



Meeting and Event Trends for 2020

Optimizing these trending topics
will deliver results in the coming year.

Introduction

"Trends, like horses, are easier to ride in the direction they are going." So claimed New York Times best-selling author, John Naisbitt as he began identifying societal trends that would socially, economically, politically, and spiritually restructure and redirect American life.

To see if 2020 is trending in the right direction for the meetings and events industry, we began by digging through data generated in 2019 to see what worked best and what could be optimized to deliver better results in the coming year. What we found was that while some trends just keep on trending, focusing on the topics discussed below will empower you to engage your participants in a more meaningful, relevant way and maximize your event ROI.

1. Millennials Will Be the New Perennials
2. Avoiding Burnout at your Turnout
3. It's Not Easy Being Green – It's Imperative
4. Total Event Optimization Will Keep Getting Optimized
5. Metamorphic Design – One Size No Longer Fits All

1. Millennials Will Be the New Perennials

"In a world that is constantly changing, there is no one subject or set of subjects that will serve you for the foreseeable future, let alone for the rest of your life. The most important skill to acquire now is learning how to learn."

John Naisbitt

"For years, millennials have been caricatured as a generation of 'hipster brats' who 'fritter away our paychecks on avocado toast.' So wrote Catherine Rampell in the [Washington Post](#) a year or so ago.¹ But the generation born between 1981 and 1996 now constitutes half of the global workforce and the most important audience that must be acknowledged and catered to by the meetings and events industry.

OK Boomer... believe what you will about Millennials' cynical view of capitalism and the roadblocks they believe were put in place by previous generations to block their path to the American Dream. The fact of the matter is, they're a force to be reckoned with, and the values that resonate with them are less materialistic and more experience-centric than any generation preceding them.

We've been all over this [growing trend](#)² for awhile now, and what we at Creative Group know is that active and authentic experiences are what drive this young demographic, and keeping it real is an excellent way to keep them engaged with their brand and enthusiastic about their roles within the organization.

Millennials are and will continue to be the most influential population shaping planners' meeting strategies as we move into the new decade. The evolving trend for all things immersive and meaningful will continue to shape the experiences we create for them. That's why we've been busy crafting programs that focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR), choosing fresh destinations with unique themes and amenities, and engaging attendees with interactive activities that educate and inspire.



The trend is here to stay for the foreseeable future, which is why we've been all-in on creating [transformational programs](#)³ that lean heavily on value being placed on the uniqueness and authenticity of experiences. Experiences are connected to one's identity and social behavior and may even provide a new or unique perspective on life.

At Creative Group, our 2020 vision is to continue to be the architects of business changing experiences that will [resonate with Millennials](#).⁴ If we are not continually striving to transform the lives and businesses of our millennial participants and clients with customized, adventurous, unique and authentic programs, we're failing to acknowledge and capitalize on beliefs of the most important, influential demographic in global business.



2. Avoiding Burnout at Your Turnout

Speaking of our friends the Millennials, they're getting a little burned out. The predominance of chronic workplace stress combined with the anxiety of raising a family and managing the complications of everyday life in our time-compressed society is trending hot in the meetings and events industry. In fact, [burnout](#)⁵ is now recognized as an official syndrome of the [World Health Organization](#).⁶

How will this growing trend continue to shape the programs we create for our clients? Once again, we're in complete agreement with [TrendWatching's](#)⁷ David Mattan, who predicts "smart brands will rush to help those burned by the pressures of modern life." Our "always-on" work environment is a beast that's not likely to go away any time soon, so rather than ignoring the elephant in the room, let's instead focus on bringing a little calm to the circus.

Obviously, work-life balance has become something of an oxymoron over the past few years, with life increasingly getting the short end of the stick. The more we can do to address the daily stresses and challenges faced by today's harried businessperson, the greater the positive overall perception he and she will have for the organization which had the foresight to acknowledge and do something about it.

It's not that hard. We often look to design meetings and conferences that wrap things up just before the weekend, giving participants the option to stay over for an extra night or two to de-compress and enjoy some "bleisure time" with colleagues. This is oftentimes a win-win, since it can drop the overall cost of flights into and out of the meeting destination.

