

Onsite Assessment **In Action**

3 Real-Life Examples

Curious about onsite assessment, but not so sure whether your meeting, incentive or expo really needs one? Here are three examples from the recent adventures of the Maritz Design Studio to show you how an onsite assessment can help you revitalize, energize or maximize your event.

1 Diagnosing a Sick Event

Sometimes Design Studio's experts find themselves solving a mystery like Dr. House in the TV series House. One organization reached out to us because they had a sick exhibition hall...and not in the good way. Attendees were avoiding the exhibit hall and sponsors and exhibitors were left questioning their investment.

THE OBJECTIVE: Get to the Bottom of The Disease

Design Studio conducted an Onsite Assessment focusing on uncovering the reasons why the exhibit hall wasn't performing. Our team converged on the event for a day and a half. We interviewed attendees, talked to exhibitors, immersed ourselves in the experience and observed everything. Walking around and watching the attendees, we came across the cavernous exhibit hall. It was basically dead: exhibitors were standing around with no one visiting their booths and no sense of community whatsoever. (Ironically what we heard in our dialog with attendees and exhibitors was that they wanted greater community.)

THE OUTCOME: Miraculous Recovery

Design Studio recommended a strategy for transforming the exhibit hall that would create mutually beneficial opportunities for networking and learning among attendees, sponsors and exhibitors. The client took the transformation strategy and used it to guide their production partners in delivering the experience. When it was implemented the following year, it was an instant success. The exhibit hall became a hub of activity. The atmosphere was noticeably more relaxed, peer-to-peer and egalitarian.

Not surprisingly, we found that more vendors wanted to participate than ever before and return the following year. In addition, satisfaction scores and attendance both went up and today the event is dramatically healthier.

2 EVEN Sizzling Events Benefit from Scrutiny

Design Studio was asked to do an Onsite Assessment of a highly-popular event that drew over 24,000 people each year—not to solve a problem, but to help them perform even better.

THE OBJECTIVE: Go Find What Friction Points Exist — If Any

We sent a team of three designers to the event to observe. While onsite, the team uncovered a number of opportunities, the biggest of which were the long lines that left attendees cold. By mingling with the masses in the registration line, our team received a powerful primer on the emotions that the long waits evoked in attendees. You didn't even have to ask them. All you had to do was just look at them to understand: no one likes feeling lonely and bored while they're standing there wasting time.

It was an emotional dip in an otherwise stellar event experience, and Design Studio saw that the solution would be emotional as well. Recognizing that lines are inevitable in all events of this size, they took a cue from Walt Disney's theme park strategy and focused on ways to engage and entertain attendees while they stood.

THE OUTCOME: Recognize the Needs of the Individual Among the Masses

The following year, event organizers were guided by an initiative to take the pain out of the wait. Design Studio provided a library of recommended solutions that the client could use throughout the event. The client's favorite, and the one attendees loved the most, was the simple experience of an ice cream cart, dishing out designer flavors and making attendees feel the love all along the way.

Design Studio recognized that this challenge didn't require a big budget...just some purposeful and intentional idea. Sometimes that can be all it takes to reset emotions and transform an experience.



3 Moving an Event from Status Quo to Altered State

Onsite assessment can bring clarity and focus to middling events that aren't 100% stale and aren't highly successful either. Organizers of one such event came to us with worries that they weren't growing. They had some theories, but internally they couldn't agree on how to move forward. What aspects of this venerable event should stay? Which should go? And most importantly, how could they reinvent their event to appeal to the next generation without alienating their loyal attendee base?

THE OBJECTIVE: Help Event Organizers Get Out of Their Own Way

The Design Studio designed a custom engagement for this client that included an Onsite Assessment as part of it. The in-the-moment interviews and unvarnished observations we received were used to validate the findings from the attendee Design Study performed during the first phase of the engagement—and more importantly, to dig deeper into the challenges that the qualitative research revealed.

The observations and recommendations from the Onsite Assessment were also instrumental during the Design Lab phase, when the Design Studio and client team collaborated to redesign the event. The recommendations from the Onsite Assessment covered everything from the learning sessions and receptions to the registration and exiting experiences. These insights proved to be invaluable. They helped us easily brainstorm ideas and inspired changes that included: launching the event with a futuristic keynote, enabling audiences to respond digitally and hosting a closing reception to ensure attendees stuck around until the end. And the answers received from the Onsite Assessment gave event organizers the justification (and courage) to make bold, brilliant moves like killing the time-honored awards gala in favor of a panel discussion with the winners.

THE OUTCOME: The Focus and Impetus to Move Forward

As a result of the event's redesign, there was a significant increase in participation for individual elements across the board. After setting a fast and futuristic precedent in the general session, every key indicator picked up the pace: The expo floor had more traffic and education participation rose to a new high of 60%.

There's simply no substitute for being at the event listening to and interacting with the very people who determine an event's success. Are you ready to hear how your guests really feel? Reach out to the Design Studio team and let's talk about how an Onsite Assessment might be just what you need to elevate meeting performance.

