

CVENT HOSPITALITY CLOUD PRESENTS

2016 TRENDS REPORT AND 2017 FORECAST



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2017 MEETINGS AND EVENTS FORECAST

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PART 001

2016 MEETINGS AND EVENTS TRENDS



The meeting and event industry thrived alongside 2016's flourishing economy, with positive indicators at every turn. Hotels and venues experienced the highest demand since 2007, challenging them to address leads with innovation, service, and flexible meeting environments.

In the first half of Cvent's two-part report, we'll tackle the trends that drove the industry in 2016, including planner insights, technology improvements, and branding growth. In the second half, we'll share our forecasts for 2017 for the same categories and more.

MEETINGS AS EXPERIENCES

Two-thirds of planners surveyed by Successful Meetings said that creating compelling meeting experiences was one of the most important priorities for effective meetings in 2016. Venues responded by introducing captivating experiences onsite for groups, such as teambuilding, guided hands-on activities, and experiential learning.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

CWT's Fall 2015 Survey found that security went from a hot-button issue to a planner's highest priority in 2016. Planners sought out technology that would help communicate vital information and react quickly in case of an emergency, helping put attendees, staff, and venues at ease.

VIRTUAL SITE INSPECTIONS

The International Association of Conference Center members reported an increase in marketing coordinators, human resource professionals, department heads, and executive assistants who were also tasked with planning meetings. Facing other higher-priority responsibilities, these occasional planners relied on venues to offer tools like 360-degree video, photos, virtual meeting layouts, and Google Street View to aid in research and remote site inspections.

SELLER'S MARKET AND NEGOTIATIONS

CWT predicted earlier in the year that room rates would increase by 4.3 percent. The GBTA Global Travel Price Outlook 2016 stated that while new hotels added more than 100,000 new rooms to the market in 2015, demand continues to quadruple the rate of supply. This seller's market caused challenges for meeting owners, as suppliers in high-demand markets began omitting or reducing flexibility in attrition, cancellation, and F&B. With high demand for venues in top-tier destinations, planners had to work faster and further in advance to secure their top venue choices to increase their negotiating power.

INCREASED MEETING BUDGETS

Inspired by the strong economy, meeting owners across the globe increased meeting budgets in larger increments than in previous years. The combination of growing meeting size and budgets was a healthy sign for the industry. However, these budget increases were balanced with rising hotel rates, and meeting owners remained focused on monitoring spend on activities and cost per attendee.

HEALTHIER AND PRICIER F&B

The Destination Hotels' "State of the Industry" survey revealed that two-thirds of the planners surveyed rated food and beverage pricing as a 9 or 10 out of 10 in importance when sourcing a venue. As attendees expressed desire for more plant-based, gluten-free, and organic options, the simultaneous rise in the price of those ingredients and products put this much-loved food trend out of reach for planners on a strict budget.

SHARING ECONOMY AND CORPORATE TRAVEL

A study by Allianz Global Assistance USA showed that a growing number of millennial business travelers trusted non-traditional companies like Uber, Lyft, and Airbnb. While first met with distrust from corporate travel managers because of a lack of policy, Airbnb now has active policies in place for business travelers, attracting partnerships with BCD Travel, Carlson Wagonlit Travel, and American Express Global Business Travel.

 **TWEET THIS:**

**DEMAND CONTINUES
TO QUADRUPLE THE
RATE OF SUPPLY.**

**NEW #HOTELS ADDED
+100K NEW ROOMS
IN 2015.**

MEETING PLANNER BEHAVIOR



According to the Cornell Center for Hospitality Research, millennials are expected to make up 50 percent of all visitors to the U.S. by 2025. Hotels worked to redefine their strategies around this growing audience's personal preferences and habits, such as an expectation for personalized marketing, bespoke experiences, and their quick adoption of new technology. Hotels responded by creating marketing campaigns and property amenities that focused on memorable moments and modern technology.

REINVENTION OF LEGACY HOTEL BRANDS

With millennials driven more by novelty and less by brand loyalty, hotels adapted by moving away from their traditional, cookie-cutter aesthetics, replacing them with unique amenities and experiences, such as local design touches, communal spaces, and digital connectivity. Legacy brands also launched millennial-focused concepts to their collections. At Marriott's Moxy Hotels, guests check in at the bar and are treated to fast and free Wi-Fi. Similarly, Radisson Red offers an app that allows you to check in and order drinks from the bar.

VALUE OF MILLENNIAL TALENT

Because millennial hotel employees identify and empathize with their customer counterparts, hotels focused on long-term retention of millennial talent, deeming it essential for future success. To instill millennial employees with a sense of ownership, hotels focused on engaging and empowering this group with incentives and accountability to creatively deliver personalized guest experiences.

MILLENNIAL MEETING PLANNERS

Last year, millennial planners solidified their roles as change makers in the meeting and events industry.

