Convene Podcast Transcript
Convene Series: Insights from PCMA edUcon 2024

Note: the transcript is AI generated, excuse typos and inaccuracies

[00:04] **Kristi Casey:** In terms of best practices for adult learning, the person who is talking the most is the person who learns the most in a room.

[00:14] **Magdalina Atanassova:** This is the Convene Podcast.

[00:18] My name is Maggie, Digital Media Editor. Welcome to season five of the Convene Podcast brought to you by Madrid Convention Bureau Today. I'm thrilled to welcome back Kristy Casey, education strategist at PCMA for her second appearance on the pod.

[00:37] Joining us as well is Carolyn Ray, learning program manager at PCMA.

[00:42] Both Christie and Carolyn are known for their innovative approach to creating immersive and engaging educational experiences. Hello, ladies. It's a pleasure to have you both on the podcast.

[00:53] **Kristi Casey:** Hey, Maggie, it's great to be back.

[00:56] **Carolyn Ray:** Hi, Maggie.

[00:58] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Welcome, welcome. Let's start directly with some questions and let's dive into the event pillars at this year's edge. So there was power up, build up and skill up. How did the idea of this come about?

[01:12] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah, so they came out of a conversation between Jenna Kurinsky, our graphic designer, and first Chief Marketing Officer Traci DePuy.

[01:24] And they were looking at EdUcon and they capitalized the U in the middle and decided that, you know, a lot of times people were thinking of EdUcon as a mini convening leaders and they really wanted to have its own identity.

[01:38] So making you and who you are and what skills you're gathering central to the event was a very intentional choice. And then as they were talking about, had to differentiate it and they were looking at kind of the segments of the PCMA audience, it became obvious that the next generation of business event professionals were who needed to be served by this event.

[02:04] And so the pillars came out of that and kind of like play off of that. You. So you power up, you build up, you skill up. And then the overall theme is leveling up how we're transforming together.

[02:17] And that's where we took the inspiration for a lot of our education for the, for the event.

[02:22] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yeah, speaking about that, there were a lot of different formats.

[02:25] There were hands on labs, ask me anything sessions with experts, peer to peer exchanges, and so many more. So what was the format that each of you found to be more innovative and heard from attendees as being especially creative?

[02:40] **Kristi Casey:** So I think people really enjoyed the opportunity to be part of the action.

[02:47] And I think that probably, and Carolyn, you can, you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it's, you know, the, the format that they enjoyed the most was actually a surprise format, which was closing keynote where we did an audio experiment.

[03:03] We disrupted what the traditional keynote was going to be where halfway through everyone put on silent disco headsets and then had the shared audio experience to actually see, see what it felt like to create a community and to become connected with other people through these moments of surprise and joy.

[03:22] **Carolyn Ray:** And I think one of the other pieces that made it so different for us was that typically at the end of a keynote, we see people are sitting there low energy and they're leaving a conference where they should be energized on a lower level, although they may be excited about what they hear in the keynote, they're still not energized.

[03:42] So getting them out of their seats and having them move around really uplifted that energy walking out of the event.

[03:50] **Kristi Casey:** I think in terms of stuff that was happening during the breakout sessions, a couple of things that were really popular were we had these demos for Spark that were in the, in the hub.

[04:01] And so they were, Nick Borelli and Meredith Douglas were doing. They kind of alternated demos for advanced users, for beginning users that they had asked me anything at the end of the day where people could kind of drop in.

[04:14] And people really loved the opportunity to understand what this technology meant for them and how to be able to apply it immediately. And actually, regardless of the format, all of our speakers were really coached to focus on what people could take away and what they would be able to apply immediately.

[04:34] We also did a couple of experiments where broke up formats, where if in talking with a speaker during our initial consultation, it felt like they were trying to fit too much into their session, we might break it into an information exchange which is, you know, pretty much a traditional lecture and let that be a shorter time.

[04:58] So, you know, a 30 minute segment, a 15 minute segment as opposed to an hour and then have a part two. So after lunch maybe they have time to think about the ideas and then come back for a hands on workshop where they're actually now taking a real life scenario and applying what the concepts they learned that morning were to something that might apply to them in their work or help them figure out a problem they were working on.

[05:27] **Carolyn Ray:** So, for example, we did a session with John Nan where we had a very content, heavy first portion and then we followed it by an actual tour of the venue space where they could see the actual principles that he was discussing in action and either troubleshoot or reiterate on the spot of how based on the principles that he was discussing, he might do it differently or why this was particularly awesome based on what he was discussing.

[06:01] So being able to see it real life immersed them in that activity.

[06:06] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah. And we really did look at EdUcon, as EdUcon has always had this reputation for being a place where you could do educational experiments. And so Carolyn and I really took that to heart in terms of what we could play with.

[06:22] And that was whether it was on the main stage or whether it was in the body of the. The breakouts.

[06:28] **Carolyn Ray:** I would say the one other format that we discussed that we really weren't expecting when we started this all was we did one format of a session in a game show session was called Fundraising Feud.

