PUSHING BOUNDARIES OF CREATIVITY FOR STANDOUT EVENT EXPERIENCES
INTRODUCTION

Events, both big and small, should provide standout experiences. They often need to fulfil multiple objectives – for example, to educate, unite and delight - but ultimately, they need to be memorably. The key to achieving this is engaging the audience, to spark their imagination and interest and then once they are receptive, deliver valuable content. As event professionals, we know that it is our duty to ensure stakeholders, partners and delegates are provided with the tools to make all of this possible.

The purpose of this paper is a simple one: Event Insight, in partnership with Stagestruck, look to bring you some of the best and most innovative event ideas that will amplify and enhance the experience of delegates and the opportunities open to sponsors.

In order to banish event malaise, event organisers should take a step into the unknown and find creativity through diversifying. Tap into your inner creativity and look outwards to be inspired.

After which, unify these ideas and integrate them into your event. This means crafting creative thinking to fit event and communication objectives, with the audience profile and requirements in mind. Adopt the attitude that there is no such thing as a bad idea, instead accept or reject based on a clear understanding of what your event needs to achieve.
Through a holistic approach, all event touchpoints – before, during and after – are areas that your new ideas can impact.

If this seems like wishful thinking – read on and discover how to make this a reality.
FINDING CREATIVITY IN DIVERSITY

Every event has the potential to embrace diversity and be a forum for new ideas, whether B2C or B2B, an established or relatively new venture. Each event will have its own content obstacles; however, a creative and outward looking approach is a powerful starting point to combat these challenges.

Similarly, there are new and different styles of thinking emerging when it comes to events – inspired by the ‘behavioural science’ that super brands employ to make people buy into them, event communication can evolve from embracing such an approach.

Touch points, communications and content need to appeal to delegates ‘System 1’ mode of thought – which is fast, instinctive and emotional – as well as their ‘System 2’, the slower, more deliberate and logical.

To unearth the perfect ideas and inspiration, look to really understand your event objectives and the way in which it could adopt innovations. This must be the bare bones, the essence and the very reason for your event existing. If possible, summarise the whole project in a single sentence or even just a word.

CASE STUDY
TRANSFORM YOUR CONTENT

Unum – a company working in the “income protection insurance” space. To spice up their offering, they have created takeaway content, often humorous in tone, such as “you don’t need to know feng shui to create awesome office space”, with some great ideas for mixing up the office layout. Or, “Playtime!” which features some novel ways to lighten up the working day, such as office computer game rooms.

Edmonton Dental Clinic – taking a leaf out of Buzzfeed’s book, they have deployed some click baiting lists, such as The Biggest Tooth Ever Discovered, Strange Teeth Modifications, Three Insane Dental Floss Flavours and The Parasite that Eats Tongues. The result is upped engagement and some memorable (if a bit bizarre!) experiences.

These examples are not from events – but they are transferable. The mindset is to accept that it is possible to take inspiration from all and everything.

“Copy from one, it’s plagiarism; copy from two, it’s research”
Wilson Mizner

I. THINKING, FAST AND SLOW
by Daniel Kahneman
Next, what are the necessary ingredients to achieve this? There will be delegate needs, sponsorship requirements, and internal demands too. All of this information can feed into working out the key goals to making an event a success. The real challenge is found in ensuring that each of these stakeholders is inspired and engaged, throughout all stages of the event cycle.

Similarly, it is important to check these goals against feedback from previous events. If certain areas were lacking or done particularly well, this is strong framework to focus reparatory attention or build from a position of success.

Think big – what, in an ideal world, do you aspire to achieve from your event? This transcends KPIs and taps into the heart of your offering. In turn, these brave aspirations can fuel the inspiration and motivation to produce a truly standout event.
Research undertook by Leeds Beckett University explores what makes an event truly immersive. One discovery is that an event makes it into a delegate’s ‘episodic memory’, the place where the human brain stores all of its personal stories. Although their findings are common sense it highlights the importance of creating a personalised and lasting experience for attendees.

They suggest that events need to consider three P’s: Play, Place & Performance in order to truly create an experience that lives on as part of the individual’s memory.

Play is, as literal as it sounds; spontaneity and fun leads to increased involvement and positivity.

Place is the consideration of the event’s physical environment and the delegates interaction with it; paying particular attention to the human need to ‘nest’ – e.g. familiarise and get comfy, then ‘investigate’ by extending territories within a space and finally ‘stamp’, which is where the space/experience truly becomes the individuals own.

Performance is all about creating the theatre of the event – most powerful and memorable when the audience are the co-creators rather than passive observers.

SPEEDY BRAINSTORMING

Get the creative juices flowing – and get your team involved from stage one.

Ideas roulette: place A3 pieces of paper around a table, each titled with a key aspect of your event, for example “supplier delegate meetings” or “sponsorship opportunities”. Split your organisers into teams, each with a different colour pen, and on a timer give them 30 seconds to write as many ideas as possible on each piece of paper, before speeding onto the next.

The delegate experience: get storyboarding, from invitation through to leaving after the final session. Would their journey inspire you? As with all this, the details are key and each touchpoint is an opportunity for something that little bit special.

Registration is a tick register? Boring! How about face recognition, QR code-scan, fingerprints, or a Hawaiian wreath of flowers (may be...).

Mood board: create a collage of all the images, videos, colours, styles, etc of your event – create how you want people to feel during the event, and the theme that suits it best.
GET INSPIRED

Here at Event Magazine and C&IT, we have put together some ideas that we have seen or implemented ourselves that have really stood out. This list was compiled in partnership with Stagestruck, who have experience working across a variety of industries creating events that are imaginative, technically demanding and innovative in format.

