

# THE RISE OF THE SMART VENUE

New research on choosing  
event venues in 2020

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Venue selection remains one of the most crucial elements of event planning. Selecting a venue for a meeting or event will impact food and beverage, audiovisual, room block and logistics choices.**

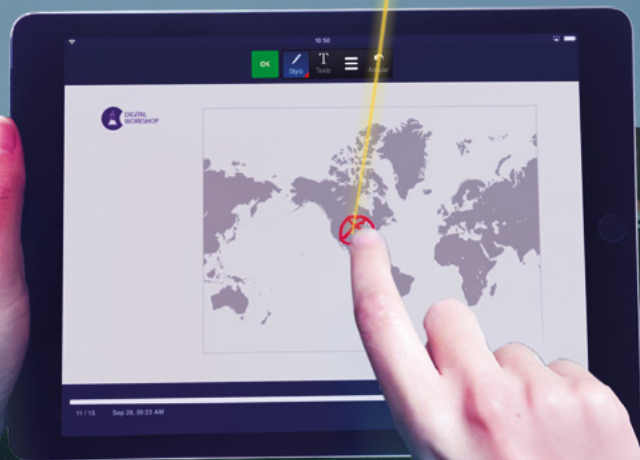




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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Since early 2018, the demand for experiences, as opposed to events, has exploded. Multiple reports, analyses and researches point at events as one of the most effective marketing communication tools.

This report looks at the rise of the **smart venue**, a type of venue that helps event professionals design experiences by offering features in touch with the zeitgeist of attendees' needs. This contribution is key to experience design as event professionals cannot overrule structural or policy fallacies.

This report is the result of the following research:

- **400 venues reviewed across the globe with an emphasis on North America**
- **50 events reviewed for room block pricing analysis**

The results are staggering. The search for what venues currently offer uncovered a new breed of forward-thinking suppliers – the smart venues – that are more in touch with the needs of attendees and event professionals.

As a result, savvy event professionals looking for a venue in 2020 should carefully consider what the research of this report uncovers, keeping in mind the features highlighted in this report will inevitably raise the standard and deliver more negotiating power when dealing with weaker suppliers.

When it gets to room block negotiation, this report is an incredible eye-opener for the planner who commits to working with hotels in order to give attendees a discounted accommodation rate.



## WHAT IS A SMART VENUE?

Event professionals seem to agree, venues are the **second most important element** of live experiences. 72% of event professionals said so in [our recently published research](#).

Choosing a venue that does not support a smooth execution with elements that wow or surprise attendees will, on the other hand, negatively affect the outcome of an event.

We were left puzzled by such an overwhelming consensus. Our curiosity was stimulated. Some of the questions on our minds were:

- › **Are all venues offering the same features?**
- › **Are all venues transparent with event professionals?**

To answer these questions, we embarked on a study of 400 venues and 50 events to uncover, for you, dear reader, the zeitgeist of the current venue offering.

What the research uncovers is a category of outliers, which we like to call '**smart venues**'. These venues embrace the needs of attendees and planners alike.



They went above and beyond to rethink the way we interact in a physical space during events, offering staggering features that make them stand out in the following categories:

### **Transparency**

Planners expect room block rates to be competitive if not favourable. Sadly, that's not consistently the case. While some venues honor this expectation, others have gone above and beyond by eliminating their F&B minimums and cancellation fees, among other things.

### **Experience Design Support**

Some venues are stepping up their offerings to help planners cope with the pressure to deliver transformative experiences. Wrap-around, high-definition video walls and dynamic intelligent light systems allow you to create virtual environments and set the tone and atmosphere for your event.

### **Accessibility and Inclusivity**

It's imperative that planners make all their guests feel welcome, and venues are in an important position to facilitate that with accessibility infrastructure. Ramps and elevator access should be standard, but some venues go beyond the status quo with braille text on everything from elevators to ATMs, hearing loop systems, and special staff training.

### **Sustainability**

Green initiatives are important for us all to consider, and choosing venues that prioritize these is one way you can apply pressure throughout the industry to follow suit. From efficient water features and solar power to rooftop gardens and apiaries, some venues are building sustainability right into their physical infrastructure. Some even offer consultative services to help you offset your own event's carbon footprint.

### **Structural Flexibility**

Venues are beginning to recognize the importance of versatility in experience design, and large multi-use spaces are an attractive feature setting some venues apart. Notably huge, open spaces with flexible layouts, transformable mechanized features, and bespoke set design are leading this trend.





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## Why Should You Look for Smart Venues?

Smart venues should be the only type of venues planners look for when planning events.

We can all agree that our event outcomes will inevitably be negatively impacted by having a venue that is

- › **Not committed to sustainability**
- › **Not accessible**
- › **Not inclusive and diverse in its workforce**
- › **Not architecturally versatile**
- › **Not ethical in their policies**
- › **Not tech-friendly**

On the other hand, selecting a venue that excels or wows attendees in one or more of the above categories will positively affect how key stakeholders experience the event. In fact, you can secure the X factor required to elevate your event to an experience by selecting a venue with:

- › **A strong carbon offsetting program**
- › **A diverse workforce**
- › **Strong architectural flexibility**
- › **Advanced technology infrastructure**
- › **A transparent and ethical approach to doing business**

It will make stakeholders feel understood in their needs, it will make them feel comfortable, catered to, and ready to transform – the ultimate objective of designing event experiences.

By embracing the 'smart venue' way, you will have a much stronger feeling of what to look for when selecting a venue for your next event.

You will also be more protected from unethical (to say the least) practices of some venues that consistently take advantage of room block allocation at the disadvantage of both the planner and attendees.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research for this report consists of two phases:

### PHASE 1.

#### UNCOVERING UNETHICAL PRACTICES IN ROOM BLOCK ALLOCATION.

An alarming consensus from multiple industry reports suggested that attendees constantly dodge room block offerings to find alternative solutions.

We also received several complaints from event professionals in North America on how they had to call their selected hotel multiple times to lower the rate offered to attendees as public booking websites were offering better deals.

We decided to investigate whether something was broken in one of the most utilized mechanisms to book venues today.

- We reviewed **50 events** in North America, Europe and the Asia Pacific.
- The events were all happening within **2 to 4 months** of the date of review.
- We looked at the website of each event to determine whether a **'preferred' or 'exclusive' attendee rate** was offered. That explicit language gave us a signal of a 'contracted' rate as opposed to a 'courtesy' rate. We recorded the rate, tax-free.
- We searched on publicly available **hotel booking websites** for the same properties during the same dates of the event. We recorded the rate for the same type of room, tax-free.
- We then looked at **alternative offerings** by nearby hotels in the same category, for the same dates, and for the same room type.
- We also looked at the availability of **'entire apartments'** on airbnb.com that had a similar or higher level of amenities, recording the tax-free price for each.

Although the sample of this research is very limited in scope, it is worth noting how recurring the patterns of the research are. For consistency, we had to discard 185 entries in which hotel rooms or apartments were not available. However, a quick search on similar dates (within the same season) a week before or after would, in 95% of the cases, confirm the patterns outlined later in this report. This signals a very pervasive statistical occurrence event professionals should be aware of.





## PHASE 2.

### UNCOVERING UNIQUE FEATURES IN THE CURRENT MEETING VENUE OFFERING.

We reviewed over 400 event venues to pick out the most innovative trends in today's industry. The study focused on venues in major cities across North America, Europe, and Asia, with some additional research performed on Africa and the Middle East. Although large convention centers received the most attention, the study also included smaller business venues, hotel venues, coworking spaces, concert halls, art centers, and other offsite locations. The breakdown by group was roughly as follows:

- › 40% major convention centers
- › 20% mid-sized banquet venues
- › 15% hotel venues
- › 10% concert halls and art centers
- › 10% coworking spaces
- › 5% other

In the United States and China, many of the small- to mid-sized event venues catered to weddings primarily, and corporate events secondarily. Although there is significant overlap in applicability, this report deals mainly with innovative venue features that are relevant to the business market.





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# PHASE 1.



