



# NextGen- Proofing Your Events

May 2026

# About This Report

## The Why

Business events are at a critical crossroads. And it's not because of rising costs, AI, sustainability mandates or geopolitical tensions. These all matter. But they obscure the most important disruption of the next five to 10 years: shifts in the people who come to these gatherings in the first place. (And those who don't; more on that later).

The good news? Shifting societal values and behaviors present new opportunities for event organizers who understand today's attendees and are ready to adapt.

**This report offers guidance on how event professionals can respond to societal shifts to differentiate themselves and gain a competitive edge.**

## Our Approach

This report aggregates themes from data both within and outside the business events space. You'll see events industry data referenced, as well as research from academia, business thought leaders and global consulting firms. For each theme, we'll call out actions organizers might take in response.

We'll reference generational shifts throughout this report. This lens is important not only because research shows generations behave differently based on the events that occurred during their formative years, but because generational shifts are simply a numbers game. By 2030, Gen Z (born between 1995 and 2010) will comprise 35 percent of the workforce and millennials (born between 1981 and 1994) will represent 40 percent. **In other words, in just a few years, three-quarters of the workforce will be comprised of the two youngest adult generations.<sup>1</sup>**

And due to the rapid retirement of baby boomers and fewer people within Gen X, younger generations will ascend more quickly in the ranks than their predecessors, fast-tracking into decision-making roles. We ignore the needs of these generations at our peril.

**But looking only through a generational lens is limiting for several reasons.** For one thing, trends that start within one generation often proliferate across all, as we have witnessed with technology adoption, media consumption and other trends. For another, what is mistaken for preference is often more an expression of what we tolerate. For example, we note in this report that younger generations want to learn through interactive formats rather than talking heads. Members of older generations might be quick to tell you that they do, too; they simply haven't demanded it to the extent younger generations have.

More importantly, as humans we share fundamental underlying needs. These needs may be expressed differently by cohort, but the core needs are the same. For example, baby boomers and Gen Z may both strive to make a positive impact. For Gen Z, this may be expressed through hands-on service and immersion in the local community, while for boomers "giving back" may look more like mentorship and legacy. But the underlying value is common to both.

**We ignore the needs of these generations at our peril.**



# Framing the Problem

## The Non-Attendee

While much attention is given to current attendees, focusing only on those who attend events ignores the most opportunity-rich group: those who don't. With only 10-20% of association members typically attending the association's largest annual event, the remaining 80-90% represent a significant untapped audience. That's an enormous pool of could-be attendees who are up for grabs with the right value proposition.

With that said, it's useful to explore **what's holding people back from attending events — particularly younger people.** Here are some commonly overlooked barriers for younger attendees according to Dr. Corey Seemiller, professor, author and speaker who researches generational dynamics in the workplace:

**They lack a buddy:** A whopping 59% of Gen Zers will avoid an event if they don't know anyone else attending — significantly more than for other generations. Contrary to popular belief, it's not that younger generations only want to interact through screens. Research from Freeman shows they actually crave in-person connection but are the first to admit they're not very comfortable doing it. Only two in five feel confident networking with people in their industry or building strong business relationships.<sup>2</sup> Lack of practice is a likely reason, according to Dr. Seemiller. Not only did they grow up as digital natives, they came of age in an era of structured and supervised activities rather than the unstructured, spontaneous play that was common in earlier generations. In other words, they need help breaking the ice.



Only **2 in 5**

Gen Zers express high confidence in networking with people in their industry or building strong business relationships.

<sup>2</sup>2025 Gen Z Report: The value of live events in a digital world – Freeman and The Harris Poll

### Hidden costs:

What a “free” event might cost the attendee

#### EXAMPLE COSTS

Airport parking for 3 days	\$50
F&B during transit / outside of event hours	\$100
Childcare for 3 days	\$500
Housesitting / pet sitting for 3 days	\$150
Foregone wages from gig work	\$200

**TOTAL OUT OF POCKET COSTS \$1,000**

**Free events aren't free:** Two-thirds of Gen Zers work in the so-called gig economy, either as their main job or to supplement income from their primary job to make ends meet. Even with free or discounted registration, attending an event can be costly for students and early-career professionals. Time away from gig work like pet-sitting, tutoring or Door-Dashing means lost income on top of hidden expenses like meals, conference attire and travel.

