

59 Interviews with Event Planners: Complete Guide on Getting Booked on BIG OPPORTUNITY Stages

The 3 Top Pet Peeves and How to Avoid Them

Executive Summary

Getting booked on BIG OPPORTUNITY stages is a mystery to many—even the so called experts that clutter up the internet. Join me as I share insights from top event planners that will help you avoid the common pet peeves that only frustrate and annoy them while setting you back in your quest to get on their stages.

Instead, I will show you how to create a better strategy to get selected on the right stages for you. This proprietary research covers many areas including, the 3 top pet peeves of event planners, which are:

1. **Don't Pitch Me** (Instead build a relationship or be strategic in your initial contact)
2. **Don't Assume Value** (Clearly articulate your value to the audience and the event, so we don't have to read between the lines)
3. **Don't Blend In** (Stop copying the copies in your market. Create a brand with authority and demonstrate how well you can perform on the stage.)

This is the guide to what is important to the event planners and what is **NOT**. We are all pressed for time, so don't waste your time on what is not important.

The heart and soul of this insight paper is about helping you develop a better strategy to share your talk on the most valuable and profitable stages for you and your business.

Why Did I Write This

There are many “experts” that have ideas of what works in the process of getting speaking engagements. I use the quotes on purpose because I have attended the events, watched the trainings, and read the books. All of them have valuable aspects to their work, and none of them mean to mislead you. However, I have done deep research for over 20 years in

various areas of business and know the TRUTH always comes out when you go beyond what others are willing to do.

This insights paper removes assumptions and guesses that plague the process that so many people are taking right now and gets to the heart of what works and what doesn't.

In 59 interviews, I uncovered misconceptions and discovered ideal strategies that you can use more effectively to get booked.

The Selection Criteria

The selection process has so many variables that it helps to understand the difficulty of their job to create the right experience for the audience. The audience is the prime focus for the event and the reason for having the event in the first place.

Here are some of the most critical variables according to the interviews:

- The content schedule (topics determined in event set up)
- Known experts or authorities on the subject
- Speaking ability
- Innovative content
- Written proposals submitted (for call for speakers)
- Value of the message/speaker for the audience
- Availability of speakers
- Capacity of rooms/stages
- Many other factors that must be considered

One question that I loved asking was “What do you wish speakers knew that they obviously don't?” This question was a BIG one. It went in many directions from showing up on time, and you are not the only one we have to make happy, and this one...

We have a difficult job to select one speaker for a slot and we get hundreds of submissions to sort through. Most submissions are horrible.

I don't quote any one person here because it was a common sentiment that many meeting planners expressed. It means you as a potential speaker need to do a better job of making yourself stand out. Lucky for you that is exactly what I reveal here. I even included examples and data to back it up.

Let's set the stage...

These interviews were done live via the phone (one was in person). You can't google the answer to these questions with any accuracy. This is proprietary research that was taken one-by-one (no surveys here). I chose to go deep to ensure I covered the topic and exposed any biases that are possible with unique selection criteria and experience of meeting planners.

Event Planners means...

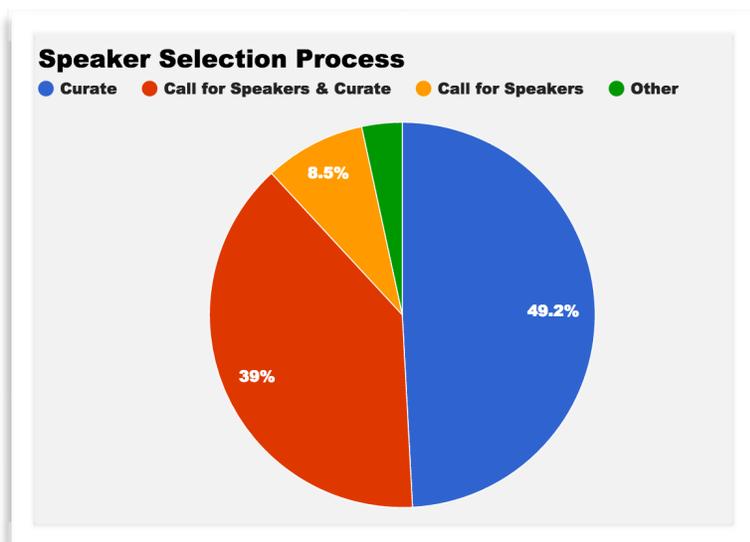
The word "Event Planners" (EPs) means all of those involved in the speaker selection process. It is a combination of conference hosts, meeting planners and any other titles that have speaker selection responsibility. Everyone interviewed was responsible for selecting speakers either as the sole selection or part of the selection committee.

