

A close-up photograph of a gold mesh microphone, positioned in the lower-left quadrant. The microphone's grille is a fine, woven mesh. The background is a dark, out-of-focus field of colorful bokeh lights in shades of purple, blue, pink, and yellow, creating a vibrant, stage-like atmosphere.

Behind the Mic: A Definitive Guide to On-Stage Roles and Competencies at Events

A White Paper

By: Clare Forestier and Richard John

Clare Forestier

Clare is a professional Event Emcee. She specializes in creating engaging attendee experiences at B2B conferences and summits. With a background as a broadcast journalist and presenter, she is also a skilled moderator and communication coach helping speakers to deliver audience-friendly presentations.

clareforestier.com

[linkedin.com/in/clareforestier](https://www.linkedin.com/in/clareforestier)



Richard John

Richard is C.O.O and co-founder of Realise, a specialist events services agency which also delivers events apprenticeships across the UK and acts as a boutique investment and advisory agency creating and developing new event concepts. Richard is a regular speaker at industry events around the globe and a sought-after coach and mentor. He is the author of numerous books and articles on the meetings and events industry.

realise.me.uk

[linkedin.com/in/mrrichardjohn/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/mrrichardjohn/)



About the White Paper

If you are involved in the exciting world of meetings and events, then this White Paper is for YOU.

If you are **involved in organising events** (for a corporate, a charity, government, or association) or an event or marketing agency, then understanding the different requirements on-stage at an event is essential. You need to know all about the distinct roles, what they do, and which should be used in each case.

If you are a **professional Event Organiser**, you understand the need for a common language and framework to select the right on-stage talent at events. And, if you are working across sectors and countries, you understand how vital it is to ensure the titles and languages are consistent.

You may consider yourself an **aspiring Speaker; you have spent some time ‘treading the boards’** and want to develop or refine your on-stage skills. This guide offers guidance on expanding your skillset and taking on other roles.

And for everyone who plays a vital role in making events happen — whether you’re managing the details behind the scenes, running the show from technical operations, or ensuring everything flows smoothly backstage — we hope this White Paper equips you with the insights, tools, and confidence to elevate your contribution and ensure your events shine.

Why it matters

There are distinct on-stage roles that contribute to a successful audience experience.

In the world of B2B events, confusion often arises around titles like ‘facilitator,’ ‘moderator,’ ‘emcee/MC,’ ‘presenter,’ and ‘Chair,’ as they are frequently used interchangeably. This leads to a lack of clarity about the unique value each role brings.

The result? Events and meetings fail to reach their full potential because the wrong individuals, with mismatched skills, are assigned to roles or responsibilities that do not align with their expertise or the event’s needs.

This White Paper provides a clear framework to:

- Simplify industry jargon
- Clarify the unique competencies of each on-stage role
- Help event professionals and aspiring speakers understand the value each role brings.

Our goal is to establish a definitive event industry standard that fosters consistency, professionalism, and excellence in B2B events - whether in-person or remote.

Overview of key On-Stage Roles

Here are the main roles typically found on stage at B2B events:

- Keynote Speaker (usually one per event)
- Speaker
- Presenter
- Host
- Emcee/MC (Master of Ceremonies)
- Chair
- Panelist
- Facilitator
- Moderator
- Voice of God (VoG)

On the following pages we define each of these, identify the key skills each requires, plus, where possible, provide additional helpful resources.

Keynote Speaker Role

What do they do?

The Keynote Speaker sets the tone for the event, delivering a powerful and mission-driven message that inspires and motivates the audience. Often external to the organisation, they frequently carry 'celebrity' status due to notable achievements in business, sports, or research. Keynote Speakers are also a draw for commercial events, helping to attract delegates. They are often positioned towards the end of an event to minimise the risk of attendees leaving early.

What skills should they have?

Mission-Driven: There should be a keen sense of purpose at the heart of every great Keynote Speech. The best Keynote speakers will deliver their message with passion ensuring the audience feels its relevance to them and stays engaged.

Agility: Successful Keynote Speakers are agile and responsive, and able to adapt quickly to the energy and feedback of each new audience. Hiding behind a standard script will no longer cut it. The ready availability of digital tools, such as live polling, means there is no excuse for a Keynote Speaker to hide behind a standard script. With applications like live polling readily available, they should be able to easily 'read the room' and adjust their delivery to align with a specific audience's reactions and expectations.

Storytelling: Engaging storytelling is crucial to keeping the audience captivated. The best Keynote Speakers draw from personal experience and present their insights in a way that keeps attendees on the edge of their seats.

Credible & Trustworthy: The speaker must exude credibility, with their accomplishments and integrity establishing them as someone the audience can trust.

Authentic & Genuine: A great Keynote Speaker is not just there for the fee. They genuinely believe in their message and care about delivering it specifically for that audience, motivated by more than financial gain.

