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GET BOOKED AND STAY BOOKED: 21 STRATEGIES FOR PROFESSIONAL SPEAKING

David Newman

Since 1992, I've been a full-time professional speaker, trainer and consultant.

In March of 2007, I was asked to take on a 1-year interim position as Conference Producer at Business 21 Publishing based in Springfield, PA. I ran their two-million-dollar audioconference and live conference division, hiring over 160 speakers a year. I got to see the speaking business—and whole lot of professional speakers—from the customer's perspective.

Here's the key point: within 2 weeks of starting, I had a shocking moment of clarity—because I was now sitting on the *buyer's side* of the desk. When I paused my speaking career for one year to switch to the other side of the desk, I saw what REALLY gets speakers hired—what meeting planners are truly looking for—and what they run away from. And here is what I learned:

I wouldn't have hired the "old" me as a speaker.

No way!

I want to give you the inside track on speaking as a lead generator and as a revenue generator for successful entrepreneurs, executives, and C-suite leaders.

I'm going to share with you all the things I did wrong, so you can get it right—and this will help you get hired more easily, more often, and at your full fee. Since returning to full-time professional speaking and consulting in February 2008, these strategies worked wonders for me over the past dozen years, and they helped me create a multimillion-dollar hybrid speaking, training, and done-for-you services business—and I know they'll work wonders for you.

Let's dig in...

1 | Decide who you are: Negotiations speaker, customer service speaker, sales speaker. Don't be afraid to specialize and focus your business on mastering ONE topic. **ONE.** If you offer everything to everyone, you're like an average restaurant. The menu has a million choices, and nothing is especially good. But now think of your *favorite* restaurant where you walk in and *always* order the same thing because it's OUTSTANDING. Now that restaurant stands out in your mind as THE place to go for your favorite dish. You've probably told 10 friends how great this restaurant is—and you certainly told them what you always order there and how delicious it is. My point—**specialize and stick with it.** Don't be afraid of labels. **Labels are good!** Meeting planners BUY labels! Label yourself early on and focus on getting expertise that is DEEP rather than BROAD. Wannabes know 10 topics 1 foot deep. Experts know 1 topic 10 feet deep—and beyond!

Don't be afraid of labels. Labels are good!
Meeting planners BUY labels!

2 | Write a book: Or write several books. Early on, I made the mistake of writing 8 self-published books on 8 different topics—if you’re going to write 8 books, you should write 8 books on ONE topic! Also: decision-makers like to see at least ONE *traditionally* published book. Self-publishing is great but having one or more ‘real’ books helps your buyers sleep at night after they hire you. You should work *harder* on getting an agent or a publisher BEFORE deciding to go the self-publishing route. Many marketing experts will tell you that the most important thing is having a book. From a meeting planner perspective, your REAL priority should be producing an *outstanding traditionally published book*. Focus on that first, for **credibility** and **visibility** purposes, and THEN create your self-published products, eBooks, and digital programs to build additional revenue streams.

3 | Write articles with substance: Meeting planners need to see a speaker’s thinking. Show your buyer good, meaty articles with lots of specifics and do-it-now tactics. Don’t be stingy in sharing the ideas that you’ll share with their audiences if they hire you. In your articles, don’t just TELL people what to THINK about your topic—SHOW them what to DO and HOW TO DO IT. **Make your articles ACTIONABLE.** Top professional speakers write articles conversationally. Write the way you speak—it connects more deeply with your readers. Here’s a one-word shortcut to great articles: **REPURPOSE.** Keynotes become articles; articles become special reports; special reports can become audio programs; transcribe your audio programs and they can become the rough draft for your book! Once you’ve got a solid platform of ideas, the different ways to package and profit from them is limited only by your imagination.

4 | Take a stand on your topic: Be unique. Gary Markle is an HR and performance management consultant whose program is based on the idea of “No More Performance Reviews”; Alfie Kohn is a rewards and recognition expert who firmly believes that “Rewards don’t work”; Larry Winget calls himself the Pitbull of Personal Development and one of his trademark messages is “Shut up, stop whining, and get a life.” Remember: Sacred cows make the best steak. Be contrarian and event producers will remember you. **Sound different and BE different.** The more you stand out from the crowd in both style and substance, the more AUDIENCES will remember you—and that’s key for both retention and referrals. If you sound like every other speaker and you act like every other speaker and you look like every other speaker, you’re making it very hard for audiences to remember you—and you’re making it even harder for them to refer you!

