Content comes in all shapes and sizes

So you've got the venue, the keynote speaker, some screens, lights and a sound system, but what do you have to do to really engage the audience? What is today's secret to a successful conference or live event?

Geny Caloisi investigates . . .

Organising a live event is no-longer about getting a bunch of people together in a room and having someone at the front talking to them. Today's events are multi-dimensional, colourful and fun. They entice people to participate and provide a rewarding experience. This is thanks in part to AV technology being more readily available and widely used, but it is also because of the growth in video content usage.

Angela Law, director at consultancy company Everysense, works with creative agencies on video and event production; she has seen the tendency to use video content grow in recent years. One of the main reasons for this is that it allows a more flexible and easy way to leave a lasting message in the participants' minds. Law says that her creative clients are constantly looking for technologies that will "value add" to what they are offering.

"Whether a company is trying to give some internal or external comms, the biggest driver is to get people involved and contributing; make them feel included," says Law. "Events are more interactive, people participate in shaping the solution of how things will be implemented. Companies need to learn to draw from people's views, knowledge and experience."

Nick Terry, director at Top Banana, a specialist in global leadership and management events, believes that what you need is to touch the audience's hearts, bringing strategy to life. "At Top Banana, we produce a mixture of video, audio, animation, PPT and keynote, together with specially chosen music to help emotionally engage with content - a barrage of the senses," explains Terry. "Often we also plan and plot lighting sequences to complement and exaggerate what is on screen or due to appear."

Steve Quah, head of events at Twentyfirst, says he has seen the use of video on events growing by 20 to 30 per cent in the past couple of years. This has in part been helped by the recession. Quah explains: "With the credit crunch and budgets being looked at, there is more emphasis on screen content because companies don't want to spend so much on the staging. It also provides better value - instead of a complicated set you can have clever, animated background for screens." He adds that companies are also now looking at 3D content to keep their audiences hooked.

For its events, Twentyfirst uses tools such as nVision, a web-enabled reporting application that offers business intelligence technologies to gather information on what participants say and do. It also uses Dataton Watchout to manage multiple projectors, or other display devices like videowalls and plasma screens.

A typical event for Twentyfirst has a budget of around £150,000. Quah noted that with AV technology being a lot more accessible and people being more savvy about what they want, the rise of video content and video usage will only grow stronger. "More customers expect full AV sets because they also see it on TV," he says.

Terry agrees: "We need to be much more creative with the environments, as effective communication isn't two-dimensional. The move from single screen to multiscreen and extreme wide projection, LED and moving sets helps, but we are at times restricted by budget, which sometimes also restricts creativity."

Budget might restrict some crazily creative ideas, but creativity is still at the centre of any production. The key to bringing a plan to life is to link the creative and the technical early on.

Above, top right: Angela Law, director of Everysense and (below) Nick Terry, director of Top Banana.