

BUSINESS EVENTS

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BUSINESS EVENTS

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OVERVIEW

Welcome to the age of experience

Live face-to-face experiences with take-away value are driving the experience economy of consumer engagement and business events

YASMIN ARRIGO

The age of experience is upon us. Customers, consumers, clients and colleagues have long been saturated by a digital overload of information, messaging and marketing, and so the experience economy has come of age. On any given weekday, a walk through London’s Waterloo Station will reveal a brand eager to appeal directly to commuters, from heating products provider Vaillant with their warmth pods this January through to last November’s virtual reality experience from Qatar Airways.

Venture on foot towards the South Bank and, within the last 12 months alone, views include everything from a giant Candy Crush castle by King, a colourful installation of giant balloons by Kipling, the women’s accessory brand, and finally a giant “Batarang” by Warner Bros and Premier PR for a LEGO Batman stunt. Add to this the indomitable rise of the pop-up experience, which many chief marketing officers are now integrating into wider campaigns, and the age of experience is here to stay.

Claudia Stephenson, vice president of business development at FreemanXP in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, creators of Vodafone’s Future Breakers Live event at Capital’s Summertime Ball, believes brand experience plays an increasingly important role in the marketing mix.

“Marketers seek out new and unique ways to cut through the clutter of modern life and connect in meaningful and memorable ways with consumers, who are busier and more distracted than ever,” she says.

“Live, face-to-face experiences allow brands to achieve just that, which is why we’re seeing a rise in demand for brand experiences, whether it be from existing clients, who are looking to increase the number of events they execute annually, or new clients who have witnessed the effectiveness of the medium first-hand and are eager to enter the space.”

Institute of Promotional Marketing’s managing director Carey Trevill says: “Time away from the office has to be balanced with what you will gain from the experience, insights and take-away value. If these are not evident quickly to the potential delegate, it is unlikely to convert to a booking, even if the event is free. Leadership con-



Entrance hall of the Düsseldorf Fairgrounds, which hosts Drupa, the world’s largest print media exhibition

ferences and events have become more popular, with recent economic events adding to the urgency to attend ‘critical’ happenings to keep on top of a fast-paced marketing environment.”

And this sense of urgency and staying at the forefront of industries remains key to brand interaction, says Olympia London’s managing director Nigel Nathan. “In today’s world, where information is delivered in many forms and at an ever-increasing rate, the most meaningful brand relationships are still formed face to face,” he says. “Even with innovations in technology and the explosion of social media, we as the event industry still maintain an edge as the only channel to offer a holistic marketing experience, facilitating true connections between people and brands.”

Creative experience agency drp recently delivered the global launch

of Triumph’s Bonneville Bobber in front of 1,000 guests at Printworks London, recording a social media reach of 68 million. The agency’s head of insight and innovation Callum Gill believes events devoid of technology will have little resonance with the millennial generation, yet argues that the right tech must be deployed to gain a strong and measurable result.

“This year the buzz is around augmented reality and virtual reality,” he says. “The latter is immersive and powerful but actually quite isolating in an event environment. Large-scale shared virtual experiences are still a way off, while augmented reality is shareable at the event which encourages wider participation, plus it is scalable pre and post-event, and easily accessible on devices everyone already has. As it becomes more a part of everyday life, such as Nike just launching their NIKEiD AR

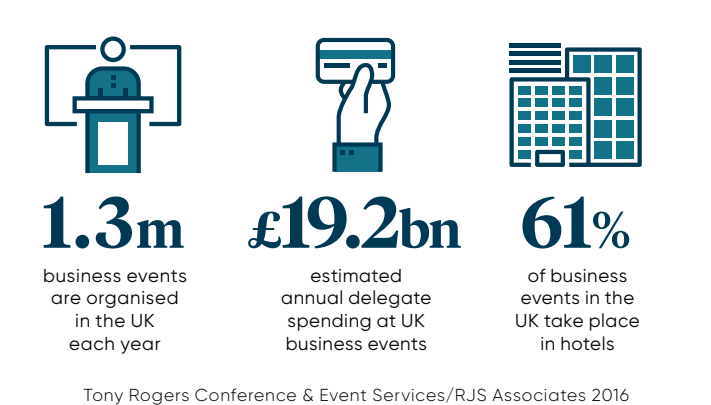
shopping experience in their Parisian flagship, augmented reality will become a must-have like an app or even wi-fi.”

Printworks also worked with Toyota and Adidas, and Vibration Group’s creative director Simeon Aldred believes that content remains key for the brands. “Creating the right content for sharing by key influencers is everything. With brands like adidas, these super fans are not just propagating through the traditional native social channels, but increasingly using apps such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, WeChat and Facebook Messenger. Brands know this and are working hard with their agencies to create the best most engaging, and ultimately, sharable content possible,” he says.

Meanwhile, across the exhibition halls, event organisers are embracing the new wave of tech that tracks visitor movement, to gather anonymised analytics about flow of movement, including a visitor’s preferred route around an event and dwell times at particular areas. Olympia London’s head of eForce Amir Vered explains: “We’ve recently concluded several successful trials of a visitor movement tracking programme and we expect to roll this out in its entirety this year, and for event design around this insight to become commonplace across the industry.”

So be it consumer engagement or business outcomes, events are increasingly seen as a core solution and this is set to further augment in the future as Generation Z fuels the experience economy. For this social media savvy generation, the FOMO – fear of missing out – factor will extend from consumer gatherings to business events, conferences and networking opportunities as experience becomes the new currency.

Mr Gill at drp concurs: “Status is no longer determined by the car we drive or the watch we wear, but rather the experiences we’ve had. The more unique and interesting, the higher value we collectively award. Secret Cinema, Punch Drunk, experiential pop ups, guerrilla events all fall under this category. Now events within marketing must be part of this zeitgeist to stand any chance of delivering engagement. Alongside this, personalised event journeys and experiences are vitally important to win a share of attention in a desperately crowded marketplace.” ●



CONTENT

KIM BENJAMIN

When software giant Salesforce kicked off its Dreamforce event in 2015, an annual showcase for product launches, demos and workshops, it dedicated an entire keynote session to mindfulness training, bringing in technology and meditation experts including Google’s Chade-Meng Tan and GoldieAWN. For Dreamforce 2016, it used the same tactic but on a bigger scale, with mindfulness and meditation sessions led by 20 Buddhist monks.

Edweena Stratton, vice president for employee success for Salesforce Asia-Pacific, says Dreamforce aims to be more than a business conference, with mindfulness helping the brand to engage further with attendees, by deepening their awareness and appreciation for life.

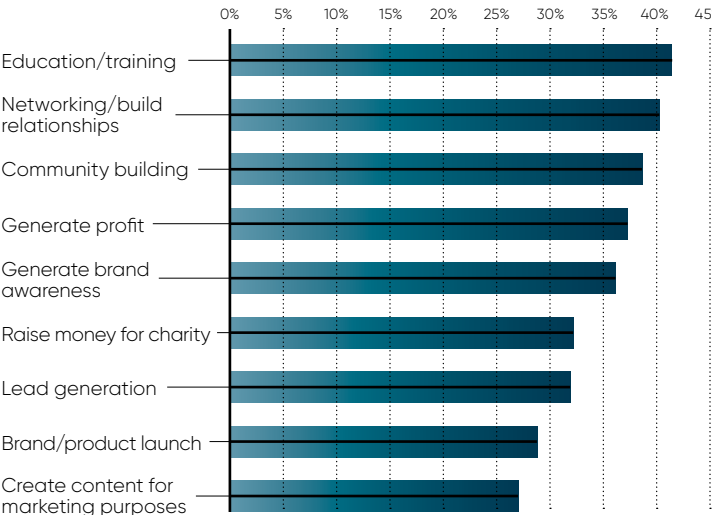
“The keynote served as a great avenue to allow our attendees the chance to look inwards and reflect while at Dreamforce,” she says, adding that it also offered them moments of calm and clarity to avoid burnout.

At last year’s Drupa, the print and cross-media trade show, Kodak unveiled a life-sized interpretation of an urban neighbourhood called The Kodak Quarter. It featured warehouses with printing presses and industrial spaces transformed into creative studios, highlighting the brand’s print technology. Kodak wanted to appeal to an audience who were creatives at heart as well as buyers of printing equipment.

These are just two examples of how business-to-business (B2B) events are focusing on creating immersive environments that aim to engage all the senses.

Damian Ferrar, senior vice president and executive creative director at agency Jack Morton Worldwide, which worked with Kodak at Drupa, says B2B clients recognise the importance of igniting a relationship with their customers based on a mix of logic and emotion, by providing richer experiences, meaningful narratives and one-on-one attention.

TOP REASONS WHY UK EVENT COMPANIES ORGANISE EVENTS



Eventbrite 2016



Bret Hartman / TED

Mixing mindfulness and selling brands

Business-to-business events are focusing on creating immersive environments with content that aims to engage all the senses

“Designing an experience that established a context of creativity was an important lever for success,” he says. “Instead of designing a stand, we designed a platform for a community – a physical plat-

form with multi-layered content and a visitor journey to deliver a consistent, coherent and compelling experience.”

He adds that while the importance of content should not be underestimated, it is no longer king. Rather, content has to reflect the needs and values of individuals to engage with them successfully.

Agency WRG managed Ricoh’s stand at Drupa. WRG executive creative director Mark Gass says that time spent at a B2B event needs to be far less passive.

“Second screen content needs to work far harder, so we see more of the ‘telling’ being done in the pre-event phase, giving delegates more time to absorb the information, so they come armed with really good questions instead. In other words, more ‘asking,’” he says. “It’s no good having great content if you fail to engage on other levels like venue, format and networking, really engaging all the senses to create something unforgettable.”

