

A nighttime cityscape with illuminated buildings and a large, glowing blue globe overlay on the right side. The globe is composed of a grid of lines and has a map of the world on it. The city lights are blurred in the background.

THE FUTURE OF EVENT TECHNOLOGY: A MIX OF REALITIES

Presented by

Skift.

+

VENETIAN MEETINGS

— LAS VEGAS —

SKIFT SUMMARY

Many factors have influenced the growth of technology at live meetings and events during the last decade to improve how organizations and attendees connect.

The rising cost of everything is a big one. Event technology saves time and resources by automating many meeting design tasks, so event planners can spend more time on business strategy and attendee engagement, rather than an endless barrage of logistics needs.

The technology itself, of course, gets more sophisticated every year. Everything from event apps to matchmaking solutions are exponentially more effective and intuitive today than just a couple of years ago.

The user demand for digital platforms is another primary driver behind the increasing adoption of event technology. Attendees today employ myriad online tools during their personal and professional lives, so they expect to have those same options before, during, and after live events.

Lastly, the meetings and events industry has slowly come around to the fact that event tech improves the face-to-face experience, and grows live attendance, global reach, and brand engagement as well.

As proven repeatedly, younger generations want to attend business event as much, and more, than previous generations. Technology is not supplanting face-to-face. It's enhancing it.

The most exciting developments are still to come. Artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality, robots and other autonomous systems, and esports are still emerging as mainstream event solutions.

These technologies are already informing the next-generation of meeting design today, but they will soon completely reshape the convergence of live and virtual group engagement.

"In the next few years we'll see people start using augmented reality (AR) more and more with their phones, and people are already used to the idea based on the huge success of Pokemon," said Neil Mandt, founder of Mandt Media, who produced the opening event for the Forbes Under 30 Summit in Boston this year. "I always tell people now that we're still in the Angry Birds phase of AR — really kind of simple stuff."

This Skift Trend Report, produced in collaboration with The Venetian Resort in Las Vegas, explores how that "simple stuff" will evolve, and the people leading the meetings and events industry in that direction.

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ABOUT SKIFT

Skift is a travel intelligence company that offers news, data, and services to professionals in travel and professional travelers, to help them make smart decisions about travel.

Skift is the business of travel.

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MASTHEAD

Executive Editor, SkiftX / Greg Oates
Contributing Editor / Rayna Katz
Creative Strategy Director, SkiftX / Matt Heidkamp
Branded Content Director / Katherine Townsend
Designer / Andrea Yang-Yanez
Executive Director, Sales / Deborah Knudsen
Brand Strategist, SkiftX / Dawn Rzeznikiewicz

Cover: MSG Sphere at The Venetian Resort, opening 2021.

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EXECUTIVE LETTER

We are thrilled to be partnering with Skift thought leaders once again, this time on a rapidly evolving aspect of our business: event technology.

When first deployed in the event space, technology was mostly about automating processes such as billing or booking. Now, however, clients are using technology to create entirely new attendee experiences and to personalize those experiences down to the individual level. Most clients have quickly realized that event tech, somewhat paradoxically, can actually enhance face-to-face experiences – thereby deepening brand engagement.

Our resort is home to major industry conferences such as CES, Adobe Summit, IMEX America, and Amazon's re:Invent, and we are continuously partnering with these clients and many others to leverage new event technologies. We are also continuously upgrading our facilities in order to expand deployment of these technologies. One of our most exciting projects is the co-development with Madison Square Garden Company of a brand-new venue: MSG Sphere Las Vegas. The Sphere, which is being built adjacent to our current resort, will feature the most state-of-the-art technology in the business, including the latest in esports and gaming technology and the highest resolution LED screen in the world. The grand opening is slated for New Year's Eve 2020.

In the past 20 years, gaming has become far more interactive due to the rise of social media. In recent years, multiplayer gamers have migrated from text exchanges with other players to voice chat and video streaming. The beauty of esports is that gaming technology can be used to enhance all sorts of event experiences. In the Sphere, event organizers will be able to use esports technology to fully customize environments, bringing their unique brands to life and optimizing attendee interactions. This report explores many other applications of existing and emerging event technologies. Many of the most fascinating developments are still in their nascent stages; these include uses for artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality, and robots.

Whatever the platform, we are 100% committed to the use of technology to enhance connections and brand engagement. Once you've read this report, we're sure you'll agree.



Chandra Allison
Senior Vice President, Sales
The Venetian Resort Las Vegas
Venetianmeetings.com

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chandra', located at the bottom left of the page.

INTRODUCTION: THE RISE OF EVENT TECH



Freeman VR experience

From the strategic to the logistical, there's virtually no end to the number of tasks meeting planners are expected to tackle. Fortunately, for many steps in the process now, there's an app for that – or an augmented, virtual, or mixed reality experience powered by artificial intelligence.

No matter the platform, technology is pivotal to meeting planners and conference organizers today, and providers are working feverishly to innovate with constantly improving products.

Just five years ago, when event tech was considered a new thing, the primary purpose of these innovative digital and cloud-based tools revolved around automation. The goal was to free planners from mundane tasks and heavy binders filled with endless spreadsheets, agenda revisions, and hundreds of other things.

Event tech has also had a profound impact on hotel and destination sourcing. Cvent, for example, facilitates more than \$16 billion of contracted business annually, and it will continue to grow as the platform expands into providing direct online bookings for small meetings.

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The Mix demonstrated how you can be physically at an event, but digitally access sessions in other places and engage with content in a more customizable way.

— Carrie Johnson, senior director, education, PCMA

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Today, however, corporate and association leaders are focused on leveraging event technology to elevate attendee and brand engagement. The future of meeting design and user experience will embrace a mashup of technologies to merge the physical and digital worlds, producing a mix of various degrees of augmented experiences personalized to the individual attendee.