[06:41] And we actually took the framework of Family Feud, which is something that all of our attendees are familiar with, and let them live in that game.

[06:53] So applying the concepts that our speakers were using and having our attendees guess, say what the most popular or most successful fundraising options were and really discussing all of those answers as we went through it.

[07:11] So a chance again to be heavily engaged and immersed in the activity.

[07:16] **Magdalina Atanassova:** And I wanted to ask you, those sessions that you kind of broke apart into different sections, was it okay for those that did not attend, let's say the content part, to just attend the second part, would it make sense for them?

[07:31] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah, I mean, I think we coached all of the speakers who. We kind of had these part one, part twos to think about what would happen if somebody just dropped in.

[07:43] So, you know, and I think it also was good for maybe some advanced learners who didn't need the 101 content or didn't need the introduction. Like they got it, they just wanted to go on an experience design audit.

[07:56] Right. Like, so they didn't really want to talk about what the different components were. They just wanted to experience it. And I think that was another way that we were able to serve different levels of knowledge and different levels of learners.

[08:08] **Magdalina Atanassova:** What were the delegate outcomes that were expected of these formats? What was the process of building those?

[08:16] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah. So in terms of best practices for adult learning, the person who is talking the most is the person who learns the most in a room. So when you're programming for adult education, you need to be able to open up opportunities for people to discuss issues and work on them together.

[08:37] That peer to peer exchange is really important.

[08:40] And I think also too, the more elevated your position is, the more you benefit from peer to peer and the less you actually want to be kind of sitting in a technical lecture unless it is something that's very, very new, like you really need that introduction.

[08:56] So looking at that, you know, but there are some things that, you know, you do need somebody just to sit and talk to you. So you can't get rid of that.

[09:05] You know, people do like to have a variety of experts and opinions. So you have that kind of idea exchange with panels, you have round tables and solution storming and all sorts of things like that.

[09:18] But the hands on workshops, I think are really important in terms of being able to apply knowledge. And so for things like data analytics, as opposed to just talking about it, what are some real exercises you can go through and kind of.

[09:34] And figure out how to, how to work on that, or being able to open up your laptop when we're talking about artificial intelligence and doing some of those prompts and seeing what the results are and the variety of results just from the same question in the same room.

[09:50] So that I think is kind of what was behind it.

[09:55] Carolyn, do you have anything that you'd want to add to that?

[09:58] **Carolyn Ray:** I think the thing that we built in was the synthesis at the end of each day to really solidify the content. So we engaged with Beth Surmont and what we included at the end of each day was a chance to sit down and sort of process that information that was received throughout the day.

[10:24] Because you go to a conference and for a lot of attendees it's stimulation overload. You have learned so much information, you have networked with so many individuals, you need a minute to just sit with the knowledge and process it and figure out how you're going to apply it.

[10:44] And so we built that into both days of the program, which I think was super well received in the sense that it was a dedicated time and space.

[10:54] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah, and that's also too backed by neuroscience. I mean, we know that if we want people to be able to remember something, the conference is the absolute worst educational container for that.

[11:08] Because if you cram, you forget things at the same curve, like the same rate that you learned it. So if you space out the learning. Right. So from an educational programming standpoint, for all of you education geeks out there, if you really want people to retain what they're going to learn at the conference, what you want to do is spaced repetition.

[11:32] You want to, you know, maybe have your speakers do some webinars or some blogs or some articles. And we do that, you know, cross platform. We have our speakers inconvenience.

[11:43] So you kind of get introduced to the concept and then you might see them on social media talking about what they're going to talk about. And then you get on site and then you experience what they're talking about.

[11:52] And then if after that you give them a chance to describe what they learned in Their own words that help cement that learning and then continuing to space that repetition where you force them to recall things.

[12:07] So maybe having a post event webinar or a post event article or some kind of gathering to talk about things or check in or an insight paper or a white paper or research, there are all these little touch points.

[12:24] And so the longer you space these opportunities for people to recall the information they picked up, the more concrete their memory becomes. So by having Beth, one of the first breakout sessions was her talking about how to design a conference for synthesis.

[12:43] And then we actually put that into practice at the end of the day, like Karen was talking about, where you could just pop in and just identify the key learnings.

[12:52] And so little touches like that were very intentional. So that, you know, because the key takeaway that we wanted the audience to have was to be able to go back to work and remember what they learned at EdUcon so they could do better.

[13:08] They could. So that it could enhance their experience and make things easier for them or, you know, that they wouldn't forget those.

[13:16] **Carolyn Ray:** Aha moments and giving them access to those Snapsights as well, which were AI takeaways that recorded the content in the room and gave the attendees and participants access to a quick summary of the key insights that were there that they could download easily as well.

[13:38] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah. And then, you know, Carolyn, uploading the PowerPoint presentations after the conference and then they're available on the, on the event app like that. Those are all examples of neuroscience based ways of cementing learning and helping people retain what they learned.

