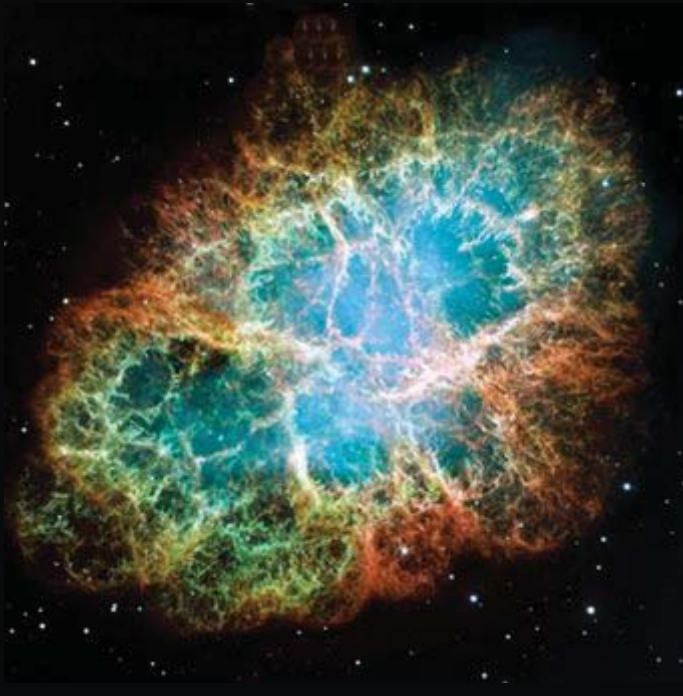


The Expanding Universe - Does the “Big Bang” Theory apply to Events?

John Mikstay, CEM
Manager, Events Audit
BPA Worldwide
Leading the World in Auditing Media



Cosmologists believe that about 14 billion years ago, the Universe expanded from an extremely dense and hot state. This is referred to as the “Big Bang” theory. This theory was introduced sometime around 1927 with the term being coined in 1949 through a derisive remark by a competitor of the theory who thought the Universe remained in a “steady state.” Relying on measurement as their main source of data, scientists continue to study this expansion and its origins as it occurs today.

We see this playing out much the same way in the tradeshow industry. One theory is that the industry is in a “steady state.” Because of this, accountability is not needed. Status quo is the norm and brand marketers can rely on the word of their show organizers to know the shows they participate in are providing a valuable, qualitative audience with product

interest at a high level of engagement. As a result of this “steady state,” marketers continue to base their important investment decisions on little to no accurate show attendance and demographic data.

Meanwhile, the economy shows no real strengthening, budgets continue to tighten and people attempt to maintain daily relevance as the tradeshow industry forges ahead in its continued “steady state.”

The reality is the tradeshow “universe” is dynamic and ever-expanding. Marketing channels are more dynamic and continue to expand, as in the case of using mobile devices and social media. However, more media platforms and channels mean more options for marketers to get their message to their clients quicker and, in some case, cheaper. Every marketing platform and channel option including digital (web), print, mobile and face-to-face means more scrutiny of ROO/ROI and keen internal competition for budget dollars.

So where’s our tradeshow “Big Bang” in all of this? Brand marketers need to validate their investment in any marketing platform. Most platforms make it easy to do so with defined measurement metrics. Print has audited circulation statements; digital has a number of metrics to analyze traffic and user activity; social media and mobile continue to push for useable and relevant metrics; and then there is face-to-face.

“Quality” is the new buzz word that everyone in the tradeshow industry is striving for. Organizers want to prove their events have it and exhibitors want to make certain they’re getting it. But no one wants to move from the face-to-face “steady state” to accurately and credibly provide quality – whether it is organizers providing independent, third-party certified show attendance and demographic data to their exhibitors, or brand marketers asking show organizers for this same independent, third-party certified show data to credibly validate their marketing investment decisions to their managers.

The tradeshow “universe” is different – for better or worse – for reasons mostly beyond our control (i.e. economy, technology). Yet face-to-face events continue to shine as one of the most important and valuable platforms for marketing products and services and for meeting business associates in networking settings. How we choose to view this important marketplace - as dynamic and living or as a “steady state” and status quo - will certainly impact our relevance against other media platforms with expanding marketing channels and most importantly, credible, independent, third-party data metrics.

The Big Bang theory describes the state of our ever-expanding Universe. The ever-expanding tradeshow “Universe” has the same opportunity for its own “Big Bang” through the adoption and implementation of independent third-party audits of show attendance and demographic data.

