

# TIPS FOR BOOKING THE RIGHT EVENT SPEAKERS

## EVENT PLANNING ADVICE FROM INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS





## INTRODUCTION

Over the years, I've seen numerous polls in meeting and convention publications asking meeting planners what makes them anxious. Booking speakers is always at or near the top of the list.

This e-book is meant to lessen that anxiety by providing useful and practical tips on booking speakers. I asked for the best advice from top meeting planners all over the world -- from organizations both big and small, associations, corporations, non-profits, and producers.

I would love your feedback -- and feel free to add any advice you might have as I think of this as a work in progress.

Best wishes,



Tony D'Amelio, Principal D'Amelio Network tony@damelionetwork.com



## About the Author **TONY D'AMELIO**

Tony has spent his career putting talented people and audiences together, first in the music business and later representing the world's leading speakers. After concluding 27 years as Executive Vice President of the Washington Speakers Bureau, Tony launched D'Amelio Network, a boutique firm that manages the speaking activities of a select group of experts on business, management, politics, and current events.

## **OUR CONTRIBUTORS**



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## SECTION ONE

# I'll never book a speaker unless I...

## "I'll never book a speaker unless I...

...have support of the senior executive who ultimately owns the program."



Joanne Henry Manager, Community Relations & Marketing, TD Canada Trust, GTA Region

...am utterly convinced that this speaker is right for this audience. A speaker can only influence an audience that is ready to hear - and act on - the message."



Karen Parise Communications, Archer

...have access to a video that showcases the speaker in a similar environment as to the one in which we will be using. Videos that show multiple levels of inflection and a deep connection and level of engagement with the audience are very helpful in making decisions."



James Lenz Professional Development Manager, Credit Union Executives Society

## "I'll never book a speaker unless I...

...can see myself learning something from the speaker. I try to book speakers who will offer an important lesson or takeaway to the audience.



Jody Lowe President & Managing Director, The Lowe Group

...am comfortable with the booking agent.



Laurie White President, Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce

...have a complete understanding of all the key themes or topics he/she speaks on, which usually comes from the speaker's own website or a good agency's description. Having access to video clips to see the speaker in action for more than just a minute or two is also vital. And finding a speaker who has a book to sell is like the "trifecta" of a speaker search.



Lisa Kaplan Conference Development, Institute for Career Advancement Needs



PRO TIP

## **PRESENT A TEASER**

"I get the most out of the speakers I hire by having them present a "teaser" during the opening general session and then following up with an educational session during our concurrent breakouts. The American Lighting Association has moved to a TED-style talk using two or three general session speakers instead of one, longer, presentation."



Beth Bentley

VP of Conferences | American Lighting Association

## "I'll never book a speaker unless I...

...know that they will stick to topic and remain neutral on opinions. A little thought provocation is fun, but too slanted in any direction can be off-putting to some attendees."



Lizabeth L. Bustamante Director of Marketing, Coastline, Wealth Management

... have complete confidence in the agent and the agency, and am able to speak with him/her to personally discuss the event and audience in advance of the appearance.""



Raymond Ruzek Managing Director, Ruzek Management

... am confident that he/she is a match for my audience and the particular program. Being sensitive to those aspects – as well as even the region – is essential. Who may be a great match in SF may not be a match at all in Chicago."



Megan Mandeville Sr. Marketing Manager, Programs, Sidley Austin LLP

## "I'll never book a speaker unless I...

...have done a proper research/ background check like website, articles, books, recommendations, made personal contact through email or phone, but most importantly checking out videos from previous events."



Romana Walter Head of Marketing, APSIS International AB

...am confident the cost versus securing additional sponsors or participant/other revenue covers the full cost."



Sam Moon
Executive Director, Next Generation Leadership Council



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### **TIPS FROM TONY**

"I believe successful events are made in the selection process. It's hard to correct the situation if you've chosen the wrong person in the first place. DN speakers want to deliver success. They're willing to get on the phone during the selection process. They talk about how they'd meet the program's goals."

## SECTION TWO

# When it comes to booking speakers, what will you never do again?

## When it comes to booking speakers, what will you never do again?

Book someone who is unreliable. I appreciate it when I can have confidence that a speaker won't cancel on me at the 11th hour.



