

Speaker Management 101

Using Event Technology to Manage Your Conference Presenters



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A woman with long dark hair, wearing a yellow sweater, is sitting at a desk. She has her hand to her chin, looking thoughtful or concerned. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an office or library setting. The overall lighting is dim, with a dark overlay on the image.

5 Big Problems With Speaker Management



How the right technology can help event planners manage speakers better.

There is a lot of frustration with managing speakers. But speakers themselves aren't necessarily the problem. In fact the tools we're currently using are the real issue. Email is disorganized, spreadsheets are clunky, and desktop folders for each individual speaker are hard to share with your colleagues, with your third party vendors, and with the other tools you rely on for a successful meeting.

Something really exciting is happening right now in the meetings industry. Technology is catching up with the times and solving problems every single day.

Managing speakers doesn't need to be so unruly. Event management software, and speaker management software in particular, is a new way forward. It's a way to help speakers and meeting planners become TRUE collaborators. It's a way to bridge the divide and fill the gaps.

So... Let's take a look at how this simple technology can transform the way you collaborate with your speakers.

Problem #1:

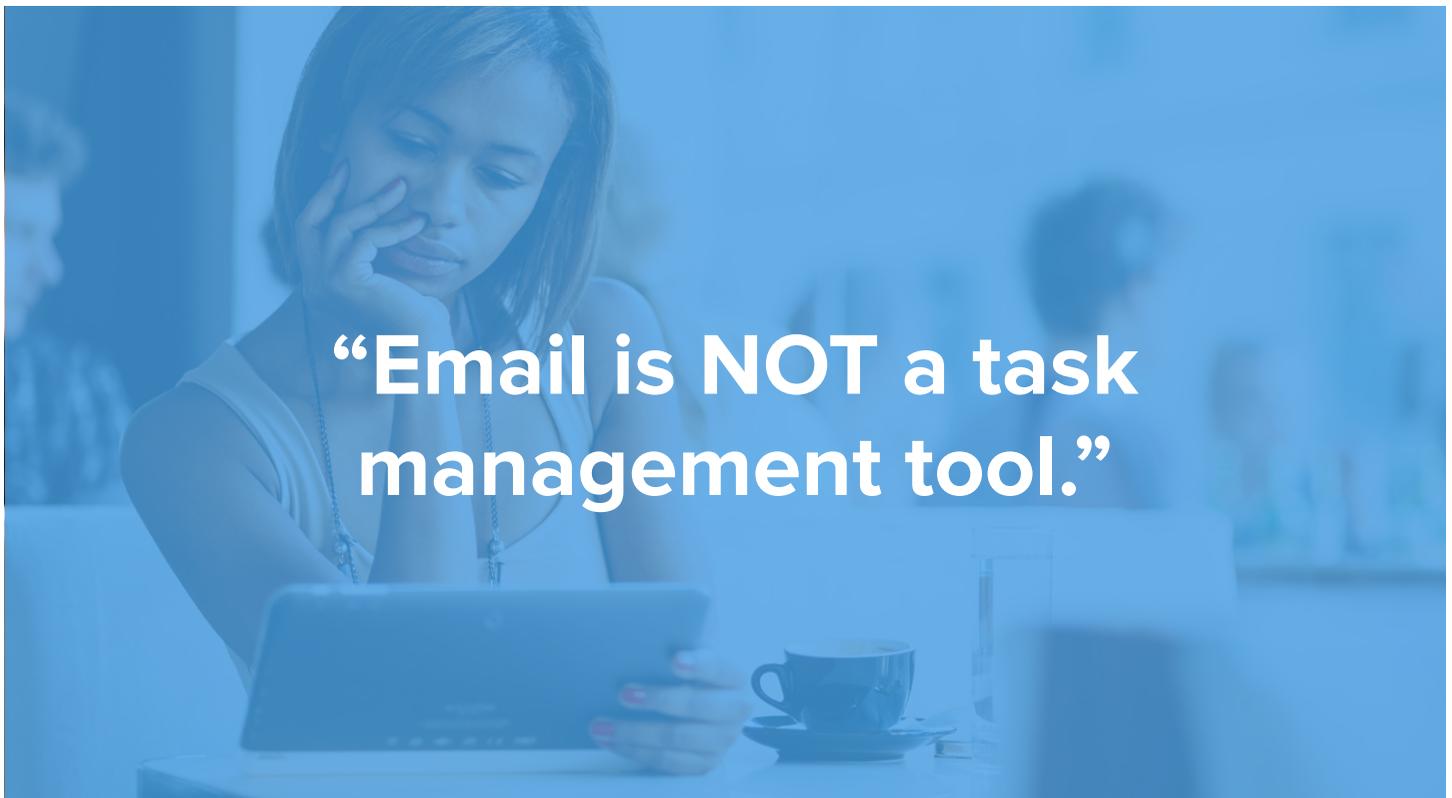
Managing speakers through email is a nightmare.