Allegra Group produces the annual London Coffee Festival,

which includes two industry days alongside public sessions. Its founder Jeffrey Young believes “infotainment” is driving brand engagement at B2B events, where the pre-event, at-event and post-event content storyline is woven into the fabric of an event via a mix of media including online, mobile and live activity.

“The visual appeal of the event layout, the flow and the multi-sensory experience is paramount to creating an environment where a lot of business gets done,” he says.

For Clarion Events, which produces exhibitions such as Internet Retailing Expo, B2B events have evolved to be more about sharing knowledge, generating opportunities and creating a memorable experience.

Its portfolio director Sam North says that to facilitate this, Clarion invests a significant amount of effort ahead of its events, enabling pre-event connections between visitors via social networks and bespoke systems, as well as creating networking and relaxation areas on-site for exhibitors.

ABOVE
TED owner and curator Chris Anderson interviewed the Dalai Lama at TED2015 – Truth and Dare, in Vancouver, March 2015

INSIGHT
WHAT B2B EVENTS CAN LEARN FROM TED

Ask speakers to give the audience something they can use or learn from and that lights up their world view, says Chris Anderson, curator and owner of the TED Conference.

“In our experience, talks that might come off as self-serving – touting a product or service, for instance – have the ability to turn eager audiences off instantly,” he says.

Pushing speakers to cut everything back to one single idea, what TED calls “establishing a through-line of a talk”, is key.

“By narrowing the focus, speakers stand to make more of an impression,” maintains Mr Anderson. “Too much information and the audience’s eyes just glaze right over. One of the biggest pitfalls of business-related talks is the tendency to use jargon. Experts are often so immersed in their industries, they forget what it was like not to know their field’s specific terminology or concepts. We encourage our speakers to keep language accessible for a general mainstream audience.”

Vincent Ng, founder of 1+1 Productions and vice president of education at the International Live Events Association of Hong Kong, is a former TEDx curator. He says that creating engaging content is a combination of sourcing great content and producing it right – the selection, speaker preparation, staging and production.

He says: “With our TEDx speakers, we begin coaching them three to four months before the event and some speakers go through five or six sessions of coaching. For great content, go where the experts are, but also go where people are pushing the boundaries with experimentation and new paradigm shifts.”

B2B events have long since moved on from the classic booth or stand format and one-sided product launch. Event companies recognise that B2B customers and their audience are people too. As such, engaging live experiences, with content that is both exciting and enticing but which engages all the senses, and across different channels and formats, is increasingly key to success. ●

“Clients recognise the importance of igniting a relationship with their customers based on a mix of logic and emotion

COMMERCIAL FEATURE



WRG: Six trends defining the future

Creative engagement agency WRG, which engages audiences through the creation and delivery of live experiences, strategic communications, video and interactive content, looks to the future



Part of The Creative Engagement Group

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF EVENTS

When the *IPA Bellwether Report*, the barometer of UK marketing spend, reported a record 13th successive rise in event marketing spend, it became evident that live engagement is now firmly established as a strategic part of an overall campaign. "Marketers are prepared to invest more in experiences for deeper and richer levels of audience engagement, both consumer and employee, that simply can't be achieved in other channels," says WRG chief execu-

tive Russ Lidstone. "The role of face to face is becoming more and more relevant to brands as the level of engagement with the customer is so much greater." The global communications agency creates unforgettable experiences for brands across all sectors, including healthcare, technology, retail and fast-moving consumer goods, and was recently engaged in Hong Kong by adidas to create a Sportsbase six-week outdoor sport event. The activation exceeded client expectation for participation rates with more than 65,000 people taking part and almost 22 million online views.

INTEGRATING IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGY

From iBeacons to augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) to wearables, technology and event marketing are becoming perfect bedfellows, enabling audiences to be truly immersed in the brand message. Geo-location, virtual platforms, Oculus and instructional design are increasingly being deployed across sectors as diverse as automotive and healthcare to create impactful experiences. WRG used iBeacons at a client leadership event to track activity in a

concept store, following customers as they experienced the event and triggering messages relating to the environment, pushing messages to delegates' apps and assessing in-store hot spots, right down to the detail of how much coffee was consumed. The gathered data was then fed back into the plenary content. Meanwhile, at Europe's largest cardiology congress, the agency put patients at the heart of the project by placing healthcare professionals in the mindset of a patient, within immersive VR projection pods that recreated the sensation of a heart attack. As new technologies come to the fore complementing immersive experiences, agencies will need to build capability by partnering with the best-in-class suppliers or to form strategic alliances with specialists, such as WRG's partnership with film, digital content and VR experts, The Moment.

66 Marketers are prepared to invest more in experiences for deeper and richer levels of audience engagement that simply can't be achieved in other channels

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

The greatest engagement in a live environment undoubtedly requires a personal approach and for 2017 events will embrace all the small touches of the luxury and hospitality sectors to create a memorable experience. Be it a handwritten note from the chief executive, your favourite magazines and snacks in a room drop or a dedicated event concierge on hand for special requests, enhancing the guest experience at events will grow to mirror the way brands are increasingly using data to personalise the consumer experience. This focus on customer centricity, the experience arc and understanding the user journey will in turn manifest itself in the crowdsourcing of content, the rise of bespoke agendas and an ability for the audience effectively to curate their own event. "We're now able to think about our audience as individuals – microcosms of supply and demand – whether it's for Google or our healthcare clients," says Mark Jackson, WRG's head of environments.

VIRTUAL APPROACH

When virtual events were first mooted a decade ago, the events industry experienced a collective shudder. Yet far from being a threat, the growth in virtual events has actually been a complement to the live industry, spawning in turn hybrid events. A virtual gathering can offer a cost-effective solution for large organisations holding internal events and, as the interest in this surges, the focus for the year ahead has switched to how to make them more engaging, and to ensure audiences feel truly in the moment. Meanwhile, hybrid events help to overcome the isolation that virtual events can experience, with options including broadcasting from a central studio into satellite audiences or using planning tools to enhance audience engagement with the content. Mr Lidstone explains: "Feedback, engagement, measurement are all possible in our virtual approach – it is no longer the poor relation to live."

SENSORY EXPERIENCES

"Digital will become more sensory in the events sector," says Mr Lidstone, describing the blend of real and augmented reality that engages the senses to impact audience behaviour, evoke emotions and influence choice. It was this approach that WRG deployed when Ricoh required a communications campaign and exhibition stand to demonstrate all the benefits that their digital production printing could bring to customers in 2016. The Open New Worlds campaign needed to demonstrate how Ricoh's new, digital approaches to printing could change the way things are done to the better. WRG opted for a sensory and relatively low-tech solution to the challenge and, as executive creative director Mark Gass explains, the results were all the more engaging. "A great compelling story is what grabs the attention, not necessarily the screen or device you use to tell it on," he says. "Don't be afraid of seeming out of touch if you choose to go low-tech. It can be very refreshing. You won't overwhelm your visitors, there will be no barriers to engagement and, best of all, they may leave with something they'll really value – a real human experience. Isn't that why they came in the first place?"

RETURN TO REAL

With an ambition to provide two million people with free training in digital skills, Google UK came to WRG and asked for a solution that would be easy to install in any public space. The Digital Garage design needed to be affordable and accessible, so the agency combined raw untreated materials with simple, modular construction techniques to give these spaces a utilitarian and functional appeal. This practical, logistical approach underpins the "return to real" ethos that clients are now embracing as they switch back to some of the very basic principles of human behaviour. "We are now investing a lot of thought into creating environments specifically designed to facilitate conversations. The latest science behind lighting, sound and seating becomes critical," says Mr Lidstone. "There is something very special about live performances and it is becoming increasingly rare for audiences to share a real-time experience. When combined with technology, the experience can be enhanced and amplified to a wider group."



RUSS LIDSTONE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
WRG

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ENGAGEMENT DATA

Get to know your visitors with tech...

Data is gold if you can get to its real value in the details gathered at events increasingly with the help of innovative technology

PATRICK WOLFF

Data is only as useful as the user makes it. Simon Clayton, founder of badge and registration company RefTech, did some secret-shopping research sending spies posing as juicy prospective clients to speak to people at stands at a major exhibition. Astonishingly, only half the exhibitors followed up later. When they repeated the experiment more recently, just a quarter followed up. Only one in four exhibitors actually bothered to follow up with a promising lead after the show.

Given how costly it can be to have a stand at an exhibition, you have to wonder, was the volume of potential business so great that exhibitors simply didn't have the time to follow up? Or was it a combination of not using the data properly and moving on too quickly after the show finished?

Engagement data – its collection and application – is perhaps the area

within the realm of business events that is seeing the most pronounced and rapid rate of innovation. Much of this is in line with the increasing speed and miniaturisation of computer networks, the internet of things, for example.

One example that may have helped Mr Clayton's hapless secret shopper is the lead capture app offered by Akkroo. Downloadable on to tablets and smartphones, the customisable Akkroo app replaces the clunky traditional methods of collecting stacks of business cards or filling out paper forms on-stand, only to transcribe them (or not) into a spreadsheet after the event.

Akkroo lets exhibitors scan business cards or badges and automatically transcribes them into a cloud-based data hub, from where they can be poured into the company's own customer relationship management system such as Salesforce. That's right, take a picture with your device and before you've finished your conversation the visitor's name and



With more data being collected before the show even starts, it's now possible for visitors to fill their schedules with meetings before getting on the plane

contact details are already making their digital way into your company's sales system.

