



HOLDING SLIDE FOR ROOM LOAD IN



This session is all about making your attendees feel like the main focus, because attendees who feel like the hero pay more attention, remember more, and tell more people. Turn your attendees into Superman and they tend to return the favor. But first, a little about me.

My name is James Papadopoulos, some of you may know me already, hi! Now, I have a well-known vendetta against speaker slides with a big glamour photo of someone who's already standing on the stage. But.... Since I'm the one on stage...

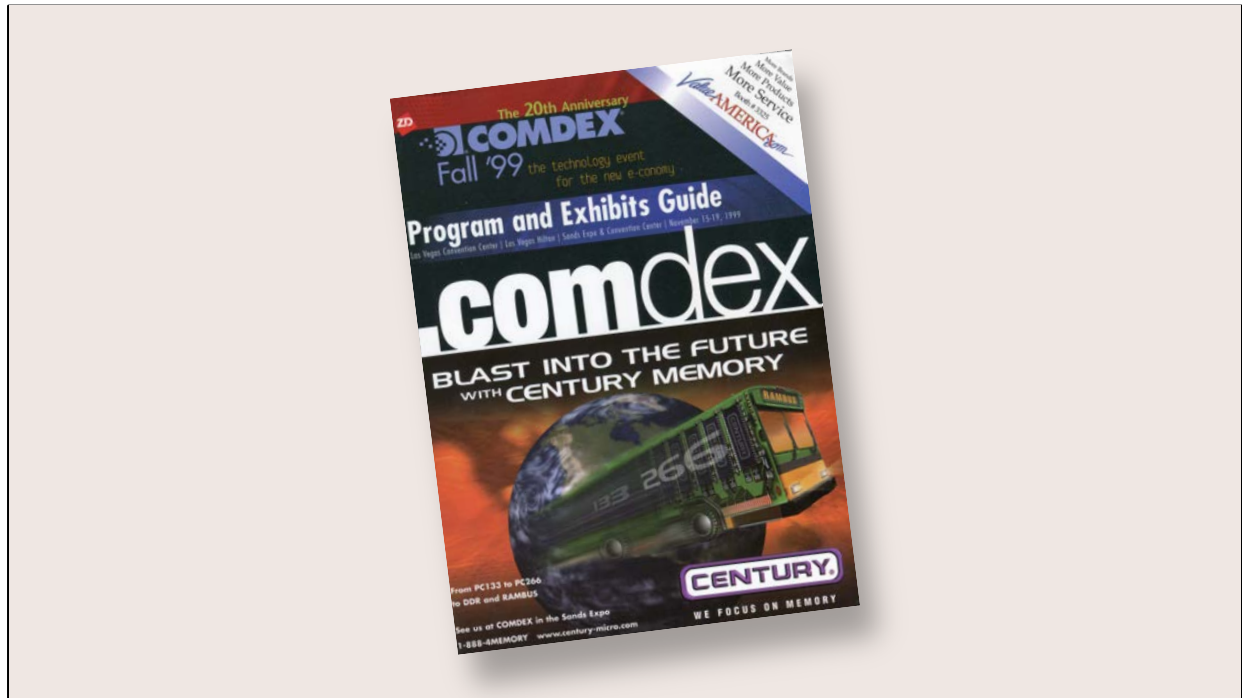


Anyway.

I'm a born and raised New Yorker, private school on the Upper East Side, if you've seen Gossip Girl, basically that.

Then the nerdiest science high school in the city, Bronx Science- DNA electrophoresis, a mass spectrometer, the whole thing.

I graduated in 1999, and here's what else was happening in 1999...



...have any of you ever heard of COMDEX?

It was THE tech show back in the day.

Here's a show guide - they were printed back then. There's advertising all over this thing – some things never change, right?

WELCOME

Welcome to
COMDEX/Fall '99!



Jason E. Chudnofsky
 President and CEO,
 ZD Events

I am pleased to welcome you to a very special COMDEX. This year we are celebrating our 20th Anniversary. Over the last two decades we have been privileged to host the launch of many of the major technologies that have become cornerstones of today's technology marketplace. At Sunday's IT Industry Retrospectives Ceremony we will celebrate the breakthroughs of the last twenty years and look ahead to what the future holds for the IT industry. Whatever the future may bring, you can be sure you'll see it first at COMDEX.

As befits a milestone event, this year's COMDEX is bigger and better than ever. In addition to our peerless Technology Conference, you'll find more special conference programs addressing the issues that are important to you. Developers Design and Methodology Clinics. InfoSecurity University. Open Source Software Development Forum. IT Executive Symposium, brought to you by the Yankee Group and Ziff-Davis. And more — all geared towards improving your ability to compete in the challenging 21st century IT marketplace. Our official *Show Daily* and *Program & Exhibits Guide* are your best roadmaps to all COMDEX has to offer.

On the expo floor you'll find more pavilion areas than ever, making it easy for you to see hot new technologies in action. And be sure to check out the COMDEX Hot Spots, which combine cutting-edge technology and vendor-sponsored education right on the show floor. You'll find hot spots dedicated to

Welcome to
COMDEX/Fall '99!



Eric Hippeau
 Chairman and CEO,
 Ziff-Davis

On behalf of Ziff-Davis, I am pleased to welcome you to the 20th Anniversary of the World's leading information technology event.

On the eve of the new millennium, the technology industry finds itself facing more paths, and more choices, than ever before. The Internet has opened up new ways to do business over and above the e-commerce model, from the availability of dynamic new operating systems such as Linux to the e-sourcing Web-based applications. New hardware platforms, from "smart phones" to PDAs are challenging — and many say ending — the decades-long dominance of the PC. And the growth of a truly global economy has changed the rules of engagement for channel/resellers.

To compete in the exponentially more complex marketplace of the new century, the buyers and sellers of technology need access to the most up-to-date, accurate information available, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. At Ziff-Davis, we are committed to ensuring that our millions of IT professional customers around the globe are empowered and enlightened by every one of our products serving the Internet-enabled marketplace.

This year many of Ziff-Davis' other media platforms will be working overtime to enrich your COMDEX experience and make sure you don't miss a minute of the 20th anniversary celebrations. In addition to COMDEX TV, you'll find ZDTV at COMDEX, which will offer special reports throughout the event. COMDEX Radio, produced by *PC Week* Radio and ZDNet, will keep you informed with

Inside – there was a welcome letter.



With lots of brags about COMDEX.

That's pretty much all they talk about.

FALL '99 CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

COMDEX/Fall '99 Keynotes

COMDEX Keynotes bring you face-to-face with the luminaries who are shaping the post-PC era of technology. Share their insights into the dramatic evolution from today's trends to tomorrow's standards. All Comdex Keynotes will take place in the Grand Ballroom of the Venetian Resort Hotel and Casino (accessible through the Sands Convention Center).

Sunday, November 14,

7-8 pm



Bill Gates,
*Chairman and
Chief Executive Officer
Microsoft Corporation*

Tuesday, November 16,

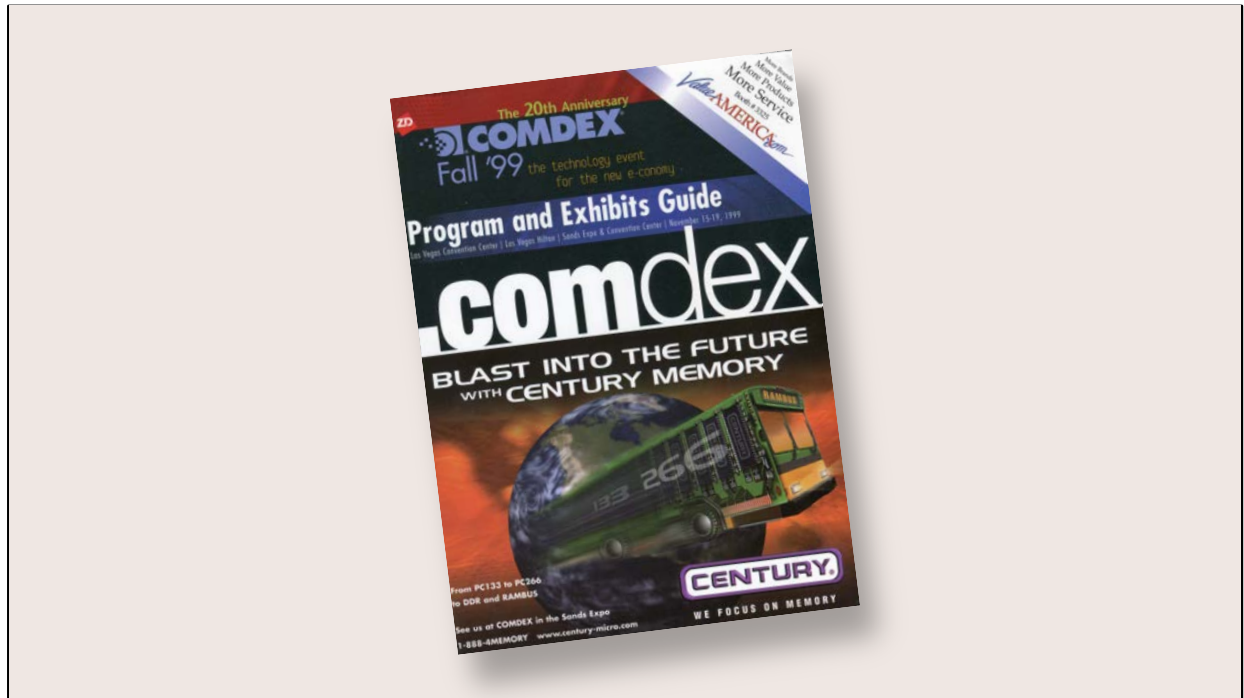
Noon-1 pm



Eric Schmidt,
*Chairman of the Board and
Chief Executive Officer
Novell, Inc.*

And here's the keynote listing.

