

TECHNICRACY EVENT PRODUCTION

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



EDUCATING & INSPIRING
THE BALTIMORE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

EVENT PRODUCTION | SMARTCEO

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Event production for the Circle of Excellence Awards includes large projection screens, pipe-and-drape, clear podiums, hand-held microphones, and a quality sound system.

DEVELOPING LEADERS

The year was 2001. Craig Burris, who had previously grown and sold a national network of regional computer magazines, ComputerUser, realized that executives in the Baltimore region lacked resources and mentoring to develop themselves and to grow their businesses. These leaders faced similar challenges, yet each person had to find his/her own solutions, often resulting in lost time and money, and increased frustration. No forums existed for business executives to reach out for advice or to learn from each other.

Craig decided that this shortcoming had to be addressed. In October 2001 he launched SmartCEO with the mission to educate and inspire the business leaders in the Baltimore region. Since that time, the company has expanded its reach, now serving three additional markets, including Washington, DC (since 2005), Philadelphia (since 2010) and New York City, introduced one year ago. SmartCEO directs business for all of its regions from its headquarters in Baltimore City overlooking the harbor.

SmartCEO uses three communication avenues to realize its vision. They publish an award-winning magazine for growth minded CEOs, they deliver helpful online resources, and they create high energy entrepreneurial events to bring CEOs together.

SmartCEO's bi-monthly subscription magazine delivers educational content to more than 50,000 readers per month in the Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia, and New York regions.

This resource, tailored by market, is filled with information to help CEOs "lead educated, lead inspired." The magazine includes profiles of local CEOs and award-winning executives, and insight on topics such as mergers and acquisitions, risk and rewards, negotiation, hiring, and the importance of strategy. Subscribers look to the SmartCEO magazine to find real world knowledge to help them manage business challenges and propel their businesses forward.

In addition to the magazine, SmartCEO educates the business leaders with a website packed full of useful information that gives business owners, and their management teams, easy on-demand access to thought-leadership articles, profiles of award winners, and other content from the magazine. SmartCEO's daily email jolt, "The smartest moment of your day" brings tips to business executives each morning.

WINNING EVENTS

SmartCEO's high-energy entrepreneurial events provide CEO's and other C-Level executives with professional forums to share and learn from each other, as well as build a network of peer advisors. Each year, SmartCEO creates more than forty exciting, high-class awards events to honor business leaders. They plan and deliver more than twenty smaller round table sessions on requested topics and editorial content published in the magazine.

"Events are key to what we do at SmartCEO," says Jaime Nespor-Zawmon, President of SmartCEO Events. "Our invisible

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print audience comes to life when someone comes to one of our events. We want the quality of our event to be high and the occasion to be full of energy, and it our job to transform the venue and the entire event into an exciting experience from beginning to end.”

SmartCEO holds most of its events at local hotel ballrooms to accommodate an average attendance of 300 people. Most attendees are award nominees or winners, and they bring along key staff and family members as their guests. Awards events are full-service, including a reception, dinner, dessert, and a high-energy awards program. A lot of planning and behind the scenes work takes place to create events that “Wow” the audience.

SmartCEO uses a formal process to nominate finalists and select winners for awards. The process is spearheaded by the SmartCEO’s programs team and facilitated by SmartCEO committee members who are volunteers from targeted industries. Some events, such as the Circle of Excellence Awards—recognizing the regions most accomplished CEOs in distinct categories, the Future 50 Awards—celebrating the regions fast-growth companies, and the Brava! Awards—honoring female executives, are held annually in all of SmartCEO’s markets. Other awards events are designed for local markets, such as the GovStar Awards—honoring government contractors in Greater Washington, and the Small Business Awards—recognizing small businesses in Greater New York. SmartCEO celebrates more than 1,500 business leaders each year.

