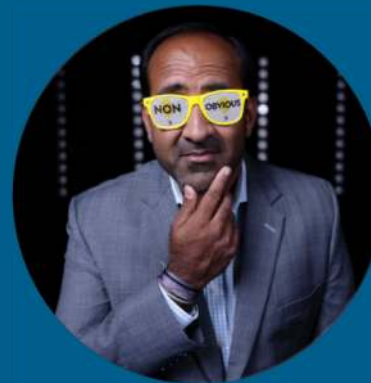




NON-OBVIOUS SECRETS FOR EVENT PLANNERS

*A SHORT COMPILATION OF INSPIRING
IDEAS TO TRANSFORM YOUR NEXT EVENT*

CURATED BY ROHIT BHARGAVA



ORIGINAL IDEAS. ALWAYS USEFUL. NEVER OBVIOUS.



AUTHOR'S NOTE:

WHY I PUBLISHED THIS ...

As a speaker, I have been invited to hundreds of events in 32 countries across the world. Some are better than others. Several years ago I started gathering my favorite (and not so favorite) examples of the big and small details that went into some of these events. This short presentation is my compilation of some of these observations—shared with candor (and sometimes without references to avoid calling people out). I hope they inspire you to add (or remove) something from your next event and help to make it as memorable and non-obvious as possible!



Rohit Bhargava – Trend Curator, Keynote Speaker, Nice Guy

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EVENT | MULTIPLE

Idea #1 – Give attendees a language to connect



Why It Works:

Every event has “networking” but often people need a way to forge connections. At many events, I host a Non-Obvious 7 Minute Meetup where we teach people to ask each other “what’s something non-obvious about you?”



EVENT | WISDOM 2.0 – SAN FRANCISCO

Idea #2 - Create theatrical moments



Why It Works:

In the registration area at this event on mindfulness, they invited Tibetan monks to carefully create a sand mandala over 3 days. It was a perfect example of extreme mindfulness and a constant reminder to slow down and do real work with pride.

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EVENT | INBOUND - BOSTON

Idea #3 – Organize food trucks for lunch



Why It Works:

Lunch can be an ordinary affair if you go with the hotel menu. Instead, when INBOUND offered lunch to attendees, they gave people lunch coupons and let them go out and pick a food truck from several options and eat outside. Best lunch idea ever.



EVENT | AMAZING.COM – LAS VEGAS

Idea #4 – Frame the stage branding around speakers



Why It Works:

Most stages have some sort of branding, but they don't always frame the speakers in a way that shows up well in photos or video after the event. The best branding creates a lasting impression after the event too.