## PHASE 1: TRANSPARENCY

One of the key features of the smart venue is transparency. Three years ago, our research on [The Venue of the Future](#) uncovered how the negotiated rate was by far the most important element influencing the selection of an event venue.

Whether you plan your events in convention centers or hotels, you will inevitably encounter the offer to reserve a block of rooms for your attendees at a preferred rate in exchange for a better price on the venue rental.

This is a win-win for everyone. At least on paper.

Attendees get a preferred, discounted rate to stay on site during the event.

The planner saves money on the rental and occasionally F&B.

The hotel fills up rooms.

Negotiating a room block comes with a great deal of stress for event professionals. Most deals will, in fact, come with an attrition rate or the percentage of rooms that need to be occupied to avoid paying a penalty.

These rates can sometimes be re-negotiated, but they require serious commitment from the planner and an incredible negotiating effort to minimize risk. All of the above is based on the fact that attendees will, in most cases, choose a room on site at a discounted price.

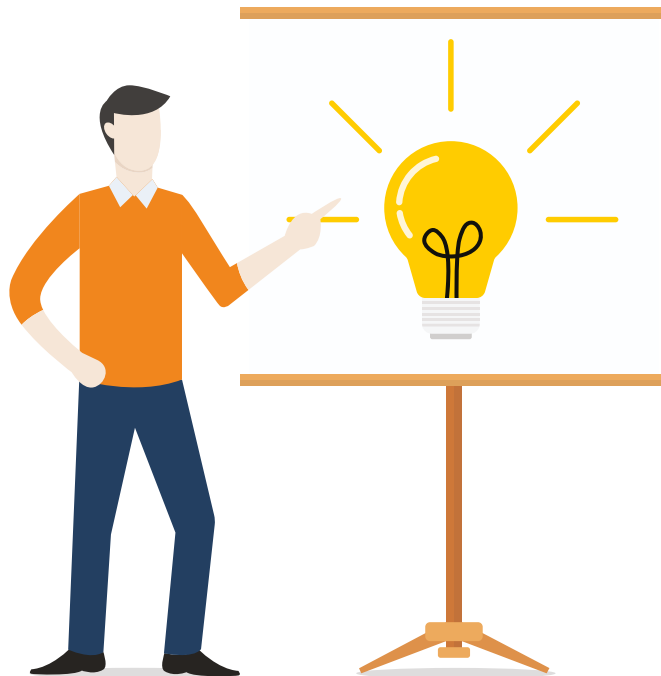


Yet the trend highlighted by multiple reports in the industry is that attendees consistently dodge the room block in favor of alternative accommodation (or simply neglect to enter the room block code on public booking platforms).

Why?

This was the question that stimulated our research.

The results were quite staggering:



**On average, the same room at the same hotel and during the same days of the event is **1.17% cheaper** on booking websites than the 'negotiated' or 'preferred' rate.**

This is probably the most disconcerting result that impacts the basics of room block negotiation. After reviewing most of the literature on the subject, it is evident how a preferred rate is one of the top incentives to engage in a contracted room block. It's a commitment to minimize costs on the space rental and F&B while assuming the risk of filling up the hotel.



**The consensus and analysis of event professionals' contributions in online forums are that the preferred rate should be anywhere from 10% to 30% cheaper than the publicly accessible rate. This is not the case.**

Worse than that, the average rates on booking websites are cheaper than in discounted room blocks for events. Therefore, event professionals are, in most cases, taking on a substantial risk while being tricked by hotels.

Another interesting aspect of our analysis is that 10% of the preferred rates ended up being over 50% more expensive than publicly available options for similar hotel accommodation.



**Similar rooms with the same level of amenities within a short distance from the event are 25.39% cheaper than the advertised or preferred rate.**

While this is not an element directly connected to the negotiated rates and the venue/planner relationship, a rate 25% cheaper is shocking to say the least.

One of the most shocking elements of our research is that sometimes these rates are available from hotels within the same chains and at the same level of service. While we can't hypothesize demand manipulation practices, it is inevitable to feel how the room block offer at preferred rates is almost always doomed to fail when compared to similar offering close by. Of course, attendees give up the opportunity to be on site and to have every part of the event close by. Yet again it is more than acceptable to question the weight of being close by compared to savings of 25% - sometimes in a substantially better accommodation option.



Airbnb and sharing economy options have been a hot item of discussion in the room block debacle. While most reports seem to indicate that, eventually, attendees would spend more at alternative accommodations,

**airbnb.com options are 35.52% cheaper and, in 85% of the cases, offer substantially more amenities such as an extra room, free wifi, and extra beds.**

This is definitely another factor eating up the quota event professionals have to reach to avoid penalties.

Here are some interesting aspects of our research that can help event professionals negotiate better deals for their room block:

- ▶ Some cities offer substantially **fewer Airbnb options and similar accommodations** – above all Orlando, where room blocks always seem to be winning – especially if events happen within Disney.
- ▶ Las Vegas offers many similar **alternatives and Airbnb options**, yet some events manage to get very good preferred rates. This may indicate a better negotiation power for larger meetings or from experienced event professionals.
- ▶ Smaller or independent events consistently get **worse rates or options**. This may indicate a general lack of understanding, resources or experience to control the negotiation process.
- ▶ Europe almost always guarantees **better-negotiated rates**.
- ▶ Larger companies that plan multiple or large events tend to get **better rates**.
- ▶ When an event offers a link to book directly with the hotel with little information about the preferred rate (lack of code or deadlines), the prices are **substantially higher** than what is available on public booking websites.
- ▶ When a convention center is involved (and as a result a CVB), rates are **consistently better** even if multiple properties are involved.
- ▶ Planners with a courtesy block used services listing Airbnb and other hotel opportunities. This practice inevitably offers **better opportunities** for attendees.



The small sample size of our research can put off some of you, yet the patterns were extremely clear when looking at properties.

Many events were discarded for the lack of all elements we were looking for, yet the same unethical practices were very evident. We are prepared to stand behind the fact that larger research would uncover very similar trends.

## HOW CAN SMART VENUES HELP?

Room block management is an industry-wide transparency issue. We expect smart venues to offer a guarantee that the rooms offered as part of the block will inevitably be 10% to 30% cheaper than publicly advertised rates.

Our research of 400 venues uncovered how more efficiencies can be achieved with a transparent approach to pricing and the traditional pain points of venue negotiations.



Some highlights from our research include:

- › **No food and beverage minimums**
- › **No gratuities or service charges**
- › **Waived cancellation fees**
- › **Group discounts for select periods**
- › **Discounts for non-profit groups**
- › **Budgetary guidance from the venue's event manager**

Read further to learn more about how some venues are implementing these ideas.

## DISCOUNTED RATES AND BUDGETING GUIDANCE

**Discounted rates and special deals were major themes among venues in the United States and Asia.**

Turnkey packages are king, but venues are also finding ways to save planners money by offering flexible catering deals. Many venues now allow you to select your own caterer, while others are removing gratuities and F&B minimums. Although it may be a longstanding tradition, it's worth noting that many venues offer reduced rates for specific periods.

Some venues are able to confer massive savings to the planners. The [AMA New York Executive Conference Center](#), for example, has removed food and beverage minimums. By cutting out service

charges and gratuities, they claim to offer event planners a savings of almost 25%.

The [Langham Chicago](#) has not only removed all F&B minimums, but has also waived cancellation terms. Additionally, it offers "Group Value Dates," or discounted rates for group bookings at specific periods of time.

[Suntec Singapore](#) has even set special rates for particular times of day, with a rate of \$7 per person for business meetings held after 7 pm.

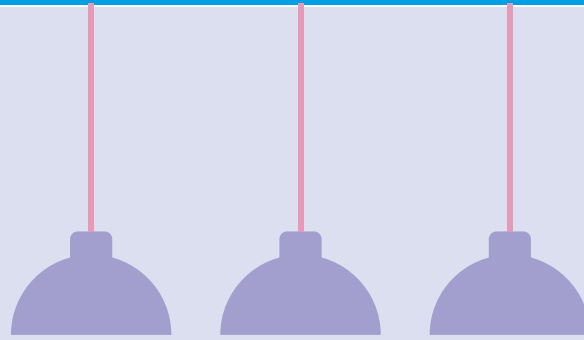
Another factor to keep in mind is the possibility of special rates for select groups. If you are planning an



event for a charitable organization, consider asking for a special rate. Brooklyn's [BRIC](#) arts center, for example, offers a 20% discount to non-profit organizations.

