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Event Stats Every Venue & Planner Should Know



Introduction

Earlier this year, we started a little Social Tables tradition we like to call Friday Finds. The idea? End every week with a bit of knowledge about this crazy, compelling industry that we all know and love.

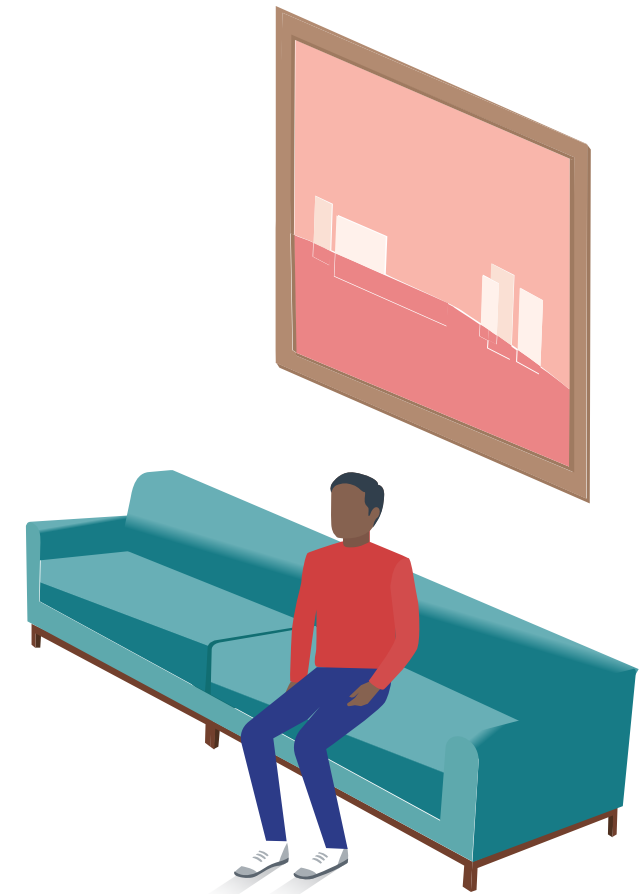
Each week, we email a short survey to a mix of over 23,000 planners, venues, and hotels. And with each survey and stat, we learn a little bit more about how all of us can come together to create better face-to-face events.

Sure, we could send planners and venues different questions and different surveys. But that would be the easy route. At the end of the day, it's the stats that bring us all together, open up new conversations, and spur collaboration, that have the biggest and most holistic impact on our events.

So with that in mind, we made every single question one that both parties could answer. And today, we're proud to share the answers back with you in this little book of Friday Finds.

It's a book dedicated to every one of you... and the incredible events you all bring to life.

Yours in Hospitality,
Social Tables



**Keep Up With
#FridayFinds**



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a new stat every Friday!

1. 100% of event professionals believe communication among their teams could be better.

In this survey, planners told us that many details change up until the last minute, communication is not shared across the entire team, there's not enough consistency in documented event details, and communication isn't concise enough. Meanwhile, venue respondents reported that important pieces get lost in endless email chains and cross-functional work can get confusing due to a lack of alignment on priorities across departments.

The takeaway here is that time spent planning how to communicate better internally can save headache and inefficiency down the line. Just as importantly it can make teams better partners to their clients.

Both properties and planners need to create consistent systems that minimize communicative pain points, doing so through a mix of smart internal processes and innovative technologies that streamline them.



2. 56% of event professionals believe health and wellness programs impact the overall success of meetings.

As the events industry continues to move toward more holistic experiences that go beyond content, health and wellness is playing a key role. Leading events such as IMEX, Dreamforce, and C2 Montréal are integrating opportunities for attendees to focus on their mental and physical health, as well as recharge.

Sure, wellness programs don't dictate the success of meetings, but they certainly enhance results. Attendees are in a better mood when their health is being taken care of: A well-timed massage or workout can unleash the creativity and energy needed to create visionary thought and connections. Plus, when attendees can keep up with their wellness practices, it removes a potential deterrent to attendance.

Venues like Wyndham Hotels are hearing the call and putting wellness front and center as they promote their groups and meetings product.

3. 60.7% of event professionals believe the seating process for groups needs to be improved.

