

Even Pimps Don't Earn This Much

A Report for Event and Conference Organisers
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*The conference industry can no longer sustain fat commissions
to people and organisations that add little or no value.*

"...an excellent logical and very persuasive case you present. It needed to be articulated clinically and you have done that so well." **A well-established UK professional speaker.**

"Unfortunately, a devastatingly accurate account of the speaking industry." **Manager to a professional speaker.**

"Wow!... Knowing how much pressure we have been under in the last 12 months to be more transparent I think that this approach will eventually filter down to the next level of suppliers.... We never mark up speakers because its so visible." **Co-owner of £3 million turnover live events production company.**

"...great, relevant and true..." **Professional speaker**

"...the longest suicide note in the world" **Professional Corporate Comedian**

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Introduction

If you are responsible for organising or paying for conferences or events, **you need to read this**. It could help you make better buying decisions, save you money and even help you to avoid getting ripped off.

This report focuses primarily on booking 'on-stage' talent – one of the more expensive and visible elements that determine the success or failure of an event.

According to the UK Conference market Survey 2003, published in July 2004

- The UK Conference Market is now worth approximately £10 billion (1% of the UK gross domestic product), up from £7.3 billion in 2002.
- £2.3 billion is spent on transport, leisure and entertainment, the remainder on hotels and venues.
- The average budget for events is now £108,000

Any Finance Director under pressure from board director's or shareholders to cut costs can instantly improve their company's bottom line by cancelling events. At a stroke of the pen, savings of anything from £30,000 to over £150,000 for each event can be made.

In-company and agency event managers are therefore under increasing pressure to demand more for less – sometimes much more, for much less. Understandably, there is far more emphasis on measuring and generating a higher return on their considerable investment (ROI). A glorified 'piss up' for staff or customers is difficult to justify these days.

The livelihood of in-company and out-sourced event managers are therefore at risk unless they can demonstrate an ROI for their employer or clients. These are important questions that need to be asked within any organisation that holds events:

- How many experts have you paid for to speak at one of your events, meetings or conferences?
- Who actually helped produce a tangible, measurable result for the event?
- How much value did they add to your organisation?
- How long did that 'value' last?
- How many speakers have delivered more than was promised?
- Who made those promises? The artist themselves or their representative?
- How happy were you to sign their cheque?
- How often have you felt 'ripped off'?
- How confident are you that you are being offered the best/most appropriate talent for your specific business needs?
- Or are you being offered talent that's over-priced – to satisfy the commercial interests of those providing that talent?

Those who book speakers, MCs or moderators are sometimes over-charged to an alarming degree. In order to ensure that you purchase the best and most appropriate on-stage talent for your organisation, in the most cost-effective ways, the following recommendations are made;

Recommendations To Those Who Pay for On-Stage Talent

- Before you contact anyone, do you REALLY need an external professional?
- Please, please DON'T just say 'We need a motivational speaker.' Because you might not!
- Discuss and agree with colleagues, and then clearly articulate in writing what you want on-stage talent to achieve for your company in general and for the event in particular.
- What is the **result** you are looking for from them?
- How would you know if they were a success and delivered added value to you and your organisation?
- How important is their topic expertise?
- How important is their platform expertise?
- Contact your existing network of event organisers and speakers you have worked with in the past and whose judgement you trust. Ask them for any thoughts and recommendations they may have based on your requirements. Benefit from the combined expertise of your fellow meeting professionals.
- You may be pleasantly surprised at a) who they know that can fit the bill perfectly and b) their recommendations may charge you far less than you were expecting.
- If you draw a blank from your network, then go onto the internet. Visit <http://www.google.co.uk/> If you are looking for a UK based person click the "Pages from the UK" button before you make your search. Or you can go to the US site for a more global search. <http://www.google.com/>.
- If you know the name of the performer you are looking for, type "Name of Speaker" inside quotation marks. This will ensure that only results show up that feature their full name.
- If you also know their area of expertise, type "Name of speaker" + topic area such as 'Leadership'. This should provide you with even more accurate search results.
- When you scroll down the results you may find their personal website. Be aware that you will often be directed to sites with a button that promise "To contact this speaker click here". It probably doesn't. It will often link you to a sales person at a speaker bureau.