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—Jaime Nespor-Zawmon, President of SmartCEO Events

Audio-visual plays an integral part in making SmartCEO events spectacular and memorable. The SmartCEO events team works exclusively with Technicracy Event Production to handle all their audio-visual needs in the Baltimore and Washington region. “Nick La Forest, CEO of Technicracy, and every member of his team, are fantastic to work with,” says Director of Event Operations, Devin Servidio. “They are very good at executing what we need. I never worry because I know Technicracy delivers what they promise.”

Nick and his team use uplighting, spotlights, pipe and drape, custom gobos, multiple projection screens, hand-held microphones, sound systems, clear podiums, and more to create the right effect for the SmartCEO events. They manage projection and sound throughout the evening, ensuring that videos profiling winners and nominees run smoothly, and energy is kept high with music that builds as winners are announced and fills dead space throughout the evening.



Circle of Excellence winner accepting his award on stage at the clear colorfully-lit podium.

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Ambience, created by lighting, at the Future 50 Awards.

HONORING BALTIMORE'S BEST

The largest and most important SmartCEO event of any year is the Future 50 Awards. Typically held in January, Future 50 starts off the year by honoring the 50 fastest growing companies in the region, based on an average of employee and revenue growth over the past three years. Future 50 also recognizes five emerging firms with revenue less than five-million dollars, and five blue chip companies with revenues exceeding \$100 million. To be honored for this award is exceptional, especially during times of economic recession.

“Future 50 is a big production and the most labor intensive event we do all year. We develop a strong theme and build out the event around it,” explains Devin Servidio. The Future 50 Awards starts off with a small VIP reception for the winners to meet and greet each other. There is a cocktail reception for

all attendees, followed by a sit-down dinner, dessert, and an awards program. Special theme-related activities take place throughout the evening. Remarks Devin, “We always use theme-based decorations and dramatic audio-visual effects. We hold the Future 50 Awards in a large venue to handle the 550 people who usually attend.”

UNDER THE BIG TOP

In 2013, SmartCEO chose a circus theme for their Baltimore Future 50 event at the Hunt Valley Sheraton, and SmartCEO and Technicracy worked together to plan and deliver a spectacular event under the Big Top. Technicracy's AV solution included using black pipe and drape from wall to wall to create a seamless backdrop to eliminate distractions, two 12' x 9' rear projection screens on either side of the stage for easy viewing, two hand-held microphones, two clear acrylic podiums, complementary blue and purple up-lighting all around the room and between the stage and drape, and stage wash to light the stage. They also used a high-end sound system and gobos to project sponsors' logos on the stage steps and ballroom walls.

During the venue walk-through a few weeks before the event, SmartCEO learned that it could not hang a bar from the ballroom ceiling to support an aerial walker. Nick suggested using a truss instead, and Technicracy built a structure that worked perfectly. “When I work with Nick's firm I never worry about what the event is going to look like when the doors open. The

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—Craig Burris, CEO, SmartCEO

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quality of everything is great. They are consistent, reliable, and dependable,” states Devin. SmartCEO always does a run-through at 4:30 pm the day of the event. “The AV is always ready-to-go before the run-through, and Technicracy’s team members are receptive to our fine-tuning requests”, says Jaime Nespor-Zawmon.


The night of the Future 50 Awards the circus did indeed come to town. Stilt walkers, acrobats, clowns, and cardboard circus cutouts entertained guests at the general reception while attendees nibbled on hors d’oeuvres around small stand-up cocktail tables and networked with each other. When it was time for ballroom doors to open for dinner and the awards program, everyone was “Wowed” as they entered the circus. Confetti canons fired streamers from the stage where an acrobat performed his stunts. An aerial walker balanced overhead and 55 round dinner tables livened up the room with fine linens and centerpieces of white hydrangeas in white and red popcorn boxes. Clowns, stilt walkers, a custom circus backdrop, and a photo booth, where guests could take photos with the ringmaster, added to the fun.

