

2016
EDITION



GES *Global
Experience
Specialists*

event**marketer**[®]

Present

TREND TRACKER

THE FIFTH ANNUAL LIST OF THE TOP TRENDS
IMPACTING THE EVENTS INDUSTRY THIS YEAR

THE TOP TRENDS OF THE YEAR

Budgets are up, ROI is rising and the experiential marketing revolution continues to take hold across Corporate America and around the world. Face-to-face engagements have become the driving force of innovative brands looking to connect with customers, convert them into buyers and drive long-term—and lifetime—relationships. Welcome to the strongest year in the history of the events industry... and welcome to the fifth-annual Trend Tracker, produced by Global Experience Specialists (GES), the leading global full-service provider for live events. As always, Trend Tracker provides a rapid-release checklist of trends. Go through the list and check off the ones you're activating now. Circle others you know you should. And make a list of the ones you'll need to learn more about in 2016 and beyond.



2016: THE YEAR OF THE PARTICIPANT

Holistic strategies combined with an emotional edge are driving growth and trends across the event landscape

Barriers have been broken. Engagement has been redefined. Technologies, from drones to virtual reality to live streaming, have landed in the hands of customers who are controlling the output of information from the experiences you build—in real-time. There is no longer the attendee. There is only the participant.

Marketers have proven the worth of events in the traditional marketing mix by planning better, measuring better and targeting better. But in the year ahead, a sea change in demographics and preferences will reshape the way we think about engagement, and it will force us to ask: How can we connect on a deeper level? How do we build advocacy in a crowded social sphere? How much technology do we need to do it? And how do we meet the needs of three generations of "participants" in one event?

One area in which this theme will play out is the red-hot B-to-B event sector, where the hierarchy of VIPs, speakers, keynotes and one-way communication from events past no longer applies. The needs of target audiences who crave shared experiences, who want to contribute and be accepted into a shared event audience, will require a restructuring of how we build event schedules and experience footprints. And over in the the B-to-C sector, shared and shareable engagements are being fused into branded tractor beams that draw consumers toward brands like never before.

"Research proves that events are a huge piece of an organization's effectiveness—there's nothing more powerful than getting people together," says Dan Hillbert, Senior VP of Events at Global Experience Specialists (GES).

Indeed, enhanced strategies are helping to elevate not only the actual event experiences being designed for audiences but also the resulting value being delivered back to the thousands of brands who are transitioning marketing mixes to event-driven portfolios. Never before have events been so accountable—and so effective.

To win the hearts and minds of "participants" around the world, you'll need to be informed and on top of industry trends and changes. Presenting the fifth-annual Trend Tracker, the world's only annual checklist of the top trends impacting the events industry this year.



Photo Credit: Tableau

PLANNING AND STRATEGY

CMOs are believers in events, but this year they want to dig deeper into their budget process, see budgets broken down into smaller pieces and truly understand the evolution of the strategy and how or why there are more elements or more pieces in an event than ever before.

“Marketers are beginning to see that the event needs to hang together as a whole—just like any marketing effort, consistency and repetitiveness build brands. And that happens across all touch points of the event, from the first email to the last follow-up from the sales team,” says Jeff Youngs, VP of Production at GES.

○ HYPERPLANNING

The planning cycle for events is shifting toward weeks and months, from what was quarters and years—a reflection of the speed in which business is conducted today. The role of the event marketer, in turn, is shifting from experience builder and event producer to problem solver... using events. And as a result, marketers are seeking out strategic partners that have the infrastructure in place and the subject matter experts on-hand to support this shorter calendar.

○ ULTRA DATA ANALYSIS

To strengthen the argument around the power of events versus other channels of marketing, event teams need to leverage more data to compare events against the rest of the marketing mix. It's not just about results year-over-year; it's about arming brands with industry research, to show how, as an industry, face-to-face is moving the needle for brands.

○ OFFBEAT SPACES

The typical event in a typical place is too typical. Trending for 2016, more brands are opting for non-traditional spaces for events. Attendees get excited when they walk through a new or unexpected space, whether it be a speakeasy or a bright loft. And event teams are finding that changing venues is an easy and effective way to freshen up evergreen events—or launch a new event in style.