Contacting a Speaker Direct:

- 1) Outline the purpose, size and scale of your event. Where it will be held. Who will be in the audience; age, experience, position within your organisation/sector. The

- format for the day; theatre, cabaret, classroom or any other style.
- 2) Would they be available on the date(s) required? If not call someone else, but first ask for the name and contact number for someone else they would be prepared to recommend.
 - 3) If they are available, tell them who you have used before – and how that worked out.
 - 4) Ask *“How much does this sound like it is something you might be able to help us with?”*
 - 5) Tell them you are exploring your possibilities at the moment and that no firm decision has yet been made.
 - 6) What specific experience do you have working within our industry/sector?
 - 7) How prepared are you to customise your presentation for us?
 - 8) How interactive and entertaining is your presentation?
 - 9) How much do you charge?
 - 10) What does this include?
 - 11) What does your fee exclude?
 - 12) Would you be available to meet our team for them to assess your suitability for this meeting? (I once walked into such a meeting to find the event committee of over 20 people!! Don't do that to someone!)
 - 13) Would we be charged for such a meeting?
 - 14) Does the person have a promotional pack and video/DVD showreel they can send? Alternatively, the more 'up-to-date' performers have streamed video that can be watched on-line while you speak to them on the phone!
 - 15) Do you have clients we can talk to about what you delivered for them?
 - 16) If so, ask THEM;
 - a. How easy was he/she to work with?
 - b. Did they start and finish on time?
 - c. How did the audience respond?
 - d. What words did the delegates use to describe them within their evaluations?
 - e. Did they try to sell their books and tapes from the platform?
 - f. How did you feel about that?
 - g. Did they arrive sufficiently early to allay the organiser's nerves?
 - h. Did they stay to mingle with delegates afterwards?
 - i. Did you get any unexpected surprises from them or their representatives?
 - j. Would you hire them again?
 - k. If so, why?
 - l. If not, why?
 - 17) Does the performer have written testimonials from other satisfied clients?
 - 18) Do they have books they have written on their topic?

- 19) If you decided to distribute these to delegates, how much would they cost?
- 20) If the speaker fulfils your criteria, you may choose to make a provisional or 'pencil' booking. This is only possible if you have specific dates for your event. If they agree, the speaker will put you into their diary as a possible booking. Make it clear that you are not confirming the booking at that time. Performers treat 'pencil' bookings in different ways. Clarify their position. Some are prepared to 'pencil' the booking on the basis that if they subsequently receive an enquiry from someone who wishes to confirm a booking on that date – they would get back to you for a confirmation decision. If you are unable or unwilling to confirm the booking at that time, the performer is then free to accept the other booking if they wish.
- 21) A booking is never confirmed until the client has signed and returned a contract supplied by the performer or their agent. Some contracts even stipulate that 50-100% of the fee has to be paid up front to confirm the booking.
- 22) Make notes relating to the answers you receive during your conversation. Create a 'paper trail'. Summarise these details in a follow up letter or email. If you are talking with a number of potential people this will avoid a great deal of confusion further down the track!

Contacting a Bureau or Booker

- If you still can't find what you are looking for through your network, contact no more than two or three reputable speaker bureaus with your detailed brief.
- To find out if they are reputable, ask colleagues and contacts for their experiences dealing with bureaus. Also decide for yourself, based on how they answer the detailed questions below.
- When you've found suitable bureaus - ask for their advice. Include the research you've found on the internet. Create an environment in which they can impress you. Good bureaus consistently come up with radical and creative solutions.
- If the bureau you are calling has been recommended to you – tell them who gave you the referral.
- Explain exactly what **result** you are looking for.
- Follow up your conversation with an email that includes your detailed brief.

Questions to ask speaker bureaus once they have provided you with a shortlist and made their recommendations:

- 1) First - ask if the speaker is available on the dates you require – if they aren't, or they don't know (perhaps they didn't check), the rest of your conversation is a waste of time for both of you.

- 2) Ask “Have you **personally** seen each of these people work?”
- 3) If not (many haven’t), what specific criteria are you basing your selection on?
- 4) What value will they bring to my organisation? (Be VERY wary if they can’t answer this fundamental question for you.)
- 5) What is the performer best at?
- 6) What areas would they not be best suited for?
- 7) Are they within the budget we discussed?
- 8) How willing are they to speak to me **personally** to discuss possibilities? Some bureaus actively discourage this, but its essential for you and for the performer to fully understand everyone’s expectations.
- 9) What is the nature of the bureau’s relationship with each speaker they are proposing?
 - a. Do they have ‘sole representation’? (more on this later).
 - b. If so, how can they assure you that this person has been chosen for their ability to deliver on your brief – rather than because the bureau has a special relationship with that performer?
 - c. If they don’t have a sole representation arrangement, are they booking the person direct?
 - d. Or would they be booked through their appointed agent?
- 10) Do you ‘add-on’ commission or does it come out of the performers normal fee?
- 11) How do you prove that you comply with The Conduct of Employment Agencies and Business regulations 2003? Don’t accept a vague answer - they could be operating illegally.