Nick and his team kept energy high with flashing lighting, circling ballyhoo spotlights, and lively music as guests located their tables. Special lighting and music after dinner hyped the audience for the awards program and built excitement as award winners were introduced. “We are lucky to work with such a reliable event production partner who wants our event to be as successful as we do,” says Craig Burris, CEO, SmartCEO.

RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE AT THE HORSESHOE

When SmartCEO began planning for its 2014 Circle of Excellence Awards in Baltimore, the Horseshoe Baltimore Casino had just opened its doors to the public. With two floors of slot machines, gambling tables, and restaurants, the casino had not yet hosted a special event in its Harbor Room. SmartCEO took a leap of faith and booked the fresh venue to honor the Baltimore region’s most respected, forward-thinking, and community-driven business leaders. For 2014, SmartCEO’s Circle of Excellence finalists and winners came from the construction, food/beverage, government contracting, marketing/PR, non-profit, real estate, and technology industries. Executives were selected for expanding their businesses and creating programs and solutions that stood out from the competition. At this event, SmartCEO also announced the Baltimore region’s “CEO of the Year”.

When the SmartCEO events team and Nick did their preview walk-through, and later when they prepared the day of the event, they realized that the location was not a typical venue for them. Because of the casino environment, security at the venue was very tight and the loading dock was not convenient to the space they were using. The set-up teams had to go through many security checkpoints and traverse many narrow and winding



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—Jaime Nespor-Zawmon, President of SmartCEO Events

hallways to bring in the supplies and equipment needed for the event. “Load-in took longer and was more complicated than usual,” says Devin. “I am glad Technicracy always arrives early and handles challenges well.”

For the Circle of Excellence Awards, SmartCEO used several hand-held microphones, two clear acrylic podiums on each corner of the stage, two large rear projection screens to the left and right of the stage, white pipe and drape, and rose and blue uplighting. The room was laid out horizontally to keep guests close to the stage. Small round dinner tables and food stations around the room created an inviting setting for more than 250 guests. Technicracy brought in a quality sound system and managed the audio and video for the sponsors, speakers, and viewing of professional videos of the winners and nominees. “We loved the lively colorful uplighting Technicracy added to the clear podiums for this event,” comments Jaime.

Because the casino was so new, SmartCEO ran into several issues that needed to be addressed on the day of the event. The biggest challenge was that the casino did not have enough platforms to create the professional size stage that SmartCEO requested, and no stairs were available for winners and nominees to enter and the leave the stage. The stage, used as is, would be too small for the size of the room and make the backdrop look disproportional.

The SmartCEO team likes working with Technicracy because they are always willing to help them work through problems, and the stage challenge at the Horseshoe casino was no exception. “After tossing around some ideas, Nick and I came up with a plan to shorten the depth of the stage and use the extra platforms to extend the stage’s length. It worked, and we were able to create the look we needed and the audience never knew the difference,” says former Event Coordinator, Sara Harding. They even used palettes covered with fabric to create stairs on both sides of the stage.

Despite several challenges with the new venue, the Circle of Excellence Awards at the Horseshoe Baltimore Casino was a success. SmartCEO appreciates that Technicracy Event Production is very detailed-oriented, dotting the i’s and crossing all the t’s. Says Nick La Forest, “We always tell our customers that your event is the most important event, and we mean it. We listen to our customers and we use good equipment. That helps us deliver high quality AV solutions.” SmartCEO works exclusively with Technicracy Event Production on awards events, lunch-and-learns, and roundtable sessions in the Baltimore and Washington regions.

“ WHEN I WORK WITH NICK’S FIRM I NEVER WORRY ABOUT WHAT THE EVENT IS GOING TO LOOK LIKE WHEN THE DOORS OPEN. THE QUALITY OF EVERYTHING IS GREAT. THEY ARE CONSISTENT, RELIABLE, AND DEPENDABLE.

—Devin Servidio, Director of Event Operations, SmartCEO



Careful planning, coupled with quality event production, create an engaging experience for the Future 50 audience.

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