From the peak to the plateau

Event apps after the hype
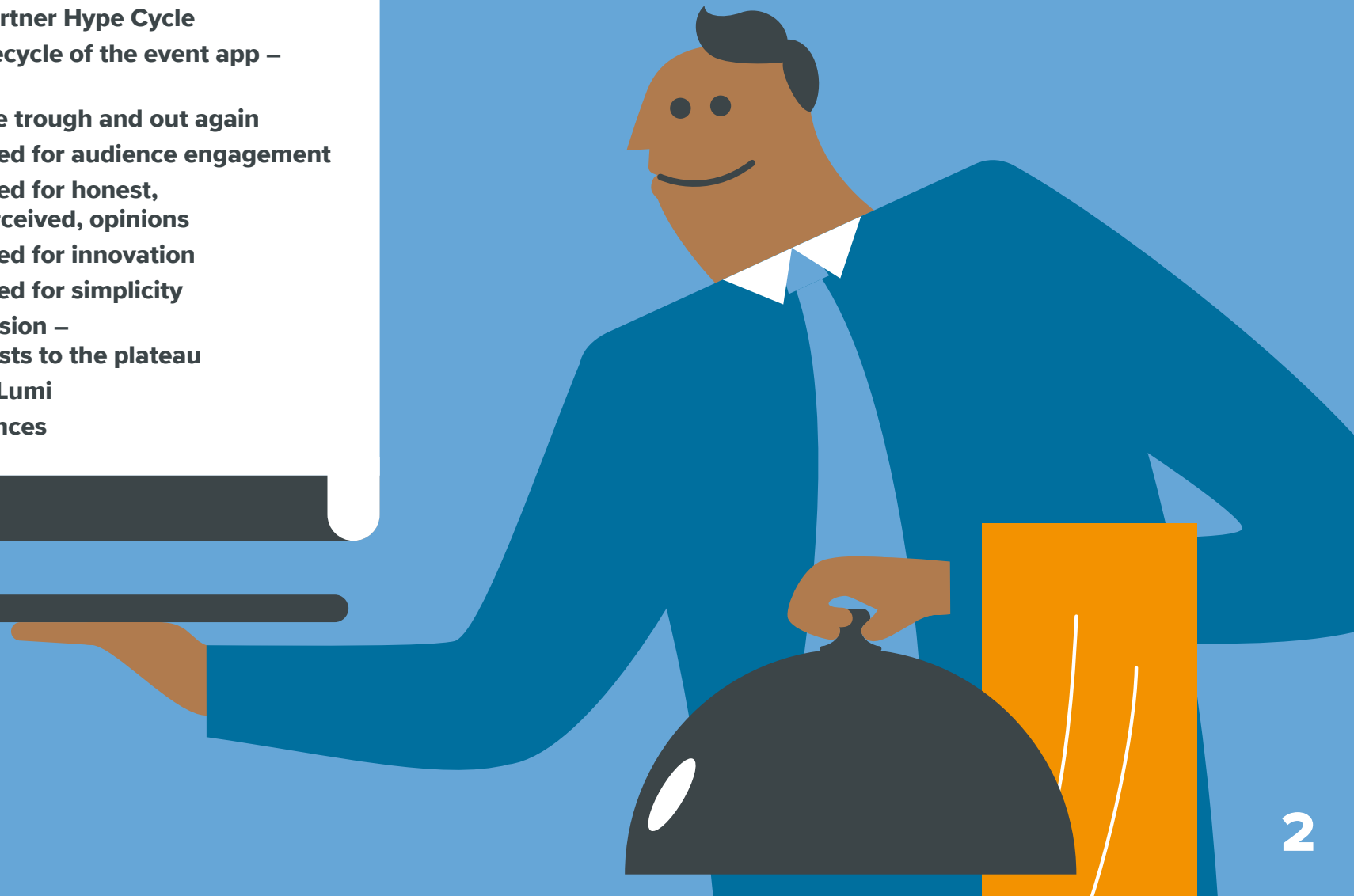
LUMI
Transforming Events

A Lumi white paper

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Introduction

The ups and downs of technology

Event managers go into the job for many reasons. Invariably they have a passion for people, communications and engaging with others. They are also likely to be brilliant at multi-tasking and managing large projects. Few choose their career because they are fascinated by technology.

Yet many are feeling disenchanted because technology is taking over their job. Things were fine a few years ago when the event app was first launched onto the conference and meeting landscape. In fact, they were more than fine; it was exciting to offer clients and delegates something new and different. There was a buzz about the event app then.

