Creative Group®



2018 Meeting and Event Trends

Each year, we examine consumer and business trends to find the ones that are having (or will have) a direct impact on the meeting and events industry.

The Trends

1. Artificial Intelligence has caused us to expect ON DEMAND, PERSONALIZED experiences.
2. Companies are becoming more aware of how they present themselves due to the demand for TRANSPARENCY.
3. People are building the LIFESTYLES that suit them best and injecting them with FUN.
4. Personal enlightenment is taking LUXURY to a new level.
5. The value of INFLUENCERS is more important than ever.

43% of regular voice tech users say they love their voice assistant so much they wish it was a real person.[ii]



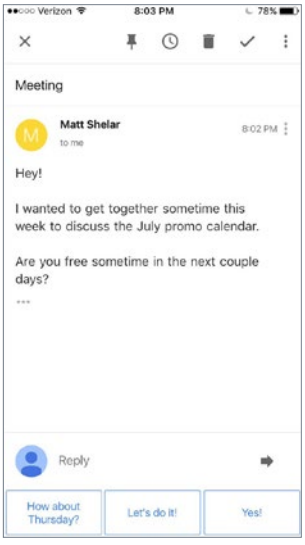
1. The Trend: Artificial Intelligence has caused us to expect ON-DEMAND, PERSONALIZED experiences.

The Proof:

The human brain is wired to take shortcuts, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) is designed to do just that. It provides convenience and thinks for us, so we don't have to. Virtual assistants such as Google Home, Amazon Echo, and Apple HomePod[i] give consumers the power to get what they want without lifting a finger. Want to play country music? Want to turn down your thermostat? Want your floors vacuumed? Just ask Alexa and she'll make it happen.

And oh, do people ever love their virtual assistants! In fact, 43% of regular voice tech users say they love their voice assistant so much they wish it was a real person.[ii]

Aside from the here and now, AI continuously follows patterns and learns from humans, which allows for extremely personalized outcomes. It can give advice on selecting stocks, some robots are close to diagnosing diseases,[iii] and AI-powered chatbots[iv] have already replaced humans (to an extent) in customer service. Have you noticed that Gmail is essentially reading your email and suggesting responses based on the content?



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What will you do to keep up with changing expectations to impress your audience?

The Implication:

The way to acknowledge and respond to this growing dependence upon digital immediacy is to build it into the structure of a meeting or event so that participants' expectations of content however, whenever, and wherever they want it is met. This might mean creating a "choose your own adventure" format or offering an agenda builder, where attendees can choose sessions based on personal preferences. Taking this a step further would be offering suggestions for sessions based on data captured about attendees – something the Dreamforce Conference[vi] has already started doing.

Mobile app technology helps create more personalized experiences by capturing the meeting where attendees likely spend the most time – on their phones. You can show personalized agendas, offer content on demand, and allow attendees to connect with peers. If your meeting or event is large enough, it might make sense to include chat bots to answer attendee questions. IMEX launched its chatbot, Frank,[vii] this year. As consumer expectations continue to rise, those of meeting and event attendees will follow.

What will you do to keep up with changing expectations to impress your audience?



2. The Trend: Companies are becoming more aware of how they present themselves due to the demand for TRANSPARENCY.

The Proof

According to TrendWatching, brands have become "glass boxes"[viii] and it's connectivity that's been the driver of this transparency.

- Employees now expect to document and share their lives online. That includes their working lives!
- Day-to-day life is being captured in real-time video or livestreamed.
- Consumers now expect as standard to know – or be able to find out – pretty much everything about the brands with which they engage.

A company's internal culture has become how they are seen externally. It can be a brand's biggest detriment, or greatest asset. With the visibility of the #MeToo movement and Time's 2017 Person of the Year,[ix] organizations are not only forced to review internal policies (rightfully so), but in some cases – perform major damage control. Taking advantage of the power of transparency are the brands that demonstrate their commitment to values and a positive workplace culture. For example, REI,[x] an outdoor activity retailer, decided to close shop on Thanksgiving and even on one of the busiest shopping days of the year – Black Friday. The move was to encourage people (and employees) to enjoy themselves outside.

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Have you had to re-examine your business this year? Has it made you look for ways to be more ethical, more sustainable, healthier, safer, or just better?

The Implication:

While what goes on inside the four walls of an office may surreptitiously seep out into the marketplace, meetings and events have always served as a public display of a brand's personality. Forward-thinking organizations, realizing the power of the platform, are tapping into it and utilizing it to showcase and broadcast important company values. From CSR to emphasizing wellness, meetings and events should be created as brand experiences that reinforce and embody the culture and values of the organization.

Another increasingly scrutinized topic in the meetings and events space is "duty of care," and savvy planners are making sure attendees, vendors, and employees are kept safe by closely following safety best practices and processes.

Have you had to re-examine your business this year? Has it made you look for ways to be more ethical, more sustainable, healthier, safer, or just better?

3. The Trend: People are building the LIFESTYLES that suit them best and injecting them with FUN.

The Proof

Land a career, get married, buy a house, start a family. The "normal" expectation of lifecycle progression has been upended. The definition of proper adulthood is debated by diverse opinions and protested by hilarious adulting memes.[xii] According to the J. Walter Thompson Future 100 report, "The experience economy is helping to ease the burden of adult life with a range of novel, playful and immersive experiences designed for 'big kids.' And TrendWatching agrees, as it predicts consumers will expect brands to leverage the sharing economy, co-working spaces, and on-demand lifestyles to "help them craft the narratives of adulthood that suit them" best. This is demonstrated in examples like adult summer camps[xiii] and brand activations like Refinery29's[xiv] interactive funhouse installation that taps into the joy of play for adults.