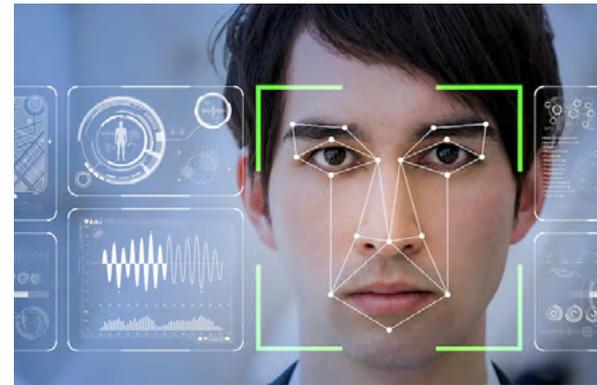
The Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) and the Freeman event management company provided a glimpse into that future at PCMA's annual Convening Leaders conference this year in Nashville.

Occupying an entire ballroom at the show, the mixed-use “Future of Face2Face” experience incorporated a maze of event technologies for planners to explore.

One wall was anchored by “The Mix”— a 65x18 foot, ultra high-definition screen with eight education sessions streamed simultaneously, picture-in-picture style. PCMA's social media threads, live schedule updates, and industry news feeds also were shown. Attendees were provided with headsets to listen in to whatever session they preferred, or they could download an app to hear the sessions on their phones.

Furthermore, PCMA provided playback options for popular sessions for attendees interested in catching more than one speaker.

“The concept is all about creating an area where people can channel surf for the insight they need,” said John Kennedy, executive vice president of Freeman. “It's particularly helpful when participants aren't sure what sessions they want to attend.”



Facial Recognition

Commonly used for event registration, facial recognition is offered by a host of tech startups today, such as Houston-based Zenus.

Panos Moutafis, CEO of Zenus, says that facial recognition expedites check-in, prevents fraud, lowers costs, and adds security to an event because it verifies attendees' identity.

The software also can detect emotions, making it suited for adjusting the user experience throughout an event. Some planners are concerned about privacy implications around attendees' images being captured, but experts note that everyone is regularly photographed today on security cameras.

“What event planners have told us is that they budget one minute per check-in,” Moutafis said. “One device with our software is one hundredth of a minute.”

PCMA took the innovative educational approach not only to provide something new and different, but also to inspire its meeting professional members to replicate the experience at their meetings or, in the case of hotels, their properties.

“We’ve had 40 different customer requests since Face2Face, and one of them is going to do four monitors on an exhibit floor with 50 headsets, so it’s very scalable and the cost is minuscule compared to what we did at PCMA,” said Kennedy. “We like to have the wow factor at PCMA because if you show the Cadillac, it piques people’s interest and gets the idea across, versus pulling the Pinto out. The Mix at PCMA was about \$200,000 to \$250,000, with all of the technology and labor, but with the four monitors it’s just about \$10,000.”

The technology also could be made available by all sorts of different suppliers. Kennedy explained that, “There’s no reason that hotels can’t do this, they’d just need to put a computer in the room and stream the slides and/or the audio.”

At Convening Leaders, PCMA also had eight technology pods for companies to demonstrate different cloud-based event technologies. There was a “tech bar,” where planners could explore fast-growing tech systems including virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), mixed reality (MR), three-dimensional (3D) printing, artificial intelligence (AI), and facial recognition. Another area provided a space for participants to bring their own devices and ask questions.

Anchoring the middle of the entire event tech showcase, the CenterStage platform hosted 30-minute presentations with speaker exploring new concepts in meeting design, brand strategy, revenue generation, and much more.

All together, the entire Future of Face2Face experience was a journey through mixed live and virtual realities, filled with spontaneous discoveries for attendees to navigate.

“The Future of Face2Face space integrated physical and digital experiences with the hands-on technology tools used throughout the environment,” said Carrie Johnson, senior director, education, PCMA. “The CenterStage and three content stages were smaller, more intimate learning spaces, with headphones, while The Mix demonstrated how you can be physically at an event, but digitally access sessions in other places and engage with content in a more customizable way.”

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The concept is all about creating an area where people can channel surf for the insight they need. It’s particularly helpful when participants aren’t sure what sessions they want to attend.

— John Kennedy, executive vice president, Freeman

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4 EVENT TECH LEADERS ON THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS



Julius Solaris, founder, Event Manager Blog

Popular opinion has previously suggested that event technology takes away from the live face-to-face experience. The opposite is true, because all of these new platforms are designed to connect attendees with the people and organizations they're seeking in a much more customized fashion. The end goal for digital tools, always, is to support the professional and personal development of attendees, and the business development goals for brands

Event tech, therefore, is an on-ramp and enabler for better face-to-face engagement.

"The customization piece is the most neglected piece when we talk about event technology today," states Julius Solaris, founder of Event Manager Blog, based in Las Vegas. "There's a lot of sensationalism about personalizing the event experience with technology, but what is really accomplished six months after the event? Are we really building more strategic long-term relationships between our attendees and sponsors, using all of the artificial intelligence platforms out there. I don't think that's the case very often."

Solaris also suggests that many meeting planners and conference organizers are often more focused on the technology than the content that the technology is designed to share. In other words, there's too much emphasis on the medium and not enough on the message. Because at the end of the day, it's content that brings together like-minded communities of attendees and their organizations.

"A lot of the problem is resource allocation," said Solaris. "Planners often skip the content development part because there are so many other things fighting for attention in the budget. That's something we as an industry need to fix."

Dan Berger, founder and CEO of Social Tables in Washington, D.C., was another one of the early pioneers in event technology, who has always advocated for more targeted face-to-face exchanges, supported by platforms like his.

"Face-to-face meetings are becoming more valuable every day because our digital media time grows every day," he said. "Also, we're becoming less happy as a people with so much disruption happening on every level, and the only way out of that is face-to-face interaction. That means we need more technology to be more efficient when it comes to connecting people with the specific audiences they want."

With better digital tools for events, and a greater number of them, he continued, "Planners will connect to the right venue more easily. Events will be more successful because planners will be matched with the right speakers and attendees, while the right participants will be matched with each other because of algorithms."

For sourcing, Social Tables helps meeting planners search through over 13,000 venue listings. When they find a possible match, Social Tables populates the venue's floor plan so the customer can start plugging in meeting elements — a stage, decor, seating, etc. — to see if the location suits their needs before contacting the property. A conference organizer can also use the system in tandem with the venue to design the meeting set-up and share the diagram.

