

21 ways to break assumptions in the event-conference-business



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#1 One speaker at a time

A whole room of people is listening to one speaker on stage. But what happens if more speakers are presenting at the same time in the same room. And the audience can choose to which story they're listening by switching channels via their wireless headphone. It's called a silent conference.



#2 A presentation lasts between 30-60 minutes

But you also see more and more events where the timing is very strict. TED is a nice example of a fixed format (9 or 18 minutes) but I'm still amazed that people in the eventbusiness have never heard of the pecha kucha format - presenters have 20 slides that last 20 seconds. A great method to give the floor to a larger number of speakers. The concept works already in 900 cities.

#3 Marketing happens via website & brochure

There are so many new ways of doing marketing (that doesn't have to cost a lot of money). Do a contest. Invite 10 influencers in exchange for promoting the event. Tell a friend discounts. Use more social media channels. Make short video's with speakers. Do a pre-event on social media (webinar). Connect with past participants. Become friends with bloggers & journalists. Most important element: Marketing is something you do throughout the whole year (not 1 month in advance).





#4 Organiser takes the risk of organising an event

Make use of the possibilities like crowdfunding. Start a crowdfunding campaign and announce that the event will take place if you get at least 100 paying participants. You can immediately discover if there's an interest for your event.

#5 Location is a conference centre

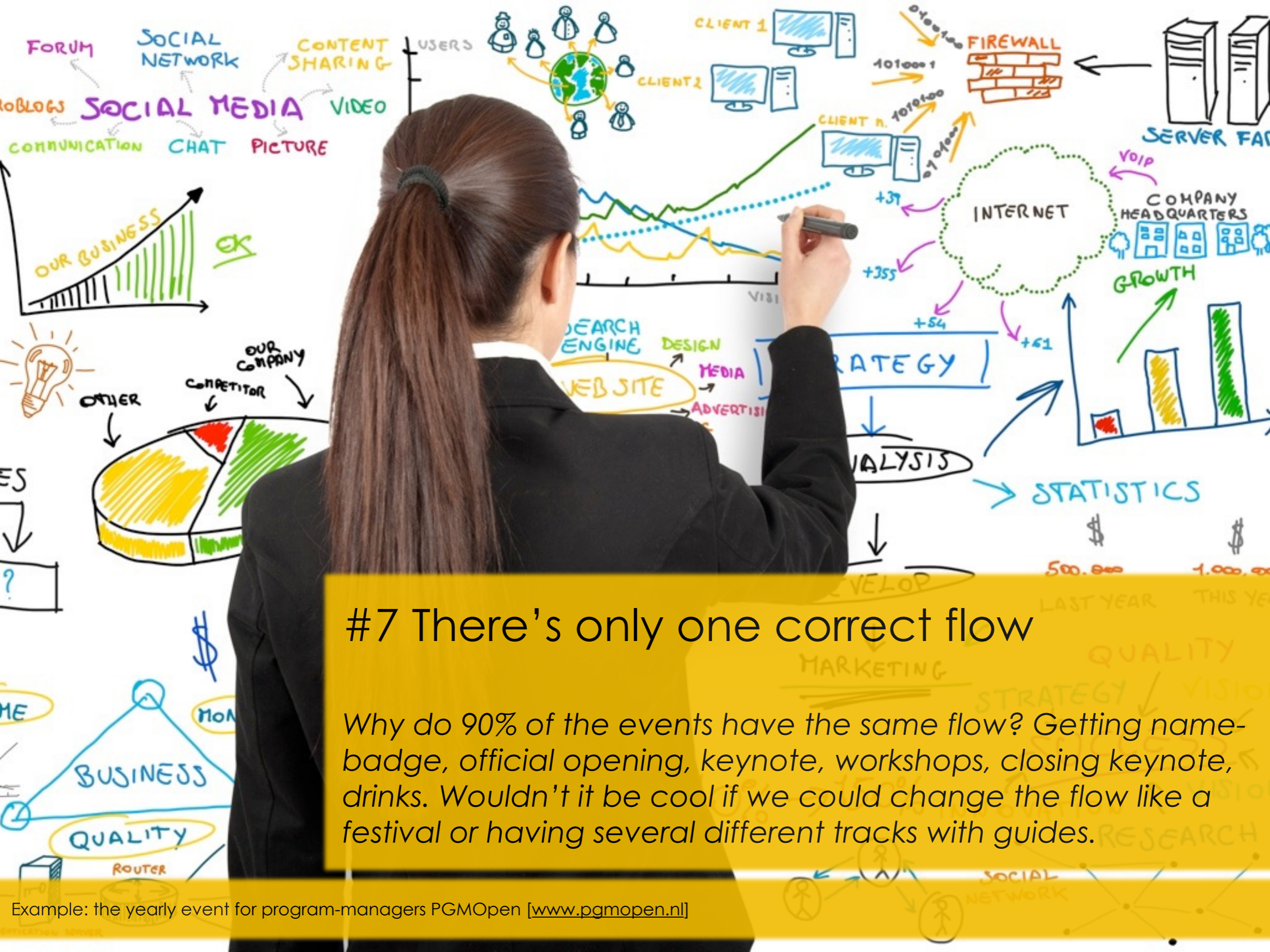
This is an easy one ... Organise your next event NOT in a boring hotel or conference centre but go to a special place. And yes ... it will be harder to organise things in the ordinary way but it also opens a lot of opportunities to do different things. Go to a museum, an amusement parc, a farm, ... Pop-up!