Another cutting-edge app that helps organisers stay organised is Eventsforce. Not only does the Eventsforce app enable organisers to see who precisely is registered to attend a given break-out session, for example, but the audience demograph-

PROS AND CONS OF DATA INTEGRATION TO EVENT PLANNERS

SURVEY OF US AND UK EVENT ORGANISERS AND AGENCIES

BENEFITS

75%
Time-savings

59%
Data accuracy

51%
Increased productivity

44%
Better data-sharing

16%
Increased revenue

11%
Improved data security

BARRIERS

57%
Cost

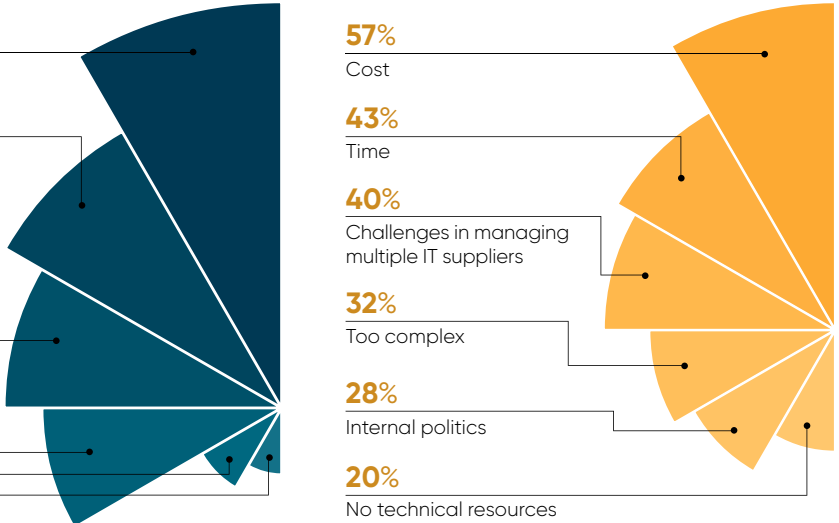
43%
Time

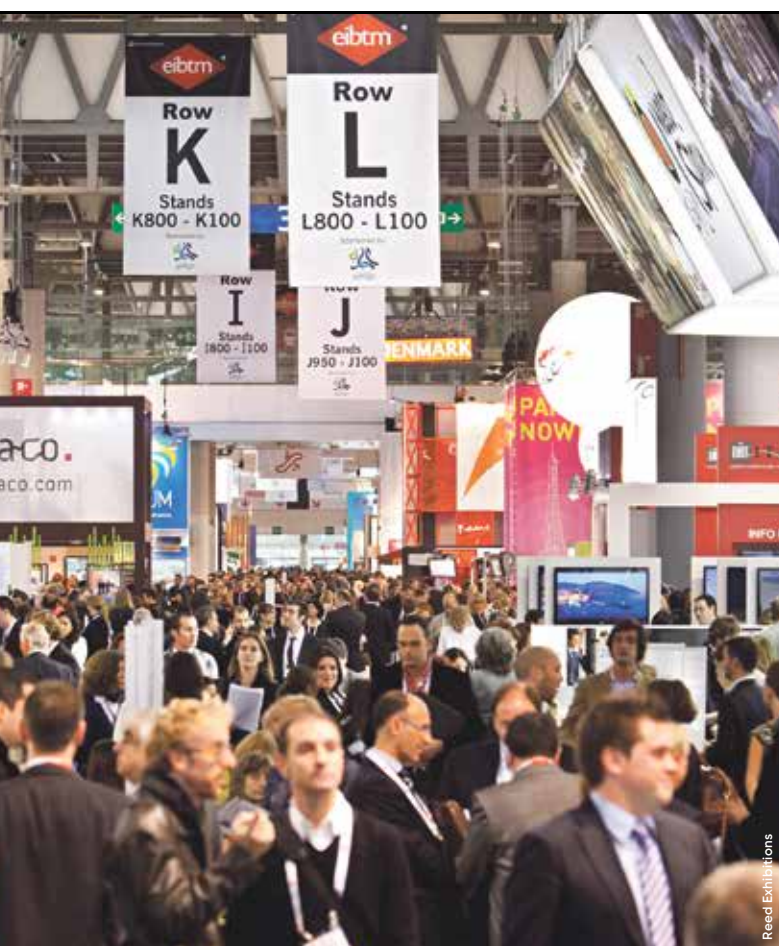
40%
Challenges in managing multiple IT suppliers

32%
Too complex

28%
Internal politics

20%
No technical resources





ic information it produces can be shared with a speaker to allow them to customise their presentation.

Perhaps more fascinating, albeit nerdier, is the ability of the app to track which sessions are full and which have space left, and tweak digital signage on the show floor to direct people to the places where seats are still available.

The intense, albeit brief, hype surrounding *Pokémon Go* brought augmented reality into the mainstream consciousness. But this budding technology had been on the event industry's radar for much longer than that.

According to Alistair Turner, managing director of EIGHT PR & Marketing, some technology innovators are trying to bring augmented reality to the show floor by using beacon technology in the venue to track location and dwell time of visitors or delegates. Imagine holding up your mobile phone to see a live projection of the show floor through your camera with marker pins layered on top indicating the location of compatible buyers or sellers, or your next meeting.

With more data being collected before the show even starts, it's now possible for visitors to fill their schedules with meetings before getting on the plane.

Increasingly, the world of event technology is focused on live feedback of delegate/visitor experiences. Some innovators are looking to take this even further by tapping into the social media profiles of visitors. Assuming visitors grant the appropriate permissions, tech such as Live Styled can in theory be used to track feeling and sentiment in a more analytical way.

When linked with the IT infrastructure of the venue, Live Styled claims to give organisers live "sentiment" information, for example if people are tweeting that they've been waiting ages for the loo, an organiser can pick up on that and tell people the locations of alternative facilities.

FACTFILE

DATA MANAGEMENT

Some 58 per cent of event planners surveyed by Meeting Professionals International still use manual processes or spreadsheets to ensure data consistency across event websites, schedules, signage and apps. Only 33 per cent use automation to keep their data aligned.



So much for business-to-business events, where registration is more than someone simply buying a ticket at the gate, everyone wants to make deals and most people come equipped with a supply of business cards.

Things are different at consumer events, where people are more reticent to hand over their details, and will often buy items then and there with cash over the counter, meaning organisers can't build customer profiles in as deep a way.

Some organisers are trying to encourage prospective visitors to buy tickets in advance, but a lot of consumers simply don't feel strongly enough about a given event to do that.

This could be where Adestra's e-mail builder could come in. While not as explicit a data collection tool as some of the other examples, the Adestra system enables marketing teams to swap out unwieldy html e-mail templates with more dynamic, modular formats that are easier to design and send, even live from the show floor. By increasing open rates and conversion rates, and sending out appealing live updates from the event itself, organisers can entice more guests, and convince existing guests to stay longer and return next year. ●

COMMERCIAL FEATURE



New perspectives

A good event space has to have good accessibility, be close to suppliers and hotels, and have state-of-the-art facilities. If you can have all this at favourable terms in one of Europe's biggest metropolitan areas, you're on your way to a great event



Situated just 20 minutes from Düsseldorf Airport and in the centre of Essen, Messe Essen has excellent connections to more than 200 destinations worldwide. Essen itself is the ninth biggest city in Germany with around 600,000 inhabitants, was European City of Culture in 2010 and is currently the European Green Capital, yet it's one of the unsung heroes.

Because the exhibition site is located in the city, attendees don't have to travel miles in a taxi to get to the venue and after exhibitions there are hotels, restaurants and bars within walking distance, which enables the groups to stick together. This puts the site in a unique position. Moreover, because Essen is an insider tip, pricing is competitive, not just at the venue itself but for service costs and accommodation too.

Messe Essen provides a service-oriented guests project team, responsible for all the guest events it runs. This means one consistent face to the customer, so if there are technical, service-related questions or conference facilities queries, just one person will be responsible.

If desired, the team can also support the organisation of an accompanying event programme. Thanks to the opportunities provided by the Grugahalle, a multifunctional event location for up to 7,500 people, or the unique atmosphere of the Galeria, a special hall that can be used for exhibitions and evening events, there are several options on site.

In addition to the services and opportunities Messe Essen offers on-site, customers benefit from the team's experience in organising cultural, leisure or entertainment framework pro-



grammes that complete an exhibition day and make the stay in Essen even more unforgettable.

Despite being one of the top ten exhibition venues and exhibitions organisers in Germany, the company is constantly seeking to improve its offering. In May 2016 it started a comprehensive modernisation project to improve its 110,000sq m of exhibition space, tearing down halls, building new ones and modernising others.

After the modernisation, Messe Essen will have one of the technically most modern venues in Germany, with eight ground-level exhibition halls and three conference centres directly connected to the different halls. The first construction phase including the new East Entrance (pictured) and the Congress Centre East will be finished by November 2017, with the overall project completed by 2019.

A lot of success stories have been written in Essen. Many of them started as a mid-sized show and are now using the whole venue. And the modernisation of the next two years will enable Messe Essen to offer more possibilities for further significant growth.

