

SEPTEMBER 2021
VOLUME 98 • NUMBER 9

Convention South

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PUBLISHED BY:
KENILWORTH MEDIA INC.
PO BOX 18888
NORTH HOLLYWOOD, CA 91615

breakout session: Tess Vismale, CMP, DES

Chief Event Executioner, iSocialExecution, Inc.



By Charles M. Cornell

Tess Vismale, an independent planner based in Atlanta, has been well established within the events industry for more than 30 years. Her resume encompasses many accolades and accomplishments, including co-hosting the Event Tech Pull Up Podcast, serving as chief event executioner and event technologist for iSocialExecution, Inc., and acting as a live event associate with ExecOnline. Vismale also has been a tech expert with DAHLIA+Agency and a stage manager for TEDxAtlanta. She recently took part in *ConventionSouth's* online Transformative Events Series, sharing her insights on event tech essentials.

"I'm a big proponent of being inclusive in thought, mind, and deed. You must be intentional about your works, your words, and your dollars. We need to make choices and be aware about who we're doing business with."

— Tess Vismale, CMP, DES,
Chief Event Executioner,
iSocialExecution, Inc.

TV: Absolutely. Tech rules our world, and your technology choices impact your entire event. Our industry was a bit slow to adapt to tech, but it's a must now. We can't just rely on IT. The event technologists are strategists who understand how to enhance the quality of your content. We need this role established now, but I'd say at the very least by 2022. You can't not have it. If your tech breaks and you don't have a contingency plan, it's critical. Levels of communication need to be in place. You should never walk into an event without a plan of how you want it to be. If people relied on the simple ways of communicating more—human to human—we'd be better off, seeing technology as a tool that gets us where we want to be.

ConventionSouth (CS): How did you evolve from an event planner into someone as technically proficient you are today?

Tess Vismale (TV): When I was younger, I worked with my sister while she managed the tech side of a hair care event. Watching her produce that was my introduction to the industry. I later worked for Macy's Special Events and did fashion show production. My love of tech developed by managing the chaos behind the scenes and ensuring the front of house looked beautiful.

CS: How has careful planning helped you avoid potential disasters?

TV: My experience taught me how to see the big picture and streamline the process. You need eyes and ears on the ground. You need a point person, a hawk that walks the room. With virtual or hybrid events, it's even more crucial. You need someone who is nimble enough to work that event in real time.

CS: You are a strong proponent of event technologists. Can you expound on that?

CS: What new opportunities have been created by the past year's pandemic?

What have they taught you about the industry?

TV: I think it has created more collaboration and partnerships and made things less competitive. We lean on each other more now and do referrals back and forth.

I'd like my industry to flourish and be sustainable. That requires looking outside to solidify the business aspect of what we do, so we won't have the rug pulled out from under us the way it was. If we were more solid from a business perspective, I don't think we would have fallen quite as hard.

CS: What inclusion trends are you finding in the industry, for women, people of color, and the LGBTQ community?

TV: I've seen so much. I'm a big proponent of being inclusive in thought, mind, and deed. You must be intentional about your works, your words, and your dollars. We need to make choices and be aware about who we're doing business with. It's important to show that we can work together, even if it's just having a conversation with people to educate them. There's a lot of positivity happening, because of active listening.

CS: You were recently named as a judge for the Event Technology Awards, coming up in November in London. What qualities will you be looking for in those who stand out in the industry?

TV: What I always look for is innovation and how that takes place in the category compared to where they are locally. What's on their roadmap for the future—what do they plan to add in? Bells and whistles are nice, but I like to look at the practical. What are people going to use, and is it truly going to be innovative? I'm hoping we're able to provide feedback that's good for all the entrants. You want people to know what they can do to be better next time.

CS: Budget will always be a topic in determining technology for events. What are some indispensable tools for top-tier, mid-tier, and lower-tier tech that can help those planners with various budgets?

TV: For lower-tier, staff is key. If you don't have the right roles, you're going to mess up. Make sure you're paying your people and that you know who can do what to get the job done.

On the mid-tier and up, digital or hybrid, I would invest in speaker kits. That allows you to control the quality of your sound and visuals. People are getting to the point they're not as forgiving with what your production looks like. You should have a good chat moderator or host, who can address issues like latency in their scripts.

For higher end budgets, I would say swag. Then there's a new service called eatNgage that allows you to deliver food to your attendees or VIPs, and they can choose a meal before the event. It's like Uber Eats, but they're specifically focused on conferences.

I would also make sure to include a regional plan. If your hub is in Chicago, but you've got people coming in from other cities across the country or across the world, you can pipe money into those local ecosystems and create a space for local vendors. Maybe rent out a conference center and ask people to drive, bike, or walk there, then you stream in the programming. So now, it's not just a Chicago event, but we're supporting the entrepreneur ecosystems and causes in those other communities to make sure that businesses are thriving and tying it back to our own conference. That's an investment that could work for any of the three tiers. ■

**Editor's note: Watch ConventionSouth's event tech panel discussion at conventionsouth.com/virtual-events*