Jody Lowe President & Managing Director, The Lowe Group

Assume that if airfare is quoted, it's only domestic. Big surprise when I learned a keynote's flight was from Europe, first class, at \$20k. The speaker waived it (thanks to a terrific speakers' rep) – but it was stressful. Now I make sure travel is "domestic" when part of an agreement.



Megan Mandeville Sr. Marketing Manager, Programs, Sidley Austin LLP

Just base my judgement on written material and not checking voice and stage performance.



Romana Walter Head of Marketing, APSIS International AB



**PRO TIP** 

## PREP THE SPEAKER

"Prep the speaker ahead of time to not spend 45 minutes speaking AT the audience, instead of being more interactive and engaging. No one likes a talking head!"



Lizabeth L. Bustamante

Director of Marketing, Coastline, Wealth Management

# When it comes to booking speakers, what will you never do again?

Book a speaker that doesn't have name recognition, because it drains marketing resources that could otherwise be used to promote the overall event.



Laurie White
President, Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce

Sign before I have the costs 100% covered.



Sam Moon
Executive Director, Next Generation Leadership Council



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### **TIPS FROM TONY**

"The most important part of the stage setup is a countdown clock – on the floor or at the podium. Speakers don't want to look at their watch (rude) and event planners don't want to try and figure out how to elegantly relieve the long-winded speaker of their microphone. A countdown clock really is a life-saver."

## SECTION THREE

# When I book a speaker, I always make sure that...



## When I book a speaker, I always make sure that...

...I review the program, audience, theme, key messages, and objectives with the speaker/speaker's bureau."



Joanne Henry Manager, Community Relations & Marketing, TD Canada Trust, GTA Region

...they grab my attention within the first 3-5 minutes of viewing their video, and that something they said or did resonated with me. I look for energy, engagement, and audience reaction. My ultimate goal is for the speaker to provide a lasting impression on my audience."



Christine Cutti-Fox Manager Online Conference Products, American Institute of CPA's

...I do my research, read what they've written, watch their past talks, and make sure they can address what we want them to address."



Jody Lowe President & Managing Director, The Lowe Group



## When I book a speaker, I always make sure that...

...the speaker really wants to be there and does not have a track record of cancelling a day or two before the event due to other demands."



Laurie White President, Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce

...I have carefully analyzed how their contribution supports the overall goals and objectives of the conference and maps to the desired outcomes. Equally important is to imagine yourself in the audience. What do I want the audience to think, feel, say, and do as a result of listening to this person?"



Mary Sullivan **Executive Producer, Wilsonwest** 

...I have access to the speaker to coordinate the keynote and discuss expectations for both parties."



Romana Walter Head of Marketing, APSIS International AB



## WORK HAND-IN-HAND WITH THE REP

"When I book a speaker, I always make sure that I work handin-hand with the rep. It's a partnership, and we're both invested in having it be a great experience. I send pictures during the event to the rep and a recap afterward when possible, so the rep feels like he/she was there with me, and has this 'intel' for other potential engagements for this speaker."



## Megan Mandeville

Sr. Marketing Manager, Programs, Sidley Austin LLP

## When I book a speaker, I always make sure that...

...it is exclusive, provides for a private VIP lunch (with photo opps), VIP reception (with photo opps), and keynote address which would attract wide local/regional press coverage."



Sam Moon
Executive Director, Next Generation Leadership Council



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### **TIPS FROM TONY**

"I'm always stunned when event planners chose to not talk with the speaker a month or so before the event. I know that our speakers find that encounter very helpful in tailoring the message to the audience.

It's a vital part of helping the organization accomplish their objectives for the event."

## SECTION FOUR

# Once the speaker gets on site, I always...

## "Once the speaker gets on site, I always...

...personally greet him/her. I have found that this helps to build my relationship by giving me a chance to thank them again for being there and to remind them of the goal of the event. Plus, it is always a treat for me to get to spend some one-on-one time with a famous person."



