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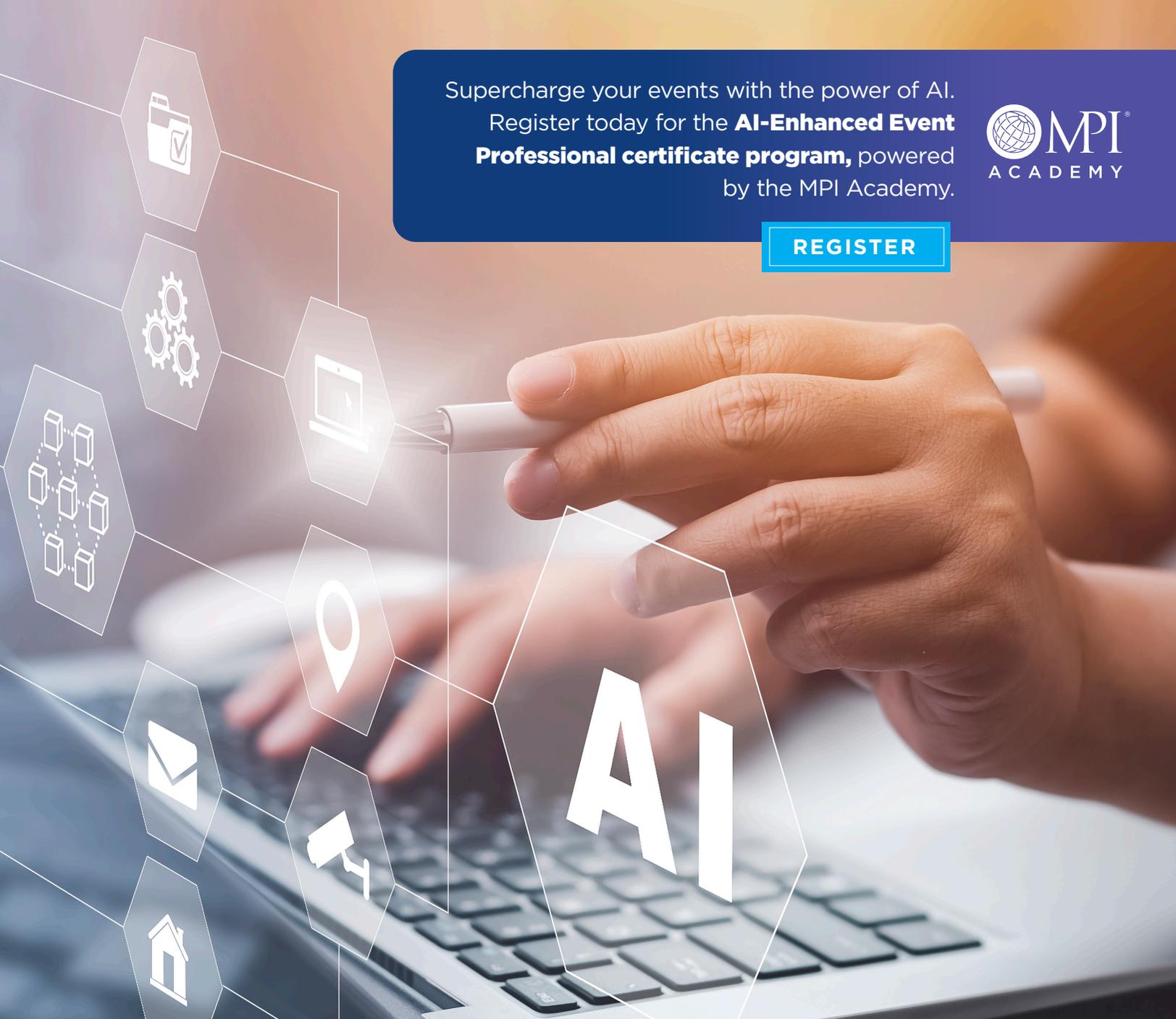
TRANSFORMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS WITH THE POWER OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

By Dani Kloap

Sponsored by destination **DC**

AI has the potential to increase event professional's capacity for creativity, curiosity, data analysis and problem-solving while automating tasks and increasing speed to market for new products, events and services, according to findings from the 2023 MPI Foundation Thought Leaders Summit in Buffalo, New York.

