



Christy Wright

# Brain Power

The rise of curriculum-based conferences gives attendees more options to come away fulfilled from an event.

BY KRISTI PORTER

While most conferences and large-scale events utilize the main stage for inspiration and leave detail-oriented topics to breakouts, there are a few gatherings that break from the norm. Two at the front of the curve include Christy Wright's Business Boutique and Jeff Goins' Tribe Conference. Their curriculum-based conferences shine the spotlight on the nitty-gritty of their subject matter: women starting a business and individuals building a creative career, respectively.

During both Business Boutique and Tribe Conference, session one jumps straight into the foundation of a new, or desired, career path. For Business Boutique, it means creating a business plan; for Tribe Conference, it means growing an audience.

When asked about this novel approach to content, Wright says many women attending their events are skeptical about being business owners. They're unsure that the investment will be worth their time and money. In light of that, she announced to her team: "I want the first session to be so valuable that if they left after that first session, women would feel like they got their money's worth. If we start there, they'll let their guard down and absorb everything else we can teach them."

Regarding his event, Goins explains, "I think our format is a great process for introducing someone to what it takes to earn a living by sharing their message: Hone your voice; build your platform; expand your reach; and monetize your message."

Given the level of actionable advice for both conferences, many planners may think they have to choose between an in-person event and other options like a podcast, courses or a book. They may worry that attendees will only pick one or the other. These two conferences have debunked the myth. Both echo the sentiment that attendees will never feel the same energy by listening to a podcast, reading a book or participating in a course. Goins likens it to buying an album versus attending a concert. Yes, some people may only choose the cheaper option, but there will also always be many fans who prefer a live experience.

Wright also notes that none of their content completely overlaps between formats. Many topics are the same, but it's unlikely that it would be addressed the same way across all platforms. Plus, she muses that we all like to believe people are engaging with every piece of content we put out into the world, but that's usually not true.

Each event also scores a lot of bonus points with attendees after they've gone home. At Business Boutique, the conference notebook doubles as a workbook, including exercises to complete in the following days and weeks, ensuring that the content is put into practice. And Tribe Conference attendees walk out the door with an armful of goodies, such as free books and courses, from incredibly generous speakers.

These factors and many others have led to raving fans who are happy to return in the future.

What lessons can other event planners apply to their own work?

"We try to lean into the things that make us unique, even those I might change if I had more resources," says Goins. "Those little idiosyncrasies are what people tell us they love. We sincerely try to wow our attendees every step of the way. For us, that simply means considering the status quo for each part of the event—from food service to speakers to lighting—and ratcheting it up a notch or two. When you do that across the board, people are amazed. It's about consistently overdelivering in every area."

Wright echoes those sentiments. "Create memorable experiences," she recommends. "For instance, in describing how to build a business plan, I use the example of my mom's tiered wedding cakes because she was a single mom building a bakery business while I was growing up. At our first event, after we wrapped that business plan session, I announced that everyone could go out into the lobby and taste my mom's delicious cakes for themselves. My mom was standing there with 1,200 Business Boutique-branded cupcakes, and people couldn't stop snapping photos!"

As marketers and event planners, we're always concerned with how to get people to share on social media. But if you do something amazing that they can't stop talking about, you don't have to tell them to share. They'll do it naturally."