

LETTING GO TO GROW

The **NEW PLAYBOOK** for
transformative events.

Powered by

CROWDPulse
BY THE EXPO GROUP

THE EXPO GROUP
Architects for connecting communities.™

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THE CONTROL PARADOX

Best-in-class shows are revolutionizing live events by intentionally relinquishing traditional control mechanisms.

By embracing collaborative design and participatory delivery models, they're creating environments where authentic engagement naturally flourishes – driving unprecedented growth and reimagining what a 'successful event' truly means.

In short, they're making live events feel more **ALIVE!**



OUR APPROACH

OBSERVED BEHAVIOR AT SCALE

Revealing the key
forces reshaping
live events.

Start with
what people

DO

Validate vs.
what they

SAY

1.5B

Audience potential
across analyzed
content interactions

+88M

Content interactions
over 12 months

+50

Industry reports
cross-referenced
against our findings



WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

IS YOUR AUDIENCE INTELLIGENCE FIT FOR THE AI AGE?

Billions of real-time audience insights

CROWDPulse analyzes **billions** of real-time interactions to uncover what your audience is connecting with – **giving you the blueprint** of what truly moves them.

FROM ATTENDEES TO WHOLE HUMAN BEINGS

Revealing a comprehensive picture of who your audience is – *in work and in life* – through observed behaviors at a scale and depth that traditional surveys can never capture.

THE CONFIDENCE TO LET GO AND DRIVE GROWTH

Turn insights into impact by embracing fluid thinking and collaborative design with clarity and confidence.

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THE NEW PLAYBOOK

Our research reveals **three transformative shifts** redefining success in live events.

By strategically relinquishing traditional control structures, industry leaders are creating more vibrant, valuable experiences that generate measurable business advantages.

Each insight represents a deliberate move from management toward facilitation, creating a new playbook for thriving in an experience-driven economy.

1

**Constellations,
Not Supernovas:**
The Power of Scaling-Down

2

**Co-Creation
Nation:**
The Death Of Event Autocracy

3

**Human-Centered
Design:**
Embracing Cognitive Reality



1 CONSTELLATIONS NOT SUPERNOVAS

Welcome to the era where "scaling down" is actually the ultimate growth strategy.

Mass appeal is dead – and trying to create the perfect event for everyone is the fastest route to creating something memorable for no one.

The industry's brightest stars are ditching the pressure to dazzle all attendees with a single blinding experience, instead crafting constellations of interconnected micro-moments that attendees can navigate on their terms.

By surrendering the impulse to control every second of every person's journey, organizers discover that these bespoke pathways create richer connections and more authentic engagement.

77%

Industry innovation conversations driven by personalization topics

— CROWDPulse

20%

Companies investing in micro events are 15% more likely to achieve +20% YoY growth

Swoogo, 2025

63%

Industry professionals believe people will be looking for more intimate experiences at events

Eventbrite, 2025

64%

Consumers prefer experiences specifically tailored to their needs

Statista, 2024



SHIFTING PRIORITIES:

ATTENDEES SEEKING TO UPSKILL & GROW

Professional skills development has now overtaken traditional networking as the primary motivation for attending industry events.

In a climate of constant disruption – where AI is transforming job roles and economic uncertainty prevails – attendees are fundamentally rethinking what makes professional events worth their time and investment.

Priorities have shifted decisively toward tangible outcomes that deliver personal ROI: upskilling, professional development, and meaningful community connections.

53%

Attendees are looking to develop professional skills at events - ahead of traditional networking

CVENT, 2024

Organizations have existing skills gaps or expect to have one in the next three years

McKinsey, 2024

87%

Tapping into Gen Z Motivations

Often depicted as lazy or uncommitted, **Gen Z are in fact the most motivated by professional development (65%)** compared to their Millennials and Gen X counterparts.

They see out of office learning as key to professional development; **70% of Gen Z workers are using learning platforms in their own time to boost skills & employability.**

Udemy, 2024



SPOT
LIGHT



WINNING BIG BY EXECUTING SMALL

Neighborhood experience design. Specialized town squares focused on niche sectors creating more tailored experiences.

Community-specific gathering hubs. Dedicated spaces for specific communities replace general networking areas to facilitate more targeted connections.