The conclave of leaders focused its efforts solely on the current impact of artificial intelligence on the business of meetings. Industry experts ideated ways to harness the power of AI for every aspect of event planning, design and execution.

Participants learned from a variety of speakers, panels and innovators in the AI space before discussing and drafting recommendations for incorporating AI technology throughout the event lifecycle and ecosystem.

Juliano Lissoni, managing director of Canada for MCI Group invited his peers to embrace the future. "Don't fear it. Have the machine work with you, not for you."

And while Lissoni voiced concerns and recommendations for protecting client and business data, he encouraged its adoption. "Use AI to help your brain think differently," Lissoni said. "Use AI to collaborate and get better answers."

Thomas Blasucci, MPI director of people and performance, recommended investing time in team training on generative AI tools and setting policies for its use.

"People will not be replaced by AI, but people who do not use AI will be replaced by people who do," he said.

With AI managing repetitive tasks, Blasucci said, meeting professionals will have the time and space to be even more strategic, creative and innovative. And that is what will guarantee job security, according to keynote and AI expert Shawn Kanungo.

Kanugo believes that event professionals are well-positioned to help their organizations and events remain relevant in this new technological age, especially as people increasingly seek in-person experiences and connections. And industry practitioners can do that more efficiently and effectively with AI as their partner, Kanungo said.

AI provides the opportunity for infinite leverage if people don't let fear stop them from harnessing its power. "We should be asking what will we create today with infinite leverage. What will we build today with infinite leverage?" Kanungo said.

Meanwhile, the prompts needed to make AI a partner in work have created a narrator economy, Kanungo said. MPI's Blasucci provided a formula for getting the best results from prompts.

1. Provide the desired output.
2. Describe the situation and context for why you need that desired output.
3. Include helpful information that will help AI generate and "think."
4. Add the sentiments or emotions involved.
5. Identify keywords or ideas.

"Use AI as a starting point for work," Blasucci recommended. "Find a balance with working with AI," he said. "Don't ignore it but don't let it take over your job."

Industry leaders and professionals are already leveraging this new-found power tool to design and deliver meaningful experiences. Alexa Berube and Paul Klopfer from Reposite use Bard to find adjacent event spaces, restaurants, flight information and best rates and dates; compare destinations;

and aggregate real-time news data. They use AI as a database and a reasoning engine, making predictions and helping make judgement calls.

Huong Nguyen, CEO of Shiloh Event Management, says AI has freed up 30 percent of her time. She uses it to transcribe and summarize client meetings and note action items, key discussions and decisions. Her toolbox includes Fireflies.AI, Otter, Sybil and Supernormal. Aftershoot helps her cull and edit multiple photos, and Jasper.AI assists with marketing content. She uses ChatGPT for analyzing data.

Ted Sullivan of tech firm Zartico offers an AI tool that uses event, spend, geolocation and other data to track how events affect jobs and the local economy. Zartico takes data streams to create a multitude of visual reports to showcase event impact for destinations.

A discussion featuring Nguyen, Lori Pugh (EnsembleIQ) and Adele Farina (Ion Group), focused on the impact of AI on their teams. Pugh's team uses AI to build their runs of show and program descriptions and to ensure themes stay consistent throughout their content descriptions and website/app copy. Nguyen uses historical data in ChatGPT to benchmark against other industry events, as well as to make year-over-year comparisons of event performance for her clients.

With the efficiencies and time AI created for Pugh's team, she was able to launch a new event for her organization that brought in $500,000 in unbudgeted revenue. AI has helped her team lean into organizational and business strategy and knowledge work and speak in language that resonates with C-suite executives.

