

Welcome to the Event Tech Podcast, where we explore the ever evolving world of Event Technology every week. This show is brought to you by Endless Events, the event AV company that doesn't suck. Now, let's talk tech.

Brandt Krueger:

Hello everybody, and welcome to another edition of the Event Tech Podcast. That gentleman over there from Endless Events, he is the comfortable Will Curran.

Will Curran:

And that man over there, is the man from Event Technology Consulting, Brandt Krueger, who is very, very stupendous today.

Brandt Krueger:

I feel like I've been stupendous before, but maybe.

Will Curran:

All right, let's do it. Wait, random... you're the real, your the snob... Oh, here's a good one. The snobbish Brandt Krueger.

Brandt Krueger:

It could be. I am very aloof.

Will Curran:

It could be today. I think we're going to be very snobby today about our very particular word choice and when it comes to this topic.

Brandt Krueger:

Yes, I think it's a very enlightening topic, one with a... I'm sorry, it's my snobby voice.

Will Curran:

That's what I sound like when I'm talking about tea.

Brandt Krueger:

Yes. You do sound a little like that when you talked about tea. It's a fine, it's a matcha.

Will Curran:

Try some tea.

Brandt Krueger:

I've tried matcha.

Will Curran:

You didn't steam it at the right temperature, you're supposed to put it at 75 degrees Celsius.

Brandt Krueger:

Oh, 75, I heard a 74 and a half.

Will Curran:

See this is what happens. You go to an event brew one time and then now you come back and now we're all snobby.

Brandt Krueger:

I'm all attitude. We did a couple of them. Nick and I snuck another one in, because I was feeling salty on a certain topic. I'm salting today too. Anyway, what we thought we'd talk about today is a question that I get asked a fair, amount through our class, the class that I teach at ELI and a couple of other venues, is what's the difference between an AV company and a production company. And I've got my take on it. I know you've got your take on it, and there's also a lot of articles out there. Some of which I think are just shooting for the, "Hey, people Googled this, so we should probably title an article, is there a difference between a AV and production companies."

Will Curran:

Two paragraphs too on some of these articles.

Brandt Krueger:

Yeah. So it's clearly just going for the hits. Not that there's anything wrong with that, not that we've never been guilty of that, but it's just one of those things that I think it's worth having a little bit deeper conversation about, because there are differences between the two models of companies. I think what you get out of them can be very different depending on who you go with.

Will Curran:

That's so true. Let's be honest, I'm not even going to lie, Endless, but primarily it uses the words we are an event production company. But the thing is when I say production company, I all the time get people, "Oh, so you make movies?" So when I'm talking to some people, if I don't see their eyes light up when they go event production, I usually follow it up with we're an AV company, and then someone's like, "Okay cool, you do AV. Okay, that makes sense." And on that end. So definitely I'm excited for us to put our stake in the flame... Stake in the flame? It's stick in the fire.

Brandt Krueger:

I like buyers. Let's put a stick in the flame.

Will Curran:

Stake in the flame.

Brandt Krueger:
Hmm, delicious.

Will Curran:
For what is the difference on what it looks like, because I think that definitely we have our... And I will say, I think opinions might be the right word, there might not be necessarily facts around this one 100%.

Brandt Krueger:
I don't have facts to back this up. That's why I need the sound effects. That's my Herman Cain in case you didn't know.

Will Curran:
That's fantastic.

Brandt Krueger:
I think that you bring up a really interesting point that's not a bad starting block for us, which is it can be different depending on who you're talking to. That's something we've talked about on this show and others, and I think you guys have touched on it on Event Brew, is defining, when you're trying to tell someone what you do, it's such a muddy verse and it really depends on if you're someone who's adjacent to the industry, knows anything about the industry. When I say I'm a technical producer, that sometimes it's like, "Oh, okay, cool." And people seem to know exactly what that is. And then other times it's like, "So what does that? What do you mean?" It's like it's the same thing, it's like, "So you make movies or your in television?"

Brandt Krueger:
I think that to a certain extent comes with the game, is we have to tailor who we're talking about. I think though, most people in the industry have at least heard those terms float around. So production company versus AV company.