Even experienced event organisers have ‘holes’ in their knowledge about the true costs of hiring on-stage expertise and entertainment. It’s important that anyone booking on-stage talent knows how the industry is organised;

Speakers, MCs, conference moderators and entertainers are simply suppliers to the vast conference and events industry. Like any industry, talent and expertise is made available through a variety of different channels. During research for this report, producers and event organisers who book speakers regularly, repeatedly used the words ‘agent’ and ‘bureau’ interchangeably. They weren’t clear about the difference. A speaker bureau is NOT an agent or a ‘manager’.

Managers, Agents and Speaker Bureaus

A Manager is responsible for the strategic direction of the artists’ career. It is usually, but not always, a more proactive and more time-consuming role. A manager may work for a salary or a

larger proportion of the artist's fee – sometimes as much as 40-50%. A relatively small number of artists have managers. More will have agents. Managers would work with the artist on an exclusive basis.

An Agent is someone who has legal 'permission' to negotiate fees on behalf of a particular artist. They have a relationship with the artist and handle most if not all elements of each booking they receive. Agents normally have a collection of artists on their books.

The agent is the point of contact for the client; the 'client' may be a speaker bureau, a broadcaster, a newspaper or magazine publisher, conference production company, communications agency or end-user company. The agent agrees and finalises all details, prepares contracts, manages the artists' diary, invoices the client, and pays the artist minus the agent's commission - normally about 20% of the agreed gross fee. Most artists work exclusively with their agent under a 'sole representation' arrangement.

Speaker Bureaus or Speaker Agencies. Almost anyone can set up as a speaker bureau or speaker agency. All you need is a phone, a contacts book of speakers and entertainers and potential clients to sell your services to. One London based speaker bureau is owned by an individual who was imprisoned for fraud. It trades today.

Speaker bureaus are the middle men who charge varying commissions for the sale of their products – the talent.

In the UK, bureaus are the most expensive way to book a performer. It's a bit like commissioning someone to find you a restaurant. They find you a restaurant that fits your needs and palate – but instead of paying £30 a head for the meal if you chose it yourself – you get charged up to £40 per head (and the person who arranged it for you may have persuaded the restaurant owner to charge only £25 a head 'to ensure they got the booking'.) The restaurant booker may play one restaurant off against others, insist that the restaurant keeps places open for their client if they choose to dine there. And more often than not, fail to tell the restaurant that the client has chosen a different restaurant. This is exactly how too many bureaus behave.

Bureaus are the 'premium priced retail' channel for those who book 'on-stage' performers. They 'add-on' their charges to the fee paid to the artist's agent. They charge a fee to their client for supplying the artist. Therefore you pay a 'retail plus' price. The bureau profit is hidden within the fee they charge. The sum varies. They sometimes negotiate a lower fee with the artist or their agent – the difference is added to their reward for the quite considerable time it can take finding, confirming, contracting and managing the booking transaction.

It is also important to note that the vast majority of bureaus do not have an exclusive arrangement with artists. Indeed, they are

required to state in their marketing material that they do not have 'sole representation' when they do not. But bureaus like their clients to believe they have a much closer relationship with the artist than they actually do.

"Your agent said...." is a common phrase heard by speakers who have been booked through a speaker bureau instead of an agent, when they meet the conference organiser for the first time. Most speakers have never even met the 'bureau booker'. Everything is done either on the phone and/or by email. Few bureaus will volunteer the fact that they are not the artiste's agent or manager. They often perpetuate the myth or confusion because it hides the fact that they are middle-men.

Occasionally a bureau will have a 'sole representation' agreement with a speaker. This is often excellent news for the bureau if the speaker has a unique story to tell and is in demand. They are guaranteed to be the point of contact for anyone who may be interested in booking that person. They will therefore make a profit every time that speaker steps out onto a platform.

Howeverif you are a client looking for a speaker, such an arrangement is not good for you because the bureau is more likely to 'push' a speaker who is 'solely represented', even if they are not perfectly suited to your brief.