"Every piece of event management software has to be collaborative because of the number of stakeholders," declared Berger. "If you're the event manager, you need to know what the sponsor banners are. If you're the supplier, you need to know where to deliver the fish dish."

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Sands Expo Convention Center, Las Vegas

Another event tech provider focusing on personalized engagement and matchmaking is Zenvoy in Los Angeles. Zenvoy is designed to match and connect event attendees on a year-round basis. Customers create a highly-specific profile detailing their interests, and then Zenvoy's algorithm recommends members in the platform's community to share information with, and ultimately create new business opportunities.

"We typically hang out with who we know, so this drives engagement by introducing people who don't know each other," explained Leo Gestetner co-founder and CEO of Zenvoy. "We've had fantastic success with that, and we have heard many stories of substantial pieces of business being won from Zenvoy introductions."

The networking engine begins a month prior to an event and lasts for four months after, at a minimum, added Gestetner. "You can promote your brand and event all year, continuing to add value to attendees and possibly creating a revenue opportunity, as advertising is built throughout the program."

Planners can invite users, creating the ability to optimize the data produced from the communities, and the system can produce a great deal of analytics, Gestetner explained.

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Face-to-face meetings are becoming more valuable every day because our digital media time grows every day.

— Dan Berger, founder & CEO, Social Tables

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“We rank skills, interests, ages, gender, engagement, and more, and provide that information to the customer, he said. “And because it’s an AI system, every time someone posts or takes some action, it learns more.”

Bizzabo, based in New York City, is another event management technology provider that provides cloud-based forums for attendee networking, event marketing and management, and a host of various integration tools to build event websites, apps, and analytics reports,

Attendees who register for an event through the Bizzabo become members of the platform’s networking community. Using AI-powered data collection engines, the company is continually learning about each member to customize content, including more targeted advertising, lists of other registered attendees, and agenda sessions aligned with specific interests.

“That level of personalization is vital for events today, and will be even more so in the future, asserted Alon Alroy, co-founder of Bizzabo. “In the next 10 years, millennials will become the majority of event participants, and they’re used to getting things tailored to them. Spotify recommends songs and artists, and even generates whole play lists based on a listener’s interests. Similarly, Google factors in search history, geography, and other factors to provide a more user-specific experience.”

It’s time for the meetings and events industry to catch up.

“It’s incumbent on technology companies, as well as events, to do the same,” added Alroy. “One group may want to be reached on Facebook Messenger, while another might want email. The events industry will need to keep pace with these changes. The more someone feels like an event experience is crafted for them, the more productive and enjoyable the experience will be.”



WeWork Summer Camp

Planners like Diana Hagerbaumer, producer of strategic events at WeWork, say that a comprehensive pre-planning tool that stores multiple types of information is sorely needed. She organizes the annual WeWork Summer Camp for employees, designed like an arts, music, and camping festival.

“We want one all encompassing platform where everything lives in one central location, like RSVPs, attendee feedback, analytics, attendee lists — basically a wiki of the entire event’s operation,” she said.

Otherwise, Hagerbaumer finds some relatively low-tech tools effective to track and communicate with employees and attendees, such as RFID technology and the ZenDesk customer service platform. “We use RFID for payment so we are able to see which bars have the most traffic,” she said. “That informs our strategy for how to improve staffing, change bar placement, offer more products, etc., at upcoming events.”

Q&A: CHANDRA ALLISON, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES, THE VENETIAN® RESORT LAS VEGAS

The Venetian Resort connects to the Sands Expo convention center, connecting more than 7,000 suites, over 30 restaurants, and 2.25 million square feet of meeting and event space. The variety of business, social, and entertainment environments aligns well with the rise in demand for more creative event spaces catering to different group segments within the same conference.

Connecting all of that together, the event technology team at the property work regularly with corporate planners hosting events for leading companies such as Amazon, Adobe, Microsoft, and IBM.

SkiftX spoke with Chandra Allison, Senior Vice President of Sales at The Venetian Resort, about how event technology helps drive engagement and business outcomes during face-to-face business events.



SkiftX: What do you see as the biggest event tech trends heading into 2019?

Chandra Allison: Tech trends we believe we will start to see more and more of in the coming years include artificial intelligence (AI), facial recognition, virtual reality (VR), live streaming, radio frequency identification (RFI), and, of course, social media. Convenience and personalization for attendees is top-of-mind for all planners and these technologies assist in meeting those goals. Applications of these technologies help planners aggregate data upstream to tailor their planning in ways they haven't been able to in the past - quicker check-ins, engaging with attendees, curating experiences based on attendee wants and needs - allowing attendees to maximize their time while they are at an event.

SkiftX: How is the property adapting to align with those trends and answer customer demand?

Chandra Allison: As a resort that prides itself on being built for business, The Venetian Resort is always looking at ways to improve the guest experience. Attendees travel with multiple devices and we strive to make sure connectivity is seamless during their visit. Attendees are engaging with events through social media which not only provides the planner with real-time feedback, but as host property, it allows us to engage with attendees and anticipate wants and needs. For example, earlier this year we learned via social media that the expected guest count for a lunch event had increased by more than 1,000 guests. In less than six hours, we were able to make the accommodations to feed not only the previously accounted for 6,000, but also the additional 1,000 attendees as well. Social media played an important role in ensuring we provided exceptional service to each one of our guests.

SkiftX: What technology trends have most impacted the way meeting planners approach event design?

Chandra Allison: Clients are using technology pre-event to gather attendee data to tailor events through the lens of the customer. That data transforms how a planner is thinking about using a space and helps them create bespoke experiences for their attendees. Personalization provides a more intimate feel to even the largest of conventions if attendees are able to curate their experience to connect with like-minded communities.

SkiftX: How does technology inform the way you develop new environments and experiences within them, especially with nontraditional spaces like the MSG sphere?

