



2019 Global Meetings and Events Forecast

Special Section: The Future of Personalisation



MEETINGS & EVENTS

The Future of Personalisation



By Banks Sadler

We are now living in a world where delegates have increased expectations due to the continual advancements in technology. Every attendee has different personal and emotional requirements and we're seeing a greater need to offer a more individual and personalised experience at events.

Content and experiences have evolved from simple online websites and portals to content-driven mobile apps, Augmented Reality (AR)/Virtual Reality (VR) experiences, and Internet of Things (IoT) solutions. Companies such as Amazon, Netflix, and Spotify are leading the way with curated content, with Netflix giving viewers access to an incredible 100 million products tailored to their individual preferences at any given time.¹ Users are now continually surrounded by these personalisation algorithms from their Instagram feeds delivering their favourite content first, to preferred shopping sites providing bespoke buying recommendations. This constant, highly personalised content not only boosts engagement and brand loyalty, but also increases expectations around how they are engaged in other situations; and this is particularly applicable within the events arena.

Throughout the events cycle there are multiple opportunities to drive a more tailored guest experience, from the invitation process and event app content to post-event survey data. Email communications, registration systems, and agendas are a standard starting point for basic personalisation, but there are many more ways that planners can be delivering more tailored experiences. Whilst any progressions in the events industry are noncomparable with the rapid advancements taking place in other sectors, like e-commerce, there is a slow and steady investment in data solutions and technologies to support more personalised events.

Personalisation through data

Event organisers have access to a wealth of data throughout the event cycle. Whilst it is important to be mindful of privacy regulations, there is excellent opportunity to leverage this intelligence to deliver a more curated delegate experience. This data allows us to focus on the attendees' needs and wants, opening up opportunities to engage with our audiences more than ever before. One of the most powerful data-driven solutions is automation, which provides event organisers the Holy Grail – the ability to personalise at scale based on users' actual behaviour. This behavioural data means that messaging can be more targeted, relevant, and timely, driving a better attendee experience. When collected in real-time, data can give the organiser

intelligence about everything from delegates' locations through to their heart rate; if leveraged properly, this provides organisers multiple ways to personalise the experience, from dynamic signage and curated agendas to session suggestions based on their stress levels.

Next generation hotels are also capitalising on the data available to them to drive a more tailored guest experience. Providing high-touch and seamless service has always been fundamental to the hotel guest experience, but data is now equipping hotels with the tools they need to drive more personalised stays from loyalty programmes to in-room activations. IoT-enabled rooms are adding layers of personalisation, such as your desired room temperature and favourite channels on arrival, to your favourite coffee ready for you in the lobby. Smart hotels combined with data-driven event planning opens up huge opportunities for the industry to capitalise on a highly personalised experience from start to finish.

Hyper-personalisation or a privacy nightmare

But when does personalisation stop adding value to the attendee and become intrusive? There is a fine line between adding elements of personalisation that engage versus verging on invasive. With many well-publicised data breaches in 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) coming into enforcement, consumers have become even more aware of who holds their data and how it is being used. This heightened awareness means that beyond ensuring events comply with data regulations, event organisers also need to be aware of attendee expectations of privacy. Too much personalisation doesn't necessarily add value to the event experience.

An area that is seeing more investment, but also opening up more questions around management of data privacy, is facial recognition technology. Whilst the application is yet to still fully take off within the meetings industry, it is being trialled for more efficient and personalised check-in processes (the 2020 Tokyo Olympics will use facial recognition to streamline entry), improved onsite security, and measurement of the attendee experience. There

are more simple uses of this technology, such as how is the content resonating with the audience. Are they happy, frustrated, bored, or excited? Or the more complex use where the system recognises the facial emotion and through automation, subsequently delivers the attendee relevant content or suggestions that fits with that emotion. This creates a whole new level of real-time event data gathering and personalisation opportunities. When an organiser can detect patterns of emotional behaviour through facial recognition software and then combine this with data such as age and gender, this gives the organiser powerful measurements for ROI, all pinpointed to specific moments within the event. But how comfortable are attendees allowing organisers to have access to their emotions? And does this expose brands to new risks when they take advantage of this information? Issues like these make it critical that event organisers communicate what data they are capturing and why, ensuring the control is always with the attendee.

Technology for bespoke experiences

There is a wealth of technology available for event organisers to satisfy attendee demands and give them individualised experiences. Major hotel chains such as Hilton and Starwood have been employing artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots for some time now. The data they collect provides insight into commonality within guest requests and new trends, allowing the hotel to make regular tweaks to their guest experience. These concierge-style services aren't just limited to hotels. There have also been instances of virtual assistants accompanying delegates at conferences to maximise their experience. In the events arena, virtual assistants are still very much in their infancy, and are still lacking the sophistication to be a trustworthy and credible support to an event, but there is huge potential for them if the data were to become richer and fully leveraged by organisers. If all the touchpoints are analysed along the delegate journey, AI technology could play an integral part in driving a more curated experience.

Event apps can significantly support event personalisation by helping attendees feel like the event has been curated just for them. Bespoke agendas are a simple integration, ensuring that



delegates aren't bombarded with irrelevant content and can make the best use of their time at an event. When combined with gamification, networking elements and push notifications, apps support attendees in creating their own experiences, using their time effectively, and increasing engagement.

Augmented Reality (AR) will continue to become more prominent within the industry to drive personalised experiences as we continue to see a war of the tech giants on driving smartphone technology and the wearables market. Attendees may not have to seek out information, as it will be laid over their current environment, engaging them in situations they might not have initially sought out. We may see organisers tapping into more gamification opportunities, where they encourage attendees to interact with content and move around an event. Presenters can fully immerse their audiences in their content, whether they're presenting on the vision of their business or showcasing a new product launch, with delegates being able to create the experience that best suits them.

With the increased use of these technologies and changing approach to event design, it is now possible to drive greater engagement and in turn, a positive change in behaviour of the delegates post event. Applying these new skills and knowledge to the workplace can then create significant impact to the performance of the business, presenting a more positive return on investment for any live event activity.

Personalisation 2020

So, what could the future hold for event personalisation? Automation likely will become more sophisticated with increasingly advanced systems to support delivering communications and content tailored to the attendee and their behaviour. As AR technology integrated into smartphones becomes more accessible and mainstream, we will likely see a rise in AR usage sitting across the entirety of an event rather than fixed to certain activations. Facial Recognition technology may give planners the opportunity to personalise the event experience more than ever. It will be increasingly used for event registration, but we may start to see it used more so for monitoring of audience emotions. Identifying an attendee's journey through facial recognition can be done without knowing who they are, and is a powerful way to be able to give them a more seamless and personalised event experience.

Whilst evidence suggests that the event industry is slowly catching up with consumer trends to meet the changing appetites of attendees, we are really only at the beginning of this exciting journey. Concerns over budget, data privacy, and using 'technology for technology's sake' will always be barriers to adoption, but through an increase in audience expectations and proven results, we can really begin to explore meaningful engagement and ROI. For event planners, the job now is to continually challenge this agenda and begin designing more personalised experiences that can meet real business objectives.

1. <https://www.thedrum.com/opinion/2018/02/12/personalisation-the-clock-ticking-brands>

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