Chapter 12

Technology in the Meetings and Events Industry

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SUMMARY

Over the past ten years, advancements in technology have created seismic shifts in how meetings and events are planned, marketed, and produced. While technology has not eliminated the importance of face-to-face meetings, what has radically changed are the tools at the disposal of the meeting and event professional throughout the event planning lifecycle. For example, event and guest bandwidth continues to increase in importance and, in many cases, may become a tipping point in the site selection process. Social media and mobile devices have become an inextricable part of the event management landscape. Meeting professionals used to preach “turn your phones off” in the meeting space, now they prioritize attendee engagement through social media. Mobile devices have become the lifeblood of many successful events, as conference attendees now demand a less passive, more interactive event experience. From mature to late breaking technologies, this chapter provides an overview to the critical technologies that impact the meeting and events industry and help ensure event success.

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, the student will be able to:

- Discuss pre-event planning technology such as deep attended personalization and virtual site selection.
- Explain the use of technology in meeting and event Marketing and Communications like blogging, podcasts, and eblasts.
- Compare and contrast the major social media platforms.
- Discuss the key technological resources used on-site, such as bandwidth, Audience Response Systems, and event badging and ticketing.
- Identify the key components used in virtual meetings, events, and trade shows.
- List the technologies used post-event in data collection and measurement.
Introduction

How is meeting and event technology defined? Essentially, it is any digital tool that can help meeting and event professional perform essential event organization tasks, like event marketing, management software, and event apps. But event technology also includes other technologies that are shaking up a whole range of industries, such as, facial recognition and augmented reality.

In 2017, the Events Industry Council (EIC) commissioned Oxford Economics to quantify the economic impact of business events. The study cited the value of face-to-face meetings at more than US $1.03 trillion for the worldwide direct spend of the meeting and events industry (Luna, 2018). In comparison, Oxford Economics found the U.S. hotel industry contributed $659.4 billion to the U.S. gross domestic product in 2018, with its direct contribution amounting to $170.7 billion, and the indirect and induced share reached $345.7 billion (Wroten, 2019). Given this significant economic impact of meetings and events, industry trends can have reach and influence beyond domestic events.

An important influence on the meeting and events industry is the use of technological tools and resources. Meeting and events technology changes rapidly. Its use is not only to add convenience for meeting professionals and attendees. A study by Enterprise Event Marketing found a 20% increase in event attendance with a 30% reduction in costs attributed to the use of event technology (Eugenio, 2017).

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss current global technological trends in operational and strategical technology in meeting and events management. Some of the technological impacts discussed include attendee personalization, fully integrated event management software platforms, event badging and ticketing, onsite data collection technology, and event data measurement (Tatulli, 2019). The chapter follows the event lifecycle by first discussing pre-event planning.
technology, followed by marketing and communications, on-site technology, virtual meetings and events, and post-event technology.

Given the changing nature of meeting and events technology, this chapter relies both on scholarly writing, but also on key industry resources. For example, event management technology companies, as well as professional organizations such as the Events Industry Council (EIC), the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA), and Meeting Professionals International (MPI) provide important information insights into the rapidly transforming meetings and events industry.

Pre-Event Planning Technology

Meetings and events do not just happen. These experiences can take months, sometimes years to plan and coordinate to ensure client satisfaction and achievement of event objectives. When a meeting and event professional begins the pre-event planning process, they must consider and address many questions, such as where will this event be held; how will this event be unique; what suppliers will help in the success execution of this event; and what technology will aid in the planning of this event.

In this section, we will discuss technologies used by meeting and events professionals in the pre-event planning phase. These technologies include meeting and events Association websites, web information portals, online Request for Proposals (RFP), virtual site selection tools, and event management software platforms.

