



29 Ideas to Create an Engaging Experience at Your Next Meeting

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The meeting planners at Meeting Expectations, Inc. have compiled this roster of ideas you can incorporate into your next conference or roadshow to make it a more engaging and memorable experience for your attendees. Delightful experiences leave a lasting impression, generate positive word of mouth and inspire your audiences to return year after year. Plus, many of the possibilities listed here come with the added benefit of being marketable as sponsorship opportunities. If you seek to diversify your meeting revenue through sponsorship sales, build these into your prospectus and provide your partners with unique and memorable branding moments with your audience.

We are happy to answer any of your questions about creating memorable event experiences. Please email us anytime at info@meetingexpectations.com.

Going Green? Go Greener!

1. iPhones, iPads, Blackberries, Androids... how did we ever function without them? Everyone's wired, which means everyone is eyeing the available outlets in your meeting facility to power up. Provide the most useful of amenities – a charging station – but add an element of the interactive that makes it fun and truly green. Let attendees generate the power by riding bicycles. You'll see your power station transform into something truly powerful – a high-energy hub for conversation, networking and wellness! Plus, they'll get the "juice" they need to keep their mobile devices energized all day.
2. Throw open the door to "Sessions Unplugged": host sessions that don't require a PowerPoint or other A/V outdoors. Attendees will love breathing in the fresh air as they learn and engage.
3. What giveaways do you typically provide? Can any of them be crafted from recycled materials? If you give away t-shirts, consider those made of eco-friendly bamboo-derived fabrics or organic cotton. Wrap your attendees in a gift that's healthy for the earth, too!
4. If you implement these and other green initiatives, spread the good word at your event. Tell attendees what you're doing in order to gain their buy-in and cooperation. Some conservation-minded changes require their participation and sharing the information will help them rally around the effort. For example, if you're providing refillable water bottles in the conference bags because water stations are more environmentally friendly than individual bottled waters, let them know and they'll gladly walk the extra steps to support the cause. If you print your green info, do so on recycled paper with soy-based inks. Even better, print it on seed paper, which grows wildflowers when planted. Now you've got a compelling piece of information and a souvenir (attendees love to bring these instant gardens home to the kids!).

Make it Personal



5. Set up a unique setting or a step-and-repeat backdrop for attendees to be photographed or to photograph each other. They'll love posting these photos to their social networking pages (Facebook, Twitter) to show friends and family members what a great time they're having at your event!
6. A conference can take your attendees away from home for a considerable length of time. Add some brightness to their hotel rooms by offering "flower market" – a beautiful array of fresh-cut flowers and inexpensive vases – and let them create their own bouquets.
7. Unleash the inner artists in your attendees. Invite a local painting instructor to conduct a step-by-step class in the exhibit hall or during a networking event. Include a sponsored beverage bar to create a cocktails-and-canvas experience.
8. Set up a computer kiosk where attendees can view pictures from the conference and email out a postcard (or share it with their other social networks, like Facebook).
9. On registration badges, have the person's name and a fun factoid – something that is interesting and easy to remember about them – such as "I love college football" or "idea guy" to encourage interaction and help with name/face recognition.
10. Likewise, include Twitter IDs on name badges so your socially-networked attendees can easily give online "shout-outs" to each other – these connections last long after your event.
11. Create VIP lounges for strategic subsets of attendees. For example, conference alumni could receive a special-access pass to an invitation-only lounge, where they'll discover upgraded snacks, a computer center, TV or other amenities.
12. Offer lavender- or citrus-scented, warm towels at registration check-in. Make the attendees feel like they just landed a luxurious and spa-like business class upgrade.
13. Consider positioning a massage station near check-in where weary arriving travelers can relax and rejuvenate for a few minutes. Your venue should be able to recommend a local massage therapist that can offer mini-appointments on-site.

Location, Location, Location.



14. Organize trips or events to special events in the area during the conference (as long as it doesn't conflict with the education or networking events you've planned). Arts and culture festivals and sporting events provide great local flavor. Your attendees would probably also enjoy a chance to see local historic sites, attractions and museums.

