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Notes



The International Attendee Experience:

Tips, Tricks, and Technology to Keep Them Coming Back

By Michelle Bruno

The concept of the “attendee experience” has changed over the years. Today, attendees can attend an exhibition in person or virtually, and the experience can begin well before the event and extend long after. When event organizers take this expanded definition of the attendee experience into consideration, it changes the decisions they make regarding programming, features, and technology. A new framework—**the Attendee Hierarchy of Needs**—can simplify the decision-making process, even when the attendees are from international points of origin.

The Attendee Hierarchy of Needs concept was presented during a two-part Webinar series sponsored by Trade Show News Network (TSNN.com) in October and November. The concept, developed by Michelle Bruno, is based on Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, a framework for understanding human motivation. In part II of the Webinar series, the framework was expanded to include examples for enhancing the experience of international attendees.

According to Maslow’s theory, humans must fulfill various levels of needs (breathing, food, water, etc.)

before being able to move to the next higher levels including safety (security of employment, health, family), love/belonging (friendship and family), esteem (confidence, achievement, respect) and finally, self-actualization (morality, creativity, spontaneity). The familiar multi-colored triangle often associated with Maslow’s theory represents the various aspects of a fully actualized (satisfied) individual.

In Michelle Bruno’s adaptation of the hierarchy, the levels are labeled according to what face-to-face event attendees need to fully experience a live event:

Utility—the basic tools needed to navigate and participate in the event including floor plans, exhibitor directories, signs, conference schedules, and food.

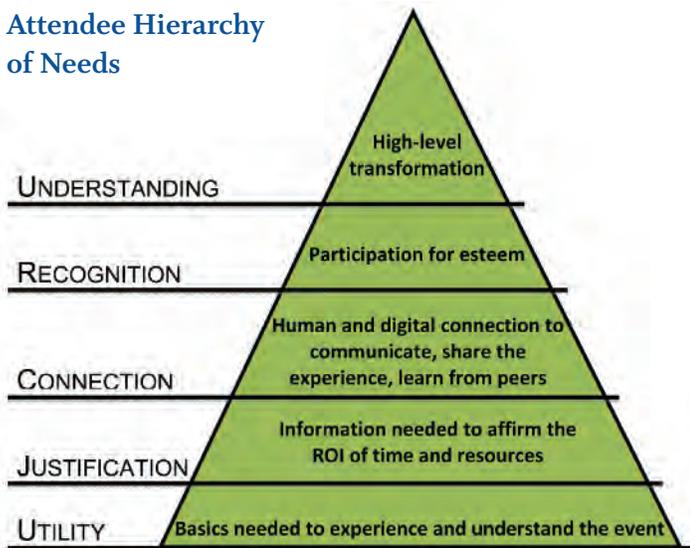
Justification—the information needed to justify the ROI of time and resources expended to attend the show including content from exhibitors and conference speakers

Connection—the human and digital connection needed to communicate and share the experience with others through such channels as matchmaking applications, social media, and games

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Attendee Hierarchy of Needs



Recognition—the opportunities needed to express opinions and participate in discussions through Q & A sessions, Twitter falls, text walls, and idea booths, for example

Understanding—the need to be transformed through higher-level learning and engagement using such tools as motivational speakers, charity events, or mentoring programs

Exhibition and conference organizers are tasked with developing programming and selecting technology that allows attendees to have experiences on all levels of the hierarchy. To the extent that they can develop programming and features or select technology that fulfills these needs (sometimes, one solution—mobile apps for example—can appeal to several levels simultaneously), attendees will be motivated to return to the event. When the Attendee Hierarchy of Needs is used to design the experience of an international attendee, the levels of need remain identical, but the particular ways in which the needs are addressed change:

Utility—An international attendee will require some accommodations to experience the event at a basic level. For example, signage could be printed in several languages, registration systems could offer multiple language options, and mobile apps could be native apps (vs. mobile web) so that attendees don't have to pay expensive roaming charges to access event content. Food offerings could reflect the cultural preferences of overseas visitors, and post-event content could be distributed with an option for sub-titles in different languages.

Justification—International attendees might find the conference content more valuable if a track were devoted to their specific issues and concerns (a presentation on shipping and customs, for example). Presentations by international speakers in native languages or using simultaneous translation could make it easier for foreign buyers to consume the content and justify their expense of attending.

Connection—Social interaction helps cement business relationships in many cultures. Cocktail receptions, dinners, and golf (which is very expensive outside the US) can facilitate engagement between business prospects and peers. Organizers can offer the services of an international concierge (to assist with meetings and reservations) and foreign language interpreters.

Recognition—International attendees from some cultures may feel uncomfortable being singled out or voicing their personal opinions; however, group recognition through awards and educational programs or team sports (soccer tournament, for example) could be a good way to bestow recognition on foreign participants.

Understanding—Achieving high-level transformation can be more complex without a deep understanding of the specific cultural motivations and preferences of each international attendee. Nevertheless, keynote speakers presenting on internationally relevant themes or mentoring programs that pair American attendees with their international counterparts can help foreign buyers experience the event with a deeper level of understanding.

THE NUMBERS OF INTERNATIONAL ATTENDEES, PARTICULARLY those from emerging markets, is increasing at US-based exhibitions. At the same time, international exhibition organizers are looking at new ways to enhance the experience of all attendees including those from other regions of the world. It is possible to design an event that is full-featured and inclusive so that all participants have the opportunity to fully engage and experience transformation on a personal and professional level. The Attendee Hierarchy of Needs is a new lens through which to view opportunities, programming, features, and technology for continuously evolving events.

VIEW ONLINE: <http://www.tsn.com/webinars>
 The TSNN Webinar presentation, *The Attendee Experience: Tips, Tricks and Technology to Keep Them Coming Back (Part II)*.

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