



# EVENTS AND INCENTIVES: WHAT'S NEW & TRENDING IN 2024

A Guide to Design the Most Impactful  
Programs and Events



Creative Group®



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Memorable experiences  
inspire and connect people.



2024 is underway, and meeting and incentive professionals are busy, busy, busy! Clients' expectations are changing, and advancements in technology offer new opportunities for engagement. Human connection is always at the forefront of our industry, especially as more people work remotely.

We're excited to share our insights into the trends shaping the future of meetings, events, and incentives. You might already be familiar with certain trends but incorporating them will ensure your event is engaging and relevant for contemporary attendees. From immersive experiences to personalized touchpoints, we explore innovative ways to create memorable moments that inspire and connect.

## Trends in Incentives

### People *Change* and *People* Change

Turnover is a reality in every organization, but it's been especially true in the last few years with the onset of the Great Resignation. And whether job-hopping or not, employees' values and interests have also changed. Although the pandemic has introduced significant upheaval to businesses, this disruption has also opened a door to a deeper understanding of current desires and motivations among individuals.

#### Knowing Your Audience

- What makes them tick?: More companies are using audience assessment tools to understand better what motivates their employees. It makes sense: organizations want an edge, and understanding motivational drivers goes a long way toward improving incentive outcomes.
- Time for a checkup: Reviewing your incentive program yearly is a best practice to confirm that rules are clear, participants are engaging with the platform, and you're seeing movement toward desired results. If something isn't working, making tweaks to rules, spiffs or rewards is a great next step.
- Not just for sales anymore: Increasingly, incentive programs are becoming more inclusive, extending beyond traditional sales teams. By rewarding a broader range of contributors – especially key roles in the steps to the sale, you are valuing diversity in performance and encouraging a wider spectrum of contributions.



*Incentive programs only work if employees are aware and engaged.*



- **Flip the earnings:** The behavioral psychology term “loss aversion” suggests that more people are motivated to avoid losses than to achieve equivalent gains. Think: a college professor declaring on ‘day one’ that students begin with an A grade and will lose points if ongoing work falls short. Some programs, rather than starting people with “zero”, are assigning starter points or perks and reducing them if progress declines.

#### **Engagement Boosters**

- **A one-two punch:** Designing a multi-tier program is an effective way to keep participants engaged, especially with a new younger workforce. The most inclusive and dynamic programs incorporate multiple tiers to boost personalization, relevance, flexibility, and sustained motivation.
- **Make no assumptions:** Just because a program is in place doesn’t mean everyone is aware of it. Sending one email at the outset is not enough— a multi-channel communication plan is crucial. Nudges, reminders, and emails with the program outline, rules, and standings, are effective tactics to keep an incentive program relevant. Remember that the most impactful campaigns are messaging to the whole incentive community throughout the lifecycle of the program, and not just as top winners are announced. Use FOMO to your advantage!

#### **Tap Into the Intelligence**

- **It’s here:** AI has become a permanent fixture in our landscape; it’s rare to go a week without encountering an article on the subject. Think of it like an assistant with access to a deep reservoir of data. Although AI is a powerful tool for certain tasks, it lacks the human capacity to comprehend the nuanced aspects of complex incentive structures.



*What are the greatest business benefits of meeting in person for internal meetings (among employees, teammates, new hires, etc.)?*

## Meetings & Events

### *The Growing “Why” of Meetings: Human Connection*

#### **Remote Workers**

The rise of remote work has certainly shifted the professional landscape, with nearly 41% of workers now operating on remote or hybrid schedules. This new norm can lead to a sense of disconnection from the organization and its culture – and the outcome is lowered employee engagement and increased turnover rates.

As a result, the value of in-person connections is underscored by a recent Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey. It shows that the majority of respondents appreciate the advantages of face-to-face meetings for nurturing trust, cultivating relationships, enhancing inclusion, and improving collaboration and innovation. These intentional personal connections play an important part in countering the isolation of remote work and supporting a cohesive, dynamic workplace.

**74%**

Stronger relationships between employees/teams

**60%**

Greater Collaboration

**55%**

Stronger organizational culture

**54%**

Greater employee engagement

**46%**

Increased feeling of inclusion for remote workers/dispersed teams

#### ***Events as Integrated Marketing***

In 2024, more companies are weaving live events into their broader marketing strategies. This move is strategic, aimed at enhancing brand visibility, fostering deeper audience connections and improving business outcomes.