[13:55] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yeah. Hopefully now that they're listening to this, those that were in attendance can also reconnect their favorite moments. I mean, like, yes, I took that away.

[14:03] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah. And. And too, just by the act of thinking about that, that helps them learn. Right. So, yeah, I just keep learning, folks.

[14:15] **Magdalina Atanassova:** I want to put the opinion on what you said, that the person that talks the most in the room learns the most. So. And I think it's.

[14:22] It sounds at the same time so outlandish for the events industry because we're so used to be talked at just. I wanted this highlighted for those that maybe did not pick on it.

[14:34] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah. And it's funny because, you know, I hear a lot of people in the baby boomer generation, sometimes if you have really interactive sessions, there's not everybody, but there's a segment of that population who gets really uncomfortable.

[14:48] They're so used to. They're so conditioned to sitting and listening and receiving information.

[14:53] They're conditioned to feel like presenters don't know what they're talking about, if they're letting about it. And it's really, it's a funny prejudice.

[15:04] And yeah, some people are not great skilled facilitators and that might impact what that experience is. But for the most part, like, I think it takes it. I mean, first it takes courage to allow that audience centric learning journey and it takes a lot of skill to architect it.

[15:24] But ultimately I think the learnings can be a lot more profound.

[15:27] And it's just always funny to me when you know, so. But that's why we do a mixture. That's why we still have some opportunities for lecture based learning because everybody has their preference and everybody has their different tastes and what they're comfortable with.

[15:43] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yeah. Could you tell our listeners more about the opening and closing sessions at EdUcon and maybe how did the idea come about to approach them in such better, unusual way?

[15:54] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah. So our VP of Innovation, Howard Givner and I, at the beginning of the process, we had been talking about mainstage experiences and we really like this idea of the Moth.

[16:09] And for those of you who are unfamiliar, the Moth is a storytelling show where people get up without cards and they just kind of tell stories and they're very well rehearsed, they're not improvise at all.

[16:21] And so, you know, then I started to work with Traci DePuy, our, our CMO and, and flushing out that idea and pitched the idea that, well, what if all the storytellers were from Detroit, which is where we were basing EdUcon this year, and what if all of their stories are about how they leveled up?

[16:46] And then collectively it paints this picture of how this city, which in all of the pre show marketing we were emphasizing this rebirth, this revitalization, this culture of innovation. What if rather than just having the CVB talk about that for five minutes, what if we showed people what was happening by spotlighting some really innovative people and hearing their story and how they're connected and how the community helped them transform.

[17:20] And so that was the idea. So we worked with the CVB to identify a handful of people. And then the other thing that that did is rather than have them come out one after the other after the other after the other, we interspersed them so that we could kind of break up some of that stuff.

[17:40] You always have to have in the main stage, you always have to have your sponsored guests, you always have to have your host city, you always have to have your CEO, you always have to have.

[17:52] So we took these voices and we spread them out throughout the program so that they were bite sized chunks, they were moments in time. But they also broke up all of the quote unquote, commercial messaging that you have to include so that it created a more entertaining experience on a whole.

[18:13] So that was the idea for that opener. And people really, really enjoyed getting a chance to know the city like that, because, you know, you get to visit maybe two or three venues for the opening celebration, for the closing celebration, but you don't always get a real sense of the city.

[18:29] And so it was one way to bring the city into the convention center.

[18:34] **Carolyn Ray:** It also weaved in the story. So for, again, I speak to my own experience of those short bursts, allow me to focus better and bring my attention over into different spaces while simultaneously connecting all of those spaces together.

[18:57] And then bringing in DJ Graffiti, who also kind of wove his message throughout.

[19:06] Really brought that story along and moved it through the show.

[19:10] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah, having the DJ as our MC was so much fun.

[19:16] And it was because normally you have the MC and they come out and they do this and they do that, whatever. But that was something like he actually reached out to me, we have a mutual friend.

[19:26] And when we were had our call for proposals open, I think he had actually proposed something. And I was like, you know, the more I thought about it, the more I was like, why not?

[19:37] If this is an event for the next generation and we want this kind of elevated energy and we're in Detroit, you know, Rock City, and, you know, how fun would that be?

[19:49] And Tracy loved the idea and it really having him there to kind of greet people and set the mood and be the representative from the city and kind of shuffle between things.

[20:02] And then even, you know, when we had community stories the next day, he acted as kind of a moderator for a panel conversation. Like, it was just a. It was a win win.

[20:13] Like it was. It was. That was. Yeah, thanks for bringing that up, Carolyn, because that was a lot of fun.

[20:19] Oh, and you'd asked about the closing.

[20:21] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yes.

[20:23] **Kristi Casey:** So the idea behind that was. So for the. For the second mainstage experience, we also did stories, but the stories were from our community and the focus there was on people who had helped you transform.

[20:36] Because mentorship was something that had merged as a prime concern and issue for next gen. And so the final keynote was our only, quote unquote, traditional keynote. And then we deconstructed it.

[20:49] So bringing in Charlie Todd from Improv Everywhere.