**There's not enough in it for them:** Today's events tend to be designed through an increasingly outdated lens, with hyper-packed agendas, passive learning formats and networking that puts the onus on the attendee. Organizers and attendees have very different perceptions of how well the status quo is working. Freeman's research shows that when organizers were asked if they believed their attendees experienced a peak moment at their event (which research shows is a critical driver of repeat attendance), organizers overwhelmingly said yes (78%) but only 40% of attendees agreed.<sup>3</sup> For Gen Z to attend a live event, there needs to be meaningful opportunities, ones they couldn't get through a device.

<sup>3</sup>2025 Freeman Trends Report – Unpacking XLNC: Bringing the X factor to attendee experiences



## Questions for Organizers to Consider

- What does an attendee feel they give up when they travel to an event? (Self-care routines, time away from family, hidden financial costs, emotional safety, etc.)
- What strategies could you use to overcome these obstacles?
- Are there ways you can position offerings differently to show hesitant attendees how you will address their needs?

**59%**  
Fifty-nine percent of Gen Z will avoid an event if they don't know someone else going.

This is a lot to overcome. But as an industry, we must understand and counteract these real sources of friction to attract and retain the next generation of attendees.

## The Empowered Consumer

Catalyzed by the pandemic and enabled by technology, we've become accustomed to a great deal of autonomy in our lives. The "Great Reset" post-pandemic caused us to reckon with whether we're spending our time in the ways we value. It opened up previously restricted possibilities of how we configure our work and our lives, from the hours we work to where we work, from to how we collaborate and learn. A work week that was previously 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in an office for five days might now consist of a blend of coming to an office for meetings, working outside at a café, and flexibility to walk the dog, do a load of laundry or meet with a child's teacher over Zoom.

One visible expression of this empowerment has been the well-documented "**bleisure**" trend arising from the work-from-anywhere mindset. Over three-quarters of travelers have extended a business trip to include leisure.<sup>4</sup> Marriott International reports that business travelers are staying 20% longer than in 2019 and American Airlines reports that bleisure travelers are the fastest growing segment of their business.

For some attendees, free time to explore the destination isn't a nice-to-have, but a requirement.

### Visit Anaheim found that 44% of travelers had turned down work trips because of a lack of leisure time at their host destination.

As technology has opened possibilities for how we connect, collaborate and consume content, attending a live event requires an intentional choice. Rather than face-to-face being the default, more specific use cases have emerged for in-person gathering. We've learned as an industry that some things — like passive content absorption — can be done efficiently online. The hook to attend an in-person event, then, needs to be something harder to get virtually: things like building trust, feeling inspired, forging relationships, collaborative problem-solving and unique experiences.

Attendance particularly for younger generations is not a given. **The bar for attending an event is "Am I getting something I couldn't get otherwise?"**

With that, let's explore what that looks like.

<sup>4</sup>Visit Anaheim 'The Bleisure Boom is Here. Is your Event Strategy Ready?' – August 4, 2025



**20%** longer stays

**89%** want leisure time

**73%** find bleisure opportunities an employee benefit<sup>4</sup>

# Shifting Attendee Expectations

## Curation > Choice

In today's world, the brands we engage with as consumers know who we are, how we behave and what's most likely to capture our engagement. We will expect our event experiences to do the same.

It will no longer be sufficient to offer activities or speakers based only on the audience's general demographic makeup and interests. Particularly as we're asked to give organizers access to more of our data, we expect something in return. From the data we provide during registration to our engagement in the event app to our behavior on the show floor, **we will expect event organizers to hold up their end of the bargain and "show me you know me."**

Let's consider two distinct attendees of your event:

- **Attendee 1** is early in their career. Their goal in attending is to gain knowledge and confidence, learn which products and suppliers are out there and form new connections with peers.
- **Attendee 2** is a seasoned professional with an established network. Their goal in attending is to connect with existing colleagues and strengthen relationships with key customers and partners.