Meeting and Events Association Websites

Meeting and events professionals rely on accurate and credible industry data to help shape and plan their events. One such website, www.eventsindustry.org, is the home page for the Events Industry Council (EIC). The EIC was founded in 1949 as the Convention Liaison Committee (Events Industry Council, n.d.a). The EIC serves the meetings and events industry and works to promote best practices in sustainability, knowledge, and leadership (Events Industry Council, n.d.a). The EIC formed The Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX) Commission, which has many critical functions such as developing and updating online templates, references guides, and an industry glossary (Events Industry Council, n.d.b).
Information Portals

While meeting and events organization websites can aid in the development of an event, an Event professional may also turn to an information portal. A web information portal is a specially designed website that brings information together from various sources across the Internet, like emails, online forums, and search engines, in a uniform way. Information portals can provide event management tips (www.eventmanagerblog.com or www.smartmeetings.com) or compare the latest event technology (www.eventtechbrief.com or www.capterra.com).

Using meeting and events organization websites and information portals help professionals craft personalized event experiences. Personalizing the attendee experience leads to both increases in satisfaction and in Return on Investment (ROI) (Minneci, 2019, Tatulli, 2019). Personalization can be seen in the event’s customized websites, marketing materials, event apps, and registration materials and paths.

Virtual Site Selection and Research

An important component early in the meeting and event planning process is the selection of an appropriate destination and venue. Over time, meeting and event professionals have adapted the site selection process based on shorter planning lead times, budgetary changes, and improvements in technology. Often, meeting and event professionals do not have the time or the budget to conduct multiple on-site inspections and rely on virtual inspections.

While technology can assist with some of the destination research, Compton (2011) suggests letting the meeting or event objectives guide the location. By establishing the event purpose, the professional can conduct online searches to find destinations and properties to match the objectives.
Site selection can be further refined by understanding the attendee profile and event history. Meeting and event professionals often develop a list of attributes such as expected number of attendees, event duration, and space requirements (Compton 2011, Event Leadership Institute, 2020). By reviewing the typical criteria, such as cost, convenience, transportation, room and space availability, the drawing power of the city itself, climate, and overall image of the city, the professional can target specific facilities. Many hotels websites offer virtual room “walk-throughs” that provide a sense of spacing and décor. It is important to know not only when the images were taken, but also if any changes have been made since the images were uploaded.

Once the professional evaluates their options, ideally, they perform a physical review of their desired destination and venue. Whether or not virtual site selection is appropriate depends on several factors. Moore (2014) stresses the importance of the quality of the facility’s sales and marketing tools, such as photographs, streaming video, interactive room diagrams, and 3-D modeling software. These technologies allow the venue and meeting professional to complete a virtual walk-through of the event.

**Request for Proposal**

When searching for industry partners, vendors, and suppliers, such as lodging, food and beverage, or audio/visual companies, a meeting professional may utilize a Request for Proposal (RFP). An RFP is a solicitation by the meeting professional to potential suppliers for proposals to host their event (Minneci, 2019a). It is very common to submit RFPs to Convention and Visitors Bureaus or Destination Marketing Organizations at the desired meeting location. Suppliers’ proposals contain consistent information so the meeting professional can thoroughly and fairly evaluate their options.

In 2015, the Global Business Travel Association Meetings Committee partnered with the Event Industry Council’s (EIC) Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX) to form the eRFP Efficiencies Workgroup. The working group’s charge was to study the viability of the online RFP. According to the findings of the GBTA Meetings Committee and Convention Industry Council
APEX eRFP Efficiencies Workgroup (2015), an electronic RFP is generated using online tools, including those from meeting technology suppliers and hotel websites, for site selection purposes. This study found the technology has great benefits, most notably the ability to identify venues for events using a wide range of qualifying criteria with ease and low cost. These online platforms can simultaneously distribute multiple eRFPs for the same event, saving hours of time-consuming work.

However, the GBTA and CIC Workgroup (2015) also identified concerns with the electronic process. The most pressing concern stemmed from the sheer volume of eRFPs. How can suppliers ensure a thorough review of the large volume of eRFPs and offer meeting professionals the best possible services, at the best possible price? The high-volume distribution of eRFPs to hotels and other venues has resulted in heightened dissatisfaction for meeting professionals due to slower supplier response time, and the declining probability of business materializing from those leads. To combat these concerns, the Workgroup suggested solutions to the challenge such as education, limiting the volume of eRFPs, and creating guidelines for appropriate supplier response time. This technology and the process will continue to change and improve over time.