There are many types of stages

Conferences were the prime focus of this research. It is where many entrepreneurs speak that are not professional speakers. The conferences were large and small. I did not include in this research conference stages connected to associations (i.e., Financial Advisors, Doctors, Engineers). However, the insights apply to these stages too.

Speaker Selection Process

The interviews began with an open question about the speaker selection process. I wanted to understand their thinking and the process they underwent to find their speakers.



One key factor was if they did a formal “call for speakers” or if they curated (invited) speakers to submit a proposal.

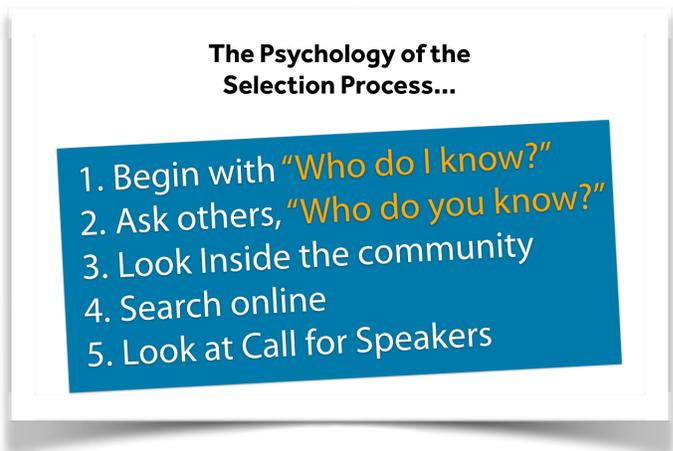
With 59 responses, the majority share of the conferences either did all “Curation” or a mixture of “Curation and Call for Speakers.” Looking at the chart to here you can see that 88% using a prime strategy of curation.

This is important because there is tremendous effort that is put into the speaker submissions through the online forms (call for speakers) by you. It does work...*sometimes*. However, most of the speakers are selected through the process of curation.

This means that you want to put less effort into online forms and more effort into the effective methods of getting booked provided below.

The Psychology of Selection

The selection process is not that difficult to understand, yet many people don’t consider it. The first place EPs look is within their current network. They will ask themselves “who do I know?” that can give this talk. This is where most of the speakers get selected, and the search ends right there. They have their assessments and knowledge of how that person will perform. It is the safe choice.

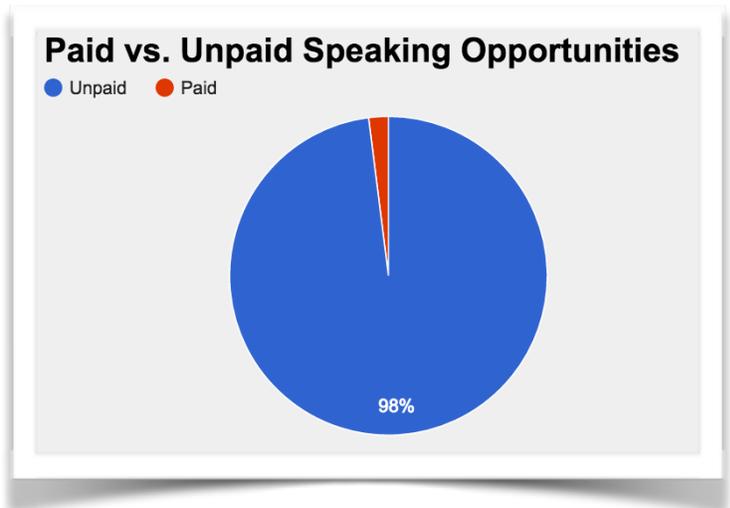


Then the EPs step down the selection process to ask those that are in their personal network “who do you know?” that can give this talk. The third level down is “the community” they serve. They ask and survey for the experts. Searching online and sorting through the “call for speakers” submissions seems to be the EPs last resort. I know some conferences take the call for speakers as their primary strategy, but it is rare.

Paid vs. Unpaid Speaking

It is common to believe that most speaking is paid. There is a whole job category for professional speakers. They get a speaking fee and travel expenses. This is usually their business model (as in how they get paid).

However, for conferences included within this research, it is mostly unpaid opportunities. I am excluding the fact that some conferences have budgets to pay for modest travel expenses.



Based on the conversations, only a handful of slots were paid a speaking fee as the types of events don't have the budgets that corporate and some associations have for speaking.