You'll be face to face with luminaries.... share their insights. Pretty generic, but it's Bill Gates in 1999, you wouldn't have to try too hard to fill that room, right?



The biggest tech event was focusing on itself mostly. And this is the world where I started my career. I didn't work in the events world then, I would have been a nerdy attendee.



My first real job was at MTV working on reality shows and crazy celebrity stuff. And of course as anyone would, I made my way to pharma advertising.

Next I went into IT marketing on the agency side as a producer and creative director working on everything from Direct Mail campaigns to producing over 300 live broadcasts and livestreams, and those livestreams led me to the EVENTS world.



I use everything I've learned along the way to help companies tell their story at dozens of events.

Including 6 years in house at a global enterprise software company, where I was an EP, co-wrote the keynote narrative, and even called a lot of the shows live.

So, long story short, I've changed a lot in the last 25 years or so. Let's see how things are going in the events world.

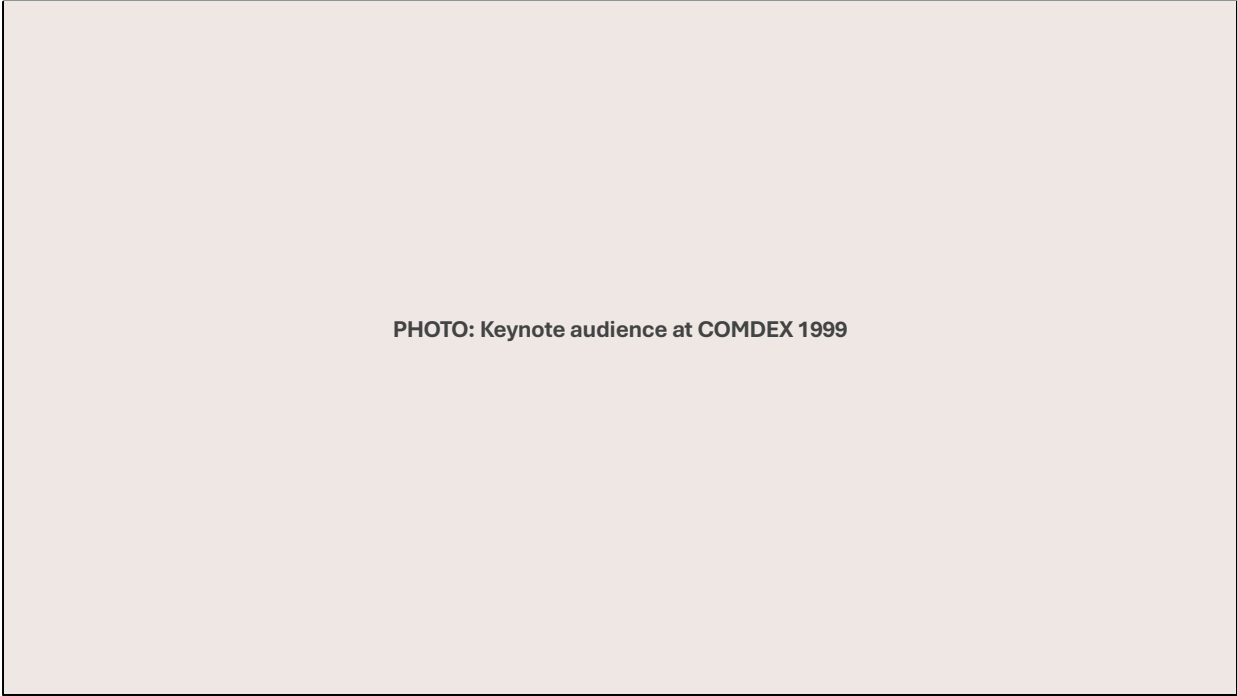


PHOTO: Keynote audience at COMDEX 1999

25 years ago, COMDEX was all about COMDEX. Surely by now the focus is all on the attendee, right

[CLICK]

Well... Let's take a look at NVIDIA's GTC opening video from earlier this year.

VIDEO: GTC 2026 Opening – First 2 minutes, shortened for time

[VIDEO PLAYS – ENDS WITH “WELCOME TO GTC!”]

PHOTOS SIDE BY SIDE

LEFT: Bill Gates on numerous screens in main stage at Comdex

RIGHT: Jensen Huang at GTC under banner reading “The Inference King” by SemiAnalysis

So that’s a little cringe – and I’m not saying that to talk trash, if there’s anyone in the room from NVIDIA I’d love a job there. But these two giant events, a quarter century apart, are still all ME ME ME.



Every touchpoint at your event says the show is “about us, the brand” or the show is “about you, the attendee”.

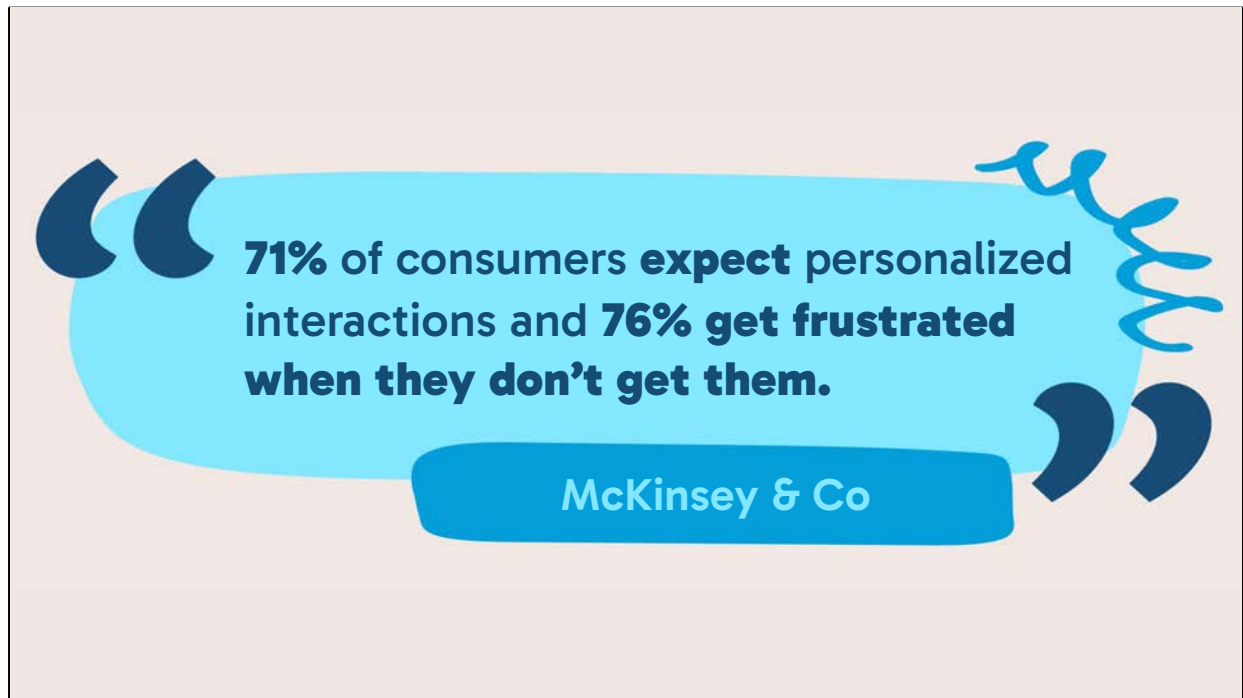
There's no neutral. Every sign, every subject line, every session title votes one way or the other. You never get to not choose.

WHO IS AN ATTENDEE?

(basically, everyone except you.)

