



**IAEE**  
International Association  
of Exhibitions and Events™  
[www.iaee.com](http://www.iaee.com)

# **Future Trends Impacting the Exhibitions and Events Industry**

*IAEE White Paper by Francis J. Friedman*

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction.....	3
1. Generations .....	3
2. Big Data .....	4
3. Data Capture, Recording and Reporting .....	5
4. Technology .....	5
5. Social Media Marketing .....	6
6. Year-Round Communities .....	7
7. Experiential Trade Show .....	8
8. Non-Attendee Engagement.....	8
9. Exhibitors .....	9
10. International Trends Impacting U.S. Exhibitions.....	9
11. Internet Connectivity.....	10
12. Private Events .....	10
13. Complexity .....	11
IAEE Future Trends Task Force.....	12

## Introduction

In looking to the future of our industry, the International Association of Exhibitions and Events™ (IAEE) Board of Directors created a Future Trends Task Force chaired by Francis J. Friedman and comprised of senior industry professionals.

The focus of this task force was to look into the future and identify major trends it felt will impact the exhibitions and events industry. This white paper presents the results of 13 future trends the task force anticipates will impact and shape our industry.

## 1. Generations

This industry is facing a broadening range of generations in the overall workforce, both in the worldwide trade show industry and IAEE. Many industry veterans who might have previously retired are staying in the workforce as their retirement plans will not financially sustain them in retirement.

At the same time, there are legions of young professionals entering the workforce with advanced computer and social media skills. Their digital and social lifestyles of engagement and participation in decision-making are not known to older generations, and the older generation's skills and processes are not known to this younger generation.

In today's fast-paced work environment, the older generations – who generally do not possess advanced computer skills – need to understand new trends in technology and social media. This older generation (typically managers and lead personnel) will also need to learn how to effectively put the younger generation to work and to keep them engaged.

This same dynamic, cross-generational issue holds true for employing younger people in the industry as well as generating a new contingent of clients and customers for exhibitions and events. The industry has “older” people managing trade show companies and holding key positions in exhibitor and attendee companies. However, this is about to change dramatically over the next three to five years as the current computer savvy 28- to 32-year-olds move into management and decision-making positions.

Some of the issues facing the industry include:

- How to relate across all generations of employees, customers and clients.
- How to hire, train and motivate college graduates as employees and to also keep them in the industry.
- How to reach, engage and teach the younger “online generation” about attending or exhibiting at trade shows and the value of face-to-face marketing.
- How to continue to keep current customers from “aging” out of the industry or leaving the industry because they do not see the value of “modern,” digitally-enhanced trade shows due to long exposure to the historical trade show models (note: this includes exhibitors, attendees and trade show industry veterans). The industry needs to educate “customers” on how to view a “modern” trade show or event as integral to advancing their marketing and advocacy agendas.
- How to recognize that communication tools to reach and influence population segments will continue to include all traditional media plus current and emerging digital and social media formats.



- How to anticipate the direction and magnitude of disruption in the larger marketing community and our own industry as the technology wave sweeps throughout society.
- How to customize the exhibition experience for each generation to maximize participation and engagement (e.g. offering digital and printed materials, segmenting and tailoring marketing for each generation, offering a diverse mix of educational offerings, etc.).

Some of the questions management will continue to wrestle with going forward include:

- What is the new vocabulary? Experience, engagement, marketing, etc., need to be understood in order to effectively communicate the extraordinary value of face-to-face marketing to the new generation entering the industry.
- What are some ways that the industry may have to change/adapt to accommodate the younger generations?
- How will the younger generation be trained to effectively interface with their older colleagues?
- How to communicate to all generations the use and benefits of face-to-face marketing?
- Mentoring programs for experienced professionals to mentor individuals new to the industry ... and reverse mentoring where young professionals and those starting a new career in the exhibitions and events industry mentor seasoned veterans. The anticipated outcome for these programs is to increase knowledge and cross-generational respect both within and across a specific work force and across the entire industry.

## 2. Big Data

Another future trend the task force identified was the concept of “Big Data,” which is the collection of every bit of information that can be collected relevant to customers, the community and event. Once collected, the data has to be “mined” with advanced analytical tools to understand issues and trends that may not have been visible or considered with the use of more traditional, analytical methods.

