

Millennial Generation

computer

tablet

Wikipedia

Geocaching

GoogleMaps

YouTube

road
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Flickr

cell phone

iphones

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berries

QR codes

smart phones

Four Square

playbook

Pinterest

Google Analytics

paperless

mobile communication

galaxy tab

online car share

By Florence May

Top 10 Tech Trends

for the Best Event Managers in 2012

In just 5 years, the tools for communications, marketing, management, fulfillment and evaluation have gone through a complete online evolution. Like many event managers you and your organization may be struggling to keep up with the dizzying pace of change.

Do you see your organization falling into one of these categories?

Cutting Edge Crew are willing to spend endless money and/or time to stay on the bleeding edge of technological advances. They seek to own virtual space but may struggle with the tools that don't quite work YET. *a.k.a. Techno Wizards.*

Working IT Team is seeking solutions that have proven efficiency and effectiveness. They want to grow their online presence with current technology. But they don't want to spend their time testing tools that are not ready for prime time. *a.k.a. Techno Realists*

Kicking & Screaming into 21st Century? Hopelessly inefficient? Waiting for the internet fad to pass? Still using your home phone, e-mail, dial up and spreadsheets? You know who you are ... *a.k.a. TechnoNOT.* However, since you are reading this article, chances are that you secretly want to get those feet wet but have a fear of getting electrocuted while testing out the online world. Read on, we can help.

Regardless of where you and your organization are now, there is good news in 2012. More than ever before *inexpensive, easy to use and effective* technology tools are available for associations, festivals,

conferences, marathons, performance art, amateur sports and, well, all events.

At TRS, we watch event management and technology trends closely. Our team members regularly ask: What is working? What is not working? What has the potential to help our clients? And what tools have growing influence or market following?

The top ten list below are those technology trends that either impact or will soon impact every event manager.

#1 - The Millennial Generation.

No they are not a technology tool but the millennials are now 18-29 and largely in the workplace. Though still considered young, they are quickly dominating the way the world communicates and does business. This generation is larger than the previously dominant baby boomers and is a whopping three times the size of generation X.

The millennials are considered the most economically desirable consumer demographic due to sheer size of this cohort, roughly 80 million, with associated spending power estimated at 1/3 of total market potential.

Where will you find them? *And where will they find your event?*

According to PEW Research, "They are the first generation to regard

behaviors like tweeting and texting, along with websites like Facebook, YouTube, Google and Wikipedia, not as astonishing innovations of the digital era, but as every day parts of their social lives and their search for understanding." PEW and Junco & Mastrocasa research data indicate that millennials are connected like no other generation. 97% have a computer and 94% have a cell phone.

You will experience the sound of time and money flushing down the toilet when trying to reach this generation completely through printed publications and e-mail.

It is not new information that you will find the majority of the millennial generation on Facebook and Twitter. But if you are counting on your event website, facebook page and twitter account to do the job you are only taking the first steps into the virtual world.

And if you are not paying attention to this generation now, your organization is in decline.

#2 - Grow Your Event Image Online

Don't be surprised if the first search for your event is on YouTube. According to Social Nomics, YouTube is the world's second largest search engine after Google. Who is doing your video storytelling? You? Or your participants? Or hopefully both? In addition, you should consider these proven tools to help grow your event image online.

Professional networks are on Linked In. Millennials, and everyone else, are creating their online business rolodex, join professional groups and search for professional growth opportunities including conferences, advice and referrals here. Is your staff professionally connecting online?



Smart phones are ideal for anyone who wants communication, information gathering and computing power at their finger tips.

- Provide links to event or volunteer registration and ticket sites?
- Keep supporters up to date with the latest breaking news on event scheduled, contests, vendor promotions, entertainment selections, parking, weather considerations and any changes from the previous year?
- Encourage open and honest comments from followers? Sometimes we learn the most from negative comments.

The goal is to build an online gathering place for your supporters. Are your social network efforts growing support for your event?