[20:53] **Magdalina Atanassova:** He.

[20:55] **Kristi Casey:** You probably have seen the YouTube videos like Frozen Grand Central Station or no Pants Stay on the Subways. And like these are all these little pranks that he had started doing when he was an improv student in Upright Citizens Brigade in New York.

[21:09] And and so he actually was.

[21:13] We have a lot of like he was doing things in New York when I was coming back from Europe and I remember him doing it and I. And I had friends that would participate in the pranks.

[21:24] And then I was working for a different organization and, and saw that they had a corporate division. They did these MP3 experiments where everyone kind of had this sonic journey and it's synchronized and it just looked like so much fun.

[21:40] And so he was somebody who I'd been aware of for a really long time and I had been trying to work with for about a decade and it just finally came together.

[21:48] And so that was like again, you know, how much fun would it be for everyone to think that they're just going to be there for a keynote? Like, oh, finally, like just like a keynote.

[21:58] And then all of a sudden they're this surprise and now. And now they are the experience.

[22:06] Yeah. And I just felt like that would be a great way to level up and kind of be consistent with the theme and just kind of take people out of their comfort zone in a way that was really fun and joyous.

[22:20] **Magdalina Atanassova:** A word from our sponsor.

[22:25] **Madrid Convention Bureau Ad:** Voted the world's best meeting destination for five consecutive years, Madrid offers an exceptional transport network, breathtaking spaces, world class dining and accommodations, and a vibrant lifestyle that seamlessly blends business with leisure. Make your next meeting Madrileño. Discover more with the Madrid Convention Bureau.

[22:43] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Now back to the program and what was the strategy behind the concurrent sessions?

[22:51] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah. So Carolyn, do you want to talk a little bit? I feel like I've been talking so much. I'm learning so much on this podcast.

[23:00] **Magdalina Atanassova:** You're welcome.

[23:02] **Carolyn Ray:** I think one of the biggest pieces when we were building it was to make it a little bit different and to really focus on the participants learning journey and giving them their key takeaways.

[23:21] What behavior did we want to see them change coming out of the room?

[23:28] And the piece of this that sort of surprised me and it's just sort of a little bit of a segue was the room that we had that was completely standing room and unexpected in a last minute add in was our burnout buster.

[23:47] We could not fit the number of people who wanted to be in that, in that room, in that room.

[23:57] And that says something to me about what our attendee is feeling. And when I look at that, we want to make sure that we're giving them that content but not overloading them.

[24:09] So as we said, we wanted to have really hands on, we wanted to build things that would give every participant the opportunity to get what they needed without directing them through a sort of a funnel.

[24:28] We wanted to give them almost different forks in the road to do. We want to focus on your soft skills. Do you want to focus on your leadership?

[24:36] What is it that this particular individual wants? One of the things that I know, I personally do at a lot of events is I stand in the hall between sessions and I look for people who have this confused look on their faces and you know that they're debating between sessions and go, okay, how can I help you pick the right session for you?

[25:02] And so I think when we're building out that program, we're looking at what are we offering across this time slot and what are we offering that's going to give every single person in the building something for them?

[25:18] A tour, a conversation starter, a workshop, so that no matter what they're feeling in that journey, they've got a place for them.

[25:28] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah, and the strategy starts with data, right? Like we know who the audience is, we know what they enjoyed last year, we know what they said that they want this year.

[25:36] So there's a certain amount that we can lean on in terms of membership surveys, past satisfaction reports, you know, things like the Next Gen Summit that we had at Convening Leaders and some of the issues that dolphin out of that.

[25:50] So all of these things gives us kind of like that need analysis that we need. In addition to that, we have an educational task force that the educational task force gives us feedback.

[25:59] We have the call for proposals and there we get, you know, we had outlined what we were looking for. And so there are people who had aligned their proposals to what we needed, which was a great fit.

[26:12] And then there were also surprises and things that we didn't know we needed.

[26:16] And then there are things that we felt like, you know, as from an educational standpoint, this is what they need to succeed. So then we might have to curate that and develop that.

[26:25] And then, yeah, there were surprises like Robin Shear with Burnout Buster, who was local, and she sent me a query email and then called me, which is not my favorite.

[26:35] I would not recommend you calling people at all.

[26:41] But we had a really good conversation. I happened to have an empty room and it wasn't with like the AV setup she wanted or anything like that, but, you know, it was an empty room and she was local and.

[26:53] And so she popped in and it, yeah, it was an absolute surprise. And it was exactly the, and what was really funny was, you know, as much as we focused on technology and you know, these, these practical skills and design and all of those things that people say they want.

[27:12] What the data shows us from EdUcon for this particular audience is like they must have been going through it because they were really most interested in the soft skills and you know, feeling a lot of burnout and wanting more joy.

[27:27] And so I think that is a really interesting lesson too. Just as you're programming your own events, just kind of like there's a lot of data that you pick up just from the audience behavior on site that may not be something you could have predicted, but it's really important because, you know, we did some of the same things just in terms of like, there was so much response to the burnout at EdUcon that we're like, huh?

