



Outdoor Meeting (Copyright Switzerland Tourism/SCIB)

NEW MEETING FORMATS FOR NEW TARGET AUDIENCES

The Generations X, Y, and very soon Z, perceive meetings, conferences, trade shows and any sorts of working session very differently than their predecessors. Standardized and one-dimensional platforms don't suit those audiences well; interactive and fun forums are in demand.

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To understand the new formats, it is helpful, first of all, to comprehend the different types of the term «meetings». According to a 2017 survey by American Express Meetings & Events, Europe, 17% of all events held were used for sales & marketing activities; another 17% for pure training and 14% for internal team discussions. 20% of all events involved open conferences and trade fairs and around 10% incentive activities. The remainder relates to meetings of management and boards of directors. Interestingly, the last

segment (boards and management) hardly use new formats. They prefer direct verbal exchanges in a confidential environment; not digitally connected to the outside world. Those leaders use video conferencing, for example, only if required because of long distance to another interlocutor.

Example Trade Shows

Other segments, especially the fair business, are presently involved in wild changes. The traditional concept,

for both B2B and B2C, invited opinion leaders, suppliers, end-users and the media to their exhibition platforms and practically «enforced» those visitors to maximise their time on-site by accepting the given slots. And the booths were set-up to handle walk-in public as well; the more the better. There was hardly any variety and often no real preparation either.

Today, trade fairs need to offer countless elements; from fitness runs in the early morning to hundreds of

parallel presentations, education, and entertainment pieces - for just about every segment and every target audience. The main objective is, that each participant can create its very own, and very personal schedule. Every visitor can decide on how much time he spends where, with whom, and within which format. Many well-known global trade shows, such as Baselworld or CEBIT Hanover, did not see that coming. They maintained for too long the classic «booth-visitor»-concept, until those visitors did not show up anymore...

Motion – Emotion

The art of dialogue has changed; analogue telephone conversation became rare. The younger generations wish and need to communicate differently. Especially those in charge for training and internal team-meetings have to rethink about what models they choose. The own pale office conference room becomes more and more «out of order» and professional meeting rooms at fancy hotels are not appreciated much more. The new generations want to get out of firm infrastructures, they want to move and unfold freely, if possible at fresh air. For decades, flipcharts, checklists and spreadsheets were the basis of every employee-meeting. But now-a-days, data is being transferred digitally and quickly, and no-one needs to wait for next month's meeting to get the newest facts and figures.

Therefore, meetings can and should be staged in more informal settings; no longer with a front stage and boring theatre-style seating's. One can meet outside, in unusual venues, on a train, on a field, easy going, and relaxed. Embraced by motivation; inviting to be involved, active, engaging. Seating arrangements are no longer firm, people settle where they feel comfortable; circles are enjoyable and initiate eye-to-eye

exchanges. No surprise that more and more conference hotels offer meeting facilities in the garden, in an alpine hut or even on the roof. Motivational elements such as nature, health and fun empower such meetings. And they lead to a new sort of «comfort zone» for all participants, allowing open and smoother dialogues. No more monologues please.

Personalised Meeting Rooms

And if these monthly meetings and training sessions must take place at the office, then at least create there a cool environment. For example, enterprises with employees from many different cultural backgrounds could rename their meeting room «World Café» and have it decorated by its staff. The room might then not appear in a traditional corporate style no more, but at least, employees enjoy going there and that's one basis for more successful team work.

The monthly salesmen-conference is another MICE-segment which has changed dramatically. There used to be monologue presentations about which salesman has achieved his target or acquired a new client. Then, numbers were juggled, mostly on the basis of hope, and promises exchanged about upcoming activities. In reality, for most salespeople, those internal report meetings were an abomination, and actually, they just want to leave as quickly as possible and get back out to the market place. Sales Managers often are emotional people with lots of creativity; they need to be constantly on the move. So, if you need them to participate at meetings, use motivational environments, such as a Lake Steamer or a meeting-train. Create meetings with a «flow», with motions, and with emotions. The actual conference will not last longer, but at least, the Salesmen enjoy it.

Together

In any case, the new Generations want to have a say, to spin along, to experience something, and all of it together. They want to be part of the whole and on the same time experience personally what is happening in the company. The communication towards staff has to adapt to those new needs and boring summaries of corporate objectives and requirements do not reach those audiences any longer. Companies need to setup internal digital communication platforms; be it Intranet-based, WhatsApp or simply a message board in the World Café. These exchanges among each other, including regular feedback from management, must be activated throughout the year. On a constant flow; for everybody to enjoy and for everybody to be part of it. Together.

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