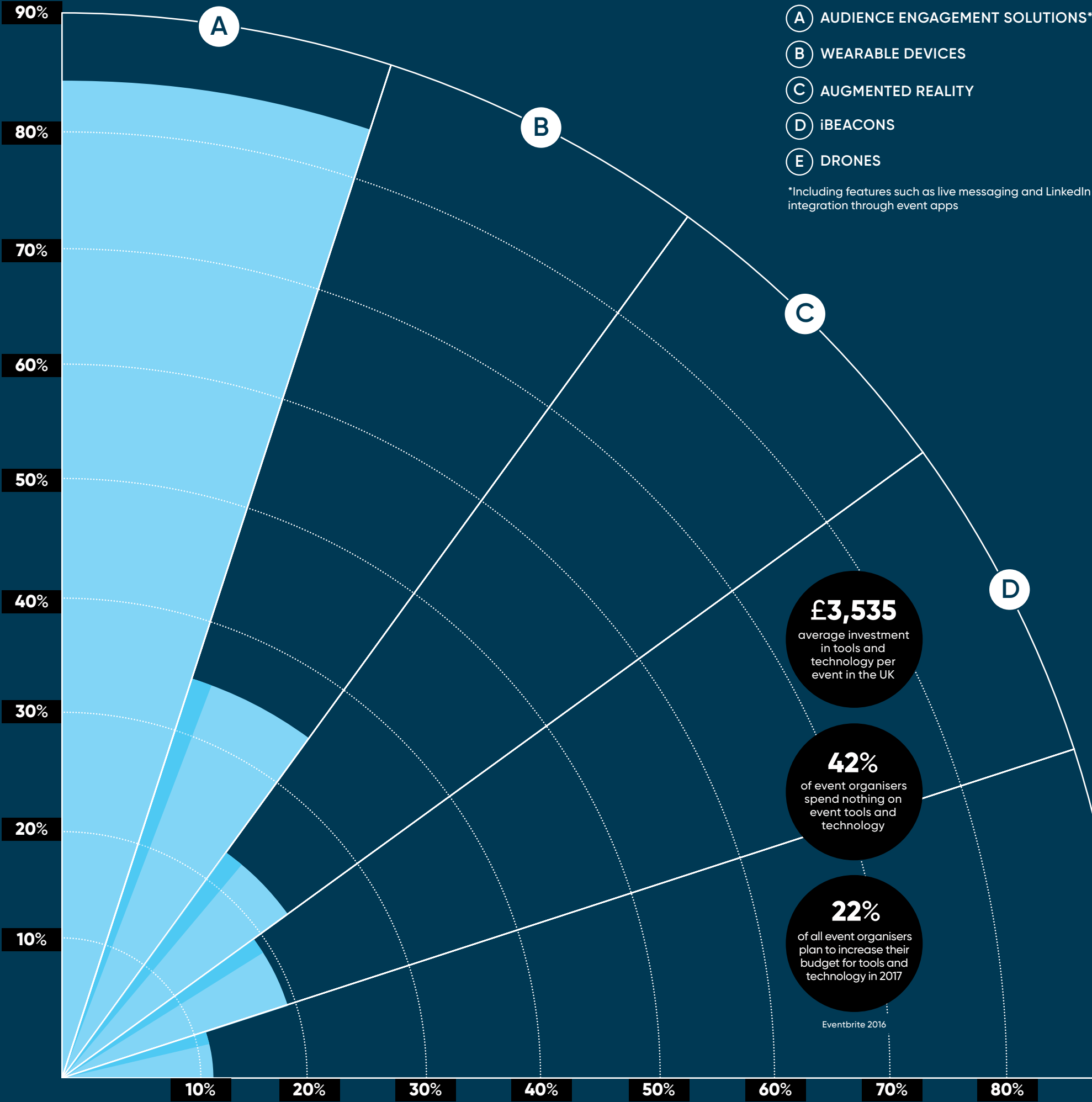
The topics and target groups of the exhibitions held in Essen are diverse, with Messe Essen placing itself in the co-pilot position, looking for bespoke client solutions. From the 65 shows in the company's portfolio, ten are the leading shows for their industry, including industrial trade fairs such as METPACK (metal packaging) and SCHWEISSEN & SCHNEIDEN (welding and cutting); the E-world energy and water exhibition, which focuses on the energy sector; Security Essen, the world's leading fair for security and fire prevention; and IPM, the world's leading horticulture trade fair.

But with guest events, Messe Essen's real speciality lies in growing mid-sized shows. An exhibition with 10,000 or 20,000sq m gross gets lost in a venue with 200,000sq m or you might find yourself up against another big show with 100,000sq m happening at the same time. In Essen, if you have a mid-sized show, then you're always going to be number one.

For more information please visit www.messe-essen.de

EVENT TECHNOLOGIES

TOP TRENDS IN MAXIMISING EVENT EXPERIENCES



CURRENT PLANS TO USE THE FOLLOWING EVENT TECHNOLOGIES
SURVEY OF UK EVENT ORGANISERS

● Definitely ● Maybe ● Definitely not



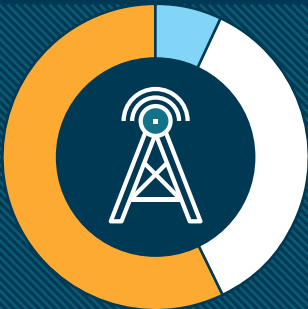
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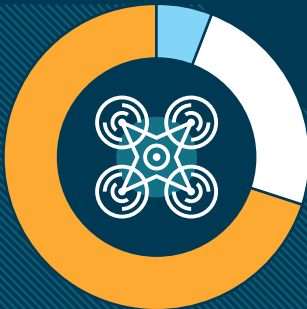
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OTHER SENSORS



