In the business world, it has long been known that all work and no play make for a dull person, and that all play and no work make it difficult to make a living. However, even in today’s world of electronic gadgets and instant messaging, there are valid solutions somewhere in between that will not only make a person be more educated, but will be entertaining and productive at the same time. Experts agree: organizations which provide opportunities for there to be a little fun with the work will gain a lot more than following the staid, “tried and true” approaches.

When business and enjoyment are combined, there can be a whole new dimension added to the messages companies send to their employees, suppliers and associates can help to improve sales, marketing and return on investment. Adding interactivity, creative presentation methods, entertaining visuals, relevant themes and some good, old fashioned energy and enthusiasm into the work environment and onto the agenda at business meetings, conventions, product launches, conferences, workshops, trade shows, training sessions, sales meetings can make a big difference when the costs are counted and the results are tallied. Creating a good mix of fun and content is almost always more productive for all concerned.

Recognizing the values of “all work and no play” for business meetings can be as simple as realizing that speakers and presenters who are little more than “talking heads” behind a podium often send a value message that is counterproductive to the content of their words. Add in a dull, uninspiring visual presentation of purportedly important-to-know information that leads with phrases such as, “As you can see on this slide”, or “You can’t read this slide”, or “A lot of what’s on this slide isn’t applicable to this group, but …”, and the process of communicating, educating and motivating people to excel gets a whole lot harder. Such uninspiring style messages are insulting to their audiences and, when that negative is reinforced on a day-to-day basis, can lead companies to become full of boring people who produce unexciting, mediocre results.

On the other hand, there are many corporations, associations, sales and distribution groups and trade event and fund-raising “shakers and movers” (both in-house or on contract) that know from personal experience how actively working to add interest, involvement, interaction and fun into hard work into their communication and leadership methods can help to build employee interest, effort, commitment and productivity.

Intra-organization working relationships and problem-solving can also be made easier by allowing employees and program participants to interact in non-traditional ways. Having corporate messages be supported by specially selected, relevant themes; tying key points to common sports, social or local references; reinforcing critical, need-to-know elements by staging a TV-style game show; or applying other stimulating activities can not only get employees and
attendees caught up in the action, but building participation can have substantial long-term benefits as well. And while more fun for all concerned, these interactive methods can still carry big information workloads and deliver the goods by providing excellent returns on investment.

A strong proponent of using interactive learning activities and fun to build results, Jim Seltzer, President of QuizMaster Productions in Roswell, GA, has long been a fan of interactive learning and improving companies’ messages through creativity and fun. Seltzer, a former National Sales Manager of a Fortune 200 company, has had more than 25 years experience designing, producing and presenting network caliber, TV-style game shows, quiz competitions and “Fun and Gains™” programs for groups of all types and sizes. He has seen first-hand the exceptional results that can be obtained from moving outside the traditional boundary lines.

Mixing Business and Pleasure Brings Added Benefits When the Results Are Tallied

Literally thousands of businesses and associations have relied upon QuizMaster’s team-oriented, live quiz competitions for a fun and energetic, but highly effective, way to reinforce “need to know” information at major sales meetings, product launches, association meetings, fund raisers, trade shows and other special events. By using custom written questions and answers tailored for each specific client, QuizMaster programs help increase attendee interest, build group participation, improve retention of key content elements of the program – and build more ROI.

While no two QuizMaster shows are the same, the common thread within every show the company presents is that it will be both theme-oriented and team-oriented. Amy Arblaster, Marketing Manager for QuizMaster, explains, “For example, if we have three hundred attendees in the audience, we might recommend that the group be divided into three teams of one hundred each. Then we would color-code and name the teams. So, for a financial company, you might have the ‘Red Inks’, the ‘Green Backs’ and the ‘Blue Chips’. Within each team section, there will be a ‘Captain’ who may select three to five (sometimes more) people at random to become that team’s onstage representatives. We will very often have fifteen or more players on stage at once.”

Arblaster explained that after playing for ten to fifteen minutes, the game will take a short “commercial break” and the initial panelists will be replaced by another, new group as the game continues. On-stage panels may change as many as four to six times during any given competition. This gives QuizMaster the opportunity get as many new faces in front of the group as possible -- and the game action will often shift dramatically due to the different personalities and the different levels of knowledge and personal experience the panelists bring to the show.

Amy says that is all part of the appeal and fun of staging a game show to reinforce the things organizations want their people to know. “Because the questions and answers, game style, methods of play and the total presentation focuses directly on them, their jobs and the things that are important to building knowledge and productivity, we find that the experienced people get just as much out of the shows as do the newer people. Game shows are amazing fun, but they can definitely be ‘business’ too.”

An Interactive Training Technique That Always Gets Great Results
Another place where better interactivity can really make a difference is with the ever-popular “role playing” scenarios often used in training programs. Meeting Concepts’ Director of Meetings, Bobbi Taylor, says that these sometimes grueling, interactions can often have much higher impacts if live videotaping and instant-editing are used instead of having trainees view and discuss the traditional “wrong way-right way” tapes. Taylor says that a good example of putting interaction to work is “stop-action video role play”. She asserts, “The chance for people to actually experience for themselves possible resolutions to the conflict and emotion of a difficult situation is tremendously increased when they have to put themselves in the other guy’s shoes – and then can see their roles played out on video as they really happened.”

Seltzer knows the drill from his long experience being involved in corporate training, and agrees, “The levels of focus, involvement and attention required can initially be daunting. But, when done properly, stop-action video is more effective than other role-playing techniques because the skills taught become far more transferable to real-world situations”.

In the stop-action method, a camera is set up and a video recording is started as a normal live-action role-play is begun. When the role-playing parties’ initial interactions result (as they often do) in a problem, the trainer can “pause” the video recording and, when things truly get out of hand, can stop the role-play in midstream. The trainer and the seminar group can then discuss the scenario and provide insights regarding how new communication skills might best be applied.

Then, with the camera rolling again, the interaction continues and the role-play is reset just prior to the point where the trainee got into trouble and the taping was stopped. When the second version of the scenario turns out more productively, the trainer can then replay the whole tape. Everyone can see exactly what happened, what might have happened if the trainee had continued to handle the situation in his or her own way – and also what happened when alternate, more effective skills were used.

Taylor says that using the “stop-action video” technique to come up with new ways to react to real-world situations makes the work of learning immensely more fun for everyone. Seltzer agrees, “Without question, this way of learning effective communication is immeasurably more valuable -- and more enjoyable -- than simply talking about skills, listening to “experts” or doing the stale, canned “what if” approaches many groups have called upon for years.

What’s the “bottom line” on raising the interactive and entertainment components for organizations? QuizMaster’s Arblaster, sums it up, “When people have fun learning, they will learn more, learn better and use the knowledge more often than with any other methods we have tried. People can still learn what they need to know to do their jobs better … but with both the fun and the gains, they will have a great time doing it.” Playing for keeps: what a concept!