Articulate: Simplifying complex information in an engaging way is key. Whether tied into a business objective or otherwise, flawless delivery is essential.

Sense of Humour: A touch of humour helps balance the intensity of a presentation, making the content more engaging and easier to digest.

Confidence: The ability to command a stage with poise is a hallmark of a Keynote Speaker. Confidence is non-negotiable.

Creativity: Even with familiar topics, a speaker should bring a fresh perspective, presenting ideas in a way that feels new and intriguing.

Relatable: Connecting emotionally with the audience leaves a lasting impact. Sharing personal stories and moments of vulnerability fosters this connection, inspiring the audience to think, "I could do that too."

A Powerful Message: Keynote Speakers need to deliver a message that inspires action or shifts perspectives. Today's audiences expect more than a standard "stand and deliver" talk - they want to be moved.

Likeable: The 'likeability factor' is crucial to keeping the audience engaged and interested throughout the keynote.

The Keynote Speaker who can weave the audience's opinions, experiences, and views into their talk, will ensure the message resonates deeply, leading to highly engaged attendees.

More Information to find your next Keynote Speaker

Do a search for 'Professional Speakers Association.' You will find one in most major countries. For example, the National Speakers Association (<https://nsaspeaker.org/>) and the Professional Speaking Association (<https://the-psa.co.uk/>).

You can also use a specialist speaker bureau who can provide recommendations and share showreels of the Keynote Speakers they represent.

If you are using an agency to help you, ask around; they will see speakers regularly and know who the best for your event is.

Event industry events also give you an opportunity to see up-and-coming speakers, and network with fellow organisers who can recommend suitable contacts. Speak to your emcee as they will attend a lot of events and have recommendations.

Speaker Role

What do they do?

Speakers are typically industry experts or professionals brought in to share detailed information aligned with the event's objectives and audience challenges. Unlike Keynote Speakers, who provide overarching inspiration, Speakers focus on specific topics, offering insights, data, and expertise within their area of expertise.

While organisations may believe they have capable internal candidates, speaking on stage requires more than just technical knowledge or seniority. Technical knowledge and internal 'status' may not be enough to deliver the standard of presentation the audience expects and deserves.

What Skills should they have?

Expertise and Knowledge: Speakers must have a deep understanding of their subject, providing credible, accurate information that adds value to the audience.

Clarity and Structure: It is essential that Speakers can break down complex topics into clear, understandable segments. A well-structured presentation ensures the audience can follow along and retain key points.

Adaptability: Like Keynote Speakers, industry Speakers need to be agile, adjusting their delivery based on audience reactions, questions, or live feedback, such as polling results

Engagement Skills: Great Speakers do not just deliver content. They actively engage with the audience, encouraging interaction, addressing questions, encouraging discussion. This helps transform the session from a lecture into a dynamic learning experience.

Credibility and Authority: Confidence in a Speaker's expertise comes from their professional experience, qualifications, and a proven record of accomplishment in the field.

Passion and Enthusiasm: The best Speakers convey enthusiasm and passion for their topic. Even technical or highly detailed topics become engaging when presented with genuine enthusiasm and passion.

Effective Use of Visuals: Speakers often rely on slides or other visual aids. The ability to use these tools effectively to support their message — rather than distracting from it — is crucial.

Audience Awareness: Understanding the audience's level of knowledge, expectations, and interests, and tailoring the content to this, is vital to ensure relevance to the specific audience.

Resources to be a successful Speaker

There is a wealth of training courses on 'how to speak.' However, delivering a presentation in a meeting room is different to being confident on a stage in front of 500 delegates!

Both authors of this White Paper run training and consultancy services to help Speakers to perform well in business conference environments.

Resources such as TED Talks (www.ted.com) provide an excellent opportunity to see a whole variety of different speakers in action and increase their mastery of new skills. However, memorable Speakers will develop their own style and work to their strengths, rather than simply try and emulate someone else.

Presenter Role

What do they do?

Presenters introduce and explain information in a clear, engaging way, often focusing on product demos, specific segments of the event, or detailed information that requires explanation – bridging the gap between the content and the audience's current knowledge. Their role is typically more focused and concise than that of Speakers.

What skills should they have?

Clear Communication: Presenters must be articulate, with the ability to explain concepts or products in a straightforward, understandable way. Their language should be tailored to suit the audience's level of knowledge and expertise.

Engaging Delivery: Just like Speakers, Presenters need to capture and maintain the audience's attention. This involves using storytelling, humour, or real-life examples to make their content relatable.

Product/Content Knowledge: Especially when demonstrating products or explaining detailed processes, Presenters must have an in-depth understanding of what they are presenting. This ensures they can answer questions confidently and provide additional information when needed.

Time Management: Presenters often have a limited window in which to deliver their content. They need to be efficient with their time, ensuring they cover all key points without rushing or going over time.