Email is a great tool for communicating quick, easy-to-follow information. It's also great for sending high-level stuff that people need to file away.

But email is NOT a task management tool. It's not well-suited for asking people for a huge checklist of files or information and keeping track of whether they've sent you everything you need.

And the number of emails people are getting everyday is going up. A recent study from technology marketing research firm, Radicati, shows a consistent 7% growth of B2B emails sent per day over the next three years.

You may be requesting one piece of information per email from your speakers – a photo, a bio, their presentation slides or disclosure forms. That can be 10+ emails when all is said and done, and that's only for one person. The flipside is that if you end up requesting all that information in one email, it's likely that email will be filed away and forgotten.



“Email is NOT a task management tool.”

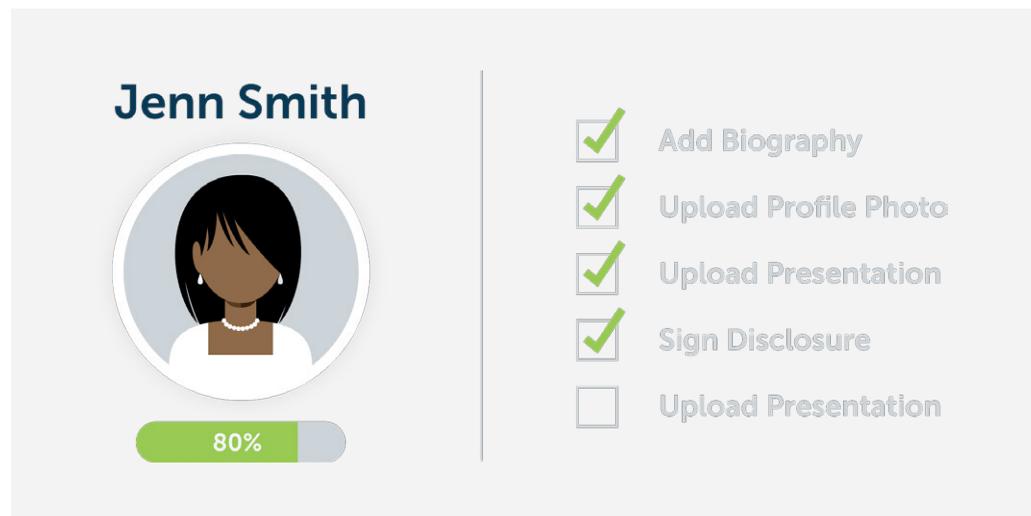
"The number of emails people in general are getting everyday is going up... [Radicati] shows a consistent 7% growth of B2B emails sent per day over the next three years."

Solution #1:

Custom task lists with speaker management software.

Speaker management software however allows you to define what you need from your speakers: photos, biographies, session descriptions, disclosure forms, presentation slides, and so on. You can build a customized task list based on YOUR needs.

Then, right from the same system, you can send out emails to custom lists based on who has submitted, who hasn't, how many tasks they've completed, etc. The speakers simply click the link you've sent them, instantly log in, and submit one piece of material at a time.



This does two things: (1) It allows speakers or their assistants to easily visualize what they have left to submit and breaks it down into small tasks that they can easily complete, and (2) it allows you to track who has submitted their materials and who still needs to in a well-organized database.

