

Why Conference Session Descriptions Matter

Meeting professionals spend countless hours on the room setup, F&B, hotel negotiations, speaker selection, AV and other conference logistics. Yet little time is spent on crafting the best session titles, descriptions and learner objectives.

A lot rests on conference session descriptions. How well you convey what — and how — content will be available to attendees may be the deciding factor in whether they register in the first place. We can do better.

Four Conference Session Practices That Matter

Here are four simple best practices to get you started.

1. Come up with a good, intriguing session title.

It's the first and perhaps only impression you'll make on a potential attendee. The primary purpose of a title is to get the attendee to read the first sentence of the description. Which of the following two session titles makes you want to read more?

Plenary Session — The State of the [fill in the blank] Industry

or

What Everyone Ought to Know About the Macro Trends Affecting the [fill in the blank] Industry.

The second title does a better job of piquing the reader's interest.

2. Liven up your session description.

Most conference session descriptions are dull, leading attendees to believe that the presentation will be the same. A session description should get the reader to say, "Hmm, that sounds interesting. What do the Learner Objectives [LOs] look like?"

Focus on the reader. Make a promise and address the WIIFM (What's In It For Me?) benefits of the presentation. The word limits imposed on most session descriptions is not the challenge. It's choosing the right words to accurately describe the session, pull readers in and get them to commit to attending the session.

3. Craft strong Learner Objectives.

These statements that follow the session description describe what the participant is expected to achieve (outcomes) as result of attending. Strong LOs have three distinguishing characteristics: They are

- observable
- measurable (you can evaluate them immediately upon leaving the session) and
- actively done by the participant.

Which of these two LOs do you think is better?

After attending the session, participants will be able to:

- *Increase their sales by 50 percent and maintain critical partnerships.*
- *Identify seven ways to improve their sales and maintain critical partnerships.*

The first LO has sex appeal, but it is misleading and not measurable. Have you ever walked out of a conference session and automatically improved your skills by 50 percent? Of course not. The second meets all three LO characteristics.

Including two or three LOs with session descriptions will help participants choose the presentation that's right for them.

4. Spell out who should attend both by group and experience level.

This is a critical component that should be included in conference marketing materials. Many attendees have walked out of a session and said, “That workshop was not for me. I wish the session description had been more specific.”

Event professionals should also label the appropriate audience for each session in terms of experience level — novice, intermediate, veteran — and niche area (as well as other categories specific to each industry). This simple addition won’t take much space and can reap great attendee benefits.

Take Away

The primary purpose of a session title is to get the reader to read the first sentence of the session description. The primary purpose of the first sentence is to get the reader to the second sentence. And so on, through to the learner objectives.

By the time the reader has read the title, description, and learner objectives, the goal is to get the reader to attend the session. Ultimately, the goal of the conference organizer is for the session titles, descriptions and learner objectives to accurately match the presentation that is delivered.

The Purpose Of A Conference Education Session Title

The primary purpose of a session title is to get the reader to read the first sentence of the session description. The primary purpose of the first sentence is to get the second sentence read. And, so on through the learner objectives.

By the time the reader has read the title, description and learner objectives, the goal is to get the reader to attend the session. Ultimately, the goal of the conference organizer is for the session titles, descriptions and learner objectives to accurately match the presentation that is delivered.

So why is so little time spent on crafting the best session titles, descriptions and learner objectives? Most conference organizers depend heavily on session titles, descriptions and learner objectives provided by speaker proposals which usually are not written very well. Or they depend upon the marketing department to craft titles and descriptions with a lot of flash but often don't accurately correspond with the presentation.

Attractive session titles, clearly articulated descriptions with a dash of pizzazz and well written learner objectives increase the chance that conference participants will attend the session. Let's spend more time on the session title.

The Importance Of The Session Title

The session title is the first, and perhaps only, impression you make on a prospective attendee. On average, eight out of ten will read the session title, but only two out of ten will read the session description and learner objectives. So it's fairly obvious that if people stop at the title, you're already dead in the water.

Without a compelling promise that turns a browser into a reader, the rest of your words may as well not even exist. So, from a marketing standpoint, writing a great session title is a critical skill.

The Four "Us" Approach To Writing Titles

The [American Writers & Artists](#) trainers teach *The Four Us* approach to writing titles:

- Be **USEFUL** to the reader
- Provide the reader with a sense of **URGENCY**
- Convey the idea that the main benefit is somehow **UNIQUE**
- Do all of the above in an **ULTRA-SPECIFIC** way

Consider the following conference session headlines?

Example 1

Position For The Next Market Shift

or

Get Rid Of The Great-Recession-Thinking And Position Yourself For A Shift

Example 2

A/V And Production Technology For The New Meetings Era

or

Little Known Ways To Save Money And Enhance Your Meetings With Innovative AV And Production Technology

Example 3

Plenary Session — The State Of The Meetings And Travel Industry (This is probably the most overused title in every industry and can be seen at most hospitality and meetings-related conferences. Blech!)

or

What Everyone Ought To Know About The Macro Trends Affecting Meetings And Travel Industry

Which appealed to you more in each example the first or second title? The first title in each example is an actual session title from recent association annual conferences. Yet, the second title makes you want to read more. It piques curiosity. With just a little time and thought, these titles could be rewritten to attract more eyeballs.

Authenticity Still Rules

Consider the following titles:

- Improve Your Hotel Revenue Sales By 50%
- Sex! Sex! Sex! Now That I Have Your Attention, Attend My Session

While these titles got your attention, do you trust them?

Bimbo titles, over-promise and under-deliver. They have an inherent flaw. Either they betray trust up front, when the session copy confesses the deceit. Or they betray it on the tail end, when the session proves it can't live up to the challenge.

If people attend your sessions based on a great title and your speaker under-delivers, attendees lose trust in the speaker and the conference organizers. Your session titles need to be honest and authentic to the presentation. Improving that trust, means increasing attendee loyalty and retention.

Ultimately, the better your session title, the better your odds of beating the averages and getting what you've written read by a larger percentage of people and thus getting people to attend your session.