Conference Moderator or Link Presenter - the difference explained

In much the same way that confusion reigns over the differences between managers, agents and bureaus, 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.

15-20% of an Event Budget

A couple of outside speakers and evening entertainment can easily represent 15-20% of an event's overall budget.

Any savings can have a significant impact on the cost of an event. Sometimes it can make the difference between holding the event or not.

Greater cost transparency is starting to become more commonplace within the industry. Driven by increasingly cost conscious clients. The more forward thinking production companies and event organisers/agencies offer their clients 'open book' accounting; their clients pay the actual venue, equipment and production costs, plus a management fee for 'making it all happen'.

But even more transparency is needed. Especially with regard to 'on-stage talent'. There is a perception that 'artists' are expensive. Compared to people who stack shelves in supermarkets, performers are paid obscene amounts of money. But all is not as it may appear.

*There's the apocryphal story that has travelled around the 'speaker circuit' for years; a motivational speaker was standing at the urinal, his client was standing alongside and says "You were good. But you weren't worth £7,500." The speaker was shocked. He was actually going to be paid **£2,500 not £7,500.***

So who received the other £5,000? Does this story have any basis for truth? Yes. Absolutely. It is still widespread.

Commissions are routinely paid to agents, bookers, managers and organisers. But it's often the artist who is made to look so expensive and greedy.

If an artist has an agent and is booked through a bureau, the artist is subject to two sets of commission on his/her fee. The agent will deduct about 20% from the fee. While the speaker bureau will 'add on' anything from 20%. For many years their 'add on' fee was actually anything they felt they could get away with!

When the 'client' is a PR, communication or production agency they may mark the fee up again for 'sourcing' the artist for their client. Although fewer production companies now add a mark up. And then when the client complains of the price of the talent – the 'mark-up merchants' will smile and say "Yes, it IS outrageous how much these performers cost!"

**Lots of middle men.
Lots of potential for profit.
And lots of potential for abuse.**

The conference industry can no longer sustain fat commissions to people and organisations that add little or no value. This has to change if events and conferences are to remain a viable and valuable part of corporate communication strategies.

Middlemen that add cost and no value are disappearing in so many other industries. It is inevitably going to happen within the conference industry too.

A well-known inspirational speaker reported that he had just completed a speech that had gone down very well with the audience. This time, he decided to ask the client how much she had paid for him. "**£6,000 plus expenses.**" came the reply.

He said "*I was paid £3,000. But what really pisses me off is the fact that the bureau that booked me tried to persuade me to accept only £2,500 because he was 'afraid that the client would go for a less expensive option'.*" It turned out that this was a lie because the client had specifically asked the bureau for

this speaker. No other speakers were even under consideration.

To add insult to injury, the bureau later told the speaker that the client was only 'lukewarm' about the speaker's performance. An ecstatic testimonial letter the speaker had received from the client shortly after the event brought into question the accuracy and motivation of the bureau's feedback. Perhaps it was a ploy to ensure that the speaker remained grateful to receive bookings in the future?

Aside from that, this poses a number of important issues;

- 1) the speaker was deceived by the speaker bureau.
- 2) the client paid an artificially high price for the services of that speaker.
- 3) the speaker may have represented excellent value for money to the client and the audience if he had cost say, £4,000 – but was not 'worth' £6,000'.
- 4) The pressure is on the speaker to deliver £6,000 'value' while the bureau can bank the money (always before the event has even taken place), while clients bemoan the extortionate fees charged by even 'mediocre' speakers. There is growing discontent amongst professional performers on this issue.
- 5) The speaker had to wait many weeks before receiving payment.

The inspirational speaker mentioned above does not want to be named in this report. He relies heavily on bureaus for his income and is afraid that they may refuse to put him forward for jobs in the future.

Smaller Meetings

Another trend identified by the 2003 UK Conference Market Survey is the move towards smaller meetings; both in size and budget. They are also moving away from glitz and glamour towards a more 'workshop', seminar or training environment. Organisers want delegates to learn valuable skills they can apply within their businesses.

With smaller event budgets, high profile and expensive speakers become a significantly higher proportion of the overall cost of an event. Added to this is an increasing feeling amongst those who pay, that some/most of the expensive celebrities they bring in to motivate, inspire, entertain and impress – don't actually add any real tangible business value to the client.

And just because someone is a celebrity, it does not mean they are a skilful speaker. Too many celebrities have little or nothing to say of value – and without autocue, some (as I'm sure you've seen in the past) can't even string together a coherent sentence!