- They embraced shorter and more succinct meeting presentations and education sessions.
- The oldest millennial planners, now in their late 20's and early 30's, hold senior roles in their organizations and have observed how technology transformed and redefined the way they do business.
- They expect a seamless digital experience throughout the planning process, from sourcing, to making conference services requests, to communicating with attendees post-conference.
- Venues began offering digital and social media services to further assist planners. Options included ready-made websites and social media content to help attendees explore the destination.
- Because millennial planners favored personal, engaging proposals over generic sales presentations, more venues responded to RFPs with bespoke meeting solutions aimed to make clients feel genuinely valued.
- Millennial planners relied on venues to offer strong Wi-Fi that would allow attendees to interact digitally with fellow participants, speakers, meeting staff, and meeting content.
- They relied on venues to offer mobile-friendly meeting information when researching and sourcing venues on-the-go.
- To introduce attendees to new places and experiences, millennial planners increasingly sought out unique venues and destinations in smaller markets.

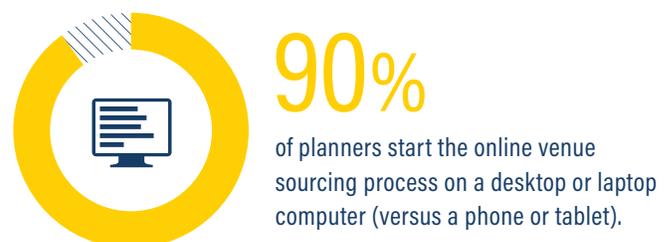
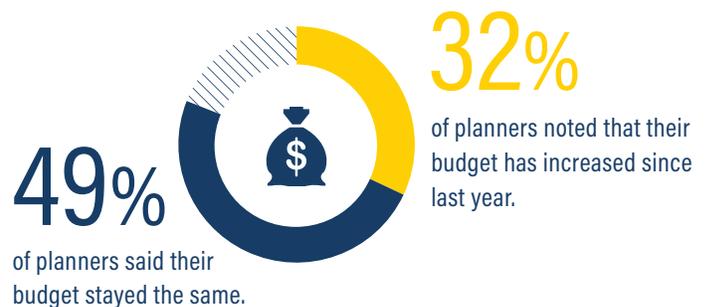
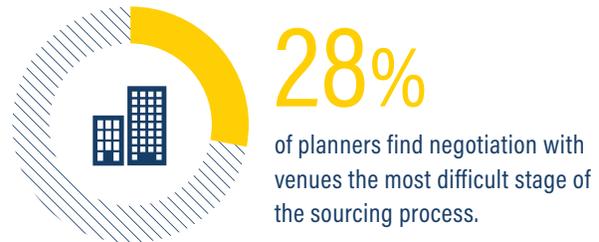
 **TWEET THIS:**

**2/3 OF PLANNERS SURVEYED
RATED F&B PRICING
AS A 9 OR 10 OUT OF 10
IN IMPORTANCE WHEN
#SOURCING A VENUE.**

CVENT 2016 PLANNER SOURCING REPORT

In 2016, Cvent surveyed more than 700 meeting planners (35 percent were millennials) for first-hand insight on their sourcing behaviors.

The results showed that both the advances in event planning processes and the convergence of millennial planners are changing how venues should compete for group business.



- 33 percent of planners said that positive reviews are the number one influence on their destination choice, followed closely by brand/reputation, with 31 percent.
- Speed (36 percent) and thoroughness (33 percent) were the top two elements planners said hotels could improve upon when responding to RFPs.

To see all the results, [check out the full report here](#).

MEETING TECHNOLOGY THAT DOMINATED 2016



Meeting planners started leveraging tech trends more than ever in 2016, and not just at the event itself. Meeting tech also played a huge part in their sourcing processes, including researching, site visits, supplier communication, and booking. Corbin Ball, CSP, CMP, an independent third-party consultant focusing on meeting technology, shares a review of the technology that made headlines in the meetings industry in 2016.

SECOND SCREEN TECHNOLOGY

Second screen technology allowed event attendees to interact with each other, view content, and consume beyond the speaker's presentation on stage (considered the "first screen"). This technology turned the presentation dynamic upside down, notes Ball. Instead of attendees passively listening to a one-way presentation, audience engagement tools allowed attendees to chat with the speaker, answer polling questions, and look up more information on the presentation topic right from their seat.

EVENT DATA COLLECTION

Meetings used to be the "black hole" of event data management, says Ball. Planners were able to get information before and after an event, but were flying blind onsite. Now with mobile apps and beacon technology, planners manage real-time polls, social media monitoring, crowd flow, and dwell times to tailor each event experience. This real-time collection of data offered planners a goldmine of intelligence to improve events, engage participants, market to the right audiences, and make mid-course corrections.

WEARABLE TECH

Fueled by the release of the Apple Watch and fitness bands, many companies started developing wearable beacons that attach to attendee badges. This enabled attendees to use their badges as entrance tickets, cashless payments, and tracker reminders for which exhibit booths they visited. These beacons also provided the event planners with a wealth of data for future planning.

SOCIAL MEDIA IMAGES AND VIDEO

Planners understood that events were great sources of videos and images for attendees. They leveraged technology to broaden their events' social footprints and increase attendee engagement, such as using **Social Media Walls** to display posts from Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook that included the event's hashtag. Events also took advantage of Snapchat Live Stories, which allowed attendees to contribute to a collective "live story" with other meeting participants. Facebook's auto playing video became a natural tool for attendees to use onsite, and steaming video apps also made their way into meetings.

