

Create the World's Most Welcoming Events (You can do this!)

A playbook to explain the purpose of World's Most Welcoming Events, along with tips and tactics to create more engaging gatherings for attendees, especially Gen-Z and millennials.

Hilton
FOR THE STAY™





Introduction

Say hello to the World's Most Welcoming Events (WMWE).

This new initiative and playbook are the result of a research study to discover how today's meeting attendees prefer to engage in and experience a live event, especially Gen Zers who are largely participating for the first time in their careers.

After all, no two people feel the same about attending a live meeting or event. Ask one, they'll tell you they can't wait to get there. Ask another, they'll say they feel drained by the "pointless" conversations and time away from work. A shifting workplace, as people seek greater flexibility from work or home and clear work-life boundaries, demands in-person meetings shift in new, modern ways.

Imagine an event
where everyone
feels welcome,
enjoys participating,
and can't wait to return!

World's Most Welcoming Events Playbook

World's Most Welcoming Events strives to ensure that all meeting attendees, including Gen Zers who are the youngest group at live events, feel more relaxed, engaged, and motivated to fully and authentically contribute during the event.

By providing customers with messaging and tools to make live events as welcoming as possible, attendees feel a greater sense of belonging, enjoy a meaningful experience, and want to attend a future event.



DID YOU KNOW?

Combined, Millennials and Generation Z **comprise 75%** of working professionals.

Gen Z was born between 1997-2012; Millennials, between 1981-1996.



“I like to review the attendees and itinerary to make sure I can hit all of the important parts and not waste time.”

— Male, 29

Research

Hilton is always listening to the needs of our guests, meeting and event planners, and attendees. Key points from a recent research study conducted by Hilton and Ipsos offer insight into the most current beliefs and expectations of meeting attendees.

- While nearly **9 in 10 (88%)** are likely to travel for a work or work-related event in the next 12 months, less than half (**44%**) of those with 5 or less years of work experience are very comfortable attending in-person events.
 - **Nearly 60%** say they would feel more comfortable if they could attend a meet and greet for those attending an event for the first time.
 - Appearance is top of mind with **79%** of Gen Zers reporting feeling at least a little anxious about not having the right attire. Nearly a third will buy new clothes and get a haircut.
- Sharing suggested attire guidelines for attendees to reference, with supporting visuals, as they get ready or pack allows meeting goers (**67%**) to feel more comfortable at in-person events.
 - More than three-quarters of attendees (**78%**) agree that when they are at a work event, they need a break or time to themselves. A quiet area to work or check work emails would allow them (**65%**) to feel more comfortable.

(This finding also prompts planners to rethink events that require special clothing, like '80s parties, to eliminate additional shopping and stress for attendees.)



Solutions

When asked what would make them feel more comfortable at in-person events, respondents said...

- Receiving an agenda well in advance (**71%**) and having an opportunity to ask last-minute pre-event questions (**58%**) would make them feel better going into the event.
- Being welcomed to the event by someone who shows them around and answers their questions would also put them (**61%**) at ease.
- Additionally, **54%** of all attendees would feel more comfortable having icebreaker questions to help start a conversation.
- Receiving event menus in advance (**60%**) and having options for people with allergies (**52%**) would help reduce mealtime anxieties.



Hilton partnered with Ipsos, a global market research and consulting firm. The survey, conducted in late 2024, involved over 1,000 U.S. adults ages 18 to 65 who were planning to attend an in-person event in the next 24 months.



“I can’t tell you how much I appreciate seeing the menu. We should do that for all events.”
— Female, 40

Breaking the Mold

For years, if not decades, most live events have been structured around “from sunup to sundown” agendas of keynote sessions, breakouts, panels, buffet luncheons, and the like.

However, recognizing that a new generation has entered the workforce—and realizing that attendees of all ages are increasingly expressing a desire for a more welcoming, comfortable, and supported experience—the time is now to help our customers evolve and reimagine their event programming.

We are doing so through WMWE, which evolves these meeting components:

EVENT STRUCTURE

LOGISTICS

CONTENT & SPEAKERS

WORK/EVENT BALANCE



“I’ll learn about the content of the meetings and memorize anything I have to say. I will stress over my attire the most.”
— Female, 19

Challenges & Solutions

These are some of the biggest challenges planners face, which can also create unfavorable attendee memories. Rethinking them as an opportunity to do things differently turns your event into an experience that's more rewarding. The solutions checked have been tested and proven effective by Hilton's Special Events Team.