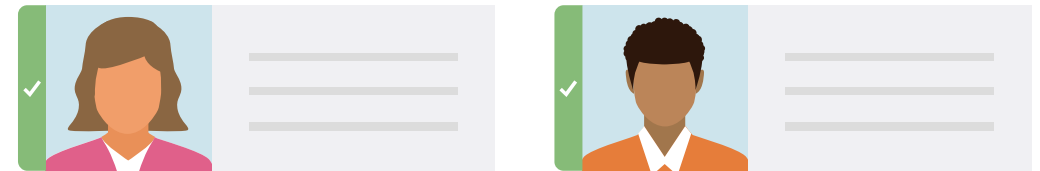
Seating presents a unique challenge because attendance is dynamic and often changes up to and throughout an event. Some seating issues we heard back about in our seating survey included participants having trouble understanding the layout, not being connected enough to the speaker, and needing more spatial/seating flexibility for networking.

Traditionally, event teams have seated attendees based on elements such as relationships, titles, or industry. However, many proponents of modern meeting design recommend letting participants choose their seating to spur engagement and networking.

Just ten years ago, this would have been unheard of, but new solutions are giving teams the agility they need to update seating in real-time and execute a seamless event. To be the best possible partners, venues need to show the same kind of flexibility as they collaborate in planning and setup.



4. 72.5% of event professionals believe the check-in process for groups arriving at venues needs to be improved.



Check-in provides an opportunity for great first-impressions to set the event's tone. But today, professionals report being frustrated by low staff numbers, slow lines (more important now that guests expect immediacy with everything), and a lack of attention to guests' details.

Let's face it: At the end of the day, people hate standing in line. That sour taste can last well into the event itself for attendees, negating all the hard work of an event team and venue to make other facets great.

Event professionals who responded to our survey proposed solutions including private group check-in versus lobby check-in, digital check-in to ensure rapidity, and even assigning arrival times in tiers or waves.

5. 72% of event professionals believe most properties are best suited for a particular type of customer or event.

No venue can be everything to every customer, and the results here very much reiterate that. Hotels and other venues have to be realistic about the things they can offer well. Just as importantly, they need to pinpoint the right customers to target with those offerings. Finding your target group segment is crucial to success, and it all starts with the type of event(s) that your space is best suited for.

For event planners, the takeaway is to map the purpose of your event back to the groups and meetings product — space, F&B, location, price — that a venue has to offer. At times, simply following the formula of rates, dates, and space can lead to events in spaces that exude the wrong vibe or energy. This dissonance from the more holistic purpose of the event can hurt the success of the gathering.



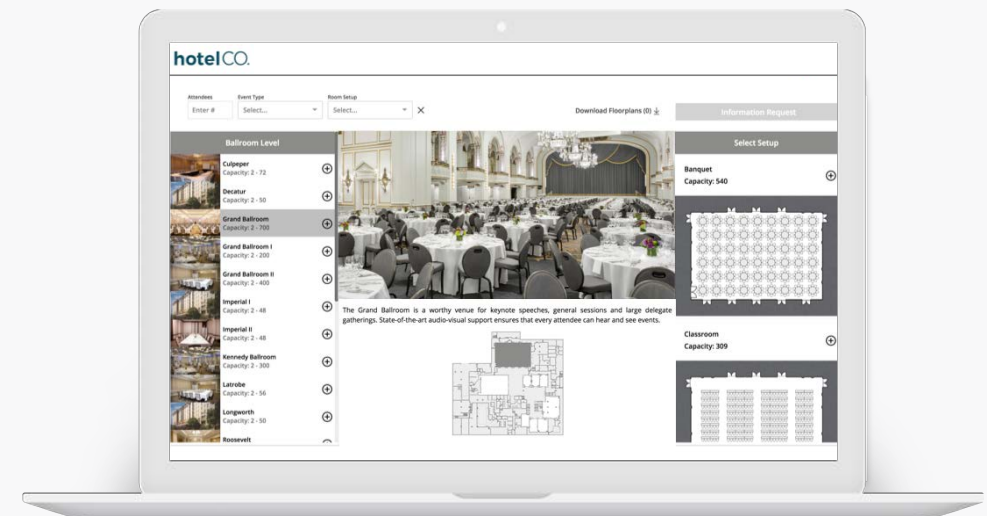
Event Sales

Event sales software that increases qualified leads and drives direct revenue.