Because of this, high profile celebrities and radio/TV MCs and comperes are a less viable option to cash strapped clients.

Therefore, more clients are choosing not to engage outside speakers for their events at all.

Bureaus prefer to book celebrities for one simple reason; they can make far more profit margin from them and the client has been conditioned to expect to pay a lot of money for them.

This is where there is **the greatest tension between performers and speaker bureaus.**

To provide a speaker for say, £8,000 will enable a higher proportion of that fee to be charged as 'commission'. Whereas a fee of say £2,500 by a less well known performer cannot be marked up so much. A profit driven bureau booker will want to make as much profit as possible for each job. It is often in their interests to source the most expensive talent possible. Not quite the same objective for the client who is paying the bill!

Some bureaus have been known to employ the following sales technique to increase the likelihood of getting the 'gig'. They will offer a potential client or production company 2 or 3 possible moderators or facilitators. They may put forward "Mr Celebrity TV newsreader" A bureau may say *"He is excellent. He's only going to cost you say, £12,000 per day. Or you could have "Mr Unknown" He's about £10,000 a day. We haven't actually seen him work, but we've heard he's 'quite' good."* If you had the budget, who would you choose? A high-calibre celebrity, or someone you've never heard of? You'd probably go for "Mr Celebrity TV Newsreader". And that's what the bureau is hoping you will do too. Why? They can make more profit within his fee than a much lower fee from a non-celebrity. The fee for Mr Unknown would be pumped up massively to the £10,000 level – nothing like the real fee, because they know there is no way Mr Unknown would be considered at that price anyway. And if in the unlikely event that Mr Unknown was chosen – the bureau could make £6-7000 profit per day for this job!

If the bureau offered lower cost alternatives, their profit margins could go through the floor, they would need to sell far more speakers into far more events to maintain their revenues and once it was seen that lower priced alternatives can deliver better business value, it would make it less easy to sell more expensive celebrity based 'solutions' in the future.

With a finite number of events to provide talent for, it certainly makes more commercial sense to sell in expensive, celebrity options. Finding and 'closing' a booking can involve a great deal of time and 'running around' – therefore bureaus need to make sure they make the most profit from each booking. But this is not good for the client or for the eventual audience. The status quo is geared more towards the business needs of the bureaus – not always for the benefit of the clients.

However, also be aware that some bureaus find low fee inexperienced speakers. They may go out for £750-£1,000 – or

less. They are signed up, often on an exclusive basis by the bureau. They are then tied-in. The inexperienced speaker is flattered, and sold on the idea that they'll get a lot of work. The bureau then aggressively pushes their new discovery by dismissing more experienced speakers, saying things like *"Oh, so and so has gone off the boil – they aren't what they used to be. You need instead. This person is brilliant, new and fresh.... Etc etc"*

This is potentially great for the client But only if the speaker lives up to the hype – and the event runs smoothly.

It's also very good for the bureau because they may charge £3,000 plus for a speaker they are only paying £750. Obviously, they don't tell the speaker the full story.

It's worth remembering that a professional is paid for handling things when they go wrong – not when everything is running smoothly. When something does go wrong and the performer fails to deliver, they 'damn' all other lower priced options. This then strengthens the argument for paying high fees for celebrities – even though many of them don't have sufficient platform experience either!

Less Expensive Alternatives

A high proportion of people who book speakers are not aware that there is a HUGE reservoir of far less expensive, highly professional speakers and trainers available to them for their conferences and events. These are experts who speak for a living; they possess a high degree of knowledge that's directly relevant to the needs of business audiences today and they have the platform skills to deliver their material in an engaging, entertaining and compelling way.

But many clients simply don't know where to look. And are unlikely to find them on the books of most speaker bureaus.

Indeed, the majority of bureaus refuse to add non-celebrity, lower fee speakers to their speaker rosters. Many non-celebrity speakers report that bureaus are uninterested, even antagonistic towards them when they send their promotional material for consideration. Some of the more non-client focussed bureaus even try to charge speakers hundreds of pounds before they are prepared to review their materials – with no guarantee that they will be put forward for jobs.

How can a bureau possibly look after a client's best interests and business needs if they do this? They claim it's a way to stop being pestered by time wasters. It is the job of a speaker bureau to know what talent is available to their clients; to do the sifting for them.