Large companies are using big data to map out brands. For example, a well-known beverage company collected social media impressions on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, etc., of its brand for a month and then analyzed these comments for feedback on such elements as brand perception, advertising copy awareness, regional brand promotion awareness, etc. These “data analytics” were used to measure various criteria as well as calculate ROI on various regional promotion program investments.

The outcome of Big Data is uncovering marketing and customer development opportunities and, ultimately, results in an ROI calculation of some sort. Right now the scope of “data analytics” is so big that only large, well-funded organizations can afford the analysis and also have the ability to translate the analysis into business and marketing plans. Over time however, the costs of data analytics will come down as service bureaus spring up to provide these data services at a reasonable cost to an expanding customer base.

At present, the exhibitions and events industry is using the back-end analytics supplied by websites and search engines which now define them as “metrics.” These metrics are readily available as part of these service offerings and generally measure participation in or on that particular web service.

In the future, Big Data will become cheaper, more easily available and increasingly important to help show management more fully understand its market and how to create and deliver products and services to meet the deeper needs of its market.

### **3. Data Capture, Recording and Reporting**

New technologies and tools for capturing data are constantly emerging. These new data capture technologies and tools enable organizers to have more robust data about their exhibitors, attendees and their interactive “behaviors” before, during and after a show. The data that can be collected not only provides important information to assist show organizers in understanding what took place and to plan for the next show, but also to monetize the data by selling the analysis to exhibitors and other outside interests.

As part of the whole movement to ROI marketing investing, there is an increased trend among exhibitors to ask show organizers for more information that they need (and expect) in order to make good exhibiting decisions. This trend is expected to grow in both depth and breadth of data requests going into the future.

It is anticipated that there will be many vendors approaching the exhibitions and events industry with various technical and sales approaches to this aspect of data capture, interpretation and packaging. Some vendors will be registration companies, some software companies now in the industry and some technology companies completely outside the industry.

This increase in vendors, and their hardware and software products, will present a challenge to show managers. The challenge is technical and financial in that they will need to evaluate the vendors and their products, and understand how to reduce the expensive risks of implementing the wrong products from the wrong vendors.

With increased data capture capabilities the other issue becomes: how can show management integrate this new data into the other data sets they rely on now, which could potentially include pre-show marketing plans and post-show surveys?

With increased data capture capability from all types of sources, exhibition management will be challenged to develop an integrated data plan as part of its ongoing marketing activities. It will be important for show management to learn what data it needs to capture, how to interpret the data it captures, and how to turn that data into action steps as part of its total business operation and marketing plan.

### **4. Technology**

Within the past two years, mobile devices have surpassed standard technologies in their rate of adoption and penetration of the population using these devices. The device penetration of the population is almost universal, with the increase in smart phone capabilities and 4G wireless service speed by the major phone companies.

The adoption of mobile devices, the increase in their capabilities, and the increase in transmission speeds and geographical area coverage for mobile computing via 4G implementation is expected to accelerate substantially over the next three years.

Apple's latest iPhone and iPad, plus the growth in Samsung product suites including its latest computer/phone/watch product, indicate advanced devices will become ubiquitous in our business and personal life.

The Microsoft introduction of the Windows 8 software and its own tablet computer clearly show the trend in this form of computing, data capture and video exchange. Apple's new operating system, Google Chrome, and Google's Android platform and apps all support the trend towards rapidly growing mobile devices and mobile computing and communications.

Cloud computing storage of data and expanded 4G wireless infrastructure make it easy for people to go paperless using lightweight, handheld devices while maintaining immediate access to any data they might need.

This technology can also create a potential threat to face-to-face events because they have high-quality video and video-fed communications capabilities built into them. This capability makes the device owner location- and time-independent from an in-person event. Potential attendees who are location- and time-independent means show managers need to produce high-value, in-person events that meet attendee needs in ways not available via the Internet or wireless devices.

The growth in communication and data storage technologies also encourages the elimination of "paper" by making digital files easily available on "devices." This is a significant advantage in cost savings for show organizers (i.e. the digital Exhibitor Manual). Wireless apps also help reduce on-site paper usage and reduce a show's carbon footprint.

Wireless devices and mobile computing will also have a dramatic effect on how shows are managed and the ability to connect exhibitors and attendees. Implementing on-site, digital engagement tools and sponsored apps utilizes these devices to lower costs as well as increase engagement and exhibitor/attendee satisfaction.

