

BREAKTHROUGH CONCEPTS CHANGING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

“My job is to alert people to what is going on around them,” says Richard Aaron, President of BizBash Media and Professor at NYU. “Then they can select things they want to use.” Aaron begins his presentations by asking the audience, “What is the most important element in event planning?” The answer, he tells planners, is “You!” You make the decisions, you do the planning. It’s up to you to make it memorable.

Speaking at HSMAT’s Affordable Meetings® Mid-America in April, Aaron called himself a ‘memorologist.’ “People want more today,” he explained. “We are surrounded by so much stimuli, and memorology is the science of creating crystalline memories, the WOW factor, lasting impressions, and buzz. Meetings have to be taken to the experiential level to do that.”

He cites *The Experience Economy*, by B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore, which postulates that while the “goods economy” was supplanted by the “service economy,” the service economy is about to be superseded with something that critics will find even more ephemeral (and controversial) than services ever were: *experiences*. Consider restaurants like Planet Hollywood and the Rainforest Cafe, and how rides at theme parks like Disney World are always evolving to higher and higher levels, just to meet consumer expectations.

Aaron talks about the “Idea Landscape” that is changing all the

time. Social media came on the scene and was largely ignored by business; now it is critical. LED lights were practically unknown two years ago, and now 20 percent of meetings use them, and Aaron predicts that within five years all meetings will use LED lighting.

Among the challenges faced by meeting planners in these times is creating experiences for multiple generations attending events. While not long ago most events were designed to please Baby Boomers, today’s meetings must address the needs of Traditionalists, Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and the Millennials. How do you please them all? “You have to factor in a little bit of everything,” Aaron says. “You need better technology to keep the young people involved, and remember people cannot sit too long – everyone is ADD today. Telephones are the next big thing – it’s mobile marketing that is changing the landscape. Marketing by I.M.ing, welcoming everyone, sending schedules, allowing your attendees to receive updates during the show, sending speaker bios, broadcasting notices about what’s happening on the floor – financial companies and pharmaceutical companies are using the technology now. It will become the standard.”

Some people are “adopters,” Aaron explains. These people learn new technology quickly at all ages, and the young people love the new technologies. The non-adopters are becoming a smaller proportion of the populace.

“It is a buyer’s market now,” Aaron reminds us, “and

PHOTOS: BIZBASH



BALLOONS MAKE A COMEBACK IN A BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S THEME.



LOUNGES ARE MORE POPULAR THAN EVER.

authenticity is paramount. Hotels and vendors must communicate with planners honestly. People know if they are not being dealt with honestly, and they talk about it,” not just to their friends, but to the entire Internet.... “Think Social Networks – Facebook, Twitter, Linked In, Blogs, You Tube. Customers are measuring your reputation and your results in a new mood.”

Aaron advises meeting planners that good design equals good business. “Design is one part technology, one part magic. Your branding needs to be clean and crisp. Everything has to look good – your business cards, your logo, your website – to look professional. Does your logo work? Can you read it on other websites? It makes a statement about you, shows your marketing acumen. The importance of good design is seen everywhere we turn today, and your design makes a statement about you. It shows your marketing acumen. Look at Mix Masters – they come in every color. You have to be clever. Make the designs on your signage bigger and better. Have your bars glowing.”

Green meetings are in and that’s not going to go away. You need to think about hotels that are certified “green,” that separate their waste, use recyclables – things like bamboo plates that are biodegradable, potato starch silverware, organic linens, organic flowers. Plastic bottles with a 9 on the bottom recycle; bottles with a 6 on the bottom do not. People care more about these things than they used to, and that will continue and accelerate.

Edible rentals



EDIBLE FOOD ITEMS CONTINUE TO BE DISCOVERED ADDING FLAIR TO FOOD.

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Themes are critical to any event, Aaron stresses. “Themes unify the team, communicate stronger vision, drive the ‘buy’ in the process, create excitement, and define collateral development. Reality TV has saturated meeting themes. ‘American Idol’ is big. There are chef themes, competing cook-offs, rock & roll camps with guitars, wigs, the whole thing. Bars rock events. Cirque du Soleil was very popular for a time, but that seems to be out now. Elegance is in – ‘Breakfast at Tiffany’s,’ string quartets. Lounges keep advancing. You have to have a lounge, a stylish lounge. Rent sofas instead of chairs and tables.”

What about F&B? The trend in foods is mini portions. Have two or three tiny cups for dessert, even for breakfast. For drinks, make it special. Use signature drinks like apple pie martinis, put colored sugar on glasses, include an olive bar, and use edible plates and cups.

“Remember, it’s all about *you*, and how you can make an experience, and meeting memories!”



Richard Aaron, CMP, CSEP, is president of BizBash Media. A former Broadway actor, he is called the “king of edutainment” bringing his high-energy approach to every speaking engagement as a leading authority on event management. Richard has served on both the MPI’s and ISES’s International Board of Directors and numerous committees. Richard was named event guru by Meeting News Magazine as one of the most influential hospitality professionals in the nation. Richard is currently an adjunct associate professor at New York University Tisch Center for Hospitality, and has been named MPI’s International Planner of the Year, Event Solution’s Visionary, and was recently inducted into the NY MPI Hall of Fame. He can be reached at raaron@bizbash.com.