We also try not to overlook opportunities to create space within the frameworks of our itineraries that allow meeting attendees to unplug, chill out and [engage](#).⁸



“In their search for quality, people seem to be looking for permanency in a time of change.”

John Naisbitt

Empowering and enabling workers to be their best selves creates the happiest employees, and that connects directly to client satisfaction. So whether it's about scrapping plans for another standard-issue breakout session in favor of crowd-sourced, self-directed productivity pods or providing ample time in the schedule for meaningful self-care, the reality is that [“traveling employees who are able to eat healthy and exercise, and who feel well rested, nourished, and energized, are better positioned to achieve their business objectives on the road.”](#)⁹

That's kind of what we have in mind when we build in little surprises and delights to remind and reassure guests, we understand the challenges they face just getting through the average day, and we appreciate the daily sacrifices they make to be stellar employees.

Gratitude. Appreciation. Recognition. We share the thinking behind the American Express [2020 Global Meetings and Events Forecast](#), which states, “One of the most successful methods of stimulating positive emotion is with surprise. Deliver unexpected moments both during the incentive and post-trip and use gifts to create a permanent memory of their experience.”¹⁰

Maybe we'll surprise them with framed photos of family members on their nightstands. Why not block out an hour or two for them to catch up on email and personal business? Who wouldn't love a latte personalized with their snapshot in the foam? Let's think in terms of creating truly immersive adventures they'll likely never have the opportunity to experience in their away-from-work lives.



The bottom line is that thriving employees create a thriving organization. Innovative ideas, efficiency and productivity are just some of the benefits an engaged workforce provides. Empowering and enabling employees to be their best selves creates the happiest employees, and that connects directly to client satisfaction.

“One of the best kept secrets in America is that people are aching to make a commitment, if they only had the freedom and environment in which to do so.”

John Naisbitt

3. It's Not Easy Being Green – It's Imperative

Sustainable initiatives and environmental concerns have been on meeting planners' radar for years. In fact, we wrote about the benefits and advantages of [planning green meetings](#)¹¹ way back in 2016 when we realized “creating green and sustainable events doesn't have to be costly, (in fact, it inevitably saves money), it just takes the right commitment. We also knew tapping into a nascent trend to reduce our carbon footprint meant the initial scale and successes would be measured in baby steps, but you have to start somewhere.

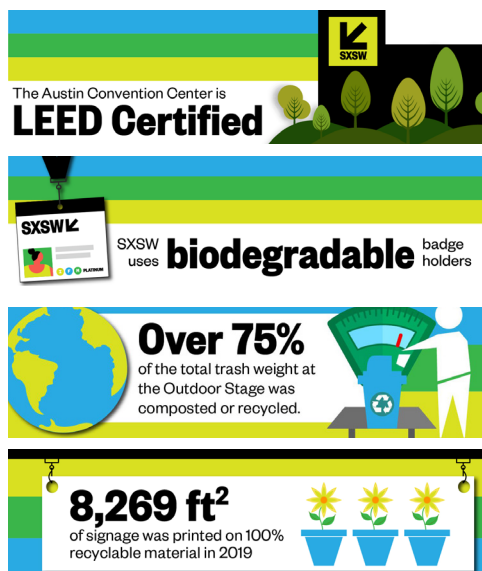
Now, several giant leaps later, that nascent trail has been blazed by organizations like [Salesforce](#), and sustainability has taken on a momentum of its own. Today, if you're not rising to the occasion, you risk being lumped into the wrong side of the narrative.

David Mattan, Global Head of Trends and Insights at [TrendWatching](#), throws down the gauntlet: “When sustainable alternatives are widespread, affordable and just as good or better than the legacy option, then eco-consumption becomes less about the status of opting in, and more about the shame of opting out. That's why in 2020, millions of consumers will seek out products, services and experiences that help them alleviate rising eco-shame.”¹²

The report goes on to cite specific examples of how the green landscape has shifted from micro status to macro implementation over the past few years. In 2008, Tesla introduced its \$100,000 Roadster for eco-conscious trendsetters. Today its \$35,000 Model 3 targets mainstream drivers. In 2016, trendy NYC eatery Momofuku Nishi became the first restaurant to offer the Impossible Burger. Just three short years later, you can order an Impossible Whopper at over 7,000 Burger King outlets across the U.S.