**Integrated Event Management Software**

Technology is changing the way meetings and events are planned. Meeting and event professionals are under a lot of pressure to produce complex and engaging events with limited time and budgets. Integrated event management software streamlines the planning process from beginning to end with tools that automate many of the manual tasks and processes.

Integrated event management software offers a combination of event planning tools in one platform. Meeting and event professionals can use this technology to help plan, promote, engage, and measure the Return on Investment of their events (Goenka, 2019).

These platforms contain such tools that enable the creation of event-specific websites, produce customizable forms and payment processing, track attendance lists, aid with event registration and
ticketing, and create personalized agendas, notifications, and announcements. More comprehensive platforms may also provide budgeting and site selection tools, along with mobile event apps, lead retrieval software, audience response, and even event marketing software. Some of the more specific uses of event technology include projection mapping, 5G networks, branded multi-use applications, event diagramming, and Augmented and Virtual Reality (Waida, n.d. & Luna, 2018).

In addition to streamlining processes, integrated event management platforms improve meeting professional efficiency by allowing access to a seamless flow of data between systems. Meeting and events professionals need access to other tools and resources that their company uses to plan events. Such information, like Customer Relationship Maintenance (CRM), content, speakers, sponsors, exhibitors, marketing data, registration tools, onsite services, and analytics, should be part of a comprehensive and integrated event management software platform (Social Tables, n.d., Waida, n.d., and Tatulli, 2019). Integration lessens the risk of errors associated with manual transfer of data between different systems and improves customer communication and retention.

While these platforms offer the meeting professional many benefits, there are still limitations to the technology. Goenka (2019) explains that these platforms are not one size fits all and different events (corporate, association, non-profit) prioritize the need for different tools. Systems can be expensive and may contain unnecessary functionality. Mature systems are less flexible. If events require flexibility with any aspect of planning, it is important to have a responsive event management platform. Burns states (in Tatulli 2019), “The big message here though is that because of the maturity of the market and the consolidation occurring in the industry, an all-in-one provider that continues to improve their platform with new technology is key.” A comprehensive event management software makes meeting professionals available in a more cohesive manner.

Marketing and Communications

Strategic marketing and communications are a critical part of the entire meeting and event planning lifecycle. After determining event objectives and metrics for success, the professional must identify a marketing and communications strategy that addresses the importance of the event and why people should attend (Aventri, n.d.). Meeting and event marketing must convey the benefits and value of event attendance for participants and stakeholders. Meeting professionals looking to connect with potential attendees and build excitement over upcoming events often turn to traditional marketing and outreach methods such as trade advertising, online banners, and direct email solutions (Steinberg, 2018). But there are other affordable and easily implemented promotional vehicles that can help capture the audience’s attention, such as blogs, newsletters, podcasts, and other outreach channels.
To connect with their community, a meeting professional can survey potential attendees by using internal, online, social media, strategic partners, or other readily available distribution channels. In addition, meeting professionals can partner with event speakers and presenters to help drive event awareness and boost potential audience reach. By sharing blog posts, social media posts, or videos and podcasts in industry trade publications, the speaker can build awareness for both the event and their contribution (Steinberg, 2018).

Social Media

Today, strategic marketing messages are communicated through social media channels. Social media is integrated into every aspect of our day-to-day lives (Huston, 2019). Meeting professionals need to determine how to use various platforms to best market their event and engage their attendees. Whether it is a registration link, speaker bios, or session descriptions, social media content is expected from today’s event attendees.