MOBILE EVENT APPS

Mobile event apps gave planners the ability to streamline their processes, including attendee lists, event itineraries, program surveys, and budgets all in one place. At the same time, apps put event schedules and one-on-one networking opportunities right at attendees' fingertips.

AUGMENTED REALITY AND VIRTUAL REALITY

Both augmented reality and virtual reality (VR) received major investments in the past year. VR worked its way into events, engaging attendees in immersive experiences. Venues leveraged the technology for realistic site inspections with meeting planners and to redefine virtual meetings, allowing a remote attendee to join in.



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2016 BRANDING TRENDS



Digital marketing became a top priority for hotels and venues in 2016, with 69 percent focusing on content marketing and 53 percent using mobile apps and social media as their primary channel for driving engagement. The last few years have seen plenty of growth in hospitality marketing, and the growth is far from over. Mobile is rapidly expanding, and marketing technology is breaking more ground every year, changing how hotels market and sell experiences.

Here are the major **digital marketing developments** the hotel industry experienced in 2016:

DATA-DRIVEN MARKETING

Some of the most valuable insight hotels receive comes from a client's first website visit, including first clicks and the number of page views. Once hotels meshed their present knowledge of the target audience with observed website behaviors, it became much simpler to determine the content, messaging, and campaigns that would resonate and drive more direct bookings.

The number of guests willing to offer personal details in exchange for tailored hotel marketing also grew in 2016. A hotel loyalty study by Sabre and Forrester in 2015 showed that more than 50 percent of travelers said they wouldn't mind sharing personal details if the hotel were to offer relevant rewards, loyalty points, and discounts.



50%

of travelers said they wouldn't mind sharing personal details if the hotel provided something in return.

BIG BRAND APPS

Large hospitality brands designed mobile apps that would enhance the user's experience throughout the entire travel journey. The Four Seasons mobile app allows guests to share preferences to personalize their stay, order room service, check in and out, and explore destination experiences curated by mood or proximity. Hilton's HHonors App offers room selection 24 hours before arrival, digital keys, digital check-in, and the ability to hail an Uber.

MORE MOBILE BOOKINGS

On average, 21 percent of hotel bookings were made on mobile devices in 2016. Plus, 65 percent of travelers make same-day hotel reservations on their phones. Hotels got serious about mobile in 2016, integrating mobile marketing strategies that included mobile-compatible booking engines, responsive websites, and marketing emails. Mobile Google searches in the travel category increased more than 50 percent, and mobile web conversions for travel purchases grew 88 percent.

RETARGETING TECHNOLOGIES

While nothing new to the retail industry, retargeting became a sought after tool by hotels looking to recapture abandoned bookings. Hotels turned to tactics such as ad and email retargeting to deflect traffic from OTAs and to increase their direct booking revenue. [Video retargeting](#) combined the experiential benefits of video with concise targeting using Google technology.

 **TWEET THIS:**

**65% OF #TRAVELERS
MADE SAME-DAY #HOTEL
RESERVATIONS ON THEIR
PHONES IN 2016.**

INFLUENCER MARKETING

More hotels grew comfortable vetting and inviting social media influencers to create content and videos onsite. Hotels leveraged the influencer's content in brand ads to accelerate the travel journey, on the property website to drive direct bookings, and on social media to create top-of-funnel awareness. Hotels also reached new audiences when influencers deployed the content onto their own social media channels.

USER-GENERATED CONTENT

This year, more hotels decided to leverage User-Generated Content (UGC) to their advantage, understanding that UGC impacted the hotel's reputation and success. Hotels once weary of UGC started encouraging content by running contests on social media. In 2017, more hotels will upgrade these methods by implementing tools to deliberately convert guests into social advocates.

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2016 INDUSTRY TRENDS



In 2016, all signs pointed to continued ADR increases and healthy demand. However, hotels addressed a ballooning list of client expectations, while guests enjoyed more options than ever before. To implement strategies that drove revenue goals, hoteliers explored how major market changes were impacting sales, services, operations, and marketing.

Here are the trends that changed the face of the industry in 2016.

ECONOMY

POSITIVE GROWTH

In 2015, every hospitality key performance indicator increased, and in 2016 the forecast included a 1.4 percent increase in demand, 5 percent increase in ADR, 0.8 percent increase in occupancy, and a 5.8 percent increase for RevPAR.

GLOBAL GROWTH

The global travel industry saw steady growth, with a predicted increase of 4-5 percent in outbound trips. Worldwide outbound trips rose by 3.9 percent from January to August 2016, with Chinese and South Korean

travelers as the key growth drivers. Meanwhile, North America and the Caribbean each drew in 4 percent more visitors, while Europe's global visitors increased by 2.9 percent. Despite growing concern, political unrest and terror attacks did not impact the overall volume of worldwide outbound trips, though it did affect the choice of destination.

LABOR COSTS

An ongoing concern for hotel operators was the cost of labor. The call for a \$15 national minimum wage gained traction, with several cities launching successful "Fight for \$15" campaigns. This unnerved many hospitality operators, including hotels and restaurants, whose workers at the lower end of the wage spectrum have been most vocal.