The strategies listed within this paper will work for paid speaking. In fact, I believe it will be more effective than what they are taught to do from their trusted advisors that use the "spray-n-pray" approach of blasting emails to hundreds of people at a time.

What most experts say to do...

There is no shortage of opinions of what to do to book speaking engagements. I have listened to podcasts, been to the events, and taken the trainings. This is a good representation of what you will hear in the image of What the "Experts" say.

I will share with you "why" most of these don't work and what to do instead.

What the "Experts" say?

1. **Connect with your network** of people to find speaking opportunities
2. **Just ASK...**that one comes from the famous Brian Tracy (love this guy, but this is not a strategy)
3. **Use your LinkedIn account** to make it read like a speaker's account
4. **Send out X number of emails per day** if you are serious
5. **Create a PR (Public Relations) style email** that can be sent to every meeting planner you can find

3 Pet Peeves of the Event Planners

The standard PITCH email, which has been around since the advent of Public Relations (PR), is not working the way it is intended to. This is what most people do to get attention. It is the typical tool used with the cold or unsolicited emails.

#1 Don't Pitch Me

EPs get hundreds (even thousands) of submissions for as few as one opportunity on stage. This was news to me, but ***it is rare that they actually consider those that send in unsolicited pitch emails.***

Read that again. I don't want you to miss it.

Here are some of the comments from the interviews:

“I’ve never picked a speaker from inbound before.”
—Lloyd

“I don’t really consider the pitch.” —Tim

“The more they pitch me, the less likely to be selected.”
—Amanda

“Standard PR pitch is a problem. It is all about them.”
—Greg

“I almost turn down everyone I’ve never heard of.” —Steve

“Most submissions don’t understand our event.”
—Mark

“I’m so amazing is not a good pitch. I don’t like that.” —Joe

“Most pitches try to sell me.” —Stephen

“[About pitches] They all suck a lot. ” —Chris

“Never selected nominated speakers. We get about 1000 for one spot. Pitching is not the best way.” —Kera

“We only take like 4 out of 400.” —Brett

“Most speakers pitching don’t take the time to look at the audience, especially service providers.”
—Matthew

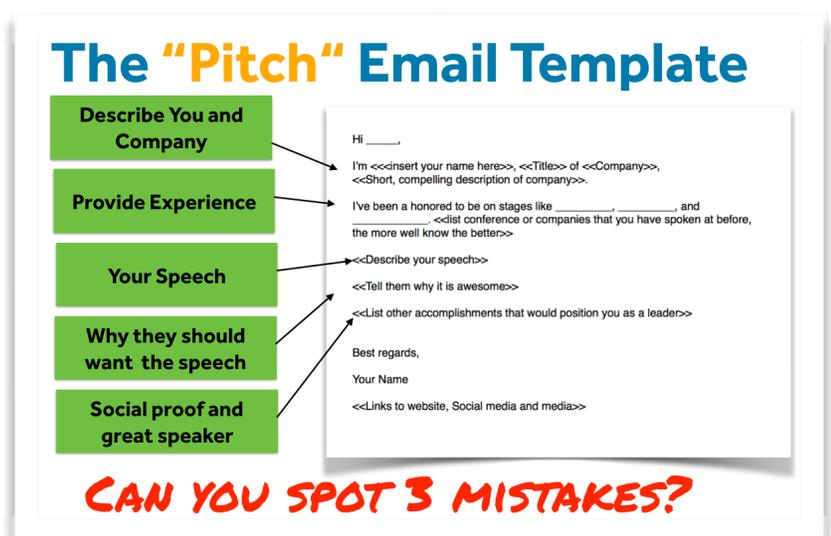
“[The Pitch Email] Frustrating because it is not targeted. They send the same email to 100-200 people. Don’t pitch.”
—Laura

There were many quotes to choose from here, but I hope you get the idea. The oh-so-common pitch email that is driven by a template is not very effective in getting the attention of the EP and making you stand out.