Implementing social media is a great first step, but meeting professionals need to creatively use social media before, during, and after their events to maximize value. For events to stand out, professionals must go beyond event filters, and incorporate unique strategies. Huston (2019) suggests ideas like partnering with sponsors to create social media games, creating event-branded emojis, stickers, and badges, and hashtag mosaics. Again, the unique hashtag is not a new concept, but creating interesting images using attendees’ social media posts and hashtag can be an engaging way to build event excitement.
Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning

Successful marketing strategies go beyond listing the features of the event, like the names of speakers and workshops, and approach the event benefits from the attendee perspective. Today, meeting and event professionals have access to machine learning and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Machine learning will help event professionals determine the right attendee mix for their event, how to optimize their event, and how to draw the right attendee group to the event (Tatulli, 2019, Ball, 2020). Building on the collection of big data, the future will see data consolidation via machine learning and AI (Kane, et. al, 2019, Ball, 2020).

Copeland (n.d.) defines AI as “the ability of a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings. The term is frequently applied to the project of developing systems endowed with the intellectual processes characteristic of humans, such as the ability to reason, discover meaning, generalize, or learn from experience.” The meaning and use of AI varies across industries, but in the meetings and events industry, AI usually refers to technology or machines that can understand and engage in an environment using words, syntax, and smart learning (Experience Institute, 2017, Slater, 2020).

Chatbots are a commonly used AI technology across meetings and events for improving attendee communication. Chatbots conduct human-like conversations with site visitors and event app users. The chatbot can answer questions, keep in contact with attendees, and provide information as requested. This technology can also process multitudes of languages and instantly translate web pages, content, and any other event-specific communications (Slater, 2020).

More recently, AI and chatbots have become a networking tool for “match-making”, that connects event attendees with activities and experiences that align with their own interests and goals for the event. In 2018, IAEE found networking to be a top driver in event attendance (The Event Institute) and personalized experiences will increase value for participants. AI allows for a more thorough understanding of attendee needs through “deep-learning” abilities. Utilizing AI assists the event professional in crafting more personal event experiences for individual attendees, based on their unique interests.

On-Site Technology

Once the event arrives, technological tools can power the experience from start to finish. Along with producing a more high-tech experience, onsite technology helps enhance meetings and events in several ways such as personalization, convenience, efficiency, sustainability, monetization, and data sharing (Aventri, 2020). On-site technology can create a more personal and individualized event experience for each attendee, whether through targeted messaging based on their respective interests, or the ability to build their own event agendas. Self-service technologies offer convenience by allowing attendees to help themselves, such as in scheduling workshops or
requesting specialty food and beverage items. Mobile applications also offer convenience by consolidating several useful tools into one.

When it comes to saving time and money, onsite technology can efficiently accomplish both; from reducing wait time and long lines at check-in with remote kiosks, to delivering badges in just seconds with the latest printer technology. Or, by keeping interactions digital, the need for paper decreases, possibly improve the carbon footprint of the event. In addition to saving money, on-site technology could add revenue streams to the event with sponsored push notifications, lead retrieval, digital advertisements, and data sharing. With data sharing and ultra-high frequency technology, event professionals can collect valuable attendee data. These data can be shared with event partners and sponsors, to quantify event value.

**Event Infrastructure**

When meeting and event professionals begin the planning process, it is important to consider technological needs throughout the negotiation process. It is critical to determine which technologies add value and support to their event. Event attendees demand an experience where they can stay connected, and so event professionals must consider necessary infrastructure such as minimum bandwidth and wired versus wireless needs and required bandwidth levels. “Wired” is a physical Internet connection that may not be moved around. A wireless connection lacks physical wires and is easier to connect to, but not be as secure as a wired connection (Hoffman, 2017).

Bandwidth is the broadcasting capacity of a network or internet connection for transmitting signals. It is the amount of information that can pass through a communications line. Meeting and events professionals must incorporate bandwidth that can support the mobile technological demands of the attendees (Fenich, 2012). Minimally, bandwidth must be able to support an internet connection, and additional bandwidth may be needed to support more advanced technologies.
The more bandwidth, the more information (number of e-mails, hits to a social networking site) can occur simultaneously. The meeting and event professional must determine adequate bandwidth needed to support key event interactions such as registration, Internet cafes, and digital recording/streaming media. Digital recording is the method of saving, editing, and replaying audio and visuals post event, while streaming media allows an event audio and visual to play directly to audience as it happens. Additional bandwidth may be required for events that utilize facial recognition software, Audience Response Systems (ARS)/speaker interactions, and social media applications or support virtual sponsors at trade shows (Fenich, 2012).