Whilst these are just some of the outward influences that have been successfully integrated, the aim should always ensure a positive response to an event’s core messages.

UNIQUE VENUES

The event industry has a wealth of venues and spaces available to utilise, yet too often settle on conventional conference centres. Gone are the days of a slide projector and easel, with the advancement of audio visual technology and some out-of-the-box thinking, exciting new opportunities open up. For example, the Liberal Democrats kicked off their 2010 campaign in a Night Club. Nonetheless, a selected venue should still be easily accessible and adhere to the philosophy of your event.

If you can’t find a venue unique enough on the outside, change it up inside – build a giant ball pit – or an ancient Greek agora – and challenge people’s expectations as soon as they walk in the door.

COMPETITIONS

Gamify your event by adding a competitive edge. This could involve quizzes, puzzles or even organised team games. The aim is to maximise engagement through entertainment, whilst keeping relevancy to your event’s core messages.

UNEXPECTED SPEAKERS

It is vital to have relevant high-profile speakers, attracting delegates and sponsors to engage with their insight and wisdom. However, by diversifying the speaker line up, with some off-the-wall choices and approaching a topic from a unique angle can reinvigorate the audience between core sessions. For example, an event on Social Media could include a Twitter Comedian (they exist!).

DRAGON’S DEN

Innovate with some well known formats, creating some tension and added excitement. A speaker or sponsor could pitch their product to an audience of faux Dragons. An app, for example, could facilitate audience voting or ‘investment’.
TED TALKS

Perhaps the gold standard of engagement throughout their events and online presence. Whilst their speakers and content is a huge draw, the format is transferable. For example, the short bite-size presentations or the powerful narrative driven storytelling. For research and inspiration, TED is a good place to turn.

SILENT DISCO

Not an actual ‘club night’, but the head-set technology. By using noise cancelling headphones, with a direct link to a speaker’s microphone it becomes possible to ensure a highly engaged audience, totally focused on the content being delivered. This is perhaps most effectively implemented to overcome noisy background situations, for example, a session could be run in the foyer or during lunch, keeping your delegates engaged whilst they are eating.

SKETCH ARTIST

For each talk or session, a professional artist could sketch the salient points into a concise and whimsical drawing. This could perhaps follow the narrative of the session, showing how a speaker developed their argument or a panel exchanged ideas on the topic in hand.

CARICATURES

Enhance the delegate experience by injecting entertainment by way of a caricature artist, capturing guests and speakers in a humorous light. Also, this is an effective way to engage delegates and sponsors during follow up, and for them to keep a valuable event memento.

LIVE STREAM

Events no longer need to be confined to their physical location. Through online streaming, an event can be pushed out to people across the globe. In turn, this is a good way to capture leads through gated content and registration, creating a new sponsorship opportunity. Questions or comments could also be submitted by the online audience, creating dynamic audience engagement.

IMPROV TROUPES

Add a bit of theatre to your events with performers that can use delegates as a springboard for their routine. With no props or costumes, create a theatrical scenario related to an event’s content. This is also a great way to bring to life some techy content or even an inspiring way to answer an audience question.
SET DESIGN
Continuing the theatrical theme, to enhance a venue, employ the skills of experienced set designers. This can create “wow!” moments for delegates and unique space for sponsorship opportunities too.

TELL STORIES
Did you know that when someone tells you a story about running, that it activates not only the listening part of your brain, but also the part that looks after movement? Whether you know it or not, you’ve put yourself in the position of the runner. Tell your content as stories, touch people’s emotions, involve them and they will store that data in a totally new and far reaching way in their brains.

BE HUMAN
We are hard wired for empathy – it’s a tribal response – so appeal to their humanity and an audience (in almost all cases!) will take you and your messages much closer to their hearts.

OTHER IDEAS
- Creative catwalk
- Dance crew
- Circus act
- Experiential drinks & catering
- Spoken word & poetry
- Brain workout
- Against the clock pitch
- 2-speaker battle
- 2-speaker battle
As with all ambitious ideas, do handle them with caution. Wherever possible enlist the guidance of expert professionals, ensuring all measures to successfully implement and maximise impact have been taken. The result of adopting an idea without proper care can produce some rather undesired outcomes, not least confused delegates and puzzled sponsors, and at worst detract from your core messages.

Also, be “always on”: It is no secret that as event organisers, we are busy and under the pressure of looming deadlines, delegate and speaker acquisition, venue troubles, and so on – the list really is endless. However, take that extra minute at lunchtime to share an idea, a video clip, a story you read, or whatever it may be. Keep an openness to inspiration in you and throughout the team at all times.

**STAGESTRUCK TOP TIPS**

Creativity comes from a diversity of experiences, ideas and expertise. Bringing these all together coherently can deliver a brilliant event. This is the heart of Stagestruck’s ethos.

Mix up skill sets, and be open to new ideas. Find synergies between departments – and even across client industries - to maximise engagement and opportunities, and to keep everything fresh and exciting.

Finally – learn from life, and bring this to the office every day.
TAKEAWAYS

☑ Understand what your event is fundamentally looking to achieve

☑ Brainstorm openly and creatively – no idea is a bad idea, the trick is in benchmarking it against your event’s priorities AND your aspirations

☑ Find inspiration everywhere, and diversify your outlook by looking outward. After which, unify these ideas so that the result is a coherent yet exhilarating standout event experience

Good luck!