Technical Skills: In many cases, Presenters need to be comfortable with technology, whether it is using software, operating presentation tools, or managing live demos. This technical competence helps ensure their segment runs smoothly.

Adaptability: Presenters should be prepared for technical glitches, unexpected questions, or shifts in the event's schedule. Being able to adapt on the spot ensures they handle any situation professionally.

Audience Engagement Techniques : Whether through direct interaction, live demonstrations, or interactive polls, effective Presenters know how to engage the audience to keep them involved and attentive throughout the session.

How the Roles of Keynote Speaker, Speaker and Presenter Differ:

You have noticed by now there are many overlapping competencies across the on-stage roles of Keynote Speaker, Speaker, and Presenter. Now let's see how these roles differ.

- Keynote Speakers inspire and set the overall tone of the event, often focusing on broader themes, and delivering a powerful, mission-driven message.
- Speakers provide in-depth knowledge and industry-specific insights, offering detailed information on topics or themes.
- Presenters focus on delivering clear, concise explanations, often with an emphasis on practical demonstrations or explaining products, ensuring the audience understands and connects with the material being shared.

Host / Emcee Role

What do they do?

A Host or Emcee is the thread that ties everything together, acting as the guiding light throughout the event. Their role goes beyond simply introducing Speakers. The Emcee shapes the entire attendee experience, ensuring the event's objectives are met and that the audience remains engaged and connected. They are responsible for overseeing the event's flow, maintaining energy, signposting what is coming up and ensuring seamless transitions between sessions.

The Evolution of the Master of Ceremonies (MC)

Historically, the **Master of Ceremonies (MC)** was a formal role, often associated with events like banquets or weddings. In these settings, the MC, also sometimes referred to as a **Toastmaster**, was typically the person in a red coat, announcing "ladies and gentlemen, please take your seats" or guiding the evening with a traditional sense of decorum and formality.

However, in modern B2B events, the role of the Emcee has evolved significantly. Today, the term **MC (or Emcee, which we will use in this document), or Event Host** is far more commonly used in business events. The formal, "red coat" Toastmaster role still exists in more ceremonial contexts.

What skills should Emcees have?

Engaging Communication: The Emcee must have a captivating presence, confident delivery, and adaptable language skills to match the audience's level of expertise. Their tone and style need to resonate with the crowd, whether they are speaking to C-level executives or a room of industry newcomers.

Charisma & Presence: A confident and magnetic personality makes an Emcee approachable and engaging. It is their job to bring energy to the room, ensuring that attendees stay attentive and involved.

Versatility & Flexibility: The Emcee should adapt quickly to unexpected changes, stepping into multiple roles if needed. This means adjusting to last-minute changes in the agenda, accommodating speakers running over their allotted time, or filling in when there are gaps in the agenda when technical issues or delays arise.

Organisational Skills: Emcees coordinate closely with the event team to ensure everything stays on track. They are not just performers; they are key players in maintaining the event's structure and flow.

Emotional Intelligence: Reading the room is crucial. Knowing when to shift the energy, pace, or tone to maintain engagement. A skilled Emcee senses when the audience needs a burst of energy, a moment to reflect, or an interactive element to keep them involved.

Problem-Solving: The ability to think quickly under pressure is vital. Whether it is handling technical glitches, a delayed speaker, or an unresponsive audience, the Emcee addresses issues with grace and humour, ensuring the show flows seamlessly.

Authority & Control: The Emcee maintains authority without alienating the audience. Both firm and friendly, key is how they manage time effectively while keeping the atmosphere enjoyable.

Knowledge of Content: While not a subject matter expert, the Emcee must be familiar with the event's themes and speakers. This prepares them to provide meaningful transitions, connect the dots between segments, and ensure the event feels cohesive.

Audience Engagement: The Emcee's role includes keeping the audience involved with interactive elements such as polls, Q&A sessions, challenges, or storytelling. Their goal is to ensure the audience feels like active participants rather than passive listeners.

Likeability & Approachability: A strong Emcee establishes rapport with the audience, making them feel comfortable and valued. This connection encourages audience participation and engagement.

Time Management: The Emcee is the timekeeper, ensuring that the event runs smoothly and stays on schedule. They manage the timing of sessions, speakers, breaks, and audience activities.

Cultural Awareness: Adapting communication to the audience's cultural norms ensures inclusiveness, especially at international events.

The Emcee's involvement: before, during, and after the event

An effective Emcee's involvement extends far beyond the event day. Their role is vital in the run-up to the event and in ensuring its success:

Early Involvement in Planning: Engaging the emcee during the planning stages is crucial. Their experience and insights will help you tailor the event to maximise engagement, as they can offer advice on structure, flow, and opportunities for audience interaction. They can collaborate with organisers to understand the event's objectives, themes, and target audience, ensuring they craft a performance that aligns with the event's goals. In their role they attend a wide variety of different events and may well have great speaker recommendations and session ideas to share that will enhance your event.

