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# MEETINGS OUTLOOK™



*Planners are reporting an increased focus on personalizing the user experience through technology (virtual reality, augmented reality, facial recognition, beacons, etc.) and data collection (including through apps) in a landscape of continued growth—and even an increase in the perceived value of face-to-face meetings.*

2018 WINTER EDITION

# TECH CONVERGENCE ON THE HORIZON

Event organizers can use information gathered to understand and track individual demographics for greater personalization that may pit privacy against data collection. **Here are six of the leading tech tools being used in the industry today.**



**FACIAL RECOGNITION**



**VIRTUAL REALITY**



**MEETINGS OUTLOOK™**

**By Elaine Pofeldt**

**A**ttorney Michele S. Katz is sold on the value of personalization technology at meetings. “It really warms the room,” she says. In October, she used a badge technology called Proximity at a networking event for about 100 people that her firm, Advitam IP, ran with sponsor Amata, a shared workspace environment in Chicago.

When participants at the gathering came into close proximity of someone else that the meeting organizers had identified as having complimentary interests, both people’s initials lit up on their badges. Katz found that this feature

made it easy for attendees to start a conversation about what brought them together and build a lasting connection.

“The element of personalization, with meaningful conversations, allows you to have better targeted follow-up,” adds Katz, who has also used the technology at a larger meeting of 300 people for the National Association of Women Business Owners in Chicago.

Katz isn’t alone in embracing personalization technology at meetings. MPI’s latest *Meetings Outlook* survey found there was a significant focus on planners personalizing the user experience through technologies such as virtual reality





## AUGMENTED REALITY



## AUTOMATED REGISTRATION



## BEACONS



## RFID (RADIO-FREQUENCY IDENTIFICATION)

***“I think that meetings have become so tech-oriented that the personal contact isn’t there anymore. You see people walking around looking at their phones continually, even during sessions. They’ll be on their phones or iPads, and I know they are not following what is going on in the room.”***

### DONNA MANGOLD

MPI Pittsburgh Chapter  
Federated Investors

(VR), augmented reality (AR), facial recognition, short-throw projection and beacons. “The use of beacons to monitor exhibit traffic will change the landscape of exhibit sales and follow-up,” wrote one planner who requested anonymity.

In one case, a planner reported seeing more use of ConsensusOnline for AR and facial recognition technology. Another anonymous planner pointed to “mass adoption of VR in the consumer space” and “expectations for this in the meeting environment to increase.”

When asked which technologies are taking precedence, respondents overwhelmingly cited apps, mentioned by nearly

28 percent of respondents. “The use of meeting apps is changing how meetings happen,” wrote the same planner who pointed to the use of beacons.

Whether apps are event-specific or not, the *Meetings Outlook* survey found they are being used to reduce paper usage, improve communications, facilitate networking, speed registration and improve attendee safety. Linda Nelson, CMP (MPI

**27 RESORTS.**

**ENDLESS**

**ENTERTAINMENT.**



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# LARGE VENUE SELECTION

Which of the following factors is most important to you when selecting a destination or venue for larger meetings or congresses?



**44.7%**  
MOST SAFE &  
SECURE



**26.1%**  
MUST BE  
DOMESTIC



**24.1%**  
BEST AIRLIFT &  
ACCESSIBILITY



**19.1%**  
DESTINATION IS ON  
AN APPROVED LIST

Carolinas Chapter), owner of To PLAN Ahead, a full-service meeting planning firm in Asheville, N.C., pointed to “more robust registration software that allows for speaker management, which is a huge bonus, since this is a very time-intensive process.”

Other technologies viewed as particularly important were automated registration (17.4 percent) and social media marketing and communications, AR/VR and data collection and mining (all cited by 9.3 percent).

As Tyra Hilliard, CMP (MPI North Florida Chapter), a St. Simons Island, Ga.-based attorney and educator, noted in her survey response, “Self-check-in kiosks at conferences are streamlining the process and reducing the need for so many staff/volunteers.”

The overriding goal in using such technologies, the research found, is often to create opportunities for novel and personal experiences for attendees.