These apps and engagement tools also generate increased capture of data concerning activities that took place at the show. By analyzing this data, show management can better understand what took place at the current show and how to plan for the next show (see page 5, section 3). This data can also help show managers counsel exhibitors on how to do a better job on-site.

## **5. Social Media Marketing**

Social media marketing as a trend is here to stay. It is already having a profound effect on business in general as well as the exhibition industry. It will be one of the continuing underpinning technologies that will drive marketing and business going forward. It will grow more sophisticated as new digital technology comes online and as new, more advanced devices are able to handle greater bandwidth and increasingly complex software.

The growth in such social media platforms as Google, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Pinterest illustrate the acceptance of this type of targeted communication and more importantly – community building. Each of these platforms embodies its own community with its own social structure ... apart from any exhibition, publication or association.

More importantly, each of these communities competes within corporate marketing budgets for attention and advertising dollars. They also compete with face-to-face exhibitions, meetings and events for influence, time, money and attention.

Because of the growth and importance of social media platforms and communities, exhibition organizers have to learn how to join them rather than fight them. Show producers will have to become highly skilled at social media marketing in order to enter each of these communities and build appropriate followings for their exhibitions and events.

Google has positioned itself as the super highway of the Internet and social media. It continues to enhance its search engine capabilities and service packages. Google+ and Google Hangout are two new features Google has recently added to its package.

Exhibition organizers will have to truly understand all of the capabilities Google offers as a search engine, communications platform and analytical tool, and how to apply each of these features when building and marketing their shows and events.

Video marketing and video-based technologies are emerging, and will only grow more robust as time goes on. Society is evolving into a “visual” society; understanding the use and applications of video-based marketing will become more important as part of the total exhibition and event marketing mix. Video marketing also includes device-to-device communication models.

## **6. Year-Round Communities**

The current structure of the exhibitions and events industry is “episodic” in that a show or event takes place at one short time period in the year (assuming an annual show), and is unavailable the rest of the year. The show producer typically “stacks” all of its marketing and subject-area focus into the “consciousness” of its intended market during this one time slot. The rest of the year, the show is somewhat “out of sight, out of mind.”

Shows today are including social media sites on a pre-show and post-show basis. In general, these extensions run through the show’s website and represent the episodic nature of the show they support.

The growth of social media communities now enables shows and events to participate in these communities as active “members” on a year-round basis. As such, building year-round communities is a growing trend for shows and show management.

The competitive need for year-round, exhibition-related communities is driven by social media and its 24/7 competitive interaction with target audiences vs. a fixed-date trade show and its narrow interaction with its target audience.

For a show to participate in this 24/7 social media interaction, show organizers need to understand social media marketing and develop an appropriate strategy for engaging its specific target market community. Developing an appropriate strategy for each social media community based upon that community’s unique features and characteristics is critical to a show’s social media marketing success.

Implementing a social media marketing program requires the right technology, skilled personnel, consultants, vendors and an appropriate “content” strategy. “Content” is king in social media marketing. Generating and “curating” content are new skills and capabilities that show organizers will need to understand, and add, into their ongoing show management processes. *Content curation* is the act of discovering, gathering, and presenting digital content that surrounds specific subject matter. Adding these new skills will also have an impact on the show production budget.

The challenge for the exhibition industry lies in extending a show via social media to a 24/7 capability. As noted above, there are significant challenges and asset commitments involved in extending a show’s community interaction to a 365-day-per-year basis, across a diverse social media landscape. Given the emerging trends in marketing and audience engagement, the industry will have to master these skills in order to keep shows prominently featured in the total marketing mix.

## 7. Experiential Trade Show

Currently, emphasis is being placed on the attendees’ *experience* of the trade show, the question arises as to what that experience should be. How do show organizers increase the experience of engagement on the show floor? How do organizers increase engagement overall with the show? What tools and techniques increase engagement and enrich the on-site experience? Moving forward, what forms and formats will keep exhibitions and events as highly-valued marketing opportunities?

As technology adds more engagement and experience to the home theater (e.g. big 3D screens and surround sound), and as marketers use more engaging technology in their own communication and social media programs, what has to happen to the in-person, face-to-face exhibition experience to keep its *experience* dynamic and engaging at high levels relative to other media experiences generally available in society?

As the exhibitions and events industry evolves, and as advanced technologies and social media also evolve, the art and science of person-to-person engagement and experience must also evolve. Exhibition organizers will have to recognize that the “experience” of the trade show has to be included as one of the measurements in assessing a show and its performance for both exhibitors and attendees.