How might these two attendees engage differently with your event, and how might you entice them to attend? Below are examples of how an organizer might use differentiated marketing messaging to target the unique needs of both attendees.

	Attendee 1 — Early career	Attendee 2 — Late career
<b>Reasons for attending</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gain knowledge</li> <li>• Learn about new products/suppliers</li> <li>• Form new connections</li> </ul>	Strengthen relationships with existing customers and partners
<b>Learning sessions</b>	Attends many learning sessions	Attends few learning sessions (time is spent in business meetings)
<b>Expo hall</b>	Visits many booths for short durations to learn about the range of providers	Visits only a few booths of known suppliers but spends longer time at each learning about latest developments
<b>How organizers might market to them</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote professional development opportunities</li> <li>• Overcome hesitance by connecting them to activities and people to "break the ice"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show who in their network has already registered</li> <li>• Show how attending links to their business outcomes</li> </ul>

The specifics of this example may or may not hold true for your audience; what's important is the principle of using data to reach the right people in the right ways.

## A Personalized Registration Journey

Registration presents a significant untapped opportunity to ask attendees to provide data and show them they will get something in return by doing so. This must go beyond boiler-plate questions about role, tenure and budget. Simplifying registration and making it more engaging for the user will not only reduce abandon rates but will entice users to share information that provides richer value to you and your exhibitors.

For example: Organizers might prompt users with an interactive five-question quiz during registration or right before the event that serves up tailored suggestions based on their responses. (Consider the viral popularity of social quizzes that tell the user who they are, where they fit and how they compare to others — from their personality type to where they should live to which Harry Potter house they belong in.)

Based on an attendee's responses, they could be served up personalized guidance ranging from:

- Which sessions to attend
- Which event-goers to meet
- Expo hall areas and exhibitors of interest
- Activities they might like
- "Giving back" opportunities that connect with their passions



## Leveraging Bleisure

We shared earlier that bleisure opportunities can be a powerful hook to entice attendance. Consider how today's travel journey has changed and how you might capitalize on this as an organizer:

My online activity might lead an algorithm to detect my upcoming business trip and serve up local attractions on my social feed. Knowing from my web history I'm a soccer enthusiast who attends professional matches, it directs me to the city's Major League Soccer team's upcoming games. This prompts me to consider including my family in my travel plans since it would be a fun experience for my son who plays youth soccer. My social media presents relatable influencers sharing their experience in the city, further heightening my anticipation. I decide to post-extend my trip with the family. I ask AI to create a customized itinerary based on my family's ages and interests. I ask for hotel recommendations in my preferred brand that are near these attractions and book through my hotel's app so I can earn free nights based on the brand's knowledge of my past stays.

**According to Deloitte, more than half of Gen Z report using social video platforms (such as TikTok, Instagram reels, and YouTube shorts) for travel research<sup>5</sup>, highlighting a shift in who consumers look to for travel inspiration and a preference for storytelling over stock imagery.**

You as the organizer might serve up personalized recommendations to attendees based on their interests uncovered during registration. If the event is in Seattle, for example, you might suggest a first-time visitor see the better-known sites like Pike's Place and the Space Needle; another might enjoy a half-day picnic and bike or rollerblade rental along Alki Beach; another might enjoy the natural beauty of Snoqualmie or the Olympic peninsula. **The key is giving attendees the right scaffolding to choose their own adventure.**

<sup>5</sup>2025 Deloitte Holiday Travel Survey

- 1 Algorithm detects my upcoming work trip.**
- 2 I'm served content on the city's Major League Soccer games based on my history.**
- 3 Spurs my idea to bring my kids who play youth soccer.**
- 4 Anticipation heightens as I see influencers sharing their experiences in the city.**
- 5 Decide to extend my trip with the family.**
- 6 Ask AI to create a customized itinerary and hotel recommendations.**
- 7 Book through my hotel's rewards app.**



## Personalization ≠ more choice

A fundamental point that often gets misunderstood when we talk about personalization. We may think of personalization as “lots of choices so everyone can pick what they want,” but this misses the mark. Consumers don't want more choice; instead, they want to be known so well that the right choice is served up to them. The science tells us that too many choices actually decreases satisfaction. It causes decision paralysis, time and energy to consider tradeoffs and post-purchase dissonance — i.e. second-guessing and anxiety that we chose the wrong one. As speaker and marketing professor Scott Galloway puts it:

**“Consumers don't want more choice. Choice is a tax. They want confidence in the choices presented. They want someone else to do the research and curate options for them.”**

As tech-driven personalization proliferates, this will become an expectation across all consumer experiences. From how we book travel to where we stay, to content and sessions, we will increasingly expect to be efficiently funneled to the right offerings based on predictive analytics. Further, we will expect offerings to adapt based on our feedback in real-time through mechanisms like live polling, voting, behavior tracking and emotion/sentiment monitoring. The proliferation of AI will accelerate tech-driven personalization.

MPI's "A Glimpse into the Future of Events" describes this as "personalization at scale":<sup>6</sup> "Attendees are now looking for tailored experiences that cater to their interests, preferences and needs. AI-driven solutions are making it possible to provide personalized content, session recommendations and networking opportunities for each attendee, ensuring higher engagement and satisfaction. AI-powered tools will also help with predicting attendee behavior, improving matchmaking and ensuring all logistics run smoothly."

## How AI Will Show Up in the Traveler's Journey<sup>7</sup>

### 01 | Personalized Recommendations

Analyze consumer data to offer personalized recommendations based on past trips, online purchases and tendencies.

### 02 | Destination Selection and Trip Planning

Specific options and an ideal itinerary for the next trip, considering trip type, duration, budget, group size and composition, best time to visit, weather conditions, etc., along with prior travel history.

### 03 | Travel Shopping (Hotels, Airlines, Activities)

Traveler needs are matched with up-to-date supplier information to surface the most relevant photos and information within search results. Shoppers surface specific attributes and components and refine recommendations with natural language – no more fiddling with filters.

### 04 | Day of Travel

Smoother transport, notification processes and booking adjustments. Tools provide a full view into airport infrastructure, offerings and food and beverage options, as well as the ability to schedule and edit food pickup based on flight details.

### 05 | Accommodation Experience

Past-visit data from partner networks enables properties to tailor their offerings. Concierges, powered by AI 24/7, provide personalized and timely offers.

### 06 | In Destination (Activities, Attractions, F&B)

Activity, attraction and food recommendations are optimized for the traveler and their circumstances. Itineraries seamlessly fit around each day's priorities and conditions. Choices that travelers make inform subsequent recommendations.

### 07 | Post-Travel Pulse

Post-trip tools prompt the traveler with questions about their trip experience, likes and dislikes, teaching the tool to generate more accurate recommendations for future trips. Travelers can enter ideas for expected future trips and schedule when they would like destination recommendations.

<sup>6</sup>Trends That Will Shape 2025: A Glimpse into the Future of Events

<sup>7</sup>CSMR\_8577894\_FutureofTravel\_POV\_FINAL\_040324

## Questions for Organizers to Consider

- How can you introduce more tech-driven personalization into the attendee journey?
- Where are there opportunities to do this before, during and after the event?



## Connection and Community

It might seem counterintuitive to talk about the need for human connection in a world that we just said is increasingly algorithm-driven. But the two are not mutually exclusive. Used the right ways, technology is a facilitator of real-world connection rather than a replacement.

The desire to form meaningful connections is fundamentally human, but for younger generations forming these connections in business settings can cause anxiety. Consider Freeman's research on Gen Z attendees:

- While 95% of Gen Z recognizes the importance of business connections for career success, 82% want to feel more comfortable with face-to-face interactions.<sup>8</sup>
- Over half (52%) of Gen Z considers business travel very/fairly stressful — well more than for older generations.<sup>9</sup>
- Fifty-nine percent aren't comfortable attending events where they don't know someone going.<sup>10</sup>
- Gen Z professionals average just 16 strong business relationships versus 21 for millennials and 40 for Gen X.<sup>11</sup>

Younger attendees approach identity and community differently, explains Dr. Seemiller. Finding "their people" is less about shared demographics or industry. Instead, they seek micro-communities and niche subcultures that let them connect with like-minded individuals around shared interests.