Will Curran:
Well, it's interesting, I think that you bring up about that too, is that I think we're in an industry too. I think we talked about some temporary, where you can name yourself whatever you want to be. If you want to be a meeting planner today, you can be a meeting planner, just call yourself a meeting planner. There's no like 100% certifications around and things like that. And I think one of the big issues with the event production company versus AV company is that you can just title yourself on an event production company because you want all the benefits, maybe that we list on here for what an event production company is versus an AV company. And sometimes you might be like, "Oh, well everyone calls me an AV companies, so I'll call myself an AV company." I think that's what's also really interesting as well. No one else is naming you, you name yourself.

Brandt Krueger:

Which then also leads down to another thing, and we can maybe touch on this later, is that then it leads people to perhaps use the wrong name or a name that's just like, "Oh yeah, we're a production company." Are ya? And a lot of companies that were previously branded as AV companies are starting to brand themselves as production companies. So without further ado, let's start diving into what we think the main differences are.

Will Curran:

From what I've understood, one of the biggest difference is, that I hear a lot of people say, is that production companies do creative services, AV companies do not. AV companies are gear in labor, production companies are creative design and all those things like that. True or false?

Brandt Krueger:

I think it's a delineation, I think it's a good point, I think it's, again, where the lines start to get a little blurry because frequently an AV company will come to the table with some ideas of, "Hey, this is what we're thinking." There's definitely a creative aspect to it, unless they're acting as a true just order taker, and that's something that's popped up in a couple of shows as well, it's the order taker versus the professional. And is it the company that I'm coming to you saying I want this many of this light, this many of this light, this many, at which point you're basically a rental company.

Brandt Krueger:

So most of the time I would say there's some creative aspect to it. So I don't think that's a hard delineator of creative versus, because unless you're truly a rental company, there's usually some creative aspects to it. It's like, so I'm not usually going to come to you and say, "Okay, here's what we've got for general session. Here's what we've got, this many breakouts. Here's a rough idea of what the agenda is." And then the AV company is going to come back to me, will say, "Okay this is what we think is going to cover you." I think there is some creativity to that. Especially once budget gets involved. I usually shoot for the moon first, and then say "Okay that's ridiculous. We can't afford that."

Brandt Krueger:

I find having to shoot for the moon conversation, that's a whole nother topic for another day, but I find having those shoot for the moon conversations are really useful, but then also being realistic about, "Okay here's the budget." Rather than coming straight out of the gate with the budget. I also, that's a whole nother conversation for another day, is do you tell people your budget? I've known planners vehemently on having their feelings about are they on one side or another like, "Oh, you never tell them your budget, because that's what you're going to come back with." Or you have to tell them the budget because otherwise they don't know where to be. And so I've definitely seen some really my camp, your camp type stuff, which seems like everything these days is my camp, your camp.

Brandt Krueger:

My take on the creativity level is that there's always a level of creativity unless you're a pure rental company. But I think that's a delineation, that's a factor is how much creativity is involved. How much are they doing when it comes to design and really designing the experience. I think that trends more towards the production company. What do you think?

Will Curran:

Yeah, definitely. I definitely feel like the full experience... That's the one thing I've noticed too is like event production companies, AV companies, they only do AV, whereas production companies, you might also see them do furniture design, like signage, things that are complimentary to the AV services as well. I definitely see that 100%.

Brandt Krueger:

I think that's another great check checkbox that you put in there, is that I think the production companies tend to lean more towards the other stuff. AV companies can usually get the stuff, it's like, "Hey, by the way, can you throw on, we also need some tables and chairs, or we also need this." They'll usually, in my experience, be like, "Yeah, we can get that." But it's not going to be something that they're more readily having sources for. Whereas a lot of the production companies that I've worked with either have some of that inventory already, like they own it, or will have the sources, like they'll have trusted partners, that like, "Oh yeah, we rent from Court." Or "Oh yeah, we get that stuff. We've got a national sales rep at company X, Y, Z when it comes to that."

Brandt Krueger:

I think you're onto another good checkbox there between the differences, between a traditional, and maybe that's fair, as these lines have gotten blurred. A traditional AV company versus a traditional production company, understanding that both can now blur a little bit.