Show design and format will be driven by assessments of engagement and on-site experience. Will “hosted buyer” formats become the preferred show model? Will “gamification” be a necessity for all show configurations? Will “apps” become the engagement tool that drives the on-site experience?

The elements of show design must evolve to drive the show “experience.” What the “experience” must be for a given show so the audience finds it rewarding, will require more research and insight into that specific audience. Creating outstanding “experiences” will be a growing show management consideration as the industry moves to the future.

## 8. Non-Attendee Engagement

Non-attendees always represent potential show-community members, as well as revenue sources to show owners, producers and exhibitors. By definition, non-attendees are not-present at the live event, but this does not necessarily mean they are not interested in what is taking place at the exhibition itself.



The question becomes: how can technology and social media be utilized to engage the non-attendee? How can face-to-face programs integrate technology and social media applications to emulate the “experience” and engagement of onsite before, during and after the event?

Technology currently allows for hybrid events to create an opportunity to attract the virtual audience to a live presentation, which also subtly re-defines the “attendee.” This aspect of extending the value and concept of a show must be included in the ongoing look at technology, and the concepts of what constitutes a “modern” exhibition.

Engaging the “non-attendee” can also take place through social media. Google (and others) provides a number of search tools that can enable a show producer to discover and then engage a potential audience member or group. SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and keyword search tools and techniques are available to assist a show producer in finding a potential audience currently considered a non-attendee.

These same SEO/key-word tools can also assist the show producer in discovering ways to engage this audience and convert them from a non-attendee to an engaged prospect, to an attendee.

The exhibition industry movement to build 24/7 communities (see page 7, section 6) will require that show producers have high-level skill sets in SEO and keyword utilization in their plans. These skills are fundamental to utilizing social media to its full potential, as both an audience discovery tool and an audience conversion and satisfaction measurement tool.

The successful use of SEO/keyword tools enables show producers to gather high quality information upon which to make decisions. These tools also make it possible for show producers to find non-attendee/non-engaged audiences which they can then use to test new show/marketing approaches and gather high-quality feedback about how these approaches convert non-audiences to participants without a great deal of risk.

## **9. Exhibitors**

There is concern that as time goes on, exhibitors may spend more time and money on electronic marketing automation and capabilities, and less time and money becoming more proficient and professional in face-to-face marketing. Indicative of this is that young professionals entering the marketing field will have higher skillsets in electronic and technology-based capabilities as well as personal usage habits.

These young people will have been raised on IM (instant messaging) and may not have been exposed to face-to-face marketing, either as part of their coursework or as part of a corporation’s total marketing portfolio. This population of future managers tends to be device-dependent and device-centric (e.g. smart phones, iPads). Short text messaging seems to be their communication mode of choice.

Exhibitor education and booth staff training on how to successfully use face-to-face marketing will present an ongoing challenge and opportunity for the entire industry. This includes not only exhibition organizers, but also meeting/event producers, booth builders, publications, etc. Marketing decision-makers will need to fully understand face-to-face marketing and its benefits, and not default their marketing decision-making to their own electronic and personal handheld device biases.

In-booth, face-to-face engagement skills will increase exhibitor success and encourage continued investment in exhibitions and in-person events. It will be incumbent upon all aspects of the exhibitions, meeting and events industry to encourage exhibitors to train their in-booth staffs on both the benefit of face-to-face marketing and the skillsets necessary to succeed on-site.

## **10. International Trends Impacting United States Exhibitions**

### **A. U.S. Department of Commerce International Buyer Program (IBP)**

The IPB seems to have aged appreciably and is in need of at least a tune-up, if not a major overhaul. The program has not seen much change in the last six years. Many features and mandates of the program are cumbersome to understand and implement, as well as becoming cost-prohibitive.

To address this concern, it will be necessary for a coalition of U.S. industry organizations to work with the Department of Commerce on the IBP and other programs to help the industry in the U.S. This dialog would include both inbound (IBP) and outbound (subsidized U.S. pavilions at shows in other countries) marketing and exhibiting assistance.

### **B. International competition**

As developing international markets begin to expand, there is a growing trend for new shows to be launched, or existing international shows to expand, into new markets. Some of this expansion is from U.S. shows via joint-venture partnerships.

A concern to monitor is large U.S. exhibitors moving to exhibit in exhibitions outside of the U.S., and cutting back on their U.S. exhibition investments.