Chances for speaker compliance go up, speakers have less emails to clutter their inbox, and you're more organized.

What happens when a speaker reschedules? Or needs to be replaced?

Problem #2:

Keeping track of all the materials speakers send is time consuming and stressful.

The way most meeting planners are doing things now - collecting files and information through email - is very disorganized. When a speaker sends you her picture or presentation, what do you do with it? Create a folder on your desktop? What if you have 100 speakers? That's 100 folders! It just doesn't work.

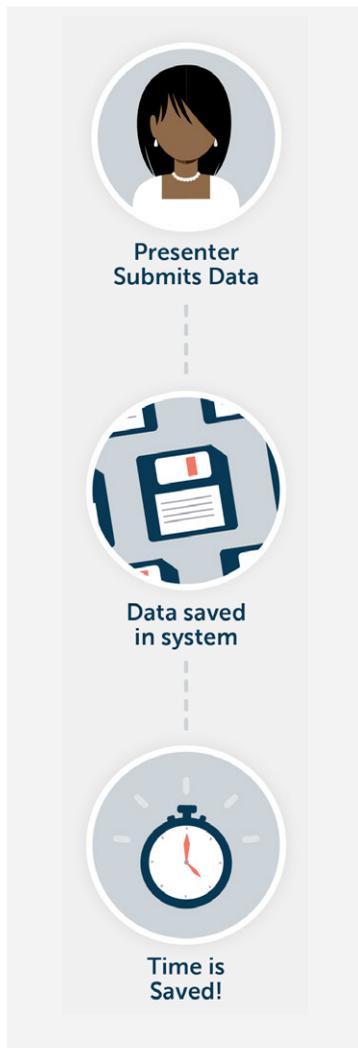
When you need to bring all this information together for your website, printed program guide, or to send out to other third party vendors like graphic designers or your app company, email is not the way to do it. Email cannot automatically compile and distribute data. It just wasn't built with this functionality.



Solution #2:

Let speakers upload everything into one system which acts as a database where you and other admins can access everything.

The great thing about speaker management software is that everything speakers upload or enter into the system on their end is stored for you in one big database. The database is cloud based, so no data is crowding up your servers and it remains safe and secure through a service like Rackspace or Amazon Web Services.



If your speakers are recurring presenters, their data is saved so that next time they submit they simply have to confirm that all the details they entered last time are still correct. This saves them a lot of time inputting data and uploading materials, but it also saves you – the meeting planner – a lot of time too.

Increased compliance through a system like this gives you the peace of mind that you won't have to constantly hassle speakers for the data you need. It also saves you time because you can allocate your resources to much more pressing issues about your event.

Most speaker management systems come with a downloader tool that allows you or your vendors to download presentations and other important information from one place. This tool also will also allow you to automatically change file names based on criteria you define.

Say, for example, you're working with an A/V company that uses a very specialized naming convention for presentation slides. Something like Session-Speaker-Room. This ensures that they are displaying the correct presentation in the correct room at the correct time.

If your speakers are sending you emails with the title of their presentations, it would take you countless hours to change those. With something like a downloader tool however, you'd be able to quickly mass-edit all these files names instantly to fit the proper format.

“How easy is it to change your schedule or your brochure?”

"[Speaker Management software] includes really great tools like a editor drag-and-drop schedule tool that's a bit like Google or Outlook's calendar."

Problem #3:

After speakers send materials, building/editing the schedule through a spreadsheet is impossible

What happens when a speaker reschedules? Or needs to be replaced? What about when a speaker wants to update their biography or session description? How easy is it to change that on your schedule or brochure that attendees are going to use? Do you change it in the spreadsheet, send it to the graphic designer or IT team, and wait?

It's a tough problem to have. If you've already printed your schedule for attendees, you'll have to include leaflets that let them know of any changes, which - to be honest - just complicates things.

