



MARK PERL



Why do I need a Master of Ceremonies for my Event?

There are many event planners, professional conference organisers, meetings planners and also a large number of PAs and Executive Secretaries for whom this is a vexing question. Here, we will detail the scope of responsibilities you can expect an experienced and professional Conference Facilitator, or Event MC, to undertake in the lead up to, and during, an event. You'll then be able to answer this question in a way that meets your individual needs.

Once clear on the full breadth of tasks and responsibilities that a professional Conference Facilitator, or MC, shoulders for their clients, you will be better able to decide whether you are happy to leave this role in the hands of an internal, senior manager from within your company (usually an extrovert who is comfortable and confident in the lime light), if you feel you have the time and expertise to fulfil this role yourself, alongside the many other tasks you'll be managing at the venue during your conferences or events: or, indeed, if you would be better served by retaining the services of an external, experienced and professional Conference Facilitator or MC.

It does not help that this largely underestimated role is referred to by several titles: MC, Emcee, Master of Ceremonies, Toastmaster, Conference Host, Moderator, Conference Facilitator, Presenter, Compère etc. It is confusing! Whilst, from a professional's point of view, some of these role titles do have subtle differences in their key focus, for the purposes of this article I will refer to the [Wikipedia definition of a Master of Ceremonies](#).

That being: *'the official host of a staged event or similar performance. An MC usually [makes the welcoming speech and introduces other speakers] presents performers, speaks to the audience, and generally keeps the event moving. The MC sometimes also acts as the protocol officer during an official state function.'*

A little known fact is that the term 'Master of ceremonies' (MC), originates from the Catholic Church and that the office of the Master of ceremonies can be traced back to the late Middle Ages (15th century). The 'Master of ceremonies' is an official of the Papal Court responsible for the proper and smooth conduct of the elegant and elaborate rituals involving the Pope and the sacred liturgy. He may also be an official involved in the proper conduct of protocols and ceremonials involving the Roman Pontiff, the Papal Court, and other dignitaries and potentates. So the title of MC, and the important role to which it refers, has wielded significant influence in ensuring the success of events for over 500 years.



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The Planning Phase

The role of the Conference Facilitator, or the MC, commences prior to the event day itself. There is much more to-it than simply announcing the name and title of the speaker, introducing the topic of their presentation and letting the audience know about refreshment and meal breaks.

Expect a professional MC to block time in their schedule to undertake research ahead of the event day, itself. They will need to acquire a good grasp of the client's business; have a very clear picture of the target audience; be aware of the full running order for the different phases of the day; flag any logistical challenges that the program may contain (such as delegate movements between rooms; the need for relocation to break-away or plenary sessions; group photographs; team-builds etc), which will need to be communicated to delegates clearly and effectively, and which have the potential to negatively interfere with scheduled timings. Additionally, a professional MC will seek to fully understand the specific goals of the event and how the host organisation intends to define or measure what 'success' looks like at the end of it. A professional MC will require a clear grasp of the event objectives so they can be part of the solution in delivering them.

The MC will also seek to familiarise himself/herself with third party suppliers, sponsors, VIPs (both internal and external), celebrities, exhibitors and any key stakeholders, to ensure they are correctly addressed, as per accepted etiquette or protocol, and that such guests are appropriately considered, acknowledged and accommodated throughout the program.

A professional MC will consult with the organisation's senior executives who will play a role in opening and closing the event. It is essential that the MC is aware of what they plan to say, so that the MC doesn't inadvertently steal their thunder with his/her own introductory, or closing, comments. In this way, you guarantee that delegates derive maximum impact from these crucial moments; that the correct tone is set for the event, from the outset, and that the expected event outcomes and takeaways are clear to all participants.

In the planning phase an experienced MC will also seek to receive the scripted introductions for each speaker and an overview of their talk topic. This enables the MC to research each speaker and check that these, usually standard, scripts are:

- relevant to your event goals
- sufficiently attention grabbing to ensure attendees both understand the value of what is to come and are motivated to pay attention
- to answer the question we know all delegates silently ask themselves: 'what's in it for me?'