Will Curran:

Yeah, that's what's interesting too, is I think that's one of the interesting things too, there's a lot of blurring between the lines when it comes to it. Especially when that leaning of wanting to use other people's stuff. I mean talk about hiring other people as well. I've also seen it that traditionally event production companies hire AV companies. So they might manage an AV company or bring them in. I think that's where Endless gets a little blurry though, is because like, so our model is all built and we don't own the equipment, so we hire rental companies to rent the stuff, but then we're producing and doing all the setup and everything like that. So we're like this blur between AV company and production company. But definitely I've noticed that production companies are usually totally okay subbing the entire AV to just an AV company.

Brandt Krueger:

Yep, 100%. And I think that's another one of the big differences. Again, traditionally, maybe we should just put that asterisk on everything, and that way I can stop saying it. Traditional production companies didn't own equipment or don't own very much equipment. I know at Metro Connections, the company I used to work for out of Minneapolis, it was always a discussion of

does it make sense for us to own that or does it not make sense for us to own it? And sometimes we would guess, and sometimes we would guess wrong, like, "Oh yeah, that's going to go out a thousand times. We should totally buy it." And then it goes out four times and yikes, we just ate that money for nothing.

Brandt Krueger:

But then there's other times when we had a client where we were on a three year contract and we knew they were going to have 30 breakout sessions every year at least. So, okay, well maybe then it makes sense to buy a bunch of short throw projectors and some small AV rigs for laptop speakers, and things like that, and carts and drape kits and all that jazz. That's, especially spread out over three years, that's a guaranteed contract, that starts to make a lot of sense instead of hiring it out and renting it. I couldn't reiterate any more. You got to have the space though.

Will Curran:

Yeah, that's true. That's definitely... Oh man, we're coming in with lots of good topics I think for the future. We probably should answer the question, should you buy gear, not buy gear. I don't think we've ever answered that question before on the podcast before.

Brandt Krueger:

I think we've touched on it in a couple of different ways. But it's tough because a lot of these topics are good topics, but not necessarily half an hour topics or something like that, the buy gear versus don't buy gears, it's like well, do you have a space for it? Who's going to take care of it? Where are you going to keep it? Are going to keep it in like the unused cubicle down at the end of the hall or is it going to be in a closet, that's going to get dusty? There's a lot of factors that I always just try to remind folks of, whenever that comes up.

Will Curran:

I think every time we say though, that we're not going to be able to fill an episode with time though, we always end up-

Brandt Krueger:

You're not wrong about that.

Will Curran:

We always have fun a lot to talk about it.

Brandt Krueger:

We'll never figure out a way to fill even a half an hour about that, and then 45 hour later we're like, "Oh yeah."

Will Curran:

Like, "Oh yeah. Let's do the history of Event Tech in the last decade. We can do this in 30 minutes real quick." An hour later.

Brandt Krueger:

Yeah, never underestimate Will and Brandt's ability to riff on something for possibly far too long.

Will Curran:

Probably because the reason is why we just end up challenging each other too in always doing that. Anyways, off topic on that one. So do you want another one? I'm coming with those bullet points. I'm poking around the internet and thinking about what I've heard a lot. You ready for another one?

Brandt Krueger:

Yeah.

Will Curran:

So the question becomes do production companies focus on strategy, so like larger brand messaging, things like that versus the AV company who's going to say, "Give me your messaging, give me your PowerPoint and I'll project it."

Brandt Krueger:

I'd say more so than AV, with our usual asterisks. But a lot of the production companies that I know, well and a lot of the AV companies, to be fair, most of the people in our industries are like, "Hey, we'll do as much or as little as you want us to do." So if you're the client that is way into the strategy and way into the theming and the branding and all that stuff then either a production company or an AV company is going to be there to help you execute that.

Brandt Krueger:

At the same time I would lean, yeah, more towards a production company for helping me with that strategy and helping me come up with a theme and, "Hey, what are you guys seeing as far as what's hot this year and what's not?" I think the production company generally is going to be looking those broader trends with... I know I'm going to keep caveating this, so AV people, if you're listening right now, don't get mad at anything I say in the next 15 minutes because I'm going to stop saying the words traditionally, has always been, that thing. We get it, there are plenty of AV companies that can help you out with a lot of the things that we're going to talk about. So I'm done apologizing for it, and I'm done caveating everything. So just understanding that from here on out don't get pissed off at anything that I say regarding, "This is what AV companies do."