[27:58] Well, we bet, like it's got to be even, you know, bigger problem at CEMA.

[28:05] And that may or may not have been borne out. Right. So when you talk to Brian, it was well received, but it wasn't nearly to the level which kind of speaks to maybe it's people who are at that kind of mid level in their career career who are getting squeezed more than people who are leading these teams.

[28:21] **Magdalina Atanassova:** And I was so tempted to ask you, can you really trust what people say they want to hear? Because we've seen it so often that people say they don't know this kind of session and then it's like, no.

[28:33] **Carolyn Ray:** Nobody goes there and then nobody goes to it. Exactly.

[28:36] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah. And I think, you know, Carrie Johnson, who is the Senior Director Of Education, she has a really good strategy in terms of like, you know, she knows, she's been here for a decade, she knows what people go to, she knows what's going to fill a 600 person room.

[28:52] And so when she's looking at what she's programming, she's looking at like the things that people respond to and that they go to. And then she's building, she's putting those things in rooms with a little space to grow and then there's room for experiments once you know that you have those kind of cornerstone content places and.

[29:12] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yeah, and I'm so not surprised about the burnout session because that's what we are seeing in both the salary survey and the meetings market survey that we're running.

[29:22] I mean, people are just, you know, tired.

[29:26] **Carolyn Ray:** Yeah, well, you and I look at the sessions that were very highly ranked and it's things like psychological safety and things like, you know, overcoming influence and overcoming resistance for persuasion.

[29:52] You know, we're looking at things like emotional intelligence and.

[29:58] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah. How do you manage difficult people? How do you convince your boss that they're wrong?

[30:04] How do you protect yourself? How do you protect your team? How do you keep yourself from just spinning out? That was what I think were the highest rated things at EdUcon.

[30:14] **Carolyn Ray:** Yeah.

[30:15] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Oops.

[30:19] **Carolyn Ray:** And also, you know, the other spot that was really quite highly rated was also around accessibility.

[30:25] So that seems to be something that was very high on people's minds.

[30:30] Beyond the binary. You know, the things that.

[30:33] **Kristi Casey:** Oh yeah.

[30:34] **Carolyn Ray:** Are emerging in our day to day life that we're focusing on more heavily seem to also really get a good turnout.

[30:45] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah. These topics that certain elements are kind of politicizing stateside. Right. Like they want to take education about accommodations and about inclusion out of businesses, out of schools. And what I thought was really interesting was that it made me.

[31:05] It gave me a little hope because as business event professionals, we need everyone at our events to feel welcome. We need everyone at our events to feel like they belong there and that we want them there.

[31:21] And so some of this weird political rhetoric about, like that's anti DEI or woke or whatever, like what they're missing is they're missing the point that if we're going to be good neighbors and good stewards and good co workers, like, we need to think about these things.

[31:38] And so it was really nice to see that those sessions were so popular and so well received because it is so incredibly important. Important that as professionals we don't get regressive about those topics, that we keep moving forward and we keep improving.

[31:57] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Oh yeah, we're putting people together so we need to understand people to do that successfully. Christine, last time we discussed the Next Gen summit and the executive leadership Summit that took place at convening leaders.

[32:11] Were these formats continued at EdUcon in any way?

[32:15] **Kristi Casey:** So, yeah, so the way that it showed up at EdUcon was there was in the inside papers the findings. Between the Executive Summit and the Next Gen Summit, there was a disconnect.

[32:26] There was a lot of advice that the executives were giving the next gen professionals, like take stretch assignments and put yourself out there and then the next gen for like, with what time, with what resources, like how?

[32:40] Why? And so what we decided to do was we created a breakout session called Intergenerational Exchange. And we had people discuss mentorships and how to create like what, you know, what did the generations need to learn from each other?

[32:58] How could they help each other? And so that was a Co created session between me and Tats with Mail and Tamela Blaylock, who was actually one of the mentors who got a shout out during the second main stage experience.

[33:11] And the three of us kind of led this peer to peer exchange where people identified the things that were kind of keeping them up at night and the things that were troublesome.

[33:22] And then in the second part, we kind of let them move to these different working groups and identify potential solutions. And so the takeaways for that were captured by Spark, which was great.

[33:37] And we had some really fascinating combinations. And so in terms of the demographic makeup, we had about 30% Gen Xers, 30% millennials. I think like 10% baby boomers. And then the rest of it were next gen.

[33:51] And so, like in one of the conversation groups, there was this woman who was like, I want to retire. I want to retire so bad, but I don't know how to prepare pair my team.

[34:03] Like, I can't just go away.

[34:05] And right. I'm, you know, like a lot of, a lot of business event departments, like, there are a lot of one person teams. And so she was trying to figure out how to set people up for success and how to do a knowledge exchange.

[34:19] And so there was a millennial who was like, I want your job and I will sit down and, like, help you figure out how to create your succession plan. So the two of them sat down and outlined how Baby Boomers could work with Millennial to create a transition strategy.