○ STRATEGIC CREATIVITY

Gone are the days when a pretty picture told the story of an event. Today's event designs are being formulated more as creative strategies, a new concept that sheds light on the evolution of event design from “look and feel” to today's “form and function,” says GES VP of Design & Creative John Woo. The creative idea should drive the experience, support the strategy and dial up reach, engagement and sales.

○ COST REALIZATION

Brands continue to implement innovative pricing solutions and transparency in the budget process—it's an update to old cost structures and models that provides a better look at costs but, more importantly, provides brands with a better look at what their options are. Many are crafting budgets more about brand needs these days than brand wants. “There's a cost-shifting and a cost-realization taking place in the budget process that wasn't there years ago,” says Mark Thomas, VP of Business Development at GES.

○ TEAM TECHNOLOGISTS

With digital extensions part of every event strategy, technologists are being invited into the event development process much earlier than in 2015. And they have a distinct role to play—not as mad scientists deploying every piece of hot technology out there, but as artistic consultants who can help brands tell a story using technology.

○ OPTIMIZED B-TO-B SPONSORSHIPS

Across B-to-B events, marketers are seeking out sponsorships that optimize events over sponsorships that simply offset event costs. “We're seeing more sponsorships at B-to-B events tied to technology,” says David Saef, Executive VP with GES' MarketWorks unit. “We've always seen mobile app and digital signage sponsorships, but now we're seeing sponsorships around new items such as targeted messaging and geolocation engagement.”

○ NEUROMARKETING

Using research that studies sensorimotor, cognitive and affective response to event marketing stimuli is coming of age. And many brands are pursuing it or implementing its principles. At a TED conference, Delta helped participants slow down, offering relaxing sound and images to decrease their heart rates. Check out Choco-Phonica in London, a pop-up where consumers try chocolate in four separate sound booths, each designed to evoke an emotion to improve the taste—when, in fact, all the chocolate is identical.

○ LONG-TERM PROGRAMS

Event teams are concepting and committing to longer event programs, moving away from one-shot campaigns that create short-term lifts and getting more aggressive about multi-event series, road shows and other initiatives used to generate more frequent contact with customers. “As marketers continue to understand their audiences, they begin to understand that continuous engagement has a huge impact on ROI,” Thomas says.

○ GETTING CLOSER TO I.T.

In a connected world, the I.T. team is no longer an arm of the event that works behind the scenes to make sure the wi-fi is operating properly. In 2016, the I.T. team has a seat at the planning table. Its members need to understand all of the touch points of an event, and how technology will impact engagement. They're offering input on how to make environments optimized, connected and more strategic.

○ THE SUITE MENTALITY

More marketers are swapping out single-focus events with experiences that deliver a “suite” of engagements tied to a variety of products or services. Many events that used to provide information on one product now offer breakouts and interactives that provide content on dozens. “The most savvy companies are thinking through the role of each event, what information gets deployed and how to make the most of the investment,” Saef says.

○ SUSTAINABILITY 2.0

It's not enough to put out recycling bins and call an event “green.” Thanks to new industry standards, like the APEX/ASTM Environmental Sustainability Certification, marketers actually have to walk the walk. GES was the first live event production company to achieve APEX/ASTM certification at Level Two—meaning no matter in which city you hold an event or are exhibiting, every GES facility has been independently verified to have the resources and practices necessary to achieve your sustainability goals.

○ UPGRADED PARTNERS

In addition to advancing standards in sustainability, marketers in 2016 are continuing to up their standards on which partners they hire, now focusing on using agencies that over-deliver on objectives. From ISO 9000, which offers guidelines and standards to increase business efficiency and customer satisfaction, to J.D. Power certification (which GES' National Servicercenter® has achieved for seven consecutive years in a grown-up event industry the best brands are now focused on using the best agencies.

MARKETING

Marketers are working to strike a balance between the needs of seasoned consumer and B-to-B event attendees with those of Millennials and younger professionals attending personal and corporate events. That need for balance is being woven into event strategies.

“Someone who goes through the physical event is likely to renew faster and buy more as a result of their emotional attachment to that company and its brand than someone who doesn’t,” says David Saef, Executive VP with GES’ MarketWorks unit. “But not all audiences are the same. As an example, marketers have a greater challenge connecting with young professionals at events—because the younger Millennial attendee is used to choosing digital engagements over live ones.”