Or have a meeting at the Burning man festival or build a temporary structure for your event



#6 Content is key

This was true 20 years ago but today experience is key! It's not enough to have a great location, interesting speakers and a networking drink. The participants want an experience, interactive workshops, unique activities, two way co-creative communication, a room to reflect, to be inspired and astonished.



#7 There's only one correct flow

Why do 90% of the events have the same flow? Getting name-badge, official opening, keynote, workshops, closing keynote, drinks. Wouldn't it be cool if we could change the flow like a festival or having several different tracks with guides.

Example: the yearly event for program-managers PGMOpen [www.pgmopen.nl]

#8 Inform participants long in advance

People like to be surprised and there's a trend to go away from the mainstream events and conferences. What would happen if the audience is informed about the secret location and speakers only a few hours before the event takes place? It creates mystery and exclusivity.



A network diagram consisting of several colorful nodes (blue, red, green, yellow) connected by thin lines of the same colors. The nodes are arranged in a roughly circular pattern, with a central green node and several peripheral nodes. The lines connect the nodes in a complex, web-like structure.

#9 Organiser creates the agenda

It sounds very logical that the organiser creates the agenda and decides which speakers are invited. But the possibilities of crowdsourcing are very interesting and becoming very easy. Why don't we let the audience choose their favorite speaker from a shortlist? And let them have a voice in setting up the agenda and flow? It's immediately a great marketing tool.

Example: [SXSW](#) is well known for their crowdsourced speakers.

#10 Feedback happens afterwards

Thanks to technology, it's possible to go for real-time feedback. Simple formats are a twitter wall, an interactive poll, the smiley terminals but it could also be done without any technology. Just place a number of boxes at the exit where participants have to drop their badge to evaluate the quality of the event (very good - good - bad).



#11 Experts share content via presentation

But a presentation is just one way of communicating content. The format 'Ask me anything' is an advanced way of the normal 'Q&A'. Participants can ask anything to a presenter who doesn't have to prepare a presentation but just answer all the questions. A short introduction of the topic or expertise is of course very handy.

#12 A conference happens between 9AM - 6PM

But what would happen if we would have a 24 hour (or longer) conference? Then suddenly we can come up with very creative ideas - linked to the theme. At this moment, events & conferences are mainly focussed on exchanging content & inspiration is only for the head. Can we integrate more physical activities, moments to relax, ...?





#13 One screen for one speaker

The ideaVJ supports the keynote with tailormade images, words, twitter-feeds and animations. The ideaDJ uses realtime and spot-on images and movies to support the content on a second screen.



#14 Conference takes place at 1 location

Why should we limit a conference to one physical location. We have so many technologies at our disposal which makes it very easy to streamline content at the same time to different locations in the world or have an online events with live chats and live webcasting.



#15 Presenter knows his content

I hope that most presenters prepare very well and know their stuff. But sometimes it's time for fun (certainly at a heavily content-driven event). Powerpoint Karaoke (also called powerpoint roulette or battledecks) is an improv game where a person presents a slideshow to an audience without knowing the contents of the slides.

#16 Real interaction only works in small groups

There are many ways to interact with 500 or 1000 people in an interactive way. The **Open Space Technology** is a great way to let participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme of strategic importance. Or the method of **Worldcafé** is brilliant if you want to engage people in conversations that matter. Or you could organise a **Mega-Brainstorming session** where large groups generate hundreds of ideas around different challenges.

#17 Networking happens during the drink

As an event organiser, you are also responsible for supporting meaningful conversations. It's not enough to have short breaks & a closing drink where people can network but this has to be stimulated by creating a context where this is possible. think about a speeddate; a network auction; a tool to know who's attending (digital or not); start a private facebook page in advance where people can connect; move and mix participants a lot of times; give a few influencers who know a lot of people the role of connector; ...



#18 Let's do the same as last year

The world is changing really fast; customers demand more & more; competition is getting harder; technology is booming ... We don't want the same event as last year. Dare to experiment. Dare to be brave. Dare to explore new roads. You don't have to throw everything away but keep evolving. Do small experiments to make things better. Show that status quo is not in your dictionary.