Additionally, this changing acceptance of adult life has paved the way for entrepreneurs and self-promoters to create their own career paths that are symbiotic with their chosen lifestyles. The demand for personal videographers, bloggers and Instagram influencers just didn't exist 10 years ago.



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The Implication:

Consumers (and therefore meeting participants) don't fit into pretty little boxes anymore – but that's ok. It's the individuality and diversity that each attendee brings to a meeting or event that makes part of the face-to-face experience so valuable. Outside of brand activations, meetings and events are where people expect (or hope) to find and engage in elements of play. Business meetings shouldn't be boring – in fact, they'll be a lot more effective if participants enjoy themselves and have fun. At Creative Group, we follow the i|xperience® methodology that helps us plan for participant touchpoints we can make more engaging and entertaining.

It's not just about dialing up the fun factor, though. From personalized content to productivity-inspiring conferences, the demand continues to grow for lifestyle-based themes and activities that can help attendees grow both personally and professionally. For example, thought-leadership conferences, like Gwyneth Paltrow's In Goop Health,[xv] are gaining popularity and offer mentorship, networking and entertainment. Whether it's health, fitness, environmental initiatives or activism, consider infusing your next meeting or event with themes and activities that will resonate with your audience and make the experience more fun and valuable for all involved.

How are you making your meetings and events more fun and valuable for participants?

4. The Trend: Personal enlightenment is taking LUXURY to a new level

The Proof

In addition to quality, luxury has always been about scarcity - the unattainable to most. But as remote destinations are becoming more accessible, it's unique, authentic, and personally challenging experiences that set some apart from others. In 2018, guests will be able to visit the Titanic on the ocean floor – but not to experience it in its traditional opulence, rather as part of the working crew of research company OceanGate. Luxury has become a "launchpad for self-actualization." People are looking for experiences that will transform their lives in one way or another. A Skift[xvi] survey found that over 50% of luxury travelers rank the importance of transformative travel at least 7 out of 10 or higher. In the same vein, physical and emotional well-being are an even stronger focus for luxury consumers than just three years ago.[xvii] They are looking for ways to disconnect and take care of their bodies through fitness, meditation and conscious nutrition. Lastly, most luxury consumers are tech-savvy and have come to expect experiences that are enhanced and personalized through apps, augmented reality, etc.



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Are you creating memorable moments? If so, how are you helping your audience remember them?

The Implication:

If you're putting on the same meeting or event year after year, the predictability is likely downgrading the enthusiasm of your audience. Having the courage to re-evaluate and re-invent your meetings will make them interesting and desirable for attendees to keep coming back. Destination appeal used to be an easy "draw" to rely on, but as meeting attendees become more well-travelled and informed, the challenge becomes to design itineraries that not only captivate audience attention but offer transformative experiences that help individuals grow in some way. Your event should create an anticipation and expectation for activities that will transport them from their everyday lives and responsibilities and reward them with unique, memorable, and meaningful takeaways.

Smart planners will discover ways to surprise, challenge and engage their audiences in new ways. This can be done through well-being initiatives, creative technology applications and sessions that tap into the personal identities and aspirations of meeting participants. The result will be sharable moments that generate buzz around the value of your event. You'll want to find ways to capture your audience doing something they've never done or learning something they never knew. Create experiences that help participants express themselves and show them how to hang onto those moments.

Are you creating memorable moments? If so, how are you helping your audience remember them?

5. The Trend: The value of INFLUENCERS is more important than ever.

The Proof

People don't like listening to brands and their marketing and advertising material. They skip through commercials and ignore pop-up ads. They listen to real people who have experiences with those brands and consult their peers and communities for input. The increasing popularity of influencers made possible by social media sites like Instagram and YouTube have the attention of consumers. As this trend progresses, we'll likely see younger and younger influencers enter the domain. According to Google Research "Gen Z (born 1998-2010) is constantly connected to others, but they are more cautious about what they share." And although they are likely swayed by their parents' opinions, even Gen Alpha (born after 2010) is starting to make its mark. Before you scoff at the thought, consider 6-year-old Ryan, who made millions of dollars from his toy review videos[xviii] in 2017.



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Do you have a strategy to create user-generated content at your meetings and events?

The Implication:

Beyond social media, meetings and events can be used as a great platform to leverage the capital offered by strong brand advocates and influencers. A known entity with a strong social following will not only attract and enthuse attendees, he or she will speak in a voice that is meaningful and relevant to an audience. In 2018, Forbes[xix] predicts influencer marketing will inspire more brands to turn to "experiential marketing to drive on-site engagement, capture brand content (through photos, video, commentary) for other marketing campaigns and influence sales."

Do you have a strategy to create user-generated content at your meetings and events?

Summary

We hope this report has sparked some new thoughts that might inspire you to re-think your meetings and events. Attitudes, desires and cultural shifts will continue to shape how your audience responds to the experiences you create for them, and staying abreast of those changes can ensure you get the greatest possible return on your investment.

Put These Trends to Work for You Today

Creative Group's approach is focused on conceiving and delivering engaging, personalized participant experiences. Our domestic and international programs reward excellence and inspire people to reach their full potential – we call it Thrivability℠ – the art and science of reaching for the stars and nurturing individual greatness. To get started on implementing these trends for more impactful meetings and events, contact Creative Group.

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