**Virtual Reality**

Banfield (2020) suggests the use of Virtual Reality (VR) as an engaging and innovative way for attendees to interact at events. VR applications can be successfully incorporated into both face-to-face and virtual events. A VR headset allows participants to engage with 3D images, immersing them into places and experiences that are otherwise inaccessible and may be beyond typical technology the attendee can experience at home or at work. Trade shows are harnessing VR for interactive demonstrations of products that are difficult to bring on-site while hotels and Destination Management Companies are using it to showcase their properties through virtual tours and “visits”.

![Figure 8. An example of event infrastructure. Source: Adobe Stock.](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/m3publishing/vol17/iss9781732127593/1)
Augmented Reality

Augmented Reality (AR) overlays a computer-generated image on a user’s view of the real world, creating an enhanced reality (Porter & Hepplemann, 2017). As with VR, event professionals can implement AR into their events to improve event engagement within product demonstrations. Attendees interact with new products in ways that create a connection by allowing an attendee to see the inner workings of a product or comparing different products to highlight unique attributes (Banfield, 2020).

AR, like VR, has adapted to virtual and hybrid events to immerse attendees in their home environments and create a more accessible, immersive, and interactive event experience. AR events can be created from home by triggering experiences from a mobile phone, tablet, or VR headset sent to participants at their remote locations. The accessibility of AR allows for a wide range of possibilities to engage attendees including creating entire trade show booths from home, showcasing new products and services, or integrating gamification and virtual training features to significantly increase audience engagement.

In addition to making event experiences more accessible, AR utilized in virtual environments also opens the door to gaining key insights into event attendees through accurate data and analytical reporting. Whether trying to gauge progress on training, or engagement with a new product that is launching, AR experiences can often have analytics embedded in the experience to expertly track attendees’ experience.
Projection Mapping

Projection mapping is like AR, where an image is projected onto objects or spaces that are often irregularly shaped. This can turn any 3D shape into interactive displays, fully immersing attendees in the experience. This technology has been around for decades but has more recently been used by corporate event planners to up their creative game and increase event engagement and even post to social media.

Audience Response Systems and Speaker Interactions

Audience Response Systems (ARS) are wireless technologies that allow audience members to interact with a presenter by answering questions, polls, or posting reactions. Most ARS use a combination of software and hardware to present questions, record responses, and provide feedback (McElwrath, n.d.). The hardware consists of two components: the receiver and the audience’s clickers. Speakers embed questions or surveys in their presentation slide decks and using wireless radio frequency identification devices, the audience uses small, handheld keypads to provide immediate responses (Ramsborg, 2015).

The use of ARS technology offers a variety of applications and benefits from helping the presenter gauge audience understanding and engagement with the material (Padgett Communications, 2020), encouraging risk-taking because participants can answer anonymously, attendance taking, and data collection (McElwrath, n.d.). Maintaining audience engagement is a challenge in the current climate of personal mobile devices and other distractions.

With the popularity of personal handheld devices, audience participation through short-message service (SMS) and mobile applications is also a consideration for the event professional. While this method of ARS interaction is generally less expensive and easier to accommodate, instantaneous access to feedback could be delayed because of network availability. Regardless of use of traditional ARS or text messaging, systems can be kept active post-event, for data analysis and sharing (Ramsborg, 2015).