Chandra Allison: Customers are looking for unique, immersive experiences and MSG Sphere will bring that to life. Expected to open in 2021, MSG Sphere at The Venetian Resort will be a first-of-its-kind venue that will feature game-changing technologies and pioneer the next generation of transformative, immersive experiences. The venue will revolutionize the way the audience connects with the presentation – whether it's a product launch, keynote, concert, or any other entertainment experience.

SkiftX: Have you noticed any differences in the ways groups utilize technology? Is there a difference in expectations that stem from the attendee demographics? (ex: "Attendees at Money2020 do XYZ, while attendees at a medical tech conference are more likely to...does attendee age or professional background play a factor in engaging in tech...)

Chandra Allison: There are a number of ways groups can engage with their attendees including virtual reality and live streaming. Clients can use AI to tailor experiences for their attendees, use social media to gather real-time feedback, bring products to life through the use of virtual reality, and even live stream portions of an event to engaged viewers who weren't able to attend.

SkiftX: What do you see as the primary value propositions for sponsors who've used event tech well?

Chandra Allison: We've seen a move toward non-traditional opportunities, whether it's branding, or an autonomous car driving attendees to the resort from the airport. As a resort, we're working to ensure our clients have the opportunities they're looking for. We've made significant investments in digital assets and as attendees are moving more to mobile for every aspect of their visit, we are exploring other areas throughout the resort that will provide a seamless visit to the guest.

SkiftX: What have been some of the most innovative experiences at the property this year leveraging advances in event technology?

Chandra Allison: The Venetian Resort was conceived with the needs of business in mind and convenience is key – making it easy for clients and attendees to conduct business and entertain without ever leaving the resort. The world is at attendees' fingertips through a mobile device and planners are using social media to activate attendees to become event marketers, encouraging attendees to post, thus generating excitement and engagement.

SkiftX: How are questions from planners during the sales and sourcing process evolving with regard to event tech?

Chandra Allison: Planners are craving elevated technology experiences to provide to their attendees. Construction recently began for MSG Sphere and planners are very excited about the capabilities this venue will provide. Additionally, we see attendees utilize mobile to get them through all aspects of their visit, and planners want to provide seamless connectivity to their attendees. This allows for a more personalized service experience, engagement via social media, and convenience.

SkiftX: How are attendee expectations evolving when it comes to event tech?

Chandra Allison: Attendees are looking for personalized experiences and to connect in like-minded communities. Clients are utilizing technology to assist their attendees in making those connections and providing unique experiences helps build affinity to their organization, and building relationships that lead to retention in their attendance from year to year.

SkiftX: What do you wish more meeting planners were aware of in terms of new and existing event technologies?

Chandra Allison: With construction officially underway for MSG Sphere, we're excited to begin telling the story of this one-of-a-kind venue and the way it will transform the landscape of Las Vegas not only physically but technologically as well.

Forbes Under 30 Summit



EMERGING EVENT TECH SOLUTIONS

1> **Artificial Intelligence**

The power of conversational commerce

2> **Augmented Reality**

Marrying the physical and digital worlds

3> **Virtual Reality**

Redefining the immersive event experience

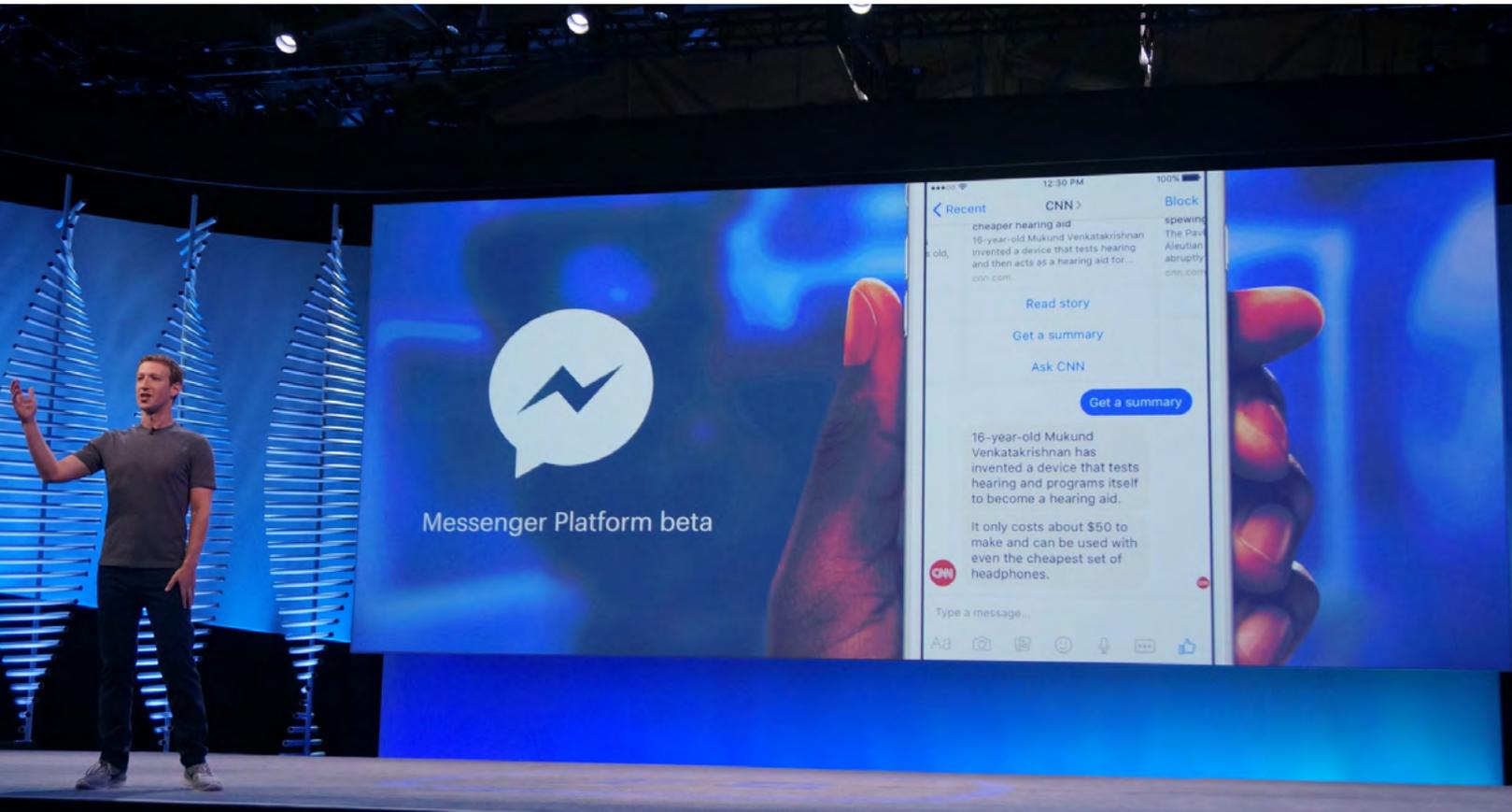
4> **Autonomous UX**

The rise of the smart machines

5> **Esports**

Interactive entertainment and education

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: THE POWER OF CONVERSATIONAL COMMERCE



