

Addressing the Growing Generation of Millennials

By 2020, millennials will make up more than half of the global workforce and account for the largest segment of business travellers. Needless to say they are our future and there is no better time for organisations to explore the potential of this new market.

Words Aloysius Arlando

Millennials are a unique group, with expectations and experiences that are very different from the Gen-Xers and baby boomers we have been working with. In my opinion, to remain relevant and competitive, venues and association organisers need to recognise that they can no longer function on a 'one-size-fit-all' basis when it comes to event design and space planning. Instead, a deep understanding of the burgeoning group of millennials, who eventually will form the next generation of decision makers, is critical.

POWERED BY DATA & TECHNOLOGY

Events which are powered by data and technology and able to provide differentiated and authentic experiences will appeal to the young business travellers as they wish to stay connected throughout the customer journey. The instant gratification mind set of millennials also means that every touch point, both online and offline greatly matters – from technological integration to the onsite experience, food as well as venue setup.

Millennials want to be heard, hope to make a difference and crave affiliation with groups that they can identify with. Therefore, it is critical for event organisers and venue managers to keep young travellers actively engaged in inviting spaces, so that they can develop a strong sense of belonging. They often have short attention spans and lose interest quickly, hence the desire for concise, engaging and productive meetings which are out of the norm and less formal.

As millennials are deeply influenced by technology and extremely reliant on their smartphones and laptops, as a recent study by the Digital Marketing Resource Center concludes, only centres which are highly wired and able to provide stronger and more reliable and seamless WIFI coverage will be able to address the growing needs of these tech savvy visitors and make them feel at 'home'. Globally, association organisers are also increasingly making use of mobile apps to engage their target audience and create customised value propositions. What distinguishes a good venue from a truly world-class one will be how well it allows events partners to harness the potential of technology.

Singapore FinTech Festival (SFF), which is held yearly at the Singapore EXPO, for example, relied heavily on its mobile app to communicate with its attendees. To appeal to the millennial audience, who typically have many screens competing for their information all the time, the app was gamified and loaded with heavy and eye-catching images.

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

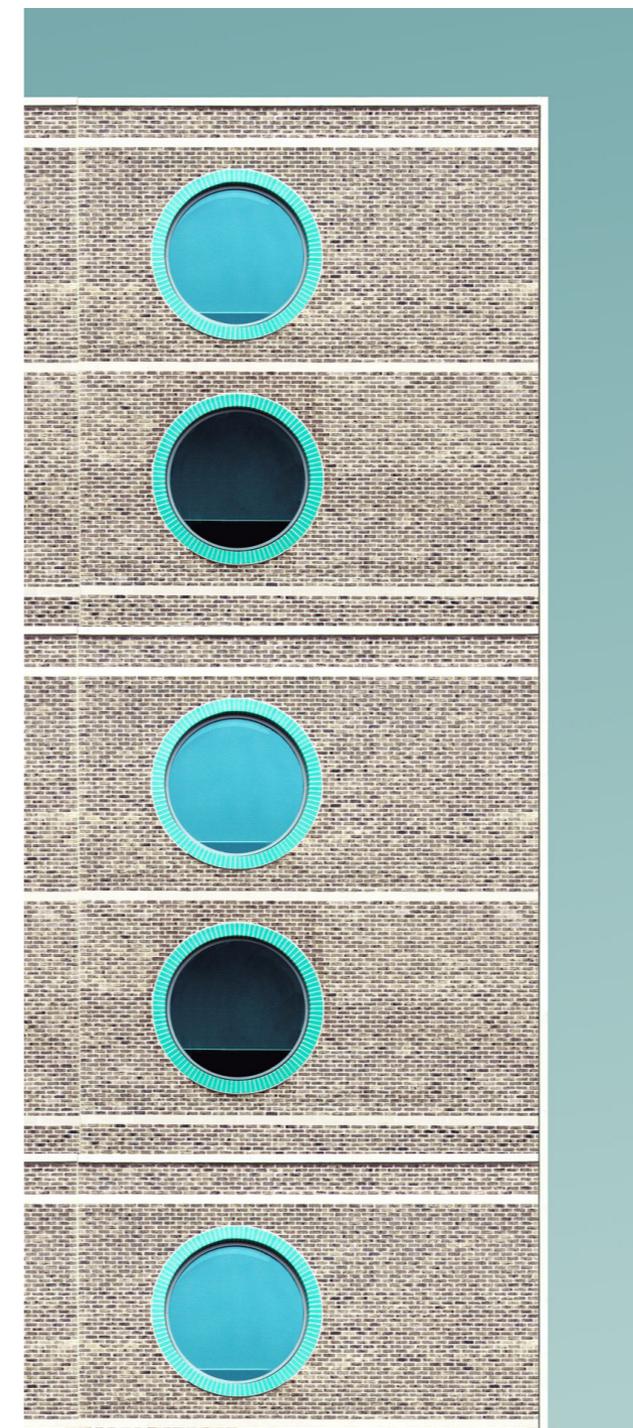
The younger group of business visitors values personal connections and desires to participate and immerse themselves in communities of like-minded individuals. Consequently, they are increasingly looking out for immersive learning and unique experience. Gone are the days where event organisers can involve their target audience in a one-to-many kind of dialogue. It is thus vital for venues to transform and begin to work

more closely with event organisers to create and deliver differentiated experiences that leave an impression on event attendees.

SFF also sought to appeal to the millennials' need for differentiated and authentic experiences by serving instagrammable fusion dishes such as "Nasi Lemak" (coconut infused fragrant rice dish), sushi on a conveyor belt and bite-size portioned food in brown bags to allow attendees to grab and go. In addition, the venue management worked closely with the event organiser to enhance creativity in event space design through multiple-themed zones to interest and engage even the young visitors. This includes the Sandbox which design was inspired by the Singapore vintage dragon-shaped playground, as well as the F&B zone with a Straits Chinese heritage theme.

Similarly, the past Echelon Asia Summit made use of bean bags instead of chairs to create an informal and conducive corner for ideation and community building. Instead of the usual catering, event organisers, through the assistance of the venue provider, brought in food trucks which served novel dishes to cater to the largely millennial crowd. Everything, including the meetings, exhibition, conference and dining are all meshed together into one large playground so that visitors stay continuously engaged.

While the orientation of most events is mostly decided by organisers, as venue providers, it is important that we keep abreast of the needs of the industry. Innovative event designs that are user-centric can only be made possible through active collaboration between organisers and venues. Venues ought to remain flexible and evolve their suite of services to suit the evolving needs of customers now and in the future.



In addition to his role as AIPC President, Aloysius Arlando is the CEO of SingEx Holdings, which manages, among other venues, the Singapore EXPO Convention and Exhibition Centre / AIPC represents a global network of over 185 leading centres in 60 countries with the active involvement of more than 900 management-level professionals worldwide
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