5 | Niche, niche, niche: There are several ways you can do this—**by topic** (Leadership, for example), **by audience** (HR people, Finance people, IT people), **by industry** (banking, HVAC, healthcare), **by level** (senior execs, high school students, first-time supervisors), **by method** (3-day bootcamp, 12-week mentoring program), or **by media** (perhaps you’re known for THE book, THE video, THE podcast, or THE blog in your particular arena of expertise). For example:

- Let’s say you’re a Customer service speaker = that’s a good start.
- Customer service in the HVAC industry = better (My friend Steve Coscia, CSP)

Now, let's do a deeper one:

- Let's say you're a Sales speaker = good
- Sales prospecting speaker = better
- Sales prospecting using the phone speaker = best (Art Sobczak whom you'll meet in the pages of my new book, *Do It! Speaking*)
- Sales prospecting using the phone in the financial services industry = WOW!

That's a 4-level niche! This makes your work **repeatable** and **referable**. People can easily repeat exactly what you do and refer your value proposition to others.

6 | NO Video Beats A BAD Video: Get a GREAT video. But first, watch lots and lots of them. Visit speaker bureau websites, visit top speakers' websites, and make a list of what you like and what you don't like. Then look at where you are in the marketplace and ask, "What are MOST of the NEXT level speakers doing in their videos?" Plan out your video carefully—you can actually storyboard it shot-by-shot using something as simple as index cards or Post-It® Notes. When you have a VERY clear idea of exactly what you want viewers to experience and how you want to present yourself professionally, go get it done. (If you want to make sure your first speaker demo video is the best it can possibly be, consider registering for the Speaker Video Summit that we produce several times a year: www.SpeakerVideoSummit.com.)

The mistake I see a lot of speakers make with shooting their demo video, and many top speakers openly admit this, is that they did it before they were educated consumers. *They didn't know what they didn't know* and that made it very hard for them to truly

collaborate with their video professional. Understand that most of your money will go into **editing and post-production**. Don't skimp on quality and get the best professional help you can afford with both the shooting and the editing. Your cousin Vinnie's \$500 DSLR camera may be good enough for posting short clips on YouTube, but it's not good enough to represent your professional work when your livelihood depends on it. Do it once and do it right.

7 | Learn to say No: When it's not your topic, when it's not your expertise, when you know in your heart someone else does it better than you, say No. The more you say No to meeting planners, the more you're on their radar for what you do BEST. It's always a credibility boost to a planner when a speaker responds to an invitation with the words, "You know, that's really not my topic. I'm probably not the best person to do that program for you." When someone asks you as a professional speaker "What *else* do you speak on?" it's perfectly OK to say "Nothing—this is what I KNOW *best* and this is ALL I do." Contrary to what you may have heard out there, many meeting planners LOVE one-trick ponies. The more you say No to topics that don't fit you, the happier planners are to book you for topics that are a 100% bullseye for you. **You win. The planner wins. Your audience wins. Learn to say No.**

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8 | Specific Topics Beat General Topics: “Sales Success Secrets” isn’t nearly as good as “Overcoming the Stall: How to Shift Your Prospect Out of Neutral.” “How to Become a More Effective CFO” isn’t as good as “Seven CFO Negotiating Strategies for Vendor Contracts.” TIP: use the word FOR to target a specific audience. Presentation Skills *for* HR; Up-selling *for* Customer Service Reps; Internet Marketing *for* Stay-at-Home Moms. This does two things for you—it makes your title more specific AND it identifies your target audience. Another bonus—**the more specific your topic, the less you can be compared with the sea of generalist jack-of-all-trades speakers** who are perceived—accurately—as a commodity.

9 | HARD topics beat SOFT topics: Even if you’re a motivational speaker, a keynoter, an inspirational speaker—unless you’re already making a great living doing JUST that—I recommend having at least 1 “hard” topic in your arsenal. By that I mean, make it specific, skill-based, include *what to do* and *how to do it*, *what to say* and *how to say it*. What most meeting planners need for business events is 80% hard topics and 20% soft topics. In fact, many of the speakers I work with have 100% hard topics—topics like Question-based Selling, Cash Management for CFO’s, Advanced Interviewing Skills, How to Make Safety Meetings Work. **When you speak on hard topics, you can also include great take-home value**—you can share scripts, templates, tools, forms, checklists, worksheets, and other items that your audience will want to keep and use daily—and, of course, your contact information is on everything you share so that they know where to find and hire you for more of your expertise!