Solution #3:

A schedule tool that is instantly updated everytime a speaker submits something and lets you drag and drop sessions

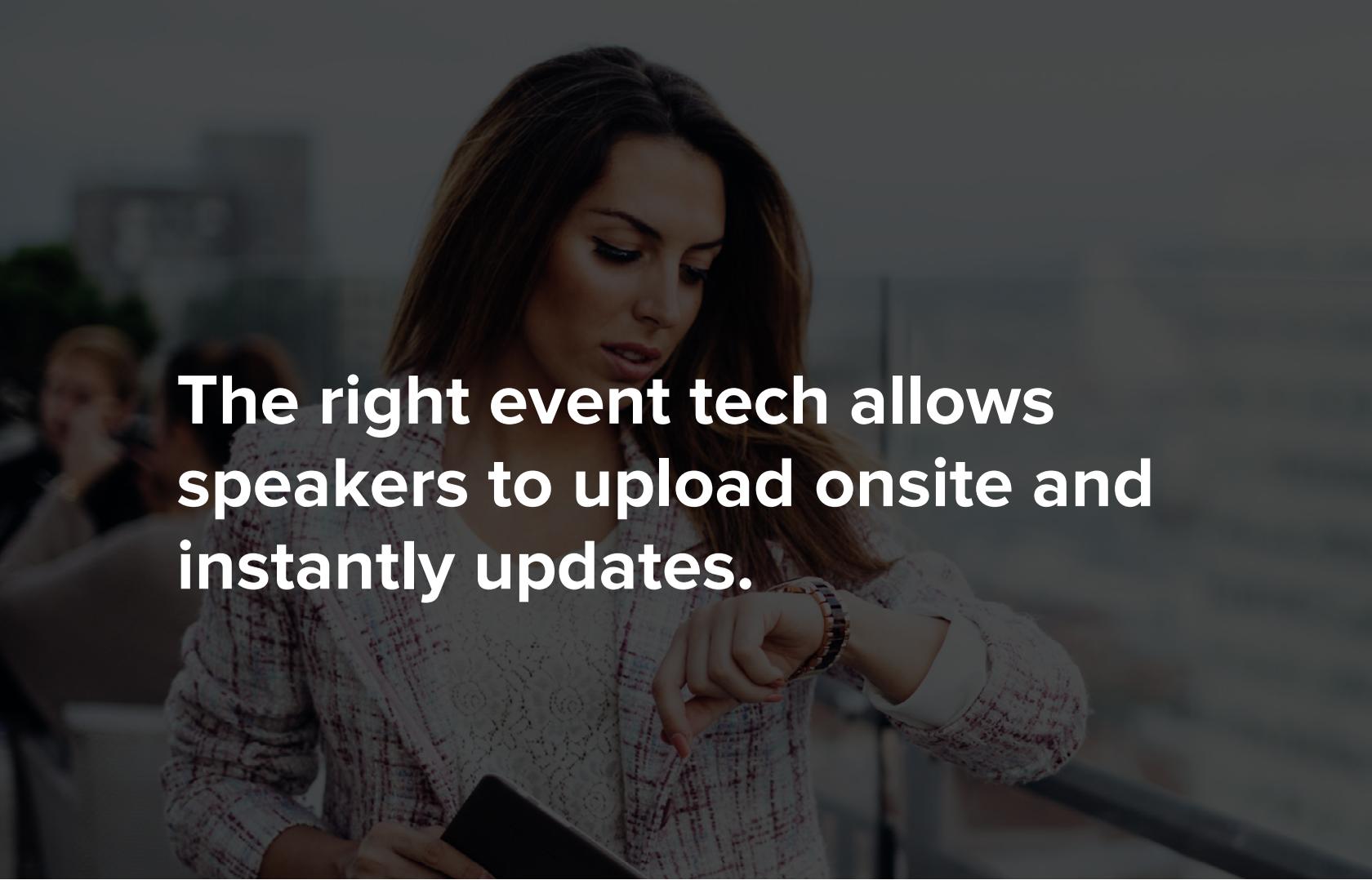
The cool thing about speaker management software is that it includes really great tools like a WYSIWYG editor drag-and-drop schedule tool that's a bit like Google or Outlook's calendar. You can easily move sessions around, change session details, and remove or replace sessions completely. If you're using an online brochure, itinerary planner, or app, these changes show up instantly.