Prioritizing small-group discussions. Expert-led small discussion groups addressing specific challenges faced by different audience segments.



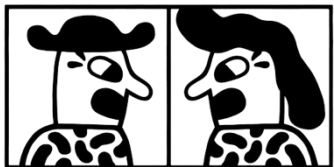


SMALL CIRCLES, BIG STORIES

For Tracker Season 2, CBS replaced one mega-event with a series of handcrafted, off-grid experiences — each one tailored to bring Colter Shaw's world to life for select VIP audiences.

Each event saw small groups tracking through wilderness, decoding mysteries, and living off the land. Resulting in deeper connections, authentic content, and participants who didn't just watch the show — they became part of its DNA.





Mikkeller

SCALE DOWN TO SCALE UP

Mikkeller Running Club proved that scaling down really scales up. They built 200+ local chapters by rejecting the mega-event playbook entirely.

Their simple framework—run, then celebrate with a beer — empowered local champions to create **authentic micro-communities**, resulting in deeper global connections through **interconnected small experiences, not one overwhelming spectacle.**





SPOT
LIGHT



SMALL EVENTS ARE DOING MORE WITH LESS

While industry-wide exhibition attendance still lags pre-pandemic levels, **the smallest events are approaching full recovery.**

Smaller, more intimate formats clearly possess advantages in meeting attendee expectations that can be adopted at larger shows.

KEY TAKEOUT

Bigger shows can tap into this behavior shift by designing more **targeted community activations** and 'event-within-event' constellation experiences to create **value** throughout the attendee experience.



KEY TAKEAWAYS >>>

1

Create **specialized micro-experiences** and community-specific spaces that **cater to distinct audience segments**, rather than organizing by broad categories or relying on generic networking areas.

2

Shift from **large-scale presentations** to intimate, expert-led roundtables, **upskilling opportunities** and **problem-solving workshops** that address specific challenges faced by different segments of your audience.

3

Design personalized attendee journeys using registration data, personas, and AI to develop **pathways tailored to different interests, energy levels, and time constraints**.

