

Professional documentation: your post-event business card

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The professionalism of large group facilitation, “Open Space Events”, workshops, trainings or project meetings is frequently judged by how well it is documented. For many reasons, photo documentation is becoming increasingly popular because it accurately depicts the different stages of your event and the results.

No one has to take notes or type minutes and nothing else has to be coordinated because the photos show what has been discussed and agreed upon. The degree to which a photo documentation is accepted naturally depends on the professionalism with which it is created.

So what can you do to record your event as professionally as possible? How can you optimize the photo documentation? What are the necessary “ingredients”?

The Prerequisites

A photo documentation or “Photominutes”, naturally, consists primarily of photos. While there is no single recipe for good photos, there are definitely some things one can do to create professional photo documentation. It is, for instance, important to use the right paper and the right software program.

But let us start at the beginning:

Paper, cards and writing implements

Contrast is important - it is impossible to read black print on black paper. It is easiest to read dark print on a light background. Optimal contrast is achieved by using black on a white background.

While it is not uncommon for facilitators to use the nostalgic brown wrapping paper, this is definitely second choice as the darker the paper,

the worse it is for a professional documentation. The best camera and the best editing software cannot create a contrast that does not exist.

As far as the writing surface is concerned (e.g. the paper), the lighter the better. As well as flip charts and pin boards, this also applies to the use of any kind of facilitation cards.

When one uses cards, it is important not only that there is a sufficient contrast between the writing utensil and the writing surface (i.e. the card) but also that there is a sufficient contrast between the cards and the background paper. White cards on a white background offer one the maximal contrast as far as the writing is concerned, but there is then no contrast between the cards and the background. Using pastel colored cards on a white background is a good compromise.

Oh, yes, and let us not forget the writing utensils. Here, the opposite applies - the darker the better. MODERATIO markers have a larger surface than markers with a pointed tip. Since cameras can only take pictures of what is actually recorded on paper, it is logical that the thicker the marker, the more the camera has to see. Thus, the editing software has more to work with, so the viewer of the photo documentation sees more.

And one last tip: Old markers with used, frayed felt and/ or dry ink won't give you the contrast that you need!

DigiCam & Co

To create a photo documentation, one could theoretically use the latest DigiCam cell phone to spontaneously shoot photos and immediately transfer the pictures to one's office or the Internet where participants could view the pictures or

download them. For those who find that scenario a bit futuristic, there is a more realistic way of creating a photo documentation.

To create a professional photo documentation, it is a good idea to set up a small “studio” if possible. If you cannot set up things exactly as described below, then make the necessary compromises.

For photo documentation, one needs a digital camera. Commercially available 35mm digital cameras have a sufficient resolution. It is important that the room is uniformly illuminated in order to avoid shadows, and this can be achieved most easily with large flash units of the type used by photographers which create diffuse light.

For a complete “studio”, one also needs fixed pin surfaces for flip charts and pin board paper, and a stable camera tripod.

Software

To create a professional photo document, one needs high performance software, such as Word, PowerPoint – or the specialized new program, “PhotoMinutes”, which offers the user a logical, intuitive structure for the entire documentation process.

All “PhotoMinutes” requires in order to create a professional photo documentation is digital photos of the information which has been displayed on pin boards, flip charts, white or blackboards, etc. The inclusion of the “content photos” and the arrangement of text pages, such as title page, interleaves, list of participants, bibliography and the final sheet is possible, as is the inclusion of scene photos. The company logo can be shown on each page of the document.

The user can redo each page with the integrated text editor and add text or pictures and background. It is also simple to number the pages and create template sets. The completed protocol is

then made available to be forwarded to participants as a DPF-File or PMP package.

The program can be downloaded for a 30-day trial version free of charge at www.photominutes.com.

Some tips...

What do I need to be aware of during the event?

- Try to clearly display the work process as well as the results. Whatever participants cannot read during the event, you will not be able to record in your documentation.
- If you use the classic facilitation media (pin board and flip chart), it is better to use white paper than the prevalent brown wrapping paper.
- Make sure not to lose any individual presentations or group findings. One of the signs of the quality of photo documentation is its completeness.
- Roll up any documents that you wish to transport for photographing - don't fold the paper. Each crease makes it more difficult to get good pictures.

Some tricks to help you take good pictures

- To keep the quality of your pictures consistent, it is a good idea to work with a tripod and keep your camera at the same setting. That way your photos are of the same quality and blurry photos can be avoided.
- Turn your camera 90°, so that the viewfinder optimally matches the pin board format. Otherwise you'll have a small picture with a big border.
- Select a larger frame so the photo can be adjusted in case there are any parallax errors.
- Keep a proper flash distance in order to minimize lighting differences between the borders and the middle of the picture. If one stands too close, one gets a light spot in the middle of the page.
- Make sure the photo edges are straight in order to keep photo editing to a minimum. The border of the medium which is to be



visualized should exactly fit the edge of the viewfinder. Otherwise your pictures will be somewhat unfocused.

- Check your photos immediately to see if there are any “misses”, so you can reshoot the photo immediately if necessary.

Producing the document

- Cut the “content pictures” so that no superfluous background can be seen.
- If necessary, correct the contrast and the colors.
- Be generous when creating your document, so that your documentation is clearer - use a title page, interleaves and a white final page.
- Given that this is a photo- rather than a text documentation, add only important and brief comments to the photos, if absolutely necessary.
- Using scene photos of the event lightens up the document and is a kind of motivation to repeatedly look at the documentation.
- Extra input can be added by including a bibliography and presentations from the event.

Distributing the documentation

Nowadays it is best to make the documentation available on a server and to send the participants a link to that server.

The advantages:

- The size of the file is more or less irrelevant.
- It is inexpensive
- It is fast.

If you are dealing with sensitive or confidential topics, it is advisable to send the photo personally/confidentially to the client or participants.

Filing the documentation

Make back up files on external data carriers such as a CD/DVD, hard disc or USB stick because:

- Documentation would be lost if something happens to your PC.
- Participants could request the documentation at a later point in time.
- You can reproduce the contents at any time and tie them in seamlessly with other possible further events.

We wish you an optimal post-event business card!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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