Some venues are using their event planning services to assist with budget management. At the [Crowne Plaza Beijing](#), your "Meetings Director" will provide you with a daily list of itemized expenses to help you manage your budget.

While many venues now offer turnkey packages to minimize the amount of planning required, they also offer more opportunities to opt out of services that you may not need. They recognize that event planners are facing increasing pressure to be budget-conscious.



# PHASE 2.



## PHASE 2: INNOVATION

### EXPERIENCE DESIGN

Designing transformative experiences is impossible without a venue that supports a frictionless execution. Some structural barriers, like a gigantic column in the middle of a room, will inevitably impact the most ambitious experience design plans.

There are also further elements that can help attendees let go of the outside world. This is a key element to really connect with what is being presented and to connect with other attendees.

The smart venue also features very low levels of noise. Meaning that all those nuisances like underperforming WiFi are taken care of so that attendees can focus on the event.

Our search for the smart venue highlighted the following forward-thinking features:

- › **Bespoke custom set design for next-level brand storytelling**
- › **Huge blank-canvas spaces with movable walls and highly flexible layouts**
- › **Immersive digital environments via huge wrap-around screens and light projections**
- › **Intelligent lighting that allows you to switch up the ambiance on a beat**
- › **Charging stations that feature lockers, and mobile charging docks**
- › **Enhanced WiFi to guarantee optimal coverage and bandwidth throughout the venue**

## TRANSFORMABLE SETS FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCES

What is the narrative for your event? Do you have a storied theme for your event brand? If so, how are you currently carrying that narrative throughout your attendees' sensory experience of your event?

It's tempting to imagine a venue transformation that underscores your theme, but for the majority of venues, the traditional set-ups are often fixed and prohibit that kind of fantasy-come-to-life event design.

But there are some places where you can indulge in a little dreaming.

Smart venues are offering event planners full-service bespoke set designs for their events with setup times that start at 24 hours. These services include custom designed stages, bars, furniture, and props that transform your event space into a scene worthy of theatre production.

If you do go this route, however, make sure you have a clear vision when you engage the venue and ask about what kind of support is offered. You wouldn't want an elaborate set built in a day with nobody around in case something breaks.

**Quick Tip:** For added versatility, desirable architectural features include industrial-strength rigging, programmable lighting systems\*, in-house sound packages, and an evenly distributed electrical supply.

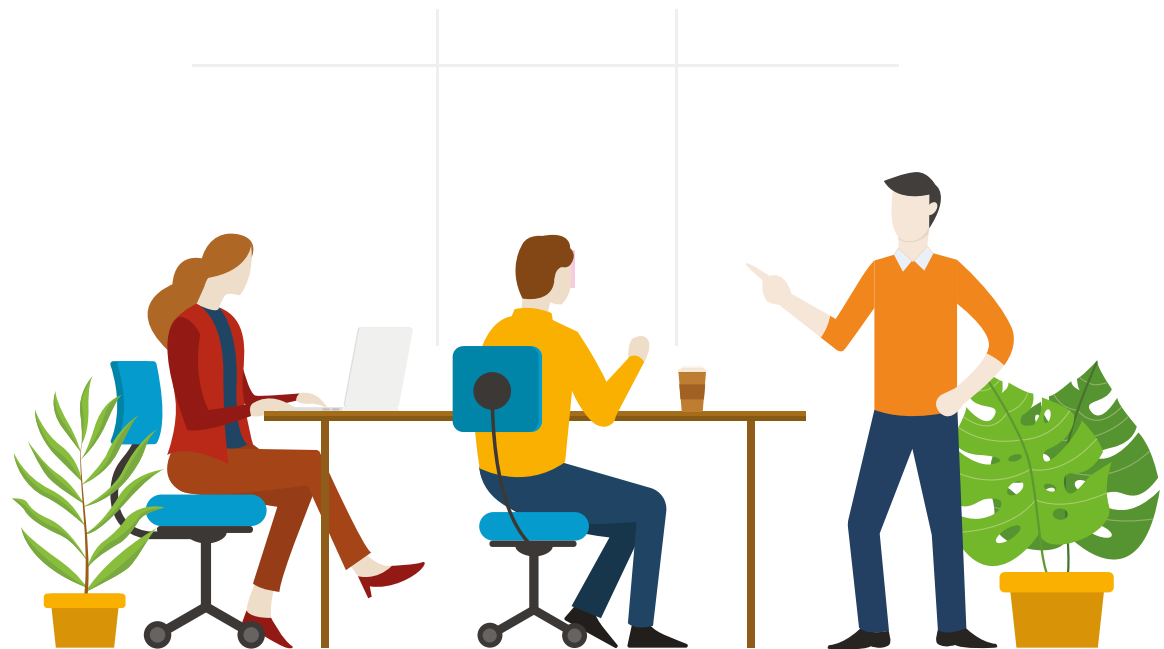
Battersea Evolution in London, for example, has completely transformed its spaces into fanciful set designs for multiple different events. The venue provides bespoke furniture, bars, and set designs within a 24-hour turnaround for construction.

\*Programmable or "intelligent" lighting systems vary in complexity. It is a blanket term that covers any kind of lighting with mechanized features. Adjustable movements usually include tilt and pan, while other effects like programmable dimming and color shifts are becoming more common. These lighting systems differ from traditional lights that have fixed positions and a single color setting.



Depending on your vision, here are some things you should look out for in a custom set:

- **A large enough space to create the immersive experiences you envision**
- **A venue with an industrial design that supports heavy-duty rigging capable of suspending artificial hot-air balloons, acrobats, and temporary chandeliers from the ceiling**
- **Electrical access points that are distributed throughout the space for lighting the set**
- **A comprehensive lighting and sound package**



## IMMERSIVE SPACES WITH EXPANSIVE PROJECTION AND LED SCREENS

If you want to be able to continually transform the theme of a space throughout the duration of your event, there are few features that provide more versatility than large-scale video screens. These allow you to create an ambiance and environment on a moment's notice.

**Did You Know?** Some advanced venue AV technology can be used to make holographic objects appear within the space itself — imagine the potential for a truly memorable engagement experience!

The more wall-space that is covered by a screen, the more flexibility you have to immerse your attendees in a scene of your choosing.

And Chicago's Adler Planetarium takes full advantage of this potential with the 360° dome screen that defines its Granger Sky Theatre. The domed ceiling forms a wrap-around projection screen that rises 36 feet (11 meters) high.

With this kind of dome coverage, you can transport your attendees to a scene of your choosing. The (artificial) sky's the limit! You could go for a romantic starlight effect, a fiery sunset, or an abstract design featuring company colors.

**Did You Know?** The world's biggest conference venues are able to create immersive experiences with rectangular flat-screens simply by magnifying their scale to epic proportions.

The Suntec Singapore conference center, for example, features an “ImmersiveAV Suite” comprised of the signature “Panorama” and “Float3D” effects. Powered by 20,000 lumen projectors, the “Panorama” is an enormous wrap-around screen that surrounds the event with a dynamic display of your choosing.

**Remember:** Large screen setups like this allow you to transport event-goers to faraway places, but you’ll likely want to have a consultation with the venue to discuss the logistics. Do they have stock images or videos or do you provide your own? If the latter, what is the recommended resolution for those assets?

The “Float3D” uses holographic projection technology to create the illusion of a 3D object hovering roughly 15 feet (4.5 meters) above the ground. The same considerations are important here: who supplies the image and what are the specs? If you’re interested in this effect, getting this sorted well in advance is in your best interest.





**All Angles Covered:** These features allow you to surround your attendees with a 360° view, while they can also appreciate the central holograph from all sides. It is the principle of a VR headset applied to an entire room.