SHARING ECONOMY

AIRBNB MANAGEMENT COMPANIES

Business bookings on Airbnb tripled in 2016. This success spawned a new niche of management companies that assist Airbnb hosts with cleaning, guest communication, key swap, decorating, and price automation – all in exchange for a cut of their bookings. As both guests and hosts become more sophisticated in their expectations and offerings, this new ecosystem is a sign that Airbnb is a maturing marketplace.

HOTELS & SHARING EXPERIENCES

To encourage its guests to make meaningful connections, Marriott teamed up with the MIT Mobile Experience Lab to develop an app that allows neighboring guests with shared interests to connect with one another. Hotels such as Ace Hotels are turning their lobby areas into shared community lounges and workspaces. Some boutique and independent hotels began listing unoccupied rooms on Airbnb – lured by the low 3 percent booking commission, as compared to an OTA's 25 percent.

Other travel companies have recognized the value in building strategic alliances. A partnership between Starwood and Uber allows riders to earn Starwood points in their loyalty program. KLM partnered with Airbnb to allow KLM passengers to book Airbnb reservations directly from the KLM Website.

Skift CEO Rafat Ali predicts, “Airbnb won’t be as transformative for hotels, as Uber was to the taxi industry, but it may be the next big distribution channel, surpassing OTAs.”



 TWEET THIS:

EXPERIENTIAL #TRAVEL IS ABOUT GETTING PERSONAL WITH WHAT #LOCALS EXPERIENCE NATURALLY.

LOCALIZED EXPERIENCES

CONTINUED PRODUCT EVOLUTION

“Hotel owners and hospitality brands are recognizing and understanding consumers’ growing appetite for authentic, local discovery and for a different product all together,” says Dave Spector, partner at Tambourine, a marketing technology company that has worked with more than 1,000 hotels and resorts across the globe. He adds that owners and hotel markets must remember that the third leg of marketing is the product itself.

ADOPTION OF A LOCAL MINDSET

Whether promoting a small boutique hotel or a global brand, hotel marketers must make a mental shift to start thinking like locals. Where does the hotel stand in the context of the destination? What do true locals do each day? Where do they eat, where are their favorite places to go, what traditions do they follow, and what do they do on the weekends? Experiential travel is about getting personal with what locals experience naturally.

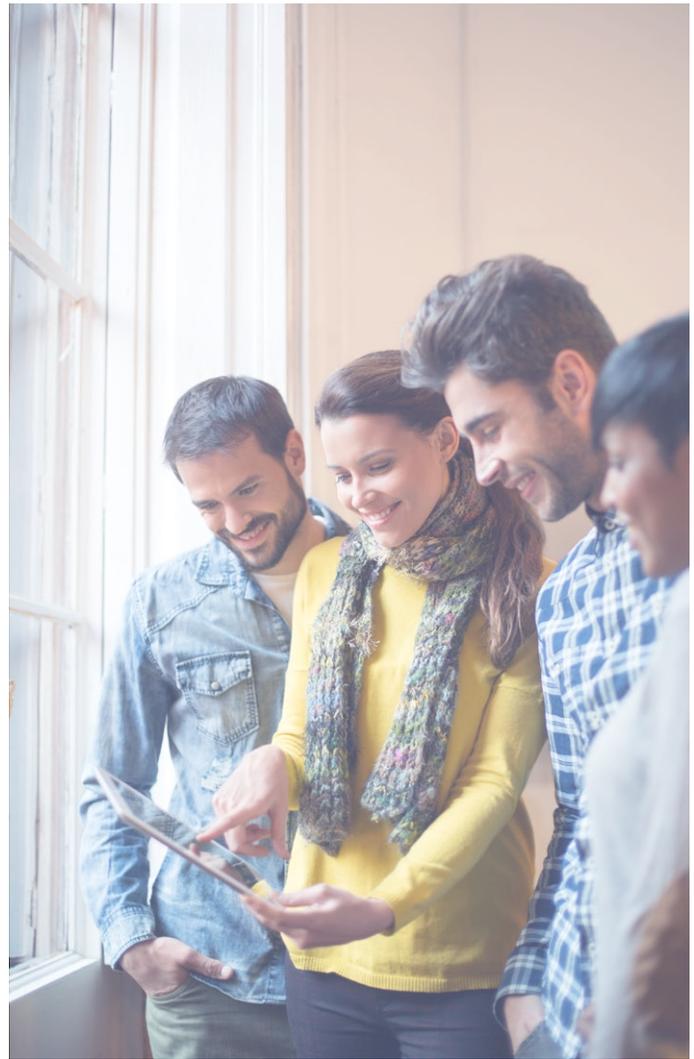
Hotels will continue to collaborate with the local community to help immerse guests in local culture. True locals are seen as coveted resources of destination information and the key to an authentic, remarkable experience. Hotels will venture out more to build these connections and then work alongside them to answer the call of experiential travelers.

SUMMARY

The hotel and meetings industry enjoyed a flourishing year, with venues experiencing the highest demand in ten years. As a result, planners had to work faster and plan further in advance to secure their top-choice venue. Safety and security became planners' greatest priorities, and hotels redefined their marketing strategies and guest experiences based on millennial preferences and habits.

