



Lourdes Berho, Ana Maria Salazar and JC Agid - influencers and friends

For good conference content, nurture your communities!

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Conference professionals know that it takes a strong team to realize a good meeting. I have come to realize that it also takes **communities** – off/online influencers and their affinity groups – to produce strong content. I have been fortunate to work with a great community creator, JC Agid, on startup events in Brazil and Mexico (among other countries where we have produced conferences together). Here are 4 lessons that I have learned from JC about *why event communities and their leaders matter for relevant and interesting conference content*:

1. Community influencers can tell you about emerging issues and how these are being viewed and debated locally. It isn't so difficult for experienced program directors to identify trending topics. You need to know the developing parameters of an issue, though, to

create truly relevant sessions. Community influencers are great interlocutors for this, especially if you consult with several of them to understand how their perspectives overlap and diverge.

2. You can (should) test what session formats participants will want with influencers and their communities. There are lots of articles and blog posts about how conference attendees want experience and interactivity at the meetings they attend. You might already have a list of session formats that could achieve these goals. To get from that list to a good agenda it helps to be able to ask candidate attendees (which communities represent) what would appeal to them and would draw them and others like them to take part.

3. Community influencers can help you identify great speakers whom you might not otherwise identify or reach. You might need big names on a program for people to consider they'll get value for money -- but often at the actual meeting participants most appreciate the unknowns whose stories they are discovering for the first time. Community influencers might know people with remarkable stories, and they can also give you an initial assessment about how articulate they would be as speakers. And an influencer, or somebody in his-her network, might also be able to introduce you to a star speaker candidate based on personal connections and trust.

4. Communities are the best way for you to amplify your content and even co-create it with participants, before, during and after your event. Conference content is not just what gets shown and said during formal sessions at your meeting. It is what gets Instagrammed and blogged, Tweeted, and Facebooked before, during, and after it – by the conference organization and by supporters and attendees. It's clear today that social media is crucial to producing a successful event. You can do a great job delivering on a world class social media plan for your event – you still need people to spread the word and link to your content. And for real buzz, to start independently communicating about you.

It's worthwhile pointing out here the clear commercial benefits from nurturing event communities for making "inbound" delegate sales. There is also liable to be less tension between content and commercial roles with this kind of approach.

If you want to know more about building strong relationships with influencers and nurturing event communities JC (Jean-Christian) Agid lives in New York City. You can reach him through <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jcagid/>. I explain more about how I approach participatory event design and curation at <http://millikenstrategy.com>.

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