

Case Study: A Sponsor's Audience-Engagement Experience

An online supplement to of *The Non-Obvious Guide to Event Planning: For Kick-Ass Gatherings that Inspire People*

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At TEDxSeattle, our volunteer teams work closely with our sponsors to stage custom, theme-aligned audience-engagement experiences that give participants novel, powerful ways to *activate* content they hear from stage. These moments also build connections among the audience, lessen information overload, create multi-sensory learning opportunities and extend the impact of the event long into the future.

Under the event theme “Space Between,” we applied learning incubation theory (the theory that adult learners, to help seal exposure to new ideas, need quick breaks after exposure to new information) as a foundation. Our audience-engagement partner, Interplay Experience Design, developed short, strategic, interstitial “incubation” moments *between* speakers’ talks. These included activities such as filling in blanks on three cards stored in name badge holders.

Each blank represented the three steps of incubation: “Right now, one possibility on the horizon is ____.” “I could challenge myself to do more ____.” To fill in a third blank, participants were encouraged to meet a new friend, and ask: “In the space between, I see ____ (my word) and ____ (their word).” *Voilà!* We’ve also lessened the *space between* people.

Later, to get people out of their chairs, stretch their bodies and in the process stretch their *minds*, Interplay also designed a series of “meter-yoga” participation activities. The event host had everyone stand and share reactions to speakers’ material along a projected arc of possibilities—using their bodies and arms as meters. As we discussed in Chapter 3: How to Transform Attendees into Participants, when we move, information moves from short- to long-term memory. Event energy inevitably moves upward. People become more comfortable interacting with others—and new ideas.

Toward the end of the day, these interactivities culminated in the completion of a “What’s your 62?” action card. Our event host took participants through a short exercise that asked them to record their “62,” which, they were told, was shorthand for executing a new idea that came out of the day’s conference. Specifically, people were encouraged to dedicate two minutes to *thinking* about their idea, and 60 more minutes to *executing* it, after the event. They were given directions on how to post photos of their *What’s your 62?* cards to a sponsor-branded website.

In the weeks following, attendees posted photos of their ideas and actions to this sponsor-supported website, which was searchable by key word. So, anyone visiting the site could

easily get a read on the range and depth of actions spurred by our event. It also built in a level of accountability—when our goals are public, we are more likely to reach them.

Feedback was very positive: “The stand-up stretching between every other speaker is excellent for holding our attention.” “Loved the activity boards in the break times! Also loved the interactive human needle to gauge our excitement level.” “Loved the brain breaks and the interactive cards/activities between sessions.”

Aside from activating audience-engagement experiences in the auditorium, TEDxSeattle also builds custom stations throughout the venue that allow participants to engage with ideas from the event, sponsors and each other. (For more sponsor-acquisition strategies, see Chapter 7: How to Maximize your Budget .)