

Conference Moderator or Link Presenter - the difference

by Roy Sheppard



In the live events industry the terms 'Moderator', 'Facilitator' and 'Presenter' tend to be used interchangeably by clients, speaker's bureaus, agents as well as some conference production companies. These days, many presenters and celebrities 'claim' to be a conference 'moderator' or a 'facilitator'. But are they? And does it matter? The difference between the two can have a profound impact on whether you can meet your event objectives and expectations.

If your agenda is highly developed, and pre-scripted such as an award ceremony, then the presenter need not be an authority on your subject. A link presenter will suffice. Typically such presenters are individuals with broadcast experience or actors who are skilled and confident at introducing and providing short verbal links to the next topic in a 'live environment.'

If your programme seeks to engage the audience beyond the back and forth style of Q&A, or one of your aims is to change current behaviour and perceptions a facilitator/moderator can prove invaluable. A professional moderator will be prepared to invest the necessary pre-production time to gain a thorough understanding of key challenges and issues. They will focus on helping you to reach event objectives, how best to convey key messages, and ensure that company representatives are seen in the best possible light.

Link Presenters

- Introduce speakers, and function as MC
- Occasionally interview executives and staff
- Do not evaluate or adjust the event's content. The scope of their interventions, and the strength of their questions on stage is limited by superficial knowledge of the organisation or industry.
- Are invariably booked AFTER the content and format has been agreed and in some cases, scripts completed.
- Link presenters are not paid to have any responsibility for the outcome of the event.

Conference Moderators/Facilitators

- Are more appropriate for events that involve dynamic content such as, but not limited to, an unscripted Q&A (Question and Answer session) with audience members and executives.
- They are routinely brought in at the earlier stages of an event's planning.
- Will invest significant time becoming particularly knowledgeable about the personalities and the issues affecting the business and its industry sector. This enables; assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the interviewees and builds trust, so interviewees become confident that the moderator knows the subject well enough to ask intelligent questions and is reassured that the moderator will 'look after' him/her on stage.
- Works closely with the production company, to help the client clarify the objectives for the event and provide a number of workable options to ensure that the key messages are delivered, understood and 'taken home' by the audience

- Able to provide an alternative to 'Autocue' and 'Powerpoint' presentations for individuals unskilled at presenting,
- Always ensures the participants look good in front of the audience as well as being the 'conscience of the audience', asking the very questions on their minds, but are perhaps too nervous or afraid to ask in person.

Roy Sheppard is a specialist moderator at business events. He is booked repeatedly by some conference production companies, who recognise the value he brings to their clients' events. His role is to help clarify and then reach the event's communication goals. His knowledge is usually so deep about the company that he has been asked quite often "Are you a professional – or do you work for us?!". Clients include; Arthur Andersen, ASP Forum, British Telecom, BAT, Campbell Distillers, Canon UK, Hewlett Packard, HSBC, ICL, Nortel Networks, J Sainsbury, The Woolwich, Unipart, Unisys, Unilever and many more.

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