At one meeting planner’s organization, for instance, a whole day of a national convention will be dedicated to letting

participants choose their own adventure, based on their interests.

“We are also looking at how technology can be used throughout the event to connect with other participants without replacing the human connection piece of the event,” wrote a planner who requested anonymity.

Incorporating personalization technology successfully starts long before the event, with early engagement, and continues to novel onsite experiences tailored for each attendee and meaningful follow-up after the event.

While some meeting professionals are adopting very advanced new tools others have found that more familiar tools, such as social media and apps, can be used to enhance sessions to make them more personal and community-oriented.

“Real-time polling apps are increasingly being utilized in business/corporate events,” wrote Corinne Mellissari (MPI Potomac Chapter), a planner from the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials in the Washington, D.C., metro area.

The personalization trend extends to data collection, including information-gathering through apps. This process includes many components: analyzing data from event attendees, looking at their personal needs and wants, studying their real-time responses to event experiences and understanding details such as grouping and walking patterns within venues.

As Hilliard pointed out in her response, “RFID and similar technologies are allowing for better tracking of attendees, which translates to a more accurate history.”

Eric Mottard (MPI Spain Chapter), CEO of eventplus, a Barcelona-based media partner of major trade shows

*Many of the new trends reflect something bigger that’s going on: “the whole notion of anxiety and being scared.” It’s one that meeting professionals will likely have to consider for years to come.*

**GARY SCHIRMACHER, CMP**  
MPI Rocky Mountain Chapter  
Experient





**17.6%**  
LOWEST  
COST



**11.4%**  
FEWEST SOCIAL LEGISLATION  
OR POLITICAL ISSUES



**3.4%**  
BEST VACATION &  
ENTERTAINMENT OPTIONS



**8.3%**  
LOCATION IS PERCEIVED  
TO BE LUXURIOUS

in Europe, reported a trend toward the use of technology in generating data and audience intelligence and to “facilitate networking in the event, and also before and after” in his survey response.

Many respondents seem ready to try new technologies as the prices come down. In the survey, meeting professionals said they are looking forward to the advent of affordable and easy-to-use beacon (iBeacon) technology and/or RFID to collect data about attendee preferences and behaviors, and to push relevant communications to attendees on site.

“We are evaluating tools like VR for our events, looking at options like the Oculus Rift,” Bob Clary, director of marketing at education technology firm DevelopIntelligence in Lafayette, Colo., said in an email. “At this point, I think prices are just on the edge of affordability, but will be there soon.” (In the past year, the cost for the Oculus Rift hardware, as well as the powerful graphics cards necessary for the VR system to operate properly on a PC, has dropped significantly. Keep in mind that this is just the first high-end, consumer-ready version of VR equipment.)

The challenge for many is finding a way to bring new technology to meetings in a manner that does not distract people from making human connections.

Ask Donna Mangold (MPI Pittsburgh Chapter), who is involved in planning investment seminars and conferences for Federated Investors, a mutual fund organization based in Pittsburgh, as well as the firm’s presence at trade shows. Federated Investors has created apps for sales reps that attend an internal conference, but Mangold has reservations about how much technology is being used in some meetings.

“I think that meetings have become so tech-oriented that the personal contact isn’t there anymore,” she says. “You see people walking around looking at their phones continually, even during sessions. They’ll be on their phones or iPads, and I know they are not following what is going on in the room.”

## Business Conditions

A stable business environment is indicated; predictions for business growth over the next year are stable at 2.1%.

**62%**

OF RESPONDENTS PREDICT  
**FAVORABLE**  
BUSINESS CONDITIONS

**21%**

OF RESPONDENTS PREDICT  
**NEUTRAL**  
BUSINESS CONDITIONS

**17%**

OF RESPONDENTS PREDICT  
**NEGATIVE**  
BUSINESS CONDITIONS

## Projected Budget/Spend Over the Next Year

This time last year, budget outlooks were decreasingly positive—now they appear to be stable. The estimated percentage increase in actual budgets is only 1.2%—while that doesn’t keep us with rising costs, it’s the healthiest it’s been in more than a year.