Brandt Krueger:

The production companies are going to help you be able to do a little bit more on the strategy side than the AV companies. They're going to be a little bit more tuned into that.

Will Curran:

Yeah, definitely. I think one of the things that I've noticed as well when it comes to the strategy and talk about the just give us a PowerPoint versus like bigger brand messaging strategy and things like that, is that I've noticed also production companies typically provide media at some point or at least offer to or want to be involved in the process of creating PowerPoints, creating video, seeing the video content, they want to talk at a larger strategy.

Will Curran:

So for example, like us, I think we've talked about in past episodes about those super ultra wide screens. Maybe an AV company might say like, "Okay cool, we're going to have an ultra wide screen." Good, just make sure you get your content three by one. Whereas us, we're like, give us your content, let's look at it, let's see what the colors look like. We want to like go beyond, because there's this preproduction work and maybe that's teasing like other bullet points further down the line, but there's a little bit of pre-production work involved in it and somebody working with you that wants to make sure everything's going beyond just the equipment and everything like that.

Brandt Krueger:

Absolutely. I think it's also just a differences in core competencies, and so the core competency of the AV companies, I almost said it again, traditional AV companies, is going to be the gear and the people. So the, the techs and the people, and that might include a graphics operator, but usually most of the AV companies that I know don't have an on-staff graphics crew, and I mean like creation, content creation on staff designer when it comes to content creation, PowerPoints, videos and things like that.

Brandt Krueger:

Whereas frequently production companies will have that person on staff, someone who is there to help massage those PowerPoints into something that doesn't look like crap, like we've talked about in previous episodes. Someone there to help design someone there to help with the video that's there on staff, on staff videographers, things like that in addition. It's another, one of those things that's a core competency thing that in my experience the more of the production companies are going to have those types of on staff than a traditional AV company.

Will Curran:

I think one total caveat that we need to make sure that we educate people on too though is just because we're saying they have this person on staff and they have this person yada, yada, yada, it doesn't mean that you're getting them for free. It doesn't mean that you're like all of a sudden, "Oh yeah, because I hired a production company versus an AV company, all of a sudden I'm getting all these free strategy sessions and things like that." A lot of times you're paying for it in terms of pre-production work and hours and all those things like that and hiring a producer. And that was the thing that I think that I wanted to tease, was that yeah, like hiring a producer and what a producer's role is from the beginning as well. But we can talk about that one really, really in depth, but-

Brandt Krueger:

Maybe we should leave that as a tease and take a moment. I'm really super excited because, and we teased this on a previous episode, that we have finally sealed the deal, it's Valentine's day as we record this, so we've sealed it with a kiss, with our first sponsor for the Event Tech podcast. And I'm so excited because I've been able to merge a couple of my worlds together finally after a while, and that is the Event Leadership Institute. So we've mentioned it a few times on the show, but now we get to actually have them as a sponsor of Event Tech Podcast. So I couldn't be more excited. I just got to ask you, how have you ever wanted to expand your education in this industry and found it difficult to get to conferences and things like that?

Will Curran:

Oh yeah, all the time, my travel schedule is crazy and it seems like they're all happening weeks, after weeks, after weeks.

Brandt Krueger:

Absolutely. And so one of the things that I love about Event Leadership Institute is that, first of all, it's cheaper than most conferences, you're not getting locked into any contracts or anything like that. If you haven't heard about ELI, it's almost like the Netflix of event industry content, when it comes to education. So you can do either these individual courses, these professional enrichment courses, or you can do a subscription rate where you can just do it monthly, pick away at it at a time. But I love this idea of being able to continue to educate yourself in this industry on your own pace, at your own schedule. Because like you said, we're all traveling, we're all nuts, we're working from six in the morning until 11 o'clock at night, but you get an hour off here and you get an hour off there to be able to sit back and actually do.

Brandt Krueger:

There are over 180 video courses on ELI. There's interviews with industry leaders, there's white papers, there's eBooks, there's so much more than just my class on technical meeting and event production. There's topics all over the map. So there's business and sales, there's creativity and design, technical production, career building, planning and logistics strategy, ROI, dealing with venues, destinations. There's entire classes dedicated to wedding events. There's entire classes dedicated to different kinds of events that you might want to get into, building a business, whether you're just starting out or you've been in this business 20 years, you're going to be able to find something on ELI that's going to work for you. And a lot of the ELA courses qualify for CMP credits. So you need to get those credit hours in. There's an easy way to do it right there.