Farina's technology team used Microsoft Power Apps to connect Cvent and Salesforce, and she was able to use that data to show value for her team's events to senior leaders.

If AI buy-in and cost concerns are a challenge, Nguyen recommends conducting a benefit and expense analysis to help leaders understand why they need to invest in these critical platforms.

The consensus was to be patient when implementing AI. It won't immediately solve all challenges. Utilize tutorials on platforms like YouTube and TikTok, test products and evaluate their effectiveness before investing or upgrading.

Additional recommended AI platforms included the following.
- Zapier automates repetitive tasks in apps you already use.
- Midjourney generates images, eliminating the need for expensive photo shoots or campaigns.
- Galleleo.ai creates websites and user interfaces in seconds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Thought leaders collaborated on the following recommendations for the deployment of AI tools for meeting and event professionals.

Recruitment & Workforce Development

Use AI to add Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) statements to job postings and (re)write job descriptions. Employ it to create interview questions and overall recruitment strategies, resulting in better job descriptions and the identification of ideal and diverse candidates.

Predictive Analysis

Harness historical data to make informed predictions about future events and outcomes. Analyze data points such as weather, demographics, location and crime statistics to plan events effectively. Streamline the request for proposal process and identify best-fit destinations and hotels. Analyze and review contracts.

Data Analytics

Analyze large datasets, including open-ended survey responses, to extract key drivers of satisfaction and insights for better decision-making (remove identifying data). Process registration, flight and other event-related data for valuable insights. Analyze attendee behavior, session attendance and email campaign data to tailor strategies more effectively.

Customer Insights

Gain a deeper understanding of event attendees and apply this knowledge for better experiences. Create attendee profiles based on registration data to create personalized event experiences. Automate the matching of suppliers/vendors and buyers for networking. Synthesize data from surveys, social media and attendee demographics for valuable insights. Interpret cultural differences and preferences, enhancing the experience for international attendees.

Event Innovation

Use AI as a thought partner to brainstorm content and themes and generate creative ideas for event design and invitations. Automate repetitive tasks, allowing more time for innovation in event planning.

Content & Marketing

Craft email messaging, social media content and blog posts. Upload your organization's style guide and marketing guidelines, so the AI can learn your businesses tone and voice. Analyze engagement metrics such as session attendance, video engagement and click-through rates to optimize content strategies. Get recommendations based on attendee reactions and feedback, ensuring content is tailored to your audience.

RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

Sustainability
Ask for sustainable supply chain options, analyze traffic patterns for eco-friendly transportation and reduce food waste. Ask for venue recommendations that minimize travel for attendees, thereby reducing the carbon footprint of your events.

Post-Event Analytics
Analyze attendee feedback, surveys and social media posts to extract valuable insights for future improvements. Identify patterns in attendee behavior that lead to better event planning and execution, such as session attendance, app engagement and social interactions.

Planning & Management
Design event programs, agendas, set designs and asset management. Ask AI to assist with budget tracking, menu planning and venue selection. Automate menial tasks, streamline transportation logistics and optimize various aspects of event planning.

Event Personalization
Analyze attendee data to create personalized event schedules and recommendations, enhancing the overall attendee experience. Use AI-driven chatbots to assist participants with event-related queries, providing real-time support and guidance.

Networking & Gamification
Facilitate better networking among attendees by matching them based on interests and create engagement and activities. Generate interactive elements, such as gamification and real-time polling, to enhance the overall event experience, making it more engaging and interactive.

Social Media
Monitor social media platforms in real-time to gauge attendee sentiment and feedback during events. Ask AI to perform sentiment analysis to adapt event content or activities based on participant reactions in real time, ensuring a more tailored and responsive event experience.

Onsite Logistics
Streamline onsite event registration, crowd management and security using technologies like facial recognition and AI chatbots. Ask AI to predict resource requirements, such as venue size, catering needs and materials, based on historical data and event specifics, ensuring efficient onsite operations.

