

BANQUET KEYNOTE SPEAKER

THOMAS KAUFMANN

Saturday, August 3 @8:00 PM



Photo by Brian Bossert www.brianbossert.com

Thomas Kaufmann is a disability advocate, entrepreneur, music enthusiast, and inventor of award-winning audio technology.

He holds a German diploma degree in Physics and graduated from UCSB with a Master of Science degree in Chemistry. While working in music and entertainment, Thomas was always concerned about protecting his own hearing. His experiences in marketing and patent law eventually led him to the field of hearing loops. Thomas became passionate about helping other people hear and conserve their ability to communicate with the gift of hearing.

As the founder and CEO of OTOjOY, his mission is to enhance people's listening experiences at live events—lectures, concerts, theater plays, and music festivals—to raise awareness about hearing loop technology, and to offer high-quality assistive listening services that let people's ears smile. As OTOjOY's Chief Technology Officer, he focuses on the technical design of complex hearing loop systems, leads research and development efforts, is responsible for intellectual property matters, and evangelizes OTOjOY globally. Thomas is a member of the technical committee of the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) that defines international performance standards for hearing loop systems and equipment.

A hearing loop is an assistive listening system that takes sound from a venue's sound system and sends it directly and wirelessly to a listener's hearing aid or cochlear implant without any distortion, echo, or background noise.

While places of worship, universities, and government buildings are adopting the technology at rapid rates, it seems that movie theaters, music festivals, and concert venues are slower to install hearing loops because they are generally viewed as places for entertainment, not for accessing information. Furthermore, organizations tend to not recognize their lack of accessibility, since hearing loss is not a visible limitation and many affected individuals do not speak up about their need for accommodations due to the stigma that's still associated with hearing loss.

Today, OTOjOY has expanded to serve areas across California and Arizona, with a specific emphasis on making music more accessible. With the CES 2018 Innovation Award, a WFX New Product Award and a 2018 Edison Awards nomination, in addition to a recent advancement into the semi-finals of the Arizona Innovation Challenge and an endorsement from American electronic music duo ODESZA, OTOjOY has no intention of slowing down. The goal remains to help all people, regardless of their hearing ability, to gain equal access to events and activities that they choose to make part of their lives.