#4 - Mobile Communications

The two biggest communications changes of 2011 show every sign of substantial growth in 2012. According to Gartner, smart phones (e.g. iphones, blackberries, androids) are now 26% of mobile communication sales. Smart phones are ideal for anyone who wants communication, information gathering and computing power at their finger tips. In just one year, tablet sales (e.g. ipad, galaxy tab, G-slate, playbook) jumped substantially. Why?

According to Nielsen's sample the driving reasons for the growth in tablet sales: Easy to carry. Fast start up. Convenience. Use in multiple locations. Fast Speed. Device features. Lightweight.

And ease of interface. For those with poor, or mature, vision, reading the small smart phone screen can be challenging. And for those of us who fat finger everything on the smart phone screen or buttons, the tablet is easily portable.

Many organizations feel the pressure to create event apps for smart phones and tablets. The reality is that the quality of what qualifies as an app needs to be raised. Many apps are not ready for prime time and prove to be frustrating to the customer. Several recent studies also show most purchased apps are only used once and then deserted. That is not to say there are not good apps but consider your expectations and conduct research on user satisfaction before making financial commitments.

Focus first on how your present website, social media pages and your online event related tools work on the most popular smart phones and ipad, as it dominates tablet sales right now. Check that your event promotion and ticket sales tools load correctly on these devices? Does the interface work for making selections and purchases? Or are you just creating frustration for your customers?

This generation explores the world around them using tools as varied as Four-Square, GoogleMaps and Geocaching. Do you show up on location finders? Many offer recommendations and tips. Is your event represented or missing in action?

Those matrix barcodes you see popping up on billboards, flyers, magazine adverts, USA today, store product, business cards, websites and event tickets? They are called QR codes and relatively easy to create. They contain event information, site maps, coupons and vendor information. The best part? You can track who downloads your QR code. (See the Winter 2011 issue of "i.e." magazine for an article on QR Codes.)

Need to spread the word about event tickets and volunteer opportunities? Friends and families share experiences and photos on Facebook, Flickr and Pinterest. Are you providing quality, engaging images for your supporters to use online to help spread your image?

And how about the newest social media option, Google+ ? Great concept for those who want to categorize their communication with friends, family, colleagues and other groups. Unfortunately this much acclaimed tool is still struggling on consistency. Check back on this one.

Overload? Which tools are appropriate for your event? Pick one or two to get started.

#3 - Who is talking about your event?

We all laugh at the commercials portraying actors sharing the inane details of their personal lives.

According to Pew research, most adults use social networks to connect with people they already know. And 80% of internet users participate in groups, compared with 56% of non-internet users.

Events can use social media networks including Facebook, Google+, Twitter to build their community of supporters. The following strategies may seem obvious but it is amazing how many events build basic social network sites but don't invest time or resources in keeping it up-to-date. Does your event:

- Have a social network site, at a minimum on Facebook, where your event supporters can communicate easily with one another? Where they can raise awareness; drum up support; recruit etc. throughout the year?
- Promote your event with photos on photo sharing sites like Flickr and video links from YouTube?

#5 - Virtual Database

Audience information continues to be king, nothing new there. But the way we gather audience contact information is changing dramatically. We traditionally collected name, address and phone. There are still many event organizations that use online forms to collect participant information and even credit card payment information. The information is retyped (big time waste) by an event administrator. Save your staff the wasted time and invest in a technical solution that loads the participant or volunteer data directly into your online database. And the next phase? Some online tools let your audience update their contact information and your database using virtual addresses.

Sign up for a new application or online tool recently? You may have the option to use your facebook or twitter account in addition to your traditional e-mail/password. In an increasingly fast moving world many, often younger, participants will select the most expedient registration method. Others, often more mature, will have privacy concerns related to using social media account information to register for all online services.

Consider the mechanisms which are driving your audience database. Are they easy to use for your staff, participants and volunteers? Or is your audience wasting time?