Meeting Contributors and Speakers: A key part of the Emcee's role is building rapport with all Speakers, Panelists, and Contributors before the event. This ensures smooth transitions and introductions, as the Emcee understands each person's role, style, and key messages, which allows them to weave these elements into a cohesive narrative.

Rehearsals and Preparation: An experienced Emcee participates in rehearsals, familiarising themselves with the agenda, speaker order, technical cues, and any special segments. This preparation allows them to anticipate potential challenges and ensure a seamless event flow.

Crafting the Event Narrative: The Emcee does not just introduce speakers; they are the storyteller who weaves together the different segments of the event. By understanding the overall objectives, they can highlight key themes, draw connections between speakers, and emphasise core messages, ensuring the event feels cohesive and engaging.

The difference between a Celebrity and a Professional Business Emcee

While hiring a celebrity might seem like an attractive option, a professional Emcee brings much more to the table in terms of value and expertise:

Focus on the Event's Substance: A celebrity host can add star power – and may be one of the reasons why delegates choose to attend - but beware of the risk that they may draw attention away from the event's core content. A professional Emcee ensures the focus remains on the event's substance, speakers, and objectives, enhancing the experience rather than overshadowing it.

Event Dynamics Expertise: A professional Emcee understands the dynamics of B2B events and knows how to manage transitions, maintain energy, and adapt to changing situations. Their priority is ensuring the audience remains engaged and that the event objectives are met.

Adaptability and Customisation: Unlike celebrities who may only show up on the day, a professional emcee is involved throughout the event journey. They tailor their performance to suit the event's theme, objectives, and audience, offering a level of customisation that a celebrity might not provide.

The role of an Emcee at virtual and hybrid events

Virtual and hybrid events present unique challenges, making the role of the Emcee increasingly important for maintaining engagement, energy, and a sense of connection among attendees.

In a virtual setting, attendees can easily become distracted or disengaged, as they have the freedom to multitask or click away from the event.

A virtual Emcee helps to mitigate this by acting as the anchor, providing a consistent and engaging presence throughout the event. This helps to keep the audience focused, involved, and feeling connected to the overall experience.

Maintaining Engagement: Virtual Emcees often use interactive tools such as live polls, Q&A sessions, chat engagement, and storytelling to involve attendees, ensuring they remain active participants rather than passive observers.

Creating a Sense of Community: In a digital environment, it can be challenging to create a sense of togetherness. A virtual Emcee plays a key role in fostering a welcoming atmosphere, using storytelling, humour, and enthusiasm to create a sense of community and connection among attendees.

Managing Transitions: Virtual events require seamless transitions to keep attendees engaged. The Emcee facilitates these transitions by introducing speakers, explaining agenda changes, and filling any gaps, contributing to a smooth and structured experience.

Technical Adaptability: Virtual Emcees are equipped to handle various technical elements, such as working with green screens, teleprompters, and live instructions through earpieces. Their ability to manage technical challenges calmly helps maintain a professional and uninterrupted event flow.

The role of an Emcee in hybrid events

Hybrid events, combining both in-person and virtual elements, require the Emcee to engage with two distinct audiences simultaneously. This dual role involves ensuring that both the live and virtual attendees feel equally involved and valued.

Balancing Two Audiences: The Emcee is responsible for engaging both in-person and virtual attendees, ensuring that neither group feels overlooked. This involves actively acknowledging and addressing both audiences, facilitating interaction, and ensuring an inclusive experience.

Facilitating Interaction: The Emcee often employs technology to encourage interaction between virtual and in-person participants, such as incorporating live polls, Q&A sessions, or encouraging real-time feedback from both groups, contributing to a unified event experience.

Ensuring Smooth Transitions: Managing a hybrid event requires handling the logistical complexities of switching between physical and virtual elements. The Emcee assists in guiding these transitions, helping to maintain a steady flow and engagement across both formats.

Adaptability to Multiple Formats: A hybrid Emcee is expected to be comfortable with multiple presentation formats, engaging with live audiences while also connecting with virtual participants. This requires skills in maintaining energy and engagement across different platforms.

Many organisations are guilty of adding a 'virtual' element as an afterthought or believing that streaming some element of content is a useful way of capturing materials for repurposing. However, that's just part of the story. Experienced organisers will tell you that delivering a hybrid event is, in effect, delivering two separate events. Consequently, it may well be worth considering a 'virtual MC,' whose role is to focus on the online audience. For example, at a hybrid event, a Keynote Speaker may leave the stage, and the physical audience will head for coffee. The online audience needs to be kept engaged, so a virtual MC – physically at the event – may then conduct a separate interview for the remote audience.

