

# How to Design your Event for a **Millennial Mindset**



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**what participants expect and need**  
from corporate events.

# It's Time to Rethink The Event Experience

**Millennials think differently, and this has led other generations to behave more like millennials. The millennial mindset is changing what participants expect and need from corporate events.**

## **More than a generation, “millennial” is now a mindset.**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, millennials are the largest generation in the workforce. And according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, they'll soon constitute half of the workforce. But most essential to brands, millennials are demonstrating powerful influence over Generation X and Baby Boomers.

We are all a product of the technology that surrounds us. Millennial or not, we have all adapted to our rapidly changing world.

Futurecast calls this the “millennial mindset.” Collectively, we are more technology driven, socially conscious, collaborative, entrepreneurial, and increasingly attracted to trust and transparency. When it comes to events, time is valuable, attention is measured in moments, and we all want to meet the right people and hear only what's relevant to us.

With this in mind, it's time to think like a millennial, in order to rethink the event experience.

## **Location, Location, Location**

Location is critical to millennials. According to Marriott's Meetings Imagined, millennials want to go to large cities with public transportation and nighttime activities. This aligns with a Skift study proving that 85% of millennials choose to explore the host city during a convention. So before you sign a three-year hotel deal, consider giving your participants what they want, and plan your location around their needs. Some questions to ask:

1. Is the venue readily accessible to an airport/Uber/shuttles?
2. Is it a vacation-worthy destination?
3. Is the venue close to the best night life destinations?
4. Is the area safe at night?
5. Is the city easy to explore on a budget?
6. Does the venue highlight the charm of the host city?



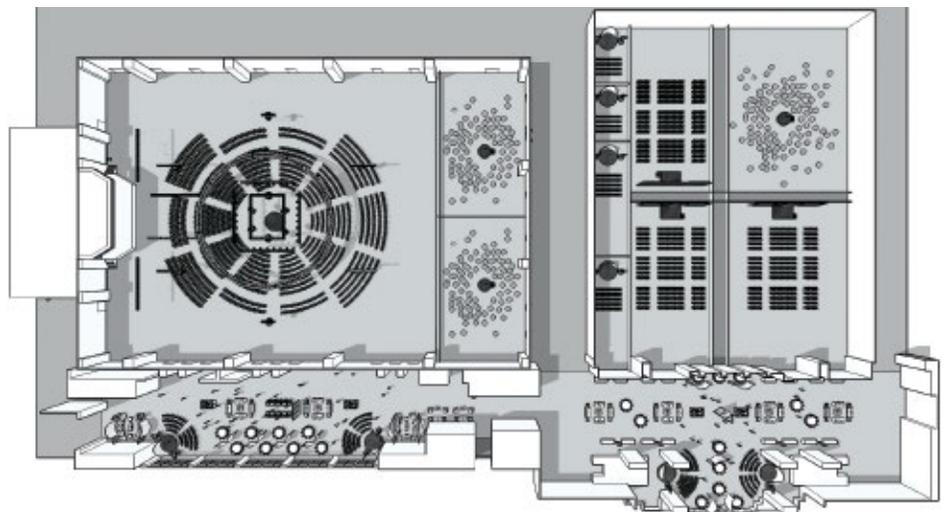
**Your event framework is an expression of your brand and your audience.**

## Find the Right Event Framework

We're all familiar with the typical routine: general session in the morning, breakout sessions all afternoon, networking reception, awards ceremony, and entertainment/party. The traditional event format works for the baby boomer generation, but it's woefully inadequate to meet the needs of millennials, and everyone who shares the millennial mindset.

Millennials want to make the most of their time, they want to connect, interact, and drive change with their peers in small group environments. They want their journey to be personalized, meaningful, fun, and driven by a sense of community.

**With that in mind, here are a few of our favorite frameworks for millennial-minded events:**





## The City (1,000+)

Break down the walls between general session, breakouts, and tradeshow environments and place attendees together to create one central location where participants live and work all day. The day begins with a general session message from city hall, then participants become fully autonomous for the rest of the day, deciding which neighborhoods to explore, what breakout talks to attend, and who to network with. By planning multiple simultaneous activities throughout the city, participants will pick the place most relevant to them, and their journey will be unique and meaningful. You may have appointments within The City, but otherwise it's a place to explore on your own schedule.



## The Tribes (500+)

Create clusters of activity called tribes, each with their own purpose and mission. Ask each participant what tribe they identify with, and set them loose in their tribe to hear elders talk, complete large tasks as a tribe, and split into specialized groups to tackle more specific problems. When participants identify as belonging to more than one tribe, send them off as emissaries to visit other tribes to share their knowledge and point of view, then have them return home to report back.



## The Marketplace (300+)

Many corporate events have specific objectives, and accomplish them with a grueling set of required breakout sessions that last all day. Consider loosening the reigns and pooling all of the presentation materials into a marketplace format, where participants are free to come and go all day. Freedom of choice matters. Participants can choose which section of the market to visit first, and how to spend their time. Each market stall is manned by a subject matter expert who gives small group presentations and answer questions in a more informal way—it's all designed to invite more engagement and meaningful conversation. Those who've heard enough can jump to the next stall and invest their time in their own way.



## The Lab (100+)

Millennials thrive on solving problems in small groups. Elevate a traditional round-table discussion into a dynamic session that encourages peer collaboration in new ways. Create a series of labs filled with highly specialized problem solving tools, then assign attendees to labs to engage with specialized topics, business challenges, and role-playing scenarios. Or better yet, assign a lab manager, let them identify a challenging topic and allow them to recruit a team to solve the problem.