Figure 10. An example of audience clicker
Source: Adobe Stock.
Smart Phones (3G, 4G & 5G) and Mobile Devices

The increasing popularity of mobile technologies and their worldwide availability has led to an increased use of portable devices, such as mobile phones and tablets in meetings and events. The number of registered mobile broadband subscriptions around the world has increased from 268 million connections in 2007, to an estimated 3.4 billion connections in 2015 (O’Dea, 2020). As of 2015, the Asia Pacific region leads in terms of number of mobile broadband subscriptions with over 1.7 billion, with the Americas reporting 765 million. Europe has almost twice the global average of mobile penetration rate with 78.2 percent. It is estimated that the average mobile connection speed will grow from 2 Mbps in 2015 to 6.5 Mbps by 2020 (O’Dea, 2020).

Attendees' dependency on their mobile devices may seem like a distraction at events, but their use can contribute to event success, by facilitating attendee networking, encouraging speaker participation, and helping attendees stay connected and informed about program updates and changes (Meeting Play, n.d.).

Mobile Applications

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of apps in the event space each offering customizable solutions for any type of event (including trade shows and user conferences) (Banfield, 2020). Mobile apps are a single stop for participant information for participants, from accessing the event agenda, to viewing the attended list, to general event information, to receiving messages and special offers from sponsors. In addition to convenience, mobile apps can be interactive by offering gamification such as challenges, rewards, and leaderboards to reinforce event goals and increase engagement leading to an immersive event experience (Banfield, 2020).

When it comes to personalization, an event-specific mobile application improves the value of the experience, often with monetization options like sponsorships and push notifications. An app can offer enhanced communication with event attendees through personalized messaging, real-time notifications, live polling, and answers to frequently asked questions. The mobile app should...
house all event information from the complete program and speaker bios to dates/times of plenary or breakout sessions. The app should connect with the event management software, allowing attendees to build their own program agenda digitally and schedule their own ancillary events, or to search for specific exhibitors and use built-in mapping to navigate venue floor plans and exhibitor directories. Event-based mobile apps benefit both the meeting organizer and the attendee by eliminating the need to provide and carry the sheer bulk of printed materials associated with an event or meeting (Laversuch, n.d., Ramsborg, 2015).

**Lead Retrieval Systems**

At trade shows, an exhibitor’s goal is to generate new business. A lead is an individual or a company, who expressed an interest in hearing more about the company’s products or services (Cpleiser, 2019). During a show or conference, a company can expect to meet from hundreds, if not thousands of people, many of whom may fit perfectly into their ideal customer profile. Although, exhibitors may use an older method of collecting physical business cards, technology has made that form of lead retrieval almost obsolete. There are many considerations in selecting an appropriate Lead Retrieval System, such as booth size and layout, number of expected leads, event culture, and staff experience.

Lead Retrieval Systems capture revenue is generated at events, conference, and trade shows. It is simply a tool to exchange information between attendees, exhibitors/vendors, sponsors, and event organizers (Solaris & Copans, 2020). Lead retrieval facilitates capturing and managing contact information referred to as “leads”, to develop existing and future sales or networking opportunities. Exhibitors/vendors/sponsors can acquire and manage these leads during events with real-time mobile badge scanning using Quick-Response (QR) codes, I-D barcode, or near-field communication (NFC) technologies (Ramsborg, 2015) or via mobile app or a handheld scanner (Cpleiser, 2019).

**Event Badging and Ticketing**

Technology has made the online process of event registration more efficient, cost-effective, and secure for face-to-face or virtual events. Event registration technology can provide admission tickets (either printed or digital), provide attendees with event entrance, print out badges, and
generate event itineraries by using radio-frequency waves to wirelessly transfer data through a tag embedded in name badges, wristbands, or plastic cards. Live badging synchronizes attendee data with the event registration platform in real time. This interface provides tracking information of registration volume and timing. Also, as attendees register on-site, they can update their personal information or correct misspellings and outdated titles, and even add current photos to badges. These updates can reduce waste and increase event sustainability.

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) can also collect data on your attendee’s journey throughout an event. For example, RFID can be used to check-in attendees at breakout sessions, giving event organizers a much better sense of where their audience is going and what interests them. There are numerous benefits to RFID technology including faster attendee check-in, immediate data on foot traffic and going cashless. But, most importantly, RFID allows for higher levels of engagement, because attendees can interact on-site with sponsors and other attendees through live polling and surveys (Banfield, 2020).