Anatomy of The Pitch Email

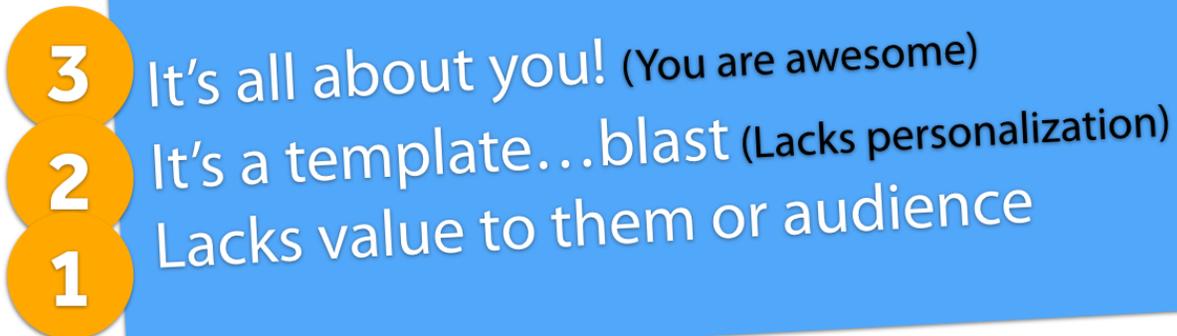
The PR Style Pitch Email is simple to understand. It describes who you are (and likely your company).

It gives experiences and tells about your speech. It likely gives social proof too.



Can you spot the mistakes?

They are listed below, but can you spot the mistakes based on the quotes from the EPs in the section above? Give it a try.

- 
- 3 It's all about you! (You are awesome)
 - 2 It's a template...blast (Lacks personalization)
 - 1 Lacks value to them or audience

#1 It's all about you! — When a stranger sends you an email that is all about them, it may not seem like a big deal. But assume for a moment that you get 100 of those emails. That is exactly what is happening with the EPs. Try to empathize with their day-to-day work. When they get so many emails in their inbox that are all about the speaker they begin to blend together. They just don't stand out. Their first job is to weed out the ones that don't seem to fit. When you talk about YOU...you are asking them to figure out how YOU fit in with THEIR event and the value of your talk through the lens of your stuff.

#2 It's a template...blast — The template email that is blasted out is easy to spot. It is something that you can send to many different EPs and change very little. This is much easier for you, but that is not the point. Again, when you get lots of these, they are easy to see. Even if your email is not a template, you have to make sure it does not seem like that to the reader. "COPY and PASTE" is bad. "Personalize" is good. Keep that in mind.

#3 Lacks value to them or their audience — This one will be explained in detail further in the document, but for now, let’s just say you want to do your research to create a unique and thoughtful email that clearly addressed the value of your talk to the audience and the event. Don’t expect the EPs to read between the lines to decipher your value. (This idea is further unpacked in #2 Pet Peeve.)

The “Pitch Email” (or as I like to call them the “I’m Awesome Email”) image below has different descriptors that will help you see how the typical pitch template email are not good for your strategy.



Here is what the EPs had to say about what to do instead...

Most speakers submissions don't understand the events. There were dozens and dozens of quotes that said that the PR pitch is not working and what to do instead.

“Build the relationship first, don't pitch first.” —Phil

“Standard PR pitch is a problem. It is all about them. Instead, give us a tailored and thoughtful pitch.” —Greg

“Be more strategic and thoughtful.” —Breanna

“Make a much more personal approach.” —Frank

“I'm so amazing is not a good pitch. I don't like that. Better is to be the underdog proving you deserve a chance to share your talk.” —Joe

“Most pitches try to sell me. I prefer the show not tell approach.” —Stephen

“Before submitting, I wished the speakers did their homework, get to know the audience and know your community. It is than just knowing your stuff. Take your time, do it the right way.” - Brian

The most eloquent way to say how to get the attention of a meeting planner was from Greg with Cult Ideas, “The spray-n-pray approach does not work. Create a custom tailored proposal that shows an understanding of the conference. This is the way to pierce the armor of speaking on our stages.”

Getting Stages is About Relationships

It is common for people to say they understand that speaking is all about relationships, but most don't behave that way when it comes to being intentional about reaching out to the right people.

“Speaking is about relationships. Most speakers that apply don't get it. Building relationships are just a better way to get noticed.” —Laura

“[About pitches] They all suck a lot. It is better for the relationship to start organically.” —Chris

Relationships are the key to growth in all aspects of business. Getting booked on stages is no different.

Quick Exercise:

Here is a quick way for you to reinforce this idea. Ask people that you know ‘how they got their last 3 speaking engagements?’ You will likely find 66% (or higher) had some version of this story...“I met this person and they introduced me to the EP. We talked and next thing you know I was booked.” Or they may say “I've known the EP for a while and the opportunity came up, so they asked me about it.”

Think about that. It is all about relationships.

I love this exercise when I am speaking and meet other speakers. The only question is how long do you have to know the person before they trust you enough to invite you on their stages. Unfortunately, there is not a standard answer to that one.