The 2016 Cvent Planner Sourcing Report shared thorough insight on planners' sourcing behaviors, revealing that up to 90 percent of planners start the venue sourcing process on a laptop or desktop computer versus a tablet or smartphone. The increased accessibility to virtual reality made headlines in events, while data collection allowed planners to leverage real-time information to enhance their event and drive its success. Large hospitality brands introduced mobile apps to amplify the guest experience, with features including room selection, digital check-in, and curated destination recommendations.

The success of companies like Uber and Airbnb spurred hotels to look into strategic alliances that would bring the sharing experience to their own guests. Overall, hotels continued to expand their products to answer travelers' growing appetite for local and authentic discovery.



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PART 002

2017 MEETINGS AND EVENTS FORECAST



As companies come to rely on the strategic role that meetings and events play in achieving business goals, meeting planners turn to innovative and tech-forward tools to optimize the attendee experience, tailor content to attendee preferences, and measure ROI.

From increasing group hotel rates to meeting new content standards, here are the trends predicted to shape the meetings and events industry in 2017.

HARD SELLER'S MARKET

Hotel demand in North America will exceed supply, giving venues the **continued advantage in sales negotiations**. Mid-tier properties will see the highest demand for the sixth straight year, with more mid-tier property launches planned in 2017 than any other property type, including luxury openings. The industry will also see a growing demand for unique venue choices. The AMEX 2017 Global Meetings and Events Forecast anticipates demand for non-traditional meeting spaces to increase by 3.8 percent.

GROWING GROUP RATES

The average group hotel rate is expected to climb between 1.2 percent and 3.7 percent in 2017. Last year, the predicted increase was between 1.5 percent and 4.2 percent.

INCREASED GROUP AIR RATES

The AMEX 2017 forecast suggests airline rates will continue to climb, with a predicted rise of 1.4 percent to 4.3 percent. About 50 percent of the survey's participants state that group air rates influence their destination decision.



EXPERIENCE DESIGN

According to IACC, planners will focus even more on creative experiences in 2017, seeking collaborative, flexible meeting spaces and access to interactive technology. “Experiential design is akin to theater. Directors have stages. Planners stage immersive productions using venue spaces,” said Dianne Devitt, chief experience officer at DND Group and adjunct associate professor at the New York University Tisch Center for Hospitality and Tourism. “Experience design is a new area of expertise that combines creative and strategy.”

IMMERSIVE EDUCATION

Whether at a 10-person executive retreat or a 15,000-person corporate conference, planners will incorporate participation-driven and immersive educational experiences to achieve more attendee satisfaction and deeper engagement. Once experimental, the idea of pulling attendees both physically and emotionally into educational presentations will become the new norm for meetings and events of all kinds.

DATA MINING

New data collecting capabilities and analyzing solutions will play a huge role in meeting and events this year. Today's technology, like event apps, allows planners to optimize their events by generating, collecting, and interpreting attendee data in real-time. Once collected, planners make knowledge-based decisions on boosting effectiveness and relevancy at future events.

WI-FI STILL INDUSTRY'S NO. 1 PRIORITY

High-quality broadband internet will remain the meeting industry's top priority. According to the Meeting Room of the Future by International Association of Conference Centers, venues will be investing in bandwidth, A/V equipment, and collaborative technology as a response to meeting planner feedback in 2017.

MEETING PLANNER BEHAVIOR



As the meeting industry becomes more sophisticated, planners will continue to redefine their complex roles. Planners' main priority will be delivering ROI for their organizations, leaving less time for smaller tasks such as F&B decisions, coordinating event marketing, and sourcing multiple vendors. Looking ahead, the industry will see more roles that segment major tasks needed for a successful event, including director of client experiences, director of sensory events, and event stylist.

MILLENNIAL MEETING PLANNERS

The Deloitte Millennial Survey estimates the millennial generation will constitute up to 75 percent of the global workforce by 2025. With millennial planners already filling a sizable percentage of senior roles in their organizations, they're continuing to drive change and innovation throughout the entire event planning industry.

UNIVERSAL MEETING MINDSET

It is evident that the lines between generations are fluid, and the trends that millennials first ushered into the industry are shaping planner preferences across all generations.

In *Destination Marketing: The New Wave*, a study by

Marketing Challenges International, hospitality consultant David Kliman, CMP, CMM, said, "The perception that all millennials just want to look at a screen and not pick up the phone is just not true. Just like other generations, they want suppliers who know them well....They seek trusted relationships and guard them zealously."

While marketers are quick to point out the defining characteristics that make up the millennial generation, this cohort is not much different from its predecessors in values, goals, and pain points for planning a meeting. And while technology has changed the way millennial planners research, communicate, and plan, they are not the only planners who want to harness technology for a better planning and meeting experience.

CVENT 2016 PLANNER LOYALTY STUDY

In 2016, Cvent surveyed 500 meeting planners to uncover what drives their return to the same venue for multiple events. The survey also highlighted the assumed motivations from venues, including what they believe drives planner loyalty.

