

How to select a Great Speaker

Choosing the right professional speaker is like choosing your accountant or legal advisor. There is no way you would step into a relationship that could potentially harm your business without doing your homework first.

Speakers can make or break your event, affect your staff in a positive or negative way, and enhance or detract from your professional reputation.

Many professional speakers become an integral part of an organisation, forming trusted bonds with staff, management and customers.

The right choice is therefore critical.

Here are the key steps to take before selecting your next Speaker.

1. **Clearly define your event** – Its' overall aim and how you mean to reach it.
2. **Clearly define the role** (or roles) you would like the speaker to take on. I.e. present a keynote, seminar, or training/education session; facilitate a planning day; deliver coaching; or comper your event. Many professional speakers can do more than one of these.
3. **Clearly define the aims** and objectives of the session(s) they are involved in. I.e. participants are to understand and embrace a new management strategy; audience is to be actively motivated, entertained, and gain an appreciation of XXX issue.
4. **Organise your budget.** You will need a price range as opposed to a fixed price. With speakers like other professionals, you will get the quality that you pay for. Speakers will come with a variety of structures and added value opportunities too, so be prepared to discuss the best option for you.
5. **Organise your dates and venues.** If they are flexible however you may have a better chance of getting the speakers that you want. This means start sourcing your speakers early.

Here's what to look for when making your choice of Speakers.

They need to be...

Accessible

Can you reach the person you want? Did they respond to your phone call or email efficiently? If they are playing hard to get, or take ages to respond, perhaps this is a sign of possibly being 'difficult to deal with'. You want a speaker that from the outset makes your planning and organising a smooth affair. You have enough to organise without chasing your (or the speakers') tail!

Affiliated

A quality professional speaker is likely to be affiliated or accredited with organisations related to their field of expertise or to their profession as a speaker. This could range from industry specific associations, professional development organisations such as AIM, or in Australia – the National Speakers Association of Australia.

Credible

Don't be afraid to ask for an indication of past presentations and how they went. If the speaker is well known, you may not feel you need this evidence. However, you would still expect all of the above (and below) key indicators to be met. If you are trying out a new person that you have heard of or had recommended to you, you could ask for a client list, evidence of similar presentations, testimonials and referees.

A good speaker is also likely to have some qualifications related to their area of expertise. These can range of course from Phds to industry specific qualifications. Be flexible here. Not all academics are good speakers and not all good speakers are academics. It is their experience in the area that may be their biggest qualification.

You may also find that a quality speaker has produced books, manuals, DVDs, CDs or other materials that establish them as experts in their field.

Communicative

A good speaker will 'speak' with you. To do the very best job for you they should be keen and willing to engage you in some Q and A. They would want to know such things as your desired outcomes of their presentation, your company background, audience profile and history, company culture etc. The speaker will conduct research on your company to a depth that is appropriate for the presentation they are giving. Wherever possible a face to face meeting should also be offered.

Compatible

You, your organisation and your speaker need to 'click'. This means there is a congruency between the bigger, subliminal messages you want to send to your audience, and the speaker's ability to do this. For example, if you are sending a message of 'looking after yourself' in a Work/Life Balance presentation, you won't want a speaker who is overweight and smokes in the breaks!

Also get a feel for the speaker's ethics and values. Do they match yours? While you may never get a perfect match, at least you will be confident that they are unlikely to say something that is opposite to your company values. Discuss your company culture with them if they don't ask first.

Good Value

This is about really feeling that you are getting your money's worth. A quality speaker is not cheap. But a quality speaker will provide great value. This might be in the form of return on investment (in the case of motivational sessions, a well facilitated planning session, training, coaching or education). They might also provide handout material, manuals, or the

opportunity to video the event. They could also supply you with support materials such as books, DVDs or CDs meaning that the main message you wanted to get across is in a hard take-away version.

Because speakers are often versatile, they might be able to conduct more than one session or service at an event too. A quality speaker will have a number of ways to add value. Just ask.

Professionally organised

If your speaker shows themselves to be well organised from the onset it is a good indication that their whole performance will be well organised. Have they provided you with booking forms, checklists, an estimate, or product samples? A "We have pencilled that in." over the phone, followed by a bill is not a good sign! They may require a contract, a deposit, or order numbers.

As the event gets closer you should expect that they would contact you with their updated information, perhaps sending slides or masters of handouts for you to copy – in plenty of time! They will also want your updated information such as audience numbers, room layouts, AV manager's details, run sheets etc – depending on the size and complexity of the event.

As in any profession, you are highly likely to get the result you are after if the person behaves like a professional right from the start.

Where to find the best Speaker for the job

Word of mouth

This is probably the way most top speakers get their business, so ask around. If you attend a session somewhere and are impressed by the speaker, ask for their card, or get details from the event organiser. Even if you don't have an immediate need, if you 'click' with their style, put them in your 'Speakers' file.

Speakers Bureaux

These organisations act as agents for speakers. They have access to a huge range of people from all areas of expertise. They will constantly use the ones that they get the best feedback (and profit) from. Do your homework according to the tips above and decide who is best for you as many 'famous' people are not in fact professional speakers. The bureaux won't necessarily conduct the 'matchmaking' as efficiently as you will.

National Speakers Association of Australia

NSAA have branches in every state in Australia. You can check for some speakers online, although not all their members are listed. While they are not a bureaux, a call to their secretariate or President is likely to result in some suitable recommendations.
www.nationalspeakers.asn.au

Merry Robertson from **Jump Marketing** is a professional speaker specialising in Marketing and Communication. Please Contact Us if you would like to discuss your next professional speaking, facilitating, training or compering requirement.