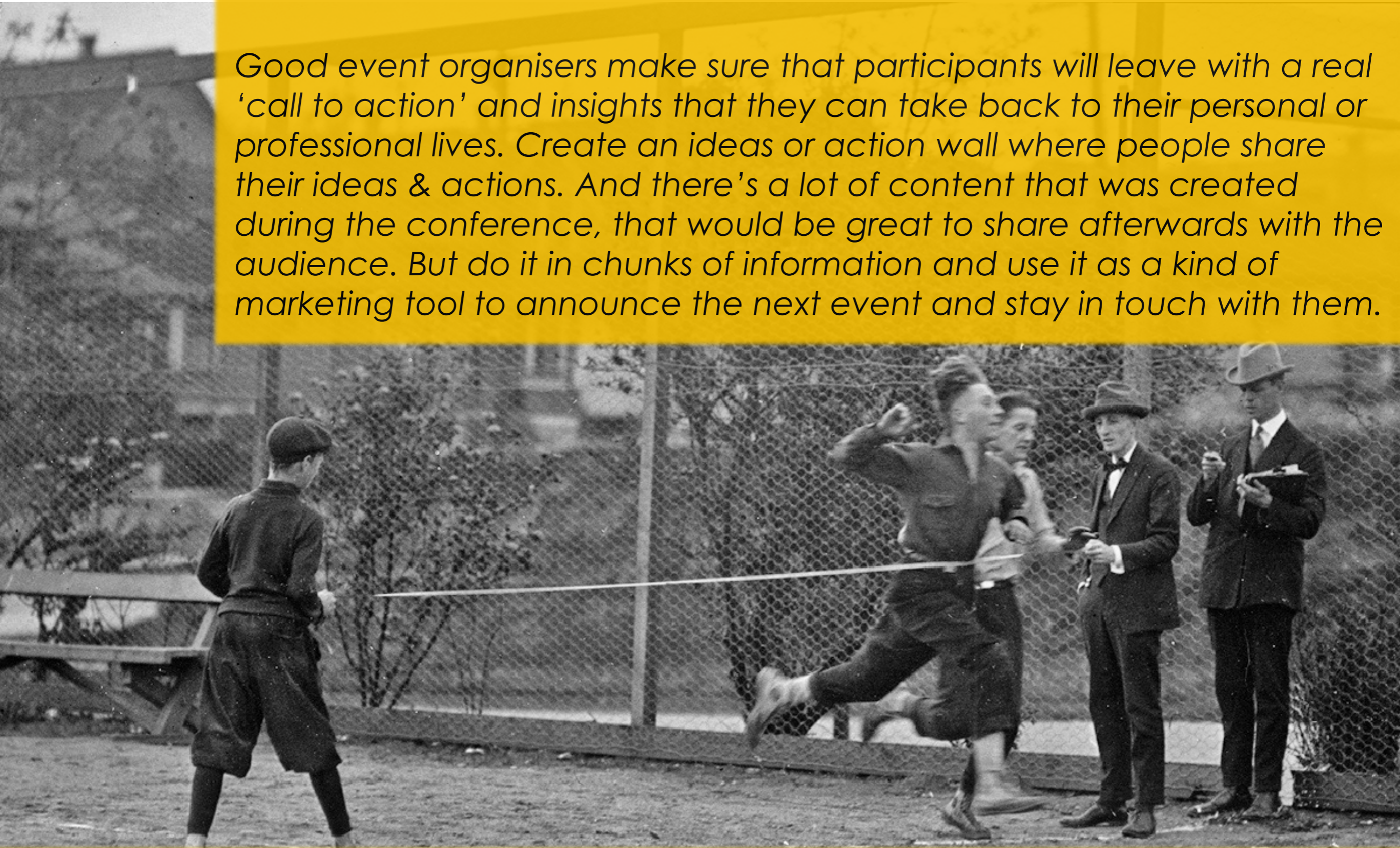
A detailed close-up photograph of a mechanical watch movement. The image shows several interlocking gears of different sizes and colors, including silver, gold, and brass. A prominent red jewel is visible in the center. The background is a textured, perforated metal plate. The overall lighting is warm, highlighting the metallic surfaces and the intricate details of the machinery.

#19 We don't need technology

The human interaction between participants and speakers is of course crucial but technology could be a great catalyst of these interactions. Julius Solaris and Becki Cross wrote a whole book on how to use interaction technology to create successful, memorable and enduring experiences. With a very broad range of topics: live response apps, photobooths, gamification, matchmaking, smart badges, social walls, livestreaming, ...

#20 My job is done at the end of the event

Good event organisers make sure that participants will leave with a real 'call to action' and insights that they can take back to their personal or professional lives. Create an ideas or action wall where people share their ideas & actions. And there's a lot of content that was created during the conference, that would be great to share afterwards with the audience. But do it in chunks of information and use it as a kind of marketing tool to announce the next event and stay in touch with them.



21 Only hire speakers who are experts in the domain

At most events, we limit ourselves to expert speakers of that industry. This is of course quite logical because they are the 'experts'. But in some cases, it might even be more interesting to have at least one non-expert professional speaker to bring in a new perspective and help the audience with broadening their view.





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A man in a brown jacket and blue jeans is standing on a silver step ladder on a wooden stage. He is facing a large audience seated in a dark hall with stage lights. The audience includes many people in dark uniforms, possibly police or military. The stage has a wooden floor and a metal truss system with various lights hanging from it.

Cyriel Kortleven is a professional speaker with a mission:

Boosting the creative & improvisational mindset of leaders & professionals in change.

Check if Cyriel could have an added value at your next event.

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