EVENT | EVERYWHERE ELSE STARTUP CONFERENCE – MEMPHIS

Idea #5 – Bring in local heroes



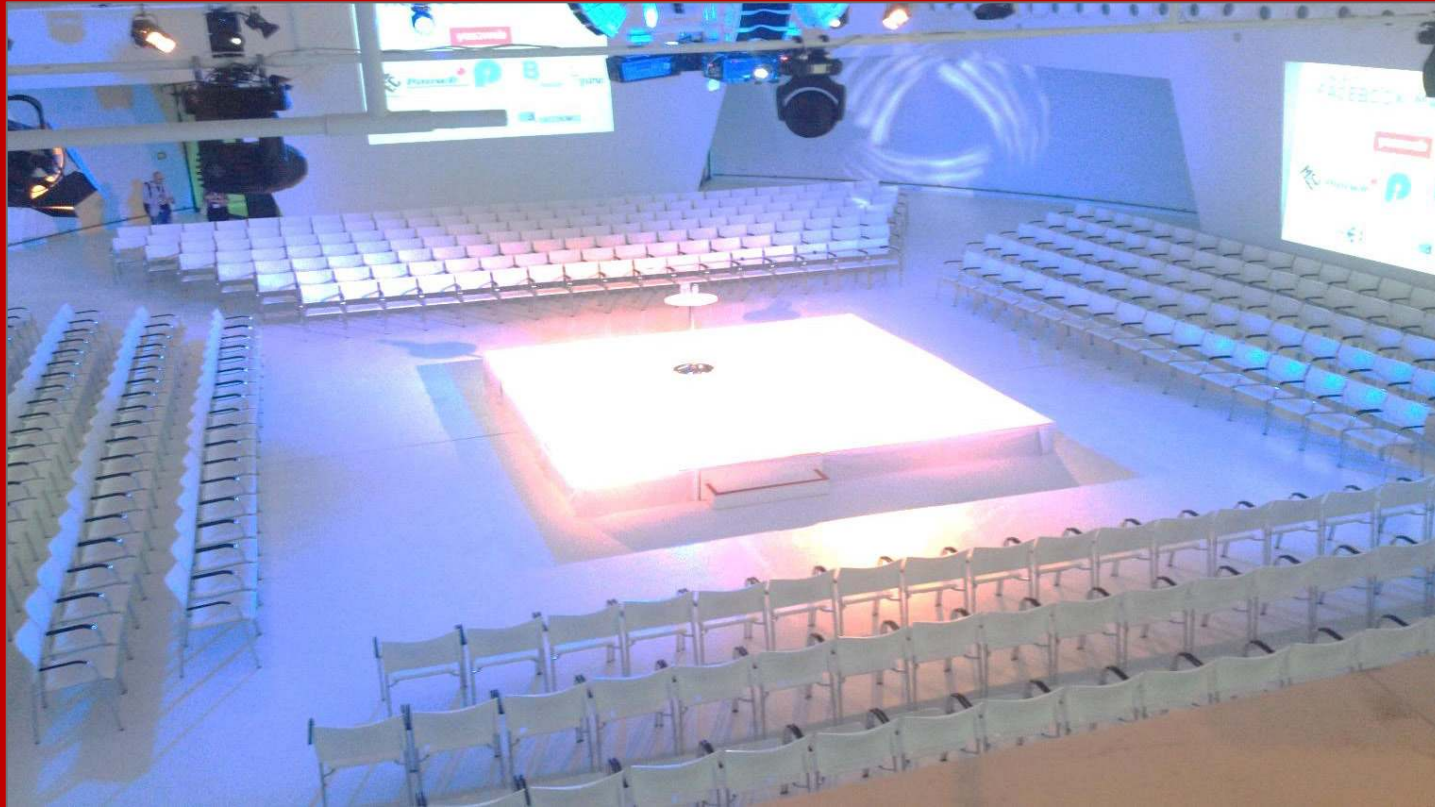
Why It Works:

At a national startup conference in Memphis I once spoke at, event organizers brought in a young entrepreneur and Memphis hero Mo'z Bridges to talk about his startup *Mo's Bows* selling designer bow-ties. It was inspiring, personal and coincidentally a year before his viral appearance on "Shark Tank."



EVENT | CONFIDENTIAL!

DON'T – Use Round Staging Unnecessarily



Why It Doesn't Work:

Round setups essentially guarantee *someone* will be staring at your speaker's back at all times. Add to that the fact that most business events rarely use this type of staging and therefore most of your speakers will be ill prepared to take advantage of it. The end result for your attendees is generally a less optimal experience and an unnecessarily daunting one for your less experienced speakers. Unless you make the round staging central to your event and prepare your speakers for it—this is one staging choice to avoid.



EVENT | MASTERMIND TALKS - TORONTO

Idea #6 – Let people motivate themselves



Why It Works:

This popular event uses the smart technique of asking attendees to write a self addressed letter to themselves which the event holds and mails back to you 90 days later. It is a powerful reminder and inspiration to take action from yourself that really has impact.



EVENT | MULTIPLE

Idea #7 – Offer permission to skip sessions



Why It Works:

Some of the most powerful connections at events come when people meet one another. If the format of your event has multiple concurrent sessions—you can think about how to make the cost of skipping a session lower. For example, when events promise to share recordings of sessions after the event, they can effectively give attendees the freedom to network in the halls, enjoy the exhibit area and generally avoid the stress of rushing from one session to another.



EVENT | DESTINATION MARKETING ASSOCIATION - PHILADELPHIA

Idea #8 – Integrate destination tours



Why It Works:

When the location of your event is central to the experience—or even if it isn't, you can find interesting ways to showcase it in order to create memorable moments. People may be attending for business reasons, but most attendees would love to get a flavor of the place too.



EVENT | DIALOG GLOBAL - ARIZONA

Idea #9 – Curate where people sit



Why It Works:

One of the most powerful ways to personalize an event is to learn enough about your event attendees to create connections for them. When you curate the seating—attendees feel seen and the networking becomes much more powerful and longer lasting.