As a result of this growth in international shows, the date scheduling of major U.S. shows is being impacted by international show schedules. The expansion of exhibitions into other countries, and the development of international exhibitors in those events, will tend to keep foreign visitors and exhibitors to U.S. shows in their local geographic regions, rather than traveling to U.S.-based shows.

It is anticipated that this trend will continue as developing countries (e.g. China and India) represent growing markets for U.S.-based exhibiting companies. Economic development leads to increased exhibition development. As a result, global show coordination or competition is expected to continue as an element in show date, venue selection and international visitor/exhibitor considerations.

## **11. Internet Connectivity**

The cost of, and access to, the Internet at exhibition venues is an important feature of producing a show. The increasing use of “apps” and wireless programming means show organizers need low-cost/no-cost access to robust high-speed Internet services.

Great variances exist today as venues and facilities provide Internet services anywhere from free to expensive. While bandwidth seems to be the most common measured pricing element, a number of additional charges or overages also seem to exist. Moreover, venue customers are frustrated with vague contracts and clauses.

The trend for successful Internet solutions in the future will center on venues having significant bandwidth access, clear and consistent pricing, reliable service, and vendor trust.

Exhibition organizers will need to request clear policy statements from facilities and demand clearly written contracts that lay out all aspects of service delivery. The exhibitions, meetings and events industry will also need to work with facilities to assure high quality and comprehensive service delivery at fair prices.

## **12. Private Events**

Private events came into vogue in the early 2000s as a response to the Y2K economic bust, and the desire for exhibitors to see their marketing dollars spent courting highly-qualified potential buyers.

Private events have morphed over the last decade, and are now a part of corporate marketing plans and programs. They range from simple productions to major, elaborate productions requiring the same skill sets as any association or for-profit show management team.

The current trend to offer “hosted buyer” events and “scheduled appointments” at trade shows is the industry’s response to meeting exhibitor requests for more intense interaction with pre-qualified buyers. These exhibitor needs and demands will continue to expand into the future.

The private-event trend will continue to “shape” the strategic options of major exhibitors as they consider marketing investment tradeoffs between their own private events and their buy-in to exhibit in public trade shows.

Given that exhibitors will have the option of producing their own events, show management will need to work more closely with major exhibitors to understand their marketing goals and objectives. From this understanding, exhibition organizers can develop products and services that offer a competitive advantage to major exhibitors that they cannot get in their own privately produced events.

## **13. Complexity**

The increased competition for customers, changes in marketing approaches and the use of advanced-technology options have significantly increased the complexity of doing business today. Complexity in managing a successful enterprise is only going to increase in the future.

The building and managing of a successful, face-to-face exhibition, meeting or event will require more insight into who the audience is, what the audience wants, how the audience wants it and how the producer can deliver to the audience in a compelling and highly engaging format.

The skills sets of the show management team will need to be enhanced from where they are today to a more strategic, marketing-centric and technologically-sophisticated set of skills. Research will play a larger role in helping show management define and understand the opportunities and risks it faces.

The biggest exhibition management need in the future lies in the area of strategy development. With complexity comes the need to have an appropriate strategy - a strategy that gives insights into the complexity, and then facilitates building tactics and action steps to successfully navigate the complexity.

Understanding strategy, the differences between strategy and tactics, and how to build strategy to deal with the complexity, will be a future consideration for the industry.

## IAEE Future Trends Task Force

IAEE thanks the task force members and contributors who made this resource possible:

Francis J. Friedman (Chair)

*Committee:*

Sandy Angus

Jack Chalden

Sharyn Collinson

Stacey Correcha-Price

Joe Federbush

Darlene Gudea

Lawson Hockman, CEM

Michael Hughes

Anna Leighton

Rick McConnell

Martin Moggre, CEM

Barbara Myers, CAE

Stephen Nold

Shawn Pierce

Proudmanee Sangsri

William Sell

Barry Siskind

David Weil, CAE

Staff Liaisons: Susan Brower, CMM, CCP and Cathy Breden, CMP, CAE

Administrative Support: Peggy Johnston

For more information, contact Francis J. Friedman:

Time & Place Strategies, Inc.

+1 (212) 879-6400

tjfconsult@aol.com



International Association of Exhibitions and Events™  
12700 Park Central Dr., Ste. 308  
Dallas, TX 75251 USA  
www.iaee.com • info@iaee.com • +1 (972) 458-8002