Beth Faulkner SVP Event Management, Bardin Palomo

...try and connect with them and ensure they are settled in until the walk through or event, make sure to ask them if they need anything, etc."



Joanne Henry Manager, Community Relations & Marketing, TD Canada Trust, GTA Region

...get in touch to do a proper social promotion as well, and share their content."



Romana Walter Head of Marketing, APSIS International AB



**PRO TIP** 

## MAKE SPEAKERS FEEL AT HOME AND WELCOME

"Once the speaker gets on site, I always seek to make them feel at home and welcome. I try to provide background on the community they will speak to and share a few relevant insights or connections that may help the speaker better engage with the audience."



Jody Lowe President & Managing Director, The Lowe Group

## "Once the speaker gets on site, I always...

...give them time to decompress, relax, eat, exercise, and ultimately focus."



Laurie White President, Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce

...introduce them to the host(s) and make sure they know the key clients' names who are at the event."



Lizabeth L. Bustamante Director of Marketing, Coastline, Wealth Management

..personally greet him/her, and create a welcoming environment from a green room to a guest room to any requests from sharing the RSVP list to putting them in touch with any key contacts they would like to meet.""



Megan Mandeville Sr. Marketing Manager, Programs, Sidley Austin LLP

# "Once the speaker gets on site, I always...

...introduce them to key sponsors/attendees. If they have an interest, I will walk them through the exhibits."



Raymond Ruzek Managing Director, Ruzek Management



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## **TIPS FROM TONY**

"Most speakers are road warriors, but they need their rest to do a great job. It's always good to make certain they have a room away from the elevators, ice machine, and noise. It's best not to call them in the room to ask if they arrived safely – perhaps leave a message on their room phone that they can collect and respond to."

## SECTION FIVE

What is the most effective way to promote a speaker's appearance at an event?



# What is the most effective way to promote a speaker's appearance at an event?

Invite a speaker that is somehow tied to the news and creates strong buzz, word of mouth, media coverage, and social media postings.



Jody Lowe President & Managing Director, The Lowe Group

Get a top-drawer speaker and give attendees examples of what they will walk away with as learnings.



Laurie White
President, Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce

Send out a bio with the invitation and any articles written. Mentioning any claims to fame, as long as not controversial, can help excite the pending audience.



Lizabeth L. Bustamante
Director of Marketing, Coastline, Wealth Management



#### **TIPS FROM TONY**

"Our speakers are always happy to create a short video that can be used to help promote their appearance. It can be posted on the website, used in emails, etc., and helps build anticipation and set up what's to follow at the event."



**PRO TIP** 

# SHOWCASE YOUR EVENT EVERYWHERE

"Showcase it on a modern website with all details, through all social media platforms...ask for a short promotional video to describe their keynote in one sentence as well as what the participant can expect, and also write a short blog post."



Romana Walter Head of Marketing, APSIS International AB



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### **SECTION SIX**

# I get the most out of the speakers I hire by...



## I get the most out of the speakers I hire by...

...having them present a "teaser" during the opening general session and then following up with an educational session during our concurrent breakouts. The American Lighting Association has moved to a Ted-style talk using two or three general session speakers instead of one, longer, presentation."



**Beth Bentley** Director of Conferences, American Lighting Association

...asking them to do a private reception with sponsors either before or after the event."



Laurie White President, Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce

...being prepared prior to their appearance – doing research, preparing questions, and productively using every minute of our time with the speaker."



Jody Lowe President & Managing Director, The Lowe Group



## I get the most out of the speakers I hire by...

...leveraging their content before and after the event. For example, we request permission to record the presentation for our members that we offer on a membersonly, password protected part of our website. In addition, we frequently interview keynote speakers for our quarterly magazine.

The best is when they agree to do a 30 second video promo that we post on the conference page of the website. It lets potential attendees see and hear a taste of how great the session will be."



#### Brian Glade

Managing Director, Global Strategy and the Americas, Association of Executive Search Consultants

...being as specific as possible as to what I would like them to convey. Some speakers like going off on tangents, so being specific can help keep them on track."



#### Lizabeth L. Bustamante

Director of Marketing, Coastline, Wealth Management

...working with them to customize their content for our group and communicating their topic through social media. I always encourage the inclusion of Q&A."