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The MC will then be able to prepare speaker introductions that will both build up an appropriate level of credibility and gravitas in the minds of the audience, whilst at the same time serving to raise the speaker's confidence ahead of their address.

The MC should also connect with each speaker, individually, to ascertain the essential, three or four, take-away points each speaker wishes to convey to the audience. This will be of significant help to the MC in understanding, in advance, what elements need reinforcing in the recap, once the talk is over, so delegates can receive the maximum benefit.

Once the MC has this detail, in advance, he/she can do several things:

1. create introductions that draw-in the audience from the start and which sets the tone and pace for what is to come
2. plan in advance for effective 'bridging' comments or 'transitions' between speakers, topics, activities and stages throughout the day, so that the event goals remain clear and to prevent any loss of momentum or impact caused by 'winging-it' on the spur of the moment
3. be apprised of any special presentation, equipment or personal needs that speakers may have, so as to avoid any oversights on the day which may either cause delay or disappointment to the speakers or which may cause potential disruption to the event schedule

In light of the obvious importance of this pre-event preparation, and the time required for these tasks to be completed comprehensively, it is advisable to expect, discuss, agree and budget for 'pre-production day' fees with your MC, when you book them. You'll recognise how skilful preparation on behalf of the MC will contribute to achieving a successful outcome for your event (and in protecting your organisation's considerable investment in time and money) so if you find these elements are *not* broached by your prospective MC, during your discussions, it may cause you to raise a mental 'warning flag' with regards to their experience, professionalism or suitability for the role. Additionally, by understanding the true scope of a professional MC's responsibilities, it may help you to motivate for a budget for this role, as opposed to leaving it in the hands of an internal executive who may have good intentions, but may lack the experience to really add value.

The Event Day

A professional MC or Conference Facilitator will normally be with you for a least a day, so expect to be able to call on them for support with any manner of operational issues, without incurring additional cost.



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As a standard, expect your MC or Conference Facilitator to:

- check the presentation equipment in the function/event/conference room
- work closely with third party suppliers such as AV providers, venue catering, venue reception, venue concierge and venue security, photographers, speakers, entertainment etc
- meet, greet and look after speakers, presenters and entertainers in a way which makes them feel welcome and comfortable and which also enhances your brand in their eyes. The speakers are as much your guests as the delegates and it is the MC who acts as their host on your behalf. It will make a big difference to them to be offered the same level of hospitality as your guests (though this is often not the case).
- handle microphone-stand height-adjustments, timeous lapel-mic fitting and the podium refreshment needs for each of the presenters
- drive footfall to exhibitors, stakeholders or sponsor stands
- ensure any promotional collateral displays are tidy and remain presentable throughout
- ensure any promotional give-aways that are to be distributed in the function room are prepared and ready in good time
- professionally handle and resolve the inevitable delegate mishaps
- be flexible enough to seamlessly navigate unexpected operational challenges which may affect the program
- keep the overall event-program schedule to time
- handle all speaker introductions, subject matter summary's, thank-you's and gift giving
- ensure the speaker podium/lectern is never left unattended. Professional MCs remain next to the podium until the next speaker arrives, shakes hands with them and offers a word of greeting or encouragement and ensures they have everything they need, before exiting
- be charismatic, energetic and articulate; and not to pepper their leadership of the program with stumbling diction, poor grammar, slang or 'ers' and 'uhms'
- keep the speakers to their allotted time
- build rapport with the audience and set the stage for what is to come, so the audience know both what to expect and how to react.
- to lead the applause. Audiences are often unsure of when to applaud and when not to. As the de facto 'leader' of event proceedings the audience will readily follow the MC's prompting. By leading the applause energetically, that is how they will respond. In this way, an enthusiastic MC can inject an abundance of energy into your event
- undertake interviews, Q&A sessions or auctions, if and when required
- keep the delegates interested, engaged and motivated to take action
- encourage active delegate participation during sessions
- courteously, but firmly, avoid the hijacking of the many by the few
- stimulate social delegate interaction during the breaks



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In Conclusion

As I said at the beginning: *'there is much more to-it'* to being a competent MC than is, perhaps, immediately obvious. In most instances I find the role of the MC to be viewed as being rather esoteric, with organisers placing huge trust in their MC to *'get it right'* with little input or direction. In fact, I consider the scope of the MC's contribution to be so broad, and so important to the overall success of an event, that when I present myself as an MC to prospective clients, I increasingly refer to myself as an *'Event Experience Architect'*.