PEER-LED FOLLOW-UPS

It’s common practice for a CEO to sign the post-event email offering thank you and additional content. But to connect with attendees on an emotional level, marketers are now enlisting other attendees to communicate these messages post-event. “It’s one thing to get a thank you from the CEO after the event, which is important. But it’s even more impactful when your own colleague who sits next to you sends that message,” says Dan Hilbert, Senior VP of Events at GES.

CINEMA CONTENT PATHS

Storytelling is reaching a new level as brands create films that blur the line between entertainment and marketing. Cognac brand Louis XIII just released a faux fictional film trailer for “100 Years” along with a release date for 2115. The brand built a preview event surrounding this “trailer,” all designed to draw attention to the craftsmanship and time it takes to create a decanter of the cognac. Toyota released the short film series “The Toyota Effect” at the New York Film Festival Convergence in conjunction with a panel discussion on content marketing campaigns.

CONCIERGE CONTINGENT

Event marketers are injecting dedicated concierges into events who are proactively reaching attendees to help divvy up their time and schedule meetings with certain experts. Gartner currently does this for customers and attendees—its concierge will ask what an attendee’s most pressing challenge is, recommend experts to talk to or sessions they should be sitting in that help reinforce the brand and its offerings.

FLIP LEARNING

Marketers are shifting the way they approach content and information gathering at events. They’re implementing strategies such as Flip Learning, where conference attendees can access pre-content—a presentation before the event—so that at the event, they’re offered even more sophisticated material. This way, they get a much deeper level of understanding of what’s going on in the sessions, plus, they feel the personal benefit of making connections with expert speakers.

INTENTIONAL TARGETING

We often look at quantity when we think of event attendance, but marketers today are prepared to hyper-target and splice their database to be more restrictive on who they invite to a specific event—based on the event goals. If they can identify customers who are more likely to renew business quickly, they may host an event for just that group.

SMARTER NETWORKING

Now that there can be up to four different generations attending one event, marketers are focusing more on strategies that can help them balance the experience for tenured folks and younger professionals alike. Think speed-dating for mentors or trivia nights.

ADVENTURE EXPERIENCES

Marketers are using adrenaline to fuse brands with customers. Take craft beer brand Upslope, which had consumers hike 2.3 miles on a Rocky Mountain trail for an Oktoberfest beer-sampling event. Or mini-marketing conference Camp9600, which had travel marketers camping for content and demos, and gathering around campfires for networking.

ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATIONS

As event attendance booms, cities are stretched thinner when it comes to providing premium hotel space as well as venues due to demand. For Salesforce.com’s Dreamforce conference, the company enlisted a Celebrity Infinity luxury cruise ship to dock and house attendees. Additionally, the brand’s registration system linked to Airbnb as a housing option dubbed “unique and authentic rentals.”

LESS F&B WASTE

President Obama and the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Environmental Protection Agency have announced efforts to cut food waste in half by 2030, while the European Union is funding a similar research project aimed at reducing the EU’s food waste by 30 percent by the year 2025. Marketers are embracing this effort, enlisting food rescue organizations and scrutinizing menus.

MAKER MOVEMENT

In what’s described as a “convergence of computer hackers and traditional artisans,” there’s a new demographic forming on the horizon—the makers. They are inventors, designers and tinkerers. Products such as 3D printers are helping to inspire the movement. It’s about self-reliance, a positive sentiment marketers can share with their audience. Marketers are creating maker interactives and engagements at their events, from maker receptions to maker workshops and maker networking micro-meetings.

RISE OF THE NEW VIP

From on-the-show-floor executive wings to private sit-down meetings, brands typically think of their company CMO and CEO as the stars of any event-related VIP engagements. But with the rise of tools that allow marketers to pinpoint exactly who their influencers are comes new intelligence on who event attendees really want to see, hear and meet. In some cases, attendees would rather meet a CIO than a CEO, a design director over a finance manager. Marketers are investing more time to understand whom their attendees define as a VIP.



Photo Credit: Tableau

ONGOING POLLING

In 2016, the industry is polling qualitatively and quantitatively three months after an event, then six months after an event—and so on. Constant polling enables brands to fully understand the true long-term impact of a live experience on someone a month or a year after the event. “We’re beginning to uncover the one or two things attendees remember from events that continue to affect their job and their willingness to contribute to their organization,” says Hilbert. “Five years ago, this industry would have guessed. But polling helps us know.”