Now, I'm gonna say the word attendee a billion times today. I mean anyone that's not working on the show, not just customers. I mean analysts, press, your CEO, other executives, prospects. Anyone wearing a badge, whatever color it is. In the case of NVIDIA at the GTC, it's very possible the target was their shareholders, and that's fine.

When I say "make it about the attendee", I mean all of them. People want to feel like they're the main character.



According to surveys from McKinsey, 71% of consumers expect personalized interactions. And 76% get frustrated when they don't get them.



-There's a reason that line for the portrait photographer was so long last year at CEMA.

You waited for the photo because of the promise of how it might make your life better.

But you're not gonna say 'I'm waiting to change my life.' They just want a headshot.

IT'S OUR JOB TO keep figuring out why people are really standing in line. --I learned that the hard way, as a reality TV producer.

FEELINGS MEAN MORE THAN FACTS

(In this context, not in court and stuff...)

When I was first doing those confessional shoots, I'd just ask about facts.

-So, where did you go on the date? What did she tell you?

-I'd get accurate, but boring answers. Nobody cares where they went or what the appetizers were.

-Tell me how the date made you feel. Were you angry when she said she didn't love you?

-That's what reality TV is - the juicy parts of a mundane day. But it also works in marketing...



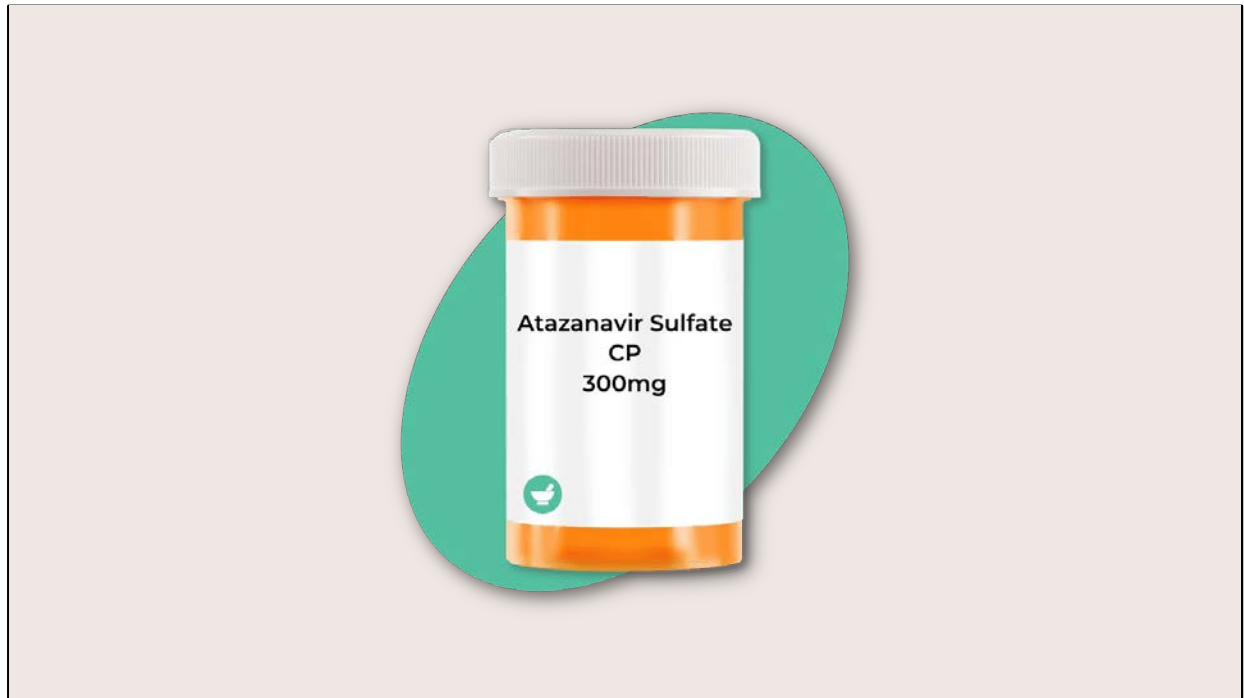
When Apple released the iPod 25 years ago or so, it wasn't an MP3 player with a monochrome 2-inch LCD, a 5GB 1.8-inch hard drive, and 32MB of RAM.



All they had to say was "1,000 songs in your pocket." And now it's about the customer. The first thing they think is - do I even own 1000 songs? Could I really put all my music in my pocket?

It's good – there's a reason you've probably seen this example 100 times by now.

Now, what happens when the audience can't see themselves at all?



Back when I was working in pharma ads, we were working on marketing a low cost drug to low income patients.
But when I get to the set...



...it's a super high end luxury apartment.



Now, do you think the person who needs financial help with medication would feel a connection to an ad featuring someone standing in that \$12,000 a month apartment?

I walked around raising the concern to as many people I could - so much so that the creative director asked me to step outside and let them handle things their way.

And, in advertising, the creative director is THE boss.

I realized he wasn't bad at his job, he just was making a beautiful ad for the wrong audience.



There's actual research behind this, too.

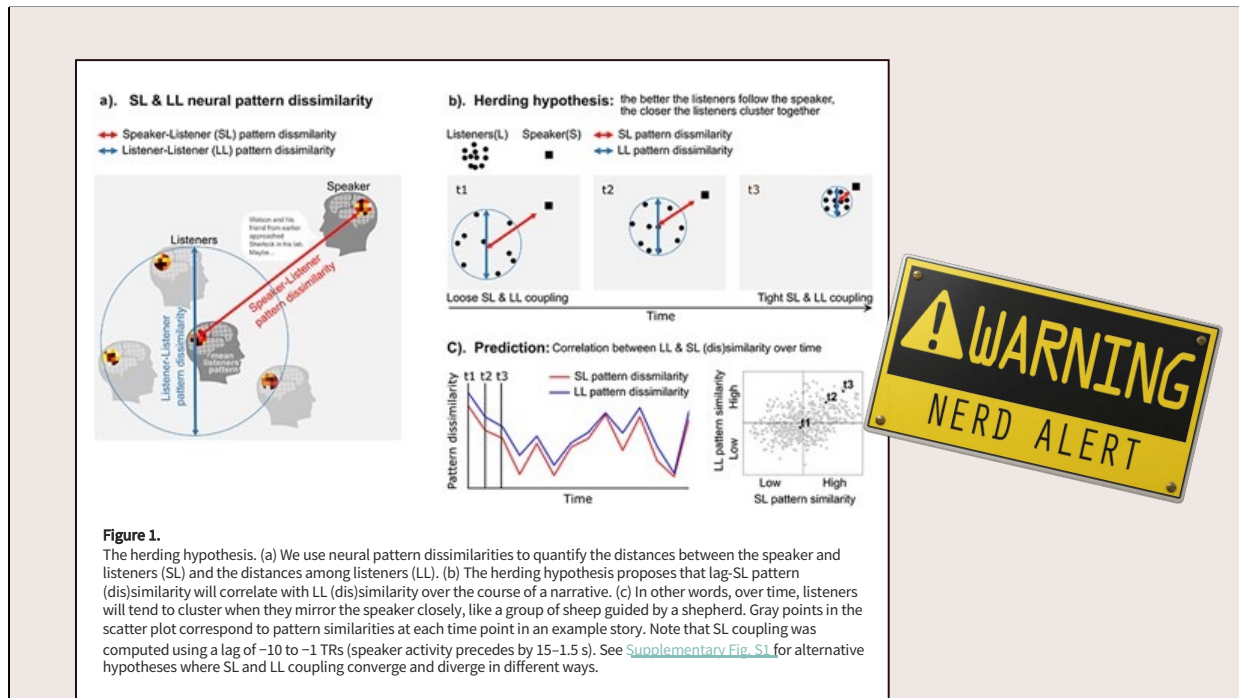
Everyone remembers stuff when it's about themselves. We encode the memories in a completely different, deeper way, that sticks better.

It's called the self-reference effect.



And here's the wild part, Princeton researchers did an experiment and put people in brain scanners while listening to a presenter.

At the moments the audience rated as most engaging, the whole audience's brains synced up, to the speaker AND to each other.