## Raymond Ruzek

Managing Director, Ruzek Management



PRO TIP

## **BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS**

"In working with the top 10 speaker bureaus/agencies in the country, I've found that trust is key – on both sides. Building the rapport and relationships with your trusted reps makes all the difference – to truly be partners in creating the best possible experience, and one that is a good match for you, as well as for the speaker/agency."



Megan Mandeville

Sr. Marketing Manager, Programs, Sidley Austin LLP



## I get the most out of the speakers I hire by...

...making it clear what the audience is experiencing, who they are, what they're going through (concerns they'll want to address, etc.). Being clear on how we will determine value - e.g. if we expect the speaker to stay for a 1-hour reception, a dinner, etc. Be as clear as possible as what you're envisioning to help minimize crossed signals and potential disappointment. For example, if you mention staying for a reception, state the minimum timeframe you are asking for him/her to stay (e.g. an hour). Being clear on what the 'point' of this is – giving the audience things to think about? Simply being entertaining? Holding a call the week or two ahead, with the rep and/or myself, the speaker, and the person who will be introducing him/ her - to "get to know each other" ahead of time, to highlight the event, the flow, the audience, and fine tuning the topic points - anything to especially play up, or anything not to mention."



Megan Mandeville Sr. Marketing Manager, Programs, Sidley Austin LLP

...using an agency, as they are very professional and fix all the small details so the speaker can focus on their keynote instead."



Romana Walter Head of Marketing, APSIS International AB



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## I get the most out of the speakers I hire by...

...doing a thorough pre-engagement briefing, so they know very specifically why they have been asked to speak, they deeply understand the audience demographics, and how their presentation fits into the overall messaging of the event. A key to that is also early engagement of the speakers with the internal stakeholders, so they can jointly curate the content for a more robust and relevant audience experience."



Mary Sullivan
Executive Producer, Wilsonwest

...preparing the speaker and the audience to meet each other. With the speaker, be specific about the walk-away message and provide detail about the context you've created for that message. Provide advance information to the audience, preparing them for the message, and establishing the speaker as the appropriate 'expert.' Focus on these activities above all else, and you'll energize your program."



Karen Parise Communications, Archer

#### **TIPS FROM TONY**

"Be careful to not send mixed signals to the speaker about the subject of their talk. I've had situations where people from the organization are not on the same page about the deliverable for the speech. It can get dicey for the speaker to navigate that political minefield. Help them out by agreeing internally on the direction of the speech before discussing with the speaker."

## SECTION SEVEN

# I've found that success with speakers begins with/by...



## I've found that success with speakers begins with/by...

...identifying the role the speaker brings to your program. Are you hiring the speaker to validate your content, add 'star power' to your event, or to bring some entertainment to your audience? Once I knew that, I was able to identify the right speaker that would bring the most value to my event."



Beth Faulkner SVP Event Management, Bardin Palomo

...having a really good idea of who you want, doing lots of research, and due diligence, but also by being open to the Speakers Bureau - Dr Jerry Linenger is an amazing example of just that."



Joanne Henry Manager, Community Relations & Marketing, TD Canada Trust, GTA Region

...an honest assessment from a speaker bureau who understands our audience and what we need to make our event successful."



Jody Lowe President & Managing Director, The Lowe Group



# I've found that success with speakers begins with/by...

...taking a risk on a lesser-known candidate who is recommended by the Speaker's Bureau. A few years ago, we considered hiring Billy Beane, who, of course, is a fantastic speaker. However, in the end, we decided to go with Paul DePodesta. He was humble, engaging, and knocked it out of the ball park! I recommend that you listen to the advice the Speaker's Bureau offers and determine the right fit for your particular audience."



Doniece Welch Vice President & General Manager, REAL Trends

...being honest about the best match, and what will bring out the best in the speaker while adding value to the audience."



Megan Mandeville Sr. Marketing Manager, Programs, Sidley Austin LLP

...good recommendations, self promotion through the speaker, additional material they might have produced like articles, books or podcasts."