#6 - Event Intelligence and Analytics.

Money and time have incredible value for all event management organizations. Do you know if your online efforts are working for you? Do you know how many website views you have or repeat traffic patterns? Are you meeting your engagement goals or reaching your target market? *Google Analytics* provides the tools to let you analyze website, advertising, marketing, social media and mobile initiatives. And Google Analytics is free. Really there is no excuse for not evaluating your online efforts.

#7 - Event Management Tools - Play with the Big Boys

Do you have the desire to be time efficient and financially effective? Are you still using excel spreadsheets, providing pdf download or basic online forms to manage your event and volunteer participants?

- My daughters and I recently volunteered for a local film festival. I love the event but it took a combination of six e-mails and phone calls to coordinate our volunteer schedules. Six over two weeks! Next year, I'm just buying tickets.

- A business colleague, while traveling, registered for an event as an exhibitor and was desperately trying to find a fax machine to send in the downloadable pdf. He was surprised to find that many businesses have gotten rid of fax machines and the dedicated phone line.
- And at a recent conference, I watched the event manager desperately trying to find registrants who were not listed on her spreadsheet. I asked her about the process and she sighed, "I get an e-mail from the online form on our website and then I have to retype the information. Sometimes the e-mails don't show up or I miss one or more."

Solve the problem with one of the many full service online event and/or volunteer management systems on the market. They are common place and most have core features that will improve the image of your organization with ease and speed of registration, event management reports, online payment options and evaluation tools.

Think full service online event management systems are expensive? Do a time study on your existing event administration. Online systems typically save an organization 50-90%, depending on event size and structure of administrative support.

#8 - Tech Green

The growing audience of environmentally friendly event goers is looking for signs of sustainability. And event managers have a responsibility to be good community partners.

- Printing and mailing is passé. Your audience expects to find tickets and event information online. Tickets can be downloaded online. Or for the more environmentally friendly, go paperless by offering tickets in the form of QR or barcodes for smart phone users.
- Print large maps at key event information desks. Watch your event goers take pictures of the map on their phones. More cutting edge, print a QR code containing an online event site map and watch smart phone users
- Recruit a Green Team! Recycling is expected at festivals and large events. Period.
- Partner with local waste and energy management firms to develop creative approaches to energy supply. You may be surprised at the wind, solar and other alternative solutions available to your event.
- Adopt a friendly model for alternative modes of transportation. Online car share. Bike racks. Nearby mass transit.

Walking paths. All options that should be detailed on your event site.

Consider the green image of your organization both in sustainability and financial terms. Your event can also save money by going green.

#9 - Wikipedia

So easy. Are your organization and event listed?

#10 - Your event brand is the sum of all conversations.

Can your event audience

- Search online? Website + Wikipedia + Social Media pages
- Volunteer? Website + Social Media pages + Online Registration System
- See the fun? Flickr + YouTube + Pinterest
- Buy tickets? Social Media pages + Website + Online ticket system
- Discover your location? Googlemaps + FourSquare
- See sustainable efforts? Less paper + more recycling + alternative energy
- Provide feedback? Social media pages + online evaluations (e.g. Survey Monkey)

All these tools come together to form the sum of conversations about your event. Consider carefully what tech holes exist in your event, these may heavily impact the future of your event.

Coming soon. The newest tech trend is a bit of a surprise ... Technology Downtime.

Florence May is President of TRS – The Registration System. TRS provides online registration, expert consultation and technological support for volunteer managers. Need more information on online event management tools/systems? Just contact TRS with a short description of your needs. Full disclosure: In some cases TRS will be listed as an option. TRS clients include the 2011 North Texas Super Bowl LOC, Kentucky Derby Festival, Indy 500 Festival, Cisco Ottawa Bluesfest, 2011 NCAA Men's Final Four, SeaFair, 2011 EuroGames, and International Children's Festival.

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