

FIVE GENERATIONS, *ONE* CONFERENCE

DESIGNING EVENTS FOR
MULTIGENERATIONAL AUDIENCES



OLYMPIA

In partnership with Olympia Events

INTRODUCTION



Ageing populations and falling birthrates in the world's advanced economies are reshaping the workplace, as is the relentless pace of technological change. As noted at last year's *World Economic Forum Annual Meeting*, there may be four, or even five, generations of employees working alongside each other in modern organisations. They range from the last members of the pre-Baby-Boom generation who have stayed on well beyond retirement age, often in C-suite or boardroom positions, to the Boomers themselves, Generation X, Millennials and the digital natives of Gen Z. And as their successors, Generation Alpha (born from 2010), begin to enter employment over the coming years, the workplace is set to evolve again.

while others value more informal, experience-led interactions and greater flexibility in how they move through an event. However, there is also significant overlap between generations, which is why organisers need to be careful not to make assumptions based solely on age."

PREFER A BALANCE OF TECH AND IN-PERSON OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT

Gen Z



91%

Millennials



90%

Gen X



93%

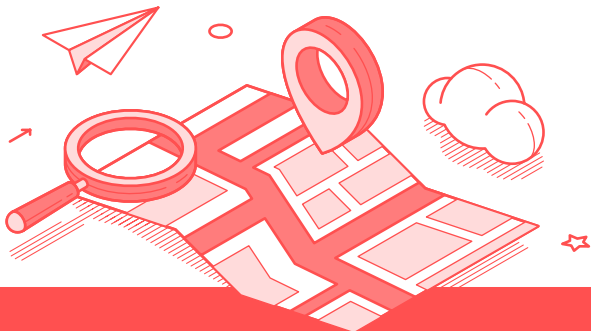
(The Harris Poll/Freeman 2025 Gen Z Report)

Today's conferences are likely to span a number of age groups – but what does this mean for event planners? C&IT has teamed up with Olympia Events to explore how MICE organisers can deliver inclusive events for multigenerational audiences. "We do see different engagement styles emerging," says Carly Gibbs, general manager of the International Conference Centre (ICC) at Olympia. "Some delegates prefer highly structured content and organised networking opportunities,

Rather than designing for one audience segment at the expense of another, she helps event organisers create experiences that cater for a range of preferences, ensuring nobody feels excluded or overlooked. "Increasingly, the most successful events are those that offer choice, allowing delegates to personalise how they consume content, network and spend their time."

MOVING BEYOND GENERATIONAL STEREOTYPES

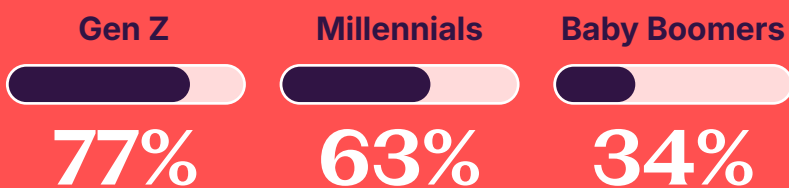
Multigenerational audiences are a hot topic in the event sector, with much recent discussion around what younger attendees, in particular, are seeking from conferences and events. The good news for event organisers is that the youngest generation in the workplace, Gen Z – typically defined as those born around 1997-2010 – place a similar value on in-person events as preceding generations, and are even more willing to travel to attend such events.



This generation is often characterised as digitally literate, socially conscious and values-driven, with a preference for immersive and interactive events, and a short attention span for content that's not instantly relevant to them.

"No single event format works across five generations," says Alex Atherton, generational expert and author of *The Snowflake Myth: Explaining Gen Z in the Workplace and Beyond*. "Older generations tend to value structured agendas, clear takeaways and handouts. Gen Z want interaction, co-creation and a reason to be physically in the room, rather than watching a recording later. Ultimately, designing for 'the average attendee' is designing for nobody."

PERCENTAGE LIKELY OR VERY LIKELY TO ATTEND EVENTS REQUIRING TRAVEL



It's important not to over-simplify, or over-exaggerate, generational differences, however. Social, experiential and economic factors may play just as important a role as age in shaping our preferences and behaviour.