They are well accustomed to forming online connections that cross traditional lines and often forge deep investments in these communities, not differentiating between online and offline connections. **Events that stand out to younger generations are ones that facilitate connections with others they see as similar to themselves.**

Dr. Seemiller advises event practitioners to think about creative ways to utilize a "fourth space" — that is, a space for a specific activity or community. For example:

- **Game-based gatherings**
- **Fandom festivities**
- **Creative classes**
- **Live social shows**
- **Culinary circles**
- **Healthy hangouts**
- **Beauty novelty boutiques**

As Amanda Ma, CEO of Innovate Marketing Group puts it: **"Gen Z doesn't just want to attend your event. They want to feel seen in it. They want moments that feel like them."**<sup>12</sup>

And the desire to connect with "their people" doesn't end with designated networking sessions. Even when it comes to learning formats, they prefer fun, hands-on interactions that make it natural to forge connections.

Dr. Seemiller describes today's learning preferences as:

- Experiential: "I need to be actively doing."
- Demonstrated: "Show me something."
- Social: "Everyone around me is interested and determined."

Organizers sometimes misunderstand attendees' desire for "immersive experiences" as high-tech flash when what attendees really crave is thoughtful connection. Behold the disconnect in what attendees crave versus what organizers think they crave:<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup>2025 Gen Z Report: The value of live events in a digital world – Freeman and The Harris Poll

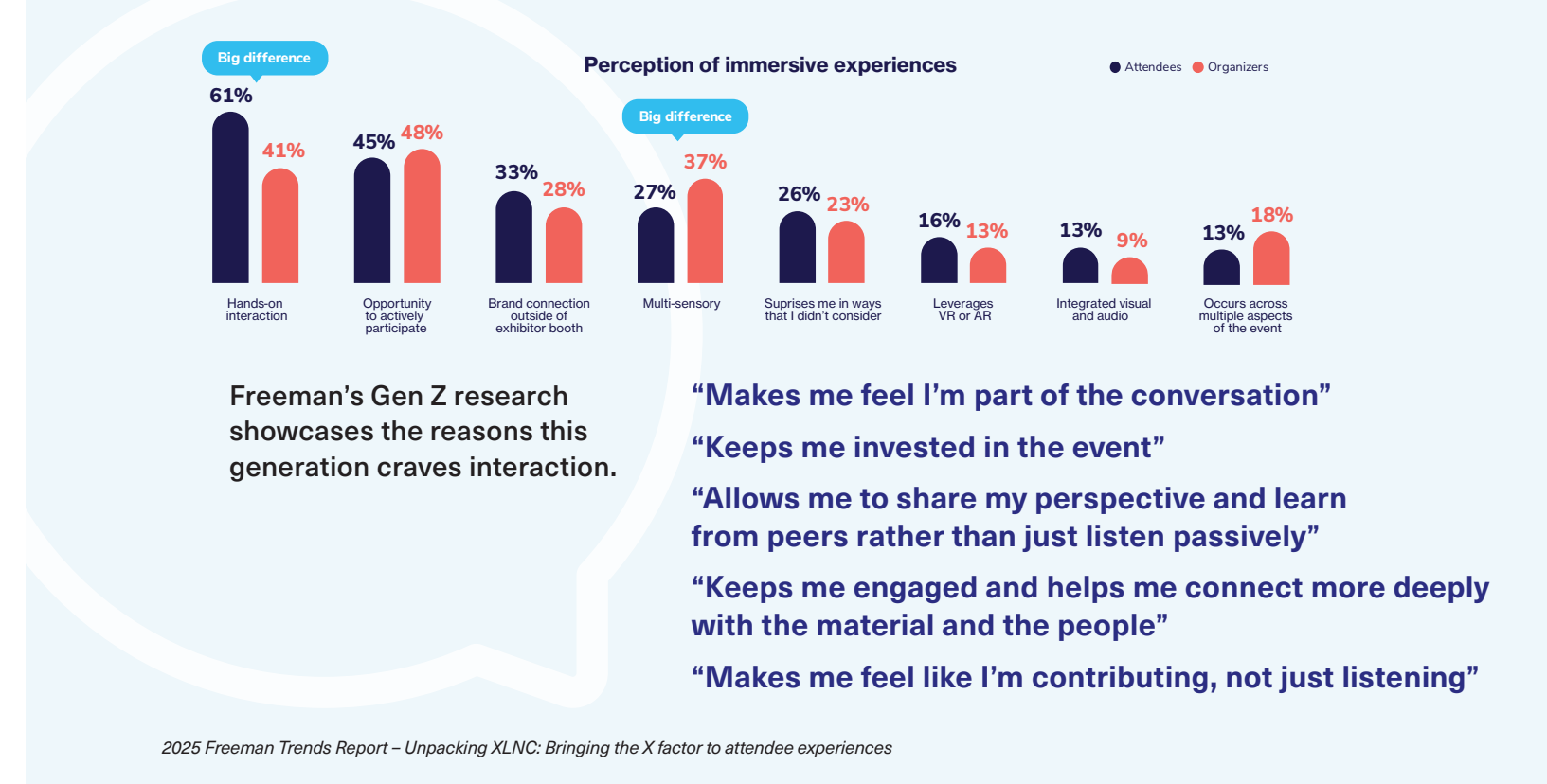
<sup>9</sup>Meet Tomorrow's Business Travelers' – Amex GBT, March 24, 2025

