

# WEDDING INDUSTRY PANELS

## *Best Practices*



## WHY A PANEL?

A panel, in many cases, can actually be an effective format for a presentation- especially if you have primarily hosted keynotes in the past. When done well, it leaves an opportunity for diverse perspectives and ample interaction with the audience.

## THE CHALLENGE

It can't be stressed enough- a panel may seem low effort from the exterior when in fact, they do tend to pose more challenges than a standard presentation.

- Uneven participation from panelists
- Lack of structure
- Lack of time management with the wrong moderator
- Preparation issues
- Redundancy of points + ideas
- Increase in AV/Tech issues (more people= more AV= higher odds of errors)

## FIRST THING'S FIRST

### DEFINE THE PURPOSE AND TOPIC

Clearly outline the objective of the panel discussion and choose a relevant and engaging topic. The key is to ensure that the topic is broad enough to allow for meaningful discussions among the panelists but specific enough to avoid wandering off-track (which happens much easier than you think!)

## SUGGESTED TOPICS

- Trends + Current Affairs in the Wedding Industry
- Future of the Industry
- Team Building + Leadership
- Tech Implementation
- Best Practices for Business + Growth

## REMEMBER: VARIETY IS KEY

Choose panelists with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and opinions related to your intended topic. The goal is to bring unique perspectives to the discussion and to keep things interesting for the audience.



### QUICK TIP:

As much as a speaker has the power to bring in registrants with their reputation, so too do panelists. Yes, you'll want to consider their expertise and speaking abilities but also bear in mind how much they could be considered a draw for the event.

## HOW MANY?

The number of panelists can significantly impact the effectiveness of the session. The ideal number tends to be 3-4 panelists plus the moderator. Some best practices to consider:

- Bear in mind manageability- Yes, you want variety but if you have too many speakers, it's difficult to manage the discussion
- Consider the time available- Assess the total time allocated first. If you have a limited time frame, having too many panelists will lead to rushed discussions and limit the opportunity to engage with the audience.
- Size of the space- You'll want to be mindful of the size of the venue and expected audience. An intimate venue calls for a smaller panel. You'll also want to consider how much space is allocated to the panel itself- how many panelists can you realistically fit?
- If you decide to stick with 3, consider having an alternate at the ready in case someone has to cancel at the last minute.

## GO LOCAL?

It makes sense to have local panelists, especially for the sake of budget. At the same time, you run into a number of challenges that may not be obvious at first, including:

- Audience disengagement due to familiarity with panelists and lack of new insight
- Risk of favoritism with more popular local panelists
- Limited networking opportunity for attendees who hope to get to know speakers from outside their area

The best way to overcome this is to bring in a mix of local and non-local participants. If this is not feasible, consider area professionals outside of your industry- be it a panel for media or tourism.

## EXPECTATIONS OF THE PANELISTS

When hiring panelists, it's essential to share expectations from the onset so everyone is on the same page. Work must be done prior to arriving on the day of the panel- which is all the more reason an honorarium should be considered for their time spent on the presentation.

***Expectations may include-***

- Providing any background + information to help the moderator formulate questions
- Meeting with the moderator + panelists prior (even virtually) to review the format and discuss the
- Q+A to establish a flow and avoid redundancies
- Studying the questions prior and having answers prepared
- Providing visuals in advance, if necessary, for the Deck, to help support responses
- Staying on topic + on time
- Actively engage with the audience
- Avoiding self-promotion



## THE MODERATOR

A great panel moderator plays a crucial role in ensuring a successful and engaging panel discussion. They act as facilitators, guiding the conversation, managing time, and creating a dynamic and respectful atmosphere.

### WHAT MAKES A GREAT MODERATOR?

- Knowledgeable on the selected topic
- Experience running a panel
- Strong active listener
- Effective time manager
- Encourage rich + meaningful discussion
- Ability to engage with the audience

### WHERE CAN YOU FIND A GREAT MODERATOR?

Professional industry speakers are often a natural fit for moderating since they already have many of the built-in skills to be effective. You may also want to reach out to area Masters of Ceremony and DJ's to gauge interest- they spend many weekends in season engaging with large crowds and sticking with a schedule. It's a natural fit!

### EXPECTATIONS OF A MODERATOR

When hiring a Moderator, you want to lay the expectations out immediately so they understand their role and the work that needs to be done to make this a success. With that, the Moderator should always be paid because there's quite a bit that needs to be done in advance to ensure it goes well. This includes-

- Researching the panelists in advance to understand their expertise and background
- Identifying key discussion points- breaking down the panel's topic into themes to serve as the foundation for questions
- Create a mix of thought-provoking, balanced questions that challenge the panelists to think critically and offer nuanced answers
- Sequence the questions logically to ensure a smooth flow of conversation
- Anticipate and ask follow-up questions live during the discussion



## IS A PRESENTATION DECK NECESSARY?

A presentation deck is not necessary for a panel, but many find that it actually can serve as a helpful visual aid to support the discussion. A deck can help maintain structure by introducing the moderator and panelists and then listing questions on each slide thereafter.

In some instances, panelists may want pre-selected images and graphics available to help support an answer they have planned for one of the questions.

If you'd like to have the panel seem more conversational, then a slide deck can be minimal, simply included to maintain the visual branding of the event. It can simply include:

- A title slide
- A slide introducing the panelists
- A transition slide to lead into the questions
- A final slide with contact info for the panelists + potential lead magnet

# THE PREPARATION

## CREATING THE QUESTIONS

- Sequence the questions logically with the flow in mind
- Assign the questions so no one overpowers the conversation
- Be mindful of time constraints

## IS A REHEARSAL REALLY NECESSARY?

I suspect 90% of panels in the industry do not practice together prior and it shows. It's typically not evident until someone experiences a well-practiced panel, and then the difference becomes painfully clear.

A rehearsal prepares both the moderator and panelists a number of ways, including-

- Getting a feel for speaking styles
- Avoiding overlapping content
- Smoother transitions
- Familiarity with format
- Time management

Typically, it's not realistic for everyone to come together live to discuss prior. If that's the case, then consider the following:

- Ask the moderator to create a Loom (or equivalent) to send to the panelists to walk them through the format/flow of the event
- Having the questions outlined and assigned 2-3 weeks prior in a shared Google Doc
- Schedule a virtual call between the moderator and panelists, with the understanding that everyone has reviewed both the Loom and questions and are ready to discuss their responses.

## THE DAY OF THE PANEL

Like all presentations, you want to make sure everyone arrives early and does an AV check. Your setup will ideally be either a living room set or a podium paired with a table and chairs. Bar stools should be avoided at all costs- they are awkward to sit on for long periods of time and typically don't photograph well.

Test all mics in advance and make sure the AV contacts is in the room when you start to ensure there is no mic feedback. Have your moderator test the slide changer prior and have a timer set for the panelists so they can keep an eye on it.