



# IAEE

Exhibitions and Events Mean Business  
[www.iaee.com](http://www.iaee.com)

## FUTURE TRENDS

Impacting the Exhibitions  
and Events Industry

IAEE FUTURE TRENDS TASK FORCE

Authored by Francis J. Friedman

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
1. Economic Outlook .....	3
2. Big Data .....	4
3. On-Site Data Capture .....	4
4. Facility Data/Wi-Fi Infrastructure Capabilities and Costs .....	5
5. New Technology .....	6
6. Mobile Computing .....	7
7. Social Media Marketing.....	8
8. Year-Round Communities; the 24/7 Exhibition or Event.....	9
9. Experiential Trade Shows.....	9
10. Exhibitors Stepping Up Their Exhibiting Skills.....	10
11. Engagement.....	11
12. Societal and Generational Considerations.....	11
13. Security.....	13
14. Increased Industry M&A Activities.....	14
Conclusion .....	15
IAEE Future Trends Task Force.....	16



## **Introduction**

In looking to the future of the exhibitions and events industry, the IAEE Board of Directors created a Future Trends Task Force consisting of senior industry professionals and chaired by Francis J. Friedman. The focus of this committee was to look into the future and identify major trends it felt would potentially impact the industry.

The first committee report was completed in 2013 and can be downloaded at [www.iaee.com](http://www.iaee.com). Since the trends identified in that report are now starting to move into the mainstream of the industry, a review of the 2013 report will provide the background for the new emerging trends as noted in this current report.

This 2014 report presents the results of fourteen future trends the committee feels will impact and shape the exhibition industry in the next few years. There has been some evolution in the trends identified in the 2013 Task Force Report and there also have been new industry practices implemented as a result of more familiarization with new technology tools. However, challenges still exist with some issues identified in the 2013 report.

This report is not a roadmap to the future in terms of best practices or specific action steps. It is, however, a waypoint to help gain insight as to what is ahead for the exhibition industry as seen by twenty-six senior, experienced professionals representing a broad spectrum of the industry.

This report will help to identify and understand the industry challenges ahead in an effort to better prepare to meet those challenges.

## **1. Economic Outlook**

The U.S. economy is not growing as fast as previously forecast. By the time the fourth quarter ends, U.S. 2014 growth is projected to be 2 percent. The Federal Reserve (Fed) has tapered its program of quantitative easing of bond purchases and is still following a policy of keeping the prime rate in the 0.00-0.25 percent range to maintain liquidity and encourage capital investment in the domestic economy. Many economists project that in 2015 the prime rate could be raised to 0.25-0.50 percent in the third quarter depending upon employment growth and other economic factors.

Internationally, China's growth rate is slowing and the European Union (EU) is still battling low economic growth and higher levels of unemployment. The EU is possibly facing deflation with its associated negative banking and financial consequences. Japan is still in a long-term very slow growth mode.

The stock market has continued to see record highs as companies are continuing to show higher earning levels. Many of these higher earning levels have been achieved through financial controls, low levels of capital investments, wage controls, no dividend payments and stock buy backs to reduce the number of outstanding shares.

While hiring is on the increase, wages have not accelerated and there are still large numbers of potential workers who have taken themselves out of the work force. Consumers are reducing credit card debt and curtailing spending. However, optimism for the future has been on the rise with both consumers and small businesses.

Exhibitors are still cautious and are continuing to invest in e-based marketing products and services. Budget allocations for exhibiting companies to e-based products, services, content, etc., are expected to continue their increase in the years ahead.

Recent CEIR economic analysis of vertical industry sectors indicates the next few years will show overall economic growth in the 3 percent per year range. The U.S. exhibition industry growth rate is projected to lag overall economic growth slightly and is projected to see slower rates of attendee growth vs. exhibitor growth.

International markets continue to offer exhibitors expanding opportunities, especially in China and other developing areas of the world. The number of international attendees at events is expected to increase in the U.S. and other countries as content and resources to foster economic development are displayed at trade events.

