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GRAMMY Week

A Conversation with Branden Chapman

By Erick Weiss, *Honeysweet Productions*

Branden Chapman is arguably one of the busiest men in show business. The season of major Hollywood awards is now behind us and, despite the Oscar publicity machine, no other organization does what Chapman's employer, The Recording Academy does. For the 2009 GRAMMY week (from February 2 through February 8) The Academy and its sister companies, The GRAMMY Foundation and MusiCares, produce over 15 events including the music industry's most important event, the GRAMMY Awards telecast which airs on CBS. That's 15 major events in six days. Branden has a direct hand in nine of them. As vice president of production & process management, he is, for all intents and purposes, an executive producer for all The Academy's live music projects. "I work very closely on the concepts, the designs, the themes, the talent selection, etc." he told me during a recent conversation, "and I have a tremendous staff with whom I collaborate on the execution of each project, working with vendors, developing the timelines, the load-in, the rehearsals and everything that needs to occur to pull an event off."

GRAMMY week is undoubtedly one of the biggest, if not THE biggest, employment engines in the entertainment awards show circuit. Over 100 vendors, suppliers and partners are engaged (not including the telecast which is a city unto itself of employment). Branden has a full time staff of eight but that ramps up about six months out of the year to between 12 and 14 and then a couple of weeks before the show he's up to a staff of 25 to 30. His core team is tight, professional and in love with what they do. The week is a testament to the value of special events as an industry and its power to keep people employed. The impacts extend beyond those directly involved in the telecast and events. The Academy blocks up to 1500 room nights and estimates that as many as four times that number is actually booked independent of The Academy by members coming to this event demonstrating further benefits to LA's hospitality business.

"The primary goal of GRAMMY week" Branden told me, "is to closely mirror our mission which is to celebrate music and its makers as well as advance the cultural well being of music people around the globe. So we take this opportunity to highlight many different genres of music, to communicate our



Branden Chapman

various missions, to deliver important advocacy messages, and to educate young artists and students. It's really a complete picture (as much as we can do in one week) with something for everybody."

The GRAMMY "brand" now encompasses a family of organizations including The Recording Academy and The Latin Recording Academy, The GRAMMY Museum and then the charitable organizations: MusiCares and The GRAMMY Foundation. The

Academy is a membership organization made up of musicians, producers, song writers, etc., who are all dedicated to making the quality of life better for music and its makers. They produce events nationwide year-round including mixers, fundraisers, concerts, annual board meetings and committee meetings. It is a beautiful example of what a well run organization can do to inspire its membership into action and the world to value music.



2009 Grammy Celebration
Line 8 Photography

Last year was the 50th Anniversary of the GRAMMYS and represented a pinnacle in production values across the boards including the GRAMMY Celebration after-party for 5500 guests. I asked Branden if this year's budgets were derived with consideration to the current economy. "Though some budgets were cut following a detailed analysis of nonessential expenses, the decision was made only after ensuring that the experience for our guests would

be unaffected. This is a very important time in our nominee's and our GRAMMY award winner's lives, so we want to support that excitement and experience. That's ultimately what we are supposed to do; to celebrate excellence in music." But, he said, "The economy is always on our minds. We took the opportunity to not only readdress our budgets but also to evaluate how our members are being affected by the economy. We want to hold to our steadfast dedication to our fundraising initiatives and events even though it's harder to encourage charity and solicit donations with the current state of the economy. One of our most valued missions involves getting money back into the pockets of musicians who may have suffered a down-turn in bookings or sales or for staff in the industry who have been laid off as a result of corporate downsizing. We look at it in a different way than many organizations. It isn't as simple as saying 'okay we need to cut our budget across the board'. It's really about evaluating how we continue to support our members and community in this new

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economic world.” Despite the economy, all the events were sold out. As Branden put it, “Everyone still wants to be a part of what is indeed music’s biggest night.”

With the punishing schedule of GRAMMY Week, The Academy has come to rely on a core set of vendors with whom they have built long-standing relationships. “Because of the complexity, scale and nature of our projects and certainly the high profile,” Branden says, “we spend a lot of time developing partnerships and relationships that we can capitalize on year after year. Our events are not easy, live events are always quite complex, and they get even more challenging with the level of talent and the quality of music that we have to deliver within each of our events. Therefore we spend a lot of time culminating a relationship by training and working with our partners to make sure they understand what we are trying to accomplish. There is a great value in that. It is about building great relationships with people who understand how to deliver on our vision and then keeping those relationships strong and true.”

This year had more challenges than many including a dramatic change in the actual telecast. As Branden put it, “To

have to replace an entire segment within hours before the doors open for any live event is complex, but for one that includes major talent, thousands of guests, a live-broadcast network and millions of viewers... it’s a situation you simply cannot imagine or describe. Yet ultimately it was one of the biggest successes of our event and proved to us that there is a reason that we work with some of the best vendors in the business. They really had to prove their credentials on this year’s show.”



*2009 Grammy Celebration
Line 8 Photography*

By the time Branden got to the GRAMMY Celebration following the telecast where he oversaw turning the space of three football fields into a fantastic 1960’s inspired Woodstock-style festival, he was ready for a cocktail and the opportunity to kick back and finally relax and reflect following a long week of events. As he put it, “Deep down I knew I never really had to worry about the telecast, the GRAMMY Celebration or any of our events that we produce because I knew we had the best teams in place for each project, and believe me that is something you cannot underestimate. It gave me great peace of mind every day of GRAMMY Week.”

Please Add Value, Not Noise

By David Nour, Relationship Economics

Have you noticed that some meetings go much longer than they ever should? Do you ever wonder that there is a perception that everyone must speak? I often wonder, do some of these people feel that if they say nothing, they are not contributing, and that somehow, sitting in active silence is a sin punishable by death?

Say the topic of discussion is a marketing campaign. An employee can think of no legitimate criticism or valuable suggestion for improvement, so instead of saying nothing at all, he digs up an objection based on a single incident that occurred years ago at another job in a different company and sometimes, you think, on a different planet.

Another painful example to watch is the “all inclusive” types – those who deem it their fiduciary responsibility to add diversity, change management, process optimization, globalization, or in more recent trendy times, a green initiative, to every discussion.

Worse yet are those who feel compelled to ask vague questions. How do we take this to the next level? What are our best options? Think about it. Every one of these interactions

adds five to ten minutes and continued drag on endless points beyond the necessary duration. Meeting facilitators in our overly sensitive PC world have been brainwashed to say – even if they are not thinking it – that there are no stupid questions. And way too many are way too considerate to cut off the offensive parties. With each up-tick of the noise, the pressure on those who haven’t said anything increases. I know in democratic societies – not to mention our dreaded educational system, where teachers make participation 20% of the grade – “speak up and be counted” is often considered to be noble.

If you don’t become a faithful advocate of quality participation counting for more than quantity noise, you are contributing to gross negligence in the lack of candor in corporate America. Be a proponent of insightfulness, not more useless banter.

Publish agendas in advance and allow participants to prepare. End meetings early. Offer your open office door to anyone who didn’t have a chance to speak at the meeting. Never single out quiet employees with the jovial yet sarcastic, “Susan – we haven’t heard much from you today.” Don’t allow

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