Facebook F8

Artificial intelligence (AI) is everywhere. It powers search results recommendations in Facebook, Google, Netflix, Amazon, and countless other platforms. It facilitates text and voice chat on our devices and home products with Amazon Echo and Google Assistant, thanks to natural language processing capability, and it's why facial recognition algorithms can confirm our identities in nanoseconds. AI is why robots can understand your moods and cars can drive themselves, all due to an incalculable volume of data crunching and complex pattern recognition at speeds that humans can't begin to appreciate.

In the meetings and events industry, the rise of chatbots is one of the best examples of AI in action. Companies such as Sciensio in Salt Lake City and Eventbase in Vancouver are developing AI chatbots, which understand human language, to provide answers to attendee questions around the clock. In Austin last year, South by Southwest's "Abby" bot answered more than 56,000 questions submitted in the SXSW Go event app developed by Eventbase.



Conversational commerce, voice speakers, voice search, and chatbots powered by AI are leading the future... The adoption curve is even faster than smartphones.

— Bruno Chauvat, founder and CEO, Travelsify

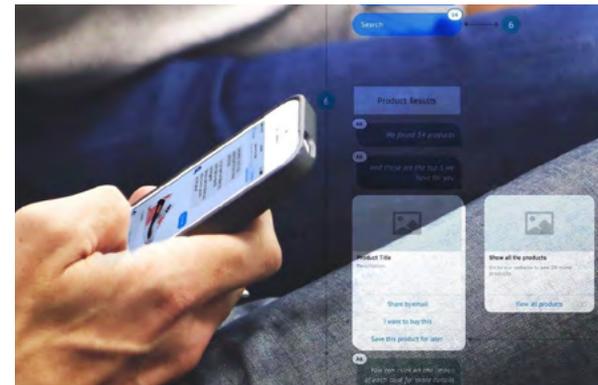


Eventbase has also provided event apps for IBM, Cisco, Microsoft, Comic-con, Sundance Film Festival, and three different Olympic games. This year, the company launched a new Data Stream product for global enterprises, which can gather in-depth data across every conference and meeting hosted within an enterprise-grade event app. Customers can utilize the business intelligence tools and marketing systems of their choice to generate customer insights that drive sales and uncover insights about event ROI, attendee needs, pain points and app experience.

“We’ve built the industry’s most advanced data platform to help our enterprise customers better understand and shape the journey of their attendees,” said Jeff Sinclair, co-founder & CEO of Eventbase. “Data Stream will let enterprises take personalization to another level and drive the next generation of intelligent mobile experiences at events.”

The rise of voice chat is especially driving the increasing sophistication of AI, because people speak to machines with more humanistic and nuanced language than they do typing into Google search. Therefore, the AI and natural language processing capabilities supporting voice platforms are “learning” more about both the end users and the products they’re inquiring about, because there’s more psychographic nuance and language complexity involved in the chat conversation.

“I’m definitely convinced that conversational commerce, voice speakers, voice search, and chatbots powered by AI are leading the future, and obviously hospitality and travel will be deeply impacted,” said Bruno Chauvat, founder of the Travelsify travel tech company. “The adoption curve is even faster than smartphones.”



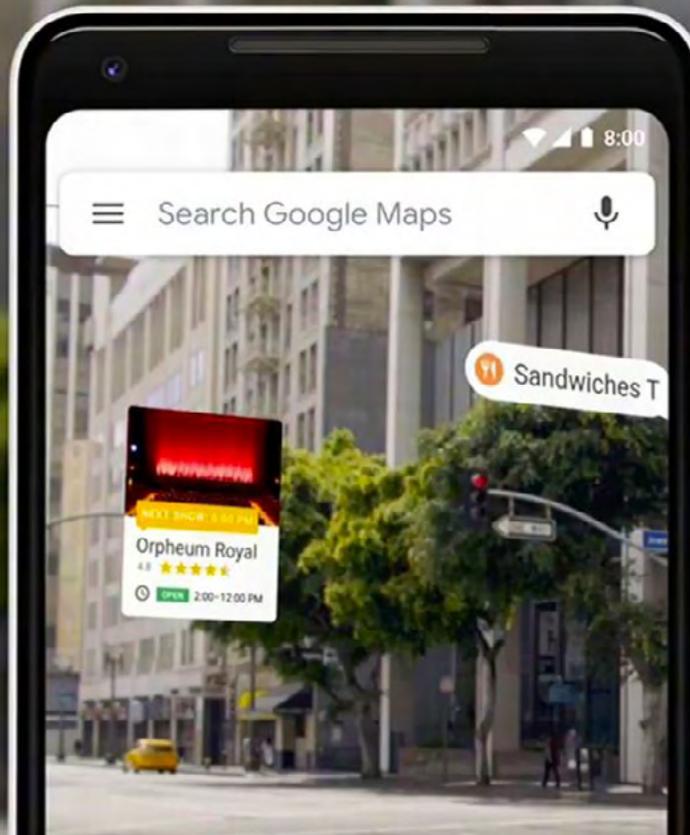
Wanna Chat?

Chatbots are AI-powered software programs designed to interact with people over messaging apps. Eventually, all consumer and industry brands will have AI-powered chat platforms to engage their audiences, and as artificial intelligence evolves, they will be able to provide more customized information to the individual user.