## **2. Big Data**

Big Data is defined as the ability of computers to analyze large databases to find trends, patterns and “differentials” to assist marketers to gain more insight into how a population thinks, acts, selects or rejects: products, advertising campaigns or any other criteria the marketer is seeking to understand.

For example, Chevrolet could analyze months of tweets about its newly introduced Corvette. This analysis would enable this company to determine how it is perceived in the marketplace and adjust its advertising and social media programs to increase buyer acceptance as a potential alternative to its competitors, such as BMW and Mercedes.

Big Data analysis and adoption is in the early stages. It is continuing to gain traction as a viable analytical tool to guide marketers, social media campaigns, product development and a host of other applications. At present it is limited to larger organizations with access to money and technological skills. Newly emerging, however, are companies who are offering BDaaS (Big Data as a Service) and are driving the cost of this analytical tool down substantially. These service companies are making advanced data analysis more affordable and, therefore, much more accessible to smaller organizations with smaller budgets.

In time, these advanced data analysis capabilities will trickle down to the smaller desktop computers and users. Since not all businesses have large data sets, there is a growing need for advanced data analysis that can be made available to smaller enterprises. Most exhibition organizers fall into this latter small-business category and, as time goes on, BDaaS will be available to the industry at affordable rates.

Marketers and the exhibition industry already are determining the data to be measured and what will be done with the information after it is analyzed. Assessing the analysis provided by a computer program or data service and then translating that data into plans and activities will require new skill sets. At present, these are not skill sets native to the exhibition industry.

## **3. On-Site Data Capture**

Data will become an important component of all on-site and post-show analysis as the industry moves to the future. On-site data capture will help show organizers understand attendee on-site visiting patterns. The premise of on-site data capture is that the more data the show organizer has relative to attendee patterns the better the organizer is able to lay out the show floor, assess various activities on the show floor, and identify areas of the exhibition with high levels of interest for the attendee – or conversely those with low levels of attendee interest.

Recording and reporting technology systems and capabilities are beginning to be used in trade shows and public events. Smartphone data capture technology includes NFC (near field communications) and iBeacon (a form of low power Bluetooth wireless communications), as well as “smart card” registration systems.

Public events, theme parks and some trade shows also are utilizing RFID technology in the form of bracelets and pendants. Utilization can include tying the bracelet/pendant to a database of user credit card advanced authorizations. In these applications, the user’s RFID bracelet/pendant allows event entrance payments, concession purchases, etc. The Reed Exhibitions public Comic-Con events use RFID bracelets to track traffic into and out of their exhibition halls.

These wireless technologies work by placing sending and receiving kiosks strategically throughout an event. The attendee’s smartphone must be turned on to send and receive the NF or RFID signals, and the attendees can specify through their registration profile if they are willing to receive downloads to their smartphone, either from exhibitors who have similar kiosks in their booths and/or from the exhibition organizer.

Some exhibitions are experimenting with placing sensors under aisle carpets to measure foot traffic in various sections of the show floor. In addition, registration systems often are able to provide “heat maps” of all traffic volume by time of day. These “heat maps” are generated based on registration card swipes in each booth during the show.

Some of the challenges ahead for the industry related to data and data capture might be the following:

- What is the business purpose for collecting this data?
- What data is to be captured?
- How will the data be analyzed?
- How/who will the data be converted to plans and activities?
- How will the data be kept “clean” and non-corrupted over time?

There is no question that quality data and effective data collection techniques are important aspects of the future development of the trade show industry. The technologies noted above also have the ability to distribute show information and exhibitor information to attendee smartphones (and potentially be a revenue source for show management).

The question for the industry going forward remains how to implement the technology so it is acceptable to the attendee to receive downloads while also enabling the show organizers to collect data that can then be analyzed and turned into plans and activities to enhance the value of their exhibition or event.

#### **4. Facility Data/Wi-Fi Infrastructure Capabilities and Costs**

With the rapidly increasing use of smartphones and exhibitor demands for in-booth connections to the Internet, the data and Wi-Fi infrastructure capabilities in facilities are continuing concerns for show organizers and venue managers. The same concerns hold true for data and Wi-Fi capabilities in the main hotels used for an exhibition or a large meeting.