TECHNOLOGY

As marketers get smarter about technology, they're less inclined to muddle an event with the latest device or integration if it doesn't make sense. This year, it's about identifying the brand story first, then choosing the right technology to help bring it to life. It's all part of the movement to transform passive attendees into active participants.

"Marketers are using technology to create content and drive the ability to surprise and delight. They're letting go of the need to control an event message and using technology to create a more [shared and shareable] event," says John Woo, VP of Design and Creative at GES.

CROWDSTREAMING

The rise of live-stream social sharing platforms Periscope and Meerkat are pushing marketers to give up control over how their events are shared. It's a changing tide of voice, so to speak, but it's also an opportunity. How can marketers "open up" events effectively, and live? Brands at New York Fashion Week wowed audiences by offering behind-the-scenes and live footage of the makings of a runway show. It offered an authentic viewpoint to what's otherwise a choreographed affair.

VIRTUAL REALITY

Marketers this year are moving away from focusing on how they can "wow" event audiences with virtual reality and beginning to learn how to use VR as a mainstream engagement tool that provides accessible content to attendees or allows audiences to create their own content. The New York Times put virtual reality into the hands of all of its home-delivery subscribers with Google Cardboard and virtual reality stories that readers could immerse themselves in from their own living rooms. Facebook is planning features that will allow virtual reality to enhance news feeds.



BEACON PROLIFERATION

Thanks to proximity beacons, we're no longer relegated to a defined space to measure engagement or push messages at an event. We can make our messaging omnipresent, and citywide. South by Southwest deployed 1,000 proximity beacons, forming micro-locations all over Austin that, in conjunction with the event app, enabled attendees to make connections to content and to other people wherever they were located in SXSW venues, from sessions to concerts.

CONDUCTIVE INK

Electric ink is allowing designers to create printed surfaces that conduct electricity. [As featured in the Chicago Tribune](#), conductive ink pioneer Novalia recently created an interactive album cover that, when touched, connects to an iPhone via Bluetooth and transmits sound—essentially, it becomes an interactive turntable. In the event world, this technology will change the way we look at static displays and graphics. It's simplistic and curated.

ANALOG THROWBACKS

Retro is in. Two years ago musician Jack White released his latest album "Lazaretto" on vinyl—and it sold 40,000 copies in one week, the most of any vinyl record since 1991, according to Digital Music News. Cards Against Humanity, the party game with fill-in-the-blank statements using mature content, sold out in three days when it was released. "There is a trend to go back to more low-tech, retro communication," says Dan Hilbert, Senior VP of Events at GES. "When you take a look at Millennial trends, there is a balance between digital and analog because they think it's cool, it's a different hobby, or something else to learn about."

INTERNET OF EVENT THINGS

The connected event is coming. Messaging is constant and triggered by location and behavior. Dynamic moments are synched across every keynote, breakout and exhibitor. Data is collected, managed and measured in real-time. "Things are beginning to talk to each other within our homes, from our TVs to our computers and devices, and it's only a matter of time before everything talks to each other in our events," Woo says.

PROJECTION 2.0

Projection-mapped experiences are getting an upgrade. This year, marketers and the technological minds behind them will take projection and stunning displays to a new level. American Express incorporated real-time tracking, 3D and projection onto a wall of water at the US Open. Freightliner wowed the press with a projection mapping display on the Hoover Dam, connecting a modern marvel with its brand.

HIGH-TECH FOOD INTERACTIVES

Expect to see more innovative uses of food in event activities going forward, as marketers tie in food at events to tell a story or offer a shareable moment (with brand messaging imbedded within). Holiday Inn Express used an event interactive to promote instant pancake machines at its hotels—attendees had their photos etched into an edible pancake. And Stella Artois created an immersive food pairing event with a projection dome overhead that reinvented attendees' sense of space with constellations and other imagery.

DESIGN

Event teams are adopting design standards that span entire event portfolios and offer one cohesive look and feel. They're also eager to adopt alternative venues and offer "found" design moments, from shareable food to download-worthy event music.

"Everything has to tie together. You have to create a footpath of touch points. It's about how you incorporate multiple elements—from the exhibit floor to the lounges to the learning labs and breakouts and general session—into a single brand experience," says Mark Thomas, VP of Business Development at GES.