Suntec Singapore also features the world's largest HD video wall. With 664 HD screens stacked like tiles, the digital wall is essentially a two-storey blank canvas for all your branding needs. Customization is the name of the game smart venues play.

## INTELLIGENT LIGHTING

Some smart venues are combining large-scale screens with intelligent lighting systems to create fully immersive effects. Lighting systems are referred to as “intelligent” when they offer programmable variations in color and brightness, as well as mechanical shifts in movement. These lighting systems are usually adjusted from a central control room, and they can shift throughout the duration of your event.

Intelligent lighting is all about creating a responsive atmosphere that shifts to match the mood you want to generate at a given moment. Whether you want a subtle sparkling effect at an evening event or calm focus-conducive lighting for an educational panel discussion, intelligent lighting allows you to change on a whim (or program changes beforehand).

**Keep in Mind:** Setting the right mood for your event activities is all part of ensuring the best experience. Intelligent lighting lets you set the right tone from moment to moment, so attendees are more receptive to that experience.

For example, the Yongle Grand Ballroom of Beijing's Hotel NUO features a state-of-the-art intelligent lighting system with over 100 mood and color combinations. You could, for example, bathe the stage with the colors of your corporate branding during speaker sessions, but spread a wash of cool, harmonious colors throughout the space during an evening meal.

Leveraging this technology to create an immersive light show, San Francisco's Moscone Center has transformed the aerial bridge that connects its exhibition halls by installing mirrored rods with almost 30,000 individually programmed colored LED lights in the ceiling overhead. The display shifts in tone and intensity throughout the night. The glass walls of the bridge allow the shifting colors and flashing lights to be seen by passersby on the street below, but the walkway is only accessible to conference attendees. This art installation gives attendees a sense of exclusive access while making the passage between event halls an experience in its own right.

**Remember:** Every corner of your venue presents new opportunities to enhance the visitor experience. And with the intelligent lighting systems available today, any space can be reinvented.

## COLUMN-FREE HALLS AND MOVABLE WALLS

In addition to incorporating larger screens and intelligent lighting systems, smart venues maximize the flexibility of their layout options. Large, pillar-less venues with movable walls are offering the ultimate in dynamic “blank canvas” appeal.

This kind of architectural design allows venues to create wide-open indoor spaces for a large-scale tradeshow one day, and host multiple break-out meetings and lectures within temporary enclosures the next.

**Did You Know:** By avoiding columns, these spaces offer unobstructed views all the way across the venue, as well as greater flexibility in terms of exhibition booth layout and temporary wall structures.

South Africa's Durban ICC has a central convention hall that encloses 125,000 ft<sup>2</sup> (11,600 m<sup>2</sup>), movable walls can divide it into 22 separate sections of varying sizes.

While large venues like this allow for greater flexibility on a grand scale, smaller and more budget-conscious venues are catching on the trend to offer lower tech alternatives in the same vein, like air walls.

**Be Aware:** The term “air walls” can cover many different kinds of movable wall systems. The term can refer to inflatable walls, free-standing partitions, and sliding walls that run along grooves installed in the floors and ceilings.

Inflatable and free-standing walls usually present more flexible layout options, but they will rarely reach the ceiling of your venue. If your venue advertises a movable wall system, make sure you clarify what specific type they use. If you anticipate large crowds, you may also want to ask about the level of sound insulation that the walls provide.

Even if your venue doesn't offer this kind of service in-house, they may be able to accommodate a third-party provider. The demand is high, and many companies now specialize in creating temporary walls for events.



## VENUES WITH MECHANICAL FEATURES

Some structural transformations have even been fully mechanized, and we're not just talking about push-button blackout window blinds. Room features from seating to skylights are built to transform according to the needs of the event, sliding in or out of the way as needed.

A number of concert halls worldwide are using automated "telescopic" seating arrangements that can be folded away or elevated into multiple different configurations. Moscow's Zaryadye Philharmonic Concert Hall can change from a flat floor to 20 staggered rows of curved seating in less than 15 minutes.

Imagine this applied to a B2B event. With a few adaptations, this could mean a transition from a reception hall to keynote session to a networking event to a panel discussion – all within the same space – and conference venues are taking note.

At the Berlin ExpoCenter's Palais Berlin, some architectural features can be radically shifted using built-in mechanical devices. Would the staircase at the center of its oval foyer be a great passageway between levels for one part of your event, but an inconvenient obstacle during a presentation?

Don't worry: a fully mechanized trap door means that the staircase can be tucked away discreetly into the bottom floor. The foyer's central chandelier can also be mechanically raised or lowered to suit the needs of your event.

**Keep in Mind: If you're hosting a multi-faceted event and you're looking for a unique way to go from one stage to the next, mechanized room components are a practical and memorable way to add a touch of novelty to these transitions.**

Smaller venues are also taking advantage of mechanical features to facilitate greater customization. Noah's Event Venues, a franchise that operates across the United States, has multiple banquet halls that feature "movable ceilings," which make use of "pick points" or rods that can be lowered all the way to the floor. Each "pick point" includes an electrical outlet and a loop for attaching lights or other decorations, all without ever having to step on a ladder.

Though these may not afford the same versatility as bespoke set design, it's easy to see how the variety of lighting effects might be used to transform a space both functionally and aesthetically. Indeed these features are typically designed with use-case versatility in mind.

## PRACTICAL SERVICE EXTENSIONS

Smart venues are also looking for innovative ways to extend their services to improve the visitor experience. Services to look out for include complimentary transportation options, innovative charging stations, and exceptional WiFi.

### TRANSPORTATION

Keep in mind that transportation services don't have to be limited to motorized vehicles. The Bvlgari Hotel in Beijing, for example, allows guests to borrow designer bikes free of charge so that they can easily explore the city on their own. Many venues have also partnered with public transportation services to offer discounted tickets.

**Do This: Check with your venue to see if they offer complimentary transportation services or discounted rates with local suppliers.**

### CHARGING STATIONS AND WIFI

Other venues are exploring ways to enhance common services, like charging stations and free WiFi. For example, London's ExCel conference center offers special lockers to store your phone at the two charging stations on opposite ends of the venue; they have also partnered with tech suppliers to provide mobile charging devices that you can attach to your phone as you wander around the facilities.

And New York's Javits Centre takes their WiFi service to the next level. There are 700 unique access points across their 2.1 million ft<sup>2</sup> building, making it possible for up to 70,000 people to enjoy a strong simultaneous connection.

Most event attendees depend on their mobile devices and WiFi access to conduct business. Charging stations and free WiFi have become standard at most corporate venues, but it is still wise to ask about the type of charging stations available and the level of WiFi coverage.



## SUSTAINABILITY

These days, it's hard to ignore the growing movement for greater environmental accountability. The events industry has been taking note, and many venues have become Smart in how they support sustainable design.

The fact that smart venues are embracing sustainability is a great contribution to make sustainability less of a trend and more of a way of thinking. Most venues are switching to LED lights, using pitchers of filtered water instead of bottled water, and going paperless whenever possible.

Attention to sustainability is a tough requirement for event professionals. Being 100% effective without the support of a venue is almost impossible. Event professionals need venues that are forward-thinking so they can pass the value to their attendees.

Smart venues will inevitably be preferred as attendees demand more sustainable practices from events. Carbon offsetting, recycling, food waste management, and local food sourcing are just some of the key themes attendees (and especially younger demographics) crave rather than wish for.

**Did You Know: Most innovations in sustainable development boil down to one basic principle: making the most of what we already have available to us. It is as much about resourcefulness as it is about resources.**

What else are smart venues doing? Here are some of the most forward-thinking features we identified:

- › **Reducing reliance on CO<sub>2</sub>-heavy forms of transportation**
- › **Using renewable energy to power buildings**
- › **Compensating for emissions with carbon offsetting**
- › **Using rooftop real estate to generate solar power**
- › **Using rooftop real estate to cultivate urban gardens and install apiaries**
- › **Harvesting rainwater and recycling "greywater"**

Today's leading venues are showing ingenuity in almost every area of sustainable design.