You get the picture. The sustainability landscape has shifted, and if you're not fully embracing it in your meeting strategy, you're trending backwards. And it's not just about paper straws and recycled name badges. It's about weaving green initiatives into the very fabric of your meetings and events. [SXSW](#) has been getting it right for a while now. In 2019, 8,269 square feet of signage was printed on 100% recyclable material, and through composting and recycling efforts, the vast majority of waste at the 15,000-person capacity Outdoor Stage is diverted away from the landfill.¹³

Consider group activities that promote and reinforce the notion of a cleaner, healthier planet. Plant trees. Clean up beaches. Take trains instead of planes. Be the green-abiding organization that's leading the charge, not the old-school thinkers who just don't get it.



Julius Solaris, founder and editor in chief of [EventMB](#) and one of the most influential individuals in the meetings industry, says that “in 2020, planners will be required to be all in when it comes to sustainability. No half initiatives, no stopping at the basics. For an event to be called sustainable, the bar will be much higher.”¹⁴

While sustainability and environmental responsibility are far from new to the meetings industry, the trend is [thriving](#), and its momentum continues to shape shift how forward-thinking organizations will continue to raise the bar for responsible, sustainable practices in 2020 and beyond.



4. Total Event Optimization Will Keep Getting Optimized

As we head into a new year, most forecasts call for meeting and event budgets to increase by about 2% in 2020.¹⁵ That's good news, right? Well, [our recent webinar](#) took a deep dive into industry expectations and came up with a bit of a math problem – costs are expected to grow between 4% and 7% in the coming year.¹⁶ That means event budgets will be tight heading into 2020. But fret not! We uncovered six areas of event optimization that can be applied to squeeze maximum ROI out of your upcoming programs.

“We created the hierarchical, pyramidal, managerial system because we needed it to keep track of people and things people did.”

John Naisbitt

1. Reducing time on site and focusing on the overall experience

We know from a slew of data that planners are spending more time focusing on the overall experience than the actual logistics of the event, and the numbers prove out that an immersive, meaningful experience can have a more positive impact than the overall length of the program.

When one of our clients decided to include business class travel for all participants of a trip to Maui and Lanai, the cost quickly became prohibitive. To address the budgetary challenges, we focused on the richness of the experiences during the stay and were able to reduce the number of nights spent in Hawaii without compromising the overall takeaway from the program.

2. Using emerging or next level destinations to find value

Another way we're helping clients optimize their programs is by exploring emerging destinations. We know from the [IRF's recent study](#) that the primary reasons planners choose certain destinations are infrastructure and safety.¹⁷ But we found that many so-called “second tier” cities like Beaver Creek, Cape Cod and Winnipeg have been building up their capacity and even adding air routes. Destinations like these offer spectacular settings for all types of events and can bring significant relief to strained budgets.

“We must learn to balance the material wonders of technology with the spiritual demands of our human race.”

John Naisbitt

3. Connecting and plugging into a bigger purpose

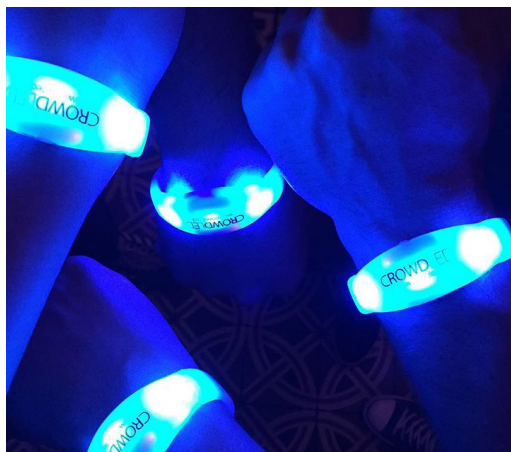
Virtually every trend report is talking about this in some manner, whether it's the [rise of CSR](#)¹⁸ or focus on wellness or engaging socially responsible incentives. This is no doubt this is a reflection of a larger economic focus on sustainable business as well as the worldwide push for green initiatives.