(RainFocus)



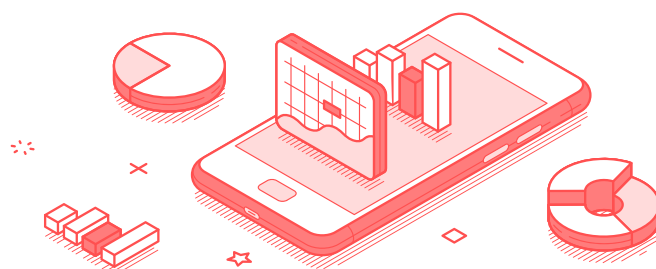
TECH TIP

"Age is becoming a less useful predictor of technology behaviour," says Richard Harris, technology director at Olympia Events. "Digital confidence varies widely within every generation, so the real challenge for organisers and venues lies in giving people different ways to access and engage with content."

"Not every Gen Z delegate wants constant technology, just as not every Baby Boomer prefers traditional event formats," says Steve Daun, head of sales for associations at Legends Global, which owns and manages Olympia Events and has a portfolio of over 450 venues worldwide. "Career stage, professional goals and previous event experiences can all have a significant influence on attendee behaviour."

Daun notes, though, that demographic data can be useful to help identify broad audience expectations and emerging trends. "For example, if an association is seeing a growing percentage of younger members attending its events, that may

indicate increased demand for career-development content, mobile-first experiences and more flexible learning formats," he says. "Equally, if a significant proportion of attendees are approaching retirement, organisers may want to consider programming focused on succession planning, knowledge transfer and leadership legacy. The key is using data to inform decisions, rather than using it to make assumptions about individuals."



CASE STUDY

PLANNING A GLOBAL GATHERING

In late 2027, the 44th World Scout Conference will convene at Olympia, which was also the venue for the first ever World Scout Conference back in 1920. The event is set to welcome around 1,500 delegates, ranging from around 18 years old to senior Scout leaders. "We want attendees to leave with new ideas, new partnerships, new friendships and experiences that genuinely help improve Scouting within their own countries and communities," says Tom Hylands, who is part of the volunteer team responsible for planning the conference. "The venue plays a huge role in enabling that. You need great plenary spaces, but you also need breakout areas, informal networking environments, places for reflection, good catering and spaces where delegates feel comfortable spending their time."

The choice of on-site facilities across the wider Olympia destination, with options to suit every

budget, helped it stand out during the venue selection process, says Hylands. "If we want the conference to genuinely represent global Scouting, we have to make it as accessible as possible for people to attend, and that includes offering accommodation, dining and social options at different price points."

Hylands is making sure younger delegates are actively involved in shaping the event – for example, by speaking directly to their audience about what they want to get out of it. "That direct engagement is invaluable because it helps us avoid making assumptions, and instead base decisions on genuine feedback," he says. "It is not just about having younger people attend the conference, it is about giving them a voice in decision making and planning. We want younger delegates involved from the outset, because they are incredibly well placed to help shape the future of events like this."

CONTENT FOR DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES

We all have our own learning styles. While older generations may be more familiar with content being shared through a linear programme of expert lectures and keynote speeches, younger attendees, in particular, seem to appreciate more active, immersive and hyperfocused learning opportunities.

Steve Daun can testify to a shift: "Across Legends Global's UK portfolio, I'm starting to see organisers change the design of their conference programmes to suit different generational preferences," he says. "Instead of longer educational sessions where delegates sit in the same room listening to a presentation, organisers are introducing shorter, more interactive sessions, workshops and peer-to-peer discussions to appeal to younger audiences."

This is backed by a recent survey of Gen Z professionals by US-based events agency GoGather. "Sixty-one per cent of respondents said sessions that feel generic or irrelevant are a major turnoff. They prefer hands-on formats over passive lectures," says the company's marketing manager, Madison Shepherd. "We're seeing younger attendees skip boring, broad general sessions and gravitate toward more niche, personalised breakout formats where they can actively participate. When the agenda feels rigid or lecture-heavy, they disengage fast. Gen Z wants to feel like they have some control over their experience, so we've been building agendas that let people pick their own path, rather than funnelling everyone through the same schedule."

TECH TIP

Smart event organisers recognise that we all consume information differently, says Lisa Tyson, deputy managing director of production company Aztec Events, an exclusive AV provider for the ICC at Olympia: "Some delegates want to sit through a full keynote, while others want quick takeaways, summaries and content they can access in their own time. We're seeing more event technology focused on making content digestible. Whether that's QR codes linking to key takeaways, edited highlight videos, transcripts or post-event content libraries, it's about giving people flexibility."