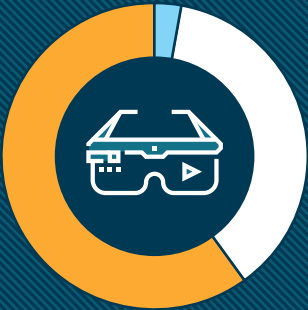
DRONES



OCULUS RIFT OR OTHER
VIRTUAL REALITY
TECHNOLOGIES



3D-PROJECTION
MAPPING



WEARABLE
TECHNOLOGIES



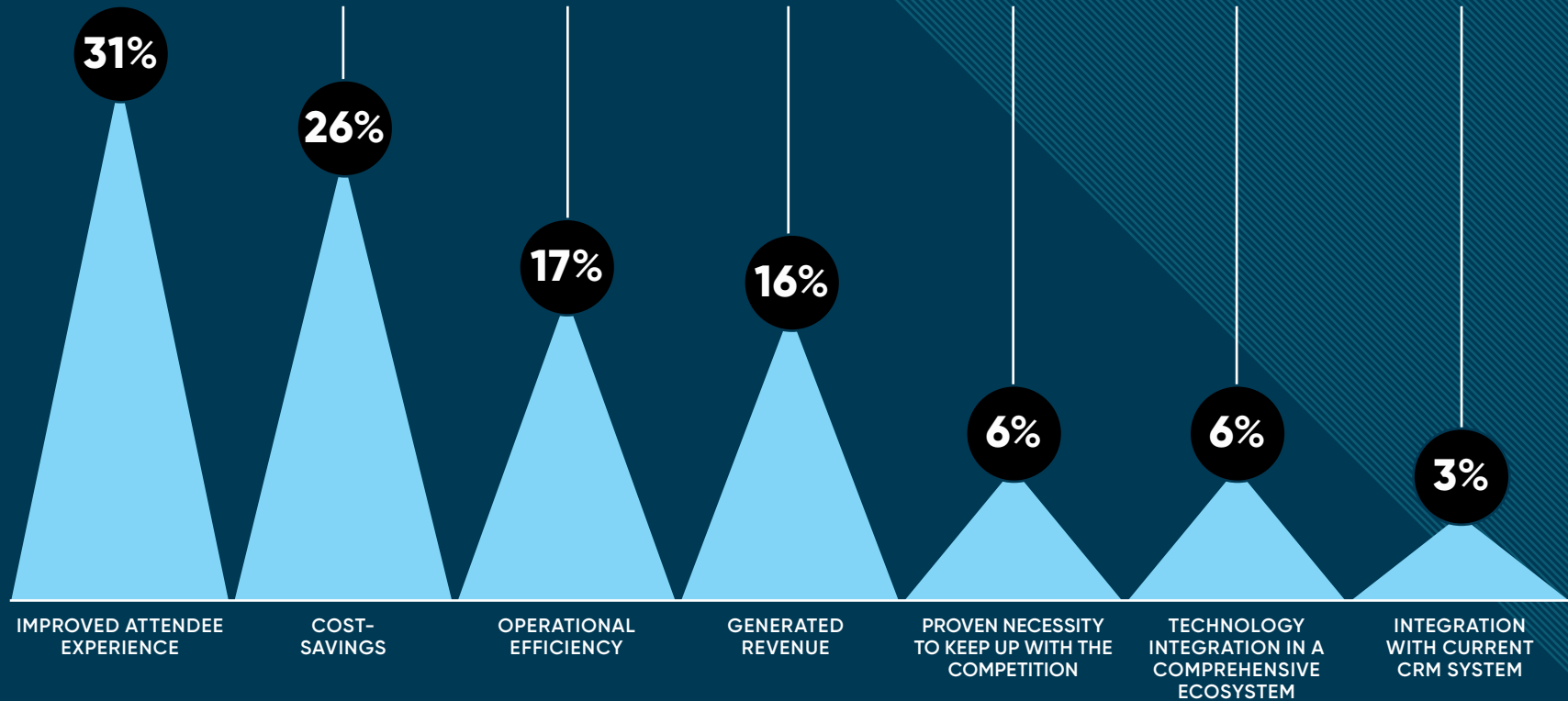
RADIO-FREQUENCY
IDENTIFICATION



HOLOGRAMS

Eventbrite 2016

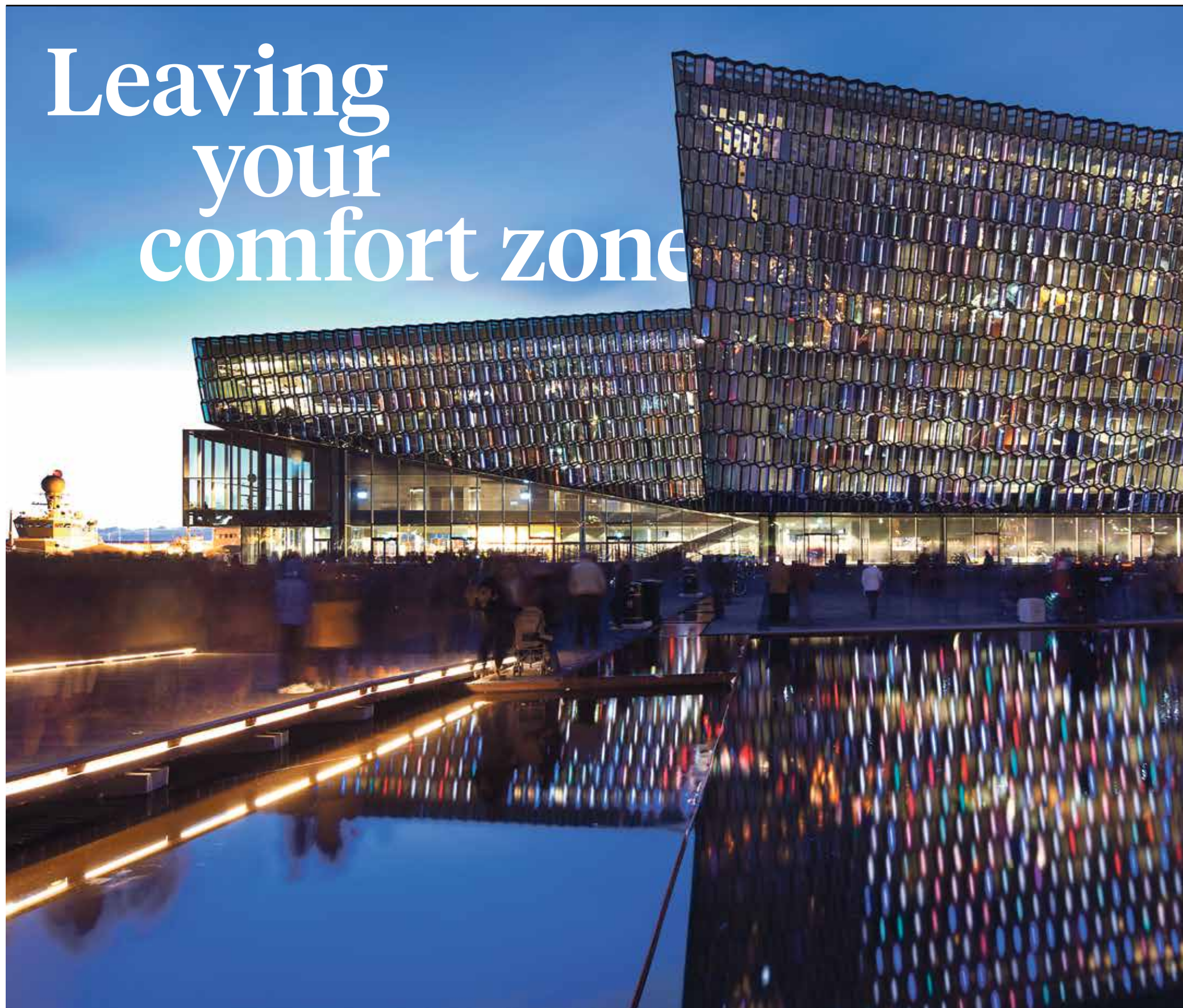
DEMONSTRATING EVENT TECHNOLOGY RETURN ON INVESTMENT
MOST EFFECTIVE FACTORS IN OBTAINING FUNDING FOR EVENT TECHNOLOGIES



*Percentage of event organisers who ranked each as the most effective reason

Meeting Professionals International 2015

EMERGING LOCATIONS



Break out of your destination comfort zone and tap in to the many benefits of organising events in some of the key emerging nations

IAN WHITELING

It's easy to get stuck in a groove when deciding on the location for your event, whether it's a business meeting, incentive programme or conference. There's a tendency to revisit those destinations that have already proved to be popular with your audience, whether they are high-performing staff, partner businesses, such as resellers, or top-spending clients. After all, why reinvent the wheel when you've got more pressing issues to think about, such as the programme content, logistics and more.

However, pulling yourself out of your comfort zone can often feel exhilarating and inspirational. The same goes for events. In fact,

an exciting, original location can be the catalyst for an amazing programme. And there are more and more emerging events destinations to choose from that offer more than simply the exotic appeal of somewhere new.

"You often have more potential to personalise and customise experiences when working with smaller, emerging destinations, greater accessibility to unique venues, unusual itineraries with activities that are indigenous to that area, and the availability of key local personalities like the mayor, a minister and key academic or opinion leaders, all of whom offer increased prestige to the event without any cost," says Patrick Delaney, managing partner at SoolNua. "Another major advantage is the perception of

Harpa Concert Hall and Conference Centre in Reykjavik, an emerging city for business events that has seen visitor numbers rise more than 300 per cent since 2010

greater safety with the likelihood of terrorism not being an issue due to their low profile."

According to Guy Bigwood, group sustainability director at MCI, emerging destinations are usually cheaper and generally more agile. "They have the ability to gather stakeholders together and make much more collective progress on an issue," he says. "This is especially relevant when it comes down to sustainability or there is another crucial factor to take into account."

“It's normally much easier to have stronger team togetherness in a smaller city which does not have many events



Harpo

Cashmore, managing director at Axis Destination Marketing. “By their nature, emerging destinations lack the track record and experience in delivering major international events, making it even more imperative that event organisers and planners carry out comprehensive due diligence to ensure the destination has the ability to fulfil the conference objectives and meet the needs of the attendees,” she says.

The destinations themselves can also do a lot to reassure organisers, learning from the established players and making sure they capitalise on the two billion-plus outbound travellers there are predicted to be by 2030.

“The internal infrastructure is key,” says Ms Cashmore. “Getting around should be easy. There should be good food and beverage outlets, and accommodation and venues of a high standard.”

Furthermore, focusing on key specialisms in terms of business and academia, such as technology or life sciences, and targeting those sectors for events business can help convince organisers. “This can also help drive internal economic development, as hosting meetings and events can be the catalyst in introducing a destination’s export business interests to key influencers, business stakeholders, entrepreneurs and investors from around the world,” she adds.

So much for the benefits emerging destinations can bring business events organisers, but where are the current rising stars for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE)?

“Some of the more undiscovered parts of Canada are really becoming a big draw, such as those located along the Atlantic coast with its short flight time to the UK,” says Ms Cashmore. “South America, Colombia and Chile are growing in popularity, with the latter’s capital Santiago being home to a burgeoning technology market. Key attractions here include improved air lift, perceived good value for money and the desire to explore somewhere new.”

SoolNua’s Mr Delaney, meanwhile, cites Belfast, Liverpool, Bratislava, Nashville, Portland, Cebu, Lima, Hanoi and countries including Slovenia, Estonia, Colombia, Costa Rica and Rwanda. “These are new destinations that have not been in the marketplace previously but, due to new access options or improved infrastructure, have now become viable,” he says.

Highlighting those destinations with a strong commitment to sustainability, Mr Bigwood sites Iguassu, Quito and Medellín in South America, Gothenburg, Reykjavik and Valencia in Europe, and Austin and Portland in North America.

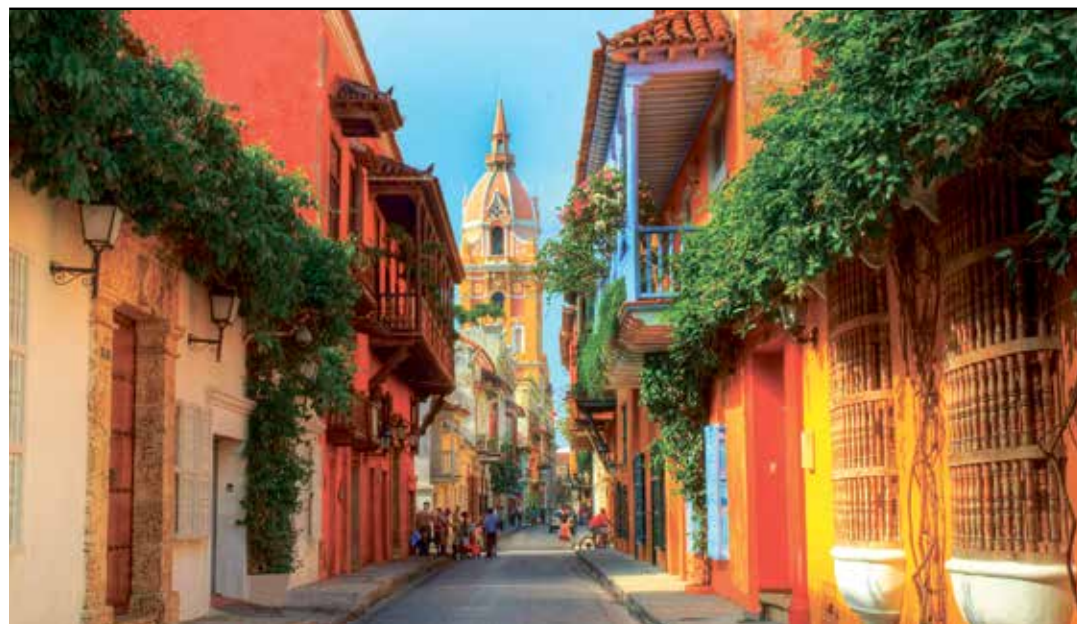
“My pick of the bunch would be Reykjavik,” he says. “Visitors have risen over 300 per cent since 2010, according to tourism arrivals. The figure used to be under 500,000 a year; now it’s 1.5 million. Iceland is hot with hipsters, nature seekers, *Game of Thrones* fans and, yes, increasingly MICE.” ●

On the cost side, Mr Bigwood also points out that you can often get more funding for your events, as there are usually less legacy structures to navigate around.