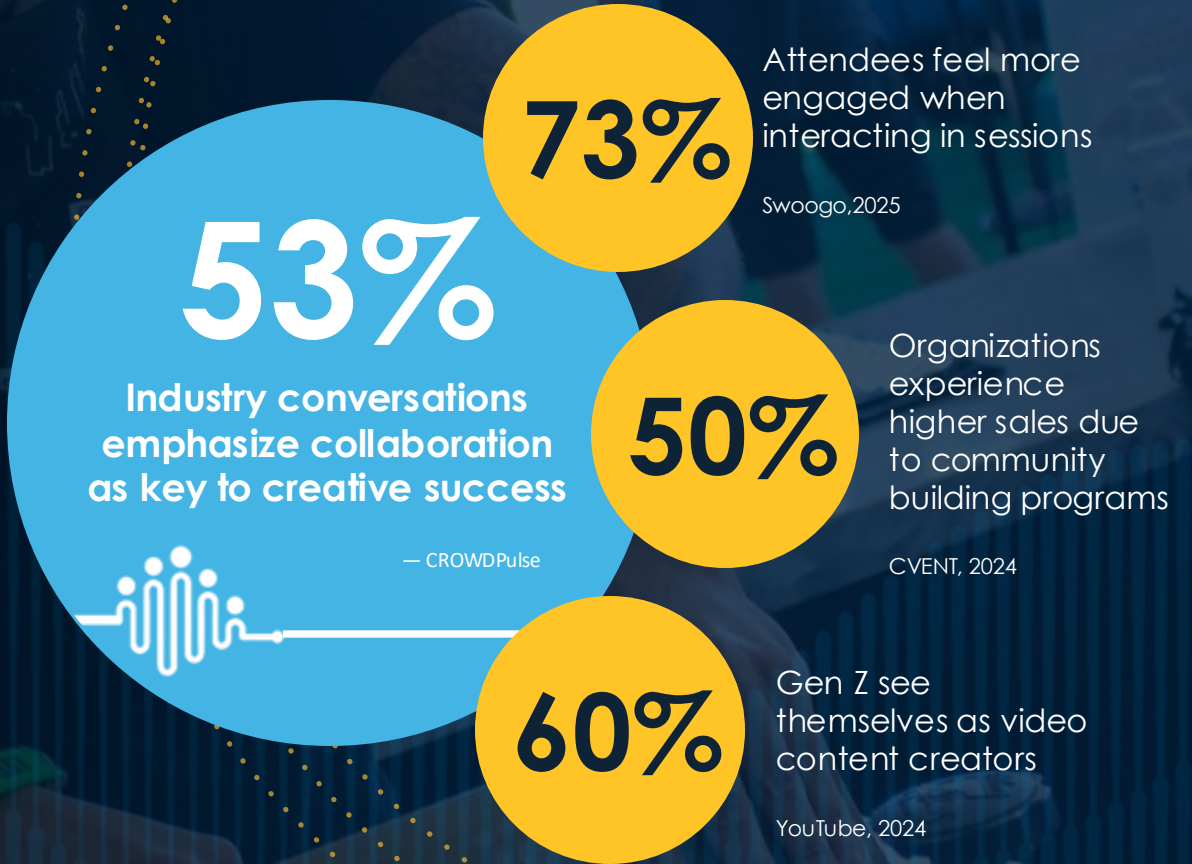


2 CO-CREATION NATION

Today's most electric events aren't just inviting attendees in – they're handing over the keys to meet the demands of audiences, particularly Gen Z and Millennials who want their voices to be heard.

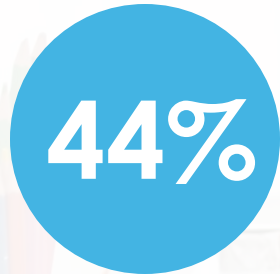
By giving up creative control, organizers are unlocking collaborative dimensions that transform passive attendees into passionate communities that help shape and evolve programming and experiences.

Younger audiences expect this collaborative approach, having grown up in digital spaces where creation and consumption happen simultaneously.



EXPERIENTIAL SUPERPOWER:

DEMAND FOR PASSION-LED EXPERIENCES IS SURGING



Event attendees love small, intimate experiences with creator interaction

Event-goers actively seeking hands-on experiences that let them get creative



PRO TIP: ALL PASSIONS ARE NOW DIGITAL

Invest in tools to understand what moves your audience beyond work and craft experiences that create real value.

Eventbrite, CVENT 2024

Fastest growing categories in 2024:

130%

Wellness Groups: running events surging in popularity

34%

Culinary Circles: supper clubs and workshops

38%

Creative Crafting: jewelry making and crocheting





SPOT LIGHT



CO-CREATED, CAMPUS CONNECTED

Turning Attendees into Co-Creators. Attendees shared personal reflections through color-coded prompts, creating a collective mural of memory and connection.

Weaving Stories Together. Attendees mapped their GW journey using colored threads, each representing a unique affiliation or experience, forming a striking visual of the diverse paths within the GW story.

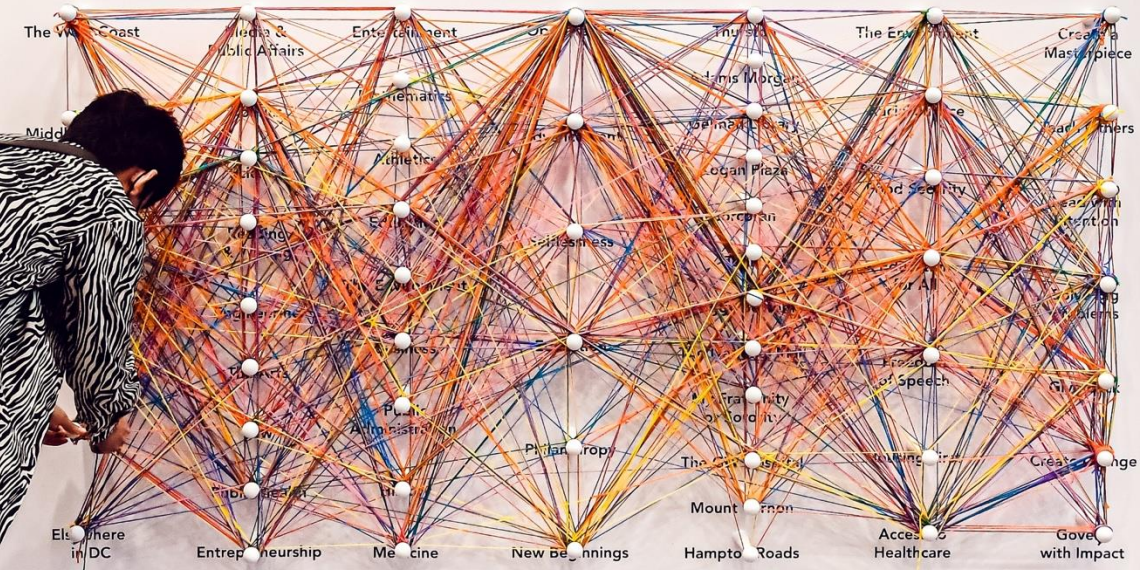
From Passive Audience to Active Architect. Empowered alumni and families to actively shape the event's narrative, creating a participatory space where institutional pride and personal identity came together.