Exhibition organizers want to be assured that the venue has appropriate bandwidth and throughput capabilities to meet the needs of their attendees and exhibitors. This capability includes show floor service delivery as well as public space service delivery.

The increases in cloud computing and smartphone utilization of cloud-delivered services mean that the need for venue technology services will only increase. In addition, the continuing increases in the volume of video and graphic content traffic will require higher and higher levels of data-handling capability and Internet connection speeds.

Facilities are looking at significant capital costs to install appropriate quantity and quality of bandwidth capabilities. An additional concern for facilities is the rapidly changing technology, which will mean that continuing capital investments in technology will be needed as the technology evolves in the future.

Facilities want to charge for these capabilities while show organizers want them included in the venue package at little or no cost. Service capabilities, types of delivery options and costs will continue to be an ongoing and important dialog between organizers and venues.

Discussions between facility managers, show producers and technology providers will continue to be necessary. The 2013 Report indicated that Hot Spots within a facility might be a viable solution to this bandwidth issue. Based upon continuing technology service demands for both exhibitors and attendees, additional types of service models, other than Hot Spots, may be necessary in the future.

## **5. New Technology**

New technology is accelerating in its development and introduction. This is particularly true in smartphones, “wearable” computing and AV technologies.

Smartphones are moving forward with upgraded screen capabilities, increased screen sizes (e.g., iPhone 6+), increased picture and movie quality, longer battery life, intuitive software programming and voice-based interactivity. These capabilities are turning the smartphone into a universal personal digital tool.

Wearable computing has come onto the scene and includes watches and glasses that have access to the Internet – usually through a Bluetooth connection to an associated Wi-Fi connected smartphone. This aspect of personal computing is expected to grow over the next few years as the technology is improved and its real world capabilities and applications clarified.

Oculus and Samsung have introduced Virtual Reality (VR) headsets that deliver high quality, 3D, highly engaging “virtual” experiences via picture and sound. These headsets are part of the larger video game industry that is the pioneer in creating realistic user experiences in the form of graphics, user game interactivity and online massively parallel interactivity (with thousands of simultaneous Internet players around the world).

These VR technologies now have advanced in quality so that they are entering the broader consumer and professional AV market as well. The near future will see an expansion of applications and usage of these devices to tell product stories and engage end users.



As these technologies mature over the next three to five years, they will have a continuing impact on the exhibitions and events industry. The early adoption of these technologies will start with the technology-based trade shows and expand throughout the industry as these technologies are more readily available and become more cost effective. The adoption by society in general of these technologies will spur their expansion in the exhibitions and events industry as well.

On the flip side, these technologies will make it easier for marketers to download high quality product demos and product tours to potential customers outside of the trade show environment. Software, cameras and technical capabilities now exist to author these types of VR product experiences. Transmission bandwidth exists for delivering these VR presentations, so it will only be a matter of time until this technology gains wider traction as an active and direct sales tool for marketers.

## **6. Mobile Computing**

The continuing rapid increase in smartphone capabilities and their penetration within the U.S and global population has resulted in a shift in demographics of mobile computing to what is now called the C-generation (connected generation). Previously, smartphone utilization was thought to be confined to younger generations, but this is no longer the case. The C-generation smartphone usage cuts across all generations and all ethnic groups.

Google has projected that by December 2014 half of its searches will be mobile based. Industry projections are that mobile usage and service capabilities will continue to increase in importance and volume in the years ahead.

Smartphone e-commerce also has been growing at a continuing rate. Industry statistics vary but project that 15-25 percent of retail orders during Christmas of 2014 potentially could be placed on mobile devices, and mobile e-commerce is projected to continue to expand in the years ahead.

The increase in mobile computing also is generating an increase in the use of “apps.” It is estimated that there currently are 1–1.2 million smartphone apps. More apps are being developed and introduced each year by independent developers and by smartphone makers.

With cloud computing growing in capability and ease of use, the smartphone is expected to become the universal personal tool in an increasingly connected world. Smartphones are now being used as the “second screen,” where TV viewers are simultaneously connecting with their smartphones through social media sites to network with other viewers of the same TV program in real time. TV programs recognizing this second-screen trend are creating specialized, second-screen plot engagement scenarios on TV program-specific social media sites for these highly engaged fans.

