

Instead of Presentations ...

Creative Forms of Information-input in Seminars, Workshops and Events

Lectures and presentations are the classical ways of imparting information in events. However, these methods are often strenuous and tiring for the participants who are thereby forced to remain seated for relatively long periods of time and face a bombardment of words, figures and pictures. They are "sentenced" to listen. They seldom have the opportunity to ask questions about what they actually want to know. And the speaker also does not know whether the message really got across. It is therefore worthwhile to think about alternatives to the "lecture".

One good alternative is, of course, better presentations: shorter and crisper, better structured, with lively examples and fewer easy to read graphics on the overhead screen.

We would like to present two further alternatives to the lecture here. Both are workshop methods and are not equally appropriate for all learning events. But, where they are appropriate, they are powerful methods of information-input. And in addition, they have a positive side-effect: they relax the atmosphere, making learning livelier and encouraging movement.

First the "**Vernissage Technique**": a guided introduction whereby the speaker

and participants literally walk through the theme. The visual supports for this "Vernissage" are very large banners which remain hung for the whole event and therefore have a long-term effect.

The "**Expert's Hearing**" is the second method we can recommend as an interesting alternative to the traditional lecture. Rather than simply listening to what the speaker has to say, the participants are asked to formulate their questions on the topic. Instead of a lecture, the speaker answers this catalogue of questions. The group gets precisely the information that they need!

Vernissage Technique Poster Session Presentations with Movement.

The principle of poster sessions is simple: the information to be put across is placed on large, interestingly designed posters. After a brief introduction, the participants are guided from poster to poster, just as they would be in a guided vernissage. At each poster they are given a brief presentation of the contents. Standing and moving thus become an element of the event.

The Poster Presentation as an active Alternative to a Speech

Instead of imparting the most significant information or core themes by speech, the presenter can write, draw or copy them in easily readable form onto interestingly designed large paper rolls. These large-format posters (banners up to 3 meters length) stand or hang in the room or foyer. So much for the preparation.

The vernissage can now begin. Following a short introduction, all participants go to the first poster. This is ceremoniously uncovered and the author (presenter) explains the poster and content - briefly. After some time for clarification questions from the audience, everyone walks to the next poster.

The process repeats itself:

- ① Brief information in advance on the poster theme.
- ② Uncovering the poster.
- ③ Brief presentation by the presenter.
- ④ Clarification questions,

Who Produces the Posters?

Usually, the presenter brings the posters her/himself (either self-designed or as an enlarged copy of existing documentation). However, participants can also produce posters: resulting from group work or as preparation for the presentation.

Hand-Drawn Posters

Many posters still originate as hand-produced documents on large pinboard sheets or long paper rolls (e.g. wallpaper rolls). Large print, two or three strong colours, a mixture of text and graphics as well as noticeable key words, hand-drawn sketches and matchstick figures are a significant aid to getting the message across clearly.

Posters as Large Xerox Copies

A new, very impressive solution is available through "Xerox poster copies". High-performance copiers enlarge A4 originals to four times their size, onto 90 cm wide continuous rolls. Meter long high-format copies of texts, tables, drawings and photographs can thus be produced, with very little effort, on rolls of varying length.

Benefits of Vernissage Technique

- The amount of information that fits on well-designed posters is limited. Authors of posters should therefore reduce the content quantity to a minimum.
- Going from one poster to another encourages movement. This helps to loosen up the atmosphere as well as enhancing the learning effect.
- Well-designed posters contain an overview, drawings or pictures. Participants tend to remember these easily.
- The poster information is displayed in the room throughout the event and is therefore beneficial as an excellent long-term memorisation aid.
- Poster sessions are a change from standard up-front presentations and enable the participants to identify with the event more closely.

Poster Sessions combined with "Written Discussions"

Poster Sessions can be profitably combined with "written discussions" (another workshop method). At each point of the vernissage, the participants write their perspectives, questions or comments on cards or post-it notes and tape them onto the posters. These contributions can thus be discussed at the end of the session.

Tips for your next Poster Session

1. More than 4 to 6 posters in one sequence tend to over-extend the attention span and comfortable standing time of the participants.
2. Noticeable and unusual poster designs are more effective learning aids than perfectly designed documents.
3. Long paper rolls can be hung from the wall, ceiling or from high spotlight tripods.
4. Such presentations can be held in a variety of rooms and encourage movement as well as different perspectives.

5. Posters can also be spread out on the floor for the participants to stand around.
6. Combining posters with real three dimensional objects (e.g. faulty parts) is an ideal combination. The poster session can thus become a mini-exhibition or information market.

Expert's Hearing

Questioning Experts – The Group extracts what they need

The questioning of experts has now become an established working form at events. The participants get precisely the information they need and the event is much more lively than in traditional forms of presentations.

"Concert of Requests" - An Alternative to Presentation?

Rather than waiting to hear the presenter's lecture, the participants collect their questions early on and note them down on large easily readable A4 cards. A catalogue of questions is thus collected on a pinboard, visible for all participants.

Collecting questions in advance has benefits: The participants tune themselves into the theme. The number of questions is clear and makes efficient time-planning easier. The direction of the questions and thereby the interests of the audience are laid out. The experts gain a little extra time to prepare themselves.

The actual question / answer round begins at the end of this preparation stage. The

invited experts respond briefly (3 to 4 minutes per question) to the collected questions in sequence. In order to understand the background of a question more clearly, s/he has the possibility to check back briefly. A question / answer round of this kind lasts from 30 to 90 minutes.

Benefits of Questioning Experts

Audience participants find out exactly what they want to know - this is of particular benefit to heterogeneous groups. The experts do not need to prepare a 'presentation' - they like it because that's less work. Questioning experts as a method makes the event more targeted, active and lively.

Tips for your next Expert's Hearing

1. Take care not to collect too many questions. If necessary, all the questions can be reviewed in order to set priorities.
2. A facilitator takes responsibility for tight time management so that all questions can be answered briefly but still satisfactorily.
3. Experts choose the order in which to answer the questions. However, it should always be clear which question is currently being answered.
4. Questions which have been dealt with are clearly checked off. This enables everyone to maintain a status overview and reinforces the rules of the process.

5. Following the question / answer round, time is allowed for discussion and more detailed additional information.
6. If it is not possible to collect all the questions in advance, they can be called out and noted on a flip chart. This is an ad-hoc list of questions made up during the program.

© Dr. Hermann Will



14-11-03

WUP[®] WILL UND
PARTNER
Bismarckweg 3 • D-82335 Berg
Tel: +49-(0)8151-9797-44 • Fax: -9797-55
wup@wup.info • www.wup.info