15. Need an activity for spouses? Bring in a local chef to perform a cooking demonstration or class. Make it hands-on – à la Iron Chef, with a secret featured ingredient – and you can have a fun and friendly competition.

16. If you need a special room-drop or speaker gift, look for a local artist that makes items unique to the area.

You Better Work (Out).

17. Keep the health and well-being of your attendees in mind. They'll appreciate your interest – and they'll have higher energy to devote to the networking and educational opportunities you're providing each day. One way to do this is by organizing a wellness program. It can be difficult to fit exercise into a busy conference schedule, so make it part of the attendees' day by hiring a local trainer or fitness expert to lead morning workouts in the meeting venue or early morning fitness walks in the area. Hand out sponsor-logoed t-shirts, towels or energy bars.

18. Conferences can be a minefield for dieters. Hold an informational session with a nutritionist to guide attendees on making healthy choices for a more successful week.

19. Offer diet-friendly snacks during breaks that cater to the health-conscious: granola bars, mixed dried fruit/nuts, fresh fruit and vegetables. Consider mixing in some brand-name diet snacks, such as Atkins, SouthBeach, Weight Watchers, etc. For attendees who wish to know, make nutrition information (or diet-specific counts like Weight Watchers points) available on request.

20. Give attendees pedometers and watch as they delight in discussing their daily mileage, which can really add up in larger venues! Sell one of your key sponsors the opportunity to place its corporate logo on the pedometers. Take this program a step further and launch a "Steps for Charity" competition: make a charitable donation in honor of your attendee with the highest step-count.

21. Have a "yoga moment." Build stretch breaks into your programming, or invite a yoga instructor to share relaxation and deep-breathing techniques to sharpen the reflexes and awaken the mind in preparation for learning.

Make it Eventful!



22. Bring out the kid in everyone. Set up an arcade in your exhibit hall or in a foyer space with classic games, like foosball, air hockey, Pac-Man, pinball – all set to “free play.” Your guests will get to know each other as they match wits and rack up points. You could even run a tournament to bring out everyone’s competitiveness.

23. Host a hands-on teambuilding activity with a professional DJ teaching the attendees how to spin. Everyone chooses a DJ name and learns to scratch and mix. It’s great, social fun – and you can dance to it.

24. “Where’s Waldo?” Send out clues for attendees to locate a particular person during a break. The successful sleuth wins a prize. (Get strategic – your Waldo can be a key sponsor or exhibitor who’ll place great value on meeting your attendees!)

25. Another imaginative teambuilding activity that can deliver your conference message and entertain while attendees learn is a customized mystery theatre dinner experience. Work with a local dinner theatre to create a storyline that will resonate with your group and achieve your teambuilding goals. This is a great opportunity to get your executive team involved and interacting with franchisees.

26. Make giveaways into annual collector’s items. For example, one software company that utilizes a fish motif in its logo gives away fish figurines in a different color each year. It’s a small detail, but one attendees look forward to time after time.

27. Start a flash mob – a public, “spontaneous” eruption of group activity, like dancing. Done well, a flash mob can energize and excite your attendees, generate sponsor revenue and catapult your event into the public eye through viral video. Done incorrectly, however, it can be, frankly, cringe-inducing. See how the National Restaurant Association recently pulled it off, on YouTube. (They also recruited participants and taught the routine in advance via YouTube – see here.) We love a good flash mob, but we do recommend you seek professional assistance. Engage a local improv group or choreographer to assist.

Do Well – and Do Good.



28. A fantastic way for your attendees to give back to the community while making deep and lasting connections is through a philanthropy project built into your agenda. Your meeting planner can assist you with identifying local charities and structuring a hands-on work day.

29. That unused conference bag and notebook may make wonderful school supplies for a local child. Work with your meeting venue to ensure leftover food is donated to the local food bank, and find an organization that could benefit from your extra bags, shirts, pens or other conference giveaways. Share the news with attendees afterwards – let them know who your conference was able to help and how.

As always, the certified conference planners at Meeting Expectations, Inc. are pleased to speak with you to brainstorm creative ideas for engaging and memorable experiences to reach your specific audience. Contact us at info@meetingexpectations.com if we may be of assistance as you plan your next event.