#### Romana Walter Head of Marketing, APSIS International AB



PRO TIP

### **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE**

"I've found that success with speakers begins with knowing your audience and engaging with the right speaker's bureau."



Laurie White
President, Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce

# I've found that success with speakers begins with/by...

...in my view, there are two key elements in having a successful experience with your speakers. First, use a broker you know and trust. They are able to provide insights on speakers that can't be gleaned from the video/demo tapes. They know their idiosyncrasies and how to help them succeed. Second, know your audience. Each meeting or event tends to have a different personality, so it's critical to match the speaker to the audience."



Jim Sgueo
President and CEO, National Alcohol Beverage Control Association

...clear communication about the event, the attendees, and the goals of the meeting."



Raymond Ruzek Managing Director, Ruzek Management



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"Success with speakers begins with not making assumptions about their content and arrangements. Attention to those details before getting on site means a great outcome is all but guaranteed."

### SECTION EIGHT

The best way to keep the audience from bolting on the last day of the event is...

# The best way to keep the audience from bolting on the last day of the event is...

...a newsworthy keynote speaker!"



Jody Lowe
President & Managing Director, The Lowe Group

...keeping killer content plugged in throughout the day. Also, ending in mid-afternoon rather than at 5 p.m."



Laurie White
President, Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce

...preparing a program that is engaging and topical."



Megan Mandeville Sr. Marketing Manager, Programs, Sidley Austin LLP



#### **TIPS FROM TONY**

"Compelling content - perhaps an important industry panel - or a great and name speaker; those have the best chance of keeping an audience 'til the end of the conference. Most important - promote the last day's agenda in every way possible."



**PRO TIP** 

### LINE UP AN AMAZING SPEAKER

"The best way to keep the audience from bolting on the last day of the event is to have an amazing speaker lined up. Perhaps also someone they never have heard from before."



### Joanne Henry

Manager, Community Relations & Marketing, TD Canada Trust, GTA Region



#### SECTION NINE

I like to sustain and drive home the speaker's message after the event by...



# I like to sustain and drive home the speaker's message after the event by...

...providing the attendees with a document that describes the key takeaways and action items from all of the speakers. This document allows attendees to easily share what they have learned with their colleagues back home."



**Iames Lenz** Professional Development Manager, Credit Union Executives Society

...seeking news coverage of the event and sharing the link with our audiences and posting to social media. Writing an article, email or blog post summarizing the event can be very successful."



Jody Lowe President & Managing Director, The Lowe Group

...providing links of relevant content."



Laurie White President, Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce



**PRO TIP** 

# INCLUDE SPEAKER KEY POINTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

"I like to sustain and drive home the speaker's message after the event by including key points of their message in social media communications."



Raymond Ruzek
Managing Director, Ruzek Management

# I like to sustain and drive home the speaker's message after the event by...

...creating a summary, a recap video, and a follow up interview."



Romana Walter
Head of Marketing, APSIS International AB

...ensuring we use their key messages and build them into any post conference / event materials."



Joanne Henry Manager, Community Relations & Marketing, TD Canada Trust, GTA Region



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#### **TIPS FROM TONY**

"Many speakers are happy to provide an article – or do an onsite video interview – after the talk. Those give a great opportunity to reference some issue that resonated particularly strong with the audience and drive home key points that will help their message stick."



## HOME TO EXPERTS ON ISSUES OF **INTEREST TO BUSINESS**

D'Amelio Network manages the speaking activity for a select group of experts on the important issues facing business leaders. Our clients speak at events for audiences worldwide on leadership & management, innovation, global business, achieving business growth, the economic landscape, American & global political affairs, managing risk, government regulation, motivating & engaging people, organizational performance issues, health care, and more.

DN is not a speakers bureau. We don't represent hundreds of speakers. We are a boutique speaker management firm. We've hand-picked a group of experts who also happen to be great speakers on topics of interest to business audiences. We are small -- by design. Small affords us the time to focus deeply on our clients. That focus allows us to be an exceptional resource for our clients to event planning professionals at speakers bureaus, production companies, marketing firms, corporations, and associations.

# **BRINGING IDEAS AND AUDIENCES TOGETHER**





#### **TALK TO US**