



How Millennials See Meetings Differently

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American Program Bureau

Speaking to the World for Over 50 Years

Millennials are the largest, most diverse, most educated and most connected generation of our time. At 80 million in the United States alone, they are a critical demographic to attract to your meetings and conventions. While older professionals seek the traditional meeting model, millennials are looking for something more interactive. Instead of a speaker giving a presentation for an hour, they would rather have the majority of that hour be Q&A. This is a generation that wants to be heard and have conversations instead of listening to a presentation straight through. The PCMA Education Foundation found that “old-school” meeting formats are the number one repellant for millennial attendees. It’s time to change the traditional speaker and panel formats to incorporate technology and audience participation.

Millennials find value in conferences and meetings, even though many don’t engage them properly. The Center for Exhibition Industry Research found that 61% of millennials believe they are more valuable today than they were two years ago. They feel this way because they are seeking networking and career opportunities more than ever before. Millennials are searching for rewarding jobs, so they view conferences as a way to connect with great organizations face-to-face.

In every industry, millennials are striving to be educated on important topics. They are just starting out in their careers and know that they will most likely change jobs, careers or industries

in the near future. Exposing them to your industry is important because it helps them decide what the possibilities are and what they enjoy the most. Choosing cutting-edge thought-leaders as your speakers will accelerate the ROI they perceive from the conference experience. They aren’t learning about career-related topics in college so they are using events and conferences in order to explore those topics instead.

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Technology is an important part of connecting with millennials, and they take free WiFi for granted. If you don’t provide it, they might not come at all. The best conferences are layering technology on top of the event with a mobile site, with social network sharing and connecting, and with games. This way, attendees and exhibitors/sponsors are more engaged with

the event and it becomes a form of entertainment, not just learning, for them.

Here are some tips to get millennials to attend your next event:

> **Market to their parents.** Based on a study I did a few years ago, we found that millennials view their parents as mentors, and influencers, over professors, friends and co-workers. By getting their parents involved in your organization and telling them to invite their children, you have a better chance of getting them to attend your events.

> **Create a “social” website.** Instead of just a basic website that lists your agenda and has a registration form, embed social media widgets that keep people updated on event reminders and the speaker roster. Have speakers write blog posts for you and allow visitors to post questions. Millennials are highly

connected and want to see that an association understands tech.

> **Choose big cities as venues.** Research shows that millennials want to live and go to big cities where there is public transportation and a lot of nighttime activities. They won't go to events in areas where there is nothing to do because there is less of a draw for them to go and enjoy their lives as young adults.

Here are a few ways to better approach meetings for millennials:

> **Incorporate audience polling** to engage them. 73% of millennials are interested in being part of live polls during event sessions. They are eager to have their votes count and to be part of presentations in any way they can, even though they are merely a participant.

> **Create a professional networking** program at the event. 80% of millennials like to have peer-to-peer networking and 86% want career networking and job opportunities from events. Knowing that millennials are both underemployed and unemployed, you should stage a networking session that forces millennials to meet companies. This becomes a huge value add to millennials who will come to the conference knowing that they will get a new business contact out of it.

> **Make learning fun for them.** 85% of millennials want interesting and fun educational programs. Event organizers should use mobile applications so millennials can explore the event on their cell phones and use gamification to turn traditional exhibits into games that millennials can play.

> **Enable sharing during the event.** Make sure that you have a hashtag for the event and set up a projection of the latest tweets so that people can watch them, read them, and be incentivized to participate. You can also push millennials to share by having a contest, where the most interesting tweet gets a free iPad.

> **Set proper expectations** before the event starts. Millennials want a structure to events so they know what they are getting before signing up. You need to ensure that you stick to an agenda and deliver above expectations. They want the event to be simple, easy to understand and for it to be easy to navigate on-site.

> **Give them instructions.** In your program manual, make sure you spell everything out for them. Tell them how to tweet, where to go for what sessions and make some suggestions for them.

If you don't do this, they won't participate as much because they will be too overwhelmed. When they have too many choices and no navigation, they end up not participating.

Millennials are harder to please than older generations. They want a true experience, something that is personalized, new and enables them to meet the right people at the right time. They also want to be more than a participant - they want to be actively involved before, during and after the event. They

want to help dictate the content of the event and steer the speakers in a direction that most benefits them.

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Collaborating on the Next Generation of Meetings

American Program Bureau (APB) has spent the past 50 years helping meeting planners such as yourself develop meaningful, educational, and game-changing events. We make it our priority to be at the forefront of creating new, useful programs and we pride ourselves on presenting speakers who will elevate your audience's way of thinking. Dan Schawbel is one of them. Regarded as the world's foremost expert on Millennials, Dan demystifies the difficult process of reaching this market and developing the types of innovative and interactive programs that this powerful audience seeks.



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