GEN Z PREFERENCES

53%

hands-on demonstrations
and live simulations

25%

interactive workshops
and breakout sessions

12%

keynote speeches
from leaders

(GoGather Gen Z survey)

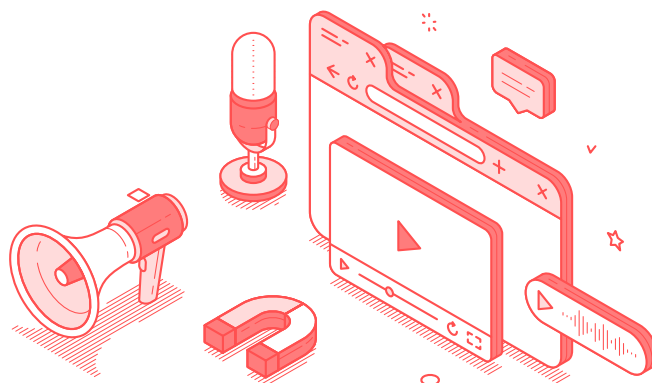


While Gen Z is most strongly associated with this demand for active learning and customised schedules, the experts agree that we all want more relevant content these days.

"Increasingly, successful conferences blend multiple formats together, rather than relying on a single style of delivery, because delegates expect greater choice in how they consume information," says Carly Gibbs.

Meanwhile, don't forget to consider whether the marketing content around your event is speaking to different audiences, too. "Gen Z engages with

social-first content and short-form formats," says Madison Shepherd. "They're more likely to hear about an event through LinkedIn or Instagram than an email campaign."



CASE STUDY

CREATING CONTENT FOR CREATORS

For the recent Adobe Creator Live event at Olympia, event agency Taylor Bennett invited around 550 content creators from a range of sectors including photography, fashion, food, sport, beauty and social media. "Rather than creating a traditional conference focused on product features, Adobe wanted to reach a completely new audience of creators and influencers who would then share those stories with their own communities," says the agency's CEO, Russell Bennett. "While attendees came from very different backgrounds and stages in their careers, what united them was a desire to learn, create and connect."

The event underlined the importance of offering choice to today's audiences, says Bennett. "Rather than assuming what different audiences wanted, we designed a variety of experiences around the venue. Alongside a central stage programme, there were multiple themed spaces focused on different

interests and communities, allowing attendees to engage with the content that felt most relevant to them."

Meanwhile, every touchpoint also had to be shareable: "This audience lives and breathes content creation, so the experience needed to inspire them to tell their own stories."

Despite the diversity of its audience – including in age – there was a fantastic sense of community on the day, adds Bennett. "It reinforced the idea that successful events are often less about catering to specific generations, and more about creating an environment where people can discover, connect and engage in ways that suit them personally. "Olympia played an important role in that experience. The combination of the venue's heritage character and newly redeveloped spaces created a unique backdrop for an audience built around creativity and innovation."

NETWORKING IS DIFFERENT ACROSS GENERATIONS



Networking remains one of the core motives for attending conferences across all age groups – and not least Gen Z. Research by global event agency Freeman found that 95% of Gen Zers understand the importance of making personal business connections to succeed at their jobs. However, research suggests that different generations may have different preferences and confidence levels, as well as different goals, when it comes to networking.

"I think younger attendees prefer smaller, more intimate settings where they can connect with their peers in a less formal setting," says Steve Daun. "Older colleagues

still enjoy the larger drinks receptions with the exchanging of business cards, but that's not necessarily how younger generations prefer to do business. Many favour smaller, more focused networking environments."

FEEL CONFIDENT NETWORKING WITH PEOPLE IN THEIR COMPANY/INDUSTRY

Gen Z



39%

Millennials



47%

Gen X



48%

(The Harris Poll/Freeman
2025 Gen Z Report)

TECH TIP

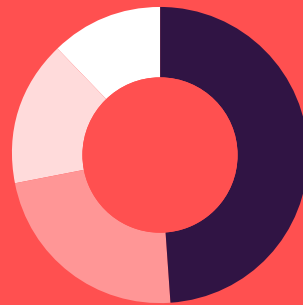
Technology can extend networking opportunities beyond the live event itself, says Carly Gibbs: "Event apps and digital platforms are enabling delegates to connect before they arrive, schedule meetings in advance and continue conversations after the event. As a result, the event experience becomes part of a longer engagement journey that supports relationship-building, knowledge sharing and community development, before and after the event."