Based on our research, eco-consciousness was a priority in both France and Germany.

**Did You Know?** According to the 2018/19 Meeting & Event Barometer from the German Convention Bureau, more than 40% of German venues have some form of sustainability management system, and 90% of event venues said sustainability was an important or very important goal.\*

Although sustainability was not as prominent a feature in most US locations, it was a major highlight of many venues in Chicago and Pittsburgh. Similarly, while most venues across Asia didn't foreground sustainability efforts, it was a standout feature in many Japanese conference centers.



As a general trend worldwide, the bigger the conference centre, the more likely it was to incorporate some form of sustainability practice. Nevertheless, many of the most innovative ideas can be adapted to smaller operations, and a few small- to medium-sized venues are jumping on board in the most eco-conscious cities worldwide.

\*[https://gcb.de/fileadmin/GCB/Discover\\_Germany/MEBA/190517\\_MEBA\\_ManagementInfo\\_ENG\\_final.pdf](https://gcb.de/fileadmin/GCB/Discover_Germany/MEBA/190517_MEBA_ManagementInfo_ENG_final.pdf)

## STANDARDS AND CERTIFICATION FOR GREEN ENERGY IN EVENT VENUES

If you are looking for a venue that actively works toward sustainable practices, check whether it is LEED, ISO 20121, or EMAS certified.

- **LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design**, and it is the world's most widely used system for rating the ecological sustainability of buildings.
- **The International Organization for Standardization uses its ISO 20121 program** to set environmental guidelines and monitor their compliance within the events industry.
- **EMAS stands for the European Eco-management and Audit Scheme**, and it has the world's highest standard for environmental management.

Pittsburgh's David L. Lawrence Convention Center was the first conference center to receive the highest "Platinum" level of LEED certification. When the building was initially being constructed, over 50% of its building materials were sourced from within a 500-mile radius, thus reducing the project's carbon footprint right from the outset.

The Viparis Group in Paris was the first company to be ISO 20121 certified. It has set stringent sustainability benchmarks as part of its Better Event Viparis 2030 initiative, including a 70% reduction in the carbon footprint of its existing facilities by 2030. One of its venues, Paris Nord Villepinte, already switched entirely to green energy sources in 2018.

Similarly, Germany's Besonderen Orte was the first venue provider to be EMAS certified in Germany. Two of its locations have been operating on 100% renewable energy since 2002.



## REDUCING THE CARBON FOOTPRINT THROUGH SMARTER TRANSPORTATION

**Did you know?** Travel can account for up to 80% of an event's CO<sup>2</sup> emissions.

**Do This:** To lower the impact of transportation to and from your event, look for venues that are easily accessible by public transport. Keep in mind that some venues also reserve parking spots specifically for carpooling.

Embracing public transportation, carpooling, and electric vehicles is a simple way for venues to reduce their carbon footprint. As an event planner, you can look out for venues that will help you offer more ecologically-minded modes of transportation for both your attendees and employees.

**Do This:** If you are offering your guests a shuttle bus service, look into options for electric vehicles and make sure there are charging stations within an accessible range.

Viparis, for example, has set up a publicity campaign to encourage the use of public transport. Additionally, at their Palais de Congrès location, they are currently testing a pilot program to share electric cars among employees. (The company car fleet is already comprised entirely of electric and hybrid vehicles, and the organization is currently installing charging stations for electric cars.)

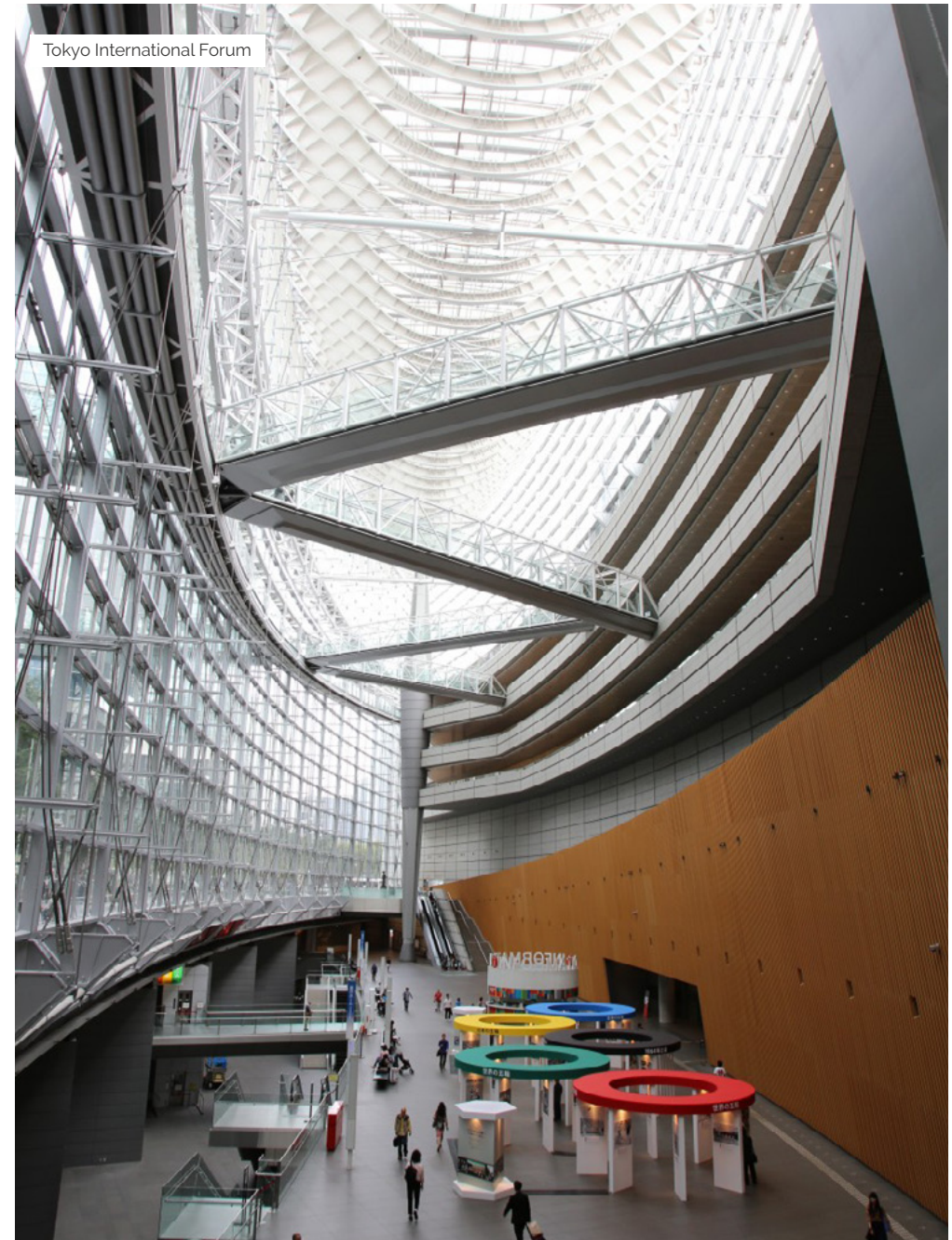
Additionally, there is always the possibility of partnering with a public transportation provider to negotiate reduced rates for your event guests. To encourage fuel-efficient travel, the German venue company Besonderen Orte provides discounted rail tickets with Deutsche Bahn for all attendees to its events.

Viparis and Besonderen Orte may be at the forefront of sustainability practices, but many other smart venues offer ways to reduce the emissions caused by transportation. Keep the key principles of efficient transportation in mind when planning your event, and you are bound to have an impact on your carbon footprint.

## SOLAR POWER: RENEWABLE ENERGY VS. CARBON FOOTPRINT

Renewable energy offers another key way to cut back on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Solar power is one of the fastest growing forms of green energy, and many venues are taking advantage of this evolving trend. Large conference centers typically have expansive roofs free from shadows — the perfect setting for a solar farm. Some have even partnered with municipalities to set up large installations of solar power generating systems.