GOING CASUAL

Many attendees are expecting more casual environments at meetings and events. Take SAP, which demolished the walls surrounding its keynotes, making the stage visible from the entire show floor. Attendees didn't have to sit in theater seating to enjoy it—they could gather at lounge areas in different corners of the floor and watch it from there.

EVENT SOUNDTRACKS

We're in the middle of a musical renaissance of sorts, as consumers have access to music, their own playlists and streaming music 24/7. And so, in that cultural vein, marketers in 2016 will think creatively about how they're tapping into that passion point across the event space. "This isn't 'We will Rock You,' it's The 1975, it's City and Colour, it's alternative, it's cooler; it has to be relevant," says Dan Hilbert, Senior VP of Events at GES.

MINI LEARNING LABS

You'll see even more of a mix of learning environments across events this year. For every breakout room with 100 seats, there may be a smaller learning lab for eight to 10 people, where attendees can demo technology intimately, or simply get a shorter but sweeter amount of content. At the most recent Mary Kay Sales Conference produced by GES, attendees could choose between several-hour-long sessions or pods for a dozen or so people located all over the show floor that offered 15-minute presentations on the key points of those sessions, and no rows of seats.

BOLD BLOCKS, CRISP WHITE

Step into a corporate event today and you'll likely find big letter structures or blocks of color that spell out the brand or conference messaging. These installations are not only bold branding opportunities, they are shareable visuals that translate well across events in the portfolio. But, when it comes to furniture, white and crisp are at the top of the trending list for 2016.

MOCK EXPERIENCES

Marketers are re-imagining their event content and staging mock experiences that give attendees access to real-world applications. Attendees of the 2015 Emergency Nurses Association meeting produced by GES were treated to the future of emergency nursing via an expansive "AdvancedED," an interactive, educational mock emergency department located in the exhibit hall that offered stations for practical demonstrations about new products, concepts and best practices.

PLAYFUL INSTALLATIONS

Giving attendees the opportunity to learn, share and have fun is the new recipe for success. Examples: The National Building Museum's "beach" installation that filled the atrium with over one million translucent, recyclable balls that mimicked what it feels like to swim in water. Or Oracle's "cloud" installation at OpenWorld that offered attendees the chance to leap, literally, into a fluffy pit to mimic being in the cloud.

WAYFINDING GUIDANCE

Designers are incorporating shape and weight into their show floor wayfinding signage, replacing what once were foam core easel stands with structures such as tall standing totems, digital mapping systems and other directions that are more semi-permanent and solid—and contribute to the brand message and the attendees' ease of navigation.

LIGHT IS THE NEW ARCHITECTURE

Gone are the days when marketers would cut the lighting spend before the structure spend. With the latest design methods and technologies, brands can now use lighting to stimulate and simulate structure at events. From projection mapping and new LED boards to pin lighting and more, never have events had as many options and uses for lighting.

BURNED GRAPHICS

Inspired by the maker movement, event designers are incorporating more intentional graphics into event displays, using routing or burned graphics for a style that feels less commercial, more authentic and more "maker"-ish. The latest printers are allowing brands to apply graphics to everything from chalkboards and glass to reclaimed timber and marble.

MICRO-MOMENTS

Marketers in 2016 are designing small interactions between brands and event attendees. It can be as simple as surprising attendees on the event app with a 60-second opportunity to reserve front-row seats at a keynote or as elaborate as giving a few hundred VIP attendees surprise access to a CEO fireside chat.

ISSUING DESIGN STANDARDS

Brands are enforcing design standards on all exhibitors in a push to align all the touch points of an event toward the message. Microsoft recently combined six events into one and implemented a design standard that resulted in modular booth kits for exhibitors and required 3D renderings to make sure each had the elevation and the right perspective to match the brand.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Content doesn't always have to be served up in a session. Marketers are thinking of innovative ways to integrate adult learning environments into design moments throughout the show floor. From gamification and QR code-driven "passport" challenges to push notifications based on an attendee's location, they're making sure every inch of the event is optimized.



LET'S MAKE THIS EPIC



You're not looking for just another live event. You want to create an experience like no other, one that guides your customers through every step in their journey, engaging, amazing and delighting them. You need an event that moves beyond the status quo, to maximize impact, spark the imagination and inspire. You need something exceptional. Something memorable. Something EPIC. And it all starts at www.ges.com/eventtrends.