<sup>10</sup>Dr. Corey Seemiller

<sup>11</sup>2025 Gen Z Report: The value of live events in a digital world – Freeman and The Harris Poll

<sup>12</sup>Next-Gen Events: How younger attendees are changing things' – The Meetings Magazine, June 13, 2025

<sup>13</sup>2025 Freeman Trends Report – Unpacking XLNC: Bringing the X factor to attendee experiences



Reckoning with the reality that the new attendee is getting on a plane for something other than passive information consumption is a foundational starting point for designing the right event. After all, we can consume content from the comfort of our own couch through a device. The new attendee doesn't just want to consume content; they want to co-create it.

To enable this, organizers can set the stage with creative use of space: use of visual prompts; non-traditional venues; engaging the five senses to spur creativity. Activities and challenges that force the group to interact, have fun and find shared purpose will make

networking feel natural and accessible. Interactive, low-pressure environments that build confidence through active participation are key.

**As an industry, we must break free from defining "inspiration" as celebrity keynotes, "learning" as listening to talking heads and 'networking' as throwing people into a reception hall with cocktails and forcing them to fend for themselves.**

Solving for this will reduce a key barrier for the large portion of Gen Z attendees who find business networking stressful.

## Questions for Organizers to Consider

- Are you offering organizers creative solutions to expand beyond traditional learning formats toward more interactive and immersive learning?
- How can you enable micro-communities with spaces and activities that help people connect around shared interests?
- How can you support organizers' marketing efforts to target specific segments of their population? (e.g. gamers, foodies, thrill-seekers, veterans)
- How can you market unique opportunities to draw in bleisure attendees?

## Authenticity and Trust

Trust is deeply rooted in our DNA. Evolutionary psychology explains that humans have well-honed filters to detect who we can trust and who might pose a threat. Trust plays a key role in which voices we listen to.

But what these trusted voices look and sound like has changed. If trustworthiness of a brand or speaker used to be conveyed through status and credentials, polished delivery and pressed suits, it now looks more like:

- **Practicing what you preach**
- **Being transparent — bringing your audience along as decisions are made**
- **Breaking the fourth wall — involving your audience in creation**
- **Delivery style that feels real, relatable and genuine**
- **Talking “with” not “at”**

Even conference footwear has shifted away from pomp, as illustrated by the sneaker trend.

Another manifestation of the search for authenticity is the desire to “live like a local” in a destination. Attendees increasingly want to feel a sense of place, to take in the vibe of the location by interacting with regular people. This flips the script on how events are currently designed. It may mean meeting the needs of those who prefer public transportation or learning the city from their Uber driver over trained tour guides and motorcoaches. The photo op in front of the famous landmark may feel less Insta-worthy than their story about exploring a unique neighborhood and meeting someone interesting.