The Interviewer Role

Including an interview-style format into part of your event can be an effective way to improve the audience experience. There are several reasons to take this approach. For instance, when a senior figure is speaking, direct questioning from staff might feel uncomfortable, while a peer-led conversation can risk coming across as too familiar. A skilled interviewer - ideally someone credible yet independent - can strike the right balance, asking insightful and challenging questions while maintaining a professional tone.

Interviewers are also invaluable when working with speakers who have great insights but may not be natural performers. By guiding the conversation, highlighting key points, and injecting energy, an interviewer can transform a potentially dry presentation into an engaging dialogue, ensuring valuable content is not lost in delivery.

While this Interview role overlaps with others, you may not need to bring in a separate specialist. However, if assigning this responsibility to an existing presenter, be clear that it requires a shift in style - from delivering content to drawing it out effectively.

What Skills should Emcees have?

<https://www.clevry.com/en/resources/how-to-interview-someone>

This article (<https://www.clevry.com/en/resources/how-to-interview-someone>) whilst it is aimed at recruiters, outlines many of the essential competencies. If you have ever undertaken a job interview, you will know how hard it can be; now imagine 500 people are evaluating your ability! Interviewers on TV are often rewarded handsomely because it is an incredibly challenging role.

Chair Role

What do they do?

The Chairperson facilitates discussions, manages the flow of the event, and ensures that decisions are reached efficiently and fairly. In some cases, these skills must be delivered against a rigorous framework of regulations.

Being a Chair is quite a formal role and may not be suitable for every event. At medical conferences, global political meetings, or corporate AGMs, a Chair may well be essential, but sometimes their role can be taken by a more relaxed 'Host.'

What Skills should they have?

Active Listening: Ensures all voices are heard and synthesises discussions into actionable outcomes.

Effective Communication: Keeps discussions concise and focused.

Assertiveness & Diplomacy: Ensures balance - everyone's voice is heard **while** keeping discussions moving forward.

Impartiality: Facilitates discussions without steering outcomes based on their opinion.

Adaptability: Adjusts to the dynamics of diverse participants.

Empathy: Sensitivity to the emotional dynamics in the room is crucial.

Leadership: Guides the meeting and ensures key decisions are reached efficiently.

Resource for developing in the role of the Chair

<https://www.leadinggovernance.com/blog/10-attributes-of-a-great-chair/>

Panelist Role

What do they do?

Panelists are individuals who contribute their expertise, insights, and perspectives during group discussions, providing depth and diversity to a session. They play a critical role in offering varied viewpoints on a topic, helping to create a dynamic and engaging dialogue that adds value to the event.

Key Competencies:

Preparation: Effective Panelists demonstrate a thorough understanding of the event objectives, the audience's level of knowledge, and the viewpoints of fellow Panelists. Familiarity with key themes and potential discussion points ensures that their contributions are relevant and informed.

Clarity and Conciseness: Articulating ideas in a clear and concise manner is essential in a panel setting, where time is often limited. This enables Panelists to convey their insights efficiently and maintain the discussion's momentum.

Role Awareness: Each Panelist is typically invited to contribute because of their specific expertise, experience, or perspective. Understanding the reason for their selection allows them to provide insights that align with the event's goals and contribute meaningfully to the discussion.

Relatability and Engagement: Panelists often share experiences, anecdotes, and examples that resonate with the audience. This approach can enhance the discussion, making it more relatable and ensuring that the content is accessible and engaging.

Collaboration and Teamwork: Effective panel discussions are characterised by collaborative interaction. Panelists who listen to others, build on points raised, and respect different perspectives contribute to a balanced and dynamic session, offering a more comprehensive experience for the audience.

Audience-Centric Approach: Panelists who focus on the audience's needs and interests provide relevant and valuable insights. This approach supports an engaging session that aligns with the expectations of attendees.

Adaptability: Panel discussions can shift direction based on audience input or evolving conversation themes. Panelists who demonstrate adaptability can respond to these changes, ensuring their contributions remain relevant and impactful.

Performance Mindset: Given that panel discussions are often presented to a live audience, maintaining a level of energy and presence contributes to an engaging experience. This mindset supports a dynamic session that holds audience attention.

Professionalism and Respect: Maintaining professionalism is a key attribute of successful Panelists, particularly in showing respect for the moderator, fellow Panelists, and the audience. This includes attentive listening, avoiding interruptions, and responding thoughtfully to differing viewpoints.

It can be tempting to include lots of panel discussions in a business event because it is an easy way to include multiple voices, accommodate speakers who might not be comfortable presenting solo, and fill time without requiring extensive preparation. However, be careful! Too many panels can make your event feel repetitive and unfocused. Panels work best when they are well-researched, tightly moderated, and feature a diverse mix of voices with something meaningful to say. Overloading your event with panels, especially with too many speakers (we recommend no more than three), can lead to surface-level conversations where everyone politely agrees, resulting in a session that lacks energy and insight. If you are using panels, make sure each one has a clear purpose, the right mix of participants, and a moderator who knows how to spark real discussion.