## The Fireside (10+)

Each participant has a unique point of view and can tell a story like no one else. Gather small numbers of participants together in an informal setting and circle them together to share stories. Everyone is welcome to the fireside, and everyone gets a chance to speak. What follows is a democratized environment where no one is in charge and each thought leads fluidly to the next – until all participants have learned through story and bonded.

## Dynamic Content Drives Results

What you say and how you say it will make or break your event. Millennials want the power to choose which sessions to attend, so you can be assured that the right people will be in the right place. All that's left is to captivate your audience—no easy task. That said, according to a Skift report, Millennials' most preferred communication channel is face-to-face. Here are a few tips to make sure your message is heard:

### Keep it short, then make it shorter

Contrary to popular belief, millennials can pay attention, but they are much more critical of what deserves their attention. Millennials grew up watching Steve Jobs give captivating presentations with single words and large images filling the screen. Those are big shoes to fill for any presenter. Have one main point for your presentation and get to it quickly. If anecdotes are used, they need to relate to your audience and add to the story. Delete every bullet on every slide and ask yourself: "How can I say the same thing more efficiently?"

### Be authentic and passionate

Millennials are attracted to those who share their perspective, and they seek authenticity and passion in every presentation. Are you reading from notes? If so, you aren't being authentic. Talk with them, not at them. Millennials can find, follow and learn from the greatest minds in their industry through search, forums and videos. The only thing that can elevate your presenter to the same level is a passion for the topic matter. Be excited, share your energy with the crowd, talk from experience, and your audience will be engaged.

### Use technology to qualify and follow-up

Millennials will be hungry for information about your session before they attend it. They are looking to qualify the topic and the presenter against their own learning needs; so don't leave them blind and guessing, release a prospectus before the talk to allow participants to evaluate your point of view. Post it within your event app, on your website agenda, and on digital screens outside the breakout area.

Post-session communication is all about speed. Make sure your final presentation is uploaded to a slide sharing service or attached to your event app before you drop the mic. If you wait even a few hours to publish the deck, everyone will have moved on. Sessions with RFID attendance tracking can go the extra mile by scheduling an email to blast from the presenter to the participants in the room giving a summary of the session and all attached materials. Make the most of your moment before it's forgotten.

## Have a plan for sharing

Millennials look for opportunities to share what they are doing with their personal and professional circles. Whether the sharing is done within a corporate firewall or freely available for the world to see, millennials need an outlet for sharing, and guidelines as to what is expected/appropriate. Just because it doesn't belong on Facebook doesn't mean it can't be posted to Chatter or Slack. If sharing is openly endorsed at your meeting, go one step further by creating share-worthy moments—such as a social media activation.

The only thing faster than tweets and snaps is livestreaming. Livestreaming is all the rage, whether done professionally and beamed back to the home base, or done by your crowd with Facebook Live. Your online audience will give their attention more willingly to something that is live, because it's live. Online participants want to be a part of the experience, they want to hang out together, chat, ask questions, and get live responses. It's easier than ever to go live—it's no longer an option, it's an expectation.

## Unexpected Engagement Tactics

### Invite opinions before, during, and after

One way to make sure your content is on point is to ask your audience—prior to the event—what hot topics need to be addressed. Send an internal survey to your audience to find common themes and macro trends—then craft content around the topics that really matter.

When those sessions are live, consider the use of live polling to validate your perspective. Participants will jump at the chance to engage, and will feel like their opinions are part of the presentation.

Session surveys are a great way to gauge which presentations were well received, but when possible, ask for feedback immediately following each session – and act quickly to clarify questions or reconfigure subsequent sessions to course-correct while the event is still happening.

### Learn through play

The term “gamify” has been used to death, but the idea of learning through play is a fundamental experience we've all shared at some point in life—and millennials strongly identify with it. Whenever you're faced with a mundane activity or required learning objective, here are a few questions to help spice up the experience:

1. Can performance be tracked and scored?
2. Would it be more memorable if done in groups?
3. If you add a countdown timer will it spur creative on-the-spot thinking?

4. Is there a way to accomplish the same goal that allows participants to get up and move around?
5. Is there a way to share individual/team results in real time to encourage high performance?
6. Are you willing to recognize top performers in a meaningful way?

## Design for Digital Natives

Millennials are tech-savvy and have a tough time disconnecting from their devices. This can be a boon when it comes to holding on to fleeting attention spans, or it can be leveraged for a better event experience. Here are a few tips to consider to appeal to the technology needs of your audience:

1. Provide an app that includes advanced networking functionality to post status updates and direct chat other participants
2. Create contextual experiences using BLE/iBeacon and your event app
3. Provide charging stations for phones and laptops to keep your participants juiced up
4. Utilize RFID attendee tracking to identify hot spots/sessions and offer more of what's popular
5. Highjack the most distracting device (smartphone) and put it to use with live polling or live voting using apps like cnf.io or makelight

## Share a Purpose

According to Deloitte, Millennials are steered by strong values at all stages of their careers. Millennials will seek out organizations which share their personal values. One way to build loyalty is to put your corporate social responsibility program into practice at your next event. Ask yourself the following questions when planning an altruistic event activity:

1. What can we do environmentally to make this conference greener? Is there an opportunity for your attendees to aid in this effort?
2. What local charitable organizations does our company and our participants relate to? How can we contribute to these groups?
3. Can you offer an opportunity to take an hour out of the week to volunteer/ give back to the host city? How can this be accomplished as a large group?

## Conclusion

Millennials have a strong presence in the workforce and in the meetings and events industry. What's more, even Gen X and Baby Boomers have adopted the millennial mindset. Their needs are changing, and the new expectation is one of a personalized event experience worthy of their time and attention.

**Ready for your events to engage today's millennial mindset?  
So are we.**

**Let's go.**

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