Education & Training
Create AI-driven simulations to enhance training programs. Attract clients and sponsors through education by addressing their pain points and creating interactive prospectuses.

AI Policies & Uses
Consider privacy, ethics, consent and bias when utilizing AI. Integrate policies into the design and execution of meetings and events, addressing image sensitivity, data privacy and bias mitigation, among other factors.

CONCLUSIONS

The consensus among thought leaders is that AI should be embraced as a partner, not a replacement, for event professionals. With AI handling routine and time-consuming tasks, meeting professionals can focus on strategic, creative and innovative aspects of their work, ensuring job security and delivering more meaningful experiences for attendees.

Numerous real-world examples demonstrate how AI is already being leveraged to optimize various aspects of event management, from venue selection and content creation to networking, sustainability and post-event analysis. The benefits extended beyond efficiency to include revenue generation and the ability to speak the language of C-suite executives.

AI is a tool that empowers event professionals to provide more personalized and engaging experiences for attendees while optimizing their own workflows. The key message is clear: The adoption of AI is not about replacing professionals but about enhancing their capabilities and embracing change. AI has boundless potential for meeting professionals and the events they plan to change the way they work and create even more meaningful experiences.

"Be humble enough to say, '(AI) is the next technology; how do we weave this into what we do?" according to keynote and AI expert Kanungo. "The most dangerous person in the room is the person who is most afraid of change."

Meeting professionals should find power in being bold, he said, and use AI as their partner in that pursuit.

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Q&A with Melissa A. Riley
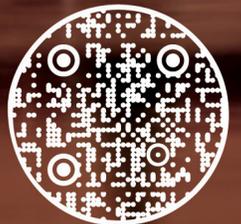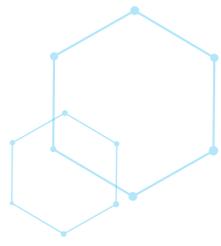
SVP Convention Sales & Services
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MPI: How are destinations using AI to help their customers excel?

Riley: AI is a relatively new tool, and we are just beginning to understand its capabilities and how it applies overall to hospitality and specifically to business events. As with any new technology, it has pros and cons. As it becomes more sophisticated, there will be AI platforms for meeting professionals to know what worked and to share feedback on events. In many cases, destinations are embracing AI for marketing purposes and creative design.

Why is it imperative for the meeting and hospitality industries to embrace AI tools?

AI can provide solutions and connect industry professionals in several ways, but we must take a balanced approach. It cannot be all things to all people and comes with risk. Know its capabilities and be vigilant with fact-checking. As our industry adopts the new technology, keeping up with its quick evolution is important.

What is your organization's sentiment on AI?

Destination DC is just now exploring the tools available. Industry focus groups are helping us realize the needs of our customers and embrace certain areas where AI can benefit them. However, AI can never replace the subject matter experts and destination experts of a DMO. Therefore, we are cautiously optimistic of its potential to enhance what we already offer customers.

How are cities using AI to attract leisure and business travel?

For suppliers, AI can be especially helpful as a prospecting tool. The level of detail provided allows for greater data analysis to assess and support leisure and business travelers. AI's strength is helping visitors plan their trips with personalized search experiences and providing activities for focused interests. This will help surface the small and local businesses that don't have big marketing budgets. Hopefully we'll be able to use AI for more personalized experiences and for providing sustainable travel options. AI is also a great tool for brainstorming ideas and kickstarting initiatives. But be cautious of using it for real time data and precision.

Destination DC, the official destination marketing organization for the nation's capital, is a private, nonprofit membership organization committed to marketing the area as a premier global convention, tourism and special events destination with a special emphasis on the arts, cultural and historic communities. For more information, visit washington.org.

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About Dani Kloap

Dani Kloap serves MPI as the Manager of Curriculum. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism and a Master of Arts in Adult Education. She pulls from her experiences as a journalist, graphic designer, salesperson and association professional to create engaging educational experiences to provide both personal and professional development. Dani loves designing curriculum and providing quality education for the meeting and event industry.