What's Your Journey?

Pick the string color that best describes you and work your way across the board.

- TO BE HERE, I TRAVELED FROM:
- MY BRAIN FELL IN LOVE WITH:
- SCHOLARSHIP MEANS:
- I FOUND A HOME IN:
- I AM PASSIONATE ABOUT:
- I WANT TO:





YOU DESIGN IT, WE MAKE IT

LEGO Ideas turns passionate fans into product designers.

Community members submit original set designs, and those earning 10,000 votes get considered for actual production.

LEGO evolved from making toys to making toy designers — proving that handing over creative control unlocks innovation no company could achieve alone.





FROM AUDIENCE TO ARCHITECTS

Lululemon's Sweatlife Festival hands creative control to attendees through 250 micro-experiences

Attendees — a mix of customers, ambassadors and employees — **don't just consume wellness— they co-create it**, building a community-driven festival that evolves based on what resonates most with the community.





SPOT
LIGHT

Majority
of Gen Z see
themselves as
video content
creators

GEN Z: NATURAL BORN CREATORS

A staggering **60% of them aspire to be influencers** – compared to only 40% of all adults.

Almost a quarter of Gen Z (**22%**) **want brands to engage them in community- building** – vs. 16% of Millennials and only 11% of Gen X.

KEY TAKEOUT

It's no longer enough to simply offer experiences; those experiences must empower Gen Z to become co-creators, allowing them to feel a sense of ownership and participation.

Give them a seat at the table **and give them tools to co-design experiences and content.**

Create community programs to manage activity and harness the power of earned reach.



KEY TAKEAWAYS >>>

1

Shift your event planning mentality from "producer" to "facilitator" by implementing community voting systems and advisory boards that give attendees direct influence over speakers, topics, and experiences – especially for Gen Z.

2

Develop collaborative product experiences where audience participation in naming and designing event-exclusive offerings creates memorable engagement.

3

Transform passive attendees into active contributors by launching year-round digital platforms where community members can propose session ideas, connect with potential collaborators, and participate in pre-event challenges.