Event Services

Collaborative event management software that drives both profits and loyalty.



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6. 95.7% of event professionals believe venues need to invest more in event technology for groups and meetings.

With both venue professionals and planners agreeing in such large numbers, a couple of things are clear. For starters, respondents show a palpable belief in the power of event technology to streamline and improve events for both parties. It also means that the need for technological adoption is clear both internally and to the clients venues work with.

Some responses include poor wifi, too much paper that could be replaced by digital solutions, difficulty getting the attention of venue reps during events, a lack of compatibility with multiple hardware and brand types, and ineffective payment tracking. Unfortunately, the realities of budgets and stakeholder approval mean properties have to invest carefully and hedge their bets on which technological investments will make the most difference.

7. 71% of event pros believe most hotel chains offer a consistent groups & meetings experience across properties.

Heavy supply growth and brand acquisitions across the industry have created a need for brands to put more priority on differentiation. With that need for differentiation comes a need for definition. Brands are mapping out who they want to be as well as what their properties should represent — then standardizing the elements that can make it happen. Much of this boils down to customer segmentation, with hotels defining their brand essence by the needs and desires of target segments.

Still, with 29% of respondents experiencing inconsistencies, there's still work to do to create unity under the brand umbrella. Respondents cited differences within brand properties in the quality of F&B, professionalism of service, levels of staffing, parking benefits, the condition of the space and equipment, transitions between reps, and pricing.

How can planners help properties here? By providing feedback after the event — something many properties say they don't get enough of.

8. 37% of event planners say bad communication is the number one reason they choose another property.

Especially in a climate where venues have to win repeat business for success, the process of event proposals needs to evolve beyond a bidding war to one showing a different kind of value. At the heart of this is better communication. Venue sales reps need to pinpoint the purpose of a meeting and use it as the fulcrum for all communication.

But it's not as simple as switching the message. Sometimes, it's also the medium. Solutions like Social Tables are empowering planners, properties, and virtually any event stakeholder with easier, better, more organized ways to communicate. With an aligned focus on purpose, the ability to work together in real time, and a central location for documentation, communication immediately improves and becomes a key value proposition for acquiring new clients.

[While bad communication took the majority of responses from planners, others included unprepared sales reps, lack of information, and a lack of transparency.]

9. 90% of event professionals believe more safety and security at events should be a priority for the events industry.

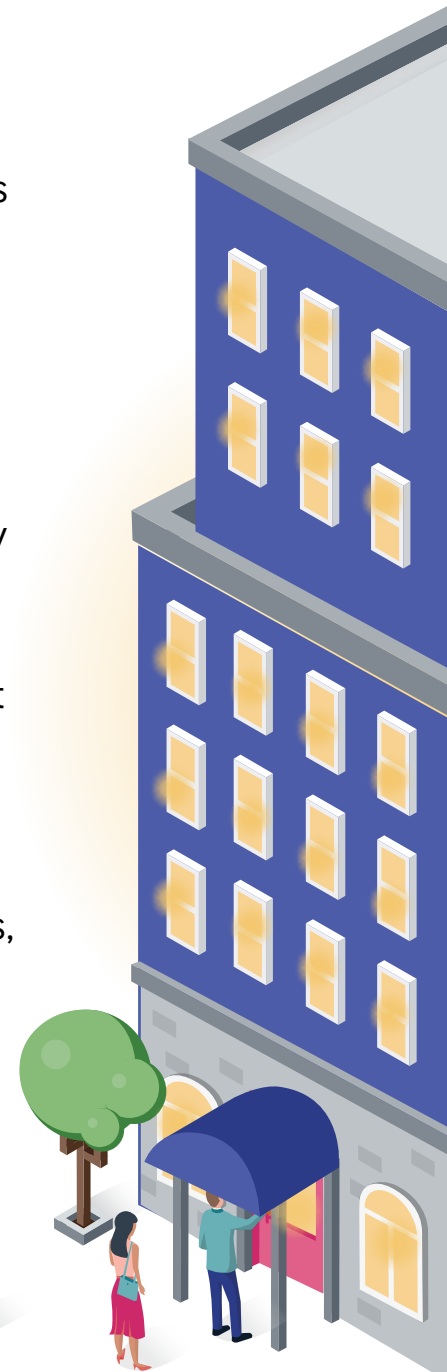
The unfortunate realities of our modern world have made event security an imperative in contemporary meeting design and planning. However, keeping everyone safe isn't just a single party's job — it falls on both venues and planners to define and implement the proper precautions and security protocols. Our industry is resilient and events aren't going away. So it's on everybody, attendees included, to collaborate proactively toward preventionary measures.