Smartphone tweeting and blogging during a seminar, about the seminar, is also a form of “second-screen” computing and user engagement. As a universal personal tool, the smartphone offers exhibitors and show organizers increased opportunities to communicate with and engage their communities and attendees. The products and services offered will be determined through research and the unique personality of each trade show or event. Over time, however, more and more attendee audiences will use these mobile options as younger demographic groups enter marketing positions and become larger components of the business-to-business audience.

The larger discussion for the exhibitions and events industry will be how each show sets the policy for electronic distribution of messaging to the attendees. For example, if a show has 1,000 exhibitors, will each exhibitor be allowed to download a message to each attendee’s smartphone?



Corollary questions include the following:

1. Who will determine the amount of download the attendee receives – the show organizer, the attendee, the exhibitor?
2. What content will be allowed to be downloaded?
3. Will there be priorities as to what can be downloaded? For example, wayfinding information, show-only information, exhibitor information where they pay a premium to be included in the download stream, any exhibitor's information, etc.?
4. How will attendees restrict downloads and/or complain to show management about it?
5. Will this be defined as "permission marketing," "push marketing," or the rights of exhibitors to distribute information electronically as part of their "exhibiting rights" in their booth contract?

Questions related to data ownership, data privacy and personal tracking (primarily of attendees) also will continue to grow over time. These types of questions are expected to increase as data capture/distribution technologies expand, as exhibition management wants to distribute more information electronically and as exhibitors want to distribute their own literature electronically. Data security and privacy laws and rulings also will be a part of these discussions.

## **7. Social Media Marketing**

Social media marketing is continuing as an absolute fundamental tool in today's marketing community. Business-to-business marketers are fully on board with social media marketing and are aggressively using it as a core element in their customer acquisition, engagement and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems.

Social media marketing is becoming more sophisticated almost on a daily basis. New analytical tools and processes are enabling marketers to better understand what their customers want, how to reach and engage those customers, and how to convert them from prospects to customers. Recent studies show that business-to-business marketers are increasing their budgets for social media content.

Social media content is evolving to include not only words and graphics in a blog or on a website but also a full range of content development, including private YouTube channels, active tweet engagement, pins on Pinterest, video blogs, top executive postings, etc.

Social media marketing has become very competitive and increasingly more creative as new tools, techniques, creativity and budgets are added to the mix to attract and engage customers. When attendees and exhibitors enter an exhibition facility, their social media marketing practices and activities are not left outside the door. All parties expect that social media marketing will continue within the exhibition facility and throughout the event.



The growth in social media marketing and social media utilization will drive the specific Internet and Wi-Fi venue capability/service needs discussed in the above sections of this report. As smartphone capabilities increase and smartphone adoption increases, social media marketing will increase and the exhibition industry will need to respond. This cycle of technology advances and corresponding social media advances is only going to grow stronger as time goes on, and it will continue to be necessary to track and appropriately respond to this marketing fundamental.

## **8. Year-Round Communities; the 24/7 Exhibition or Event**

The exhibitions and events industry has recognized its current structure is “episodic” in that a show or event takes place at one short time period in the year (assuming an annual show), and it must move to a year-round communications platform with its current audience and to attract new audiences. The industry also is awakening to the fact that continuing “content” is needed in order to move to a year-round communication program.

Exhibitions today are providing social media sites that include pre-show, at show and post-show postings. Typically, the content on these sites includes papers, research reports, news updates and video of activities that took place at its last event. These videos include educational sessions, interviews, speaker presentations, etc. The industry’s understanding of social media interaction and the need for quality content has been growing over this past year. The industry understands that the fundamentals of this concept is key to building a 24/7 show.

Implementing a social media marketing program will require the right technology, skilled personnel, consultants, vendors and an appropriate “content” strategy. Building a content strategy and generating and curating content are new skills and capabilities that show organizers will need to understand and add into their ongoing exhibition management process and budgets in the years ahead.