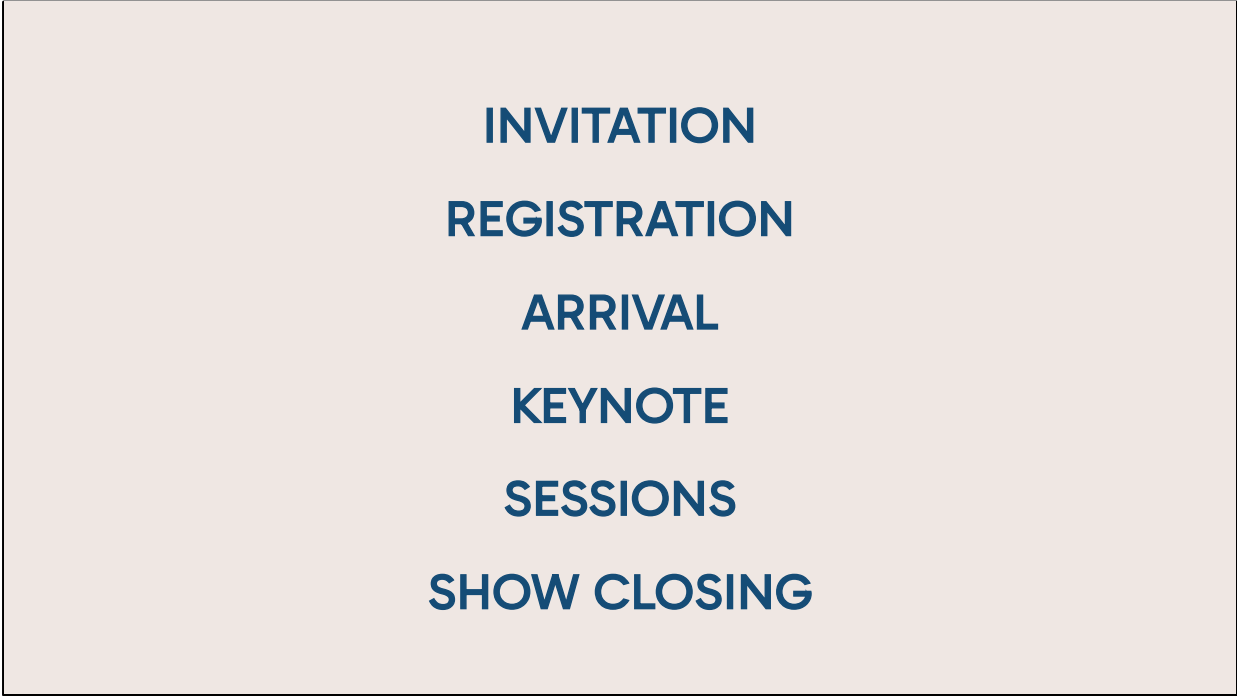
Their brain waves were literally in sync. It's incredible.

They called it HERDING. Like a shepherd and a flock.

GREAT... SO WHAT?

SO, there's actual science behind all this, it's NOT just vibes. but how do we turn all of this into something we can use at our events? Easy.

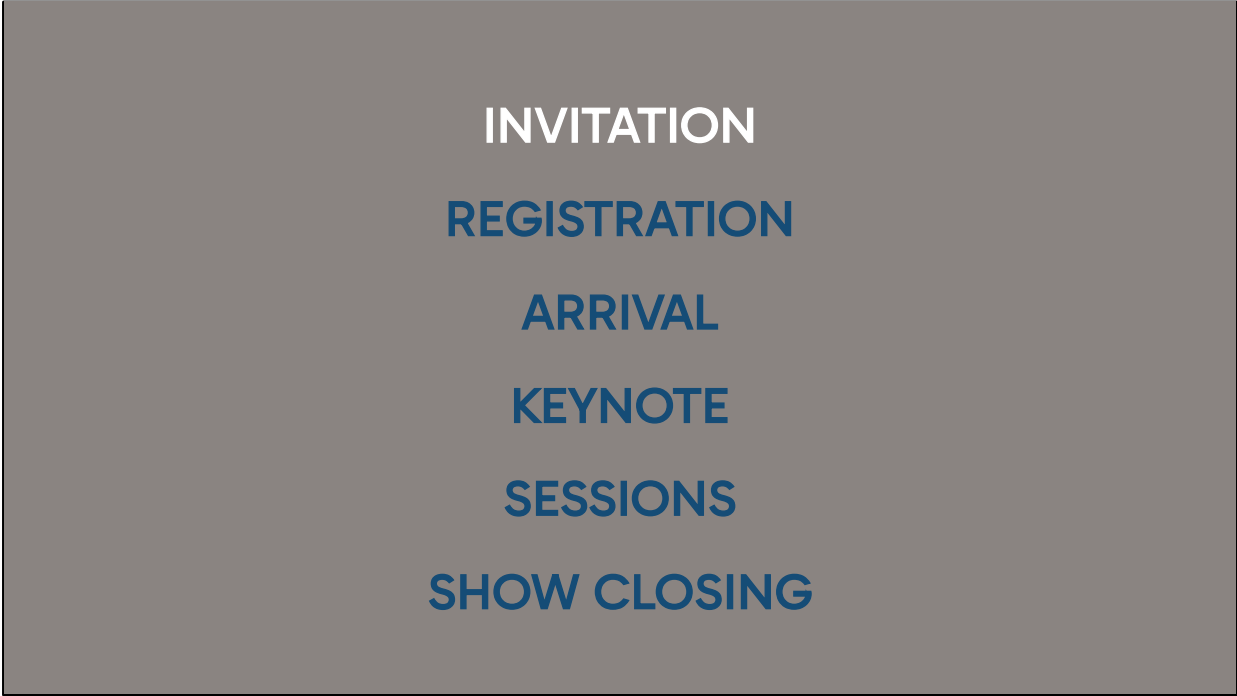
If you're familiar with StoryBrand or the idea of the hero's journey, this kind of borrows from that...



INVITATION
REGISTRATION
ARRIVAL
KEYNOTE
SESSIONS
SHOW CLOSING

The attendee's trip through your event is a hero's journey, whether you designed it that way or not.

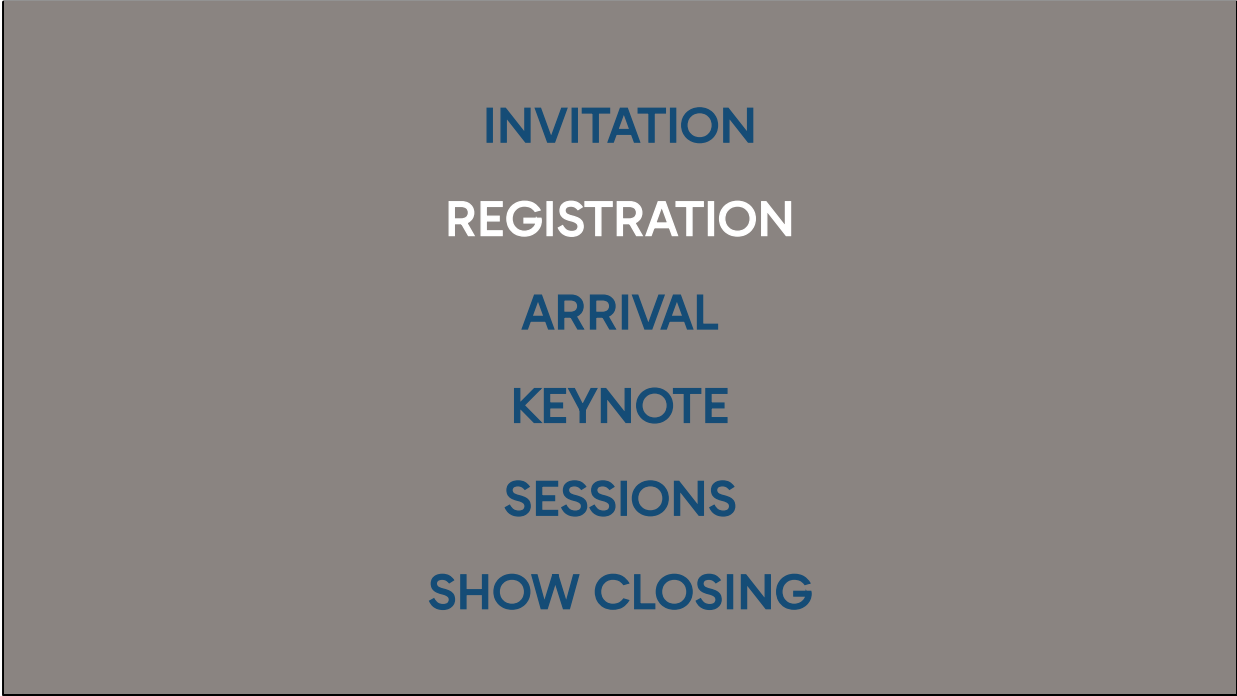
And the best part is you get to mess around with every single step along the way and make sure they feel it.