EVENT | MULTIPLE

Idea #10 – Produce a useful recap



ON SEPTEMBER 18, SPEAKERS
FROM MORE THAN THIRTY OF THE
LARGEST BRANDS IN THE WORLD
GATHERED IN NEW YORK TO
SPEAK CANDIDLY ABOUT
THEIR MARKETING AND
COMMUNICATIONS.

NO POWERPOINT WAS USED.

Shargava with Incite
@incite.com

SOCIAL'S NOT ABOUT THE MONEY

**THOSE THAT
SEE SOCIAL AS
PRIMARILY A
REVENUE CHANNEL
HAVE STRUGGLED,**
BECAUSE THE MONETIZATION
OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN SOCIAL
MEDIA TEND TO BE FAIRLY INDIRECT.



8. UNDERSTAND THE STORY THAT MATTERS.

In a company with a directive to launch dozens of products a year, keeping stories straight matters. More importantly, knowing that not every story matters to every customer is key. In his comments during a panel on storytelling, Jeff Shafer shared an insight about storytelling that is often forgotten – that different stories work at different moments. The ThinkPad design was inspired by a bento box. It's a great story – but it's only relevant in a particular moment. When you know the right timing to share your stories, and have you an arsenal of them to pull from, you can really use storytelling to drive the things a technology brand cares most about ... loyalty and sales.

JEFF SHAFER, VICE PRESIDENT GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS
LENOVO

lenovo

Written by Rohit Bhargava with Incite
www.rohitbhargava.com

THE TOP FIVE TWEETS: A COLLECTION OF OBSERVATIONS FROM ATTENDEES OF #INCITESUMMIT



Ashley Jane Brookes @ashjbee 22h
Does data driven marketing mean the end of creativity? No. We have to use creativity carefully in a content-saturated world
[#incitesummit](#)
Expand



Adam Wexler @thewordpainter 19h
I've got all the focus groups I need and they're on social media - @Aflac's CMO @mzuna <- hear that #mrk? [#incitesummit](#)
Expand

Written by Rohit Bhargava with Incite
www.rohitbhargava.com

Why It Works:

To provide more value to attendees, the best events produce a detailed recap. Aside from helping them internalize learnings from the event, it's a great way to help them report back to their own team and bosses about the event and demonstrate the tangible value they received—which in turn helps them secure the funding to attend the following year if they need to.



EVENT | CONFIDENTIAL!

DON'T – Make name tags impossible to read



Why It Doesn't Work:

Nametags are almost always terrible. One sided nametags hang the wrong way—ensuring attendees are looking at a blank side. Names are too small for anyone to read. Here's what to do instead: print both sides of a nametag, make the first name as LARGE as possible, and then find ways to let people share their personality with them (see next page for ideas on that)!



EVENT | MULTIPLE

Idea #11 – Transform how people use nametags



Why It Works:

Nametags are more than just a way to track who's coming and going. They can help people connect too. Aside from making their first names BIG and printing on both sides, give people a variety of badges they can stick on them. Or use magnetic buttons that go on the lanyards. The point is, the more you let people customize their experience, the more of their identity they can showcase.



EVENT | SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

Idea #12 – Think like a children’s museum



Why It Works:

One of the best things about museums for kids is that you are expected to touch things and interact. Rather than just having exhibits or sponsors, consider what interactive experiences or immersive content you might bring in to create a different sort of experience between session.



EVENT | FUTURE OF STORYTELLING – NEW YORK

Idea #13 – Foster smaller discussions



Why It Works:

The Future of Storytelling event uses a unique format for the agenda: participants choose 3 discussions and 2 interactive workshops to join. That's the full day. The result is an event heavily focused on sharing insights, being an active participant and leaning forward instead of sitting back.



EVENT | ECI FESTIVAL CHINA

Idea #14 – Double book your speakers



Why It Works:

Last year when I visited China to deliver a keynote presentation, I also conducted a learning workshop on the same day. If you can find ways like this to maximize a speaker's time, you can offer more value for your audience. Some speakers (like me) might even be willing to do this for the same fee you're already paying them as long as it's on the same day!



EVENT | NATIONAL ARTS MARKETING PROJECT CONFERENCE

Idea #15 – Integrate musicians + art



Why It Works:

Often music or art are seen as unnecessary extra elements for a business event. Yet there are many ways to integrate them into any event, including using musicians during breaks in surprising locations to add sonic beauty, or working with city organizers to commission street art.