[34:34] And it was like. And so those kinds of dynamic exchanges were really exciting. And we're going to look at the Executive Leadership Summit and the next gen are going to come back in like a similar kind of way for convening leaders.

[34:52] So stay tuned because it is a conversation that we want to continue to have. It is thought leadership that we think is really important. And we're looking at ways to kind of democratize it.

[35:03] So it's less about being exclusive invitation only, and more about how do we harness the smartest and the brightest people in the room.

[35:12] **Magdalina Atanassova:** I just love that you don't have to struggle with your own problems. You just have to say it out loud and somebody will jump in and help.

[35:20] **Carolyn Ray:** That is something that we also built into the program is we had a solution room. [35:25] We had a, you know, using the power of crowds to unlock your blocks. And basically you could go in and throw your challenges up on the wall and have a conversation and say, hey, I can't figure this out, but maybe somebody else in this room can.

[35:46] And taking advantage of the People who are in the circle with you, whether they're coming from the same group or they're coming from a completely different space, is where you come up with these fantastic solutions.

[35:59] And that's part of what this conference and networking opportunity is about.

[36:05] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yeah. And here speaking about psychological safety.

[36:08] **Kristi Casey:** Right.

[36:08] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Because I feel that's a general thing in the industry where people are so afraid of sharing their struggles. So not to lose face, kind of. Because event planners should know everything and have a solution for everything.

[36:22] But that's not the case. So I just love that you had this at EdUcon. It's very cool. And Carolyn and also Kristi, I know you both work on it, but how did you approach data analysis at EdUcon this year?

[36:37] **Carolyn Ray:** Part of what we do is after all of our surveys come in and we're reviewing all the. I'm looking at trends in formats and I'm looking at trends in topics, and one of the things that we did for EdUcon specifically was broke out by session type as well.

[37:06] So whether it was a tech lab or it was a demo or it was a tour, we were really looking at what formats were resonating and giving that the opportunity to really shine through.

[37:24] Because it is hard to compare a tour to a breakout session, the response is going to be completely different. They're going to be different audiences.

[37:34] And so even though we were limited in the data that we were able to collect, parsing it out that way allows us to see more trend lines and allows us to see more areas where for success, we also are able to look at the app, the app data, and what people are adding to their schedule and when they're adding it to their schedule.

[37:59] Are our attendees making their choices the day that the app comes out, or are they waiting until the full schedule is released? Or are they waiting until the night before or while they're on the plane to figure these things out?

[38:14] And that tells a story about how we need to share the information as well.

[38:21] So I think that's really the key to what we're looking at, is what trends we can see that indicate shifts in attendee behavior.

[38:32] Obviously, when we look at our ratings, I do tend to go through and remove outliers. You know, when I see a comment that is, oh, the room was too cold on a breakout session.

[38:44] So really trying to isolate, if I can, the content based feedback.

[38:52] I'm truly sorry that you didn't dress for the event, but we need to, we need to really focus on what's. What's at the core here, Christy. When you did this sort of higher level analysis.

[39:04] Was there anything that, that you focused on specifically?

[39:07] **Kristi Casey:** When you look at the data, you can tell which instructors actually said, hey, give me feedback.

[39:15] **Carolyn Ray:** Absolutely.

[39:16] **Kristi Casey:** Open up.

[39:18] Because there were some things that were just like, maybe there was a couple people who gave you a 5, but like no data whatsoever, or you got a 1 and a 2 and then you got fours and then you got, and then there's no comment.

[39:31] And so when I was communicating the post survey feedback to the speakers, there were a couple of times that I was like, hey, if you want more information, you really need to ask people what they think and encourage them to fill out the post event survey because, you know, that's how you get better as an educator or as a, as a speaker is to understand what resonated with people.

[39:57] I think I also like to look at, and I, and I don't have a complete view of this yet, but look at how many people rsvp, right? How many people added to their calendar versus how many people showed up versus how many people stayed.

[40:12] And, and you know, like Carolyn said it was scanning was optional. So we don't get a real sense of that. You know, we try to have monitors in the room who are saying, oh, there were 98 people in this room, there were 50 here, there were 200 here.

[40:28] But with something like, we used Qlik for Sema and I, and I think that is, that data is very valuable because everybody's badge, as it passes the door frame gets counted.

[40:40] And so now we know, all right, this many people added to their schedule, all right, 70% of the people who said they were going to show up, showed up or 25%, whatever it is.

[40:52] And then we can see how long they stayed in session. And then like you can even see. All right, so the people who walked out, was it a salesperson? Okay, well, they were probably taking a call or they, you know, had a meeting they had to go to or whatever.

[41:06] Versus like did a bunch of event marketers walk out? Okay, we probably have a problem.

[41:11] So, so, so, so that's how I like to look at, I look at, I like to look at the pattern of behavior and that kind of consumption, right? Like, what do people need?

[41:20] What were they paying attention to?