By clearly itemising these responsibilities to my clients I ensure they are more aware of what is involved. This helps them to give more precise input and enables us to work closely together to achieve their event goals.

Additionally, by more clearly understanding the role of the MC, or Conference Facilitator, it has the power to make both parties more accountable. It helps event organisers to be more discerning in their selection of MCs, to place more focus on the level of experience they possess and to see more 'real value' in the fees professional MCs command.

Whilst some event organisers will have the budgets to spend between £10,000 and £20,000 on celebrity MCs (such as famous sportspeople, business leaders, media personalities or TV stars) this expenditure is not necessary or warranted for the vast majority of corporate events. Many potential clients are not always aware that significantly less expensive and yet highly effective solutions are readily available outside the domain of the Speaker Bureaus.

Which brings us to the answer to the question posed in the title of this article: *Do you need the services of a professional MC or Conference Facilitator to help ensure the success of your events?*

The only person who can truly answer that question is *you*.

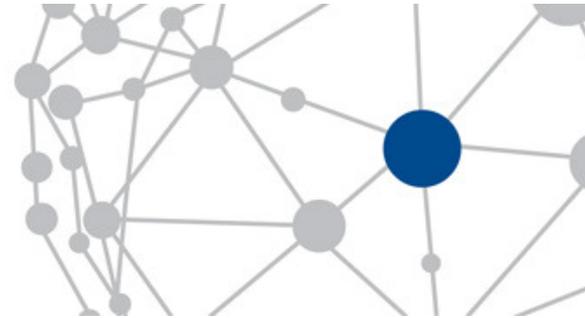
If you feel you have the time, experience, gravitas and self confidence to carry out the myriad tasks as outlined above, whilst at the same time handling the many other demands placed upon you, during the normal operation of your events, then simply fulfil this role yourself.

If you feel it is sufficient to have a member of your management team make simple links between presentations and inform delegates of breaks, then opt for this route, as a no-cost option.

If, however, you recognise the economic outcomes, emotional impact and memory recall that successful events, professionally facilitated, can have on the end client: *the delegate*; then your answer must be a resounding **YES!**



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Your guests are the people who need to leave your events transformed and motivated to take action.

Your organisation, which pays the bill, needs to be assured their investment in events will yield the required return on investment (ROI), often measured in increased productivity, better cooperation, less absenteeism and greater customer satisfaction.

To this end, I believe the best investment you can make towards successfully achieving these goals is to support your event delivery by retaining the services of a professional Conference Coordinator or Event MC.

Taking all of the above into consideration... *I hope you do too.*

Want to discuss Mark's services for your next event?

Call Mark now on 07907 438 454 or email mark@markperl.com for a no obligation chat

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[Mark Perl](#) is a [Training Provider](#), an [International Speaker](#) and a [Corporate Event MC](#). so you can be assured he has the experience and expertise to bring you the advice and guidance you can trust.

Mark is also the author of two books.

[The Impeccable Host](#) is the world's first resource ever written for executives on the interpersonal skills of how to professionally host corporate hospitality events. Packed with practical techniques that can be put to immediate use it is both a training manual and a field guide that takes you through a systematic and linear process to help generate more income from client entertainment, with less stress.

[The Impeccable Planner](#) is focused on the fundamental elements of how to plan corporate events, impeccably. It is aimed at the Personal Assistants and Executive Secretaries who most often organise company events, and it is packed with practical guidance relating to event planning, to prevent them making the same embarrassing, ill-informed, painful and costly mistakes as those made by thousands who have come before. They are [both available in paperback](#) or [on Kindle from Amazon](#)