



It's All in the Theme: How to Select a Theme that Will Enhance Your Event

When themes seem to go bad, 99.9% of the time it's not the theme's fault. They only "go bad" when mismatched with their function. It's similar to choosing socks—you wouldn't couple gorgeous, forest green, thermal knee socks with high heels, nor would you select hot pink fishnet stockings to slide into ski boots.

There's far more to a theme than meets the eye. Listed below are seven specific functions that a theme can serve. The key? Choose the function of your theme before choosing your theme.

Seven Theme Functions:

1. Create a Rack to Hang Your Hat On:

The function of this theme is to serve as "the rack" on which to hang your overall conference message—the identifying catch phrase or rallying motto. For example, the focus of one conference was entirely on "quality." While this could have been a potentially dry topic, they chose a catch phrase that provided a very colorful theme: "Trek to Quality and Beyond," a Star Trek theme. This provided the "rack" on which to hang all of their advertising, invitations, programs, breakout sessions, signage, etc. Trekkies and non-Trekkies alike enjoyed this lighthearted and creative use of a theme.

2. Feature Your Destination:

This function is more obvious. When in Rome, do as the Romans do. When in New Orleans, go for a Mardi Gras theme. When in Hawaii, a Hawaiian theme is delightful. And when in New Mexico, consider a Route 66 theme.

3. Transport Guests to Another Place:

The function of this theme is to transport your guests from Padukah, Kentucky, where your event may actually be, to a more exotic, far away destination. Consider, for example, a Parisian theme at The Moulin Rouge, or a Venetian theme titled, “Ciao, Venezia,” or a pirate theme in the Caribbean, ‘Ahoy, Mates!’

4. Transport Guests to Another Time:

Transporting guests to a time in the future or past is a fun way to celebrate a variety of events, including anniversaries. If your company or association gathers for a 40th anniversary, the theme can be based in the 60s when the company or association began. For example, imagine a Woodstock or Sergeant Pepper’s theme. For 100-year anniversaries, a theme that takes you through the decades is exciting. One company’s president used to be in a band in the 70s, so they chose a Studio 54 disco theme. Basing your theme on the movie *Back to the Future* allows part of the evening to transport guests to the 1950s, then beam them into the 1980s. No matter what time capsule you choose, you’ll want it to have flexibility. If only one time period dominates, it will inevitably alienate those who can’t relate to that time.

5. Honor Your Guests:

These themes place 100% of the attention on your guests, who become the “stars.” Consider these example themes: “Here’s to the Winner,” “Hats Off to You,” “A Night at the Oscars,” “The AT&T Academy Awards,” “The AOL Walk of Stars,” or “Simply the Best.”

6. Give License To “Blank”:

The function of this theme is usually a directive for that specific event: “License to Party,” which can be a spy theme, or “License to Chill,” which can be an island, Jimmy Buffet theme. This type of theme announces the intent of the event, like giving license to share this special evening with your spouse or license to network, etc.

7. Just For Fun/No Particular Reason:

When your theme doesn’t need to serve any of the functions listed above, you can select a theme just for fun: a Broadway theme, underwater theme, Hollywood theme, sports theme, fantasy

theme, country theme, motivational theme, and so on. The key to selecting a “just for fun” theme is that it not pigeonhole your event the entire time. It works best to establish the theme at the outset. Your entertainment should support that theme for the early portion of the event, then have the freedom to include the variety that will keep everyone engaged all night long.