The resulting report offers an inside look at the planner perspective, giving venues an opportunity to improve their group sales practices. Here are some of the most notable findings:

- There is an 87 percent chance that planners will return to a venue on the condition that seven factors are met – planner reward incentives, staff professionalism, location expectations, guest room availability, meeting space availability, food and beverage quality, and prompt RFP response.
- Loyalty to a trusted venue is high among all three generations of planners surveyed – millennials, Gen X, and baby boomers.



42%

of planners said they would recommend an exceptional venue to a colleague.



31%

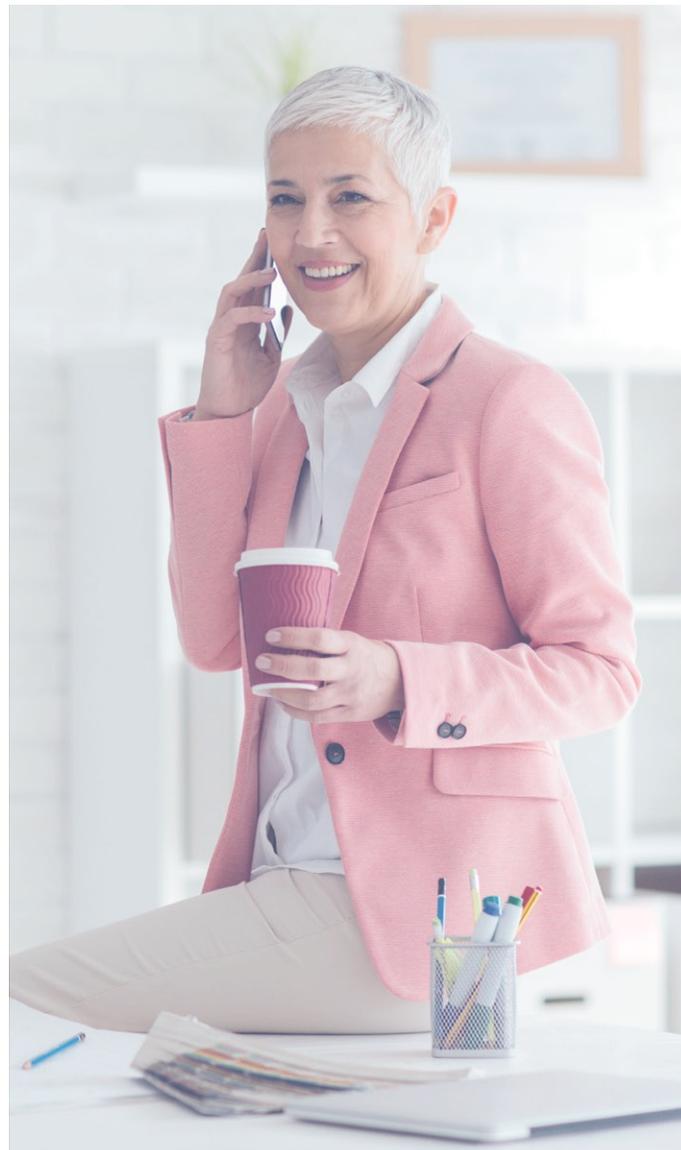
of planners stated they heard about the repeat venue originally from a colleague, proving that planners are influenced heavily by recommendations from social and professional peers.

- Hotel sales staff plays a vital role in how planners discover venues, stressing an importance on intuitive onsite service and client support.
- Venues overestimate planners' use of search engines and third-party websites to find a venue.

For complete details, download the [Cvent Planner Loyalty Study](#).

 TWEET THIS:

92% OF PLANNERS
HAVE BROUGHT REPEAT
BUSINESS TO A VENUE,
WHICH WAS 24%
HIGHER THAN WHAT
VENUES EXPECTED.



MEETING TECHNOLOGY IN 2017



Meeting technology is swiftly growing in both variety and adoption rates. “I’ve never seen a faster or broader range of technology in meetings,” said Corbin Ball, CSP, CMP, an independent third-party consultant focusing on meeting technology. Ball tracks up to 1,700 meeting tech products and explains the technology trends that will shape meetings, planner decisions, and the attendee experience in 2017.

EVENT INTELLIGENCE AND ANALYTICS

The power of meetings is skyrocketing, not simply due to the healthy global economy, but because of the wealth of data that allows planners and meeting owners to measure their events’ ROI. While 2016 saw a boom in data technology (mobile event apps, beacons, and digital polling and surveys), 2017 will be focused on cloud-based technology that will collect, sort, and analyze data from all sources.

Planners will leverage this newfound ability to track the entire ecosystem of their events, from the moment an attendee arrives to the type of room or transportation

they prefer. Not only will planners be able to make mid-course corrections during the event itself, but they can also leverage data analytics to better predict and boost ROI for future meetings.

Event data will also boost proficiency for group sales professionals and accelerate their ability to pursue quality business. **Lead Scoring** (available in the Cvent Hospitality Cloud) automatically scores and prioritizes leads based on preferences set by the venue. Leads are given scores based on profitability, lead size, and overall best fit, allowing deadline-laden sales managers to quickly prioritize group booking requests and maximize conversions.

ENGAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY

Planners recognize the ROI of an engaged attendee. They're more active, more committed to getting value out of the event, and are likely to rate the event higher and encourage others to return to the same event. Planners will leverage engagement tools to amplify the impact of their face-to-face events, such as social media walls, matchmaking, networking tools, microphone apps for attendee access, and social media tracking.