But the noise grew too loud. Suddenly more and more developers crowded the marketplace and there were too many apps to choose from. Some failed to live up to their claims or were simply more trouble to run than the value they offered in return.

The IT analyst firm, Gartner, might argue that this is all part of the 'Hype Cycle'.[1] Life has its ups and downs – and so does technology. An emerging technology is new and 'talked about' until at some stage the talk becomes clichéd and predictable and enthusiasm plummets.

Introduction cont.

The ups and downs of technology

However, for those technologies with staying power, something interesting happens next. These products have, by this time, been refined by feedback from early adopters, they have evolved to become more usable and effective and they become absorbed into our everyday or business lives.

Just look at the smartphone. Few of us get excited these days about various models or versions. Our phone has become such a necessary part of our lives that we hardly think about it anymore.

So, we believe that, in accordance with the Gartner Hype Cycle, the event app is currently taking off on a second upturn. The rise in usage may not be as dramatic as when the technology first emerged, but far more sustainable.

Why? Because a series of people-focused trends are also having an impact on the events world, opening up some very human reasons why these solutions can make a conference, seminar or meeting more engaging and valuable.

So, this paper looks at where the event app would be on the Hype Cycle, it discusses the macro-trends driving its move up the slope and finally examines the qualities an event app needs to address these – and to make the climb to the plateau.

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What would Gartner do?

Gartner analysts are among the most respected in the IT industry. Each year they analyze around 2,000 emerging technologies and place the most prominent on a graph they call the Hype Cycle according to expectations and their fulfillment.

As you see, Gartner tracks these technologies from:

- The **Innovation Trigger** or technological breakthrough – this chart shows Smart Dust at this early stage.
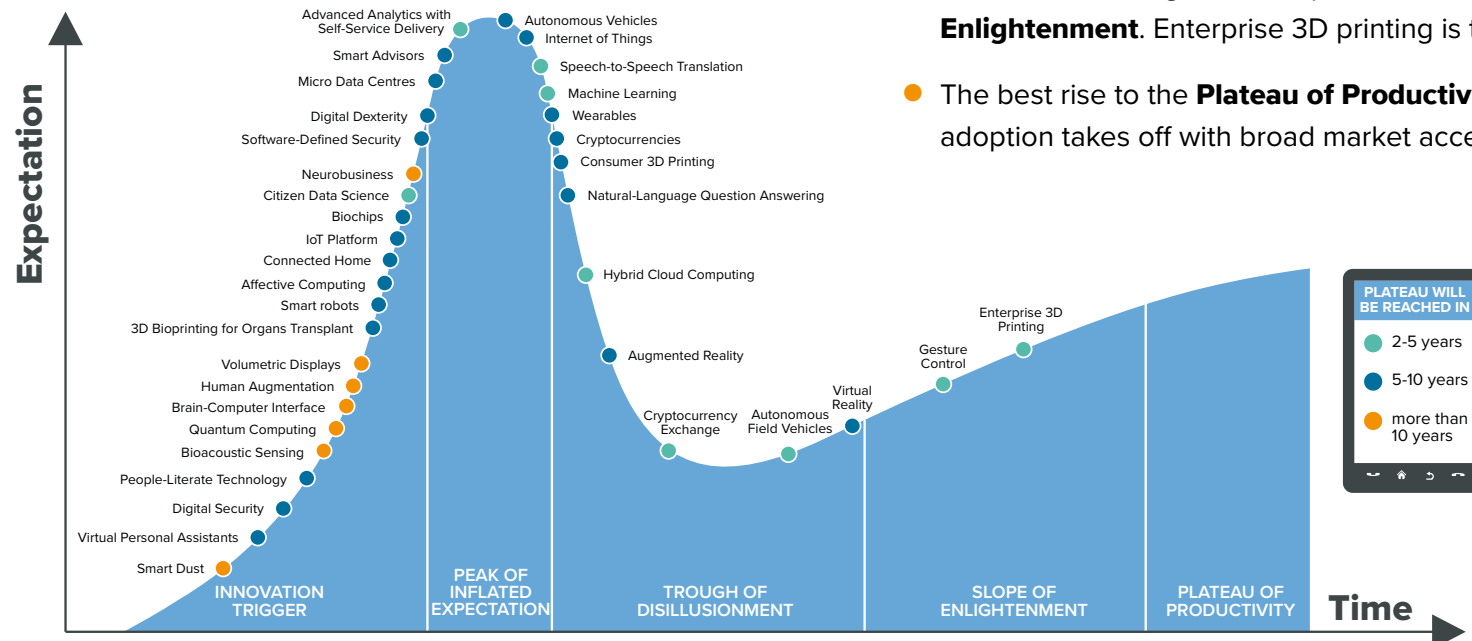
- From here the publicity takes hold, driving technologies to the **Peak of Inflated Expectations** – you'll see that the Internet of Things is just on the tipping point.

