



How Hiring a Speaker is a lot Like Ordering Products from a Late Night Infomercial!

Like most people, I've done my share of being amazed at how the solutions to life's day problems are solved by middle-of-the-night infomercials. Having been a professional speaker for almost 14 years – I've often mused at how hiring a speaker is frightening similar to buying the cure to baldness in the form of a spray from some excited guy on the television. Let me explain. Below I have outlined some of the parallels and how to avoid getting burned if you do in fact hire speakers.

Marketing is Better than the Actual Product

Have you ever bought a product where this was the case? It looked so good in the ad! People changed their lives by using this widget! In the speaking industry it is often said that good marketing will get you hired. However, it is a good program that will get you rehired and lead to repeat business. If you want to ensure that the speaker you are hiring is as good as or better than his or her marketing materials, ask for a list of repeat clients and follow up with them to see why they hired this speaker more than once. If a speaker can't provide repeat clients, there is probably a really good reason why, there marketing material may be better than they are.

One Solutions Fits All Problems

I remember an infomercial from the 80s for a knife that bragged it could slice through tomatoes effortlessly, then it cut through a tin can. That's a product that everyone needs! It probably didn't do either one well – but it could do both! If a speaker ever suggests they are the perfect fit for your group without even asking about your group, approach with caution. Specialists will ask specific questions to learn about your group to provide top value. And the real professionals, will turn your business down if there isn't a fit. He or she realizes that matching up with the wrong fit is bad for the speaker and the client.

Credibility and Fame

Just because someone is famous, it doesn't mean that the produce they are selling is good. Do your homework. There are some great celebrity endorsed products and presenters. The best way to kill the energy on a program is give the microphone to a celebrity that doesn't know how to control a crowd. If you are fortunate enough to have a speaker with a great draw that can't hold the crowd, use them accordingly. Try having them do a welcome (10-15min), do some Q&A and then sign autographs. This will create the draw and still allow you to offer top programming. Whether they are selling you exercise equipment or leadership programming, use other peoples' credibility to enhance your program, not bore your audience.

Your gut feeling is often right

People leave signatures in everything they do and you can tell a lot about a person from a brief encounter. If you have a conversation with someone and they don't feel like the "right" person for the job, you may be right. Listen to that feeling. Conversely, if you are talking to a person and they come across as genuine and real on the phone, they will likely be genuine and real to your audience. Gut feeling isn't the only criteria you should use; however, it is powerful and should not be ignored.

You weren't looking for it, it found you

No one I know actually looks to watch infomercials. However, I can't think of anyone I know who has not seen at least one. Some infomercials have great products; however, some also have junk. The trick is to be open-minded enough to accept that sometimes even when you are not looking for a solution, one may come to you. And although, the timing may not be right, it is best to store that information for when it would be a better fit. The exact same thing is true about speakers. When you come across someone who you feel could do great things for your group, even if you aren't ready to hire him or her, you may want to introduce yourself and give them some background about your organization.

You have to pay shipping and handling

It's not so bad that you need to cover the traveling costs for the speaker. What is difficult to swallow is when you get an invoice after the event and the travel costs are higher than the speaking fee. The solution that I have found that more and more clients are liking is to quote an all inclusive fee with travel included. That way, if I want to wait last minute and book a flight that is ridiculously expensive, I absorb the cost. And, if I want to stay in a ant-infested motel to save money on a hotel, then I get rewarded for that. No surprise invoices for the client and everyone is happy.