[41:23] And I know you'll get into talking with Brian a little bit more, but, but what was really nice is when Carolyn and I sat down and looked at that data for SEMA and we're like, oh, people stayed in the room.

[41:33] We did a good job. High five, you know, or, or These people like never went to a session. They just hung out and had coffee and talked the whole time.

[41:43] **Carolyn Ray:** You know, the other piece that comes that's really interesting in having that accuracy in those numbers is the ability to weight the averages.

[41:53] And why I say that is it's not something that we historically had done before, but when we looked at, it's really hard to compare the popularity of a session that got two ratings to the popularity of a session that got 72 ratings.

[42:13] So is one of those fives in calculating the average more valuable or less valuable than the other?

[42:21] And so as we start collecting more data and getting more visibility on the numbers of the people in the room, we can assign weights to those scores and go, yeah, this actually was not only really popular and really well received, but the feedback is statistically relevant.

[42:42] **Kristi Casey:** And then also too, there's the whole question on whether or not a satisfaction survey is even worth anything. Because absolutely, if you survey them right afterwards, what they say is going to be very different from what they'll say two weeks from now.

[42:59] You know, in terms of like whether it was relevant or whether they could use the information or. And the questions that we ask, it's like, you know, did you like this session?

[43:09] What does that really tell you? It tells you that you had a charismatic speaker who you didn't zone out on like, and it doesn't really tell you much else. So I think, you know, there's a, there's a whole session and series of sessions that we could give on, on how to actually survey and what's relevant and, and so the data.

[43:27] So that I think is also something.

[43:29] **Magdalina Atanassova:** That I look at.

[43:29] **Kristi Casey:** It's like, what are we asking and how are we collecting the information?

[43:33] But I do think that, you know, from being there, from being in the room, from walking around. One of the things that I did as kind of like an additional kind of qualitative data collection was I asked all of the in room stage managers the best sessions, the worst sessions every day and why.

[43:55] And so just them being able to observe the behavior and who had command of the room, who was kind of struggling.

[44:07] That also gives us a really good sense of who we'd want to bring back, who works well with this audience, what the audience might need next time.

[44:15] And that is not something that we're capturing on a forum.

[44:20] **Magdalina Atanassova:** This, you mentioned that this is a general thing we should be aware of about the post event survey. It was one of the sacred cows in our July August issue that was mentioned.

[44:33] It's something that we have to Rethink in this industry.

[44:38] **Kristi Casey:** I have a friend who is known for kind of shaking things up educationally in the industry, Jeff Hurt. And he brought me in to speak at ASAE. They have like a Next generation education event and had me do like a whole session on surveys and how to actually get more relevant data and create something about how everything we're doing in terms of education is wrong.

[45:04] So those are always my favorite things. So it's kind of fun. I always feel like the subversive things I used to do are getting more and more mainstream. Dream.

[45:14] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yeah. But speaking of all that, because you mentioned a couple of interesting things like when people were adding things to their calendars on the app and behaviors like that, was there anything that surprised you that you were like, oh, okay, we did not know that this is happening like that?

[45:33] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah, I don't know. I mean, as you're looking at the data, Carolyn, is there anything that was like, had a ton of RSVPs that you're like, what?

[45:42] **Carolyn Ray:** I mean, there's always, there's always that session that you.

[45:47] You see the RSVPs are going. And you know, it's because the speaker was heavily promoting their session in advance.

[45:54] So we are seeing. We did see a few speakers who are absolutely outstanding at promoting their session and getting engaged and pre engaging with attendees.

[46:07] But then we see sessions that are, in our minds, amazing and the content is super well developed and super exciting, but it doesn't necessarily resonate in the marketing of it.

[46:22] So that I found a really interesting thing because there were some sessions that I thought would get way more attention just based on what we saw and how it was developed, and they didn't necessarily get it.

[46:38] But then those speakers who really worked to cultivate the audience that they needed in the room had a very different presentation. I was also very surprised by how many people just didn't make their schedules at all.

[46:56] There's that, you know, you think when you've got a group of planners, we are planners by nature, but we're actually just not for the worst at all.

[47:09] **Kristi Casey:** We're the ones who don't read the note before you go. We like show up and just ask people questions. We don't read any of the stuff. We don't like, download the app until we're on site.

[47:18] If we download it.

[47:20] **Carolyn Ray:** If we download it.

[47:21] **Kristi Casey:** If we download it.

[47:23] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Well, there's the burnout and the tiredness and planning for your own event versus planning to attend an event.

[47:31] **Kristi Casey:** Right, right.

[47:32] **Carolyn Ray:** So nap pods at the next event.

[47:36] **Kristi Casey:** Napoleon.

[47:37] **Carolyn Ray:** Yeah, just like little Nap pods for power naps.

[47:41] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah.

[47:42] **Magdalina Atanassova:** So having the nap pods as potential for convening leaders 25 was there.

[47:49] Can we expect anything, any changes to the formats, having in mind the results that you got now from EdUcon?