- But, because at this stage technologies are more hype and hope and as some implementations fail to deliver, the market becomes disenchanted and they drop into the **Trough of Disillusionment**. You'll see that Augmented Reality (remember Google Glass?) is on its way down.

- But this sorts out the success stories from the also-rans and the market crystallizes. Developers correct early failures with second and third generation products to form the **Slope of Enlightenment**. Enterprise 3D printing is the example here.

- The best rise to the **Plateau of Productivity** as mainstream adoption takes off with broad market acceptability.

Expectation / Time

Advanced Analytics with Self-Service Delivery
Autonomous Vehicles
Internet of Things
Smart Advisors
Speech-to-Speech Translation
Micro Data Centres
Machine Learning
Digital Dexterity
Wearables
Software-Defined Security
Cryptocurrencies
Neurobusiness
Consumer 3D Printing
Citizen Data Science
Natural-Language Question Answering
Biochips
IoT Platform
Connected Home
Affective Computing
Hybrid Cloud Computing
Smart robots
3D Bioprinting for Organs Transplant
Volumetric Displays
Human Augmentation
Brain-Computer Interface
Enterprise 3D Printing
Quantum Computing
Augmented Reality
Gesture Control
Bioacoustic Sensing
Virtual Reality
People-Literate Technology
Cryptocurrency Exchange
Autonomous Field Vehicles
Digital Security
Virtual Personal Assistants
Smart Dust

INNOVATION TRIGGER | PEAK OF INFLATED EXPECTATION | TROUGH OF DISILLUSIONMENT | SLOPE OF ENLIGHTENMENT | PLATEAU OF PRODUCTIVITY

PLATEAU WILL BE REACHED IN
- 2-5 years
- 5-10 years
- more than 10 years

The lifecycle of the event app – so far

Yes, the event app already has a history. We at Lumi know this because we've been offering one of its precursors – handheld keypads –for 25 years; keypads with dials which you turned to say whether you were for or against a motion or topic.

Back in 1999, we went on to develop what was arguably the first event app ever; a laptop-based solution which worked on a wireless network, primarily for qualitative feedback at events and meetings. The QWERTY keyboard provided the ability to type comments in text boxes. This was combined with other features such as a voting element.

However, despite this early solution, it's generally accepted that the main trigger for the event app was around four or five years ago. Expectations were high and, inevitably, the event app hit the hype high spot. In 2014 it was reported that 63% of meetings professional used apps to run their events with the prediction that this would rise to 85% in the next 12 months.[2]
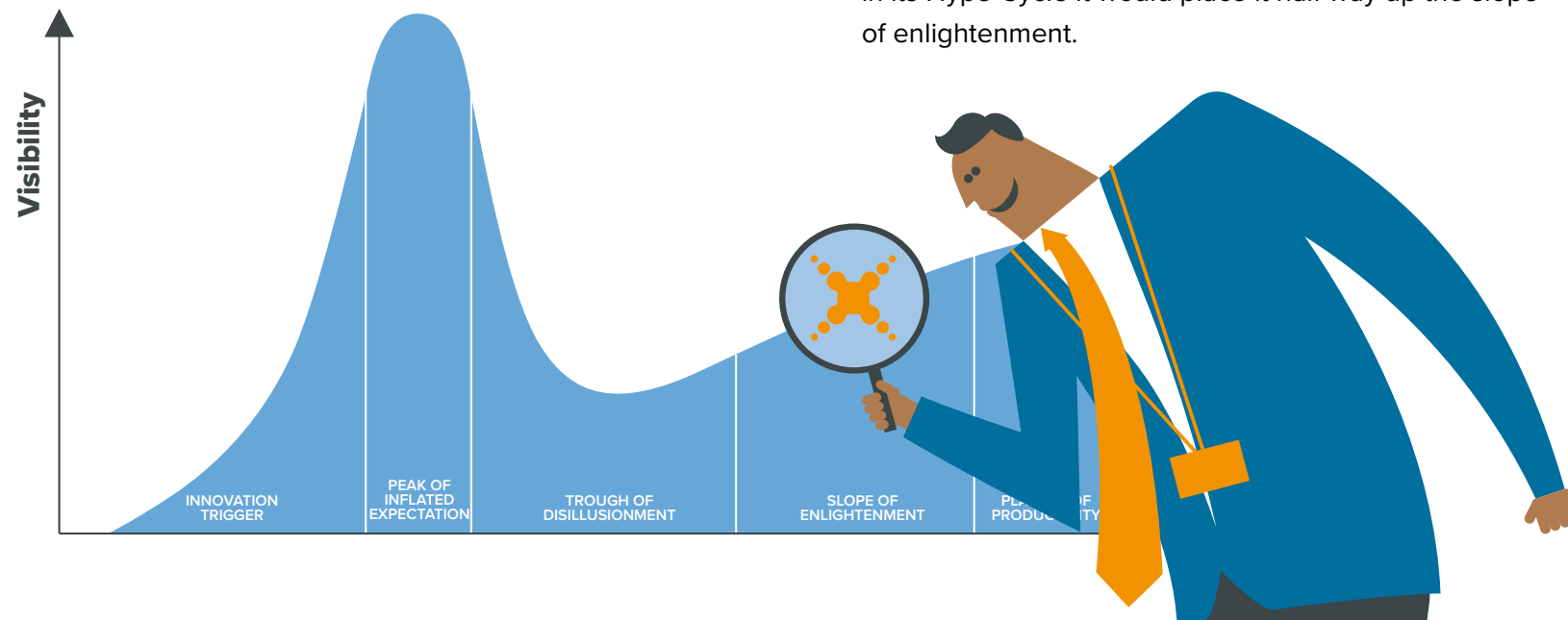
Into the trough and out again