LIVE STREAMING

Channels like Facebook Live, Instagram Story, Snapchat Story, and now LinkedIn with Quora-style Q&A with business influencers are changing attendees' expectations of event content. Planners will leverage live video streaming to provide added value to companies and presenters, to gather and curate content posted from attendees, increase event reach by broadening the virtual audience, stream and record key components of presentations to extra viewers, and highlight sponsors and their products.



MARKETING AUTOMATION

Marketing automation streamlines marketing tasks to generate, qualify, and nurture leads, manage marketing activities, and measure success. Unfortunately, events have been on the sideline of marketing automation since it was difficult to track an event's offline activity. Now event data can move seamlessly from the conference floor to sales and marketing departments. Implementing marketing automation tools helps companies develop a 360-degree profile of attendees, with data from event registration, event email campaigns, and feedback surveys automatically traveling into a company's marketing contact database and to sales reps.

VIRTUAL AND AUGMENTED REALITY

Shangri-La Hotels offers downloadable Oculus Rift VR site inspection tours, and the Las Vegas Convention Authority offers a downloadable VR app to explore attractions and adventures throughout the city. Hotels can now partake in virtual reality room diagramming, where they can customize the view of a venue space according to the planner's needs. "It's about selling a dream," Ball adds.

Event gamification has also gained considerable popularity following the huge success of Pokémon Go, a mobile augmented reality game. It will be a natural step for planners to leverage similar augmented reality games for elevating attendee engagement at events.

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2017 BRANDING TRENDS



The constant evolution of digital marketing and increasing reliance on online revenue sources is challenging hotels to sharpen their marketing tools. Dave Spector, partner at Tambourine, is quick to point out that branding trends do not apply universally to all hotels. “The owner of a 50-room hotel in Little Rock will leverage branding and marketing tools differently than the vice president of marketing for the Hilton brand,” he notes.

Here are the 2017 trends anticipated to impact how hotels reach new audiences, encourage direct bookings, and create more guest engagement using brand awareness.

TOTAL CUSTOMER PROFILING

Spector predicts hotels will see the first successful concept of total customer profiling when property management systems (PMS) automatically update marketing teams with personal guest information. The process will also work in reverse. Data on a guest’s behavior and reaction to a marketing campaign will then be stored to the PMS or CRM, giving hoteliers a fully integrated profile to better understand and market to their audience.

BRANDED EXPERIENCES

While activities and tours are not new to hospitality, hotels are now curating local experiences for their specific audiences and leveraging them as perks of booking direct. Peninsula Hotels, Four Seasons, and Wyndham have already started to offer exclusive curated experiences to their loyalty members who book direct, such as a cooking class in Shanghai, a Dubai desert safari, and a Mexico City street food tour.

BRANDS AS AGENTS

When AccorHotels launched “the first worldwide hotel marketplace,” allowing independent hotels access to Accor’s digital marketing services and booking portal, it was a bold move to openly compete with OTAs. Starwood followed up with the Starwood Tribute Portfolio, a collection of independent hotels that joined Starwood without losing their unique identity. This trend allows smaller hotels to reach a wider audience and decrease their reliance on OTAs.

HYPER-ACCELERATED CONTENT GROWTH

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg explained that the social media content each person produces will essentially double each year, leading to enormous growth and variety across a wide range of platforms. Hotels will need to become even more creative and strategic when creating relevant content that differentiates their brand experience online.

DATA-DRIVEN MARKETING

With major advances in data collection and analytic technology, data is a hotel’s biggest asset in 2017. A hotel’s revenue will rely on how well it leverages data to anticipate guest needs and deliver personalized experiences. Kimpton Hotels tracks what its loyalty members share on social media, including what they eat and drink, and are known to surprise guests with their favorite snack at check-in. Best Western uses geo-targeting in email campaigns to provide relevant offers to guests based on where they are at any given time.

 **TWEET THIS:**

WITH MAJOR ADVANCES
IN #DATA COLLECTION &
ANALYTIC TECHNOLOGY,
DATA IS A #HOTEL'S
BIGGEST ASSET IN 2017.

SOCIAL ADVOCACY

Nielsen Media stated that 83 percent of people trust recommendations from friends and family over any other form of marketing. In 2017, hotels will turn to guests for valuable extensions of their own marketing teams. Hotel social advocacy platforms like Flip.to help hotels incentivize guests to express their excitement about their upcoming stay to their own social connections, who are also incentivized to share their email address for future marketing.



83%

of people trust recommendations from friends and family over any other form of marketing.



HOTEL MARKETING AS DESTINATION MARKETING

Modern travelers are looking for experiences beyond the four walls of their guestroom and want to gain a new appreciation for the destination they’re visiting. Hotels will continue to answer this call by positioning their properties as the center of the destination experience, and if they are strategic, they’ll sell the destination first and the hotel second, said Spector.

TWO-WAY APP MESSAGING

Hilton is now focused on bringing two-way live messaging to their HHonors app this year. Many hotels are investing in this capability as well, which will allow them to not only engage with the guest directly via the hotel app, but also seamlessly react to the guests' needs and predict those needs based on past preferences and behaviors. This personalization will drive marketing to service guests with the right offers at the right time.