Having evacuation plan discussions between planners and venues, including security precautions in proposals, and ensuring the plan has been communicated to vendors is a good place to begin. Certain events may pose more of a security risk than others. In these instances, it's important to contract with security companies (especially when there's alcohol involved), and make sure that all entrances and exits are diligently mapped out prior to the event as well.

10. 85.7% of event pros believe that loyalty programs for groups & meetings will be successful.

Hilton, Hyatt, IHG, Marriott, and Wyndham have all created their own loyalty programs in an effort to incentivize repeat business. Yet as more of the hospitality industry begins to offer similar programs, competition will inevitably spur evolution within these programs. For planners, that most likely means that the rewards will only get sweeter as time goes on.

For properties, the question becomes what will differentiate a loyalty program for meetings? In survey responses, planners mentioned potential discounts on F&B and AV, waived resort fees, automatic upgrades, and complimentary WiFi as ideas that would make for attractive incentives.



11. 88% of event pros believe social media has raised the expectations for F&B at events.

Letting group F&B fall behind isn't just a small hit in the modern world of meetings, it's a major blow to revenue. In fact, STR reports that catering and banquet sales make up a whopping 57-59% of revenue at upscale, and luxury hotels. [1] It's equally important for catering companies that manage event space, or venues that cater in-house, as the lack of room blocks means less levers to pull and lock in sales.

Meanwhile attendees are putting more emphasis on food and beverage, forcing planners to get creative and make F&B a prime focus. At the end of the day, for both planners and venues, the importance of measuring up to the bar of social "shareability" is essential to F&B success.

Simple techniques can make a difference, such as using family style service at each table, creating food stations rather than passed hors d'oeuvres, seeking out foods with more color, and putting more focus on presentation. However, the strongest tactic is making F&B an experience in itself. Just take a note from the Beverly Wilshire in L.A., which offers a one-of-a-kind mixology challenge where attendees compete for the title of 'Best Movers & Shakers.'

12. 95.2% of event pros believe event emails to attendees could be better.

By optimizing your emails your event can easily stand out to attendees. Get into a cadence of regularly testing your email sends to continue to optimize their design. Suggested ways to improve emails include making them more personable and personalized, including simple FAQs, adding peer testimonials, and sending fewer emails (which can be accomplished by creating more robust, informative, and value-driven communications).



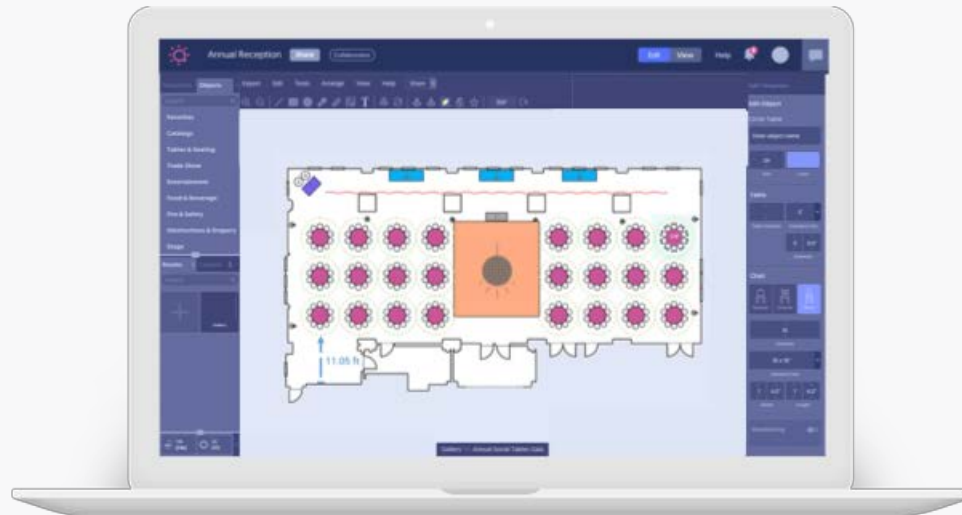
Event teams should start email communication as early as possible (directly after the latest iteration ends for annual events). Additionally, creating serial content can help spur engagement and drive registration between events. (Oh, and don't forget to leverage an innovative design that sets your event apart!)