Such was the fervour around the event app around that time that it even generated its own bible. The first edition of the Events App Bible was launched in 2013. The authors claimed they evaluated 300 apps shortlisting 50 to review. The competitive landscape was so complex that already event managers needed comparison charts and guidance on what to choose. The latest edition of the bible (2016) lists 125 apps, but authors say they assessed only 145, suggesting that the number coming onto the market has dropped.

It's hard to pinpoint when the downward slide towards disillusionment - and then upward climb began. Or indeed whether it has yet to start.

Even just recently a well-respected events blog listed Five Signs Planners are Fed Up with Technology, asking: "For years event technology has been the shiny new toy in the room. Is the love affair over?"[3]

However, some are more optimistic. As a rough guide we would say that if Gartner were to include event apps in its Hype Cycle it would place it half way up the slope of enlightenment.

Visibility

INNOVATION TRIGGER

PEAK OF INFLATED EXPECTATION

TROUGH OF DISILLUSIONMENT

SLOPE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

PLATEAU OF PRODUCTIVITY

Four reasons why event apps are on the upward slope again

1. The need for audience engagement

Engagement of all kinds is a current hot topic. For example, research on workplace engagement by the technology company Cisco has come to the shocking conclusion that worldwide up to 87% of people are not engaged in their work.[4]

If this is the case, how can business event organizers ever expect their attendees to be engaged in their meeting or conference? So they search high and low to find something to keep their audiences' attention – and usually this involves technology. According to the Event Manager Blog, 79% of event planners are still adopting some form of technology to increase engagement[5].

The need for improved audience engagement has multiple roots. Personal technologies have reduced our attention span – and increasingly we look for immersive experiences to keep us interested. Millennials, in particular, have grown up with video games and virtual reality, yet the promise of the four-generational workplace of the future will demand even more thought and diversity.

Increasingly, baby boomers kept at work through the raising of the state pension age are working alongside employees born in the mid to late-1990s with two generations of workers in between. They all tend to have their own values, varied working styles and are motivated by different things. This makes the job of keeping an audience engaged even more of challenge.
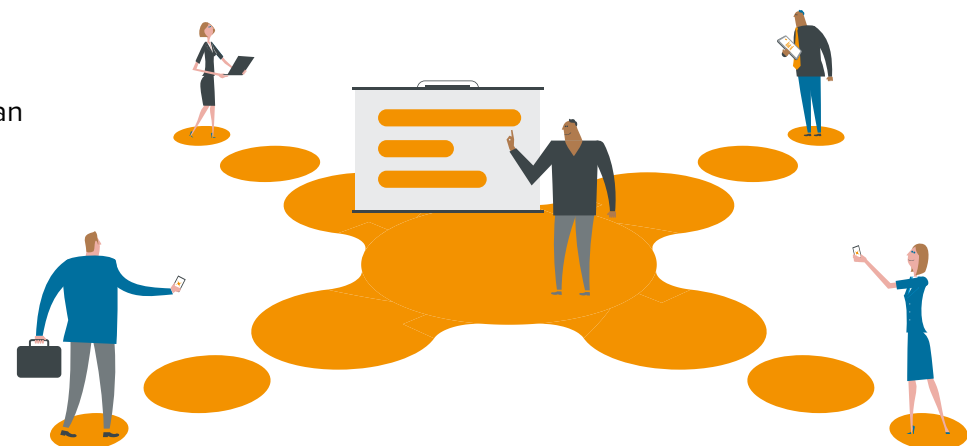
Four reasons why event apps are on the upward slope again