**For organizers, this requires a shift in mindset. Events have evolved from something done TO you to something done BY you:**

## The Evolution of Event Design event mindset



**As stated in *The Meetings Magazine*:<sup>14</sup>**

“Younger generations are highly selective about where they spend their time and money. Because they’ve been bombarded with digital content since childhood, they’ve developed strong filters for what feels genuine and what doesn’t. This means event planners must go beyond flashy marketing and celebrity name-drops. If an event doesn’t reflect their values or provide something of real personal or social value, Gen Z and Millennial attendees will ignore it without hesitation — or worse, call it out. Younger generations can spot inauthenticity from a mile away, whether it’s a forced brand partnership, a staged photo op or a speaker whose values don’t align with the audience. In the world of live events, that means flashy productions and overhyped gimmicks won’t land unless they’re backed by real substance and intention.”

The tone, language and visuals used to promote an event matter. Younger generations prefer transparent, conversational communication that speaks to them, not at them. “From panel discussions to product demos, younger audiences are looking for real voices and real stories, not rehearsed scripts or safe talking points. Panels that include diverse, relatable speakers who aren’t afraid to speak candidly will resonate far more than a polished keynote. Gen Z attendees want to know exactly what they’re signing up for, who’s behind it and why it matters. They crave more than just photo ops and swag bags.”

<sup>14</sup>Next-Gen Events | [www.themeetingmagazines.com](http://www.themeetingmagazines.com)

The desire for authenticity implies several opportunities for organizers:

- Use real voices, tone and imagery when promoting the event
- Use diverse, relatable speakers, not just big names
- Ensure content and design choices align with your organization's stated values
- Bring the audience along — involve them in design and communicate why certain decisions were made
- Connect them with the local community beyond organized activities and tours

## Questions for Organizers to Consider

- How can you embrace modern channels and communication styles that are perceived as more authentic — for example, storytelling and unscripted videos?
- Are you including influencers when you think of talent that could draw people to the event and destination?
- How can you help attendees “live like a local” in your destination and experience it on their own terms?

**Make it real.**  
**Involve**  
**real voices,**  
**real values,**  
**real places.**



## Values and Purpose

We shared in the previous section that practicing what you preach affects perceptions of authenticity, and attendees are more attuned than ever to which entities align with their values — and which don't. Brands and destinations have found themselves in the crossroads of cultural and political issues, sometimes outside of their control.

According to Forbes, 82% of shoppers want a consumer brand's values to align with their own<sup>15</sup> and will vote with their wallets if they don't feel a match. Three-quarters of shoppers report parting ways with a brand over a conflict in values.

A highly visible manifestation of this has been consumers pushing brands — and the travel industry — to become more sustainable. Deloitte reports:<sup>16</sup>

- 65% of Gen Zs reported having felt worried about the environment in the past month.
- 70% reported they consider a company's environmental credentials or policies when evaluating a potential employer.
- Two-thirds of Gen Z and millennials report being willing to pay more for environmentally sustainable products and services and around 25% have conducted research on a company's environmental impact or policies before purchasing from them.
- One-third of U.S. travelers said they would take some kind of action to travel more sustainably, such as seeking lower emissions flights or prioritizing hotels with higher sustainability ratings.

Younger people were also more likely than older generations to make decisions about how and where they travel based on social inclusiveness. For example, worldwide, 27% of respondents surveyed aged 18-24 highlighted brands and destinations that offer socially inclusive experiences as a top consideration when planning their trips, compared to only 17% of those over 65.<sup>17</sup>

**“Gen Z wants organizations that are environmentally conscious, embrace inclusivity, honor authenticity, are ethical and accountable, transparent, open and honest and admit their mistakes.”** *Dr. Corey Seemiller*

### Compared to pre-pandemic, today's event attendee is<sup>18</sup>...

- Increasingly female
- Younger (average age: 45 vs. 51)
- More diverse, as described on page 18
- More formally educated (higher levels of education attained)

### And Gen Z is increasingly<sup>19</sup>...

- Non-white (49%)
- Multiracial Dreamers (5%)
- Adopted immigrant children
- Children of same-sex couples
- LGBTQ+