Organizations want fresh ways to build personal relationships with their customers, clients, and partners, and events provide that opportunity, while fostering loyalty and trust in a way that digital communications often can't match. And for employees, events serve as a powerful platform to align individuals with the company's vision and significantly enhance their advocacy for the brand.

*Immersive brand experiences like this giant ball pit aren't just fun, they're memorable!*



Some traditional and non-traditional ways we see brand messaging coming to life:

- Expanded branding opportunities at hotels and other venues for entryway pillars, digital engagement walls, and in some cities, large-scale logo displays on hotel exteriors.
- Interest in recreating spaces that feel like an extension of the host organization's headquarters or offices.
- Branded Experiential Zones: setting up areas where attendees can experience the brand through interactive exhibits, games, education areas, or immersive activities.
- Infusing social influencers or customers into the event experience with live interactions and social media hashtags.
- Collaborative art projects that engage attendees in creating a collective art piece that reflects a brand's ethos.
- Using keynote speakers that closely align with overall brand messaging.
- Incorporating an event app that not only provides information and schedules but also incorporates brand elements and interactive features such as gamification and badges.

*A speaker who aligns with the overall brand values and messaging is key to engaging your audience.*



Simon Sinek, Author and Founder of the Optimism Company



Create a sense of wonder  
and curiosity through  
storytelling to create a  
meaningful experience.



## What We're Seeing in 2024

Some trends come and go, and some stay for a while (or come back!). Keeping up with the latest trends and skillfully integrating them into your event design ensures your events remain fresh, relevant, and successful.

### Speak Their Language

- Beyond demographics: Shift your focus from targeting specific age groups to connecting with core values. Dive into the behaviors and motivations that drive your attendees, moving away from broad labels like Gen X or Gen Z, and moving closer to values.
- Tell a story: Use storytelling components within your event to create a sense of wonder and curiosity. It will make the experience more immersive and ultimately, more meaningful. Remember to:
  - Choose a theme and narrative arc
  - Use sensory and emotional language
  - Incorporate interactive and connective elements
  - Share authentic and personal stories
  - Use surprise and humor with unexpected moments
  - End with a call to action

### Wellness and Comfort

- Take a breather: Intentionally design your space to help people avoid stimulation overload. Incorporate transitional recentering activities during meetings. Examples: 3-minute breathing practice, gratitude, and mindfulness exercises.
- Three hot wellness speakers:
  - [Dr. Romie](#), author of *Cure Your Busy Brain*, helps teams get healthier brains for better performance.
  - [Lt. Col. Scott Mann](#) led the Pineapple Express (the Afghan troop withdrawal) and works with teams to teach vulnerability and storytelling – two big parts of his PTSD recovery.
  - [Jay Shetty](#), best-selling author and entrepreneur (with an award-winning podcast), a talent for making purpose and wisdom relatable and accessible.

*Shareable and interactive food and drink experiences are back in demand.*



- Nature is nurture: Calm-cations and peaceful getaways are in.
  - Consider exclusive retreats like glamping or outdoor dining in surprising settings (e.g. a gourmet lunch on a mountain's edge or secluded beach).
  - If you can't, or don't want to be outdoors, you can still embrace nature's touch with elements like natural lighting, indoor plants or trees, and calming nature sounds that bring the outdoors in.
- Simplify the journey: Travel disruptions aren't going away (hello, missed connections!). Direct flights will rise in priority – convenience over cost – as well as early arrival options, especially for those with complex travel itineraries. Help people stay informed by recommending the best travel apps.
- Respect routines: Now more than ever, attendees want to stay on their diet and exercise routines while traveling. Being intentional about incorporating movement in the agendas and healthy meal options will be well-received, as will eliminating late nights.
- Variety is the spice of life: Mix up the room setup for each session. If it works for your event, try mixing in high tops, soft seating, and beanbags with your classroom or theater seating.
- Comfort is king!: Wearing comfortable attire is in. Consider “comfort gifts” such as T-shirts, travel pillows, blankets/throws, robes and branded sneakers. Make it exclusive; customized designer athletic wear is where it's at!