EVENT | CONFIDENTIAL!

DON'T – Give speakers bulky or inconvenient gifts



Why It Doesn't Work:

Many of your speakers will be traveling with a carry-on bag only. They don't have a lot of extra space typically. And wine is impossible to take through a security check in. Gifts are lovely, and the gesture is kind ... but if you have something bulky or an item impossible to take in a carry on bag, the kindest thing you can do is to ask your speakers for their address and just ship it to them.



EVENT | INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY BANKERS OF AMERICA – NASHVILLE

Idea #16 – Personalize the smallest details



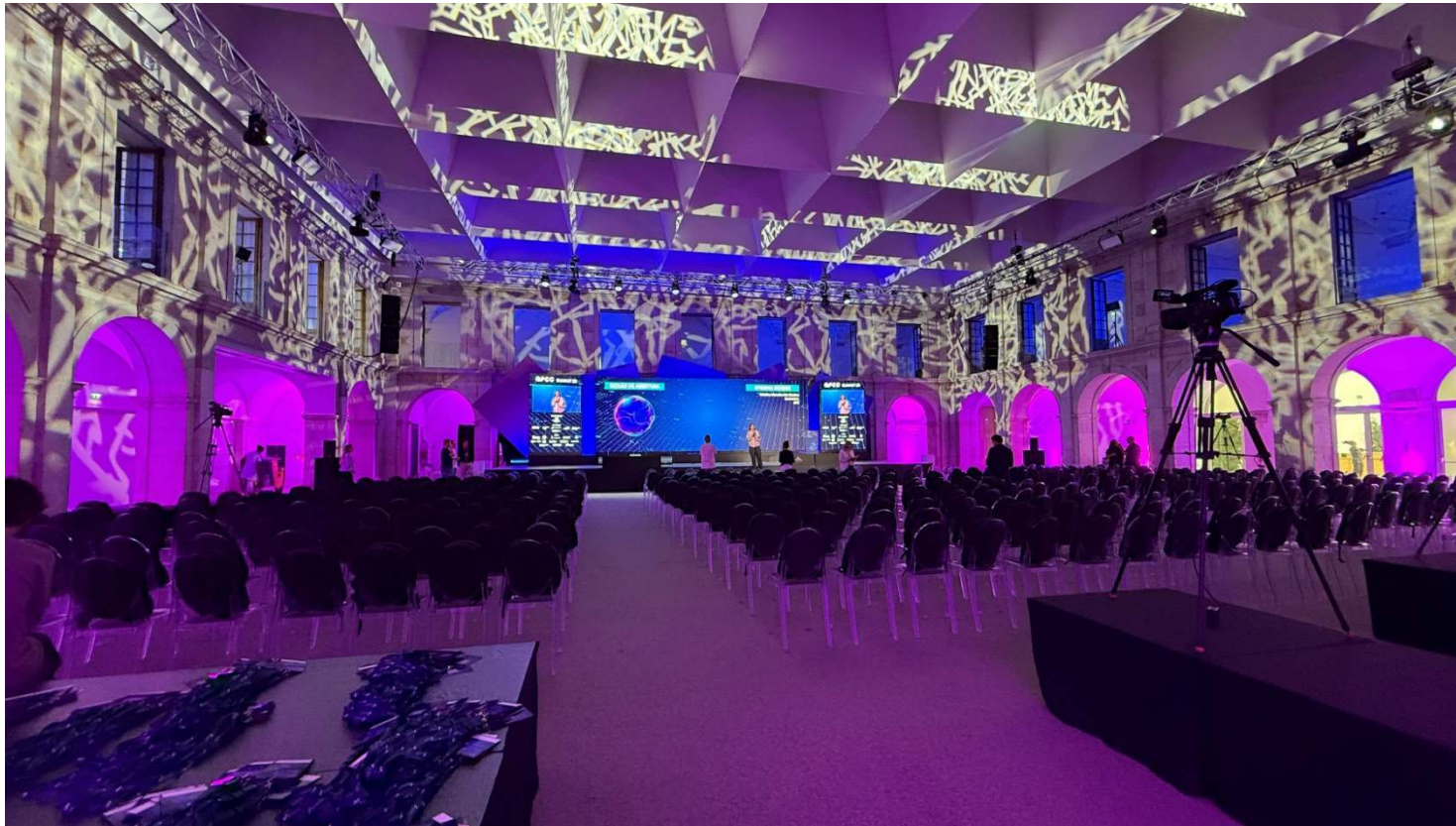
Why It Works:

A label on a clicker hardly seems like it matters much, but this was the first event where I ever saw it labeled this way. It was also a sign that they had paid attention to all the other details to make the entire experience stellar. When you get the small things, it sends a signal that everything will be good.