TAILORED MARKETING EXPERIENCES

Personalization started gaining serious momentum last year, allowing hotels to welcome return visitors by name, place them in the same room, automatically change prices according to country, discount prices for guests in drive markets, and change the website experience based on whether they are a business traveler versus leisure traveler. Hotels without accurate profiles of their guests will be at a disadvantage, so personalization marketing must be preempted by robust data collection.

EMERGENCE OF AI AND MARKETING AUTOMATION

In 2016, Expedia Inc. Chairman Barry Diller predicted artificial intelligence (AI) would be the next big thing to transform the travel industry. The goal is to augment human intelligence and interact with travelers in a human way. Hilton began experimenting with a new robot concierge named Connie, which assists guests with activity, dining, and experience suggestions based on information from IBM Watson and AI engine for travel, WayBlazer.

Robots aside, AI is seen as the next wave of marketing automation for the hospitality industry. It is data-based and can sift through tedious amounts of information to give a tailored online experience for every traveler and every trip.



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2017 INDUSTRY FORECAST



Evolving guest expectations are prompting hotels to upgrade to new methods of reaching modern travelers. Technology will further influence every facet of the industry, from the way hotels engage with guests to the way they customize their stay. Here is what the new year and new hotel landscape will bring.

TECHNOLOGY

DIRECT BOOKING MOVEMENT

The very public and deliberate direct booking campaigns by Hilton and Marriot in 2016 accelerated a resounding buzz across the industry, said Dave Spector of Tambourine. The combination of new hotel construction,

Airbnb, peaking occupancy, and pricing power is squeezing hotel margins even lower – especially after paying 25-30 percent OTA commissions for 50 percent of all bookings. “This is a wake-up call,” Spector said. “Hoteliers can’t control all of the factors driving their margins, but one thing they have control over is where they get business.” The economics of the hotel industry will put more pressure on properties to invest in digital marketing efforts instead of relying on third parties.

MOBILE INVESTMENTS

Hotel Technology's *Lodging Technology Study* found that 54 percent of hotel properties will spend more on technology this year to meet escalating guest expectations. Mobile solutions will dominate the list of hotel investments, ranging from mobile keys and mobile payments to improving data accessibility and security.



54%

of hotel properties will spend more on technology this year to meet escalating guest expectations.



FASTER BANDWIDTH

Hotel industry tech experts anticipate hotels investing more in bandwidth speeds this year, since more guests are streaming video and bringing multiple devices during their stay. Expedia and Egencia study found that when traveling, smartphones are the single most indispensable item according to travelers.

ONSITE TECH AMENITIES

Hotels continue to upgrade guestrooms with new tech-fueled experiences. Aria Resort & Casino in Las Vegas loaded hotel tablets in all of its 4,004 guestrooms, allowing guests to tailor their stays with spa appointments, one-touch housekeeping requests, in-room dining orders, and access to news in multiple languages. Guests at Aloft Hotels can even customize lighting and temperature in their voice-activated rooms.

EMERGENCE OF GEN Z

Hotels are starting to get a glimpse of the generation ahead – Generation Z. This cohort comprises people born after 1995 and are described as digital natives who are more cautious, globally minded, and pragmatic than previous generations. Their potential spending power and size make them an important market to keep in mind.

Gen Z craves entertaining, meaningful, and memorable marketing media, such as Marriott's promotional short film, "Two Bellman," and W Hotel's Snapchat postcards.

SLOWING REVPAR AND ADR

STR predicts U.S. hotel demand to stay strong in 2017, based on a solid labor market, low inflation rates, stronger consumer spending, and accelerated housing activity. However, the climbing increase in supply will cause occupancy levels to even out.

MILLENNIAL AMENITIES AND COLLECTIONS

It was predicted that millennials will be the travel industry's biggest spenders in 2017. Progressive hotel chains have already launched millennial-friendly collections like Tru by Hilton, citizen M Hotels, and Radisson Red. There, guests are treated to complimentary Wi-Fi, communal spaces for social and professional activities, living room-inspired lobby spaces, food, and beverage concepts geared for mobile travelers on the go, and affordable minimalist luxury.

SUMMARY

The power of meetings will shine in 2017, as companies continue to rely on events to produce ROI directly connected to business objectives. The focus will be on the strategy of events and leveraging experiential design, immersive meeting content, and live event data and analytics to drive the attendee experience and achieve revenue goals. Hotel demand will outpace supply, giving venues the continued upper hand in sales negotiations, while planners are expected to face group rate increases. While millennial planners have driven change in the meetings industry with their preferences for intuitive technology, customized meetings solutions, and peer recommendations, studies show that these are now sentiments shared among modern meeting planners from all generations.

Meeting technology continues to move at lightning speed, with event intelligence seen as the leading force behind achieving an organization's goals. Data will also become a hotel marketer's biggest asset, allowing venues to personalize marketing experiences and create fully integrated customer profiles to drive direct bookings. Finally, hotels are expected to make major investments to improve Wi-Fi connectivity, tech amenities, and their brand's mobile experiences to exceed the expectations of today's guests.



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