Building a 24/7 show is still in the future for a broad spectrum of the industry. There remain significant challenges in technical capabilities, skill sets, work processes and asset commitments to extend a show’s community interaction to a year-round basis and across a diverse social media landscape. Given the emerging trends in marketing and audience engagement, the industry will need to focus on mastering these skills in order to keep exhibitions and events prominently featured in the total marketing mix.

## **9. Experiential Trade Shows**

With the focus so much on the digital side of marketing and digital engagement, it is possible to lose sight of an exhibition as an “experience.”

As technology adds more engagement and content to the attendee home theater experience (e.g., big 3D screens and surround sound), and as marketers use more engaging technology in their own customer-direct communication and social media programs, the exhibitions and events industry will need to find ways to keep the in-person, face-to-face trade show experience dynamic and engaging at high levels relative to other media experiences.

To keep engagement relevant, the industry needs to ask:

- How do exhibition organizers increase the experience of engagement on the show floor?
- How do organizers increase engagement overall with the exhibition?
- What are the tools and techniques to increase engagement and to enrich the on-site experience?
- What are forms and formats for exhibitions going forward that will keep exhibitions and events as highly valued marketing opportunities?

Exhibition organizers will have to recognize that the art and science of person-to-person engagement and experience also must evolve along with social media engagement.

The experience of the trade show should be included as one of the measurements in assessing a show and its performance for both exhibitors and attendees.

The elements of show design must evolve to drive the exhibition 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? Will knowing an exhibition is a green event increase engagement?

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 for that specific show. Creating outstanding experiences will be a growing exhibition management consideration and skill as the industry moves to the future.

## 10. Exhibitors Stepping Up Their Exhibiting Skills

A major aspect of the attendee experience is the quality of the exhibitors’ face-to-face interaction. For the exhibitors to continue to exhibit and justify their investment, it is also necessary that they have a lead follow-up program in place, which many exhibitors do not have today.

Exhibitors are continuing to invest more money into their e-based marketing programs – and at an increasing pace. They also are looking at the comparative metrics of cost per lead and cost per conversion of their e-marketing activities and their in-person events and trade show investments.

There is a concern that young people entering the marketing business will have higher skill sets in electronic and technology capabilities and personal usage habits and will favor e-marketing over face-to-face marketing. This younger population of future managers tends to be device dependent and device-centric (e.g., smartphones, iPads), and short text messaging seems to be their communications mode of choice.

Exhibitor education on the benefits of face-to-face marketing and professional booth staff training will be an on-going challenge and opportunity for the entire industry. This includes not only exhibition organizers but also meeting and event producers, exhibit designers/builders, and publications specific to the industry being served, etc.

The exhibitions and events industry will need to show marketers/exhibitors how face-to-face marketing is an extension of their e-marketing activities and demonstrate how blogs, Facebook, Twitter and other social media activities translate to the trade show floor and generate content and engagement from the floor, as well as how on-site e-tools contribute to the on-site attendee engagement and post-show follow-up.

Measuring the return on investment (ROI) of the dollars spent on marketing efforts for both exhibitors and marketers will become more imperative in the future. The exhibitions and events industry needs to continue to encourage its customers to professionally use its products and services to achieve the maximum benefit through the face-to-face medium.

## **11. Engagement**

The Holy Grail of marketing today seems to be “engagement.” Marketers are seeking to “engage” potential customers in their products and services and convert them to actual loyal customers.

The face-to-face industry also is focused on this concept of engagement. Smartphone apps are being deployed that seek to engage attendees on site and wrap them into total participation and loyalty to the event. The question, however, remains – what is engagement, how is it defined, how is it measured and how is it produced for an event?

Are tweets or “likes” considered engagement? If so, does this level of engagement build event loyalty and repeat attendance year after year? Is engagement built on the value an event offers a potential attendee? Or is engagement driven by pre-event advertising and promotion campaigns?

How many different types of engagement are there – permanent engagement that lasts over time, temporary engagement only on site, or pre-show engagement for only one advertising piece that then fades? What is the difference (if any) between engagement or passion or enthusiasm for an event?

