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8 Ways to guarantee GREAT speakers for your next event.

I recently had the privilege of speaking again at London ExCel arena. This was the 3rd time in as many months I've spoken at a Business conference hosted here, and as I left stage I heard somebody in the audience ask the MC *'how do you book really cool keynote speakers? How do you book someone well known when your brand is not-so-well-known?'* I thought *'what a great question!'*

This article will speak in depth about something I know very well and will give you the run-down on how you can book keynote speakers (sometimes known as those 'hero' speakers) that will really make the difference at your next event, even if it's not well known yet...

Firstly, what is a hero speaker?

A hero or keynote speaker is a 'thought leader,' someone who is an innovator or high-achiever in their particular field; an expert in their chosen area. So, in the world of business, it may be someone like Richard Branson. In music, it could be Lady Gaga or Ed Sheeran, but these are quite broad examples.

If your event has a very niche subject area and target audience such as *'musicians that use crowd funding,'* for example, then your horizon narrows, so you have to find somebody who is an expert in that field. In this case, someone like Dave McPherson from InMe would be a good example as he's gone from being signed to a major label and on the front page of the Kerrang Magazine to running successful Pledge Music campaigns time and time again, where some of his singles have achieved Top 10 chart success.

Or it could be the founder/president of Pledge Music, Benji. You get the point... Find rising stars if you're starting out, and your event brand is not very well known, then it may be a good idea to go after great industry names that don't have a lot of public speaking experience.

When Dave McPherson was invited to speak in 2014, it turned out he had NEVER done public speaking before, yet he is very well known in the world of music and crowd funding, which I found surprising.

So look out for these 'hidden gems,' as it'll inspire more people to attend and give your event a more exclusive feel. The chances of them saying 'yes' will increase too!

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Clearly – but simply – articulate the value to them

Dave felt somewhat excited at the prospect of speaking in front of 200ish musicians, as it was something he had never done before, and he was passionate to talk about the topic of successful crowd funding for musicians.

For other speakers it may be a chance for them to show their expertise, bolster their CV, network with the other speakers, gain exposure for their cause or promote their latest project.

Whatever value you feel will be their major motivator, put it first in your invite to them. Tell them exactly what you require from them with a run-sheet of the event. Mention who will be there, what they need to talk about, and what the benefits will be for them, i.e. food and travel expenses, etc. Don't over complicate the invite or fill it full of waffle and jargon, simply explain the key details of your event, who the audience is, why they'd be a great fit and why there's a benefit to them.

Don't leave timing to chance

Typically the biggest hero speakers will only say 'yes' if there is something in it for them, and if it's very convenient. Check their LinkedIn profiles or official websites to see if they're trying to promote something that would be relevant to your events' audience; or if they're in town when your event is on.

With hero speakers, timing is everything. Try to avoid the gatekeepers, but if you can't, level with them. High profile people tend to have booking agents, managers, PAs and publicists – sometimes all of those!

However with tools like LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram it's easier than ever to get in direct contact with very influential people. Perhaps you can even guess their correct email address.

If you can contact them directly, you will probably have a higher chance of success. You'll be surprised at how many celebrities and 'experts' will respond to your contact them directly.

I've received responses from people from the Dragon's Den, well known musicians and TV presenters just by asking the question. Don't be shy! And be professional (see point two) as they won't respond to 'groupie' mail, I can guarantee you.

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However, if you can't get in touch directly, then work with whoever is their key gatekeeper and try to turn them into an asset. Be straight up with them, tell them why you want their star to appear at your event, and ask them how they could be persuaded.

Ask them about travel plans, upcoming projects they might want to promote or other value propositions you could offer that would make them more likely to say 'yes'. If their representative feels like they're working with you, and not against you, they're more likely to become a help instead of a hindrance.

Be flexible

When you want big names to speak at your event, you'll almost definitely have to be flexible. Perhaps they can only make the morning but you wanted them in the evening, or even a different date to the one you have scheduled – are they worth changing your plans for? Sometimes the need to be flexible is a little less fundamental, such as offering them the chance to appear via tele-presence or something similar, or helping to cover their travel and accommodation.

Be persistent

This is one the biggest keys to success. Make sure you ask a lot of hero speakers, because getting 29 'no's' will be worth it if number 30 says 'yes.' It is also worth asking the same people who said 'no' when you do future events, as their circumstances may have changed, or your event could have grown sufficiently in reputation.

Bonus Tip! Once you've landed that speaker, invite them to do an interview for your website or YouTube page and get them to Tweet it out as this will raise your company profile and event status and help you to sell more tickets. You'll be surprised at how quickly your website traffic and company status will grow, especially when you start to Tweet photos out of your 'hero speaker' after the event and they retweet it!

Use your existing network for warm intros Hero speakers will be much more likely to say 'yes' to someone they already know and trust, than to someone random contacting them out of the blue. This is called a warm intro. Use LinkedIn or Twitter to see if you have any acquaintances in common, and then ask that acquaintance for an introduction or to pass on your invitation.

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Find some budget

No matter what you do, hero speakers commit if there's payment involved. If you invite people that do public speaking all the time, they will most likely have a high booking price (anything from £2k-30k)! They get heaps of invites and only pick the events, which pay the most or benefit their career in profound ways.

Notes on celebrities and big budgets

If you are lucky enough to have a big budget, and you are doing a high profile event, then the easiest way to book these kinds of people is to find out what management agency your desired speaker works with and get on the phone to them.

There really is an art to talking to high profile people and once you've done it a few times, you'll get the hang of it. The trick is to treat them like human beings, and contact with them with a business proposition, although you can get more personable depending on their response, so having a good judge of character is crucial in this game.

They'll take a look at your request and if they deem it to be suitable, they'll forward it to that person or their publicist, so make sure you display high value at the event from the get-go to increase your chances of them saying 'yes.'

It has a three-stage approval process:

Management agency, publicist and then the person themselves, so be aware. However, if you have a low budget and your event reputation isn't 'high profile' as you're just starting out (like I was), its best to use the approach I just spoke of, where you hand pick speakers that don't get many invites, or ideally, don't work with a management agency or publicist as you tend to get a direct response instead.

Is it worth it?

I highly recommend making the effort and booking hero speakers for your event, as it is completely worth the investment. Not only will this increase the chances of you landing good, commercial sponsorship sales, but it'll also increase ticket sales and enhance your company status as well as your website traffic and sometimes even your SEO.

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Just remember to be direct, professional, full of relevant information from the start, and be willing to take the plunge and contact those people that other people are too scared to get in touch with. Take a risk and be persistent, and your effort will pay off, I assure you.

I hope you've found this guide of use, and reassuring that A list speakers are only human being also, but you don't need to spend a fortune to make your event a GREAT success.

Have you also downloaded our FREE E-Guide to ensuring you have a Successful Event?

I'm Jay Allen, a 2 x Global Entrepreneur 'Big Impact to Business' Award Winning Motivational Speaker, Published Business Author and Business Success Strategy Coach.

I have 2 area's of expertise on which I speak:

- The Significant and Sustainable Growth of both you and your business
- Mental Health

I'm currently listed on the Smith and Williamson POWER 100 as one of the UK's top 100 Business Influencers, AND an Ambassador for the Armed Forces Charity COMBAT STRESS (To which I donate 30% NET of every engagement)

I'd be delighted to have a complimentary 'no-strings' conversation about ensuring YOUR next event is effective, memorable and a great success.

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