#### **Food & Beverage**

- Play with your food: Interactive food experiences bring some added fun to the table. Maybe it's pouring your own beverage from an ice sculpture, build-your-own bowls, or learning from beekeepers that serve local honey. Ending on a sweet note, might be a fully immersive chocolate room to explore.
- Drinking without drinking: Mocktails have a new name! Zero-proof beverages are gaining popularity as the new go-to for non-alcoholic drink options, catering to those who are sober curious or prefer healthier alternatives. More zero-proof drink choices boost inclusivity and maintain a special sense of occasion for all attendees.





- Sharing is caring: Shared food in the form of grazing tables, family style, buffets, and active chef stations are back to pre-pandemic popularity. And donating any leftover goodies to food rescue programs is always popular.
- Good to the very last drop: Tip to Toe menu planning – the art of using the whole food product, along with locally sourced food remains an important initiative, especially as organizations strive to produce the most sustainable events.
- In this instance, labels are good: With more attendees having dietary restrictions or food allergies, clearly labeling food is a must. It is preferred to use the phrasing “made without” instead of “-free” because it’s a more careful method of description.
- Bartenders you don’t have to tip: The novelty of robotic bartenders mixing and serving drinks is great “selfie bait” at events. Entertainment and refreshment all in one!

### Awareness, Inclusivity, & Sustainability

- Wanna talk?: Let’s normalize mental health discussions! The conversation around emotional well-being and the importance of seeking support is gaining momentum. This hot topic is increasingly highlighted by event speakers, challenging the outdated norm of overworking. Embracing rest and rejuvenation as essential for peak performance is the new standard for productivity.
- Elevated sustainability: Moving beyond reusable water bottles and recyclable materials, most organizations are looking to make measurable strides toward their corporate ESG (Environmental, Social, Government) initiatives. One way is with plantable menus. Printing menus (or other literature) on seed paper is not only fun, but also a creative way for organizations to “grow” their impact.
- Waste not, want not: Net-zero is the target. Scrutinize F&B processes, supply chain practices, and swag giveaways to create the greenest events possible.

### Tech

- What’s real?: Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are still captivating ways to immerse attendees in unique experiences. The aim is to enhance engagement and involvement through virtual tours, interactive product showcases, and gamification.
- Look up: Drone shows are much better for the environment and still provide amazing light shows that are limitless in their creativity! Fireworks are wasteful, and troublesome to animals. Drones give you control over branding, messaging, and designs that fireworks just can’t offer.
- Look good, feel good: More tech attractions offer the fun of body personalization. DIY nail designers and temporary tattoo printers are just a couple of great additions to events!

*Offer restful activities to attendees who need or want to rejuvenate between sessions.*



*Attendees extending their trips after the business meeting or event is done continues to be a popular way to work in a vacation.*



- Good vibes: A new wearable, the Apollo Neuro, is a wristband (or clothing clip) that offers gentle soothing vibrations. It's a wearable that monitors the usual – sleep and movement data – but also collects feedback on moods and feelings. Boost energy or encourage relaxation with wellness-themed gifts.
- Blurring the lines: Be on the lookout for large tech companies in Martech (Salesforce CRM, Hub Spot) to expand in the Eventtech space with registration, apps and other mobile technologies.

## What's on the Horizon?

- Due to escalating insurance premiums triggered by catastrophic weather events, such as those in Florida and California, prices (hotels, transportation, food & beverage) will remain higher in the impacted states.
- Given the three-day in-office work week norm (Tuesday-Thursday), we should anticipate sustained high occupancy rates for hotels during those days.
- A new law in California mandates that resort fees be included in the total room price, potentially leading to confusion as this requirement is not uniform across all states. Consequently, room rates in California may appear higher compared to other regions.
- Ombre Travel – the trend of extending business trips for leisure, remains very popular. To streamline the process, ask about attendees' interest in personal extensions early on to facilitate smoother management of hotel room blocks.
- The potential for strikes persists. It's important to monitor contracts due for negotiation and maintain consistent communication with both the venue and destination to stay well-informed.

## Contact us!

Stay connected to explore what's new and trending in the dynamic and evolving events landscape.

Have feedback on  
these trends and tips?

**Email us!**



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