3

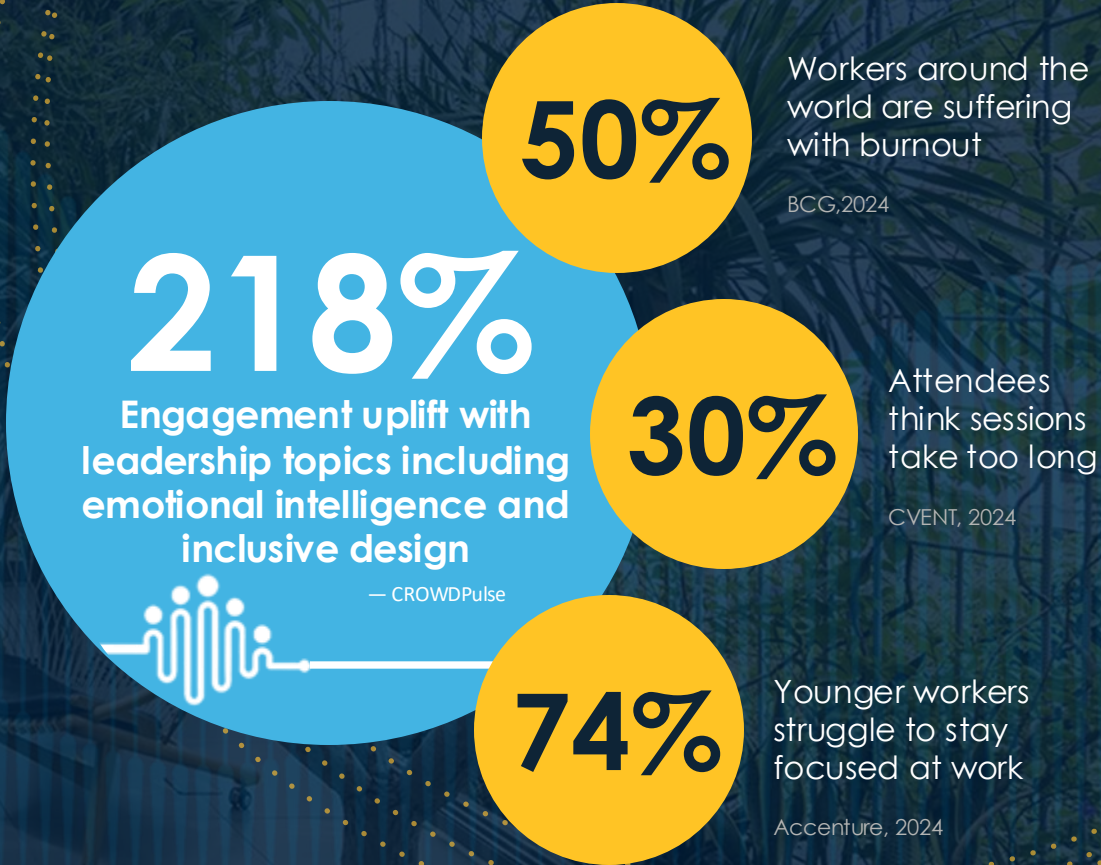
HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN: EMBRACING COGNITIVE REALITY

Progressive events are ditching outdated assumptions about human engagement – a shift accelerated by younger generations but benefiting everyone.

Forward-thinking organizers now design for actual psychology: recognizing fragmented attention, prioritizing passion-based engagement, and applying the neuroscience of memorable moments.

By letting go of idealized attendee expectations and embracing real cognitive patterns, they're creating experiences that work with – not against – our emotional operating system.

Gen Z and Millennials may be the vocal driving force, but the resulting human-centered approach creates more effective events for all generations.



SENSORY REFUGE :

THE QUIET POWER OF CALM DESIGN

Event floors are embracing the power of sensory refuge and calm design.

68%

Attendees value free time over networking, sessions and parties as vital to their event experience

Forward-thinking brands now incorporate deliberate "sensory refuge zones" – screen-free, acoustically controlled spaces with biophilic elements and slower-paced interactions.

These calm environments deliver measurably higher dwell times and deeper engagement by providing psychological relief from show chaos. In an overstimulated world, sometimes less really does deliver more.

“ Quiet environments reduce stress and help the brain function optimally. Especially important for neurodiverse audiences. ”

Buro Happold Consultancy

Neurodiversity as % US population:

19%

All Adults

30%

Under 30

46%

LGBTQ+

YouGov, 2024



SPOT
LIGHT

MONEY
20/20

“MONEYPOT” SENSORY INTELLIGENCE

Money20/20 created a content refuge space with comfort-first design. The "Money Pot" area featured plush soft seating and acoustic elements, providing an anxiety-reducing environment that balanced stimulation with tranquility.

The exhibition balanced engagement with emotional intelligence. By giving attendees control to come and go as they please while accessing content on their terms, Money20/20 demonstrated how personalization and intelligent design can elevate the attendee experience.





FROM STRESS TO SANCTUARY

Audible transformed busy commuter stations into wellness sanctuaries with cherry blossom-filled carriages.

Launched strategically on "Blue Monday" — the year's most depressing day — these immersive audio experiences offered brief escapes perfectly timed for stressed commuters.

The result: restorative micro-moments that give people exactly what they need — a mental boost that fits seamlessly into their busy morning commutes.