We know from behavioral economics that helping people acquire social status from giving back and bonding with each other pay huge engagement dividends. That's why after the devastating hurricane in Grand Bahama, we booked a client's program into the undamaged Baha Mar and empowered participants to be part of the rebuild, giving back to the Bahamas while at the same time building stronger connections and shared values amongst employees.

4. Personalizing every possible facet of the event to maximize impact

[Personalization](#)¹⁹ is something Creative Group discusses daily with our clients, and sometimes, depending on strategy, it doesn't necessarily require a lot of additional funds. Recently, we had a client with a really diverse audience – attendees ranged in age from 22 to over 60 with a range of interests in passive and active experiences.

We ended up creating a program that allowed participants to choose their own adventure. They were given the freedom to identify themselves as Chill Seekers, Thrill Seekers and Skill Seekers, and their experiences, from the food they ate to the activities in which they participated, were tailored around their specific interests.



5. Using technology to facilitate engagement

Getting the most out of technology means using it to build a better program. Most planners are using mobile apps in some capacity, but their primary purpose is for agenda and names. Ho hum.

We believe in using a text design strategy that allows us to optimize multiple event objectives into a single technological investment point and, perhaps more importantly, gathering better data on participants.

We're also all-in on using emerging technologies that have the power to transform attendees into active participants in the activities taking place in real time. For example, we created an exclusive club divided into three distinct areas. Guests were fitted with a wearable band that captured their excitement levels and displayed it via an LED indicator on the wall. Once the crowd engagement reached a certain level, a virtual screen exploded, thereby opening up a new area of the club.



inspiration – Create an engaging story that inspires and achieves the desired goals.

intrigue – Lock-in and entertain your audience.

influence – Change behavior by educating and motivating action.

impression – Touch all five senses to fully engage participants.

interruption – Transport participants away from the daily grind.

immersion – Actively involve participants through interaction.

6. Measuring better

Last but certainly not least, we know from firsthand experience that better data leads to better design, which is why we start thinking at project start how success will be measured by various stakeholders. We gather data before, during and after every event in terms of budget optimization, objective optimization, physical-digital activity optimization and emotional optimization. This enables us to analyze the complete picture of an event's successes after it has been produced and empowers us to make adjustments to facilitate even better ROI for future programs.

Total event optimization will be critical to the success of 2020 programs, and it's what [Creative Group's proprietary i|xpérience®](#) event design model is all about.

At the close of every event we create, we gather all the feedback received from mobile app surveys, word-of-mouth and social media. We compare feedback to the initial goals to see what lines up and what may have missed its mark. Understanding this alignment helps us ensure our events are delivering results.

If our deep data dives reveal needs that were not met, that becomes our starting point to analyze every aspect of the event and what can be done better in future initiatives. If our i|xpérience hits on all cylinders, we'll focus on the highlights in an effort to raise the bar and continue the positive momentum. Indeed, total event optimization will play a critical role in the lives of meeting planners as we roll into the new decade.

5. Metamorphic Design – One Size No Longer Fits All

The concept of personalization in the meetings and events industry is anything but new. However, with technology's ever-amazing advancement and evolution comes a trending opportunity to adapt to participant likes, preferences and demands in real time.

Life's little algorithms are creating territories in which to make meetings and events more meaningful, memorable and effective for participants who have become accustomed to personalized services and optimized experiences in their daily lives.

Spotify predicts bands you might like based upon the song you just listened to. Harry's knows when you need new razor blades. And remember that sweater you put in your shopping cart last week? It's still there and (shhh... it's just for you), it's now 20% off.

Whether in business or everyday life, people are looking for (and expecting) highly curated experiences. This syncs up with what we've been anticipating and trending towards over the last several years at Creative Group, and data and technology make it ever more impactful with each passing year.

As referenced in [PCMA](#),²⁰ making a crowd feel more like a collection of individuals starts with gathering — and making sense of — attendee data. *"You can't really create hyper-personalized experiences unless you go back and analyze who's coming, why they're there, who isn't coming, and how you might be able to get them there. Then, you can use that data to better understand what your attendees think, feel, and believe to shape a more meaningful experience for everyone."* When we sat down with the co-author of [The Experience Economy](#),²¹ Joseph Pine, to discuss our vision to be innovators of business-changing experiences that help people thrive, he emphasized the importance of how our approach applies just as much in the B2B context as it does with B2C.

