

Creativity and ROI: A Natural Combination

By Jim Tausch

There's no doubt that we are living in a different world. We've learned to live with reduced cash flow, smaller budgets and even Sarbanes-Oxley (the public company accounting reform and investor protection act passed in 2002), which seems to force "left-brainers" over to the right side, although every indicator shows that meeting production contracts are still being won primarily based on creativity.

At first glance, the data doesn't appear to jibe. But if you think about it in the proper context, you'll realize that financial parameters and a mandate for ROI are not impediments to creativity. In fact, as any creative professional will tell you, having defined parameters can do more to encourage creativity than to impede it. It doesn't cost anything to tell a story, and that's where our efforts should be focused. Meeting professionals need to find more creative ways to support the messages clients or companies want to deliver—write the screenplay before producing the movie, know the message before designing the set, know that the "sound and fury" needs to signify *something* before paying for expensive technology or pyrotechnics.

If we do not focus on ROI—which at its heart is strategic, not tactical, as some have suggested—then we will eventually lose the right to exercise our creativity. We need to find ways to demonstrate that the creative spin we put on a meeting's message helps to get it out there in a more powerful way, and we need to show that we can use technology before, during and after a meeting to set up, enhance and measure the impact our creativity has on the bottom line.

Increasingly, we need to be problem solvers and educators as well as storytellers. We need to understand the potential that technology has to stretch the dollar. We must get our heads out of the ballroom and into the continuum that exists between the first contact with a prospective attendee and the last follow-up, long after the meeting has ended. That continuum is filled with dozens of "moments of truth"—opportunities to introduce, reinforce and measure the effects of a meeting's message, theme and outcomes.

Being held accountable is not a bad thing for any of us. In the end, it will set us free. After all, when it comes to justifying a creative idea to a non-creative person, a chart or graph is worth a thousand words—or dollars.

JIM TAUSCH is creative director for Fusion Productions in Webster, N.Y.

Increasingly, we need to be problem solvers and educators as well as storytellers. We need to understand the potential that technology has to stretch the dollar.