[47:56] **Kristi Casey:** Oh, I think, I think the biggest thing you'll see that'll be different at EdUcon next year is I think we focus so much on the next gen attendees. We forgot that there are team leaders who also bring their teams.

[48:11] And so for EdUcon next year there will definitely be a dedicated track for those team leaders so that people do feel like, hey, I'm at this level.

[48:23] There's executive level education for me because I don't think we necessarily had that. And I think also too we were kind of in between launching and analyzing and creating educational content around several different research initiatives that weren't really ready for EdUcon.

[48:42] And so what we were missing in terms of content were some of those research based sessions. And so that I think will also make a comeback at EdUcon next year.

[48:51] And those are I think the two biggest changes that we'll probably see and.

[48:56] **Carolyn Ray:** Likely some more carrying on the trend of more hands on learning.

[49:03] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Interesting. I like that. And the tough question, if you had a chance, what would you do differently?

[49:09] **Kristi Casey:** I think I would have put a little bit more research based education in and I would have thought about those team leaders and kind of what their learning journey was going to be.

[49:22] That's what I would like to do differently, which is I think why it's going to play out next year.

[49:27] **Carolyn Ray:** And I think on my side, better identification of the Personas for each session.

[49:37] Who is this for?

[49:39] To take away that element of.

[49:42] I came in because I thought this was for me, but really it's a lot more basic than I was expecting.

[49:48] So I think better identification there is something that I could work on.

[49:51] **Kristi Casey:** For sure.

[49:52] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yeah. I think that's so important at events sometimes so hard to figure it out based on description only. So that would be very good.

[50:02] **Kristi Casey:** Especially now so many descriptions are being written by AI.

[50:06] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Oh yeah.

[50:09] **Carolyn Ray:** And just individual interpretation. Right. You know what? I think I read something accession description with my own biases in place. So I assume when I'm reading it that it's going to be at my level.

[50:23] I don't necessarily assume that it's going to be at a different level.

[50:27] And so I think just clarifying that is going to be very helpful.

[50:32] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Oh yeah, for sure. Was there anything we didn't address and we should mention before we finish?

[50:40] **Kristi Casey:** I would just challenge people who are programming education to do something a little differently. I think, you know, one of the things that we also did is kind of part of our strategy was I hate theater style seating.

[50:54] I hate it. I hate it, hate it, hate it. And I understand why it happened because you're trying to maximize the space and cram as many individuals in a room and that's the most efficient way of doing it.

[51:04] But even with theater style seating, you can still curve it. You can curve it around the screen, you can fit just as many chairs in there if you curve the seating and it makes it so much more friendly and inviting.

[51:15] And so when I was looking at the room sets, I really wanted audience centered seating in all of the rooms.

[51:22] **Carolyn Ray:** And we did play a lot with that.

[51:26] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah. And so, and so when we were playing with that, that also then opened up the option to match content and presentation styles to the room set. And so we had asked in the call for proposals, you know, what's the ideal room set for the presentation of this material and did our best to kind of match people to.

[51:50] So if it was group work, then yeah, are people around small tables? Are, you know, if it is, you know, an information exchange, like, how are they seated? Like, you know, we've really worked with people on their, on their audience engagement strategy too for each session.

[52:07] But I just, you know, I know audience engagement, it's been a huge trend on the top of business event professionals minds for years and like, you know, okay, how can you do it?

[52:18] Gamification?

[52:20] Well, like at the most basic level, you do not need high tech tools. You just need audience centered ceiling. And that sets up the expectation that you're going to be engaged, you're not going to be sitting back and just tuning out and walking into a room.

[52:36] **Carolyn Ray:** With rows of chairs that, you know, you're going back to the lecture hall of school. But you know, you suddenly put people at a table or on couches or you know, in different layers.

[52:51] We, you know, we had some high tops, we had some cafe tables, smaller groups, bigger groups. It changes the dynamic of the room entirely.

[53:00] **Kristi Casey:** Yeah, yeah. And that's, that's what I would add is just, you know, stop having the boring, awful, uncomfortable places that you expect people to engage and learn in. So bl.

[53:18] **Carolyn Ray:** So general recap of that. Avoid the blur.

[53:27] **Magdalina Atanassova:** I like that for an end. It's an important lesson.

[53:31] **Kristi Casey:** You're welcome. You are welcome. PCMA. My contribution.

[53:39] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Well, thank you both so much for this conversation. There were a lot of nuggets for those that are really into programming education that matters and changes behavior. So really huge. Thank you for making the time being on the pod.

[53:54] **Kristi Casey:** Thank you Maggie. It's a pleasure.

[53:56] **Carolyn Ray:** Absolutely my pleasure.

[54:01] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Remember to subscribe to the Convening podcast on your favorite listening platform to stay updated with our latest episodes. We want to thank our sponsor, Madrid Convention Bureau. Learn more about how to make your next meeting Madrileño at esmadrid.com/mcb. For further industry insights from the convene team, head over to pcma.org/convene. Stay inspired. Keep inspiring. And until next time.