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Lead2021: The New Playbook for Executive Leaders

INITIAL STEPS FOR CREATING A SPEAKER DATABASE

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Creating a pool of subject matter experts that your organization can pull from will improve and accelerate your search for quality speakers for learning programs and other events.

Sourcing a speaker for your association's events—including chapter events—can be a headache. But put together a speaker database, and your organization will have a vetted list of reliable speakers to choose from. "It's so much easier if you already have a list you've curated," said Sylvia Gonner, CEO of the consulting firm CultureWiz and former vice president of global relations and development at The Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA), where she helped develop a speaker database.

Use these tips to create your own speaker database.

GATHER SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

Start by leveraging your event management team's contacts and resources. Ask the team to round up a list of speakers they know of or have worked with at previous events.

Also consider tapping into your chapter network and asking chapter leaders to recommend any subject matter experts who have spoken at their events. Soon enough, you'll have a pool of credible experts whom your chapter leaders trust to deliver a presentation. When IIA did this, Gonner says, quality local speakers were suddenly exposed to the entire organization.

"Worldwide, everybody was hosting events and utilizing speakers [at IIA]. And these individuals were only being utilized in their geographic area," Gonner said. "So, we asked all of the chapters around the world to give us their best speakers, and then put those in a database for access by all the chapters."

And by reaching out to local chapters, you're amassing a geographically diverse list of speakers with distinct cultural perspectives—especially if your organization is international.

You can look outside of your organization's contacts by putting out a call for speakers on your communication channels. Place a notice in your newsletter or on social media encouraging potential speakers to volunteer to be considered for events.

CREATE YOUR DATABASE

Gonner recommends starting simple. That could mean putting speaker information into a spreadsheet, which can later be transferred to a more elaborate database management system.

IIA put together a straightforward database with Microsoft SharePoint, which allows users to store information and search specific fields of data for relevant speakers. To gather and verify speaker information, IIA asks speakers for their permission to be added to the database.

For each speaker, IIA enters these pieces of information into the database:

- name
- contact information
- general location
- date the speaker was added to the database
- where the speaker is willing to travel
- spoken languages; useful for international organizations
- speaker’s areas of expertise
- which chapter recommended the speaker

Though SharePoint isn’t truly a database management system and isn’t as complex as one, it served IIA’s purpose, as the organization didn’t need to handle complex data relationships.

“You were able to pretty quickly zero in on a person and then go out to them and approach them,” Gonner said of the database. “It gave you many more choices to consider, so it created diversity that might not have been there before.”

To keep your database fresh, reach out to chapters consistently to see if they can recommend more speakers. “If you get passive with this, the database can get stale pretty quickly, and people don’t necessarily think about it,” Gonner said.