**Think About It:** Internationally, a number of venues have partnered with their local municipalities to meet sustainability targets. Event planners can show their support for green energy production by choosing a venue with solar-panel installments, in turn showing that cities investing in green energy programs can attract business.



If sustainability is a focal point for your event or a metric you actively measure, there are a selection of venues worldwide that will help you meet this goal using solar power.

Despite being one of the world's largest oil producers, the United Arab Emirates is investing over \$100 billion in renewable energy. As part of the nation's "Dubai Clean Energy Strategy," the Dubai World Trade Centre just finished installing more than 3,000 solar panels on its roof in 2018.

One of Japan's biggest convention centers, the Tokyo International Forum, harvests the sun's energy with rooftop solar panels and evacuated glass tube thermal collectors; the panels create AC power, and the tubes provide heated water for the building.

Similarly, as the foremost convention center in the city that hosted the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the Kyoto International Conference Center prides itself on its sustainable practices. Among other initiatives, the venue has installed solar panels to power its digital signage.

As solar panel options become more affordable, we will likely see more small- to mid-sized venues jumping on board. Showing your support for these and other environmentally friendly initiatives will create a financial incentive for both venues and cities to pursue them.





## CARBON OFFSETTING

While a venue may not have the budget to update its own facilities to a green energy source right now, they can still use carbon offsetting to make a difference.

Some venues even offer consultation services on sustainability. These services often include an estimate of event-related carbon emissions, giving event planners the option to invest in their own carbon offsetting initiative to create a CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral event.

**“Carbon offsetting” involves estimating your CO<sup>2</sup> emissions in tonnes, and then assessing how much money would be required to finance an equivalent reduction in future emissions using renewable energy sources. Once this equivalence is established, you can compensate for your carbon footprint by investing in renewable energy developments.**

Chicago's Hyatt Regency McCormick Place, for example, has committed to offsetting 100% of its electricity usage with investments in clean wind energy. Another Chicago venue, the Langham Hotel, offers planners specialized consultation on sustainable practices through the “CONNECT Conferences” program. This program includes an “Event Carbon Footprint Calculator” that gives planners the chance to participate in carbon offsetting options.

Whether they involve the direct implementation of green energy sources or carbon offsetting, these initiatives allow you to market your event as eco-friendly. Particularly if you are hosting an event that foregrounds sustainable development or CSR best practices, a green venue will help you stay on message.



## EVENT VENUES THAT ARE INNOVATING WITH URBAN GREEN SPACES

While we may not initially think of downtown urban centers as prime locations for gardening, more and more venues are recognizing the “green” potential of their rooftops and surrounding property.

**Did You Know?** It may seem contradictory, but the most forward-thinking futurists are growing old-fashioned vegetable gardens and reintroducing native plants in city centers.

Large venues have the space to plant bigger gardens on their roofs, but the fundamental idea can be implemented in venues of all sizes.

The practical advantages are multifold: the opportunity to grow food locally and reintroduce hardy native plants, the option to harvest honey and protect endangered bee populations, and the ability to reduce AC costs through the cooling effects of groundcover plants.

These types of urban gardens may be more common than you realize. Look for venues that cultivate their own vegetables, maintain their own beehives, or use native plants for their centerpieces.

**Remember:** The next best thing is local produce. If your venue isn't growing its own vegetables, it may still be sourcing its ingredients from local suppliers. The less distance that food has to travel, the lower its environmental impact is likely to be.

Read further for some outstanding examples of smart venues that are actively cultivating green spaces. We have chosen to highlight venues in Europe and North America, but this trend was observed worldwide.



## Large Convention Centers with Urban Gardens

As the world's largest venues begin to explore their options for rooftop gardening, vast areas of downtown urban centers will be converted into garden spaces.

In preparation for the 2024 Paris Olympics, the Porte de Versailles Exhibition Centre is currently undergoing a major transformation that includes over 550,000 ft<sup>2</sup> (52,000 m<sup>2</sup>) of rooftop gardens, and another 200,000 ft<sup>2</sup> (20,000 m<sup>2</sup>) of biotope gardens planted in the surrounding grounds.

This urban garden project is already well underway, with publicly accessible vegetable gardens in the works and 18 on-site beehives already producing award-winning honey.

And these projects don't necessarily require the kind of funding made available through Olympic committees. The Palais des congrès de Montréal

in Quebec, Canada, has already successfully introduced a similar project on a smaller scale. Its exhibition center includes 9,200 ft<sup>2</sup> (850 m<sup>2</sup>) of rooftop gardens with 2 beehives. The gardens serve not only as a source of food but also as a natural form of air-conditioning for the building; the groundcover plants chosen for the site have a cooling effect on the rooftop.

Pittsburgh's David L. Lawrence Convention Center received its LEED Platinum certification in large part because of its rooftop gardens planted with indigenous groundcovers, which reduce the rooftop temperature by as much as 50°F (10°C) on summer days.



## Mid-Sized Venues with Urban Gardens

Some mid-sized venues are also at the forefront of this trend. Chicago's LEED-certified Greenhouse Loft boasts an 8,000 ft<sup>2</sup> (740 m<sup>2</sup>) rooftop garden, featuring native prairie plants and trees that require minimal maintenance and irrigation. Additionally, the surrounding grounds include a co-op garden for growing vegetables.

**Did you know?** This gardening system allows Greenhouse Loft to compost its food waste right on site. With a combination of on-site recycling and composting, they are able to reduce their landfill footprint by up to 90%.

New York's Brooklyn Botanic Garden also features a rooftop garden arching over its "Atrium" venue. Like the Greenhouse Loft in Chicago, the Atrium uses native grasses and wildflowers to create an ecologically sustainable green space.

**Did you know?** Native plants usually require less irrigation and fewer pesticides to maintain, since they evolved along with the region's climate and fauna.



## Venues that Convert Industrial Sites into Green Spaces

In some cases, new building projects are repurposing abandoned industrial properties to create urban green spaces. For example, Toronto's Evergreen Brick Works was built on the site of a former brick quarry and factory.

Brick Works hosts numerous corporate events and weddings throughout the year, and all its profits are redirected toward other sustainable development projects. The organization also cultivates on-site vegetable gardens, hosts farmers' markets in the summer, and encourages the use of herb centerpieces as a sustainable alternative to traditional flowers.



## WATER CONSERVATION FOR EVENT VENUES

Even more popular than the introduction of urban green spaces, rainwater collection and greywater recycling were among the most common sustainability trends across the globe.

Both the Kyoto International Conference Center and the Tokyo International Forum recycle their “greywater” for reuse in their toilet systems. And almost all of the venues mentioned above use some form of rainwater collection system, either for reuse as toilet water or for irrigation purposes.

Other popular initiatives include sensors on bathroom taps and the retrofitting of water-efficient appliances.

**Did you know? “Greywater” is a term used to describe wastewater with minimal impurities, usually from washbasins and kitchen sinks. Plumbing systems that separate greywater from sewage water allow for more efficient water filtration systems.**

## ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY

Inclusivity and accessibility are two further factors where smart venues can give a substantial contribution to event professionals willing to elevate events to experiences. Structural barriers spoil the party for many attendees. Lack of representation or of a plan to give back to the host community will make some attendees feel not comfortable.

Smart venues are working to make their spaces more accessible or accommodating to people with disabilities and other previously excluded groups.

**Consider This: While venues participating in sustainable initiatives give credibility to any environmental claims your organization or event is making, those with accessibility and inclusion programs / infrastructure have the added benefit of making it easier for you to accommodate your attendees.**

Some of the most notable accessibility features we looked at are as follows:

- › **Wheelchair loan services**
- › **Enhanced customer service for people with disabilities, including telephone hotline guidance and personalized support services**
- › **Braille text and elevator signage**
- › **Visual and auditory cues in elevators and for emergency alarms**
- › **Hearing loop systems designed to send audio signals directly to hearing aids**
- › **Assistive listening devices**
- › **TDD (Telecommunication Device for the Deaf) telephones for the hearing impaired**

In terms of inclusivity, here are some of the most innovative initiatives we reviewed:

- › **Coworking spaces that proactively contribute to community projects**
- › **Venues that host charitable drives**
- › **Venues that donate unused food and other goods to charities**
- › **Venues that organize support groups for minority workers and actively foster inclusivity within the workplace**

## ACCESSIBILITY

Gone are the days of tall entrance stairways with no elevator or ramp as an alternative entryway. Nowadays, most architects and city planners are aware of how important it is to take wheelchair accessibility into account when designing buildings. Accessible entrances, parking spots, and washrooms have become the norm across North America, Europe, and Asia.