EVENT | APCC SUMMIT – LISBON, PORTUGAL

Idea #17 – Use lighting to create the experience



Why It Works:

Some events invest in expensive elements to try and create a branded effect. One way to do it that can create a signature look a fraction of the investment is to get creative about how you use lighting and bring in a professional who knows how to do it. Another upside? It's a more sustainable choice than doing a lot of one-time use printing.



EVENT | UNUSUAL INTERSECTIONS – WASHINGTON DC

Idea #18 – Have small businesses provide snacks



Why It Works:

During coffee breaks, the snacks are often the same boring assortment of pastries, cookies and brownies. Some events use the chance to showcase a local small business food sponsor longing to sample their product anyway – which is far more memorable ... and better tasting too.



EVENT | CHASE SMALL BUSINESS SUMMITS

Idea #19 – Make it personally valuable



Why It Works:

While on tour with Chase for a series of events in multiple cities, each gathering not only had a keynote presentation, but also included myself plus two other marketing experts offering “live” coaching sessions one-on-one for small business attendees. The end result was an engaging and immediately valuable offering for any attendee who chose to take advantage.



EVENT | HEROIC PUBLIC SPEAKING – FORT LAUDERDALE FLORIDA

Idea #20 – Use “Palate Cleansers”



Why It Works:

Expert speaking coach Michael Port puts on a signature event each year called Heroic Public Speaking Live and routinely uses entertainers to break up business talks and offer a “palate cleanser” of sorts. The same choice can work well in any business event.



EVENT | CONFIDENTIAL!

DON'T – Start with “housekeeping”



Why It Doesn't Work:

Too many events start their day with someone coming on stage to make all the announcements that no one wants to listen to. Policies. Bathroom locations. An unnecessary recap of the agenda everyone already has. This is a low energy way to start the day. Instead, kick things off with a bang, jump straight into the content and do the “housekeeping” later.



EVENT | UNIVISION BRAND SUMMIT

Idea #21 – Engage visual notetakers



Why It Works:

When I was invited to speak to a group of senior brand leaders and Univision customers, they also had a live visual notetaker to transcribe my talk as I was giving it. The result was a centerpiece of conversation that brought my talk to life in a powerful way.



EVENT | SOUTH BY SOUTHWEST (SXSW) AUSTIN

Idea #22 – Ask sponsors provide utility



Why It Works:

Rather than simply providing sponsors with space, ask them to add more value by encouraging them to do things like this inventive booth from Endicia showcasing their shipping capabilities by allowing you to actually ship a box home from their booth filled with all your swag from other booths.



EVENT | HIGH FIVE – RALEIGH, NC & SUMMER BRAND CAMP – DALLAS, TX

Idea #23 – Bring your theme to life



Why It Works:

At the High Five Conference, participants greet one another not with handshakes but with high-fives. At Summer Brand Camp, the theme was brought to life through a live S'mores bar at dinner. The lesson? If you're going to have a theme, bring it to life in the details.



