

Breaking assumptions in the event world

A guest article by Cyriel Kortleven

Professional speaker Cyriel Kortleven talks about the opportunities we miss when organising our events. There are so many things that can be done in a different way to surprise or inspire guests – when thought out well these little adaptations could have a huge impact on the experience of the event. It's all about daring to break fixed assumptions.

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As a professional speaker, I have the opportunity to attend a lot of different events & conferences – different in scale, audience, location, culture, ... but some elements come back at almost every event.

One of those elements is the general flow of an event. At most events, attendees arrive at a certain hour, register at the welcome desk, get a name badge and can get a coffee. Then they are gathered in a large room for the keynote presentation (sometimes followed by some extra plenary presentations or some workshop sessions), they can have lunch and follow extra workshops in the afternoon. At the end of the day, attendees gather again for the closing keynote & the organiser expresses some words of thanks & invites everybody for the networking drink.

There's nothing wrong with this flow but there are so many other opportunities to do things in a different way that might have a huge impact on the experience of the event.

I have collected 21 assumptions and searched for some ways to break the assumption to broaden the spectrum of possibilities for event organizers.

An assumption is a thing that is accepted as true or as certain to happen, without proof. A nice way to spot these assumptions is making a list of 25 events and then writing down elements that these events have in common. Also look for the very 'obvious' ones like – they start & end at a certain time; there is somebody speaking; they close with a drink; ... Those elements are apparently accepted as the truth because they happen at 90% of the activities.

A next step in the process is to break one of those assumptions and check if an event exists where they did something different. That means that it can be done in a different way and broadens your toolbox. Here are a few examples:

#1 One speaker at a time

In most cases, a whole room of attendees is listening to one speaker on stage. But what happens if more speakers are presenting at the same time in the same room. And the audience can choose to which story they're listening by switching channels via their wireless headphone. It's called a silent conference. I had the chance to be one of the 4 speakers at the MPI event 'content' where we had to compete for the



attention of the attendees. It was a great experience but also very hard - as well for the speakers as the participants because their attention was of course also quite divided. But after 1 round, it went easier for both parties and it was a great experience to experiment with this concept.

#4 Organiser takes the risk of organising an event

Make use of possibilities like crowdfunding. Start a crowdfunding campaign and announce that the event will take place if you get at least 100 paying participants. You can immediately discover if there's an interest for your event and you're dividing the risk of the organisation over the participants. And you could combine this crowdfunding element with the possibilities of crowdsourcing. Why don't we let the audience choose their favorite speaker from a shortlist? And let them have a voice in setting up the agenda and flow? It's immediately a great marketing tool because you're involving your potential audience already in advance.

#17 Networking happens during the drink

As an event organiser, you are also responsible for supporting meaningful conversations. It's not enough to have short breaks & a closing drink where people can network. This has to be stimulated by creating a

context where it is possible. Think about a speed date; a network auction; a tool to know who's attending (digital or not); start a private Facebook page in advance where people can connect; move and mix participants a lot of times; give a few influencers who know a lot of people the role of connector; ...

#20 My job is done at the end of the event

Good event organisers make sure that participants will leave with a real 'call to action' and insights they can take back to their personal or professional lives. Create an idea or action wall where people share their ideas & actions. And there's a lot of content that was created during the conference that would be great to share afterwards with the audience. But do it in chunks of information and use it as a kind of marketing tool to announce the next event and stay in touch with them.

21 Only hire speakers who are experts in the domain

At most events, we limit ourselves to expert speakers of that industry. This is of course quite logical because they are the 'experts'. But in some cases, it might even be more interesting to have at least one non-expert professional speaker to bring in a new perspective and help the audience with broadening their view.

21 ways to break assumptions in the event-business

#1 One speaker at a time	#11 Experts share content via presentation
#2 A presentations lasts between 30-60 minutes	#12 A conference happens between 9AM-6PM
#3 Marketing happens via a website & brochure	#13 One screen for one speaker
#4 Organiser takes the risk of organizing an event	#14 Conference takes place at 1 location
#5 Location is a conference centre	#15 Presenter knows his content
#6 Content is key	#16 Real interaction only works in small groups
#7 There's only one correct flow	#17 Networking happens during the closing drink
#8 Inform participants long in advance	#18 Let's do the same as last year
#9 Organiser creates the agenda	#19 We don't need technology
#10 Feedback happens afterwards	#20 My job is done at the end of the event
#21 Only hire speakers who are experts in the domain	



You can find the whole list of 21 assumptions on slideshare:

www.slideshare.net/cyrielkortleven/21-ways-to-break-assumptions-in-the-eventconferencebusiness

Do you need to break all the assumptions and do things in a completely different way. No, please don't do that because you (& your audience) would go crazy. This slideshare can best be used as a source of inspiration. Change some small things if you think it might add value for the theme or the experience of the audience. I hope I helped to broaden your event toolbox to create a more tailor-made event for your audience.

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Published on **www.bbtonline.eu** in December 2016. Like our reports? Like our **Facebook page** as well!