2. The need for the true rather than perceived opinion

This is a huge issue of our times – and one which has an impact on, but still goes beyond, the world of events. We live in an age where group-think is increasingly prevalent – and there are many experiments which show how we are influenced by others in our views.

Imagine you are in a meeting with your boss. They share an idea with you – but you fundamentally disagree with them. Do you share your honest opinion – or do you hold back? Chances are you err on the side of caution and say nothing. With social media these inhibitions are forming barriers on a broader scale.

Peer-to-peer review sites such as TripAdvisor alongside the Facebook concepts of 'friends' and 'likes' all encourage us into clusters with like-minded people. Which sounds great, but in reality means we are only listening to those who validate our own opinion. In a recent talk in the UK, Tim Berners-Lee, founder of the worldwide web, advocated that we cultivate "stretch friends" on social media; friends who don't just mirror

our own thoughts but make us think about and question our views. He fears we are all living in echo chambers, only ever hearing back our own view of the world.[6]

So why has the need to speak out never been greater – and why is it relevant to events? When someone feels too inhibited to give their candid view, for personal, political or business reasons, it steers the world in a certain direction.

You only have to consider the shock of the Brexit vote in some quarters to recognize the effect when one group becomes out of kilter with another. This can be even more likely to happen in a corporate setting such as a meeting when everybody is thinking too much about their own career to voice their real opinion. Many participants may disagree with the company line, but keep their views to themselves. They say less and less as they feel their opinion doesn't matter and fall into a spiral of silence. The results can be far-reaching, ranging from loss of productivity to high staff churn and lack of cohesive drive towards company goals.

Four reasons why event apps are on the upward slope again

3. The need for innovation

In a world where small, agile and disruptive businesses can challenge the traditional giants, innovation becomes a holy grail. Yet true innovation works best when you listen to everyone – the worker and the boss, the techie and the creative, the extrovert and the introvert.

Susan Cain says in her best-selling book Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking, "There's zero correlation between being the best talker and having the best idea". Yet, often in meetings and conferences, the floor belongs to whoever can talk the loudest. It sounds a good idea for product manufacturers to use online remarks to modify and design their products. But does this mean that the world is being re-defined by those who complain the most vociferously?

This thought is corroborated by the co-founder of Pixar, Ed Catmull who tells the story of how a long table in a meeting room made it impossible as well as intimidating for people near the ends to share ideas and feedback: "Unhindered communication was key, no matter what your position. At our long, skinny table, comfortable in our middle seats, we had utterly failed to recognize that we were behaving contrary to that basic tenet," he recalls.[7]

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Four reasons why event apps are on the upward slope again

4. The need for simplicity

Have you noticed that, today, success comes to businesses that make our lives easier? Apple streamlined the mobile into a sleek rectangle that slips into a pocket. Amazon made the purchasing experience easy with One Click ordering. Twitter pared down communications to 140 characters. It's not just in business either. The Headspace app has around three million users in 150 countries attracted to the way it simplifies meditation and mindfulness into something that takes only 10 minutes a day.

Not every technology survives the dreaded trough of disillusion. However, if mainstream acceptance is the goal, it pays to aim for simplicity rather than complexity.