10 | Create compelling titles: Titles are important. Let me give you an example. How many speakers and trainers offer the topic of leadership? The answer is a bazillion. Now, how many speakers and trainers offer a program called, “Bury My Heart At Conference

Room B”? That’s right—one guy. Google that title and you’ll find out who it is. Learn to come up with good titles. Get Sam Horn’s book *POP!*, which is full of techniques to help you come up with great titles. **Don’t be afraid to TEST titles on your prospective buyers.** Send an email to past customers, or ask your professional colleagues, or get more sophisticated and use an online survey tool like [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). When creating programming for conferences, I used TOPIC surveys to gauge interest in the general topic and then I refined those with TITLE surveys to test specific variations and new angles on proven topics. Here is the templated language you can use in your own title surveys: “We will soon be launching a new program for frontline managers on how to negotiate more effectively. Please indicate which one of the following titles would most inspire you to attend.” Then list 5-7 different title choices. What’s interesting about title surveys is that rarely is it a close race—**you’ll often get a clear winner by a mile.** That’s why it’s so important to survey your market. BONUS TIP: One good formula for titles is “*catchy title COLON specific benefit or outcome.*” For example: *Overcoming the Stall: How to Shift Your Prospect Out of Neutral* or *Write It So They Read It: Creating Powerful Business Documents.*

11 | Offer DEPTH with VARIETY: If you’re a Project Management expert, meeting planners love to see Project Management for CFO’s, Project Management for Frontline Supervisors, Project Management for Residential Builders, Project Management Basics, Advanced Project Management, Project Management Tricks to Save Time and Money, Project Management Intensive Bootcamp, and so on. Once meeting planners find someone who delivers great content and is easy to work with, they want to be able to plug them into all their DIFFERENT audiences—different levels, different industries, different durations. You might be invited to present a 1-hour webinar, or a 90-minute general session, or a full-day pre-conference workshop. Having material that fits a variety of

depth, duration, and detail makes you more flexible. Remember—**you want to be invited back** to clients who know you and love you for a 2nd or 3rd presentation to the SAME audience, so carefully “packaging” your expertise into a variety of programs will serve you well. For example, if you spoke at a company’s annual conference last year on “Mastering the Art of Price Negotiations” and it was a huge hit, you want to be able to go back this year with “Advanced Negotiating for Purchasing Professionals.”

12 | Don’t be a utility player TOO soon: When speakers are talking to meeting planners, it can be VERY tempting to slip into the conversation, “Hey, Susan, I can probably do 3-4 other topics for you” My advice on saying that is DON’T. The unspoken secret pact between decision-makers and speakers is:

- They know you can probably deliver a great program on other topics—in fact, they’re glad because they like working with you!
- Don’t tell a planner this too soon. It diminishes their perception of your expertise on the original topic they sought you out for. If you knock the first topic out of the park, believe me, they’ll BEG you to do other topics, too.
- **Planners want EXPERTS; not GENERALISTS!** Robert Bradford, who is a corporate strategy expert, has a name for the generalist speakers out there—the ones that claim to offer programs on leadership COMMA sales COMMA time management COMMA presentation skills COMMA and so on—he calls them COMMA SPEAKERS. And in Robert’s words, “each comma means that they suck just a little bit more.” The truth is that there are a handful of “big name” consultants and speakers out there who can genuinely convey their expertise on a wide variety of topics—but don’t pretend you’re them, because chances are excellent that you’re not.

13 | Know the competition, Love the competition, Refer the competition: Become an expert on the experts. Your buyers might have questions for you such as, “Who do you know that does a top-notch program on prospecting?” “Do you know a great safety trainer who can tackle the latest twists in OSHA compliance?” “Who does a killer program on strategic planning for global companies?” Buyers love to make one phone call to you and get leads on 3-4 other great speakers on 3-4 other topics. One of them could be YOU... and it WILL be if **you can also point them to other excellent people.** As an added bonus, the best way for YOU to get incoming referrals is to start by actively referring others. They will almost always return the favor—and sometimes in very surprising, generous, and profitable ways! How do you get started? Visit the National Speakers Association website, www.nsaspeaker.org and use the FIND A SPEAKER feature—or better yet, do what your buyers do and use Google to search for other experts and speakers in topic areas related to your own and start building relationships with them.

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14 | Aim for High Visibility: Most decision makers and smart meeting planners find their HR speakers from the Society of Human Resource Management, they get safety speakers from the American Society of Safety Professionals, they get finance speakers from the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. Early on, you should make it a top priority to **target THE association in your field and work like crazy to get on their roster.** Go up the logical progression of local chapters, then state-level chapters and finally, the big national or international conventions. The sooner you do this, the sooner you'll be on everyone's radar as a credible speaker and expert. The secret is that some buyers use the association's annual conference program as their "catalog" of speakers, consultants, and experts when a need arises for hiring outside expertise. Why should buyers look elsewhere, when these speakers have already climbed the proverbial mountain and proven themselves by getting a top spot on the international stage? As a speaker, make it an urgent goal to get to the top of YOUR mountain fast, because that will increase your visibility for all kinds of new opportunities. **Note:** You can pretty much expect local and regional association meetings to provide speaking opportunities without payment (free) while state and national level meetings usually have a budget to pay speakers, and especially to pay genuine experts who often deliver a general session for all conference attendees. It's rare to get paid for a breakout session but you might get lucky.