Membership of the UK Professional Speakers Association (PSA) stands at nearly 300. Some of its members are incredible performers and leading edge thinkers in their fields. Although it also has to be said that a proportion of its members still only

aspire to professional speaker status. Therefore if you are booking a speaker, don't assume that a speaker's membership of the PSA is a stamp of speaker quality. It is not.

Take a look at <http://www.professionalspeakers.org/> you might find the expertise you're looking for and at a more favourable price.

Lessons from America

In North America, where the meetings industry operates in a much larger and more mature market, (\$40.8 billion turnover, 1.03 million meetings annually*) it is the speakers who set their fees. Not the bureaus. The industry frowns on the 'add-on' commission model. It's seen as unprofessional and unethical.

* source M&C Meetings Market Report Aug 2002

Indeed, Speakers' Spotlight, a Canadian speaker bureau state in their brochure;

“We earn a commission, which is paid by our speakers out of their fee. Therefore, our service is a FREE, value-added service – there is no cost to you.”

When bureaus approach a speaker in North America, the speaker decides if they want to do business with that company. Speaker and bureau negotiate to determine how much of the speaker's fee they will pay the bureau in return for the booking. For the performer's perspective it is a much better option. They know what the person they will eventually be working for has actually paid for their services. Some speakers offer more favourable discounts to some bureaus than others to show their appreciation for the volume and quality of business that is brought to them.

This US model will almost certainly become more widespread in the UK, as clients increasingly scrutinise artificially high fees for on-stage talent. More and more clients will refuse to pay 'retail plus'.

The Future

Recommendations To Speaker Bureaus

Your personal and professional reputation is only as good as the least ethical people within your part of the supply chain.

Decide to embrace the 'all-in' US commission model by becoming transparent with speakers and clients about what you charge.

Charge the fee that has been set by the performer, and negotiate a fair share of that fee for the work you do to secure the business.

Find new and innovative ways to add value to clients and performers.

Comply with The Conduct of Employment Agencies and Business Regulations 2003 (effective as of 6th April 2004).

To Speakers and Other On-Stage Talent

Stop trying to tell the world how brilliant you think you are. Instead, design your promotional material around what your clients say about you and the results you have created for them. This makes it easier for them to select the best person for the job.

Seriously consider putting up your prices by about 20%. This then becomes your 'retail' price. This might sound strange when the rest of this document claims to be looking after the interests of end-user clients. An explanation;

Suppose a speaker's fee is currently £3,500 per day. You could increase it to £4,000 as I have done. This becomes your fee to everyone. If an end-user client books you, you earn more money. To identify, contact and convince an end-user client that you are the best person for the job will cost you time and money. The 20% covers that. If you receive the booking through a referral, you can offer part of that 20% as a way of saying 'thank you' to the person who recommended you – or offer it as a discount to the client because it hadn't cost you anything to generate that business. This makes the person who referred you look good and the client gets a better deal.

If, or when you are contacted by a speaker bureau, gently inform them that your retail fee is the maximum they are allowed to charge for your services to their clients. You need to be prepared to walk away from a possible bureau job if they respond less than favourably to your business terms! If they want you enough, you and the bureau then need to thrash out how much of that fee they receive in return for providing you with the booking. You need to ensure that they agree **in writing** not to charge their client more than you have agreed.

Always ask those who contact you, how they got to know about you. If it was through a booking that had been made possible by a bureau, make a point of directing any spin off work back to the bureau that booked you. Certainly discuss the details of the job with the person making the enquiry. That includes telling them your retail fee. If they wish to go ahead – direct them to the bureau to finalise the contracts. The bureau deserves to share in the success that they helped you to create for your audience. Any bureau that receives repeat bookings from the speakers it places will be more likely to want to re-book you again in the future. This is when a speaker and bureau can work very closely together for mutual benefit.

Conclusion

The conference industry brings people together to share knowledge, experiences and skills. Delegates listen to speakers, debate issues in open forum and meet later in the hallways, restaurants and bars to discuss topics that are crucially important to their businesses, causes and industries.

Our entire industry has a responsibility to help companies and delegates derive as much value and at the lowest cost possible to justify the high costs and time away from colleagues and customers. If we don't add-value and minimise or eliminate all unnecessary costs from our supply chains, our clients will be forced to find cheaper, more effective alternatives. This would be a disaster for the industry and for the tens of thousands of people who earn their livelihood from events and conferences.

I hope this report has helped you to make better business decisions that improve the effectiveness of your future events.

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