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Unconventional Meeting Concept Allows Attendees to Guide Their Own Learning

Most conferences are sadly missing discussion and togetherness. The "unconference" concept breaks the boring meeting mold and encourages active participation and sharing of ideas and best practices. Attendees vote on topics they want to see presented.

SAN FRANCISCO — More than 300 executives, entrepreneurs, service providers and marketing enthusiasts are expected to attend more than 30 learning sessions at MarketingCamp's second "unconference" in San Francisco, Calif. on March 30.

This meeting is tailored to the needs of marketing professionals working in and around San Francisco who want to learn and share innovative marketing strategies, tactics and tools. Sessions will cover marketing topics that focus on the region's most crucial business concerns, from performance marketing to brand building. Topics of presentations and discussions are selected by participant voting, assuring that each person takes responsibility for what they get out of the meeting and that each topic is attended by those who are the most interested.

The first of these MarketingCamps took place on Nov. 3, 2012 at Nokia's campus in Sunnyvale, Calif. Paul Wcislo, founder of MarketingCamp and Intrepid Communications, learned the unconference model from Dave Nielsen, the leader behind Cloud Camp, an unconference for cloud computing professionals. "The concept of the unconference is a unique, thoroughly stimulating form of connecting and learning," Wcislo said. "Dave has presented more than 300 unconferences. It was through his work that I realized I needed to contribute to developing an unconference in my field of expertise."

Unconferences have been extremely successful for many years in bringing together people from diverse motivations and backgrounds to self-organize topics of greatest interest to the group, with an emphasis on interaction, discussion and debate.

The unconference concept evolved from Open Space Technology (OST), a methodology for conducting meetings developed by Harrison Owen in the 1980s, in which participants' own questions and interests drive the meeting.

"Open Space Technology is a world product," says Owen. "Many of the basic ideas come from a small West African village, the Native American tradition, and the wisdom of the East."

This unconference only has two rules. 1) The Law of Two Feet: If at any time participants feel that they are not learning or contributing, they are free to walk away and attend another session or depart the entire meeting. 2) Above All, Respect: At all times, everyone in attendance will respectfully collaborate, debate, dialogue and innovate to share, learn and grow.

"The result is an astounding increase in leadership, participation and inspired results compared to what conferences have become," said Natascha Thomson, owner and founder of MarketingXLerator. "Discussion and togetherness are maximized, and so is satisfaction of the attendees, who are no longer passive listeners, but active participants in the unconference."

Registration is free, and tickets are available at <http://bit.ly/mcsf13e>. Seats are limited. "The more participants that join us, the more engaging will be our conversation because of the diversity of voices involved," Wcislo said.

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If you'd like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview with Paul Wcislo, please call Heidi Willbanks at heidi.willbanks@gmail.com.