

Technology pushes events into experience

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As smartphone penetration reaches almost 40% in South Africa, so the interest in events technology grows, with mobile event apps topping the list in international events management trends for 2016.

"However, what is interesting is the rise in the use of the words 'experience' and 'experiential'," says Teresa Jenkins, md of Litha Communications. "Technology offers marvels for events organisers, from pre-event registration and meeting requests to on-the-day comments and integrated reporting post-event, but it is precisely because of technology that people crave the humanness of face-to-face interaction.

"Virtual meetings allow viewer participation across wide distances and even countries but the attention span of most participants is around 45 minutes, after which their attention flags and they move on to the next thing. Live events present more than just information; they provide socially rewarding exchanges between like-minded people in an atmosphere of excitement and involvement and that is where events management will take us in 2016.

"High on the list is the ability to create and engage with a community before, during and after the event and here interactive websites, mobile apps and social media come into their own, extending the event past its once-off moment to a more long-lasting relationship. Nevertheless, what they crave more than just this is a unique experience - the belief that what the event offers cannot be matched by an online encounter.

"We have always believed that an event should incorporate an experiential element - from cosy corners in an exhibition hall to outings to heritage sites to enrich the delegates' encounters and create a customised event for clients. This demand will grow, as people want to move beyond the stagnant conference hall to enrichment, excitement and energy.

"This craving for novelty will extend into the traditional association meetings and conferences, as delegates, satiated with research and information, expect richer and more focused learning experiences, coupled with tangible rewards.

"A fascinating trend is the rise in the virtual goodie bag - instead of the conventional pen, brochure, and uninspiring gift, sponsors and marketers can extend the reach of their promotion through online offers that encourage post-event engagement, extending the marketing and sales opportunities post-event. Imagine an academic conference, which offered an online book token rather than another notepad and pen set.

"In addition to the infotainment aspect of such a gift, there is also the reduction in wasted resources - the conference papers on a memory stick are far more likely to be reviewed than a printed tome. The memory stick offers the client the opportunity to add in other information, such as all the delegate contact details, expanded reviews, research, etc. After all, how many water bottles, coffee mugs, caps or pens does anyone need? Spending money and effort on new tangibles will again add to the overall event experience.

"An interesting note is that for the first time security is being mentioned as a key trend for 2016 in international events - a trend that South Africa has long since adopted, given its history. Key to this is the registration process, which can range from verification with the National Intelligence Agency, to RFID bracelets that not only welcome guests but also track their movements.

"Finally, there is the question of evaluation - traditionally done at the end of an event, which serves as a benchmark for the next, now it is possible to acquire the information, as the event unfolds, through the real-time collection of actionable data. This also satisfies an audience that wants participation that is more active and allows for input into shaping events.

"The year will be a challenging one for the South African events industry but it offers potential to in-bound events, as the rand's weakness makes it an attractive destination. I remain confident that budgets will continue to see the value and ROI that events offer against more conventional marketing efforts and set aside larger portions for conferences, events and exhibitions," concludes Jenkins.

Litha Communications promotes its client's brand and message through successful, well-attended, well-publicised events that not only excite delegates, meet specified communication objectives but also further its passion for event greening and ubuntu in southern Africa.

It offers knowledge-sharing solutions, grounded in marketing practices, which move events beyond the mundane to speak to the hearts and minds of selected audience. It has been doing this since 1999, both locally and internationally, giving it an unparalleled expertise in events management.

It achieves this through integrated project management systems that offer a seamless service that incorporates events management, risk management, environmental considerations, logistics, RSVP management and the marketing of client events, from pre- to post-event.

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