**49%**

OF RESPONDENTS PREDICT  
**FAVORABLE**  
BUSINESS CONDITIONS

**31%**

OF RESPONDENTS PREDICT  
**NEUTRAL**  
BUSINESS CONDITIONS

**20%**

OF RESPONDENTS PREDICT  
**NEGATIVE**  
BUSINESS CONDITIONS

## SAFETY, SECURITY TOP OTHER CONCERNS

With safety and security now the No. 1 trend in *Meetings Outlook* for the first time and 44 percent of meeting planners saying it trumps all other factors in selecting a destination, some meeting professionals are looking to personalization technology to keep attendees safe.

"Attendee security has got to be at the forefront of our minds for events large and small," says Bob Walker, senior vice president of events for Freeman, a Dallas-based integrator of solutions for live events.

Many personalization solutions that are already being used, such as RFID badges, have potential applications for security, Walker notes. RFID badges use a radio-frequency identification system attached to the badges.

"Depending on the size of your event or complexity they can be a tremendous help as far as registration, qualifying and identifying attendees," Walker says.

Using apps to ensure that attendees are safe getting to and from events is also a growing trend, noted Paula Klinger (MPI Carolinas Chapter), a meeting planner at North Carolina-based telecommunications firm CommScope Inc.

"For business travelers, the use of apps to track their travel, and also their safety during travel (checking in on apps) is being used and promoted much more often than we would have seen five years ago," Klinger wrote in her survey response.

The challenge for event organizers and planners comes with deploying personalization technology for security purposes without violating anyone's privacy.

"You get into a lot of questions there as to where do you cross the line and become an invader of their privacy," Walker says. "That's the balance every event has to work out. Where do you make that work?"

At one recent event in New York City, all of the personnel were asked to provide information on themselves—such as their names, affiliations, job titles and tenure in preparing the badges—Walker recounts. Although the purpose of gathering

the data was to ensure they were not imposters and make sure the event was secure, "there's a limit to what employees are willing to provide," he recalls.

One planner, who responded to the survey but requested anonymity, noted that artificial intelligence and facial recognition technology were important trends. "Facial recognition should be developed to a point now where it can be used for check-in and delivering statistics on audience behavior," the planner wrote.

Gary Schirmacher, CMP (MPI Rocky Mountain Chapter), senior vice president of industry presence and strategic development for Experient, a Maritz Global Events Company, says security and technology seem related, and sees a strong connection between security and technology that relates to buildings and personal protection.

"To me, these two things seem to go hand in hand," he says.

However, one challenge for those who deploy the new technologies is maintaining the security of any data that is gathered, he adds.

Experient makes the wearable eventBIT, a lightweight, battery-powered gadget that is attached to attendee badges as part of the registration process. The eventBIT can be used to track the exhibitors each attendee visited, how much time they spent in specific sessions, offer them networking recommendations and even provide health metrics, such as how far they walked during the show.

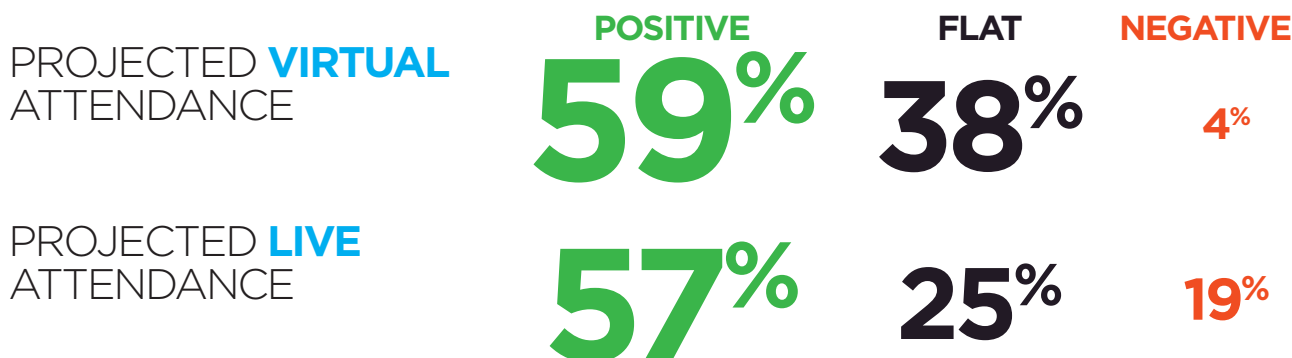
Meanwhile, event organizers can use the information gathered to do a real-time show analysis and look at a heat map, know how many attendees are located in a given spot and understand and track individual demographics, among other things.