How does an event build pre-event engagement? And does this level of pre-event engagement translate into action to attend the event? Does passion for a topic precede engagement and should passion be what is measured first?

Engagement, and its pre-supposed conversion to active participation and pro-active event promotion, is a concept that will require more research and study to understand its common characteristics and underpinning drivers. Building attendee show loyalty and support on a year-in, year-out basis and show engagement may be one and the same – or not.

Appropriately designed research studies will be necessary to help the industry sort out these questions. As noted above, there are more variables and nuances around the concept of engagement and being pro-active for an exhibition that need to be understood in order to harness these concepts into a range of specific approaches.

## **12. Societal and Generational Considerations**

At present, the larger marketing universe is focused on Gen Y, the millennial generation (roughly 20 to 30 years of age). Behind them is Gen Z (10 to 20 years of age) and right behind them will be Gen Alpha (0 to 10).

Accounting firm PwC expects millennials to constitute 80 percent of its global workforce by 2016, and Hartford Financial Services Group estimates this demographic will make up 75 percent of the entire U.S. workforce by 2025. Some workforce experts believe this rapid demographic change will have a tsunami effect in terms of organizational composition, technology use expectations and cross-generational employee issues.

The Gen Y generation is highly tech-literate, involved with social media and drives the use and development of today's advanced technologies. Gen Z and Gen Alpha are also highly tech-literate and involved, thanks to Gen Y-driven developments. They will become even more so as they grow into adulthood.

As noted in the 2013 Future Trends Task Force Report, the worldwide exhibition industry, as well as IAEE, is facing a rapidly broadening range of generations in the larger workforce.. Many older workers who previously might have retired are continuing in their jobs, as their retirement plans will not financially sustain them in retirement. At the same time there are legions of young people 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 keep up with the trends in new computer and social media technologies/skills. This older generation (typically managers and lead personnel) also will need to learn how to effectively work with the younger generation and keep them motivated and engaged in their work. Newly emerging is the issue of younger people starting to be promoted into positions where they will be supervising older employees.

**Some of the issues projected to face our industry include:**

- How to relate across all generations of employees, customers and clients.
- How to hire, train and motivate college graduates—and keep them in the industry.
- How to reach, engage and teach the under-30 “online generation” the value of face-to-face marketing and attending or exhibiting at trade shows.
- How to recognize the communication tools needed to reach and influence population segments, including 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 the exhibition industry as the age/technology wave sweeps throughout the society.
- How to customize the show 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 with which exhibition management will continue to wrestle going forward include these:

- What is the new vocabulary needed in order to understand the new generation entering the industry and effectively communicate to them the value of face-to-face marketing (e.g., experience, engagement, marketing, etc.)?
- What are some ways that our industry may have to change/adapt to accommodate the younger generations?
- How do we train the younger generation to effectively relate to, and possibly supervise, their older colleagues?
- How do we communicate to all generations the use and benefits of face-to-face marketing?
- What mentoring programs should be established so that older people can mentor younger people – and reverse mentoring where younger people mentor older people? The outcome for these programs is to increase knowledge and cross-generational respect within/across a specific workforce and across our entire industry.

Another generational issue now appearing on the scene is the change in state laws in the U.S. related to personal marijuana usage. The change in these laws appears to be an expanding trend across the 50 states, and young people are more inclined towards this usage – although this may not entirely be the case once the laws are changed. The industry will need to address these changes in terms of employees, contractors, on-site access to marijuana as part of event catering, personnel policies, liability issues, insurance, etc.

### **13. Security**

We live in a time where security is growing in concern and importance. As an industry that brings thousands of people together at one place and at one time, the exhibitions and events industry is potentially a target for a terrorist attack. The larger exhibition halls are in cities that are targets for terrorist attacks (e.g., New York, Washington, D.C., San Francisco). The international industry outside of the U.S. is also, and possibly more so, vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Physical security of the venue (including strikes, public demonstrations and public unrest) also is a growing concern for the industry as the United States and international destinations are threatened by various international terrorist groups and their domestic sympathizers.

Major exhibition organizers and major facilities usually have policies and practices in place for these potential attack contingencies. However, it cannot be assumed these practices and policies are up to date for all exhibition organizers and facilities or are in place across the entire industry.