Think about political debates – the BBC’s ‘Question Time’ is a good example. With guests from across the political spectrum and an audience with similarly widespread views, the heated discussion usually makes for good television, and highly shareable content. How do your events compare? When did anyone post comments on social media about the tension and excitement from your last panel?

Facilitator Role

What do they do?

Facilitators lead interactive sessions, ensuring participation and collaboration among attendees. They are often not on the main stage but typically run smaller rooms where they manage workshops, breakout sessions, or strategy meetings, guiding participants through structured formats.

They focus on creating an environment that encourages active participation and shared ownership of outcomes, passing the power to participants rather than positioning themselves as the central figure.

The value they bring

Facilitators play a crucial role in ensuring that smaller group sessions are interactive, productive, and that attendees feel heard. They create an environment that fosters collaboration, ensuring that discussions are focused, inclusive, and outcome driven.

It is important that their approach is content-neutral. They empower participants rather than contribute their own expertise. This is vital in breakout sessions, workshops, or strategy meetings, where the aim is often to generate ideas, solve problems, or build consensus.

When are Facilitators essential?

Facilitators are invaluable in sessions where the goal is to generate ideas, solve complex problems, or make decisions. Their expertise is valuable for guiding discussions in:

Workshops or Breakout Sessions: Ensuring these sessions are structured and productive, driving towards a clear set of outcomes.

Strategy or Planning Meetings: Helping align participants towards common goals, ensuring everyone is on the same page.

Team-Building Activities: Creating an environment where attendees feel comfortable, encouraging participation and collaboration.

Designing the Session Structure: Crafting a session agenda that encourages interaction and guides participants through a logical flow.

Managing Dynamics: Reading the room, identifying dominant voices, and ensuring quieter attendees have the space to contribute.

Driving Productive Outcomes: Using structured frameworks to guide discussions towards actionable outcomes, whether it is a decision, a plan, or a set of ideas.

Ensuring Inclusivity: Encouraging diverse viewpoints and ensuring all voices are heard, which is crucial for achieving well-rounded outcomes.

Creating a Collaborative Environment: Applying techniques to foster active participation and engagement, promoting shared ownership of outcomes.

Additional Considerations

Facilitators are typically less visible in B2B events than Emcees or Moderators. However, their behind-the-scenes work often lays the groundwork for the success of smaller, interactive elements of the event.

They are often skilled in using structured processes and techniques, such as breakout groups or formats like World Café, to engage participants effectively, even in larger group settings.

Essential Skills

Clarity in Task Management: Ensuring mutual commitment to tasks and outcomes.

Process Customisation: Tailoring methods to meet the needs of the group.

Engagement Abilities: Using various techniques to engage participants and ensure inclusivity.

Conflict Management: Resolving group tensions constructively.

Guidance to Consensus: Helping groups achieve productive outcomes.

Professional Knowledge: Having a deep understanding of facilitation techniques and best practices.

Positive Attitude: Maintaining neutrality, integrity, and optimism.

Adaptability: Pivoting their approach when discussions veer off track or when unexpected challenges arise, keeping the session on target.

Non-Verbal Communication Skills: Reading body language and adjusting their facilitation style to ensure everyone remains engaged.

Effective Questioning Techniques: Stimulating deeper thinking and engagement.

Time Management: Keeping the group on schedule without stifling valuable discussions.

Resources

Professional Certification

Facilitation stands out as one of the only roles in this white paper with formal certification pathways.

The Certified Professional Facilitator (CPF) designation, awarded by the International Association of Facilitators (IAF), is a globally recognised credential that ensures a Facilitator has mastered the art and science of guiding groups to achieve productive outcomes.

Moderator Role

What do they do?

Moderators guide panel discussions, ensuring that conversations stay focused and balanced.

The role of the Moderator: process over content

The role of a Moderator is often misunderstood. While subject matter expertise can be beneficial, effective moderation is primarily about managing the process, facilitating dialogue, and creating a connection between the panelists and the audience.

The ability to guide discussions, ask relevant questions, and keep the conversation on track is crucial, even more so than being a content expert.

What Skills should they have?

Proactiveness: Anticipates questions and audience needs.

Efficiency: Stays on schedule and keeps discussions productive.

Attentiveness: Focuses on engaging both speakers and the audience.

Adaptability: Adjusts to changing dynamics or unexpected challenges.

Clarity: Ensures clear communication between speakers and the audience.

Considerations with Subject Matter Experts as Moderators

While subject matter experts (SMEs) are often chosen to moderate panels due to their knowledge, there are some additional aspects to consider.

