

HOW TO MAKE YOUR EVENT ATTRACTIVE FOR MILLENNIALS

Here they are ... the young professionals scrolling through their social media feeds while waiting to check in for an event. “Lazy,” “entitled,” “avocado toast lovers” - this is how the media often portrays Millennials. What an anomaly! This generation is super well educated, curious, tech savvy and demanding. Hard to figure out and even harder to satisfy and attract to events due to the abundance of options served to them every day.

Rosangela Quieti, managing director of AIM Italy’s Congress Division, notes, “The generational turnover among congress participants is already under way and will be very evident in the next four to five years.” So we need to get our strategies in place.

INCON brings together the leading global conference and association management companies. In this article, we have consulted our event and education experts to provide you with some tactics on how to make your event attractive to Millennials.

In short, what do Millennials expect from your event?

Expectation #1. High-quality content and insights

Millennials come to your event to learn, so give them that opportunity.

We’re living in the YouTube and Apple podcast era, so we all have access to very good content, regardless of the topic or industry. Moreover, we can choose from multiple narrators or video and audio content creators, depending on their personality, looks and vibe. You’re not competing with other industry events anymore. You’re competing with multiple online content platforms and hosts of good quality content.

What Millennials are expecting from your event is to surpass that and hear speakers who will actually bring something new to the table using an entertaining format. The information must be fresh and extremely astute. As referred to by MCI, since everything comes down to experience, steer clear of the traditional classroom setting and create an inspiring, thought-provoking atmosphere to spark emotions and elevate learning.

Carol McGury, EVP Event and Education Services at SmithBucklin and INCON co-chair, offers this advice:

“There’s no guaranteed formula for engaging young professionals with content. It’s about testing, experimenting, listening, observing and adapting to demonstrate the value of your organization to a younger generation of professionals.”

Expectation #2. The right to choose what to promote

Be very careful how you’re motivating your millennial attendees to promote your brand. They won’t endorse your brand just because you told them to. They’ll share the things they believe in or that made a real impression upon them. As Patrizia Semprebene Buongiorno, vice president at AIM Group International and INCON co-chair, points out, younger attendees will “speak about an activity or event they attended, filtered by their own experience.”

Michael Kern, Executive Director of DEKON and INCON Dean, explains: “If you want to turn Millennials into ambassadors, you’ll want to focus on actually proving the value of your brand by running a high-quality event they’ll enjoy and learn from.”

Michael suggests trying to find opportunities to involve this new generation in the co-creation of content by consulting them in advance on topics and potential speakers. This way they will feel part responsible for the event and more fully engaged.

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Expectation #3. Diversity and inclusivity

The younger generation is much more driven by the importance of human diversity and inclusivity. Although it's very difficult to take all aspects of inclusivity into consideration, you should definitely pay special attention to doing as much as you can. Here are some suggestions from Nikkita Mitchell, Senior Conference Operations Manager at Arinex. "Millennials, and indeed people of every age, expect events to be a true representation of our communities. Organising Committees are now routinely setting gender quotas for speakers as a way to encourage more women to attend their events. Recognition of different cultures is also important and this is being achieved through carefully crafted social tours and even providing bursaries and scholarships to allow people from developing countries or low-socio economic backgrounds to attend. Inclusivity is vital in event planning too especially making sure events are accessible for people with communication or accessibility difficulties. Some of the initiatives that we recently organised included translating documents to Easy English; staff training for best practice; lower height tables and charging stations for those in wheelchairs and a quiet room for body breaks."

Expectation #4. Collective experience

One expectation your millennial attendees have is to enjoy a different kind of event that breaks the old structure of interaction. An up-and-coming format is festivalization.

Festivalization works less like a conference and more like a music festival with education, focusing on multidisciplinary topics and delivering a new convergence of experiences. [SmithBucklin has come up with a great definition for this new format](#): "Festivalization is the buzzword-of-the-day for large conferences and corporate meetings that create community-like atmospheres in order to engage attendees through collective experiences."

Antonio Novaes from MCI tells us all about this new event format in a recent [INCON expert article](#) which describes his experience organising the Campus Party: the largest global technology festival encompassing innovation, creativity, science, digital entertainment and entrepreneurship. Using a combination of online and offline experiences including hackathons, augmented reality, AI, Machine Learning, blockchain, cyborgs, as well as live music performances and exhibition, the event is successfully blending experiences that speak to all generations and creates spontaneous interactions.