<sup>15</sup>“Navigating the Evolving Landscape of Personal Values: What Brands and Companies Need to Know” – Forbes, April 5, 2024

<sup>16</sup>“70% of Gen Z, Millennials Consider Environmental Sustainability Important in Choosing Employers: Deloitte Survey” – May 15, 2025

<sup>17</sup>“Why we Need a Deeper Understanding of the Values of Gen Z Consumers” – Forbes, May 10, 2024

<sup>18</sup>2025 Gen Z Report: The value of live events in a digital world – Freeman and The Harris Poll

<sup>19</sup>Dr. Corey Seemiller



Dr. Corey Seemiller says that building trust with this audience means seeing their identity reflected in the event as a whole. Diversity isn't something they do — it's who they are. They want to see diverse perspectives not as an add-on, a break-out session or a designated activity, but woven into the fabric of the event itself. As discussed earlier, this generation fluidly crosses racial, gender and age group lines in their online and offline interactions as “community” is forged around shared interests. Gestures that feel like “checking a box” are not likely to be well received. Diverse perspectives should inform the event design from the get-go.

**“Diversity isn’t just numbers. It’s truly something valuable. Many identify as LGBTQ+, immigrants or children of immigrations, etc. They want to be seen. They want their identity to be acknowledged.”** *Dr. Corey Seemiller*

For the emerging attendee, events are an expression of identity, purpose and experience. They want to see how what they do actually makes a difference. They crave purpose and want to see why their work matters. Dr. Seemiller gives the example of how UPS shrewdly tapped into this desire for purpose when its need for workers surged during the pandemic: Rather than touting hours and pay in its recruitment efforts, UPS touted that its delivery workers were heroes on the front lines, protecting the health of their communities by ensuring people had access to food, medicine and necessary supplies.

Organizers have an opportunity to show individual attendees how their attendance makes the world better. Many are already offering opportunities to “give back” when attending their events, often in partnership with diverse local suppliers.

**So what is the next frontier of connecting to values and purpose? Making it personal.**

Personally targeted and communicated, that is. Just as we spoke earlier about intelligently matching attendees to activities and sessions, organizers can match attendees with the causes they care about — and tell them how their efforts make an impact. For example, if I indicate during registration that alleviating childhood poverty is a cause I care about, the app might suggest I participate in a CSR activity that involves building bicycles for underserved youth. Once I participate, I might receive a push notification telling me when my bike was claimed by a recipient.

**Events serve a powerful role in improving the communities they touch. There is now an opportunity to take it to the next level through powerful personalization.**



**Questions for Organizers to Consider**

- How can diverse attendees see their identities acknowledged in the event?
- How can you connect individual attendees to causes they care about?
- How can you show the attendee the direct impact they made?
- How are you making your host destination’s causes and efforts visible to attendees?

# Closing Thoughts

We've covered a lot of ground, sharing some ideas that might be new and others you may already be implementing.

If we can leave with one parting thought, it would be that the next evolution of attendee value connects the "what" to the "who." If the "what" is the things your event has to offer, the "who" is the person who stands to gain value from experiencing them.

## It's the difference between ...



... featuring learning sessions **versus** painting a picture of how the content will further the attendee's professional and personal goals;

... offering "networking opportunities" **versus** showing the reticent attendee how you'll break down barriers and assuage their anxiety;

... touting "wellness activities" **versus** assuring the attendee they can keep up with their healthy routines while on the road – and have white space to keep in touch with their business and family;

... showcasing the location's museums, venues or distillery tours **versus** painting a picture for the busy mom that she can take the later flight back and enjoy some much-needed me-time while she's on the road;

... saying the city has something for everyone **versus** connecting the 20-something gamer to the gaming spaces in town where they can attend a LAN event.

**Connecting your event's value to the individual's personal value is where powerful results are born.**



# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Deloitte Global 2025 Gen Z and Millennial Survey, May 2025

<https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/genz-millennial-survey.html>

<sup>2</sup>2025 Gen Z Report: The value of live events in a digital world – Freeman and The Harris Poll

<https://www.freeman.com/resources/2025-gen-z-report/>

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