

How will future generations disrupt meetings and events?

Just when you thought you'd started to understand what makes millennials tick, a new generation has reared its head: Gen Z. And, they're about to disrupt the MICE industry drastically.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

When the conference keynote speaker fails to inspire, many of us escape in a daydream, gazing absent-mindedly out of the window or fidgeting incessantly after roughly half an hour. Gen Z'ers are not nearly as generous with their attention span and will allow just eight seconds for someone to grab their attention and inspire them.

For event organisers, this means that hour-long speaker sessions are a thing of the past, says Raylene de Wet, director of event sales at Hyatt Regency Johannesburg. "Sessions today need to be shorter and more interactive, integrating new technologies."

According to a recent report from the International Association of Conference Centers (IACC) report, Meeting Room of the Future, younger generations are increasingly influencing and driving the need for experience enhancement at conferences, meetings and events.

Eighty per cent of respondents in the report said that younger generations place more emphasis on the overall experience of an event, second only to their interest in integrating new technologies. It is also understood that younger generations are programmed to expect constant stimulation. Meeting formats need to reflect this by being more interactive, shorter and more collaborative.

De Wet shares some insights on how event organisers can apply this knowledge about this generation in shaping their event and creating event experiences that will appeal to Gen Z.

1. Engage your delegates' senses

Silent meetings, taste booths, and visual note-taking are all innovative ways to engage your delegates' senses and keep them focussed, enlightened and even refreshed.

The trend towards silent meetings, might not be the best plan of action for large conferences. However, sound can still play an important role in larger conferences by selecting and creating soundtracks that will appeal to your delegates.

Visual stimulation is equally important. Research has shown that over 65% of people are visual learners. While we remember 80% of what we see, we remember only 10% of what we hear.

"An exciting trend we have seen emerge over the last year is visual note-taking or sketch noting where artists create cartoons that summarise the conference key takeaways," explains de Wet. "Appealing to multiple senses, including taste, sight and hearing can help event organisers create truly memorable experiences," she says.

Unfortunately, however, this creative stimulation of the senses is still more the exception than the rule. A recent survey by London & Partners and CWT Meetings & Events found that 78% of event professionals believe that events appealing to multiple senses deliver a more memorable and creative experience for delegates and audiences. However, only 27% of those surveyed believed that the five senses are being effectively stimulated at events.

2. Don't present the facts. Interact!

Any professional over the age of 30 has at one time or another lived through a 'death-by-Powerpoint' presentation. The new generation is unlikely to sit through this kind of experience patiently.

Instead of boring your delegates with innumerable facts on a static presentation, try actively interacting with them, suggest de Wet. Some ways to do this is through a fun pop quiz at the start of the conference, by using technology to poll the audience or by organising a campfire session where the presenter shifts the attention to the audience and becomes a facilitator encouraging discussion.

Ryan Jenkins, Millennial and Generation Z speaker and generations expert, echoes this and says the next generation conference or meeting attendee is interested in interacting with the keynote speaker or leader following a presentation. He suggests: "Make the event all-access where every interesting communicator, conversation, or piece of content is easily accessible."

Be careful not to overdo it, warns de Wet. "Authenticity is very important to Gen Z. So, don't introduce audience participation for the sake of it – your delegates will see through this and switch off."

3. Use relevant and innovative technology

While millennials were considered to be the first digital natives, Gen Z are mobile natives. Technology is fully integrated into everything they do, including conferences and events.

A recent Verizon Business study found that 89% of people believe better technology would improve meetings. Explore the possibility of virtual reality, integrate social media materials and consider live streaming to keep Gen Z motivated and engaged. "It would even be possible to connect with people across the world during your presentations," says de Wet.

Jenkins adds that planners should eliminate the FOMO (fear of missing out) that will likely be present in the Generation Z attendees by videoing sessions, recapping key insights from sessions and making them easily available online, or creating hashtags where attendees can weave in and out of relevant digital

conversations.

"It's important to meet Gen Z on their turf and adjust your events to this up and coming generation," says d Wet. "More important still, however, is to caution against painting all Gen Z delegates with the same brush this generation wants to be treated as individuals and not as a consumer segment. It is dangerous to stage events where you think of your audience as a collective. People want to feel valued individually and have experiences tailored to their individual needs and preferences."

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