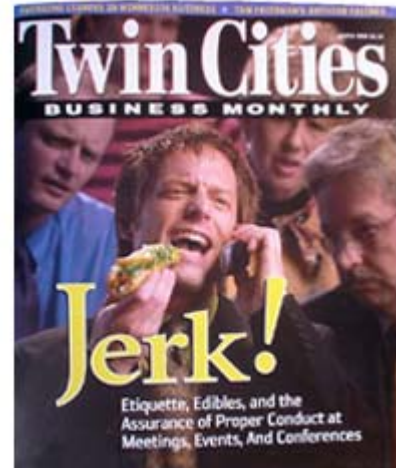




When Twin Cities Business Monthly was preparing their annual “Meetings, Events, and Conferences” issue (March, 2006), they went to industry experts to find out what companies and associations are doing to maximize the effectiveness of the time and money they spend on meetings. That’s why they called Equinox Creative, a meeting and event company in Edina, and they called not once, but twice.

In one article entitled “Annual Inspiration”, they asked Michael Vennerstrom, President of Equinox, for ideas on turning “mundane and tiring [meetings] into marvelous and inspiring” ones. Here are a couple of ideas that Mike gave them:



*“Game shows are a popular way to infuse a meeting with fun. They cost next to nothing to put together, but build on teamwork and reinforce knowledge,” says Vennerstrom.*

*Music is another method that many use to add interest and motivation to meetings. One of Vennerstrom's recent events offers a great example of impact music can make at a meeting. The software company's theme was about the integration of multiple systems. To highlight the message, Vennerstrom put together a band. "First, it was a conductor with one violinist, who played, 'Pop Goes the Weasel,'" he says. "They were joined by a string trio. Then joined by a horn section." After each addition, the group played the melody. Soon, a bluegrass band across the stage took up the melody; then a rock band, and an Irish folk group.*

*"The company wanted to talk about working together, the whole being greater than the sum of the parts," says Vennerstrom. Next, the conductor gave each of the 400 members of the audience a tone bar (similar to a key from a xylophone). He taught them to play Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" – which has only five notes – together in just a few minutes. "For the big finale, we added a background track, a chorus of singers, and created a big production," says Vennerstrom of the inspiring musical number. It got the message across. Plus, he says, "Everyone got to take their tone bar home."*

In another article in that same issue, entitled "Meeting Expectations", the magazine wanted to find out what planners were doing to ensure meeting success and how they measured that success. Again they turned to Equinox Creative, this time to Kathy Felber, Vice President of Operations. Here's what she said:

*To give attendees what they need, Felber uses a combination of pre- and post-meeting surveys. When she is planning a meeting for a company's sales force, for example, she often finds that what attendees want is inconsistent with what a company's management thinks they want.*

*"We don't do too much on the soft issues like food and hospitality," she says. "We ask questions like, 'What are problems that you face? What are the tools you need to succeed? Are the marketing efforts appropriate for the product? Do you feel the advertising helped or hindered your efforts?'" Felber notes that survey information from one year's event can get dated. "There's a lot that can happen in the 11 months before the next meeting," she says.*

*Felber also conducts post-meeting interviews with questions that are similar to the pre-meeting survey. "A lot of them are the same questions with a different twist." she says. "Ahead of time, we ask them, 'What do you want to be told at this meeting?' And then in the post-meeting survey, we ask, 'Did you get the information you needed?'" It can be a good way for event planners to get what they need, too.*

- Excerpted from *Twin Cities Business Monthly*, March 2006 (Vol. 13, No. 8)

Note: Effective with the April, 2006, issue, *Twin Cities Business Monthly* changed its name to *Twin Cities Business*"



Equinox Creative is a full-service meeting and event management company that helps their customers improve the effectiveness of their business message and the return on their meeting budget.

Michael Vennerstrom and Kathy Felber are co-owners of Equinox Creative.



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