But it is crystal clear to me based on the research and my experience that the pitch is NOT the best way to start the relationship. It is best to slow it down and get to know the right people before you blast out your next email pitch.

Getting Booked on TOP Stages

By now you know to avoid the email blasts. Instead look for a way to establish relationships with the EPs before you think of pitching yourself

OR...

you can create a strategic approach that is valuable to them first. There is no one strategy for all. It is custom to you and the stages that are right for you. (This is the strategic, thoughtful approach that so many EPs talk about).

#2 Don't Assume Value

Once a relationship is established, you will want to have conversations and written proposals to the EPs about the speech. Value is subjective. It is in the eye of the beholder. However, most speakers want the meeting planner to read between the lines to see the value of your talk. Value is HUGE. It is the lens that the EPs use to evaluate your speech.

One of the largest event planners I talked to was Neal with Sage Summit - 8 cities across the globe this year with more than 20,000 attendees. I asked Neal about the speaker selection process, "Don't send in generic pitches. Research the event and describe the value that you offer to our audience. Give practical insights."

Value is an important factor to the meeting planners. It is mostly determined from the perspectives of the audience.

Value to the EPs has two layers that must be understood:

- 1) What is the value to the audience?
- 2) What is the value to the event?

The Value to the Audience

The audience is by far the most important. When you take the time to understand the audience for each event and how they can use your talk, you will be able to describe the value in a way that makes it clear to the MP why your talk is necessary. (There are some tricky elements that tend to trip many people up so you might want to register for our next training on the subject.)

Here are a few examples from EPs that drive this point home.

“It is important to look at your talk through the lens of our audience to see the value.” —Matthew

“Attention span is small...broad is not good. Show us how your talk is actionable with three really important things and what the means for the audience.” —Jessica

“The best pitches clearly understand our event and show how it impacts our event.” —Mark

Here is a key question to ask yourself about your talk...

What will the audience be able to DO once your speech is done and what is the IMPACT of that to them?

The Value to the Event

As I said, the value to the audience is most important, but don't miss the chance to articulate the value to the event. If they are selling tickets to the event, tell them how you can help spread the word. Do you have a podcast or an engaged email list?

Is there alignment with your talents and what they see as valuable?

There are other factors besides tickets to events so take the time to look at how you can be part of the community. If you are seen as an insider, you will have a better chance for this. “Insiders” are part of the community and to state the obvious, they are not “outsiders” trying to get on the inside for a

one-time opportunity. Here are some quotes from EPs that spotlight the need to have value to the event.

“Understand the values of our conference.” —Joni

“Understand the architecture of the whole event and the value of the talk to the audience. Talks must be benefit oriented.” —Paige

#3 Don't Blend In

This is the pet peeve that gets me going. “Blending in” was never the goal. Well, I hope not. It is easy when you look to your peers within your industry to see what others are doing. You get a cookie-cutter approach to business.

A copy of a copy is never as good as the original. This quote strikes to the heart of many business owners that have followed the lead of their peers. Be careful in what you emulate as it may cause you to seem invisible with your marketing and positioning.

We all know the fundamentals of marketing and positioning, but for some reason you forget they apply to you. This includes all the marketing companies out there reading this that do this stuff for others. Seriously, I know first hand with dozens and dozens of clients in the marketing space that this is a problem.

**A copy of a
copy is never
as good as
the original.**

—unknown

Here is the deal...EPs get hundreds of submissions. They are asked to select ONE. Well, that means that you have to be THE choice, not just a choice. “THE” choice is the one that has authority positioning and stands out clearly from the others in the sea of suppliers.

Here is what the EPs say about the submissions they get:

“Don’t be an echo chamber to what everyone else is saying.” —Joni

“Most submissions just don’t stand out.” —Jessica

“The more they pitch me, the less likely to be selected.”
—Amanda

When I asked Amanda (above) about her statement, she went on to share how most pitches are about how awesome the speaker is and have very little to do with the topic or the value of the event. The pitch email is not the way you stand out.

So what did the EPs say that you should do:

“My job is to find the new, exciting, interesting and compelling speaker.” —Ross

“Be a luminary in your area.” —Mark

“Create content on your subject area and have a unique POV [Point-of-View]” —Greg

“One way to stand out is to build your personal brand. We want someone unique.” —Brett

“Speakers that get selected have an innovative approach...something that others have not heard before.”
—Danielle

Another great interview was with Joni who was very clear and passionate about the need for the speakers to make the audience think and respond in emotional ways when I probed for how do you do that? She said, “ Be great story tellers with a dose of humor.”