INVITATION
REGISTRATION
ARRIVAL
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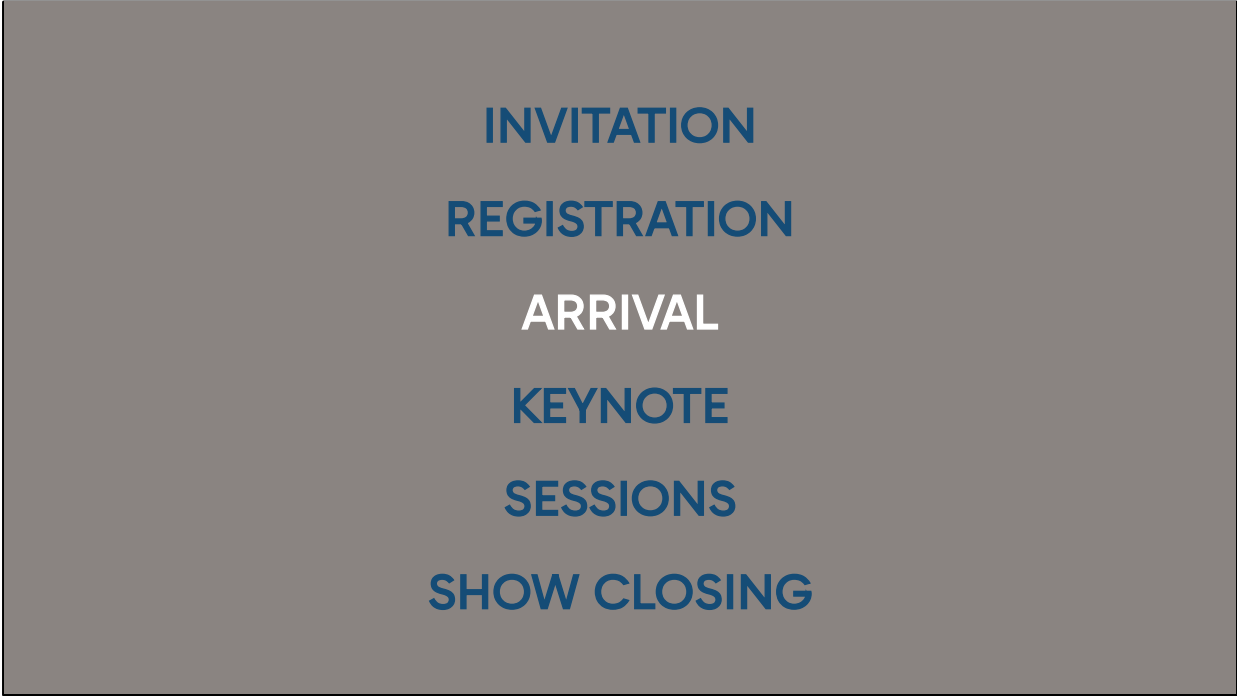
It starts before they even know about your event. Is the invitation about THEIR problems that they're on a quest to solve?

Not "Join us for our AI summit," but "Time To Finally Get Some ROI on Your AI Investments."



INVITATION
REGISTRATION
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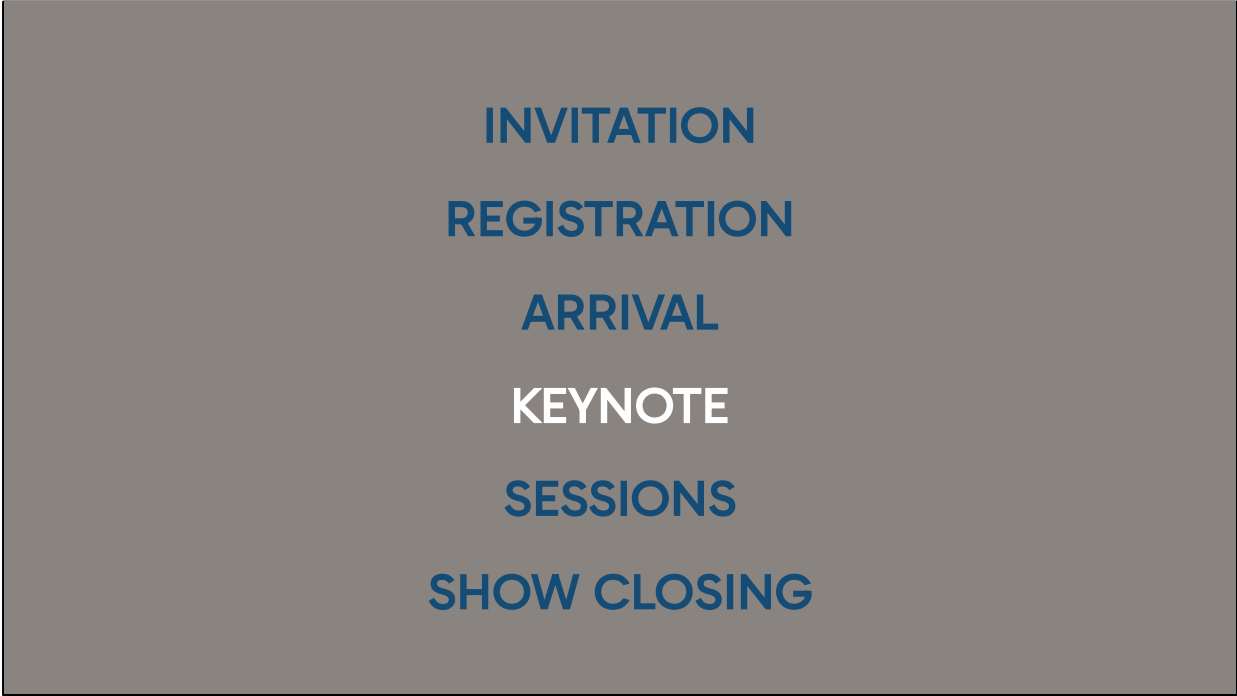
When they go to register, is it a list of agenda items with a generic FOMO video of people smiling, or does it tell them what they might be able to do on Monday that they aren't able to do today?



INVITATION
REGISTRATION
ARRIVAL
KEYNOTE
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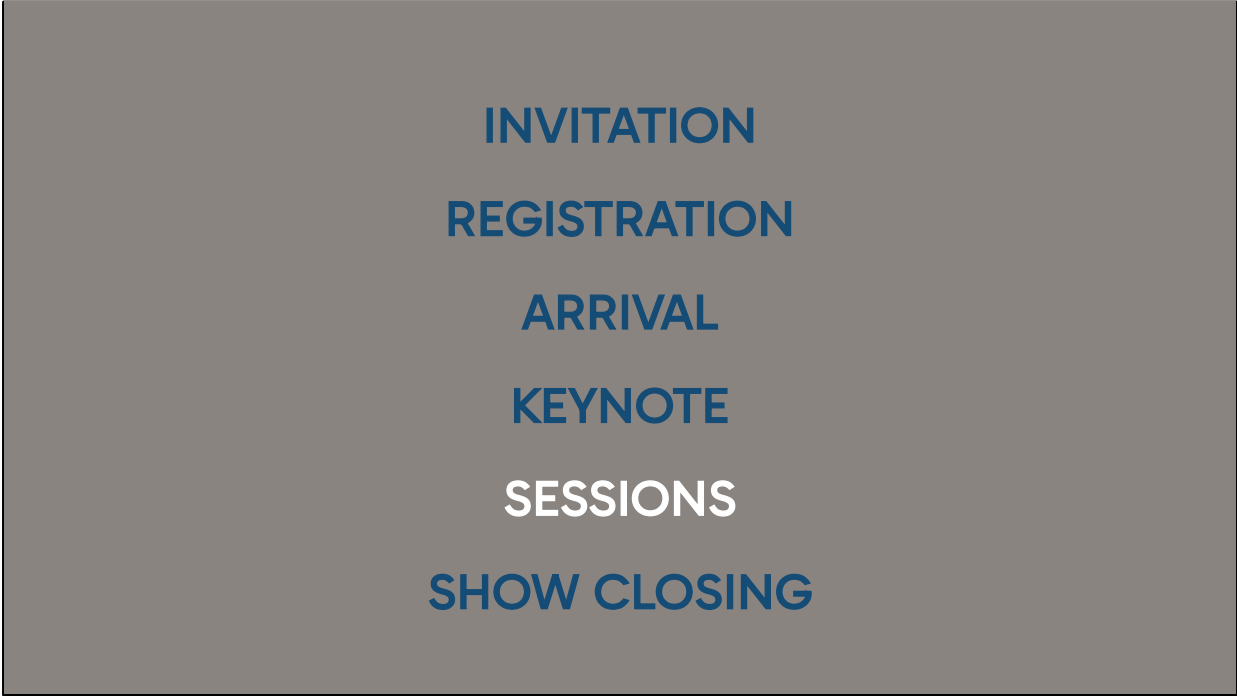
When they open the door to the hall, are they Dreamforce attendees or are they Trailblazers?

Walk in as an attendee, and you're a badge in a line. Walk in as a Trailblazer, and you're already somebody - there are people whose LinkedIn headline says Trailblazer.