Speakers can also log in at any time and update their own biographical details, which also show as instant updates on your attendee engagement products.

There are other tools included with speaker management software too. All of these let you "massage" the data that your speakers submit. They save you time managing complicated tasks like checking whether case titles are correct, reviewing learning objectives and disclosures, and proofing presentations. The limits of speaker management software are vast, and the amount of time and resources it will save you and your team are huge.



“If you’ve already printed your schedule for attendees, you’ll have to include leaflets that let them know of any changes...”



The right event tech allows speakers to upload onsite and instantly updates.

"[Last minute changes are] possibly the most frustrating thing about working with speakers. You ask and ask for their presentation slides, but they never deliver."

Problem #4:

Speakers wait until last minute to upload materials

This is possibly the most frustrating thing about working with speakers. You ask and ask and ask for their presentation slides but they never deliver. Then they track you down onsite, an hour before their presentation, frantically explaining they need to update their slides for A/V.

There is a problem with asking speakers to upload early though: many of them want to supply your attendees with the most up-to-date information. A good speaker will include statistics just released this morning, or weave something about your event into their presentation.

This means they care about your attendees, so you better not push back or show your frustration, especially if they're a volunteer speaker.

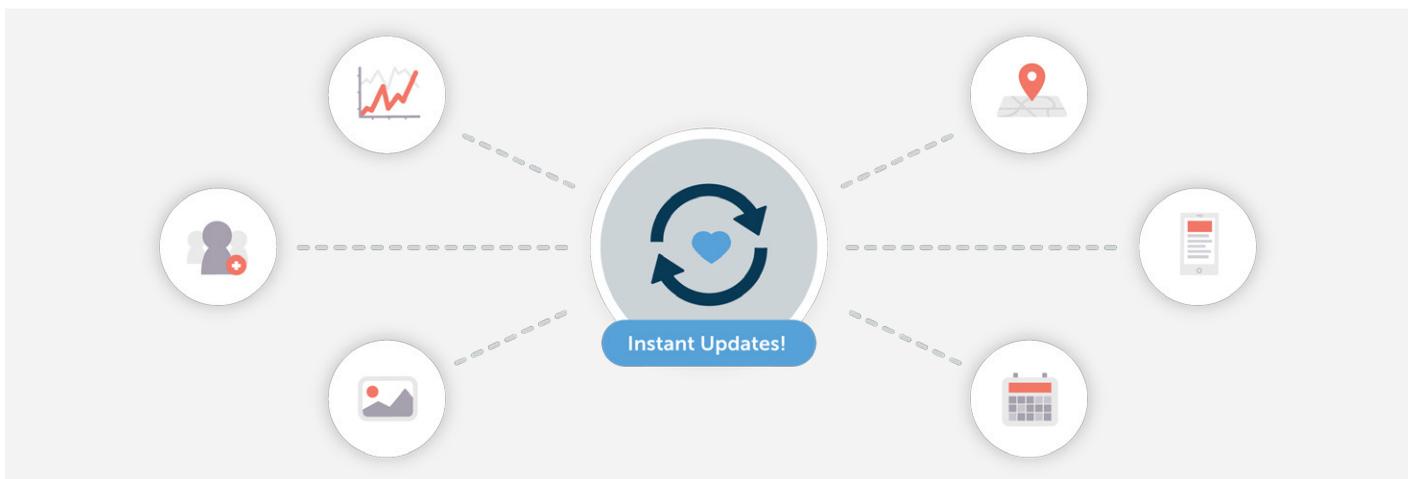
Solution #4:

Let them upload last minute. The right event tech allows speakers to upload on site and instantly updates your digital signage, website, and app

Luckily this isn't so much a problem anymore. Technology has come to the point that everything can be updated at just about any time and not cause any problems.

A/V companies are now aligning with new software that gives meeting planners and speakers access to instant updates. Speakers can check-in to the speaker ready room and upload the final versions of their slides right there onsite.

