

Pine & Gilmore's Annual

# thinkAbout

at the New York Marriott Marquis overlooking Times Square  
September 24 + 25, 2003



[www.StrategicHorizons.com/thinkAbout](http://www.StrategicHorizons.com/thinkAbout)



by Joe Pine & Jim Gilmore

## All About thinkAbout

*thinkAbout burst onto the business scene five years ago. It's back again, reuniting Pine & Gilmore with scores of likeminded individuals interested in exploring the outer reaches of the Experience Economy.*

Looking back on it now, we can readily see how thinkAbout would become a highly anticipated event every year. We're not talking about how much the (oft returning) participants anticipate it, or how much assorted associates and other "friends of the firm" look forward to receiving and reviewing our imaginative, unique-to-the-event invitations. No, we're talking about how much *we* look forward to conceiving, scripting, and performing our own event every year.

It is only here at thinkAbout that we can practice what we preach, unencumbered by the many limitations put on us (on any outside talent) by the many conferences and internal events at which we perform. It is only here that we can ensure that our overarching theme for thinkAbout – which we never reveal – as well as our sub-theme for each particular annual event – which we sometimes make explicit and you can always figure out – are fulfilled throughout the two days spent together.

Most important, it is only here that we can bring together those that share a passion for envisioning and crafting new-to-the-world experience-and trans-

formation-based offerings.

thinkAbout itself is one such offering, first fashioned in 1998 in Cleveland. That first year, our forty participants heard from Stan Davis, author of the seminal book *Future Perfect* in which he coined the term "mass customization". We invited Stan to let us know where his current thinking was at, and so we all were among the very first to hear the ideas that he eventually published in his 2000 book *Future Wealth*.

[A side note: when Joe read *Future Perfect* way back as a strategic planner at IBM, he had an epiphany – "This is what we now need to do at IBM" – which led to his own book on the subject – *Mass Customization*. When Jim, in turn, read *Mass Customization*, he had his own epiphany – "Oh, shoot; somebody else already wrote it!" – which led to the two of us meeting. And the rest, as they say, is history.]

Our participants were also among the first to hear, via a parade of placards and props, about our own new ideas that would comprise *The Experience Economy*. Spirited debates ensued (including participants taking on Stan when he questioned whether or not

experiences were indeed a distinct economic offering) as everyone sought to apply these concepts and frameworks to their own businesses, a discussion that extended over dinner at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. After “Thinking with Toys” in the morning, we closed the event with an afternoon slideshow (complete with popcorn) of a list our “Top 100” experiences participants should take in the following year.

We loved the event so much we decided to hold it over for another year. But thinkAbout couldn’t be done in the same way, or even the same place. We decided to move it to Hollywood where we could conduct a scavenger hunt of the Service Economy, introducing for the first time our fabled Learning Excursion<sup>EM</sup>. (For more on this, see article to follow.)

Held within the *Soul Train* sound stage at Paramount Studios (what a contrast from the mundane state of all the service venues visited!), our event included Dr. Sally Harrison-Pepper (author of the best book on street theatre, *Drawing a Circle in the Square*) leading us all through new ways of depicting human performance. We also had a private dinner party at the edgy West Hollywood restaurant The Gate, capped by a commissioned performance from Faustwork Mask Theater. After everyone contrasted their own businesses with those we toured and others we envisioned, we closed the event with a Top Ten list of premier experiences, headed by the number one retail experience in the world, the American Girl Place in Chicago.

After two thinkAbouts, we were on a roll, so we coalesced certain elements of the event as modules within which we would make every thinkAbout unique: from going on a Learning Excursion<sup>EM</sup> to closing with a Top Ten list of experiences, which includes giving out our EXPY award to the #1 experience stager of the year. (Look for full

descriptions of each winner elsewhere in this invitation.)

In 2000 we took the event to Chicago (we couldn’t resist the opportunity to take everyone to dinner at the American Girl Place’s Cafe!) for a survey of the emerging Experience Economy. Our outside talent was One World Music, led by the inimitable Gary Muszynski, which (within the Great Hall of Cafe Brauer by the Lincoln Park Zoo) transformed all participants into professional-level samba players in the space of a morning – and thereby taught us all about the nature of transformational change.