Registration

Today’s event badging goes beyond a traditional lanyard and paper nametags. Pre-registration and on-site registration can run smoothly with digital event badges. Various badging technologies use radio frequency identification or near field communication (NFC) wearable badges or digital event ticketing via tokenization on mobile wallets using Apple VAS and Google Smart Tap (Eventbrite, 2020, Tatulli 2019).

If the event professional prefers a physical badge, on-site badge printing can offer a more flexible and efficient option to minimize queuing at registration. Having attendees register and print their badge generally takes less time than flipping through hundreds or even thousands of pre-printed badges.

Facial Recognition

Facial recognition technology is commonly found in day-to-day activities, such as unlocking personal devices, and so attendees expect this type of technology at events (Tatulli, 2019). When incorporated effectively, facial recognition can be a successful tool to propel event goals and meet the expectations of today’s event attendees. Since this technology can recognize unique facial features, it can be used for event admittance and security without physical badges and tickets (Ishtiaq, 2020).
To implement this type of technology, it is necessary to collect clear images of participants in advance of the event or during registration. Facial recognition can assist in streamlining the check-in experience, allowing participants to simply walk up to a camera, scan their face and receive their badge. Meanwhile, exhibitors can do a quick scan to capture that lead.

Event professionals can track attendees as they enter a session, avoiding any bottlenecks at the door. Additionally, this technology can provide fast attendee information which helps personalize their experience. For example, as an attendee approaches a booth, facial recognition can provide information such as goal for attending the event, to help start the conversation right.

Facial recognition also can scan the audience and compile data to read the overall emotional charge of the room, allowing real-time communication with speakers or performers to allow a change in delivery to better engage the attendees (Banfield, 2020).

Near Field Communications

Near field communication (NFC) enabled badges or wristbands offer event professionals the opportunity to gather data and increase attendee engagement and can hold 30x more information than traditional QR code badges. Uses of NFC data collection technology include tap’n go lead retrieval, access control, session scanning, passive tracking, materials distribution, and purse management. Purse management allows attendees to load money onto their NFC badges to pay for commodities at the event through designated NFC hotspots. This added convenience can speed up the payment process while eliminating the need for attendees to carry their wallets.

NFC technologies streamline the badging and registration process and improve event security. For example, with NFC access control, event professionals could enable or restrict access to certain areas at the event by encoding the rights to those areas onto the badge.

Attendees would gain access to designated areas (like VIP- exclusive areas) by simply tapping their wristbands onto a designated NFC hotspot or having an attendant scan their badge with an NFC device.

Figure 13. Facial Recognition technology. 
Source: Adobe Stock.
Virtual Meetings and Events

Meetings Today (2012) defines a virtual event as “an occurrence of people gathering together where some or all of the attendees are not physically in the same location but are connected in a common environment. The common environment might be one of many types but is usually enabled using computers and the Internet.” This type of interactive experience provides many of the same elements present in a physical event, including educational presentations, networking, and sponsorship opportunities (Ramsborg, 2015).

A virtual meeting or event can be on-demand or live. A live meeting or event is hosted using a virtual platform and occurs in real-time. Exclusively live sessions cannot be replayed as the broadcaster will transmit the program content or service at a fixed interval and once the broadcaster stops live service the viewer or listener cannot access the content (Meetings Today, 2012). On-demand sessions are pre-recorded content items available online that can be accessed as and when demanded or required by the viewer or listener.

In an Event Bright survey (2020), respondents predicted an increase in online and virtual events, to reduce overhead and environmental impact. While virtual events and webinars are a means of reaching remote attendees, it is also worth noting how live streaming enables events to reach an even wider audience via broadcast technologies and social media sharing (Alexander, 2020).