INVITATION
REGISTRATION
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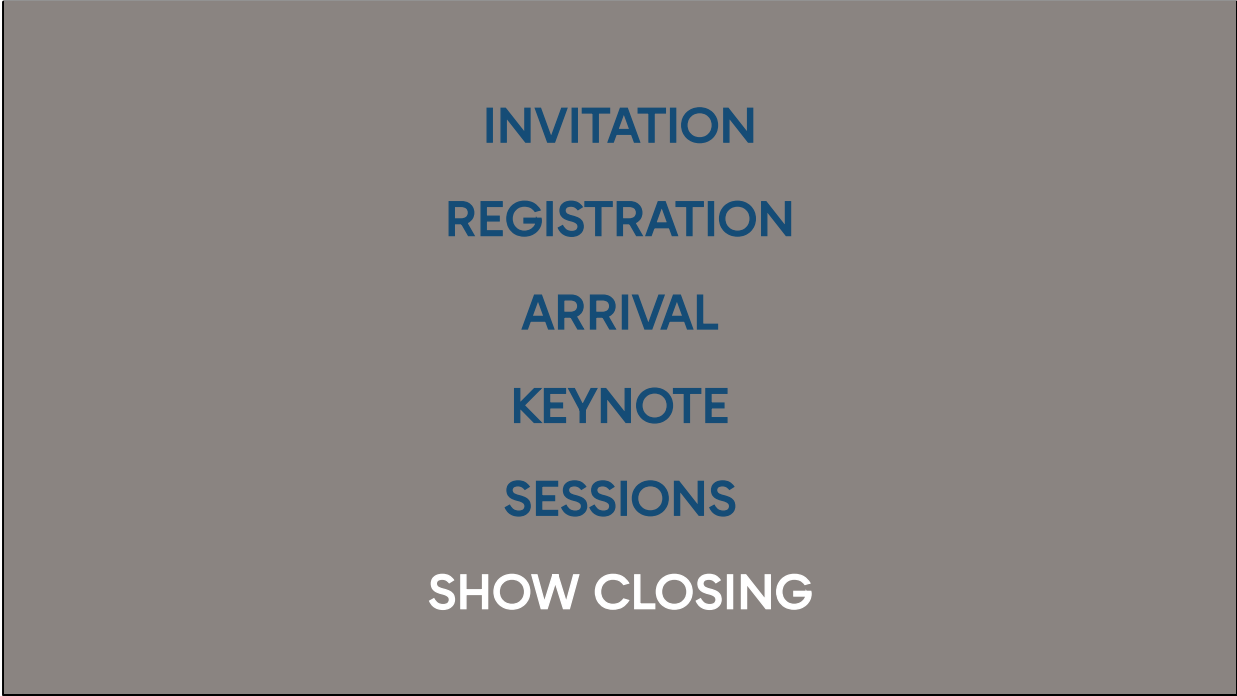
The keynote is a big one. But the brand is NOT the hero here. We're Glinda, handing over the ruby slippers and the advice, not Dorothy walking the road. The keynote's job is to help the attendee achieve greatness, not to have the CEO go on about themselves on stage for an hour.



INVITATION
REGISTRATION
ARRIVAL
KEYNOTE
SESSIONS
SHOW CLOSING

Your session catalog shouldn't be just a list of session names, but something that lets them know what super power they'll have after attending them. Something aspirational.

Oh, and speaking of multiple audiences, remember, an analyst might be reading that same catalog deciding whether it's worth the flight to your show.



INVITATION
REGISTRATION
ARRIVAL
KEYNOTE
SESSIONS
SHOW CLOSING

According to a lot of research done by someone named Kahneman - including on people getting colonoscopies, so you KNOW he meant business - a memory of an experience is almost entirely predicted by two parts: the emotional peak and the ending. The rest gets averaged out by memory. Make sure they leave feeling like they have new power that they didn't have before.

INVITATION
REGISTRATION
ARRIVAL
KEYNOTE
SESSIONS
SHOW CLOSING

While we all think we're nailing it....



This stat from the Freeman Trends report last year, shows that while 78% of event organizers thought they gave peak moments. But... [CLICK]
...only 40% of attendees say they FELT one.

So there's work to do. And it's not that hard.



Take a look at this hockey game, since we're in Canada.

There's a lull, the camera operator goes hunting in the crowd, and the second somebody sees themselves on the big screen, what do you think happens?

[VIDEO PLAYS WITH PEOPLE HAVING A DANCE OFF SPONTANEOUSLY]

-They won't remember the score a week later, but they'll remember being the star of the show. That's a peak. And it cost nothing. The game didn't change. The camera just pointed the other way.

-And for the ending, make sure you're not just putting up a slide that says 'shuttle leaves at 4. see you next year'



Alright – it's time to do our first exercise. If you're familiar with the painting "This is not a pipe" you might get this joke – but the idea is, lunch isn't just lunch, every part of an agenda can be a moment in the attendee's story.

-It's not just a coffee break, it's a recharge. // -Registration can be the starting line. //
-It's not a closing party, it's a victory lap.

But, I need your help. Time to get your phones out...

(PAINTING REMINISCENT OF René Magritte AND THIS IS NOT A PIPE)



Give me one line from your event lineup that feels a little too safe, too corporate, too brand-focused. Subject line, session title, booth banner, whatever. It's 100% anonymous. Bonus points if it's one of yours, we've all written one. Before we wrap, we'll work on a few of them together. Please be brave for me, I hate audience participation too.

It's usually nobody's job to fix "good enough"... not because anyone's lazy, but because A LOT of us sign up to be contestants on a game show called...



You don't write the keynote.

(it's a 10 person job)

You don't write the booth copy.

(the agency does)

You aren't creating the brand video.

(the CMO does)

Stay in your lane! That's not your job!
The exec team writes the keynote.
The agency works on their deliverables.
The sponsors only care about their own booths.

Remember, back when I tried to warn people on the commercial shoot, it was hard to get them to listen. But wait...



Event teams are part of every single touchpoint, from the invitation to the shuttle bus to the post event survey. You're probably the only ones who see every little piece of the event.

Why not be responsible for making sure the attendee is the hero? Keep track of that throughline. That's the job.

SO, let's reframe it....

You are the editor of your event.

Instead of trying to be the author of the story, take the helm as the editor.

You don't need permission to have an **opinion**. IT's your JOB to have one. And remember,

You are the editor of your event.
(You won't win every war. That's OK.)

Your job is to keep the ship afloat, not to steer it around every iceberg.

-Spot problems, offer the fix. Keep the show going.

You are the editor of your event.

Invitations	Airport signage	Stage design	Charging lounge
Registration pages	Rideshare drop-offs	Walk-in music	WiFi Names
Confirmation email	Front door signs	Countdown timer	Photo backdrops
Countdown emails	Badges	Slide templates	Sponsor booths
Know-before-u-go	Lanyards	Holding slide	Staff shirts
Agenda	Badge line signs	Mic runners	Nametags
Session titles	Welcome desk	Q&A cards	Greeters script
Speaker bios	Tote bag	Coffee breaks	Closing moment
FAQs	Swag	The lunch	Exit signage
Event app	Maps	Snack stations	Shuttle signs
Pre-event survey	Wayfinding signage	Napkins	Thank-you email
Parking instructions	Restroom signs	Water bottles	Post-event survey

And the story that the attendee feels lives in all the little things that make up your event. You don't have to fix all of them. Pick the one nobody's looking at and fix it before the next planning meeting, and you've already started refocusing things towards the attendees.

So, as you get ready to use your new powers, let's make sure you can tell who the focus is on. Let's try 4 quick examples.

BRAND or ATTENDEE

I'll show you an example and you have to decide if it's about the brand or attendee.

BRAND or ATTENDEE



Here's a keynote description. "Join CEO Christina Whitfield as she celebrates 90 years of engineering excellence, revisits the milestones that built one of the world's most beloved marques, and unveils the boldest product roadmap in company history."

BRAND? HANDS?

ATTENDEE? HANDS?

BRAND or ATTENDEE



This was more about the brand.

And the CEO is on the stage, so things will get political fast. Let's try: "Join CEO Christina Whitfield as we celebrate 90 years of exhilarating journeys, breathtaking design, and putting you in the driver's seat." Now the anniversary is the setup and the attendee is the payoff.

BRAND or ATTENDEE



Let's try a lunch sign for a leadership summit.

Grab a plate, pick a table topic, and meet five people who have your job.

BRAND? HANDS?

ATTENDEE? HANDS?

BRAND or ATTENDEE



This one is for the attendee. It even makes it easier for those who hate walking into a room cold – it gives lunch a job in the attendee's story. Much better than "LUNCH - NOON."

BRAND or ATTENDEE



Here's some booth signage – VOTED #1 IN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION THREE YEARS IN A ROW!