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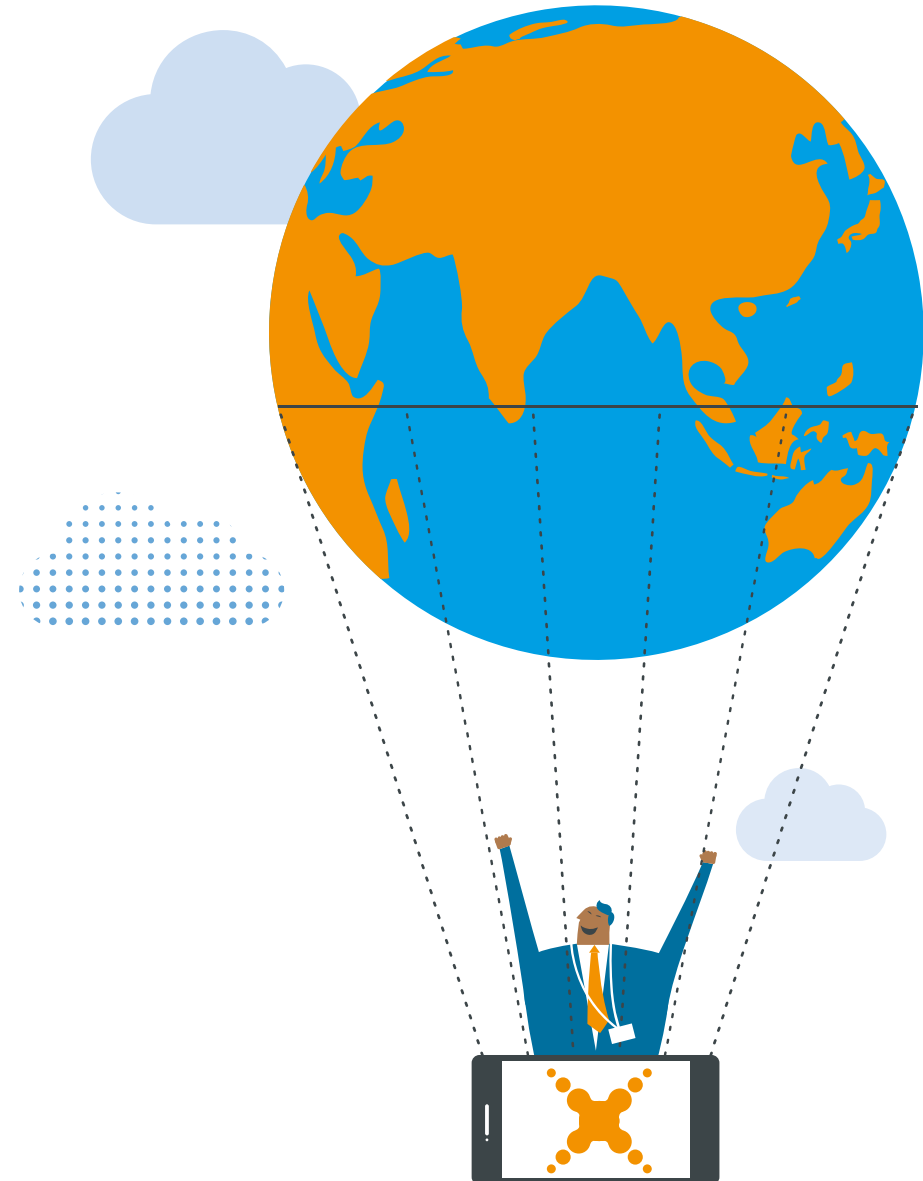
Conclusion

Signposts to the plateau

Finally, let's return to the event app. How can these trends point the market in the direction of the slope of enlightenment and to the plateau beyond?

It's clear that for any app to survive the Hype Cycle and make this journey, it must provide:

Engagement: A way to keep audiences interested by offering interactive questions and answers plus the chance to gain valuable and exclusive information.

Flexibility: Also to help enhance audience engagement, an app must enable presenters and event leaders to switch tack, change agendas and build on audience participation.

Anonymity: Moving away from group-think will provide client businesses and the audience themselves with valuable intellectual property. Being able to ask anonymous questions will also nip any misunderstanding in the bud to help the event to move forward on an honest footing.

Simplicity: For an event app to become an accepted part of the event world it must be easy to run and to download. No more headaches for organizers and broad take-up will be vital for success.

We believe that when an event app incorporates these four qualities it will soon become as an accepted part of every conference or meeting as a writing pad, pen and drink of water – no hype, but no fuss or worries for the organizer either.

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About Lumi

For 25 years, Lumi has been driven by the idea that meetings can be transformed beyond people's imagination with content, polling and other engagement ideas delivered on hand-held devices. Today Lumi is the global leader in real-time audience engagement technology.

Operating from offices in twelve countries, the company's core technologies and engaging mobile apps are used by hundreds of multinational corporations and their advisers to provide an unparalleled understanding of attitudes, opinion and behavior in a dynamic and innovative way. For more information, please visit **www.lumiglobal.com**

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