AUDIENCE PRIMING EFFECT™

Getting control over virtual event participant behavior

By Ben Moorsom, Benan Demir PhD

The best In person events happen when the entire audience is engaged in the experience.

Think about the last time you went to the movie theatre and were distracted by someone on their phone. The sudden light in the audience stole your attention from the screen and momentarily took you out of the experience. The same can happen when people talk through the movie or kick your seat. *Distractions take you out of the immersion of a good event experience and open the door to further distractions* like checking texts or email. If this can happen at a live event where we can control many aspects of the environment, what happens during virtual events where we have less control?

We can put the participants in charge by giving them the 'tools' to prepare for the event that will make it a better overall experience.

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In the past year you've probably heard or been told that you can't do anything about the distractions for remote viewers. We aren't in control of their environment. We can't control whether or not they check out to look at texts or multitask. We can't see event participants most of the time so how can we affect their environment? The short answer is we can't. But what we can do, is make them – the participant or viewer – responsible for optimizing their own event experience.

To make them feel responsible, we need to remind them that they are spending time with us. That they want to make the most out of it. And most importantly, we need to suggest simple, straightforward ways for them to improve their own experience.

Habits help us to process information
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Getting the audience involved in improving their own experience starts by helping them form better viewing habits.

We develop habits that help us process information, even in groups. Have you ever wondered why talking to someone while driving is profoundly different when they are in the car with you versus on the phone? In-car conversations are less distracting because passengers adapt their conversations to the flow of traffic and provide assistance to the driver (Drews, Pasupathi, & Strayer, 2008).

This example shows us how we develop habits over time that help us manage the flow of information. But virtual events, unlike driving, aren't something we practice every day. When we interact online we don't yet have the habits that help us manage the flow of information. That's why, as organizers, we need to **help our audience form behaviors, giving them more power to control their own experience.**

Live events have taught us about the power of cues in creating habitual behavior. Think about when you enter a movie theatre, concert or play. What happens right before the main event begins? The lights dim, music halts, or there is a definite and purposeful ambient change that captures our attention and signals that the show is about to begin. We automatically stop talking and give all of our attention to the front in anticipation of the start.

But environmental cues aren't just about changes in the room around us, **they are used to change our behavior and ultimately our perspective.** People have been trained to follow these cues (and others) over years of exposure. So what happens when events are virtual or a hybrid?

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With virtual or hybrid, the audience is in the driver's seat

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As viewers, the audience has total control over their environment and behaviors- unlike in traditional events. So, creating a better viewing experience requires us to shift responsibility on to the viewer. A better experience starts with them.

That said, we can still suggest to the audience where they should go, even though they are in the driver seat. We can cue or "prime" the audience to do things that will enhance their event experience. For example:

1. Savor the moment

By using certain messaging, similar to a movie trailer, we can get the audience to mentally "savor" every curated touchpoint. Savoring is the cognitive equivalent of "stopping to smell the roses". Researchers have found that people enjoy an experience more if they stop and appreciate how it makes them feel in the moment (Chun, Diehl, & MacInnis, 2017).

There are plenty of ways to improve savoring. Remind viewers how special and exclusive this experience is or simply highlight great features in advance of the big day. A pre-launch video, teaser trailer, or destination reveal are good examples of this.

2 . Form the right habits

Remember the last time you were in a theme park? There are suggestions all over the place: signs, pathways, videos with cartoon characters and even a speaker system for announcements. Often, it is as simple as making requests or suggestions in different ways to start shaping the audience journey.

Creating habits in our audience makes the task of listening to our events, cognitively speaking, "low load". When our audience has better habits, more of their attentional capacity is left over to process content and filter out distractions, leading to an easier viewing experience and better learning.

3. Power to the people

For virtual events, we can recommend behavioral change but we must also empower participants

to do it. They must feel that it's their responsibility to take control of their event experience. We do this by giving them Audience Priming steps to maximizing their experience.

We need to give steps to follow that aren't too difficult until we build the confidence of our viewers. As we start to see progress, we can start to add new habits or advance existing ones. For example, moving from an expectation of one workshop per day to two, or steadily increasing the amount of active participation requested from viewers in a live chat or forum.

Audience Priming can increase ROI

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It may sound simple but the more we can automate behaviours to prime participants for your event, the more successful your event will be. So make the most of your event investment by ensuring that participants make the most of theirs.

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About Ben Moorsom
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Ben is the creator of Neuroscaping®. A behavioral communciations practice. Since founding the Debut Group in 1997, Ben has made it his mission to challenge and disrupt ineffective conventions of business communications, pioneering new approaches that strengthen brands internally, engage people more effectively and deeply capture their attention. By applying advances from psychology and neuroscience, Ben and his team turn audiences into active participants. They use Neuroscaping methodolgy to cut through the noise and competition at the gateway to the human mind, placing business messages near the front of the line. Ben is a frequent keynote speaker and co-conspirator at global conferences on communication thought leadership.

About Benan Demir PhD
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Benan has a BA Media Studies and Entertainment Technology from the University of Portsmouth, UK, Graduated from Masters in Cognitive Systems and Interactive Media in Pompeu Fabra University, Spain. Continued her PhD. In Brain, Mind and Computer Science at University of Padova, Italy. Benan has worked as a cognitive scientist and advanced tech research lead for leading companies over the past s8 years... Dedicating her work to improving technologies while focusing on the human brain and human emotions.

About Neuroscaping®
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Neuroscaping® empowers and enables companies to forge stronger connections with their audiences.

Neuroscaping® is the behavioral insight engine that informs the design of communications and experiences. Deconstructing what we perceive as "engagement" into behavioral lenses. Harnessing research from the fields of neuroscience, cognitive psychology, social psychology and data science and beyond - to drive better engagement outcomes.

By approaching design decisions to better align with how people truly think, feel, and act, we can improve an individual's internal state leading to greater satisfaction and retention of messaging. People take more in and have a better experience. This process of Neuroscaping® allows Debut to go deeper by design. Reducing "guesswork" and creating with intent.

Debut manages the largest AI-powered knowledge-base of engagement insights to help guide communication and experiential design for companies that require progressive engagement products and services.

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Debut is a behavioral communications, technology and events company powered by Neuroscaping®.

We have over 20 years of experience helping leading companies design, communications, and events that go Deeper X Design.

Interested in understanding the audience mindset and optimizing your experiences?

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