“As an organiser, we are also normally trying to build a community feeling between attendees at our events,” he adds. “It’s normally much easier to have stronger team togetherness in a smaller city which does not have many events, and where we are the most important event and our delegates are visible everywhere, versus being one of 15 conferences in town. This also gives delegates that all-important feeling of being special.”

Although smaller and emerging destinations can be safer, they do carry more business risk for organisers than their more established counterparts, cautions Emma

COMMERCIAL FEATURE



Colombia is calling

Unique natural scenery, non-traditional venues and world-class infrastructure enable Colombia to host the most varied types of events

Located in the heart of Latin America, Colombia benefits from a privileged location and offers excellent worldwide connectivity with more than 1,055 international flights serving 26 countries every week. Due to its geographical location, Colombia enjoys different types of weather in different cities throughout the country. Its biodiversity provides unique landscapes for an unforgettable event.

A wide range of venues is available from bastions and museums to gardens, squares and castles. In Cartagena, enjoy a themed dinner in an old plaza or the Fortress of San Felipe de Barajas, where you’ll experience what it was like during the golden age of piracy, treasures and marquis. In Bogota, a meeting inside the world’s largest gold museum will forge unforgettable memories.

Colombia is well served in alternative venues, with non-traditional destinations in Cartagena, Bogotá and Medellín available for the events industry. Salt Cathedral (the world’s only cathedral built inside a salt mine), the José Celestino Mutis Botanical Garden (Colombia’s biggest botanical garden) and the 16th-century San Felipe de Barajas Castle have inspirational meeting spaces to match their beautiful surroundings.

Between 2005 and 2015, the annual growth of tourism in Colombia was 12.7 per cent – almost three times the worldwide average growth of 3.9 per cent. And meeting tourism is strengthening, too. In the past eight years, Colombia has climbed seven places in the International Congress and Convention Association rankings, and is now the fourth-placed Latin American country for international meetings, following Brazil, Mexico and Argentina. There was a 10 per cent increase in the number of tourists to Colombia for events between 2010 and 2015.

66 A wide range of venues is available from bastions and museums to gardens, squares and castles

Part of this success is down to the work ProColombia – the government agency for promoting international tourism, non-traditional exports and foreign direct investment – has done in promoting both the infrastructure to hold events and the capacity to host incen-

tive trips. More than 20 convention centres, 414 hotels and venues with the capacity to host up to 10,000 people in a single space help make Colombia a world-class destination for events tourism.

And with sleek conference venues such as the 10,000-capacity G12 and Corferias – the country’s largest international business and exhibition centre with 22 halls and 3.7 acres of outdoor space – it’s little wonder Colombia is gaining popularity for those seeking an innovative destination for meetings.

Cradled by the Andean peaks, Bogota is home to the government, large companies and prestigious universities. It attracts the majority of international travellers for events in Colombia; 62,244 visitors arrived between January and October 2016, with the majority from the United States, Mexico, Peru, Ecuador and Brazil.

Bogota’s eight convention centres have a capacity for approximately 20,000 people, and the capital has hosted prestigious events including the Rio+20 Summit and the 16th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates, while Cartagena has hosted the 6th Summit of the Americas.

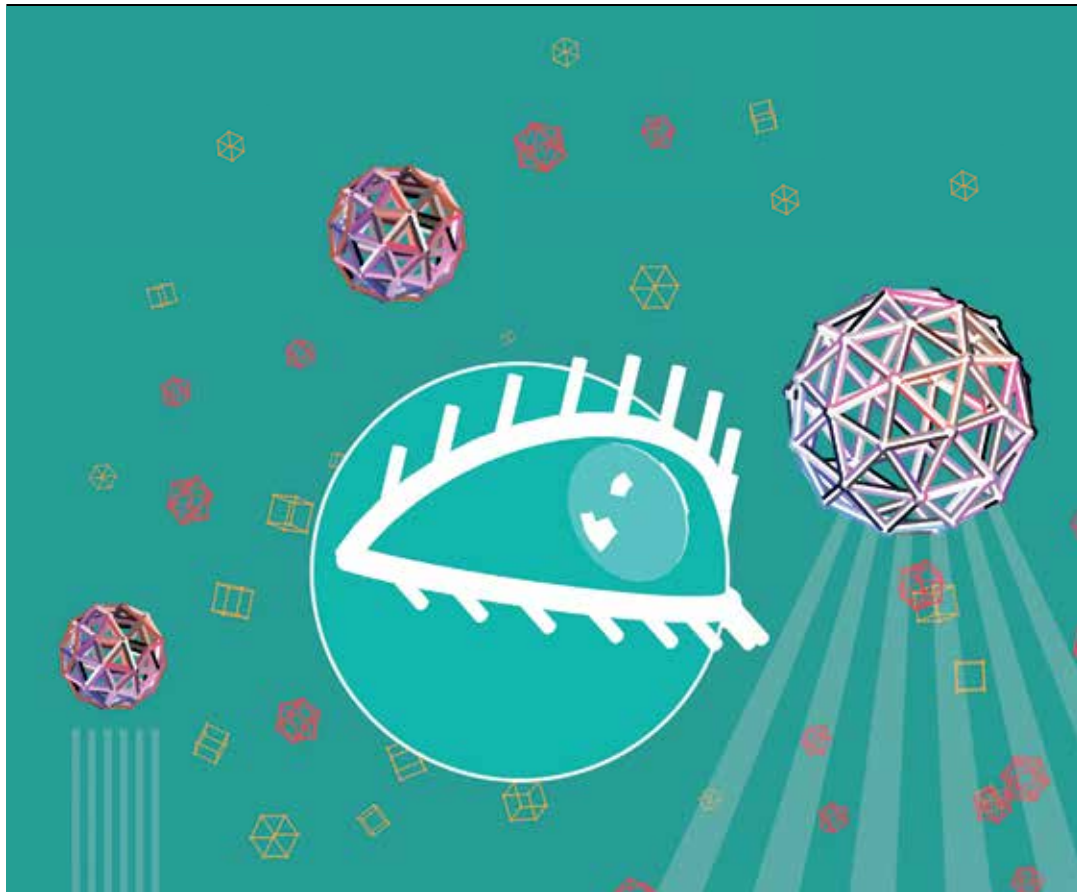
Nestled on the Caribbean coast, Cartagena is one of Latin America’s most exquisite colonial cities, with three convention centres and 23 hotels. It has an abundance of history and culture, and is ideal for incentive trips, such as scuba diving and snorkelling off the island of Barú.

New destinations are also opening up in Colombia thanks to the recent signing of a peace agreement between the government and the FARC guerrilla group. It is hoped the Amazonas area and Meta, a region capable of receiving international companies seeking nature and adventure tourism, will soon open up to visitors.



For more information please visit www.procolombia.co/en

COMMERCIAL FEATURE



Live and let live

Why there's no substitute for experience



Think back to that banging party you were at last year, where the fizz was flowing and the summer breeze was riffing through your freshly washed hair. Remember it? You can almost smell it. What's the reason you remember it so well? It's because you were there, you experienced it.

Now think about the last boring conference you were in. The one crammed full of people, with the heating too high and the food with no taste. You remember these elements, but do you remember what was discussed? Of course, you can have engaging content delivered badly, but if we could create content that could be delivered anywhere, what's the point of having everyone in a room together in the first place?

The optimal arrangement is, of course, engaging content delivered in the right environment and with the right mood. Like turning a TV programme into a theatre show, TTA is an agency which believes a live experience has the power to change behaviour dramatically. When you're in a theatre you are sharing the reaction of the people next to you and this in turn enhances your own experience. The same can be said for business meetings where face-to-face interaction not only imparts information but helps to

build trust, commitment and loyalty.

In a cluttered world, there's no substitute for experiencing a brand in person. After all, how many times have you made a major purchase without seeing it in the flesh? A TV car advert among multitudes might leave us unmoved, but when a friend shows off their new car, you might start to fantasise about the leather seats.

"The only way to do this well is by working side by side with the people conveying the message, understanding their objectives, considering every touchpoint and providing intelligent live experiences," says TTA's head of production Sam Rhodes. "Our clients range from international pharmaceutical companies to tyre manufacturers and financial corporations. Their communications challenges vary, but all look to our talented people to bring them bespoke, creative solutions that meet their business need."

This might be something simple like creating a projection screen to enable a wall to become the backdrop for an immersive video or it might be recreating a retail experience to demonstrate how people are going to feel and react in an environment. It might be as focused as designing menus around peak energy levels or even about influencing factors outside the event, such as the networking opportunities available.

It's also about knowing how an event fits within a wider campaign. The use of digital technology can be effective in enhancing and growing the experience, and clients increasingly look to extend

the reach of live communication. Here, face-to-face and digital communication work in together to create a completely integrated message. Combining these tools can break down barriers, build trust and allow us to immerse the audience in the brand.

66 TTA believes a live experience has the power to change behaviour dramatically

Live experiences can take on many forms and TTA is currently working on a range of projects across the world including a once-in-a-lifetime incentive trip to South Africa for a financial company, a series of major pharma congresses in six major cities across Europe and branded experiential activity on match day at a premier league football club for a global manufacturing company. TTA is an agency that truly believes in the power of people and this is where its focus lies.

It's a basic human instinct to communicate face to face. An event agency's job is to create the experience which maximises this natural power, drawing upon the support of modern technologies that aid human interaction, and package it all up into a live experience delivering return on investment beyond measurement by stats alone.