Chatbots, therefore, are key to a future when events planners can deliver mass personalization at scale as the bots recognize specific behavior patterns about individual users over time.

“We really focus on trying to give people a human experience, so we talk a lot about conversation design,” said AI programmer Kristi Colleran, who helped develop IMEX’s Frank and BizBash’s Betty bots. “We want you to feel like you’re talking to a human but know you’re talking to a bot.”

AUGMENTED REALITY: MARRYING THE PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL WORLDS



Google's Visual Positioning System

During a Q4 2017 earnings call, Apple CEO Tim Cook stated: “Simply put, we believe augmented reality is going to change the way we use technology forever. We’re already seeing things that will transform the way you work, play, connect and learn. Augmented reality is going to change everything.”

In March 2018, Google launched its new Visual Positioning System (VPS) where people can point their camera phones at streets and buildings to see augmented content pop up aligned with their individual search behavior and preferences. It’s almost like people can jump into their phones and actually walk down the streets inside Google Maps.

“GPS alone doesn’t cut it,” said Aparna Chennapragada, head of product for Google Lens, during this year’s Google I/O conference. “VPS uses the visual features of an environment to figure out exactly where you are and exactly where you need to go.”

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AR has the potential to add dimension to events that would take them to the next level – not just allowing for deeper engagement and more interaction, but creating solutions that provide a better overall attendee experience.

– Wilson Tang, VP of digital experience with FreemanXP.

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Sports Tech Awards

Augmented reality has progressed light years since R2-D2 played a holographic plea from Princess Leia in “Star Wars.” AR is now used to launch new products at conferences, overlay product content at trade show booths, or engage event attendees through social media.

At this year’s Sports Technology Awards, organizers asked the AR technology firm skignz to create augmented content around the Star Wars theme. The 420 event attendees who downloaded the skignz app used their phones to scan the room to see a life-sized Yoda sitting next to them and the Millennium Falcon flying around London’s Roundhouse.

“We posted AR signage outside their offices and told people to download the AR app created for us by skignz, and scan their surroundings,” said Rebecca Hopkins, CEO and managing director of the Sports Technology Awards. “This was highly effective and generated a great response on social media.”

Augmented Reality has come a long way since Pokemon Go and Google Glass a few year ago. The newest phones are AR-enabled and much better at merging the physical and digital worlds into the “3D Internet.” Therefore brands are rolling out new AR experiences to leverage the new digital tools.

For example, Amazon collaborated with Accenture in early 2018 to integrate AR labeling and wayfinding in numerous Whole Foods stores, which are owned by Amazon. When customers point their phones at different products, the AR content provides various nutritional details, and offers other suggestions based on the individual’s previous purchasing options.

It also shows related recipe options, and where to find the rest of the recipe ingredients in the store. Need to pair a wine with that dinner? The AR can recommend that too, based on personal preferences.

With the newest Apple and Android phones equipped with AR functionality, expect to see more adoption in the meetings and events industry within 1-2 years as people upgrade their devices.

Without any additional gear, augmented reality creates an immersive experience and allows everyone in a room to experience the same thing and see the same images, making AR ideal for meetings and events.

“Augmented reality has the potential to add dimension to events that would take them to the next level – not just allowing for deeper engagement and more interaction, but creating solutions that provide a better overall attendee experience,” said Wilson Tang, VP of digital experience with FreemanXP.

VIRTUAL REALITY: REDEFINING THE IMMERSIVE EVENT EXPERIENCE



Mobile World Congress, Barcelona

From Mobile World Congress in Barcelona to CES in Las Vegas, event organizers are producing increasingly sophisticated virtual reality programming and interactive experiences. The goal is to immerse attendees in a brand like few other platforms can accomplish.

The Samsung Galaxy Experience Zone at CES, for example, occupies a huge chunk of the Las Vegas Convention Center main lobby. Every year, Samsung brings together a theme park-worthy group of VR experiences where participants are strapped into simulated roller coasters, ski hill jumps, and dragon battles.

However, while the travel industry has experimented with virtual reality content as a marketing tool, the lack of consumer interest has made brands wary about the large investment needed to produce top-notch videos and experiences. Brands overall still need to be convinced that virtual reality content is worth it, according to developers.

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With the help of virtual reality, you can digitally upload your products and allow trade show attendees to interact and browse entire product catalogue.

— Absolute Exhibits

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“We are going through a period where education is needed with many of the brands,” said Guy Bedov, co-founder and CEO of Sidekick VR, during a panel discussion at CES in Las Vegas in January 2018. “If you can get them through that, then you have an opportunity to do something really special.

For virtual reality right now in the marketplace and where the tech stands, it’s very similar to where the internet was in the late ’90s.

“You didn’t know where you were going when you built that first site, but brands made that leap in the late 1990s, and the ones that made that leap became these e-commerce giants and huge brands in the digital age,” said Bedov.

Where VR is finding value at meetings and events is at exhibit and partner booths where brands and organizations have an easy opportunity to engage attendees in a dynamic way.

According to Absolute Exhibits in Tustin, California: “One of the drawbacks of trade shows is that booth space is limited and transportation can be prohibitive. If you have a large inventory of products, you can’t bring every single SKU that you offer with you. However, with the help of virtual reality, you can digitally upload your products and allow trade show attendees to interact and browse entire product catalogue.”

Looking ahead, the VR market will continue to grow with the roll out of new hardware and software. The launch of the new cordless Oculus Rift 2 in Q4 2018, for example, will help bridge the gap between entry level and high-end headgear.



The Future of VR

The 2018 Steven Spielberg movie “Ready Player One” showed the mainstream appeal of virtual reality, but there are concerns about mainstream adoption plateauing worldwide.

According to a new report from MarketWatch, however: “The first wave of VR unleashed the power of VR as a training, simulation and gaming tool. The second wave will unleash VR as a communication system/interface from a fictional concept to a multi-billion dollar opportunity.”

The report continues, smartphone-based VR experiences “fail to harness the emotions” inherent with high-resolution headgear. But, as prices drop and the technology evolves to provide real-time speed and better image quality, expect to see greater pickup among non-gaming consumers.