(GoGather Gen Z survey)

GEN Z NETWORKING PREFERENCES



49%

happy hour events

23%

casual lounge meetups

16%

breakout sessions or
roundtables

12%

exhibit halls

Madison Shepherd has also seen Gen Z ditching large-scale or formal networking events in favour of more casual and/or targeted sessions, such as lounge meetups or topic-driven roundtables. "Gen Z isn't anti-networking; they're anti-awkward. They want a reason to talk to someone before they have to talk to someone," she says. However, "Millennials tend to be more comfortable with structured icebreakers and activity-based networking, while Gen Z generally finds that forced."

Given the variety of personal preferences around networking, event organisers are becoming more imaginative about how they bring attendees together to connect. "Networking is no longer confined to coffee breaks and evening drinks receptions," says Adam Pollington, sales director at Olympia Events. "Organisers increasingly want



it woven throughout the delegate journey, using restaurants, public spaces, hospitality and entertainment experiences to create more natural, varied opportunities for connection."

The recent redevelopment of Olympia as a fully integrated destination with a range of eating and drinking venues on-site – from buzzy rooftop bars and food halls to modern British dining in Grade II* listed surroundings – is designed to support this kind of organic interaction, making it easy to continue networking beyond its conference centre or exhibition halls.

"Examples of this could include a pre-show networking breakfast in The Addison premium lounge, offering delegates a more ambient and informal setting to connect; or post-show drinks in the historic Pillar Hall, which offers a dramatic backdrop for more formal evening networking," says Pollington.

RETHINKING THE DRINKING

While drinks receptions remain popular with many delegates, it's worth remembering that booze-fuelled networking isn't everyone's, well, cup of tea. Research shows that many Gen Z-ers in Europe, the US and Australia are drinking less alcohol than previous generations. Over a quarter (26%) of 16-25-year-olds in the UK don't drink alcohol,

compared to just 15% of 55-74-year-olds.

Consider providing networking opportunities that aren't purely about the booze, such as roundtable discussions, speed-mentoring sessions, peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, or reverse mentoring – inviting Gen Z attendees to share their skills and insights with older generations.

THE RISE OF EXPERIENCE-LED CONFERENCES



Today's audiences expect conferences to feel experiential, not transactional – and it's not just younger delegates, such as Gen Z and Millennials, who are driving this trend. "Younger audiences are often looking for experiences that feel more flexible, immersive and authentic, but many of these expectations now extend well beyond Gen Z," says Brittany McLaren, head of sales for ICC at Olympia Events. "We're seeing organisers place greater emphasis on community, interactive content, wellbeing and social experiences, rather than purely traditional conference formats."

As she notes, today's delegates are not just comparing their experiences with other conferences, but also against hospitality, travel and entertainment experiences more broadly, raising the bar for organisers and venues. "Increasingly, attendees expect events to feel immersive, seamless and experience-led from the moment they arrive."



TECH TIP

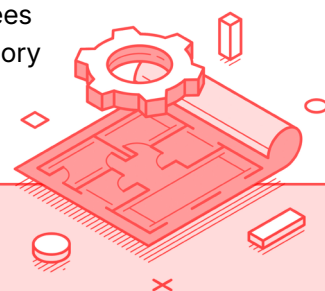
Technology can help shape environments that ensure a sense of comfort and community, says Lisa Tyson: "Lighting, content delivery, sound design and the overall aesthetic of a space can all influence how people feel. We're using technology to help create calmer spaces where delegates can pause, regulate and recharge before returning to the main event. "



Creating this kind of cohesive experience requires excellent partnerships between event organisers and their venue, hospitality and tech partners. "It includes everything from event-day hosting and guest welcome to the design of environments, staff presentation and the overall atmosphere of a space," says Carly Gibbs. "This is something we're actively exploring with organisers – working collaboratively across venue operations, hospitality and F&B teams to develop bespoke experiences that reflect the character of each event and the expectations of its audience."

Meanwhile, conferences centred on delegate experience are also building in more time dedicated to wellbeing and downtime – something which is often appreciated just as much by younger attendees as older ones. "We're seeing growing demand for quieter breakout areas, wellness-focused spaces and places where delegates can decompress, recharge or continue working between sessions, rather than feeling obligated to remain in high-energy environments throughout the day," adds Gibbs.

As she notes, accessibility and inclusivity are now seen as integral to the overall event experience, not just add-on requirements: "That means creating experiences that feel welcoming and manageable for a broad range of attendees with different physical, sensory and professional needs."