For more information please visit www.tta.live

66 Drawing on the support of modern technologies that aid human interaction

OPINION COLUMN

'Keeping the content relevant and fresh is vital, and organisers who get this right will continue to flourish'

CHRIS SKEITH

Chief executive
Association of Event Organisers

The events industry is worth more than £39 billion to the UK economy and has ambitions to drive investment of £48.4 billion by 2020, as set out in the Business Visits and Events Partnership's *Overview of the UK Events Industry*. Conferences and meetings deliver the lion's share, with more than £19 billion direct spending on goods and services, followed by £11 billion from trade and consumer exhibitions.

The Association of Event Organisers (AEO) represents UK exhibition and conference organisers, and is part of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Events as well as the Events Industry Board, co-ordinated by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. It seeks to promote the importance of the industry and find ways of ensuring the UK remains competitive for inward investment, and exporting events and UK business overseas.

Furthermore, AEO has recently launched its *Global Study* which shows that its members were responsible for driving revenues of £1.2 billion in 2014-15 from overseas events, an increase of 23 per cent on the previous year.

Although the industry is forecast to continue to grow, organisers have identified a number of areas affecting their ability to attract inward investment to the UK, including ease of entry and increased costs compared with other markets. Potential solutions are the introduction of special event visas and cost-reduction measures, such as considering how to reduce the impact of air passenger duty and VAT on business events to attract visitors and exhibitors to established UK events, and to try and attract new peripatetic events into the country.

In addition to operational considerations for maintaining competitiveness, organisers are looking at how they can enhance the experience of exhibitors, visitors and delegates because this is what keeps them coming back year after year. Keeping the content relevant and fresh is vital, and organisers who can get this right are the ones who will continue to flourish. Fortunately, there are plenty of examples out there that nurture the com-

munities they serve and make events fun, educational and tailored to a specific audience.

Trade events in the UK are learning from their consumer counterparts. Event organisers looking to target younger business-to-business audiences are developing festival-style trade shows that have taken the young, urban festival feel and translated it into a vibrant, dynamic business event with fantastic content and inspirational speakers.

Another way of engaging a specific audience is to offer visitor packages by co-operating with other organisers who are running an event at the same venue. This enables the visitor or delegate to make the most of their leisure or business time and save money by visiting a number of different events on the same day. It tends to work particularly well for exhibitions targeting similar audience profiles, for example a gaming trade show and an adventure holiday event. It's worth thinking about when planning the next event or launching a new show.

AEO also helps members support their customers, via its FaceTime initiative www.facetime.org.uk. Launched in 2010, it provides resources that enable exhibitors to improve their performance, drive sales and enhance the customer experience as well as champion best practice.

There are many ways exhibitors can make events more memorable for attendees by creating on-stand experiences that are fun, interactive and engaging. Using the latest technology and gamification is a great way to appeal to competitive types, for example. FaceTime research shows that 69 per cent of attendees recommend brands they've seen at a show and 74 per cent of visitors believe live events are the best form of marketing, which is twice as powerful as TV advertising. In addition, 32 per cent of consumer and 34 per cent of trade show attendees are considered to be high influencers and spend twice as much as other visitors.

The aim for both organisers and exhibitors is to create an experience that gives highly influential visitors something to talk about and attracts even more big spenders to future events. ●



TOP TIPS

Fantasy and comic strips show how it's done

Seven hot tips from the world's leading entertainment and comic convention could get your business events, trade shows and conferences buzzing like Wonder Woman body-slamming the Green Goblin

CHARLES ORTON-JONES

San Diego's Comic-Con International is the mother of all conventions. Fangirls, comic nerds, cosplayers in character costumes and the world's press assemble each year for a celebration of everything and anything in the fantasy world. It's always a smash-hit sell-out. Twitter goes crazy. *Game of Thrones* stars trigger hysteria. And the hype and adrenaline will prompt other business events hosts to ruminate... why can't my event be like that? With queues snaking round block. And the only complaints are why it takes so long to get into the panel discussion.



PARADE YOUR STARS

Comic-Con is all about the glitterati. The big guns. At Comic-Con 2016 the cast of the *Suicide Squad* movie held a full panel show. We had Margot Robbie, Will Smith, Oscar winner Jared Leto and Cara Delevingne striding on stage to rock music. *Neuromancer* author William Gibson was strolling round Comic-Con to talk about screenplays. The *Star Trek* boys including Captain Kirk and Commander Data were there, of course. The original cast of *Alien* turned up, plus a hundred more heroes of the comic book world. Big names are a big reason the public show up to events. Comic-Con is celeb overload.

GO HARDCORE

No one wants to be bored. And let's face it, too many business events are tedious. The reasons are many – the pacing, the delays – but a major culprit is a refusal to tackle big issues. No such fears at Comic-Con. Last year film-maker Oliver Stone took on all-comers to answer questions about his docu-drama *Snowden*, portraying the whistleblower who exposed the United States' programme of mass surveillance. The lead actors Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Shailene Woodley and Zachary Quinto engaged in a deep discussion with Stone about the balance between security and an intrusive and secretive state for almost an hour. *Rolling Stone* magazine called the discussion, "one of the more thoughtful we've ever seen here, delving into the very issues that the divisive figure's actions continue to draw attention to". Cut corporate flim-flam and go deep into troubling issues to keep people gripped.



WHAT NOT TO DO

Getting into panel discussions at Comic-Con is a bit of nightmare. It's not uncommon to wait in line for an hour. Get your staffing levels right and use a ticketing policy for popular events or you'll annoy your delegates. Time and time again trade shows get this wrong.



GIVE EXCLUSIVES

Last year's Comic-Con blew audiences away with a string of first showings. The *Wonder Woman* trailer starring Gal Gadot was given its premier. Benedict Cumberbatch's sci-fi thriller *Dr Strange* also gave its first trailer to Comic-Con. Exclusivity matters. Great business-to-business events know this and use it to ratchet up a sense of expectation. Samsung uses



the Mobile World Congress to launch its new flagship smartphones. This year's failure to launch a model was so aberrant it led the headlines.



ROCK THE PARTY

No one admits it, but conferences are a great way to let off steam. The Comic-Con set got this 100 per cent. The studios go all-out to top each other. The International Movie Database hosted a yacht

party with legendary *Mallrats* director Kevin Smith. MTV and Fox held their own glam dos. The metal band Slayer played the House of Blues. The Nerdist party had *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* creator Joss Whedon. Best of all were maybe the cosplay get-togethers such as the Final Fantasy Gathering. Can businesses do anything similar? Of course. Salesforce's legendary Dreamforce conference in 2016 hired U2 to headline its Dreamfest charity music concert. It included a cocktail reception and an after-party with MC Hammer and will.i.am.

USE TECH

There's a lot going on during Comic-Con, so fans navigate the arenas using a well-designed smartphone app. It lists special guests, provides a map and event details, and works across devices. Plus Comic-Con live stream events. Today an app is a compulsory element of any event. It's not hard to do. Other tech is vital. Google IO conference live streams to 530 locations in more than 100 coun-



tries. Chief executive Sundar Pichai reckons a million people in China watched his keynote presentation in 2016.



MIX IT UP

Do not, repeat do not, attempt to host an event where every scheduled moment uses the same template. Com-

ic-Con sets the bar high by hosting umpteen eccentric one-offs. Bored with panels? Try the X-Men: Tomb of the Apocalypse Challenge Room. Enter a vault and solve puzzles to escape. At the end you unlock Apocalypse's coffin and pull a key from his dead fingers. Not into it? How about Dr Who's Tardis? Or a *Star Wars* cosplay flash mob? As Alfred Hitchcock said, an audience would rather be baffled than bored.

Westminster's new neighbour

Venue host Alastair Stewart tells of fast-growing etc.venues' ambitious new opening and why bold but meticulous design helps event planners succeed

Listening to Alastair Stewart talk about etc.venues, you'd be forgiven for thinking he was running an art gallery. He speaks fervently about abundant natural light, splashes of colour, the right ceiling height, "experience creation" and the art of space-planning.

In fact, he's on a mission to create memorable, talking-point corporate events. Since the firm first opened as a modest training venue provider in 1992 inside a local government building in London's Elephant and Castle, it's been using its notable design nous to upgrade unloved buildings and trail-blaze with the newer ones.

Alastair has expanded the offering and put the contemporary back into conferences. He's nimbly adapting to suit the millennial mindset. "Some competitor venues focus purely on selling space. We differ in that we seek to personalise every type of event, be it corporate

daytime or ambient evening. We transform our spaces into what clients actually want. For the younger conference generation, that means more networking space and more tech," he says.

The group had six venues in 2006 when the founders sold out to Alastair and his new management team backed by private equity. "The financial crisis of 2008 ended up helping us grow quickly. It forced companies to look at how they were training. Out went expensive trips to rural residential venues in favour of affordable, accessible city-centre venues they could use by the day.

"We saw an opportunity to offer a new style of niche venue positioned between the established hotels and serviced office groups. There are so many hotel brands competing in the top end of the meetings market, just offering space of very similar design. But



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66 Event planners want to be listened to and offered customised solutions – and that's what's at the heart of our philosophy

event planners want to be listened to and offered customised solutions – and that's what's at the heart of our philosophy."

It's worked out well, with etc.venues quadrupling in size and attracting new investment from Growth Capital Partners in 2012 after the first of the larger London conference venues was launched at St Paul's.

Last year the firm hosted 15,000 events and 660,000 delegates, and announced bold plans to open its 15th and largest, most ambitious venue at London's iconic County Hall. The game-changing, single-floor, 43,000sq ft, 20-room venue is a sleek, hi-tech offering, with award-winning architects Jestico & Whiles brought in to advise on the restoration of a major space unused since Ken Livingstone's GLC was abolished in 1986. They've achieved a remarkable juxtaposition between old and new, with 10,000sq ft of original parquet floor restored to its former glory alongside stylish exposed brickwork features.