**Do This:** Roughly 10% of conference centers are now also offering some form of wheelchair loan service, often free of charge. Though guests will typically bring their own if needed, they may prefer the option not to travel with it if going a long distance. Be proactive and determine those options so you can communicate them to potential attendees.

Increasingly, venues are also considering the needs of the hearing and vision impaired. If you choose your venue carefully, you will ensure that all of your guests feel welcome.

## Services for People with Physical Disabilities

**Do This:** By choosing venues that go the extra mile to provide enhanced accessibility services, you are demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity, showing you care about every single one of your attendees.

Venues across the globe are adding more accessibility services, but even with such widespread advancements, the city of London stood out as one of the most innovative leaders in this area.

As a prime example, London's ExCel convention center provides an array of accessibility services. In addition to the standard wheelchair-accessible entrances and disabled parking spots, it offers a free wheelchair loan service and a telephone hotline that provides directions for the shortest travel routes to whatever part of the building you need to reach. This way, attendees with mobility issues can minimize the burden of traveling to and navigating around your event.

**Do This:** Speak to your venue about any specialized customer service options they provide to welcome visitors with disabilities. Ensure that these services and accommodations are communicated effectively to all your attendees and that onsite event staff is aware of any options for guests with disabilities.

ExCel's elevator buttons are also kept at accessible heights and feature braille labels, with floor levels announced both verbally and visually. Even the building's ATMs are designed with accessibility in mind, so that all buttons and screens can be accessed by someone sitting down and include braille. Lastly, the venue's customer service staff has received special disability-awareness training.

**Do This:** Selecting venues with special disability-awareness training is an excellent first step, but the buck doesn't stop there. Your own event staff, catering staff, and volunteers should also receive the appropriate training to empower them to serve all guests.





## Technology for the Hearing Impaired

When selecting your venue, you may also want to inquire about accommodations for the hearing impaired. Many innovative technologies are allowing for greater inclusion than ever before.

Venues across the globe are using technological advances to assist the hearing impaired. London's Congress Centre, for example, has installed a hearing loop system to accommodate visitors with hearing aids. With this kind of technology incorporated into a meeting space, you can send audio directly to hearing aids without the use of additional headphones.

Some venues that are specifically designed to delight the senses have also introduced more comprehensive accessibility services. Of all the locations we surveyed, New York City had one of the

highest concentrations of performance venues; one of its most famous concert halls, the Lincoln Center, now provides its hearing-impaired visitors with assistive listening devices.

Hearing loop systems and assistive listening devices offer two new ways that you can ensure your hearing-impaired guests remain part of the conversation at all times.



## Hotel Venues with Accessibility Services

Hotel venues need to consider even more accessibility features than conference centers. In China, in particular, event venues go hand in hand with hotels. Most Chinese venues are either part of a hotel chain, or they incorporate a hotel within the conference center. Many of these hotel venues have taken steps towards accessibility and inclusivity.

Because they provide overnight accommodation, even more careful consideration needs to be taken with the design of alarm systems and bathroom facilities. Bedroom and hallway alarms should feature both visual and auditory cues, and bathrooms should be equipped with accessible facilities and emergency cords.



**Do This:** While landline telephones may not be used much in daytime business activities, they are still a core feature of hotel rooms. Make sure your hotel venue offers TDD (Telecommunication Device for the Deaf) phones.

The Renaissance Beijing Wangfujing Hotel, for example, provides TDD telephones in their suites. The Crowne Plaza Beijing offers assistive listening devices on top of TDD phones and wheelchair accessible rooms. The “Features” section of their website even includes a “Special Needs” tab that details all of these services.

## VENUES THAT EMBRACE CSR IN THE COMMUNITY

A number of venues are adopting innovative approaches to community outreach and development. Hiring these venues not only demonstrates your commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR), but also helps to strengthen your ties with the local community. As a conduit for your good will, these venues can serve as a fantastic local networking opportunity.

### Coworking Spaces Involved in Community Projects

Coworking spaces are inherently innovative, and many feature state-of-the-art venue spaces available for hire. Key cities include San Francisco, New York, and London, but this type of venue model is a growing trend in multiple locations.

Some of the most innovative coworking spaces are using their unique position as community hubs to foster socially-conscious initiatives. By working with these groups, you are helping to fund their missions.

The aptly-named Innovation Hall in St. Louis, Missouri, is a not-for-profit organization designed to help budding entrepreneurs. It's exceptional in that its "Civic Lounge" is available to the public free of charge during regular weekday hours, which supports local entrepreneurs and businesses with a space to conduct their operations.

**Consider This: Hosting events at venues like these helps to fund their backing organizations and offers potentially valuable access to up-and-coming local businesses. If you're hosting an event that targets small business in a venue that offers programs like this, another way you could give back is to offer free limited access to sessions and networking opportunities to the program's regular beneficiaries.**

Chicago's EvolveHer has a more specific mission: it seeks to develop the creative and collaborative potential of female entrepreneurs. With an all-female staff, the organization provides workshops, lectures, and mentorship programs to support women in every area of life. But you don't have to be a woman to rent out their 5,000 ft<sup>2</sup> (460 m<sup>2</sup>) loft and audio/video recording studio; their facilities and consultation services are available for any corporate event.

While London's Plexal co-op workspace isn't free or targeted at a specific group, it is participating in a new design-acceleration program called "OpenDoor." Produced in partnership with the UK-based charity My Life My Say, OpenDoor is a 12-week program that aims to help participants develop innovative designs for greater social inclusivity. Plexal has a number of 3D printers and scanners available for rapid prototyping, so it's the ideal location for tech start-ups to tackle the challenges facing society's most under-represented communities.



**Consider This:** Venues with great CSR and interesting facilities present a unique opportunity to create engaging activities. Let's take a page from Startup Weekend. In this case, the venue is a prime location for industrial design events where attendees might find it exciting to shuffle into teams and spend an afternoon taking a project idea from design to prototype. Come prepared with a list of problems to solve or rough ideas, or let them come up with their own. For added event engagement, offer a prize. For added community engagement, let the local community submit the ideas.

Other coworking spaces have made community development part of their business model. GSV Labs, a coworking space located just outside San Francisco in Silicon Valley, offers a number of workshops to help spur innovation and

facilitate rapid prototyping. They also have a membership "Passport" program that gives participants access to over 100 mentors in the tech industry, as well as discounted rates at partner organizations and within the venue itself.

**Do This:** To connect with the innovative heart and soul of a locale, create engagement around a team-based activity, and invite those in need of mentorship to participate. Connect event attendees in a position to offer mentorship with a mentee on a 'buddy' system for the event. Mentees can offer supportive services at the event, and in exchange, they can make a potentially valuable connection.

Coworking spaces like these provide multiple advantages: they represent a prime networking hub, they often have the equipment needed to facilitate on-site work like prototyping, and they are at the forefront of innovation and community outreach.

**Do This:** When booking a room within a coworking space, ask about opportunities to access their network of contacts, or inquire about ways you can contribute to their community projects.



## Corporate Venues That Are Collaborating with NGOs

Some large-scale corporate venues have also made a commitment to greater community involvement, often by partnering with other organizations.

For example, the Palais Brongniart has embarked on a large-scale community involvement project in which 5 separate NGOs have been invited to use their facilities in the buildings of the former Paris stock exchange for office space and special events. One such organization is Gesat, a support network representing workers with disabilities across France.

**When you hire an event venue of this kind, you gain access to an extended network of contacts and supports.** By placing multiple organizations in close proximity, the venue is fostering a spirit of collaboration and integration.