EVENT | CADRE DC

Idea #24 – Sell the audience to speakers



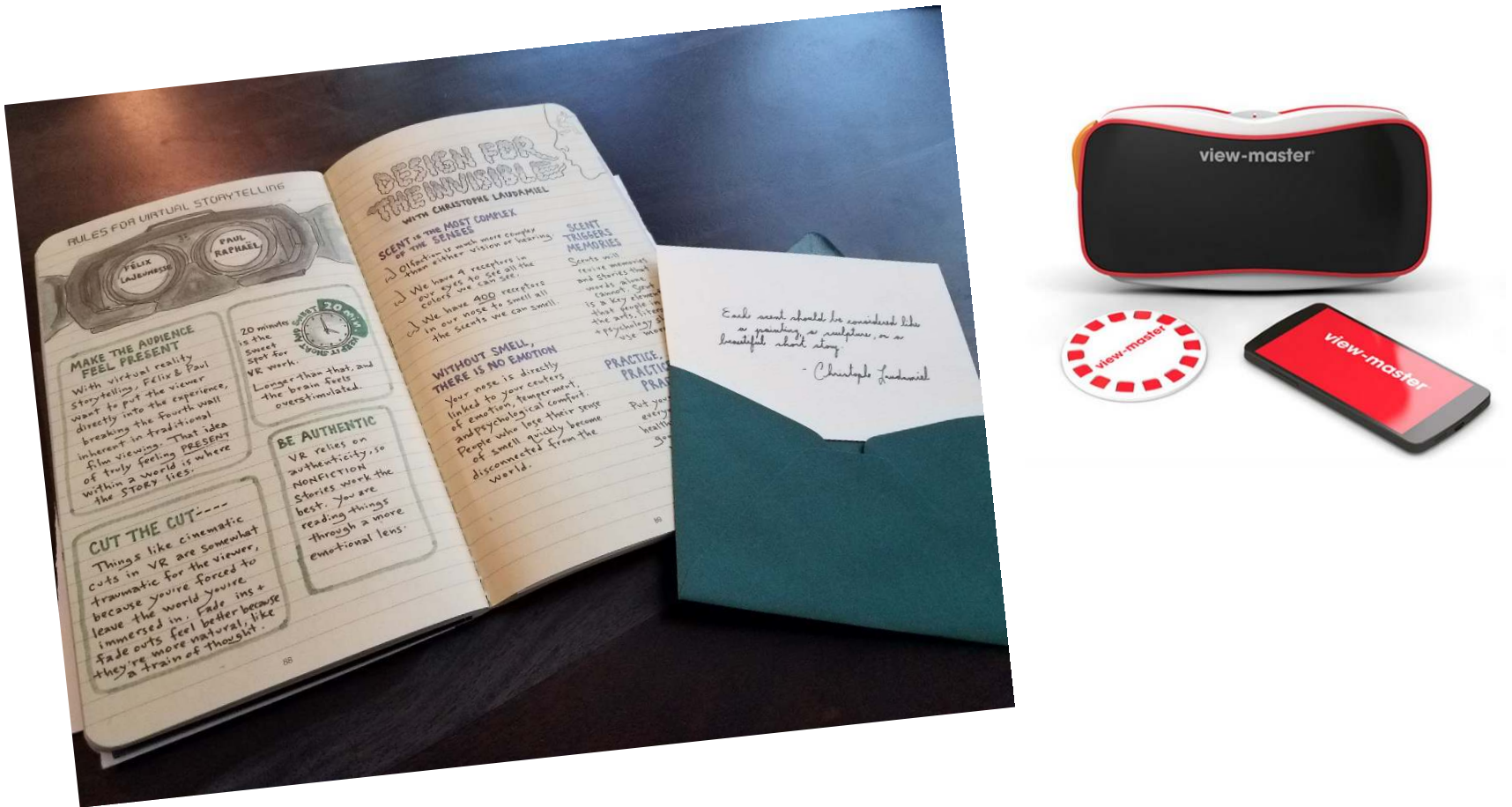
Why It Works:

When attracting speakers to an event, sometimes it is the audience that can be biggest draw. When master networker Derek Coburn pursues top notch speakers for his DC-based networking group, he sells the quality of the audience first and foremost. And it works.



EVENT | FUTURE OF STORYTELLING (FoST) – SNUG HARBOR NEW YORK

Idea #25 – Send momentos after the event



Why It Works:

From customized hand lettered notebooks to sponsored gifts, FoST is known for sending wonderfully curated gifts to event participants a month or two after. The gifts keep people engaged, provide unexpected delight and keep the “story” of the event going.



ABOUT ROHIT:

Rohit Bhargava is on a mission to inspire more non-obvious thinking in the world. He is the 3-time WSJ bestselling author of ten books on marketing, innovation, trends and the future including his #1 bestseller *Non-Obvious Megatrends*. Rohit has been invited as a “non-boring” keynote speaker in 32 countries.

He is a frequent contributor writing about non-obvious ideas for Inc, Entrepreneur and GQ magazines and is an adjunct professor of storytelling at Georgetown University. On a personal note, he loves the Olympics, actively hates cauliflower and is a proud dad of boys.

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