SMEs may occasionally focus more on sharing their expertise, which can limit the opportunities for others to contribute. Additionally, their approach might lean towards delivering information rather than fostering engagement with the audience.

Sponsors or SMEs might also have viewpoints or objectives that could influence the discussion's direction. Therefore, it is valuable to assess whether a Moderator has the necessary skills to foster engagement, control the conversation and improve the audience experience, beyond just their subject expertise.

The relationship between the Emcee and Moderator roles

It is also important to consider whether an Emcee can take on the role of Moderator for multiple sessions at an event. Emcees are often well-equipped to moderate, given their experience in engaging audiences, managing discussions, and ensuring a variety of viewpoints are covered.

Whether a Moderator can take on the role of an Emcee depends on their specific skills, as Emcees bring additional capabilities such as maintaining overall event energy, managing transitions, and keeping attendees engaged.

Another key consideration is whether the Emcee should handle all panels, especially at larger events. While they may be capable, having multiple dedicated Moderators can sometimes be more practical, allowing the Emcee to focus on delivering a seamless and dynamic experience throughout the event.

It is often beneficial to choose professional Moderators who are trained in facilitating dialogue, even if they are not subject matter experts. Their focus on process, engagement, and audience experience can significantly enhance the overall quality of panel discussions.

Training SMEs and Sponsors as Moderators

In cases where SMEs or sponsors are chosen as Moderators, training helps them develop facilitation skills, understand the expectations of the role, and focus on delivering an engaging experience for the audience, rather than promoting their own agenda.

Facilitator or Moderator

A simple definition might be that the moderator manages the interaction between the panelists, whilst a facilitator is also acting as ‘the voice of the audience.’

We don’t want you to lose sleep over the terminology, but be aware of the subtle differences, despite your colleagues and clients using the terms interchangeably. Your role will be to ensure that the right skillset is identified, and the right people chosen for the relevant session.

Voice of God (VOG) Role

What do they do?

The Voice of God (VOG) specialised role in event production, providing essential announcements, transitions, and information via off-stage voiceovers.

Though unseen, the VOG is crucial in guiding an event's flow, sustaining professionalism, and ensuring smooth transitions across the agenda. As the unseen narrator, they add structure, clarity, and continuity to the event experience.

Why is VOG a specific role?

The VOG is much more than a disembodied voice. It requires a unique mix of skills and awareness, making it a highly specialised role:

Event Orchestration: Often the 'glue' of an event, the VOG ensures that all elements - from speaker introductions to transitions - flow seamlessly. This involves a precise awareness of the event's timing, agenda, and technical production elements, all managed through their connection with the technical team via a headset. Through this, they receive real-time instructions and run countdowns, bridging the technical and content aspects for a flawless execution.

Expert Timing and Pacing: Perfect timing is paramount for a VOG. They must align with lighting, video, and audio cues, enhancing the event flow rather than disrupting it.

This calls for an intuitive grasp of the schedule, quick sight-reading. (Sight reading is the ability to read or perform something without preparation or practice). The VOG can interpret show caller notes instantly, adjusting their tone and energy level (e.g., maintaining formality for AGMs or adding vibrancy to awards).

Adaptability and On-the-Fly Changes: Events are inherently dynamic, often requiring real-time adjustments. A VOG needs the versatility to adapt their announcements to last-minute schedule changes, technical issues, or directions from the show caller.

Additionally, their role includes filling gaps during the event - providing context or additional information when on-stage presenters are occupied - making them an invaluable support in ensuring a consistent attendee experience.

Voice Technique and Control: A strong, clear voice is essential, but the VOG must also command a warm and engaging tone. This requires fine-tuned voice control, allowing them to deliver announcements that capture attention without overshadowing or distracting. Whether energising the room or providing calming guidance, they bring a subtle presence that keeps the audience focused yet at ease.

Audience Guidance: For larger events, the VOG acts as a steadying guide, offering clear directions, reminders, and introductions that help the audience navigate the experience confidently.

Neutrality and Professionalism: Balancing authority with neutrality, the VOG subtly reflects the event's personality. This blend - being commanding yet unobtrusive, engaging yet grounded - demands a level of professionalism that only comes with experience.

Why the VOG is not always required

Whether a VOG is essential depends on factors like event scale, format, and complexity:

Event Type: Some events, like festivals or exhibitions, have unstructured flows, where attendees are free to explore. Here, a VOG's guiding voice may be unnecessary.

Event Scale: Smaller, intimate gatherings (e.g., workshops, training sessions) may not require a VOG, as hosts or moderators can handle transitions and announcements directly.

Format and Structure: For informal or relaxed events, a VOG may feel too formal, such as during casual networking sessions or small roundtable discussions.

Budget Considerations: Given the specialised skill set, hiring a VOG may be an added expense for events with limited budgets, where transitions can be managed by on-stage personnel.