"I think Creative Group has a very forward-thinking vision, one that could even move it beyond staging experiences to guiding transformations, the fifth and final economic offering in our progression of economic value. Many businesses are naturally in the transformation business, such as management consultants, fitness experts, and hospitals, but it's great to see other organizations embracing this concept as well."

It's the kind of forethought and strategic planning that factors into the curated [ilxperiences](#) we create for our clients and their meeting guests everything from personalized portraits etched into their latte foam to immersive experiences and activities that can be specified and scaled to the individual interests of each attendee.

[Incentive Magazine](#) summed it up nicely when they reported that *"business success is a function of employee satisfaction,"* and that *"companies are beginning to appreciate incentives not only for what they can add in the way of profits, but also for what they can inspire in the way of performance."*²²

To that end, we remain high on metamorphic design as a growing trend through 2020 and beyond. Keep convenience, personalization and relevance rooted to the strategies for your meetings and events, and you'll generate loyalty and build trust amongst those who have become accustomed to individualized service in their lives outside of the workspace.



Summary

When it comes to the trends that will shape the corporate meetings and events industry in 2020, some familiar themes will continue to evolve. By leveraging the trends noted here, you can maximize the impact of your upcoming events, and we can help ensure they're trending in the right direction.

Let's Talk

Sources

- ¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/millennials-arent-breaking-traditions-theyre-just-broke/2018/12/06/e69fbfc8-f999-11e8-8c9a-860ce2a8148f_story.html
- ² <https://www.creativegroupinc.com/2018/04/18/whos-booming-now/>
- ³ <https://www.creativegroupinc.com/2018/02/26/will-your-meeting-be-transformational/>
- ⁴ <https://www.creativegroupinc.com/resources/list/keeping-real-millennial-audience/>
- ⁵ <https://www.creativegroupinc.com/2016/05/10/opposite-burnout-engagement/>
- ⁶ https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/burn-out/en/
- ⁷ <https://trendwatching.com/quarterly/2019-11/5-trends-2020/#green-pressure/>
- ⁸ <https://www.creativegroupinc.com/2016/05/10/opposite-burnout-engagement/>
- ⁹ <https://tripactions.com/blog/tripactions-skift-business-travel-trends-announcement>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.amexglobalbusinesstravel.com/press-room/american-express-meetings-events-2020-forecast-highlights-moderate-growth-optimistic-industry-outlook/>
- ¹¹ <https://www.creativegroupinc.com/2016/07/11/green-meeting-guide/>
- ¹² <https://trendwatching.com/quarterly/2019-11/5-trends-2020/#green-pressure>
- ¹³ <https://www.sxsw.com/about/community/>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.eventmanagerblog.com/event-trends-2020>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.amexglobalbusinesstravel.com/content/uploads/2019/09/2020-Global-Meetings-Forecast-Final-US.pdf>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.amexglobalbusinesstravel.com/content/uploads/2019/09/2020-Global-Meetings-Forecast-Final-US.pdf>
- ¹⁷ <https://theirf.org/research/irf-site-and-ficp-release-preliminary-findings-for-the-2019-incentive-travel-industry-index/2695/>
- ¹⁸ <https://www.creativegroupinc.com/2017/10/24/csr-in-events-more-than-just-a-responsibility/>
- ¹⁹ <https://www.creativegroupinc.com/resources/list/personalized-experiences-matter/>
- ²⁰ <https://www.pdma.org/freeman-how-meetings-and-events-can-leverage-personalization/>
- ²¹ <https://www.creativegroupinc.com/2017/02/27/interview-with-joseph-pine-on-experiential-trends/>
- ²² <http://www.incentivemag.com/News/Industry/CWT-Meetings-Events-2020-Future-Trends-Report-Incentive-Travel/>

Let's Talk

sales@creativegroupinc.com





Creative Group®
Let's Thrive.®