

Cutting-Edge Tech Trends: THE ATTENDEE EXPERIENCE IN 2018

By Sean O'Shea



Apps lighting up according to how the audience answers polling questions. Source: www.vividsydney.com

Technology in the event space has long since graduated from slideshows and online registration. Now there's an expectation of advanced, creative technology to be integrated into the attendee experience, especially with the use of mobile apps, even if your event isn't necessarily technology-focused. People are out-doing themselves every year with the most innovative, most visionary installments and apps. Consequently, expectations of attendees have changed and it's clear that it will only continue to move in that direction.

Welcome to the new era of digital engagement. This is now the standard of how attendees are interacting with one another and with your brand at your event or conference. Everyone has a smartphone nowadays and will be glued to it whether or not they're looking at your branded content, and brands have been reacting accordingly. Keeping your

community engaged is key. We've already seen the widespread use of things like in-app chat bots, social media displays and live-streaming to immerse attendees and encourage a greater dialogue. While these are great tools, let's take it outside the box. Interaction17 had an exhibit called "Data Futures" where the event's app was also used to poll the audience during a keynote speaker's presentation and aggregate the data in real-time. Suddenly, the audience became a participant in the lecture itself rather than just a spectator. After the audience became comfortable answering basic questions like where they're from and what music they like, the app began to flash different colors based on what you answered. Their answers are now being publicly exposed and they're even more involved in the experience of this lecture. Then, naturally, the questions got a bit more challenging. As people were forced to shed their anonymity, the

audience was made to stand behind their answers and forced to relate to one another on a deeper level. Technology is always accused of keeping people from connecting and socializing how we used to, but that doesn't have to always be the case. If it's used creatively, it can absolutely foster greater engagement, participation and solidify your community.

Now let's take it outside the lecture hall. In the age of 8-second attention spans, interactive entertainment at events is a necessity, which is where a lot of experiential, innovative tech comes into play. People want the wow-factor, they want to see something they haven't seen before. And as technology progresses, each year someone seems to up the ante. At Design Miami, Audi created an installation where a three-dimensional LED surface had real-time graphics as people walked over it with a path that their newest self-driving car was following through the middle. The

idea was to show how self-driving cars and people would interact, and it was quite the success. This is the crossroads where a fun, digital installation can serve both to entertain and to connect people to your brand in ways that will have them talking about it for months on end.

Then there's the use of gamification: a subset of the idea of bringing entertainment value to your event that will have people associate a positive, exciting experience with your brand. Take, for example, a digital scavenger hunt around your exhibits using beacons that connect to your event app. (Beacons, for those who don't know, are small hardware devices that are able to submit a signal to your phone within a certain range.) The Consumer Electronics Showcase is one of the largest tech conferences and in recent years set up such a digital scavenger hunt around their exhibition. Attendees got badges as pop-up notifications while they walked through the exhibits and got in range of the beacons with the promise of an iPad for the winners. They had great participation and managed to get attendees to explore all of the different exhibits at their event in a fun, engaging way. Not only was CES successful in branding themselves as incredibly forward-thinking technologically, but they enhanced their attendee experience by ensuring they saw all the exhibits that they had to offer. Any technology that has a connection



CES's event app with scavenger hunt notifications. Source: <https://blog.beaconstac.com>

to location-based prompts are great for events, since they connect the physical movement of your attendees in your event space to their digital experience.

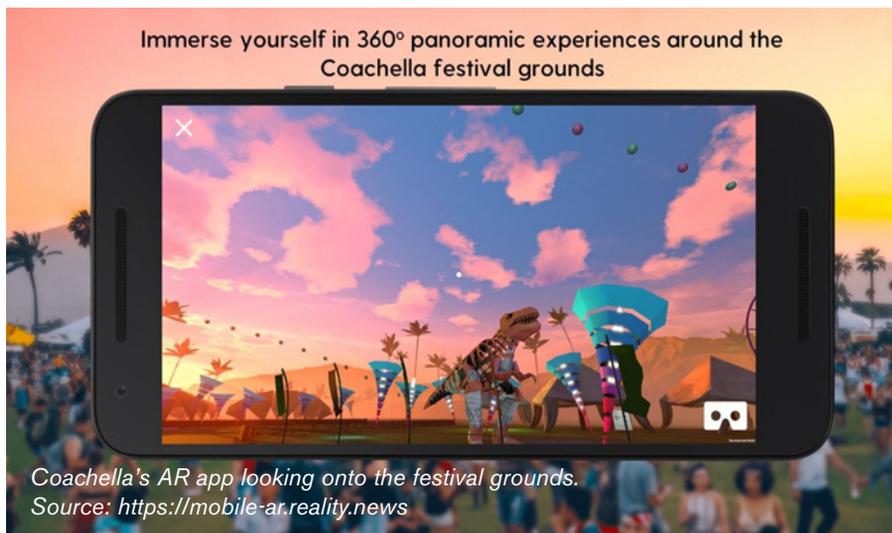
Maybe the biggest trend in how events are using technology is AR and VR, or Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality. As these technologies become more advanced, they can be used to bring a unique element to your attendee's experience. You're essentially bringing them into a different world and allowing them to visualize an experience that you may have not been able to provide for them otherwise. It opens up the possibilities of what you can offer attendees to be essentially limitless. Most people understand VR, but AR is interesting in that it combines the physical reality of the user with virtual elements added to it. Coachella's app is one of the best uses of AR, where they had recognized brand elements (like their ferris wheel, roller coasters and a hot air balloon) appear on their welcome package when you point the Coachella VR app on it. Then while at the festival, attendees were able to hunt for certain location-based AR activations on the festival grounds while using their app. You can imagine how much social media traffic this produced for them, making the app not only an effective tool to create an on-site experience but also to encourage online activity that promotes your event.



Audi's self-driving car driving between attendees. Source: <http://kollision.dk>



Two event attendees experiencing Budweiser's VR brewery tour. Source: <https://vrscout.com>



barriers of the event experience and leveraging the newest innovations to bring their attendee experience into 2018. What's a common thread you see them using? Mobile technology. Mobile is the enabling feature of almost all of the latest trends in how technology is transforming the event experience. We've moved far past listing speakers and RSVPs in event apps. With more and more mobile users each year, your event's mobile capabilities are clearly the foundation of how technologically advanced your event can be. From social media, to digital engagement and participation, to creating virtual experiences, mobile is a key factor in how empowered your brand is to be an industry leader in the event industry.

VR, or Virtual Reality, can go one step beyond that. Brands have used it to promote products that aren't able to be showcased easily in person or to give people the opportunity to engage with them from afar if they're unable to attend the event in person, effectively expanding the reach of your event well beyond who's able to travel to your on-site location. Imagine you were able to give any experience to people no matter where they're located. At South by Southwest, Anheuser-Busch set up a virtual reality tent where attendees got a tour of their brewing facilities using VR, and even the added

effects of cold air being blown on them when they enter the freezer and waving hops in front of their noses when they're starting the brewing process. The element of VR enabled users to visit their facilities and see how their product is made from thousands of miles away, empowering their brand to engage with their customers more effectively and immerse them in their brand's experience. Now just imagine what kind of experience you could create for your attendees using VR.

With industry leaders moving into more advanced technologies and more creative uses of it, they've been challenging

Sean O'Shea co-founded Majestyk Apps in 2012 and now serves as President. Previously, he created successful mobile applications for a diverse set of industries, which is why he also oversees all of our projects as our Tech Lead. He brings together years of technical expertise and client-facing experience to ensure the success of every partnership Majestyk engages in. He can be reached at: sean@majestykapps.com.