Let’s look at a few key areas that are important to EPs that you must understand for your brand.

Be an Authority

There is a consistent mention to the words “Authority,” SME (Subject Matter Experts) and “Experts.” No matter what you call it, EPs want the speakers to know their stuff. The generalist just does not have that much of a chance to beat out the competition for speaking on the BIG OPPORTUNITY stages (unless their relationship is ultra strong).

“Must be an expert in the field and usually already in our community.” —Bill

“Beyond domain mastery, they must have good speaking style.”
—Stephen

“Must have gravitas...presence on stage.” —Amanda

“Be enthusiastic. Be knowledgeable on the topic. Be known in the community. We also like the rising stars too.” —Jo

“We want the expert in the field. Someone to educate the audience.” —Ker

Be Entertaining

There is an expectation from many (not all) of the EPs that the speakers should be the authority AND be engaging.

“Our best speakers can give a talk that is heavy on content and also it ENTERTAINS, is ENERGETIC and is LIVELY.” —Pam

Paige had a great take on this with two key questions:

- 1) **Is it worth talking about?** This is about the intersection of ideas and the debate of how best to achieve the result, and it is an innovative approach.
- 2) **Is the angle interesting?** Being vulnerable to talk about the missteps, what is important, and what is NOT important. Don't forget the results and impact.

Be a Performer

Performing on the stage is creating an experience. It is not just giving your talk. There are lots of people that can read slides and share information. EPs prefer to have a speaker that performs the talk in a way that makes the audience feel the moment. You may believe this is only for expert or professional speakers, but I believe much of this can be taught with a deep awareness to stage presence.

Having stage presence is important for most of the EPs. They want their speakers to share a message that is enthusiastic and resonates with the audience.

“We don't do well with our audience if the speakers don't connect. This means they must be subject matter experts and still connect with the audience.” —Joni

“Ideal is great content with a great natural speaking style. Also, they have interesting stories to tell.” —Laura

Great talks have “Emotional Resonance” according to Paige. She described this as the pulling of an emotion string throughout the talk.

Stage presence is important and can usually be measured with a preview video. It should show what kind of speaker you are.”

—Paige

“In the selection process, I want to access how they connect with our audience. Will it resonate? Does it have warmth?” —Mark

“Must have unique elements in the presentation that are entertaining.” —Alissa

“I want a story that makes sense for our audience. It must resonate.” —Matthew

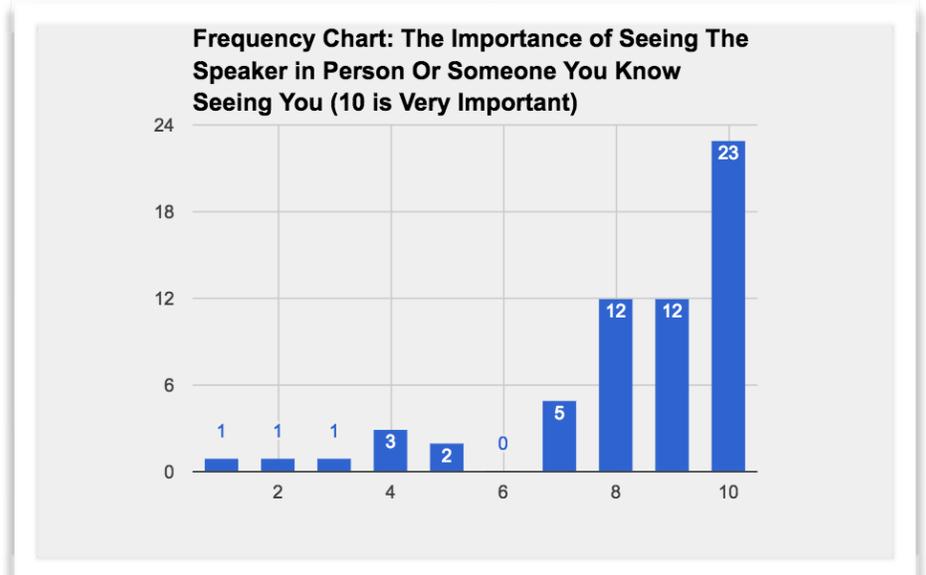
The key point to this is understanding what the EPs want so you can include that in your proposals/submissions.

Think right now how can you demonstrate your speaking experience. Is it video? Is it testimonials?