BRAND? HANDS?

ATTENDEE? HANDS?

BRAND or ATTENDEE



Just because it says customer doesn't mean it's about them. This is just a brag, and you're inviting them to come admire the company.

Why not give them a reason to visit the booth: Bring your toughest payment processing problems. We'll solve them in 4 minutes flat.

I have an AI mush detector prompt in the Playbook at the end of the session and it'll help clean this up easy.

BRAND or ATTENDEE



Last one an invitation to a retailers conference telling you how to turn a browser into a buyer in just two days.

BRAND? HANDS?

ATTENDEE? HANDS?

BRAND or ATTENDEE

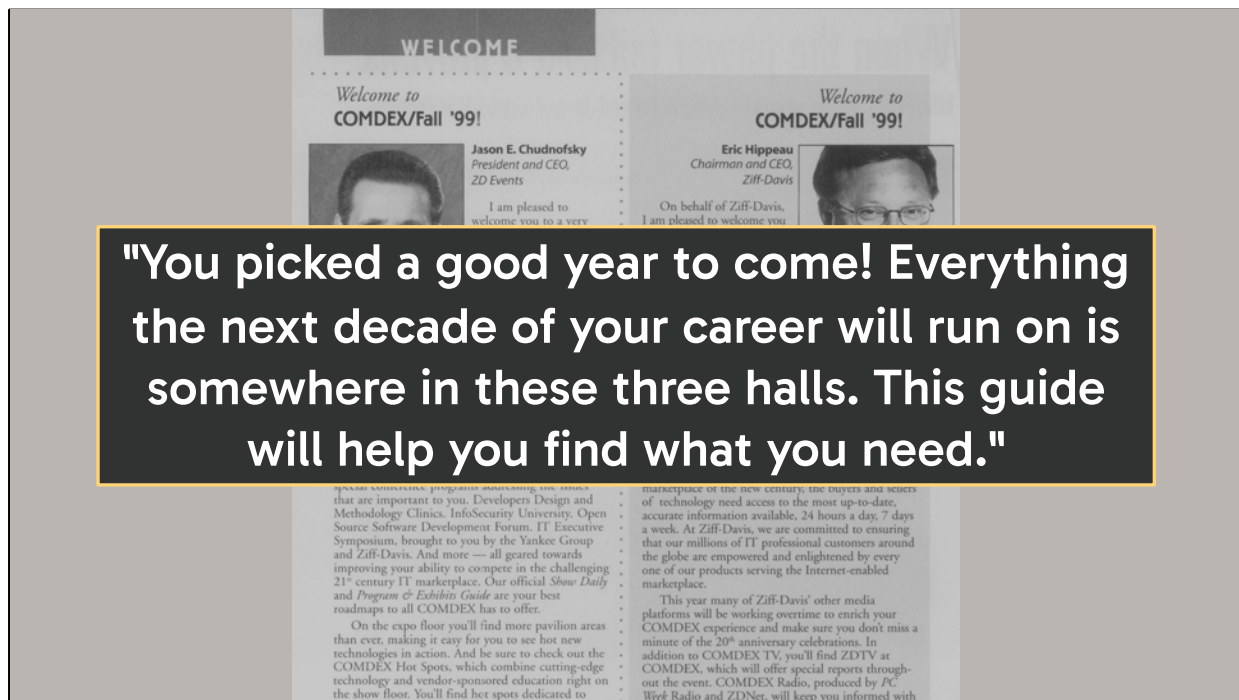


This is all about the attendees - we're solving a problem of theirs, giving them a transformation, and there's even a timeline to success. Short and sweet. It's the sort of stuff that would get a retailer excited.

OK So let's go back in time to the COMDEX stuff we saw at the beginning.



The welcome letters were entirely about the show itself - the hero is the event. How could we refocus it?
How about...



"You picked a good year to come! Everything the next decade of your career will run on is somewhere in these three halls. This guide will help you find what you need."
You're now turning a conference guide into a treasure map.

In the Playbook I'll give you at the end, there's a great checklist to use to help you find stuff like this in your sleep.

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For the keynote - instead of the hero being the speaker - even if he is Bill Gates, what about turning him into a guide?

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"Hear Bill Gates explain why the web will run your office by 2005."

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"Hear Bill Gates explain why the web will run your office by 2005."

You are the editor of your event.

While this stuff is super simple, the hard part is staying on top of it and not losing focus when things get chaotic.

While I'm sure everyone already knows the attendee should be the hero, it's the role we play in refocusing things where it falls apart. If it's nobody's job, it's nobody's job.

Which brings us back to...



...your examples – here's the QR code again in case you thought of any more ideas for what you think could be better focused to your attendees in your own events.

We can check these out at the very end. I'll give you a few more seconds... and while you do that...

**"YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN
WHAT THEY DID..."**

**An attendee who was the hero
of your event becomes the
loudest voice for your brand,
and it costs you almost nothing.**

**SCREEN GRAB OF LINKEDIN
POST:**

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/lisamendenhalljohnson_eventconnect-activity-7482154942166687744-qV27?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAVnbUEBVFrjs07yh9ONR44494L8ROoqFqQ

**CEMA
summit**

A quick example of what happens when we refocus things to make people the hero.

Look at this photo Lisa posted to LinkedIn – she got a little note on a recent flight thanking her for being a Delta diamond – the spotlight is on her, not on the airline.

She became the hero and Delta won a great evangelist, and they didn't have to do anything that the other passengers would even notice. -Being an advocate for your audience and guests always pays dividends.

You are the editor of your event.

Remember, you're the editor of your event, but if you're not the CMO...

Don't argue taste, argue money.

Don't argue taste, argue money.

You're not going to win an argument about taste with a CMO, but remind them that if your attendee doesn't see themselves in the event, you're wasting marketing dollars. And at worst, 2 weeks later it's like your \$20M event didn't happen.

That brings me to that Playbook I promised you.



It starts with answering questions about the audience to help focus on paper what this is about. It won't be wishy-washy anymore. Customers, analysts, whoever. If you're not doing it already it's a good Feel, See, Do exercise.

EVENT AUDIT

AS YOUR EVENT TAKES SHAPE
THE EVENT AUDIT

Run each stage of your event against these questions. Score each 1 to 10, and be honest. (Yes, knox will feed the guests, but is that ALL you want them to take away from it?) Try to get your numbers as close to a 10 as possible. Every nudge and every exit you make along the way will make your event stronger.

THE INVITE
Does it name their problem? Does it get them excited about their own journey with your company or event? Not "Join us for our AI summit." Try "Time to finally get some ROI on your AI investments." SCORE ____ / 10

REGISTRATION
The FOMO videos are great, but beyond the party, what does your event promise? Do you explain what they will be able to do after your event that they can't do today? Does it make a business case? SCORE ____ / 10

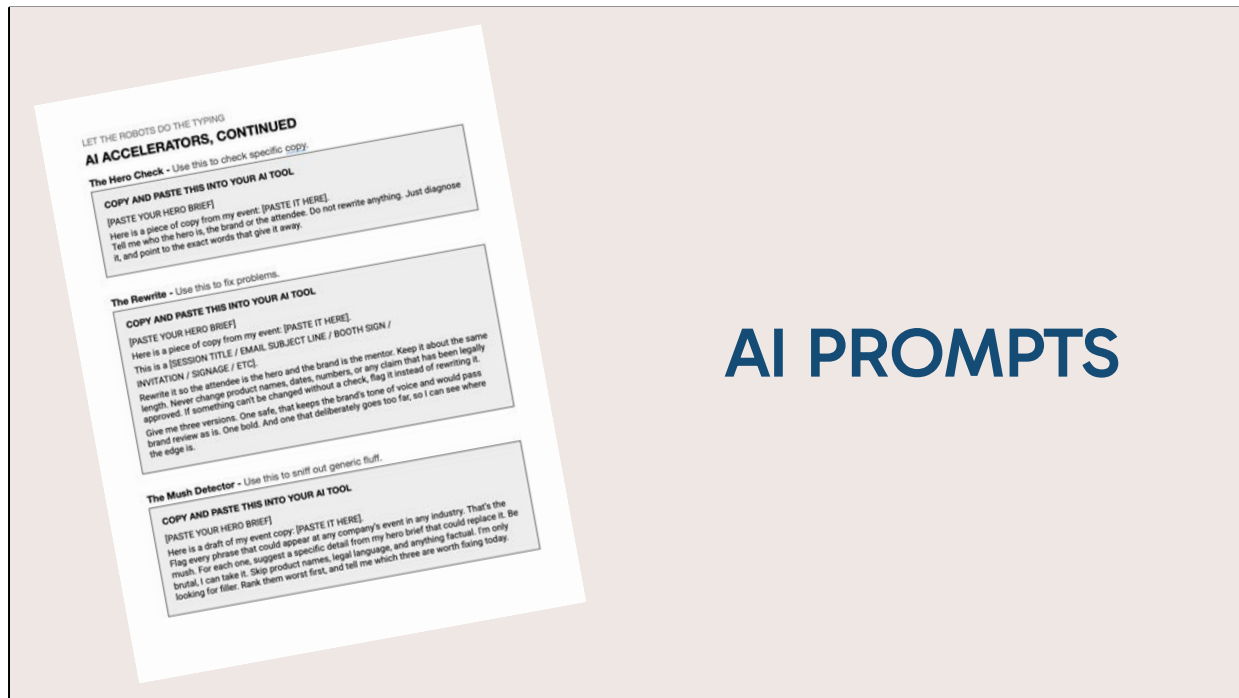
ARRIVAL
Does it make them feel special? It could be swag, or badge types, or the way greeters welcome people, or signs. It should feel special and unique to your event and attendees, not just a "Hi, what's your last name? Let me print a badge for you... Thanks... NEXT!" moment. SCORE ____ / 10

