

Bots and Drones and Holograms, Oh My!

Bringing Meetings into the 21 Century



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Before you turn the page – no, this isn't another trend piece on the latest "InstaFace" or "SnapBook". Those are fine and good, but what about actual hands-on technologies? Something that would make HAL from *2001: A Space Odyssey* say, "Whoa. That's pretty cool."

Attendees come to your show to make deals – but a cool story doesn't hurt. That's what this article is about. So stick around and let yourself be wowed knowing that this is not science fiction. These are actual technologies at actual meetings.

Augmented and Virtual Reality

If you thought PokemonGo was the beginning and end of that trend, you were wrong. Augmented reality blends an actual camera view with superimposed imagery. (Think Pikachu standing in your kitchen). It's fun, sure, but it's also an incredibly effective way to engage conference attendees. Already, programs like "[Seek Rewards](#)" combine Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and smart phone mobility for onsite scavenger hunts that can drive foot traffic across a tradeshow floor and into education sessions. Similarly, virtual reality offers immersive visual experiences that enhance the attendee experience – giving you a cool new platform for message delivery, sponsor recognition and calls to action.

Telepresence Robots

On the other end of the virtual spectrum is the telepresence robot. Say an attendee has to cancel last-minute, but he still wants a glimpse of the show floor. A telepresence robot piloted by that person (like the ones made at [Double Robotics](#)) could be deployed to cruise the show, giving a real-life vantage point. The experience can be streamed so others can voyeuristically join in as a virtual audience. It's the next best thing to burning calories!

Drones

These little guys can do more than survey the territory and deliver packages. They can also help you collect a birds-eye view of your event as well as increase the visual experience for remote live reporting

by your onsite Emcee. Your meeting space could soon be buzzing with drones relaying footage for an enhanced onscreen visual experience for attendees, and it's great for capturing footage for next year's marketing.

Wearables

Wearable technology is an excellent way to collect attendee data while simplifying their meeting experience. Like a traditional name badge, a wristband like the [Pixl](#) can be remotely triggered to light up a certain color to better identify buyers, sellers, staff, speakers and more. [iBeacon](#) devices can help track the comings and goings of your attendees and help to remove the sometimes-annoying step of flashing a name badge to a scanner.

Biometrics

Tom Cruise showed us the possibilities of mass eye scanning and facial recognition in *Minority Report*. While it's not likely that Tom will be sprinting across your tradeshow floor any time soon, it is likely that your attendees will soon benefit from biometrics for more secure entrance into events. Biometrics, such as this version from [Tascent](#), can be far more accurate than traditional identification. It's a great tool for protecting sensitive areas of the show floor or limiting access to restricted areas.

Holograms

R2D2 once delivered galaxy-saving information via hologram. You could, too! Well, you might not save the galaxy, but you can definitely make your event a little more fun. Hologram technology can transform a table top or tablet into a stunning centerpiece for your conference. [PepperGram Projector](#), for example, can be used directly with a tablet as a mini-projector. It might take some programming to customize a hologram to your event, or you could use "stock" holograms that are equally impressive.

Interactive Displays

What iPad fan could resist the allure of an interactive display spanning an entire wall? Interactive displays akin to Microsoft's [Surface Hub](#) can steal the show at any event. Attendees can view event information, play games or interact with others with massive touch screens. These types of screens can read faces and name badges, giving them a cool new way to access information previously limited to a printed guide. As an added bonus for you, this technology is an excellent way to track the information being accessed so that you can constantly improve your event.

Chatbots

An attendee wants the public Wi-Fi password, but she doesn't want to stand in the Registration line for 15 minutes to get it. Enter the chatbot, at your service. Chatbots are an amazing technology for events because their sole job is to dole out information on request. The [Concierge Eventbot](#) is an excellent

example of chatbots developed specifically for events. It can be preloaded with all event details, scheduling, accommodations, local attractions and more – and attendees can converse with it from their phone. Chatbots in general can operate as simply as a question and answer database or as sophisticated as conversation-friendly artificial intelligence. This is a technology that never fails to impress attendees, and it frees up your onsite staff and can seriously reduce attendee frustration.

Facial Recognition Software

Read the room – crucial advice in this industry. But how can you gauge the sentiment of hundreds of people at once? Facial recognition software is emerging as a way to gather massive amounts of data at a glance and report back to you in real time. Take [CrowdStats](#), for example. CrowdStats technology uses cameras to scan crowds – either in motion or in an audience – and can pull incredible details ranging from gender and age to actual mood and attention. Not only can you use that data to improve your next event, but you can actually track that candid, anonymous feedback and tweak your meeting as it's in progress.

In Summary

Of course, with new technologies like these, it's important to keep attendee privacy in mind and be totally transparent. Thorough communications and attendee surveys can help gauge enthusiasm for any data tracking you might implement.

It's an exciting time to be in this industry. The technology is flashy and getting flashier, and the result is meetings that better meet attendees' needs. It pays to embrace exciting technologies early because it shows you and your organization to be ahead of the game. While your competitors are keeping their eyes glued to the screen trying to sniff out the next social media fad, take the opportunity to launch your event into the future.