Expectation #5. Eco-friendly and sustainable

One of the things Millennials might expect from your event is eco-responsibility. They don't want to see hundreds of printed agendas going to waste or use plastic water bottles or cutlery. So one of the things you should focus on is reducing the carbon footprint of your event. From managing the waste correctly to renting venues that offer natural light, there are lots of things you can do to make your event truly sustainable.

Other great Sustainable articles from our partners can be found here:

- 3 Tips for Planning Sustainable Festivals
- Top 10 Sustainable Event Trends for 2020
- Sustainability Report
- How to achieve a carbon-neutral conference

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<p>#1. High-quality content & insights</p> <p>Invite speakers who will bring something new to the table using an entertaining format. The information must be fresh and extremely astute.</p>	<p>Millennials won't endorse your brand just because you told them to. They'll share the things they believe in or that made a real impression upon them.</p> <p>#2. The right to choose what to promote</p>
<p>#3. Diversity & Inclusivity</p> <p>Although it's very difficult to take all aspects of inclusivity into consideration, you should definitely pay special attention to doing as much as you can.</p>	<p>Try event festivalization. It works less like a conference and more like a music festival with education, focusing on multidisciplinary topics and delivering a new convergence of experiences.</p> <p>#4. Collective experience</p>
<p>#5. Eco-friendly & Sustainable</p> <p>Millennials don't want to see hundreds of printed agendas going to waste or use plastic water bottles or cutlery. So one of the things you should focus on is reducing the carbon footprint of your event.</p>	<p>People of all generations still appreciate face-to-face engagement. However, you need to work harder to find innovative ways to improve your event's networking experiences and leverage new trends and technologies.</p> <p>#6. Meaningful networking</p>
<p>#7. Experiential Design</p> <p>At the end of the day, Millennials want to be wowed. Make your event special, be creative and push the borders of your imagination as far as you can.</p>	<p>Make sure to integrate as many local experiences as possible during your event and find ways to give back to local community where feasible.</p> <p>#8. Engaging with the local community</p>

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Expectation #6. Meaningful networking

It is wrong to believe that Millennials are less interested in face-to-face meetings and prefer interacting with people online. People of all generations still appreciate face-to-face engagement. However, you need to work harder to find innovative ways to improve your event's networking experiences and leverage new trends and technologies. For example, B2B matchmaking sessions allow attendees to schedule meetings during the event with those people whose profiles align with their interests. This means no more mingling in the crowd during coffee breaks and not knowing how to approach other delegates. Purposeful meetings will help your attendees get the most out of their networking experience.

“Humans are social creatures. Just because Millennials use technology more than past generations, they still prefer face-to-face engagement to gauge people's reactions and intentions, communicate more holistically by using more senses, and generate business development better.”

What Millennials Want in Meetings, Skift and Meetings Mean Business

Considering this aspect, you'll want to improve your event's networking experience by changing its format. For example, you can set up a B2B matchmaking session, which works based on the matchup between the offer and demand.

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Expectation #7. Experiential Design

Ariadna Leticia Sánchez Padilla, marketing manager at BTC, herself a Millennial, offers this advice: “Millennials want to experience special unique moments that reflect the essence of each event, the design and customization for each audience can really make an event special. Having Photo Booths is a good tool so delegates can capture their experience in a given moment and take funny and original photographs, which can then be posted on Instagram. Also the inclusion of themed music, helps delegates identify and remember the event.

At the end of the day, Millennials want to be wowed, they want unique experiences. Here is an event design tip from MCI's COO, Jurriaen Sleijster: “Use effective registration solutions to eliminate the obstacle of waiting, which is especially repellent for younger audiences who grew up within a really fast-paced digital era.”

Other design tips include:

- Swapping traditional venues for unique, memorable spaces.
- Enhancing engagement during breakout sessions using tech or interactivity.
- Projecting impactful videos and visuals to create rhythm.

Expectation #8. Engaging with the local community

Millennials are always eager to learn new things and interact with different customs and communities. That is one expectation they'll have when attending an international event. So make sure to design as many local experiences as possible for them. For example, you can organise guided tours, gastronomy tours or “do-as-the-locals-do” type experiences. They'll definitely enjoy it.

Final thoughts

Angela Guillemet, INCON Executive Director, shares some final thoughts on the matter:

“Planning events for Millennials is just like planning events for other generations. The same amount of effort goes into the logistics, and the same challenges occur in both cases. The only difference between Millennials and other generations is their passion for authentic experiences that are aligned with their values. Surely if we get it right for this new demographic it will benefit us all”.

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