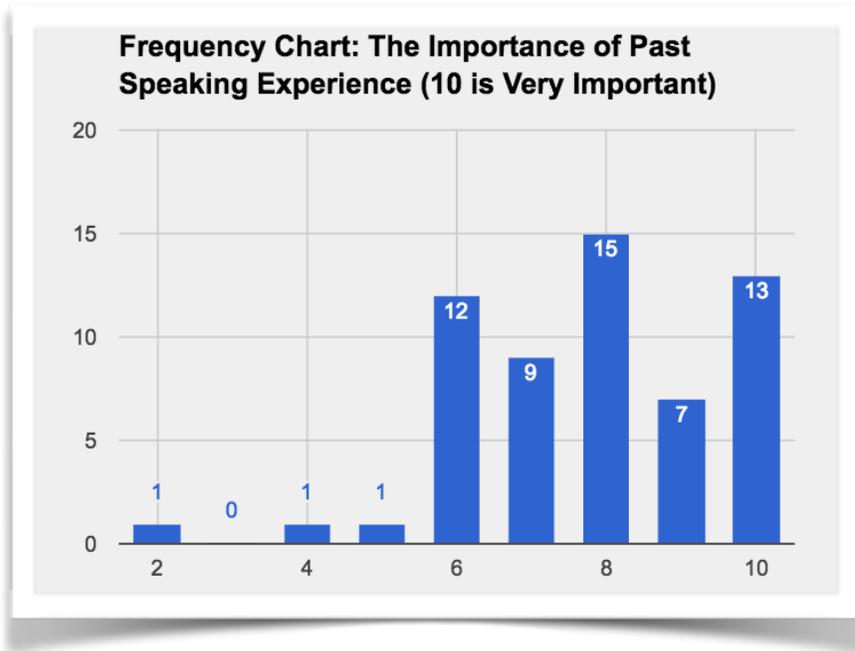
Let me share with you the data behind the research.

If you love the data, this will be your favorite section. I was careful to look at the qualitative measures of this research along with quantitative. There are some surprises for you. However, what will not be a surprise is the 2 most important factors in being selected for BIG OPPORTUNITIES is your experience and if the EP seen you on stage before.

In the chart here, you can see that 47 EPs (78.3% of all) said that seeing the speaker in person or someone they know has seen them in person is an 8, 9 or 10 making this is the most important factor in getting selected to speak on stages.



“#1 way is for us to see or hear you first hand. Must be actionable and innovative (not heard before)” - Brian



The second most important factor is the list of events where you have spoken before. EPs like to know you are a proven speaker. They can tell by your previous stages if you are able to handle this opportunity.

In other words...

You must get on stages to get on more stages.

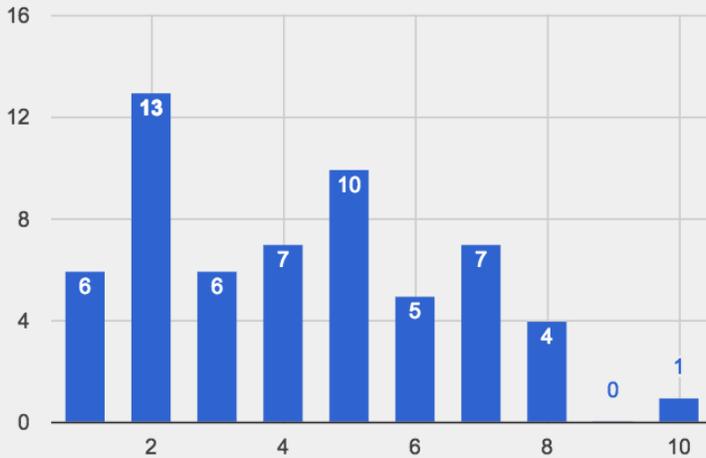
What is NOT important?

Knowing what IS important is great, but you also have to know the distractions that steal our time, attention, and money. There are two aspects of marketing at least important to EPs. It is not too surprising here as most of it is for your ego. It is all about you. It is the common speaker “one sheet” that is a marketing piece about you. And next to the bottom is the “sizzle reel” or “speaker trailer.”

The “One Sheet” is a bit old school in the marketing of your personal brand. It was used for sending out packages of video tapes to EPs. Now it is

emailed. They look good, but at this level of speaker selection EPs don't seem to see the importance of your well-designed one sheet.

Frequency Chart: The Importance of Speaker Sizzle Reel (10 is Very Important)



Sizzle reel or speaker trailer is not important for most of the EPs I interviewed. They would rather see you on video for a continuous uncut 3 to 5 minutes. The sizzle reel is highly produced and has many cuts back and forth. One EP stated...