Brandt Krueger:

So be sure and check out eventleadershipinstitute.com, but don't just go to that website, check out eli4.me/etp for a 20% discount on individual courses, or a 20% off of that monthly membership. So be sure and check that out. Once again, that's eli4.me/etp to get that 20% discount. And we thank Event Leadership Institute for their support of the Event Tech Podcast.

Brandt Krueger:

Will, I got to work on trimming those down a little bit, I babble.

Will Curran:

I get excited about it to.

Brandt Krueger:

I babble and babble, and so I go on a little bit, I'll talk to Mike over there and say, "Okay, what points do you really want me to hit in that?" So I hope you guys get excited as I do when you, when you go and check it out. So thank you so much ELI for sponsoring it. Now Will, you were teasing us before the break about production companies and maybe a little bit of the pre-production work. So what were you hinting at there?

Will Curran:

As I started my research at what other people were saying about this and what planners thought as well is that usually I found is that on production companies usually you have some sort of role that's there from the beginning, and we're not talking about like the salesperson, that sold you the thing and then they're maybe going to show up onsite and then they follow up with you, make sure you're happy. We're talking about someone in addition to the sales person who's working on the project management, they're called production manager, sometimes called producers, sometimes are called technical directors. There's a million other different roles, but usually there's someone there from the beginning to work with you on things beyond just order taking, on there as well. And I've noticed that on production companies that's very common. Would you agree?

Brandt Krueger:

A hundred percent. When I first started noodling about this, actually for the class at ELI, I was thinking about the differences, and half jokingly but also half seriously paperwork is one of the big differentiators between the two. So production companies, I feel, generate a lot more paperwork along the way regarding show schedules and keeping track of all the different vendors and when people are coming in and coming out, show design, CAD drawings.

Will Curran:

Show flow.

Brandt Krueger:

Show flows, absolutely. All of that preproduction work can be offloaded onto the production company, offloaded onto the producer and their team so that they're able to help you build this show from soup to nuts. So I think that's a huge differentiator, is that preproduction work. The traditional AV company generally they'll have a production manager who's assigned maybe to your group, but still to a certain extent, it's you reach out and say, "Okay, this is what I need. Or this is what's changed." And then they say, okay.

Will Curran:

Totally. And what's funny is as I was doing some research, this one made me laugh really hard, I saw something actually on two different articles written that said, "What's the difference between them?" Basically this is fact, they said most event production companies have a higher level of customer service than AV companies, aka better techs, and I feel like it's slightly a dig at one specific, maybe, AV company.

Brandt Krueger:

I was just wondering if maybe that came from a production company, would say it.

Will Curran:

It definitely did, and it was weighing on there, and I as a production company, I'll tell you right now that's fiction right there. That is not 100% true. I've seen some AV companies that have amazing service. I think there's some production companies that have really bad service and I've definitely seen it on them. The important thing to know is that maybe that stems from the idea that you have a project manager or producer holding your hand a little bit more beyond just the AV portion, that's also maybe why you feel like you're getting better service. They even went as far to say they had better technicians onsite, and onsite staff and I was like, "That's not true."

Brandt Krueger:

That's a little biased.

Will Curran:

That's a little biased.

Brandt Krueger:

The huge difference between quality of service and services offered, so the quality of service and the types of services offered are two separate things. I think that's a bit of a stretch in order to be able to, and clearly someone who's got a...

Will Curran:

A horse in the race.

Brandt Krueger:

Yeah, absolutely.

Will Curran:

I got one last true or false statement for you before, maybe if you have a couple of other ones, but I also saw on here too, someone said the fact that AV companies have more flexibility for competitive pricing. True or false?

Brandt Krueger:

I think that's false.

Will Curran:
But why?

Brandt Krueger:

Because anyone can rent gear if you need to. I think when you own the gear you do get maybe some flexibility in the cost of the gear I suppose. I'll rock it back, it's true and it's false because I think there must be a reason that traditional production company will still hire a traditional AV company as opposed to trying to do it. But I think it's just, again, different core competencies. So the AV company traditionally owns the gear and supplies the techs, and so the flexibility would come in the owning of the gear, you're not going to be able to discount necessarily the techs, but you might be able to throw stuff in for free because you own it and you want to show it off.