AUTONOMOUS UX: THE RISE OF THE SMART MACHINES



CES 2018, Las Vegas

The market for machines that can provide value without human supervision is massive. Autonomous systems, ranging from driverless vehicles to robots, will have a profound effect on consumer user experience at every level of society, but not just because of their utility.

The bigger picture is about how these machines make up the Internet of Things, where information is shared ubiquitously across networks, ideally for the collective betterment of those networks and the people who rely on them. While there are many complex challenges relating to security and privacy, the rise of pseudo-sentient machines are already changing how we live and work.

The 2020 Tokyo Olympics and 2020 Dubai World Expo are both expected to be a new benchmark for integrating robotics and driverless vehicles into their daily programming. In Japan, for example, robots will be roaming the terminals to provide a variety of services for inbound and outbound travelers.

“**We host U.S. and international conference groups all the time where delegates can learn about the future of AI-powered mobility, and how cities are emphasizing and developing people-centric neighborhoods.**”

— Christopher Barker, VP of new mobility, communications & marketing, Keolis

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Social Robots

Chihira Kanae was answering delegates' questions at the ITB Berlin travel industry conference in 2016, but one attendee's attempt to ask her out for dinner was met with silence. That's because Chihira (pictured), despite her lifelike features and long brown hair, was a Toshiba "social robot." At the time, she could only answer pre-programmed questions.

A recent survey of travelers across Britain, France, Spain, Germany, Canada, Brazil, Japan, the U.S. and China — produced by Travelzoo — showed that 80 percent of consumers expect robots to play a big part in their lives before 2020.

Today, robots are exponentially more intuitive than Chihira due to improvements in AI-powered natural language processing and sentiment analysis. Hanson Robotics' "Sophia" is the world's smartest social robot, who cracked jokes with Jimmy Fallon on "The Tonight Show" in 2017.

The Business Insider states: "At the upcoming Olympics, visitors in Tokyo's Odaiba district will briefly live in a 'universal future society,' according to a committee in Japan's science and technology ministry. In the makeshift robotic village, robots will help the nearly 1 million spectators carry their luggage; hail taxis, which may also be automated as self-driving cars; and offer free and instant translation services."

To build on that, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced plans to stage a Robot Olympics alongside the 2020 Summer Games. Robots from around the world will compete in technical skills to showcase the global advancements in robotics, during a time when Japan will have the attention of billions of people.

Likewise, driverless vehicles are no longer the stuff of science fiction. Operating daily on public roads since November 2017, the autonomous shuttle in Las Vegas has transported more than 30,000 locals and visitors around the downtown Las Vegas Innovation District.

"The City of Las Vegas has been very proactive about embracing new technology, and the Innovation District is well designed to do a lot of experiments in transportation, Internet of Things, signaling tech, and those kinds of things," said Christopher Barker, VP of new mobility, communications & marketing at Keolis, which is a transportation logistics partner involved in the project.

"We host U.S. and international conference groups all the time where delegates can learn about the future of AI-powered mobility," he said, "and how cities are emphasizing and developing people-centric neighborhoods for the future."

ESPORTS: INTERACTIVE EDUCATION AND ENTERTAINMENT



MSG Sphere, Las Vegas

The Las Vegas Sands Corporation owns and operates The Venetian Resort Las Vegas and the Sands Expo Convention Center inside one integrated campus on the Las Vegas Strip. The hospitality and event complex is the largest hotel property in the U.S., and it was the first of its kind built specifically for the meetings and convention marketplace.

Today, Sands Expo hosts major tech and events industry conferences such as CES, Adobe Summit, IMEX America, and Amazon's re:Invent.

Looking ahead, the Sands Corporation and Madison Square Garden company are co-developing the MSG Sphere Las Vegas, scheduled to open on New Year's Eve 2020 next to The Venetian Resort. The massive globe-shaped event venue will feature the largest and highest resolution LED screen in the world, spanning 170,000 square feet of display area wrapping around the inside of the state-of-the-art building.

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**We create modular spaces that represent a blank canvas....
The common denominator for everything we do is it's always
a social experience.**

— Jud Hannigan, CEO, Allied Esports

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“Innovation is a brand pillar for us,” said Chandra Allison, SVP of Sales at The Venetian Resort, during this year’s Global Meetings Industry Day in Las Vegas. “We’re always developing new and interesting environments for community building and creative learning collaboration, including many untraditional meeting spaces like the MSG Sphere.”

But why all the excitement in esports these days?

“I think entertainment in general has evolved and become very interactive, largely on the back of gaming and technology,” said Jud Hannigan, CEO of Allied Esports, which operates dedicated esports venues around the country.

“That is the power that esports brings,” he continued. “With traditional sports, you go to an arena and watch incredibly talented individuals play a game. With esports, one of the things that’s so powerful is the accessibility. Not only can I watch my favorite pro or team compete, but I can also interact with them via chat tools and livestream platforms. I can also potentially play with them online, as well, or in tournaments.”

Esports will have a huge impact on meeting and event design in the future because the experience can be customized to any group. The game element doesn’t have to revolve around fighting armies or dragons. Rather, the content can be customized for any group.

“We create modular spaces that represent a blank canvas for the interactive gaming industry to come in and create their own events and bring their vision to light,” said Hannigan. “That works very well for conventional event organizers as well. The common denominator for everything we do is it’s always a social experience.”



The Rise of Esports

Over the last 20 years, improved gaming technology has coincided with the rise of mainstream social networks, enabling gamers to move beyond text chat rooms and forums to voice chat and video streaming. Games like Starcraft and Counterstrike became a phenomenon in Asia, with tournaments and professional players gaining exposure on video streaming sites.