Planners and venues could also make this an opportunity to show how the venue will elevate the event.



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13. 60% of event professionals believe AI will not become a key part of meetings and events in the next five years.

While the development of viable AI solutions has made huge gains in recent years, the event community isn't quite convinced it's going to be a staple of the events world quite yet. Luckily, even though AI might not be here to help yet, there's plenty of technology to help ease the burden of selling, planning, and executing events today.

Even still, advanced chatbots and robot concierges are beginning to pop up at hotels. Hotels and other venues will ultimately have to decide when it's right to take the plunge into AI for their respective property and meetings product. Planners, meanwhile, should be thinking about how they can leverage these initial steps into an AI world to enhance the attendee experience.

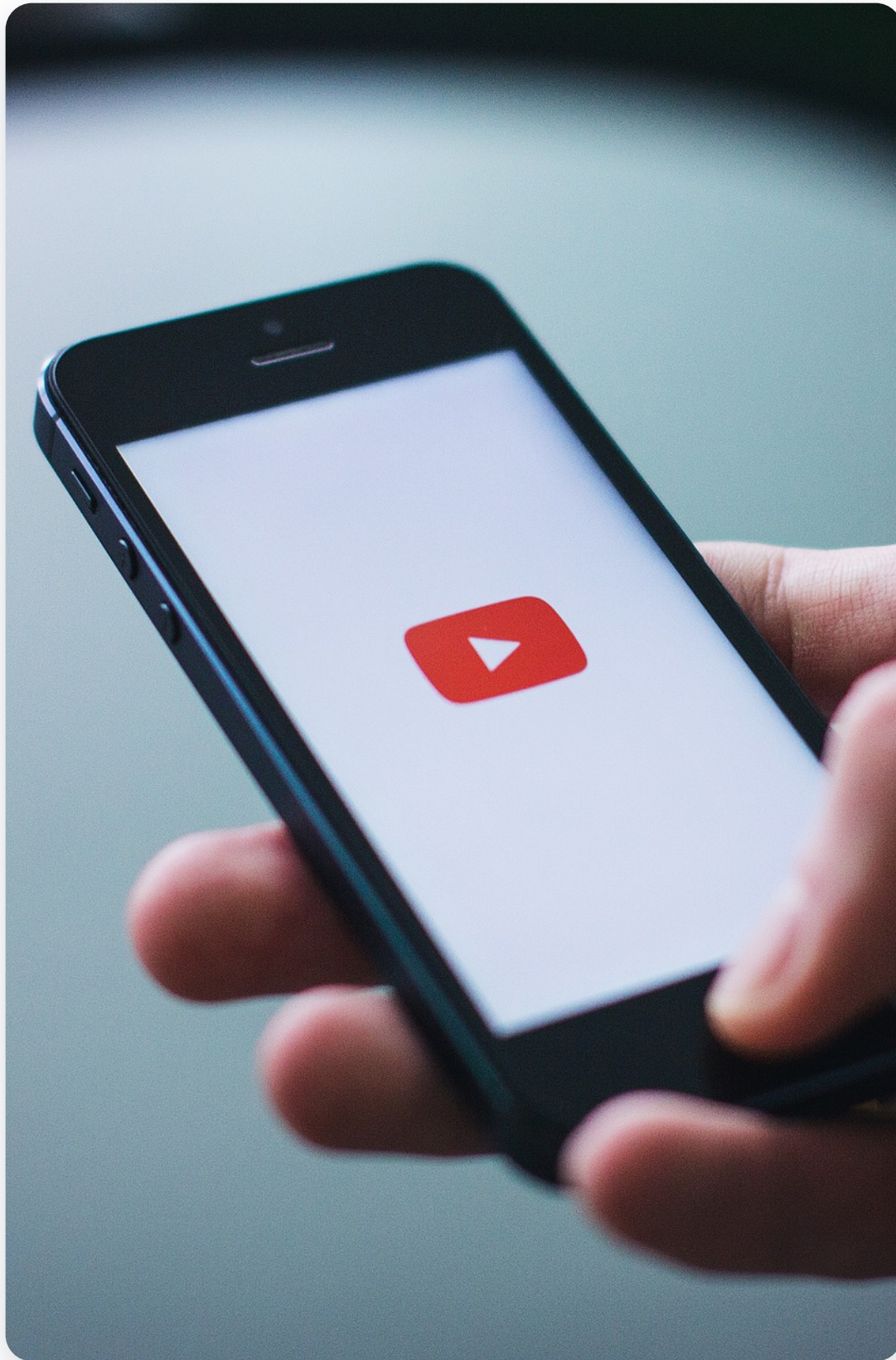
14. 92.3% of planners and property professionals believe events are more likely to be booked outside of a hotel than they were five years ago.