	CHALLENGES	SOLUTIONS	TESTED
EVENT STRUCTURE	Awkward icebreakers	Consider professional speakers that can conduct organized and proven successful icebreakers. Gen Z and Millennials crave this, so set it up for success.	
	Disorganized networking	Assign designated event hosts to make introductions.	✓
		Use conversation starter stickers.	✓
	Overpacked schedules with no breaks	Structure agendas to start later, end earlier, and include breaks for attendees to stay on top of work emails to lower their stress levels.	✓
Have designated office space, quiet areas and take away lunch options for catch up time, or if attendees just need some down time.		✓	
LOGISTICS	Assigned seating with strangers	Consider open seating for meals so attendees can make the most of this networking time.	✓
		If assigned seating is required, create social media groups for attendees to meet virtually in advance (LinkedIn or Viva Engage).	
	Dress codes attendees can't easily follow	Share detailed suggested attire with photos or videos to assist with packing.	✓
CONTENT & SPEAKERS	Panelists who can't clearly answer questions	Ask that questions be submitted during registration to give speakers time to formulate their answers in advance.	✓
	Irrelevant keynotes	Observe a live or video presentation from your keynote speakers prior to contracting to ensure they deliver the appropriate message for your attendees.	✓
	Sessions not delivering as promised	Review speaker content outlines with what is listed on the registration site to ensure attendees are receiving the messaging and education they expect.	✓
WORK/ EVENT BALANCE	Other work piling up during events	Have designated office space, quiet areas and take away lunch options for catch up time, or if attendees just need some down time.	✓
	Overly complicated food or food that can spill on clothing and/ or cause attendees to feel self-conscious (e.g., poppy seeds stuck in their teeth or soup stains on their shirt)	Work with your catering and culinary partners to create thoughtful "networking menus" – bite sized, no mess finger foods, hors d'oeuvres that don't require a knife, and limit sauces, seeds and difficult to chew items.	

Tools & Tactics

Knowing today's challenges in planning live events, we have created these tools and tactics that provide solutions to help you more confidently plan your own events. They have been tested on thousands of eventgoers at our own large conferences.

WELCOME HOSTS

From uplifting hellos to warm farewells, hosts greet attendees so each person feels like someone is always there to help. They can make an introduction, provide venue tours, programming overviews, not-to-miss activations, and act as a familiar face in the crowd who can answer questions or give assistance.

CAREER CURIOUS

A built-in "plus one" for people who want to attend a conference with a partner, Career Curious allows attendees to bring a mentee, partner, friend or colleague with them to the event. It also offers young guests a firsthand look into the industry.



Research Reveals: Being able to bring at least one friend empowers 59% of attendees to feel more comfortable at in-person events.



At HiltonLIVE at Waldorf Astoria Washington DC, Career Curious extended the event's value beyond customer connections into the broader hospitality community.

PRE-CONFERENCE CALL

For those attending a live event for the first time—or anyone who feels uneasy about being at an in-person conference—calm those fears with a virtual pre-conference call. These informal short calls offer an overview of the event, so attendees know what to expect and how to maximize their conference experience.

FIRST-TIMERS MEETUP

Attendees who have never been to a live event can meet up with others in the same situation. Starting the day in a smaller group fosters camaraderie and encourages people to relax—and perhaps find a friend to connect with before heading over to the larger event space.

CONVERSATION STARTER BADGE STICKERS

Cats or dogs? Beaches or mountain vacations? Attendees get to convey their areas of interest in a casual way based on colorful stickers that attach to meeting badges and signal a willingness to chat about their personal interests. These stickers get the conversations started and make approaching a stranger much lighter and easier.



FOOD & BEVERAGE

Eating while talking to someone you just met or a leader in your organization can be awkward and uncomfortable, especially for introverts. Offer grab-and-go meals for those who need a moment to themselves. For those who don't mind eating with others but want to know what is being served, send conference menus several days prior to the conference. That way, they can decide what they want to eat before the event or make other plans for mealtime.



Sending menus to attendees before an event was the most popular tactic we tested. Attendees appreciate knowing what will be served, so they can plan their event day.

THE QUIET CORNER

Offer a designated quiet work space when attendees just need a minute to themselves. Whether they need to break away for a quiet moment or catch up on emails, attendees have a designated place to recharge, which is always appreciated by those who need it most.



Tools & Tactics Checklist

- Promote Career Curious and encourage attendees to bring a plus one
- Host pre-conference call for attendees so they know what to expect and how to maximize their meeting experience
- Send menus in advance so attendees know what they will be eating and can plan accordingly
- Design quiet spaces away from crowded attendee areas when attendees need a break
- Create office space within larger event for people to break away and check email or take calls
- Place hosts at strategic locations to welcome people and offer venue tours
- Use name-badge stickers for gentle conversation starters*
- Host a first-timers meetup for attendees who are new to live events
- Have a takeaway buffet for attendees who need a moment to themselves to eat in peace

*To order stickers, contact [Hello@HemlineTheory.com](mailto>Hello@HemlineTheory.com)





Moving Ahead

This is an initiative for the entire hospitality industry, not simply for Hilton and our customers' events.

We are continually testing tools and tactics like foods/ menus and serving options that are easier to manage in group settings. We're also looking at networking ideas and ice breakers to help people feel more comfortable easing into conversations, and exit strategies, so that the end of the event is as strong as the welcome.

We want to hear your ideas too. Please contact Toni Zoblotsky at Toni.Zoblotsky@hilton.com to share your thoughts and feedback on your event experiences.

Together, as an industry,
let's host the
World's Most
Welcoming Events.

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