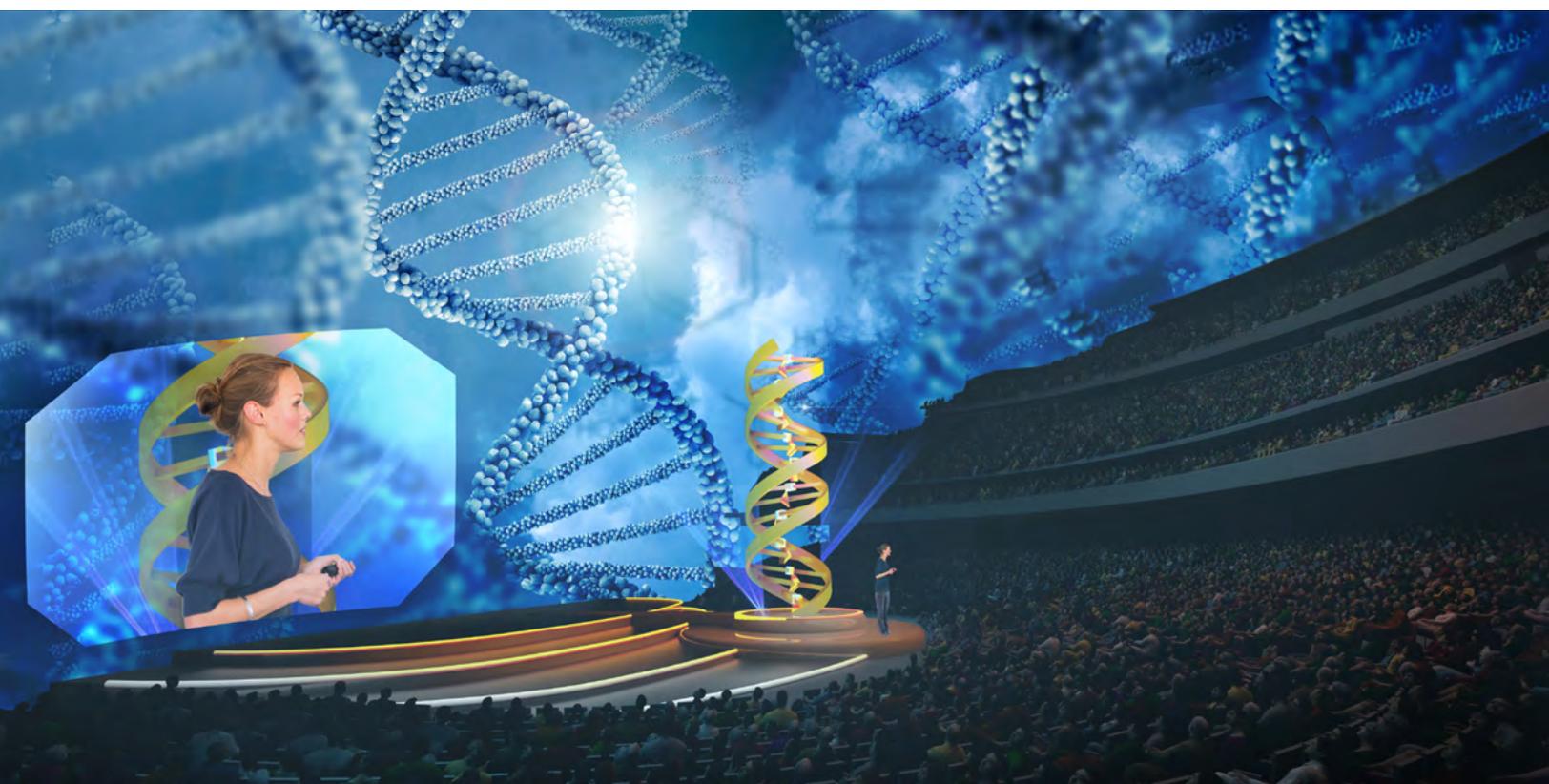
That evolved further with global tournaments offering huge prize pools for winners and top announcers. In 2017, more than 600 million people around the world watched game streaming — a bigger audience than networks like HBO, ESPN, or Netflix.

Overall, esports generated \$3.2 billion in revenue for streamers and video sites alone in 2017. As such, the global video game industry generates more revenue than the movie and music industries.

The 18,000-seat MSG Sphere at The Venetian Resort will feature an array of cutting-edge event technologies, including a dynamically adaptive acoustics system delivering crystal clear audio to every audience member, for any size or type of event. The beam-forming audio can be directed to specific locations in the bowl at a near constant volume from point of origin to destination. Also, an infrasound haptic flooring system will transmit bass vibrations through the floor so that attendees can “feel” the experience.

The MSG Sphere will have some serious broadband pipes to deliver multiple types of content simultaneously. Connectivity will clock in at 25 megabits per second for every attendee, providing more immersive entertainment experiences and greater interaction between the audience and people onstage.

As well, meeting and event planners can fully customize the MSG Sphere’s programmable LED exterior to create a digital showcase with messaging to promote brands, artists, events, and partners. No other facility in North America will provide such a one-of-a-kind, high-impact platform for sponsors.



4 TAKEAWAYS ON THE FUTURE OF EVENT TECH

Event Tech Facilitates Better Face-to-Face Engagement: Event technology provides many different value propositions for meeting and event planners, attendees, suppliers, and sponsors. Most importantly, digital tools are designed to connect like-minded people and relevant organizations more strategically, promote attendance at live events across more channels, and better inform in-person conversations in any given industry.

Event Tech Today is a Convergence of Platforms: As PCMA's "Future of Face2Face" showcase at Convening Leaders 2018 illustrated, the best event tech mixes a variety of live and digital experiences so attendees can channel surf conferences to consume content how and when they want. More than anything, event tech customizes the individual event experience.

Prioritize the Message Over the Medium: While the meetings and events industry is making significant strides to leverage event technology more effectively, meeting planners and event sponsors should always focus first on the value of the content they're sharing and who they're distributing it to, versus how they're sharing it.

Keep an Eye on Emerging Tech: Artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality, autonomous systems and robots, and esports are all going to have profound impacts on how we connect with each other across all levels of society. While it may seem like these event tech integrations are more science fiction than real-world solutions, all of them are still in very early stages of development. Understanding how these tech systems support next-level engagement will give meeting and event planners competitive advantage over time.

IMEX America, Las Vegas



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Carolyn Kremins
President, Skift
ck@skift.com
212-564-5830

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