Will Curran:
Definitely.

Brandt Krueger:
How's that for a waffle of not taking true or false?

Will Curran:

Well, I think you bring up a really, really good point that almost might, and let me know if you feel like this is a good summary and conclusion, the whole thing, but I think the thing is that there's differences and nuances between both of these. You can have some AV companies that have great customer service, that don't own any gear. You can have production companies that own gear and there's so much nuance. So I think the important answer is that you can't just rely on what they described themselves on the website or how they describe themselves to you. You need to have a further conversation about what their model is and what they're doing, because I've seen tons of production companies that are like, "We do not do content, we do not do this PowerPoint, we don't do that." And I've seen production companies that own all the gear and have all the techs in house. I've seen it where production companies is two guys who just literally focused on having the best strategy and brand messaging ever.

Will Curran:

I think it's important that the label doesn't necessarily perfectly describe that company, and what they need and what you need as a client as well.

Brandt Krueger:

Yeah, and we hinted at that at the beginning, that there might be people that are using not the wrong label but maybe a bit of a stretch on that label. So I think that there are production companies that own gear and I think there are AV companies that do a little production. Does that make sense?

Will Curran:

Yeah.

Brandt Krueger:

That the traditional models, that I said I wasn't going to mention again and have continued to mention throughout the show, are still worth talking about because this idea of here's a company that doesn't own gear, that does all the pre-production work, the handles more of the design, that handles all the other things besides AV related to your event like furniture, like displays, like carpet, all of those kinds of things versus a company that provides the gear and the tech. Keeping those in mind I think is still beneficial. Understanding though that you can have an AV company that is able to help you with show flows that is able to do CAD drawings, that is able to do design work. Keeping in mind that you may have a production company that also owns gears, that may have contact with techs that they really like.

Brandt Krueger:

I've seen that as well where they start to lock into freelance techs. So even though they're still hiring individual AV companies from city to city, they're bringing along the techs that they know are going to be the best bet for their clients. I think it's important to understand the base models, understanding the fundamentals of it, just knowing that you might be an AV company, there's an AV company that might be stretching into production, there's a production company that might be stretching into AV and really pressing them on trying to get a vibe of how competent they are in that area, because unfortunately, like we've talked about in a lot of other episodes, a lot of times people say yes first, and then think about, "How are we going to do it?" Or, "Oh yeah, sure we can help you with that." But maybe it's not their core competency.

Will Curran:

Preach. Should we bring it home? I think we got to bring this one home so then that way everyone can go continue and go continue their search, whether they need an AV or event production company.

Brandt Krueger:

Yeah, we want to know what you think though, of course, hashtag Event Tech Podcast, let us know, are there any significant differences that you feel like we left out? Also let us know at Event Tech Podcast at helloendless.com. What did we miss? What do we mess up? Do you agree? Do you disagree? I really think, that's when the AV companies start to get annoyed, is when we try and pigeonhole them and I get that, I really do, but I think it is still useful to have that initial standpoint.

Will Curran:

Definitely. I couldn't agree any more.

Brandt Krueger:

Well, thank you sir. Thank you for joining me as always.

Will Curran:

Thank you Brent. It's always fun to get to talk about AV with you.

Brandt Krueger:

Really excited for what's coming up here. We've got a lot of things in the pipeline for new shows, more than just Will and Brandt talking about topics. We've got some guests lined up. We've been trying to be a little fussy, I'm not going to lie about it, about who we bring on the show because we get contacted a lot for, "I want to be on the show." And so we're trying to be a little bit fussy about that and make sure that we think it's going to be a topic that you folks like.

Speaking of topics, please do let us know at a #eventtechpodcast or eventtechpodcast@helloendless.com the types of topics you'd like us to tackle. We've got some ideas lined up, but we always want to know what you think as well.

Brandt Krueger:

Be sure, and check out eventtechpodcast.com, there you're going to see all the show notes, the links to all the resources shared, the transcripts, all the ums and AHS are they're in their full glory. Links to subscribe in your favorite podcast apps, Spotify, Apple Podcast, Pocket Cast, Google Podcasts, all of the casts in all of the places, and I think that just about does it for another episode of the Event Tech Podcast.

Speaker 1:

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