

6 trends likely to disrupt the events industry in 2020

Do the sight and smell of a steamy shisa nyama in a pop-up shebeen seem like they have all the makings of a memorable event? What about the prospect of a collision space to promote networking at your next conference?

In South Africa's dynamic meeting and conference industry, like many other industries, the x-factor in event management is in innovation and disruption - much of which lies in the realm of finding novel ways to foster connection and collaboration.



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Raylene de Wet, director of event sales at Hyatt Regency Johannesburg, unveils six trends that will likely disrupt and elevate South Africa's events industry in the coming year.

1. Let's "festivalise" – it's all about the experience!

The days of unending keynotes and death by PowerPoint have long disappeared. Delegates want to be entertained – they want to immerse themselves and engage in an exciting events 'experience'.

Enter the concept of "festivalisation". "This has become the buzz word in the events industry," says de Wet. "Events – and the planning thereof – should be fun. And, what could be more fun than combining your average event with the elements of a festival?"

De Wet explains how "festivalisation" has led to the exchange of closed conference rooms for unusual outdoor venues. Keynote speakers now share the stage with live music and comedians. Corporate meeting attendees are looking for transformative experiences that will improve their daily work life.

Today's delegate prefers authentic local experiences and shows. They want to sample the destination's characteristic food and beverages, and interact with local residents who are knowledgeable about the area's history and culture.

2. TikTok – it's time to hop on the bandwagon

Ever heard of TikTok? If you're over 35 years old, chances are you haven't. "Believe us when we say the time has come to sit up and take notice," says de Wet.

TikTok is a social video platform that allows users to create and share short, musical videos. Like Instagram or Twitter, users can follow their friends as well as celebrities and influencers. It was the third-most downloaded app in the first quarter of 2019, with 188 million new users.

For meeting planners looking to boost event awareness, TikTok is the marketing tool you didn't know you needed – until now. Organisers can share videos leading up to the official announcement, with each post hinting at agenda items or key speakers. They can promote their event by hopping on current TikTok trends, such as popular video formats or songs.

With many young people wary of traditional marketing, TikTok gives planners the opportunity to stray from the beaten marketing path and provide authentic, branded content that younger audiences will engage with naturally on their social feeds.

3. Technology – up, up and away...

Imagine escaping a conference with a few minutes' meditation on the beach. Augmented reality and virtual reality can give that extra edge to any event by offering unique experiences in a virtual space.

De Wet explains how tech-augmented collaboration has revolutionised the events industry by allowing the world to become smaller. "South African event organisers can invite a speaker who is based in China without having to fly him or her in. With Internet connectivity constantly evolving and 5G on the horizon, we can expect to see more of a blurring of the lines between visual events and physical events."

Many audiovisual (AV) companies have also invested in equipment that enables interactive note-taking. Although de Wet explains this is not a huge trend in South Africa yet, innovative companies are moving in this direction. "There are also functionalities where speakers make notes which will save automatically to the guest phone through the meeting platform."

However, as much as technology will continue to shape the meetings industry, so too arises the demand for escaping from technology. With an always-on workforce, it is important to consider private places where delegates can relax and recharge. Mindfulness areas and places to 'unplug' are increasingly becoming the new norm.

4. Bye-bye, buffet. Hello culinary innovation.

Chicken or beef? What about a salad buffet or cocktail sausages? Step aside, everyone, and make way for MasterChef.

"Sub-par food at your event is a significant contributor to underwhelming event experiences. If you want your event to stand out, consider creative ways of displaying your food and taking your guests on a culinary journey," suggests de Wet. "By using local flavours and dishes, and presenting them in a modern and creative way, you can really make a lasting impression."

Bite-sized versions of regular food are always a hit. Nobody wants to walk around trying to mingle while balancing a full-

sized steak and chips. So, by scaling it down, you're not only being innovative, you're also making your attendees' experience a lot easier.

5. Sit, stand, mix it up...

Where people sit affects everything from how well they engage with each other to how well they absorb information. The truth is that the right seating arrangement can make or break the productivity and problem-solving abilities of delegates at your event.

Therefore, allow delegates to vary their postures during the event, advises de Wet. "Event planners constantly have to be one step ahead by ensuring that all events are productive and that attendees stay engaged. Several studies have been done on this topic and it's interesting to see how high tables with high seating combined with couches as well as standing meetings are impacting events."

Planners can create ample private meeting spaces as well as 'collision spaces'. One way to create such a space is to provide fewer chairs than attendees. With fewer empty seats, movement and interaction is encouraged.

6. Energising delegates will remain a priority

From mindfulness to movement and healthy meal options, wellness will continue to be a key focus in 2020.

Delegates are often bombarded with information in a short time span, which can leave them feeling drained. To prevent this from happening, organisers need to find new and innovative ways to keep everyone energised and engaged.

"Slot in a few meditation 'bubbles' during your conference to allow delegates to relax for a few moments, or distribute regular healthy fruit snacks to keep energy levels from crashing midway through the day," suggests de Wet. "Or shake things up by introducing a happiness coach to get your attendees smiling and engaging with their colleagues in different, original ways."

Each of these six trends in the global meetings and events industry has already made its way to South Africa, according to de Wet. "It can be daunting for local event organisers to keep abreast of the trends, which is why it is important to find the right partner to help you deliver these unique experiences," says de Wet. "You need the right people in the right places."

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