Today, the elements of venues that were once (and still are to some degree) at the top of planners' minds are becoming increasingly more consistent and reliable. That security is spurring a shift in focus from concerns like WiFi to new elements and an overall desire to diversify the meeting space. Plus, Airbnb is allowing planners to think outside the room block and get more creative with sourcing to provide a more authentic local experience.

This in conjunction with the new paradigm of “purposeful meetings” and personalized experiences is prompting planners to look for not just different elements, but different types of venues altogether. The 2018 AMEX Global Meetings predicted much the same at the beginning of the year with a forecasted 3.8% increase in demand for nontraditional venues. [2]

If hotels hope to avoid losing group business moving forward, it's imperative that they align themselves with the type of local experiences that nontraditional venues provide. For many, this may mean striking up partnerships with local restaurants or other popular attractions that are emblematic of the host city. It may also mean partnering with venues to keep from losing room nights to Airbnb.





15. 60% of planners find videos of the venue space to be the most helpful content in the sourcing process.

When compared to proposal inclusions such as photographs and even virtual reality tours of the space, a majority of planners responded that video is the most helpful visual content in the sourcing and proposal process. The takeaway? Venues with the resources should take a more proactive approach to creating videos and promoting them through marketing and distribution channels.

On the other hand, planners need to think about how this should inform their venue sourcing methods. Could looking for channels and booking platforms that include video make it easier to find the right space faster?

16. 96% of planners and venue professionals believe events are expected to be more personalized than ever before.



More than ever before, guests are searching for something beyond a “traditional” meeting — they want personalized event experiences that will engage them on multiple levels. Not only that: attendees want choices, and to be a part of meetings that benefit not only their specific goals as professionals, but also add value to their lives in a more holistic sense. So much so that 80% of meeting planners report their jobs involve more experience creation than they did just two to five years ago. [3]

Driven by millennials — the generation whose options are endless and often available from a mere swipe on a touchscreen — attendees also want some element of control. As a result, control over meeting formats continues to shift from the hands of the organizer to those of the attendees, pushing planners to create more personalized experiences that reach beyond a linear concept or agenda.

Properties also have to be adaptable to thrive, providing spaces and services with enough flexibility to provide the type of personalization that is quickly becoming the standard for events.

In this survey, respondents shared that “branding is everything,” “customizing menus and high-end entertainment can help personalize,” “incorporating interactive experiences is key,” and “it’s about the small details.”

17. 93% of planners and property professionals believe the negotiation process of booking an event could be improved.

Both planners and venues agree, the negotiation process could be a lot better. And just like the first stat we shared in this book, it all boils down to communication in the end. When surveyed, planners reported difficulties such as working with sales reps who aren't versed in the events industry, necessity for improved site visits, and lack of a single point of contact in the sales process.

Hotels and venues put their own communicative grievances on the table in responses, pointing out the reluctance of planners to relay non-negotiable concessions up front, or, in some cases, a reluctance to share enough information about their event and overall objectives.

With issues like these still disrupting the sales process, any step forward in communication and collaboration can greatly improve relationships — from first contact to proposal, planning, site visit, and beyond.

Planning the buffet, placing the mics, laying it all out — it's not easy making the little details come to life. So in 2011, we set out to change the way events are designed by introducing better collaboration between planners and properties.

Today, we've evolved that vision into an innovative platform offering the industry's leading solutions for event sales and services. All to help the world create the best face-to-face events.

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