"Event professionals constantly tell me they need a bigger supply of new venues and want something different. £3 million of advanced bookings encourages me that County Hall is hitting the mark. Thoughtful venue design can add significant value and difference in so many ways."



02

And different is what they get. The mark of Alastair's fit-out team, led by head of projects Iain Dix and design chief Franck Rosello, is recognisable across all 15 venues for imaginative use of colour and lighting, and for its trademark quirky focus on "art with a purpose".

"Thoughtful art creates a great talking point, facilitates interaction between guests and even provides tempting 'selfie spots', our life-size horse in the Hatton being a popular curiosity. The same goes for coffee points; we make a point of designing innovative breakout spaces and have increasingly customised the coffee points to be more like co-working hubs."

STAYING IN FRONT

He's convinced the industry can add more value to the meeting experience. "Venues can always do more

to bring the hosting organisation's content to life. Tech innovation is key. We're exploring hologram 'speakers' and throwable microphone pods now. Hosts can help presenters offer more engaging content by featuring multiple projection screens that can show live social media feeds and audience participation software. Back-projection is dead. And given that face-to-face events rely on frequent interactivity, the best events see great speakers combined with informal seating layouts as well as imaginative tech."

The importance of ubiquitous wi-fi, and understanding what overloads it and why, cannot be underestimated. "Delegates would rather sit on the floor than be told they can't stay connected. And less experienced event planners should get familiar with how wi-fi speed really works. The smart question to ask venues is whether a private wi-fi network can help guarantee contention ratio – the number of users to bandwidth rates – especially for larger groups.

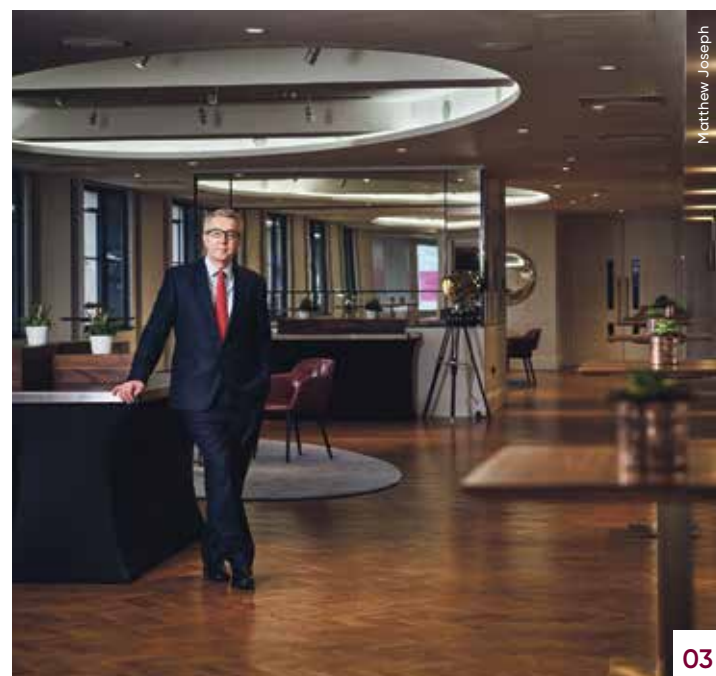
Should venues go for bespoke catering? Alastair's belief in this is unwavering. "Always ask to meet the chef. See for yourself if they're a foodie. I regard good food prepared by a venue's own team as absolutely critical. I would never contract this out." And he's out to set an example, with a food blog enjoying followers in 100 countries, plus regular trips to Shoreditch and Borough for his chefs to keep abreast of the capital's culinary and eating trends. "All-day grazing is a thing at events now."

WHAT NEXT?

The rapid expansion plan at etc.venues is set to continue, with more venues in and out of London. Manchester is on the shopping list, but outside the UK is where Alastair sees increasing opportunity. "It's not just young contemporary Brits favouring the City for their training, meetings and events. I'm seeing this trend replicating in New York, Paris and across Asia, so international growth is firmly on the agenda."

What else? "Next year we plan to add another 50,000sq ft and hit £50 million of sales. After that, we'll set our sights on £100 million." And why not?

For more information please visit www.etcvenues.co.uk



03

ETC.VENUES GROWTH LINE



etc.venues

EYE FOR DETAIL: TIPS FOR PLANNERS

- 01 Explore the venue's experience of what works well – they host events day in, day out
- 02 Look for respect, energy and fun in how the venue team communicates
- 03 Understand wi-fi and ask about connection
- 04 Always meet the chef
- 05 Read the venue's Twitter feed for insight into their quality and character

DESTINATIONS

Delegates are destined for an experience

Destinations are an important lure which can boost business events if delegates can experience more than a conference venue

BEN LERWILL

Conference is not a sexy word. Business events might be essential in terms of corporate strategy, and both their content and technology might have become far more dynamic in recent years, but they still need to work hard to stir the soul.

More astute event organisers have long understood that a simple way to boost engagement among attendees is to incorporate an element sometimes treated as secondary – the destination itself.

The idea of travelling halfway across the country, or indeed halfway across the world, to be constrained by the four walls of a conference hall is not an overly appealing one. Most major business destinations, however, tend to be culturally colourful places in their own right. Ways in which a dash of local flavour can drive interest in an event are therefore important.

These can range from the obvious to the more oblique. In London, meetings hotel Andaz London Liverpool Street has developed a partnership with travel startup SideStory, which organises city tours run by locals, giving delegates the chance to experience London through the eyes of professionals in the creative industries. Tours can be themed on anything from architecture to fashion.

The choice of event location can also be key. Unique venues such as the Houses of Parliament, Lon-



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don Stadium and Tower of London all offer event space, as well as giving the option of behind-the-scenes tours.

Some London events choose to make an impact on the local community itself. When 20,000 delegates came to ExCel London in September 2016 for the European Respiratory Congress, its organisers ran concurrent public events around the city to raise awareness of lung health, including a two-day activation in Trafalgar Square.

At the opposite end of the UK, Convention Edinburgh makes it simple for attendees to experience the Scottish capital city for themselves with the free-of-charge Edinburgh Rewards Passport, designed solely for conference delegates, which gives discounts on items such as visitor attractions and golf fees.

Edinburgh is a good example of somewhere that markets its image well, using its historical connec-



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tion with research and innovation to bolster its conference brand. Even its festival calendar finds relevance. The British Neuroscience Association timed its 2015 annual conference to coincide with the Edinburgh International Science Festival, while various media conferences have taken place during the Edinburgh International Film Festival.

Sometimes the choice of destination can have an influence in other ways. In Amsterdam, for example, which appointed the world's first "bicycle mayor" in 2016 and where, according to the city's convention bureau, an estimated 48 per cent of city-centre journeys are made by bike, event attendees are encouraged to take to the saddle themselves while there.

Continuing the transport theme, conferences held at the city's

main business venue, the RAI Amsterdam Convention Centre, can make the most of Amsterdam's famous network of waterways. The centre has a dedicated dock adjacent to the complex from where canal-boat transfers to and from hotels and function venues can be arranged.

There are times when the uniqueness of a destination means it underpins the entire event. One such example is Iceland, neatly positioned between Western Europe and North America, but offering a culture and environment removed from both.

“The stamp of a destination is as relevant in business events as in any other form of tourism

01 Event attendees in Amsterdam are encouraged to use the locals' preferred use of transport themselves while visiting

02 Event attendees in Hong Kong are able to take part in locally tailored team-building activities such as dragon-boat racing

03 Convention Edinburgh offers attendees a free-of-charge Edinburgh Rewards Passport, which gives discounts on items such as visitor attractions and golf fees

Capital city Reykjavik has some resolutely Icelandic event venues, not least the multi-award-winning Harpa Concert Hall and Conference Centre, which has an angular design intended to mirror the country's landscape. Similarly rooted in its location is Whales of Iceland, a modern venue open since late-2014, in which meetings and receptions can be held beneath life-sized models of whales.

The events industry, of course, is by its nature a global one. Much further afield, another destination with its own distinct character is Hong Kong, somewhere compact enough to allow for neon-festooned skylines and fishing villages to form part of the same day's event itinerary.

By virtue of its popularity among international conference and incentive organisers, Hong Kong has also become particularly good at laying on locally tailored team-building activities. Tea appreciation, t'ai chi, lion dancing, Chinese cookery classes and even dragon-boat racing can all be arranged for event attendees.

Australia, too, recognises that hosting a successful event involves more than simply providing a congress hall. Conference attendees in Brisbane can enjoy free volunteer-run city tours through the Brisbane Greeter Programme, for example, while the Gold Coast promotes the fact that delegates can take surf lessons in their lunch break.

Even the architecture of a venue can make a difference when it comes to driving engagement. The brand new International Convention Centre or ICC Sydney, opened on Darling Harbour last December, has been designed with high glass exteriors to "allow delegates to feel embedded in the city they're visiting". The venue has also stated a commitment to using local, seasonal ingredients in its catering.

A small touch, perhaps, but further indication that the stamp of a destination is as relevant in business events as in any other form of tourism. ●

FACTFILE
MOST POPULAR BUSINESS TRAVEL DESTINATIONS
MOST BOOKED DESTINATIONS BY UK-BASED BUSINESS TRAVELLERS

WITHIN EUROPE

- 01 AMSTERDAM
- 02 DUBLIN
- 03 FRANKFURT
- 04 ZURICH
- 05 PARIS

OUTSIDE EUROPE

- 01 NEW YORK
- 02 SAN FRANCISCO
- 03 DUBAI
- 04 JOHANNESBURG
- 05 SINGAPORE



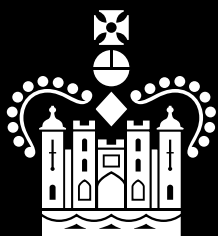
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