Early on, you should make it a top priority to target “THE” association in your field and work like crazy to get on their roster.

15 | Be Google-icious: When I used to look for a negotiating speaker, I'd Google "negotiating expert," "negotiating speaker," or "negotiations training." You can do several surprisingly simple things to **make sure your name comes up in the top 10 or 20 results** for relevant search terms in your own area of expertise:

- Organic SEO: keyword-rich content, inbound links, using the right html tags
- Articles: both html and PDF articles on your site *and* on industry portals
- Archived e-newsletters on your site: in html, txt, or pdf formats. Don't just send them out to your mailing list; repurpose them on your website as a Google magnet.
- Blogs: one or more blogs with regular postings. This doesn't have to be a big time drain. Again, repurpose your content! If you wrote a book, break it into 100 or more small bite-sized chunks to create 100 blog posts. Your blog is now on autopilot for a whole year.
- Pay-per-click: Google, Facebook, and LinkedIn all provide this type of advertising. But use it sparingly and smartly—it can get very expensive if you don't know what you're doing.

16 | Packaging counts: Your package starts with your brand. Don't be clever—be smart. Identify your expertise to meeting planners quickly and clearly. This starts with your company name and brand. Don't make me guess. Don't use *YOUR NAME & Associates*. Don't use *YOUR INITIALS Consulting*. Don't be cute or clever. Overly clever names are a solution in search of a problem. Here are some good brands for speakers and experts: LegalWatch. Safety Priority. Your Part-Time Controller. DivorceDoneRight.com.

These are good brands because they **communicate your expertise**. Organizations DO have legal problems—they call LegalWatch. They do have safety problems—they call SafetyPriority. They do have sales problems—they call my friend Scott Messer at Sales Evolution.

Bonus Tip #1: You may want to hire someone to help you create or re-create a good, brandable business name, because we're often too close to our own businesses to make smart decisions.

Bonus Tip #2: After your business name, your packaging also includes things like your website, media kit, business card, and so on. Remember **DESIGN = CREDIBILITY**. There are top speakers whose websites make them look like amateurs, and there are beginning speakers who invested in GREAT websites. Studies show that in the online world, credibility comes FIRST from appearance, layout, and design.

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If the packaging isn't credible, it doesn't matter what your content says. Your buyer is GONE. **WARNING:** Don't do it yourself, don't pay your nephew Pat who builds websites in his parents' basement, and don't use one of those cookie cutter template-driven website builders. But also don't spend \$40,000. There's a middle ground. That's where you should be.

17 | Learn to write compelling copy and bullets: Specifically, write great marketing copy to promote your keynotes, seminars, and programs. Use these building blocks:

- The ONE thing... 9 Secrets... How to...
- 5 steps to...
- 7 key strategies for...
- What most _____ overlook—even the pros
- Use action words, not learning words (i.e. Build, Improve, Increase, Boost, Build, Eliminate are MUCH stronger than 'Understand, Learn, Discover')
- You'll notice I've used odd numbers in my examples and that's because odd numbers are better than even numbers (5 tips better than 6 tips)
- Mix Teaser bullets with Content bullets
- Flip every I statement into a YOU statement, for example—"I'll teach you" becomes "You'll learn how to..." "We give you" becomes "You get" (That alone is a \$5,000 copywriting tip right there!)

18 | Earn your Certified Speaking Professional Designation: As you may know, the Certified Speaking Professional (or CSP) is the highest-earned designation from the National Speakers Association. Ordinarily, decision makers couldn't care less about obscure industry designations after your name. But let's look at it from the buyer's perspective. For meeting planners, the bottom line is if 12% of speakers have it and 88% don't, guess who they're going to feel a lot better about hiring? This lets buyers know you're SERIOUS. You're not selling real estate on the side, you're not pushing vitamins, you're not involved in multi-level marketing. You truly are a PROFESSIONAL speaker. Sure, I know what you're probably thinking: Hey, David, there are plenty of GREAT speakers out there who are NOT CSP's.

I agree with you. But the question I'm asking is, **"How many CSP's are terrible speakers whom buyers will regret hiring?" The answer is EXTREMELY FEW.**

Buyers live with their audiences.
They know what their audiences like,
respond to, and value.

