages you need to convey?
- What theme fits these objectives?
- What tone should the event adopt?
- How does this fit with your corporate identity and messaging strategy?

Ideas for the theme could come from a number of sources:

- Can you build upon an existing theme?
- Does the venue style lend itself to a particular idea?
- Does the geographical location suggest a theme?
- Does the company sponsor an event or other activity that could be tied in?
- Are there any topical films, shows, personalities or world events that could provide a hook?

Even if you are producing the event inhouse, it is worth investing in a creative professional to propose and develop ideas and clearly illustrate how they would be implemented.

Final Checks

Once you have a few ideas, run the following checks:

- Can you see how the theme could be executed and linked to your content?
- Is the theme right for the audience?
- Can the theme be used again or developed to provide a logical progression?
- What are your competitors doing?
- Is it corny?
- Will it be recognisable and have the same connotations to other nationalities?
- Use humour with care and consider how it supports the overall marketing message and tone of the communication. Again, you need to consider how well it translates culturally and linguistically.
- Don't introduce humour for the sake of it or in an effort to enliven the programme.
- Is the style in synch with your business situation? An elaborate, costly production will not be well received by delegates if the company is in the middle of tight budget controls.
- Does it grab your attention, inspire and excite you?
- Most importantly - does it immediately feel right for your company?
- Test the idea on people outside the event planning process; they may pick up on something you have missed.

Summary

If you do find a good theme and have run the above checks then be bold. It's easy to lose the creative spark through an overcautious execution. Similarly, a crude implementation can completely ruin the impact.

A good theme enhances the event. While it's important not to overwork an idea, consider how it could be reflected in all aspects of the communication from the invitation process through to the content, venue, creative, staging, catering and entertainment. And don't forget the post-event communications.

Get your delegates to live and breathe the theme, that way they will absorb the information and change the way they think and act. You could consider letting the delegates discover the theme and then the content of the business meeting. It's a fun way to break the ice and get everyone in the right frame of mind. All this needs careful orchestrating, dedicated resources and either trained inhouse or event management professionals to plan, manage, execute and measure.

About Mirage

Mirage is a full-service live event management and production company.

We continue to delight clients, and exceed expectations, for the simple reason that Mirage does not produce events to a formula. We tailor our creativity to meet your brief and create a memorable, vibrant event, which is professional without being predictable. We help define your objectives, refine your messages and then we inject fun, velocity and life into your content, ensuring your key messages are understood, reinforced and embraced.

Mirage has an impressive portfolio of blue-chip clients whose events range from product launches, conferences, roadshows, business forums, AGMs through to themed parties and fun days, award ceremonies, team-building and motivational activities. Our complete range of services includes venue selection, programme content, logistics, staging, print and electronic media, delegate management, guest speakers and celebrities, video conferencing, speaker support and AV.

To learn more about how your events could have greater impact, relevance and creativity call us on +44 (0) 1883 740400, email diane@mirageemail.com or visit our website at www.miragewebsite.com or visit our party planners site: www.mirageparties.co.uk.



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