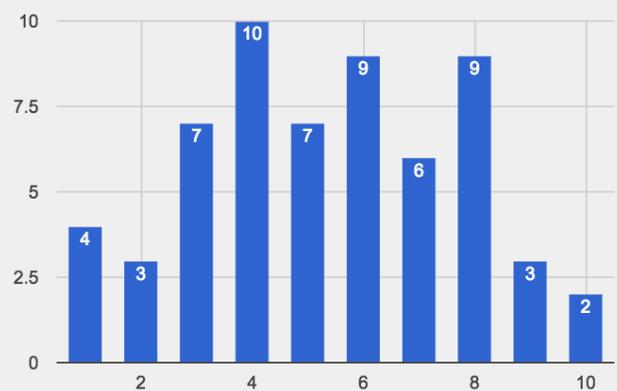
“No real content in sizzle reels.” — Shirley

There is a special note for sizzle reels that will help you if you are a professional (aka paid) speaker.

One big surprise discovered

In this research, I will tell you that I was surprised in the lack of importance put on the book. It is commonly thought that the book positions your authority. I still believe it does. But in the interviews with EPs at conferences selecting unpaid speakers, the book is only moderately important. Now I did get comments related to the value of a HOT book (meaning it is creating a buzz in the market). I

Frequency Chart: The Importance of Authoring a Book on The Subject (10 is Very Important)



also believe that a book is great if you are a paid speaker to document your POV to everyone. I believe one fear is that speakers that have books are only there to sell books. You have to make sure your message stands out from the book and is also innovative.

Big Opportunity Stage Cheatsheet

With 59 interviews, I had to find a way to go beyond the quotes. All the data provided within this insight paper is from actual conversations. No forms were filled out to collect this data.

There are some factors that you should consider in reading this data. You and your speaking may have different elements that make you unique. Analyze the data to see where you can focus your marketing for the highest pay offs.

	Average Score (10 is very important)	Insights for you...
If Seen in Person (or by someone they know)	8.28	This was the MOST important factor in speaker selection. More than 85% of the Event Planners (EP) believe that seeing you speak in person was important or very important. This means you have to get stages to get big opportunity stages.
Past Speaking Experience	7.80	EPs appreciate knowing that you have spoken at similar events in the past and performed well. They want to know you can handle yourself on stages similar to theirs.
Usage of Emails Describing The Speech	6.92	Describing the VALUE of your speech to the audience and the event is very important. This means the typical PR style email pitch is NOT what they want. Your submission must have a clear articulation of your speech value it will have to the audience.
Video Segment (best 3-5 min.)	6.88	If they can't see you in person, they want to see a video of you. Best is a 3-5 minutes of uncut video of you on stage being you.
Business Celebrity Status	6.55	Being "business famous" is not important to many EPs. It only factors in for speakers that bring people to the event. It does not hurt you to have a strong personal brand, but it is not required.
Testimonials From Others	6.25	Testimonials are not as important as you think they are. It was common for the EP to say they only have weight if I know the person who gave the testimony.
Social Media Platform	6.13	Having a new audience that you can bring to events is not a bad thing. It is not a requirement, but gathering a following for your work is smart in my opinion.
Writing The Book on the Subject	5.35	Writing the book does make you an authority and will help you if you are a PAID speaker, but you don't have to publish a book to get on BIG OPPORTUNITY stages. This was a huge surprise in this research. It is not that important to EPs.
Sizzle Reel (or Trailer Video)	4.17	The typical sizzle reel does not add value nor does it demonstrate your speaking ability. The quick cuts and editing on these make them seem like marketing puffery. Don't pay lots of money to create a sizzle reel unless you are a paid speaker.
One Sheet For the Speaker	3.85	No surprise here that the one sheet is not that valuable to EPs. Don't waste your money and time on this.

About The Company and Me

We turn everyday entrepreneurs into FORCES of nature in their market. We define the complexities of business strategies to help you “be THE choice, not just a choice.”

My name is Gene Hammett. I’ve been a business leader for 20+ years. I’ve started and run multiple million dollar companies. I’ve succeeded, failed, reinvented himself, and succeeded again. I can pass along to you the key lessons I’ve learned in the process so you can have a business that is both successful and fulfilling.

On my podcast, Leaders in the Trenches, I’ve has interviewed hundreds of world thought leaders and best-selling New York Times authors. Gene has been featured in Forbes, Success Magazine, Business Insider, and INC Magazine. Gene is also a regular contributor to Entrepreneur Magazine.

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