19 | Please your audience, but thrill your buyer: If you have a good topic and a good title, it will sell and put butts in seats. Part of the planner's job is to make sure that happens. But that's only the first part of the equation. If you don't *deliver* on your promise and make the audience happy, the planner is hosed. **Remember: you're visiting but they live there!** (As speakers, we usually understand in our head the risk folks take when hiring speakers, but since spending a year on the other side of the table, I feel that risk in my gut.) There are two bad options here: 1. You are impossible to work with and dazzle my audience. BAD. 2. You are the world's nicest person and deliver a flop program. BAD. Here are 5 things you want to make sure you do that audiences love...

- **Skip the basic stuff** they probably already know and raise the bar by giving value-rich advanced information
- **Use a variety of ways to engage** the audience and foster discussion
- **Make sure you deliver on the promise** in your title and the bullets on your 1-sheet
- **Follow your handout** and tie into it—plus make the handout too good to throw away
- **Give detailed specifics** and tactical implementation they can use immediately

Avoid these and you'll hit a home run with the audience. Now for buyers, sure—they'll put up with you if you create a hassle for them and deliver a hit for their audience. But **they'll love you and work hard to rehire you** if you put the professional back into professional speaker.

Buyers will love you if you:

- Deliver 150% value
- Customize like an insider
- Ensure the success of the event, not just your speech (before, during, after)
- Respect deadlines for things like your speech writeups, headshots and participant handouts
- Make their lives easier by being prompt and responsive to emails and phone calls
- Show UNcommon courtesy—send acknowledgment emails, give a courtesy call once you land, send a thank-you gift after the event, don't be a prima donna and ask for nonsense like having a certain brand of organic juice waiting for you on ice in the back of the limo that picks you up at the airport—be a great person as well as a great speaker!

20 | Invest in the relationship with meeting planners: It's not always about the money. Most good conference producers and **meeting planners consider themselves in the speaker marketing business, the speaker visibility business, the speaker credibility business.** There are top speakers, including members of the Speaker Hall of Fame, whom I was thrilled to hire because they recognized I was there to help promote them. The company I worked with had 350,000 email subscribers and sent out over 10 million emails a month. That's who I put my speakers in front of. Your topic, your credentials, your website. Don't get me wrong—we *paid* our speakers—but it was less than you might get for a corporate keynote. *I know that and you know that.*

Put your ego in the back seat for a minute. **Be willing to invest in the relationship.**

Because if you do a great job the first time, meeting planners and association executives are often in a position to...

- Raise your base fee
- Revenue share with you
- Publish your articles in hardcopy publications, websites, and blogs
- Publish and distribute your manuals, training guides and e-learning tools
- Promote you any way they can

I had speakers start doing audio conferences for \$500, and then gradually, as the relationship evolved, move up to getting over \$40,000 in royalties and revenue share in a single year from our projects together. On the other hand, if as speakers, we ask for all that up front, we won't get it. My advice to you at the beginning of any relationship with a meeting planner or event producer is **Recognize the marketing/PR value**, and let the relationship develop. To adapt a favorite saying, "Do what *their audience* loves and the money will follow."

21 | Be coachable: Buyers live with their audiences. They know what their audiences like, respond to, and value. Granted, you know your stuff, and that's great, but please work with your buyer to customize, tailor, and tweak. Even a small miscalculation on your part makes you look out-of-touch with the audience's reality. **Let buyers and meeting planners help you navigate** making that connection between your expertise and their audience's needs.

Bonus tip: if you're delivering in a new format, take all the advice you possibly can from your meeting planner. For example, I used to work with a lot of speakers who are terrific on the platform and have experience delivering great content live in front of hundreds or thousands of people. Then I would invite them to present the same material in a webinar format—and they completely BOMB. To help them, I created a short, high-impact online training called “The Experienced Speaker’s Guide to Webinar Success.”

Some speakers eagerly took the coaching—and some ignored it. Guess which group of speakers generated more leads, had much stronger audience feedback, and closed more follow-on business? That’s right, it was the group of speakers who eagerly took the coaching I provided as their conference producer. If you’re offered advice like this from your meeting planner, take full advantage of it. It will only make you better. **Don’t let arrogance or complacency sabotage your success.**

Well, there you have it—21 surefire strategies to get booked and stay booked.

How can you make this advice stick? Put yourself in the buyer’s shoes and ask if YOU would hire you. Think like a corporate executive or conference programs chair and then do everything you can to become the speaker you would be thrilled to hire!

Save yourself the trouble of working as a meeting planner because **I can tell you that being a fulltime professional speaker is way more fun—and it pays a lot better!** 📌



Info



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