Attendee engagement has always been a top priority when executing meetings and events, whether they are live in-person events or in a virtual format. Using virtual venues allow professionals to elevate the attendee experience and immerse participants in their environments by creating customized locations, avatars, and in-platform social interaction that facilitates more authentic connection (Alexander, 2019). Attendees may use their avatars to chat with other participants, communicate with speakers, or raise their hands to ask questions during information sessions (Banfield, 2020).

Virtual meetings and events take many forms, such as webinars, job fairs, podcasts, or virtual trade shows/expos. A webinar (a combination of the words “web” and “seminar”) is a video workshop, lecture, or presentation hosted through online software. Often business-related, these sessions can be used to share knowledge, ideas, and updates with people around the world. Webinars can also be leveraged to build and nurture relationships, build authority around a brand, or demonstrate a product (Alscher, 2020). A virtual job fair allows potential employers and employees to meeting online and discuss job openings. The virtual job fair is a cost-effective technique used to attract employees, as it saves time and travel expenses. A podcast is an audio conference consisting of a presentation that will usually include an audio-based question and answer session.
A virtual trade show is a collection of some of the most successful elements of a live trade show and transmitted on the Internet. This experience can include a real-time experience of visiting and moving (in 2 or 3-D) through a virtual exposition hall and booths. Trade shows and conferences can build out virtual stands and booths where attendees can interact with experts to access information, share experiences, and learn about products. Virtual staff can even be present within these environments to help provide technical support, assist with creating avatars, and familiarize attendees with their virtual world to help make the most of the experience.

A Note About COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the global meeting and events industry but did not eliminate the need or reduce the value of in-person events. According to Reed Exhibitions (2020), three-quarters of attendees feel either positive or neutral about returning to events, compared to 56% of exhibitors. Reed Exhibitions (2020) also found that the appeal of hybrid events (combination of face-to-face and virtual) increased from 39% to 44% approval throughout 2020.

Post-Event Technology

Once a meeting or event is over, the professional still needs technological solutions to assess event success. Meeting and event professionals often use post-event surveys to ascertain objective achievement and event success. Surveys can be conducted on-site or sent virtually to attendees, post-event. The data collected from a post event survey can often shed light attendees’ likes and dislikes and often improvement ideas for future meetings (angage, 2019). While there are definite benefits to surveying before, during, and after an event, many organizations choose to send just one survey post-event to avoid overwhelming event stakeholders. If a professional chooses to go the more popular online route, there are multiple free or reasonably priced software programs, with event-specific templates, which can be customized to for the event and organization’s specific data needs.
The professional can go beyond simple surveys and questionnaires by reaching out to participants and speakers via event website, email newsletters, surveys, and social channels to solicit event feedback. Encourage participants to suggest future topics and program setups, provide feedback on their experiences, and brainstorm even better ways to share event highlights and learning (Steinberg, 2018). To analyze the feedback and data collected, AI is increasingly being used to review geolocation data and offer personalized recommendations and interpret data from the social media profiles of attendees.

**Conclusion**

Meetings and events have been successfully implemented globally throughout history. Technology aids the meeting and event professional in many places across the event planning lifecycle. In the pre-planning phase, the professional can research using Information portals, conduct site inspections virtually, submit requests for proposals online, and maximize efficiency through an integrated event management software platform.

Technology also aid in the strategic marketing and communications process. Successful meeting and event marketing employs communications through social media channels, identifies target markets through Artificial Intelligence and machine learning, and through the analysis of big data.

Once on-site, the meeting professional can reduce cost, maximize efficiency, and increase security using facial recognition and badging. The professional can also improve audience response and engagement through Audience Response Systems, mobile applications, and social media.

While face-to-face events will continue to be viable in the future, the rise of virtual meetings and events cannot be ignored. Traditional meetings, webinars, trade shows, and job fairs are held through a variety of virtual platforms. Finally, post-event success can be measured and analyzed through attendee feedback and surveys.

Meeting and event professionals will continue to improve the event experience for their attendees through technological upgrades. Attendees are constantly demanding more value for their registration dollar, and by using technology in creative and innovative ways, the meeting and event professional can continue to produce high-quality event experiences.
References