The best part: it doesn't even matter if the WiFi is shotty or not. Here's how it works...



The speaker management software that you use to manage and plan your conference is repurposed to be used in conjunction with a custom, hard-wired server that's provided by your A/V company. When a speaker submits their final presentation to the system in the speaker ready room, it's pushed out through the network to display wherever it needs to be. The presentation is then sent to the production queue so attendees can access the latest version of the slides too.

This type of onsite presentation management will push the PowerPoint to the correct room and will queue the slides in your speaker management software for processing. Once the presentation's processed and approved, your attendees will have the most up-to-date version in their hands.

This same system allows you as the meeting planner to update session details and pushes those changes to your events' digital signage.

Problem #5:

Speakers don't upload materials AT ALL

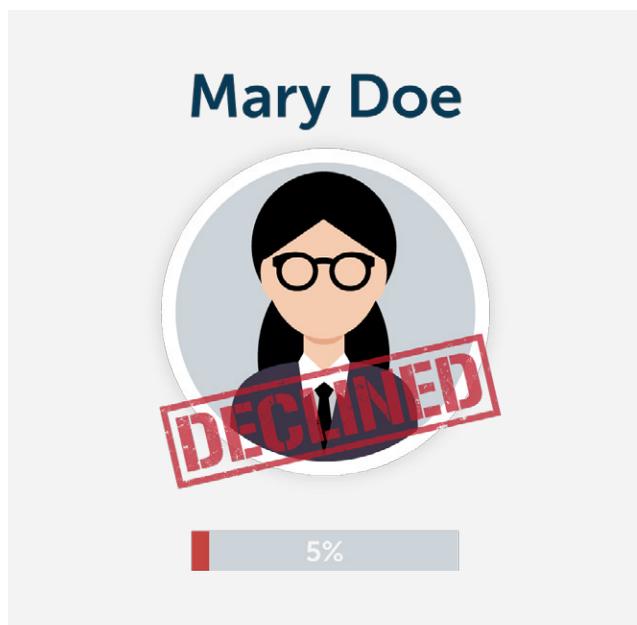
Even if good speakers often upload last minute, there are still some that don't upload at all. Sometimes it's a case of copyright, which is fine (and can be disclosed in the speaker management software), but mostly it's a lack of effort.

The worst part about this? When a speaker fails to upload their presentations or handouts, you as the event organizer lose out on content and your attendees lose out on valuable information that they paid for. Nobody wins.

Solution #5:

Play hardball. Don't allow their session description and bios to go live online and in your app until all tasks are completed

One of our clients had a simple solution to increase speaker compliance across the board. They decided they wouldn't allow speaker biographies to go live on their site until every single task was completed, including the presentation upload. Same thing if they didn't meet the deadline.



Speakers of course could log in and edit their biography or session details at any time. They just needed to have something in beforehand.

But if they failed to complete their tasks on time, this meant attendees would see the session details, but no one would be given credit for them. That's a BIG incentive for speakers.

In fact the client achieved nearly 96% compliance 6 weeks before their event. SIX WEEKS!

This worked well because it incentivized the submission process. A speaker doesn't want to be forgotten or to show up to an empty room.



“Play hardball. A speaker doesn’t want to show up to an empty conference room!”





Final Thoughts

Speakers can definitely be a lot to manage. But we have to understand their busy schedules and their workflows. We have to understand that trying to have them submit data to us through email just doesn't work. This is a two way street we're walking. We as meeting planners are simply using a broken process.

Luckily event management software – and speaker management software in particular – has come a LONG way. It has made it easier than ever to collaborate with our speakers.

And at the end of the day, that's what we should strive to achieve. Speakers are the lifeblood of our conferences. We should treat them like partners and work WITH them, not AGAINST them.

About CadmiumCD



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CadmiumCD has spent the last fifteen years building technology for educational conferences and meetings. With an all-inclusive line of products and services, CadmiumCD strives to ease the conference planning and management processes for event organizers. Their fully integrated system includes abstract collection, exhibitor and speaker data management, attendee accessible websites & floor plans, mobile event applications, proceedings distribution, and A/V production.



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