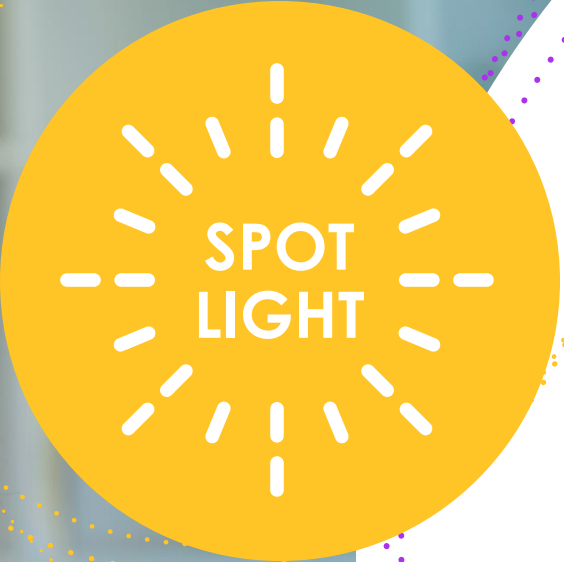
BEAUTY IN THE QUIET MOMENTS

Sephora has launched bi-weekly Quiet Hours in select stores, recognizing that traditional beauty retail can overwhelm the senses.

Creating calmer spaces with reduced stimulation — dimmer lights, softer sounds, and gentler atmospheres.

Acknowledging that sensory barriers affect everyone seeking a more mindful shopping experience, not just neurodiverse individuals.





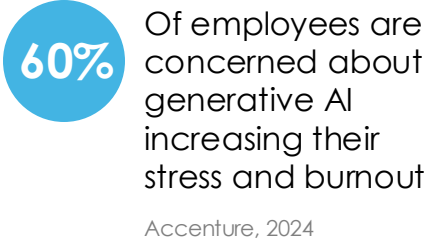
THE ANXIETY EPIDEMIC

The numbers don't lie – anxiety is a real barrier in life and work for younger people.

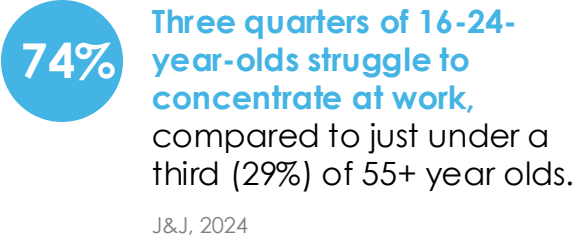
Almost half of all Gen Z are prone to anxiety:



AI isn't helping:



Low-attention world:



Interestingly – whilst noticeably less prevalent vs Gen Z – **almost a third of supposedly less-anxious older audiences are also suffering**

It's a similar story with diminishing attention spans and the struggle to stay focused across generations

GWI, Accenture, J&J, 2024/5

KEY TAKEOUT

Adopt a stratified content approach – allowing attendees to choose their engagement level based on expertise or energy levels.

Create sensory-friendly spaces for neurodiverse attendees (quiet zones, lower stimulation areas).

Provide pre-event preparation materials and information **to reduce anxiety and cognitive overload.**



KEY TAKEAWAYS >>>>

1

Design all event elements around human cognitive realities rather than idealized attention spans – for example, implement 30-minute keynotes or create varied content formats that acknowledge natural attention windows.

2

Create psychological comfort through intentional environmental design such as incorporating "sensory refuge zones" with reduced stimulation, implementing biophilic design – and developing spaces that accommodate different energy levels and cognitive processing styles.

3

Build anxiety-reducing touchpoints throughout the attendee journey by applying neuroscience principles to everything from registration flows to session transitions – like simplified check-in processes or graduated engagement options that let attendees control their level of interaction.



TO WIN IN THIS NEW WORLD YOU HAVE TO

LET GO TO GROW

1

Constellations, Not Supernovas: The Power Of Scaling-Down

Create **specialized micro-experiences** and community-specific spaces that **cater to distinct audience segments**

2

Co-Creation Nation: The Death Of Event Autocracy

Shift your event planning **mentality** from "producer" to "**facilitator**"

3

Human-Centered Design: Embracing Cognitive Reality

Design all event elements around **human cognitive realities** rather than idealized attendees



WANT TO LEARN HOW TO UNDERSTAND YOUR COMMUNITY BETTER?

The power is in the data. But it takes a specialized team of data analysts and strategists to distill it into insights that drive impact.

Are you ready?

CROWDPulse
BY THE EXPOGROUP 