NEXT-GENERATION HOTELS

If a "one-size-fits-all" conference no longer cuts the mustard, then neither does a "one-size-fits-all" hotel. That's why we're seeing the hotel industry develop more 'youthful' brands such as Moxy and CitizenM, which are prioritising playful, vibrant, tech-assisted experiences over traditional frills. At Olympia, accommodation bookers will soon be able to choose between the sophisticated, five-star comfort of its recently opened Regency

Hyatt, and an upcoming hip new outpost of CitizenM. "Having multiple on-site hotel options gives organisers greater flexibility around delegate preferences, budgets and travel styles," says Brittany McLaren. "Different brands naturally appeal to different audiences, and having choice on-site is increasingly important for international and multigenerational events where attendees may have very different expectations."

WHAT CONFERENCE AUDIENCES EXPECT NEXT

Planning events for attendees with a wide range of career and life stages, learning styles, digital skills and access needs means providing an increasingly personalised and responsive experience for everyone – underpinned by data analysis and AI. “Organisers now have access to more feedback and insight than ever before, and technology is helping them analyse that information much faster,” says Lisa Tyson. “The real opportunity is using those insights to create events that feel more relevant to individual delegates.”

This trend is set to accelerate as Generation Alpha – generally defined as those born from 2010 onwards – joins the workforce over the next few years. This generation is likely to have even higher expectations around events being immersive, interactive and tech-assisted.

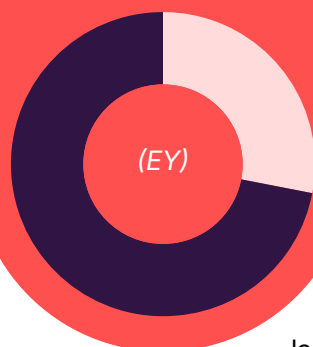
“Gen Alpha will expect physical and digital experiences to work seamlessly together, because that’s the world they’ve grown up in,” says Richard Harris. He believes the distinction between live, hybrid and virtual events will continue to blur, as future audiences will expect to engage with an event in whichever way suits them best.

In-person events will remain valuable, he says, because of the authentic human connection they provide. “However, future generations will increasingly expect content, interaction and engagement to extend well beyond the venue itself. Events that fail to embrace

WORKFORCE SHIFT BY 2033

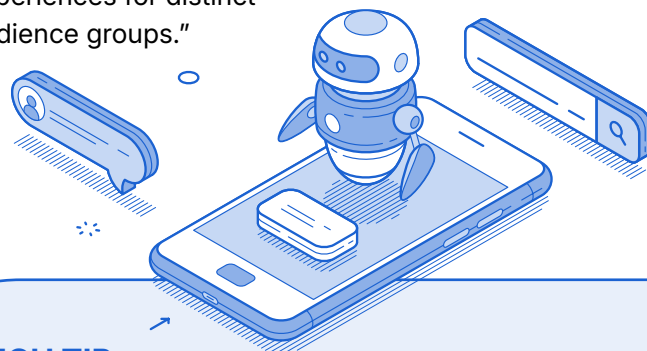
72%

Gen Alpha, Gen Z
or Millennials



digital engagement risk losing relevance, while those that succeed will be designed to create value both inside the room and beyond it; extending conversations, content and community before, during and after the event.”

Steve Daun predicts that large-scale conferences will continue to play an important role, but predicts that we’ll also see smaller, more targeted events running alongside – or within – them. “At Olympia, we’re seeing increasing demand for spaces that can accommodate everything from large conferences to smaller breakout sessions,” he says. “The most successful events will be those that can bring different generations together, while still creating relevant and engaging experiences for distinct audience groups.”



TECH TIP

“AI is going to have a huge impact on how events are delivered over the next decade,” says Steve Daun. “Organisers will need to become more agile and responsive, with programmes that can adapt in real time based on attendee interests and behaviours.”



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In partnership with Olympia Events

ABOUT/CONTACTS

ABOUT OLYMPIA EVENTS

The home of inspirational events in London for 140 years, the newly reimagined and redeveloped Olympia offers iconic event spaces alongside state-of-the-art modern infrastructure, hospitality, accommodation, and operational flexibility – all within one fully interconnected destination. Whether you're planning an exhibition, conference, interactive experience or other large-scale event, our award-winning events team will work closely with you to make it a success. Find out more at olympia.co.uk or email hello@olympia.london.

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