THE KEYNOTE
The brand should be the mentor, not the hero of the story told on your keynote stages. Are you explaining how your company helps the attendees in an engaging way? Do they see themselves as part of that story? SCORE ____ / 10

THE SESSIONS
Does your agenda explain what they'll be able to do after sitting through a session? Does it feel valuable and unique to your event? SCORE ____ / 10

THE CLOSE
Remember, the peak of their experience and the ending are the most important parts, so "See you next year!" is not going to cut it. SCORE ____ / 10

There's an audit to take you through your entire event and see what needs the most help. There's a few more sections about the event endings, a way to make sure language is focused, and even a post event survey helper.



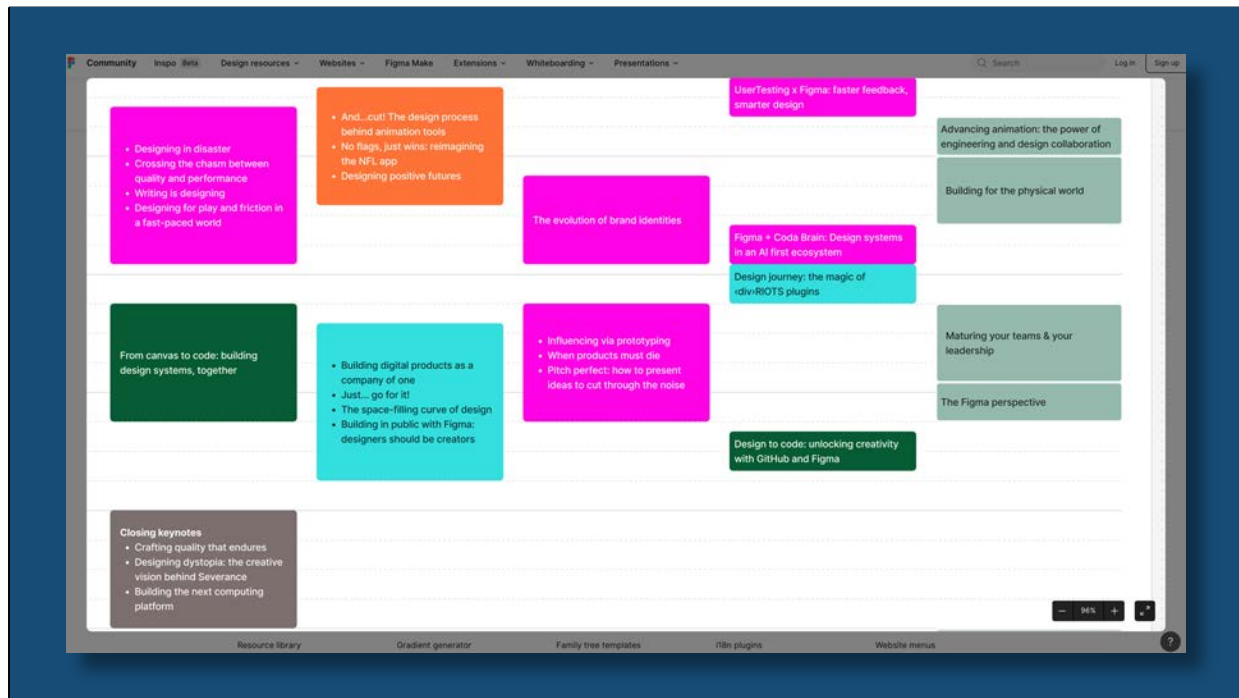
Finally at the end I put a few pre-written AI prompts you can use right away that get you an attendee brief, help you get rid of generic fluff in your event, and more.

None of this is a big shakeup. You'd be surprised - a lot of great stuff doesn't take much effort to achieve.



Figma Config 2025

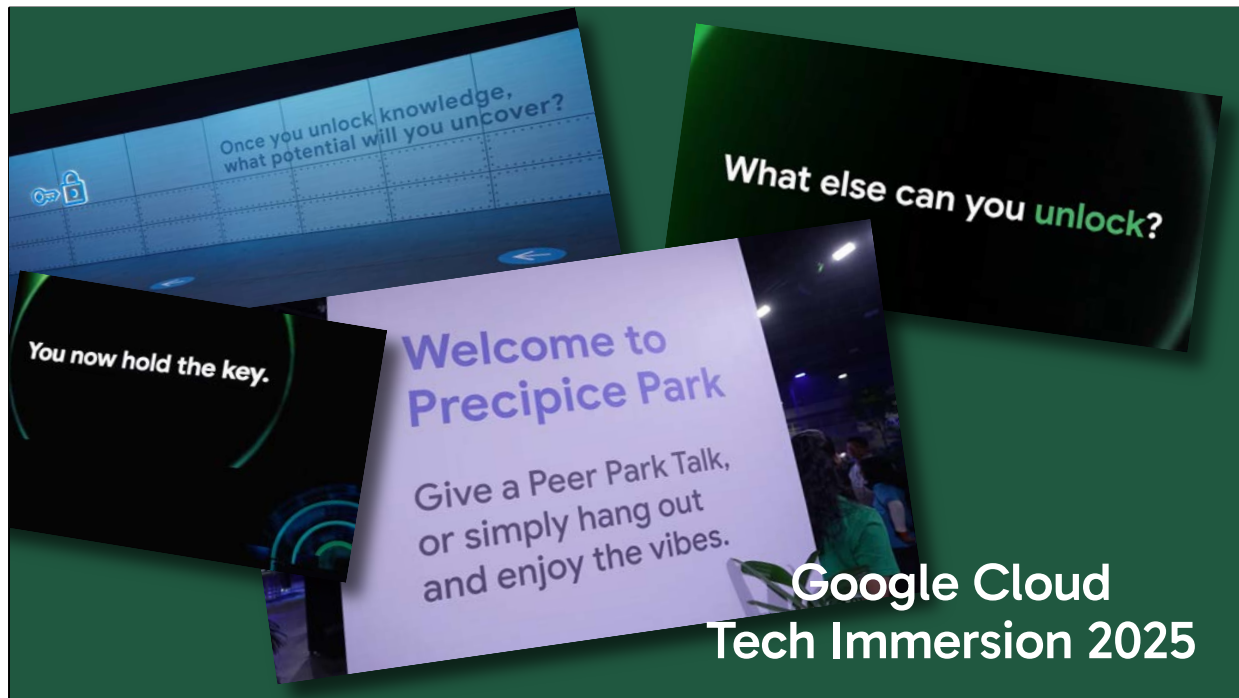
Here's Figma letting attendees customize an otherwise boring badge with conversation starters about themselves.



And using their own tool Figma to show the schedule which was full of great titles:

Pitch perfect: how to present ideas to cut through the noise.

Maturing your teams & your leadership. It's all about the attendees.



Google Cloud Tech Immersion 2025

And this is one of my favorites – Opus Agency and Gramercy Tech did some work for Google tech immersion – it's so great. The event gave them the key and they could unlock anything with the new potential they were given.



They literally put their attendees in the spotlight. I promise you people at this event felt like they were in on something big together with Google.

So that's why I came up with a playbook for this session. Make small changes that your attendees will love. Especially since I might be an attendee at one of those events.



So, scan here to check it out, you can also get this totally real photo of me. My LinkedIn is on there too - please connect, I need more friends.

But the playbook is short and sweet, and it's the first time I've ever actually written out all the stuff that's swirling around in my brain when I'm working with teams on events. You can use this stuff on the flight home and land with a better event.

So this is me handing you the baton. We just spent 3 days in this hotel to make OURSELVES smarter and our EVENTS better, and I hope I'm helping you do just that.

And with that, thank you for hanging out with me today, I really hope you got something out of your time here!