We combined that lesson with those from our excursion up and down the Magnificent Mile to help everyone develop ideas for how to transform their own businesses into engaging experience staggers, and closed by handing out the EXPY to The Geek Squad – a wonderfully engaging stager of computer installation and support experiences. Oh, and for those who stuck around, we went to Blue Man Group’s performance of *Tubes* as a post-event experience.

Come 2001 we headed to the experience capital of the world – Las Vegas. Unfortunately, we scheduled the event opening at the New York – New York Hotel & Casino for September 12th – and awoke to the horrific news coming from the real New York, New York on September 11th. We quickly cancelled the event, and did everything we could to make sure people didn’t try to come to Las Vegas and, for those that did, got home safely. We had some folks turn around in mid-air over the Atlantic, others land in far-flung locales, and only two people (other than Scott and both of us) make it at all.

Weeks later, after the events had been absorbed as well as humanly possible during that terrible time, we polled our prospective participants and found great feeling for re-scheduling the event, which we did in November. It began

with Jon Jerde, the architect and “place-maker” who helped lead the renaissance of Las Vegas in the late 1980s by designing such landmark experiences as Steve Wynn’s Bellagio and the Fremont Street Experience.

Our excursion to these and eight other places didn’t end, by design, until midnight. We woke early the next day (well, early for Vegas) to debrief each tour stop, apply the lessons learned, enjoy lunch and our Top Ten list at Studio 54 in the MGM Grand, and hand out the EXPY to Joie de Vivre Hospitality, a hotelier that employs theming better than any other experience stager we’ve encountered. Most of the attendees further extended their experience by joining us for a performance of Cirque du Soleil’s *Mystere*.

We did something particularly unusual in 2002, heading to one of JDV Hospitality’s properties, the Hotel Avante in Mountain View, California, where we took over the entire hotel to stage thinkAbout U | an intellectual dormitory. Instead of a post-show, Gary Muszynski and One World Music came back for a pre-show open-air concert, after which our matriculating participants kicked back, opened their dorm rooms, and got to know each other.

Befitting an intellectual dormitory, we stayed inside for our excursion. (Using the term “incursion” seemed a bit *too* provocative.) We invited faculty to join us, with both Gary and Sally Harrison-Pepper reprising their roles, and introduced to our audience Martha Rogers, co-author of *The One to One Future*, Tim Sanders, Chief Solutions Officer at Yahoo! and author of *Love Is the Killer App*, and Pat Esgate, editor of *EM* magazine and the *EZone* newsletter as well as co-author of *The Entertainment Marketing Revolution*. However, we didn’t hold long presentation sessions followed by short breaks. At

thinkAbout U, the opposite occurred: participants “took a break” for ten straight hours of conversation, interrupted occasionally by the short, scheduled, faculty-led provocations.

On the second day, participants “brain-dormed” through the morning, giving each other very pointed consulting advice on what specifically they each should do as a result of what they learned. We closed the event with our Top Ten list and awarded that year’s EXPY to the LEGO Company, a toy manufacturer that best exemplifies the principles from our most recent publication, an e-Doc available exclusively on Amazon.com entitled “The Experience IS the Marketing”.

Now it’s 2003. It’s time to invite you to our sixth thinkAbout, to be conducted on September 24 + 25 in and around one of the most famous experience hubs in the world: Times Square in New York City. (We won’t go into the details of the event here, as other articles in this invitation do that. . . . Plus, folks like it best when they don’t know exactly what we’ve got planned!) Harkening back to our very first event in 1998 in Cleveland, we will explore the ideas and frameworks in our *next* book, which will be available in 2004. (We promise to send a signed copy to every participant of this year’s thinkAbout upon its publication!) The subject? Authenticity.

While we’ve grown thinkAbout every year, we are coming close to the limit. It’s designed as an intimate gathering of likeminded individuals, not as just another conference with hundreds of people who never get to meet and know everyone else. This year, therefore, **we’re closing registration after 81 paid admissions**. You’ll surely want to be among that 81, so register now. We both look forward to provoking you to see the world differently through the lens of authenticity.