Technology and Production Requirements: A VOG role requires robust technical support and infrastructure to operate seamlessly with the event's production systems. For simpler setups, a VOG may not be practical or necessary.

When is the VOG most effective?

The VOG shines in larger, more complex events where clear flow and audience engagement are vital. Such events include:

Conferences and Summits: Where smooth transitions and timely announcements are essential across sessions.

Awards Ceremonies: The VOG brings formality and anticipation, introducing nominees, announcing winners, and maintaining the ceremony's rhythm.

Product Launches: Building excitement and guiding attendees through various launch phases, a VOG can heighten the event's impact.

Corporate Events and Galas: The VOG enhances the professionalism and tone of the event, ensuring a polished experience for attendees.

In summary, the VOG role is highly specialised, bringing value through clear communication, seamless transitions, and a cohesive event experience. However, it is not suitable for every event format and should be deployed when its unique skill set meets the event's objectives and enhances its structure.

Cross-Competencies: Emcee, Moderator, Facilitator, Chair, and VOG

These roles share several key competencies, though each has a unique focus that adds distinct value to a B2B event. Understanding these shared skills helps to clarify where the roles complement each other.

1. Engaging Communication:

Shared Competency: All these roles require clear, engaging communication to maintain audience attention and convey complex information effectively.

VOG: Must communicate concisely, often acting as a guide for the audience without visual engagement.

2. Emotional Intelligence :

Shared Competency: The ability to read the room, assess audience energy, and adapt is crucial in all roles, including the VOG, who can adjust tone to match the event's energy.

3. Authority and Control:

Shared Competency: Each role requires authority to manage the event's flow and structure.

VOG: Commands attention and transitions the audience smoothly between segments.

4. Versatility and Flexibility:

Shared Competency: The ability to adapt to unforeseen changes is essential across all roles.

How these roles complement each other

Emcees: Set the tone and maintain the energy and flow of the overall event, ensuring that everything runs smoothly, and the audience stays engaged.

Moderators: Ensure panel discussions and debates are focused, balanced, and insightful, bringing depth to the content of the event.

Facilitators: Lead interactive sessions, ensuring active participation and collaborative outcomes.

Chairs: Maintain the structure, uphold the schedule, and provide a level of authority and formality during event proceedings.

VOG: Works behind the scenes to guide the audience and ensure smooth transitions, coordinating closely with the event team.

Why an Emcee can fulfil other roles

While each on-stage role – Emcee, Moderator, Facilitator, Chair, and VOG - has specific responsibilities, a good Emcee is uniquely positioned to take on any of these roles due to the broader skill set they bring:

Dynamic and Adaptable Skill Set

An Emcee must be adept at communication, emotional intelligence, and controlling the event, making them suitable for moderating, facilitating, chairing sessions, and even adapting to VOG-style announcements if needed.

Broad Perspective and Event Awareness

Emcees have a holistic understanding of the event's objectives and audience, allowing them to step into other roles seamlessly.

Audience Engagement Expertise

Emcees are trained to engage audiences and adjust their style to suit the energy of the room. This makes them ideal for roles that require high levels of audience interaction.

Authority and Leadership

Emcees exude authority and leadership, enabling them to effectively chair sessions or moderate discussions.

Flexibility and Quick Thinking

Given that Emcees frequently face unexpected challenges, they are naturally adept at improvising and handling any situation with ease.

In Conclusion

Events do not just happen. Well, they do, but whether they are engaging, well-paced, and enjoyable is another matter. The difference between a slick, seamless experience and a meandering mess often comes down to who is on stage and how well they understand their role.

Too often, titles like 'host,' 'moderator,' and 'facilitator' are used interchangeably, as if anyone who can string a sentence together will do. The result? Panels that drag, keynotes that miss the mark, and an audience more engaged with their emails than the event itself.

This white paper has laid out why each on-stage role matters, how they differ, and what happens when you get it right. It is not just about having people on stage; it is about having the right people in the right roles - ensuring the event flows, the audience stays engaged, and speakers deliver their best.

Getting this right is not just about making the stage look polished; it is about crafting an event that holds attention, creates connections, and keeps people in the room both physically and mentally. Whether it is an emcee setting the tone, a moderator steering a lively discussion, or a keynote speaker delivering a message that sticks, every person on stage plays a part in shaping the experience.

So, next time you are planning an event, don't just fill speaker slots - think about the bigger picture. Because a well-matched emcee, a skilled moderator, or a speaker who knows how to hold a room isn't just a nice touch; it is what makes an event worth attending.

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Clare Forestier

clareforestier.com

[linkedin.com/in/clareforestier](https://www.linkedin.com/in/clareforestier)

Richard John

realise.me.uk

[linkedin.com/in/mrrichardjohn](https://www.linkedin.com/in/mrrichardjohn)