Health care is another aspect of industry security that needs constant updates and best practices implementation across the entire industry – both domestically and internationally.

This Task Force is recommending to the entire exhibitions, meetings and event industry that every exhibition plan includes updated contingency plans for both physical and health care emergencies. These plans should be reviewed by the event team with facility management and key local authorities (as necessary) prior to move-in for each exhibition or event.



Data hacking and data vulnerability are also rapidly growing security threats. Exhibitions and their service providers collect important information about a show and its participants. Exhibitor contact information and financial records, attendee contact information, financial and credit card records, hotel information, etc., are all sensitive (and private) data that may be collected. Data security has not been an issue of high concern to this industry in the past. Now, however, in light of what is taking place with data hacking, data security needs to move up in importance with exhibition, meeting and event organizers.

Privacy concerns with collected data are also growing issues. These concerns will increase in the future as personal social media, app usage and personally identified scanner data will reveal individual behavior tracking at exhibitions and other events. Some questions that arise with this type of data collection are these: Who owns the data, who has the right to determine its usage or restrict its usage, what are the state/provincial and federal laws concerning guarding the data site and data access security, and what are the personal data privacy rights?

Data security and data privacy rights go hand in hand as the exhibition organizer and exhibitor data collection and management systems must now do both—secure and protect the collected data. These increased requirements mean higher levels of data system sophistication and security protocols than was necessary in the past.

Looking to the future, data security and complying with private data security and management regulations will need to be an ongoing element for exhibition organizers.

## **14. Increased Industry M&A Activities**

The increase in economic activities has once again increased the level of mergers and acquisitions in the exhibitions and events industry. Several recent acquisitions of more than \$900 million signal that the roll-up of the industry into larger event production entities has once again moved to the forefront.

This increase in acquisition activity, especially in larger transactions, is being driven by public companies and pools of professionally managed private equity funds. Private equity funds are continuing to invest in this industry because their return on investment (ROI) is significantly higher than other investment options due to the higher profit margin structure of this industry.

The increase in M&A activity also will see existing exhibition owners acquiring selective vertical market shows to expand and round out their basic subject-area portfolios. Subject-area dominance will be an ongoing strategic element of future business development in this industry. Subject-area dominance increases an exhibition owner's critical mass in that subject area and enhances the ability to offer an increased range of products and services to that subject-area community. Subject-area dominance also leads to increased revenue and profitability.

Association trade events have generally been off the radar screen of the M&A community. As competition in the exhibition and e-commerce industries increases in the years ahead, it is possible that associations may be courted to sell their shows, as there are already existing precedents for this within the association community.



## Conclusion

As philosophers have stated, the only constant is change. The global economy, technology and business practices are continuing to deliver rapid rates of change. New technology and technology applications are projected to increase dramatically as more funds are available for technology investment in a recovering economy over the next few years.

The exhibitions and events industry will have to keep up with these changes in order to meet the needs and expectations of its exhibitor and attendee customer base. Understanding the changes in demographics and the use of technology that affects different generations will be key drivers in how the exhibition industry responds to its changing customer needs, wants and desires.

The industry itself will need to continue its embrace of technology to collect high quality data about its events and to successfully utilize technology to produce and market its products and services. Over time, the exhibition industry will need to become a technology-centric industry.

## IAEE Future Trends Task Force

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

Francis J. Friedman (Chairperson)

David Adler

Sandy Angus

Corbin Ball

Kathleen Canning

Jack Chalden

Sharyn Collinson

Stacey Correcha-Price

Nancy Drapeau

Joe Federbush

Darlene Gudea

Lawson L. Hockman, CEM

Wendy Holliday

Michael J. Hughes

Matt Kormann

Ivan Lazarev

Rick McConnell

Stephen Nold

Joretta Rahim

Ted Rawson

James E. Rooney

Jeff Stanley

David Weil, CAE

IAEE Board Liaison: Shawn Pierce

Staff Liaison: Cathy Breden, CMP, CAE

Administrative Support: Peggy Johnston

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