While this data can be very handy, it could potentially be misused in the wrong hands.

"We have a responsibility to protect that data," Schirmacher says. "Every day you see somebody, a company who hasn't protected people's data. That is certainly an

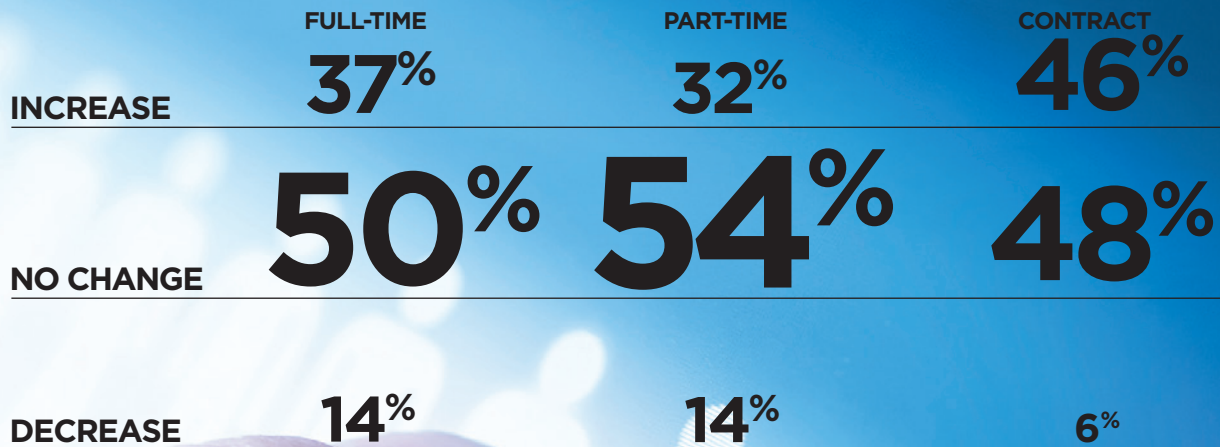
## ATTENDANCE FORECASTS

LIVE AND VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE FIGURES ARE EXPECTED TO GROW 2.2% AND 2.6%, RESPECTIVELY, WITH LIVE EVENT EXPECTATIONS UP SLIGHTLY OVER LAST QUARTER.





# GLIMPSE AT CURRENT EMPLOYMENT TRENDS



area where we strive to have the highest standards.”

The stakes are high. If companies providing such technology fall down on the job, attendees may well vote with their feet and decide not to attend optional meetings, he notes.

“With an association or trade show, I don’t have to go if I don’t want to,” Schirmacher says.

Ultimately, companies will have to create a balance between bringing convenient technology and offering an environment where data is secure to keep them coming back, he believes.

“That’s what I think some of this technology is trying to do,” he says.

One technology Schirmacher has been following in the headlines is “Realtime Crowd Insights,” a software tool that connects web applications to Microsoft’s cloud computing services. Through Microsoft’s emotional analysis API, applications send an image to Microsoft’s servers, which, in turn, analyze the faces and determine the emotions on each one. The tool has been marketed for analysis of crowds at political rallies, among other uses. Microsoft tested it at the Democratic National Convention and Republican National Convention in 2016.

“They were able to look at individuals and see their expressions,” Schirmacher notes. While such observation can be helpful in making security decisions, there is also poten-

tial for violating people’s privacy.

Schirmacher believes many of the new trends reflect something bigger that’s going on: “the whole notion of anxiety and being scared,” he says. It’s one that meeting professionals will likely have to consider for years to come. ■

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