**Consider This:** Traditionally, universities and research centers have filled this role, but as new models evolve, corporate venues are offering alternative ways to approach social issues and community development.



## VENUES WITH INNOVATIVE CHARITABLE MISSIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Many venues are looking for ways to give back to their communities, and a few key players are setting an example for everyone. If you want to emphasize CSR at your event, a venue with a charitable track record will help to reinforce your message.

Even with the growing trend toward CSR, South Africa's Durban ICC stands out for its charitable initiatives. It has invested in numerous programs that support student scholarships, and it helps to coordinate charitable drives throughout the year.

In partnership with the "Santa Shoebox Appeal" charitable drive, Durban ICC acts as a central collection station for charitable donations to orphaned children at Christmas time. Members of the public send shoeboxes full of regular everyday items to Durban ICC, and the facility stores these donations until they are ready to be distributed among orphanages and care centers across South Africa and Namibia. The venue has also hosted charitable concerts and free tours for children in need.

**Do This:** This model can be adapted to multiple venues. If you are planning an event for a charitable organization, consider partnering with your venue to organize a charitable initiative within the event program. Use your event as a platform to showcase their CSR efforts, and create engagement around them through auctions, paid sessions, and other fundraising efforts.





Some North American venues have combined community outreach with sustainability. San Francisco's Moscone Center, for example, donates both unused food and other goods to a variety of local non-profit groups. The center recycles or reuses nearly 2 million lbs (900,000 kgs) of material that would otherwise be sent to landfills each year, with almost 20% of that amount funneled into charitable donations.

Similarly, New York City's Javits Center donates surplus goods to schools and other non-profit organizations before, during, and after its events.



**Do This: Waste not, want not. If you're participating in a redistributive program, double-down on the effort by reminding guests during key moments at the event. If surplus food is being donated, a reminder during a cocktail hour might curb the compulsion to finish things or go back for seconds just to avoid waste.**

**If your food choice was informed by this initiative, it could also help to remind people why they're eating hearty, travel-friendly carrot sticks instead of crab puff delicacies with a much more limited shelf life.**

## VENUES THAT FOSTER INCLUSIVITY WITHIN THE WORKPLACE

While many venues publish information about their accessibility services and public outreach initiatives, few provide detailed information about their own workplace efforts to support diversity and inclusion. Of course, this doesn't mean those policies are not in place, but that venues with diversity-oriented hiring policies don't feel it's a selling feature.

**Consider This:** Specifically asking your venues about their workforce diversity and using that as a criterion in your venue selection is one way to let venues know that it's important to you and that there is a monetary reason for engaging in progressive hiring practices.

The Choice Hotel Network, which offers meeting spaces for rent at many of its venues, does provide an overview of various programs it has instituted under its HR department. Its support networks have been widely recognized, winning several awards including the 2018 Best Places to Work LGBTQ Equality from the Human Right Campaign Foundation and the 2018 Best Employers for Diversity by Forbes.

Since many organizations do not publicize their inclusivity practices outside of internal HR documents and job recruitment postings, ask the venue's management if they have an official inclusive workplace policy. Another approach is to research the findings of third-party organizations that protect and monitor human rights; the Disability Equality Index, for example, compiles an annual list of the Best Places to Work for Disability Inclusion.

## 3 EVENTS LEADERS FORECAST THE FUTURE OF VENUES



### **Eric Amram**

*Founder and CEO*

[evenium.com](http://evenium.com)

**Eric Amram, a strong advocate of interactive in-person meetings, is the founder and CEO of Evenium, a tech company pushing the frontier of live, interactive collaboration and learning with the intent of fundamentally transforming the event participant experience.**

An Ecole Polytechnique and M.I.T. graduate, he co-founded Evenium with business partner Avner Cohen Solal in 2000.

After establishing Evenium as the reference technology platform for professional meetings in Europe, Eric moved to Silicon Valley in 2013 to expand Evenium Inc. in the North American and LATAM markets.

### **What makes a venue a smart venue?**

A smart event venue helps create enhanced attendee experiences by ensuring fast, reliable WiFi that's easy to use. It offers device-friendly environments with easy access to chargers and outlets, and to 4G/5G.

Working, modern audio visual equipment is also crucial, and smart venues will boast the latest in high-resolution screens and projectors, working with planners to create all-encompassing immersive experiences.

This audio visual technology can also allow participants to attend the event remotely.

### What do you expect from venues in 2020?

We expect innovations in seating arrangements to foster more collaboration between attendees and higher standards when it comes to WiFi connectivity.

### What trends do you see in venue offering?

Innovation is becoming a priority, and venues will invest in technology (event tech, virtual/augmented reality, digitizing the whole booking process, etc.) to help elevate not just the attendee experience, but also the event planning experience.





## Laura Puglisi

*Sales Director, Sourcing & Housing Solutions*

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**Laura Puglisi currently serves as Director of Sales for Cvent, managing a global team dedicated to promoting and selling Cvent Sourcing and Housing Solutions.**

Laura has considerable experience in understanding how organizations across different industries can benefit from implementing a venue sourcing program to drive cost savings and increase efficiency, and she has been instrumental in the growth from \$50 million to \$16 billion in sourcing volume in the past 10 years.

### What makes a venue a smart venue?

A smart venue puts their best foot forward for every client. Every event is an opportunity for that property to make an impact to that organization, earning their repeat business and possibly even getting the attendees at that event to come back to that property for leisure.

While it's difficult to make all accommodations work for each client, the client knows their audience best and is in the best position to know what is going to work for the type of experience they are looking for. In my opinion, a smart venue is flexible and thinks outside the box to answer "how can I make this work?" instead of shutting down their clients' ideas based on limitations with their space right away.



### What do you expect from venues in 2020?

I expect venues to work on being more proactive. Properties are constantly trying to fill their spaces, and event organizers are trying to save money. How can they find those planners? How are they advertising their "need dates" in order to be at capacity while offering clients lower rates? How can they facilitate earlier connections with planners to avoid putting both parties in a pinch and limiting their ability to accommodate each other??



### What trends do you see in venue offering?

The actual space of a property – and not just the location – is becoming increasingly important. In the 'Instagram world' we live in today, everyone wants to have an experience that is both actually memorable and looks memorable in photos. It's becoming increasingly important to take advantage of the space available and showcase ways you can turn it into whatever a client is looking for. In this way, they help planners turn the experience into a story that results in great networking opportunities, and in turn, long term marketing collateral for that property to use to win future clients.



## Renée-Frédérique Aubert

*Marketing Advisor,*

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**Renée is the Marketing Advisor for Québec City Business Destination and the Québec City Convention Centre, and is studying part-time to get her MBA in Strategy and Innovation.**

An avid traveller, Renée spent a semester abroad at the University of Navarra in Spain. Wanting to pursue another international experience after graduation, Renée interned in Barcelona for a tour and travel company with activities all around Europe, but her love for Québec City has brought her back home. She had never thought that she would be paid to promote it to the world.

### What makes a venue a smart venue?

In my view, a smart venue is first and foremost sustainable. Its energy use is monitored and reduced. It makes decisions that will have a better impact on its ecological footprint.

Any organization should have stringent environmental policies and operations. Reducing food waste, buying local, making compost, and recycling and reusing materials are simple gestures that go a long way and have a greater impact when important venues make them.

Being certified by LEED and BOMA, like the Québec City Convention Centre, is a good indicator that environmental standards have been met and are a part of the organization's priorities.

I am also a huge fan of the Internet of Things. Being able to control everything easily with our devices has a real value to me. Not only does it directly help the sustainability of a building, it is also very practical and time efficient.



### What do you expect from venues in 2020?

Over the last two years, I have observed a growing demand from planners to meet certain sustainability goals. What used to be a trend has now become a standard; organizations and venues need to be prepared for that in 2020.

Having a designated page on your website about your environmental efforts is simple and can convince a planner to choose your venue. Making it a prominent feature will not only give you a competitive edge, it will drive the competition to do the same, and in turn, show them the marketing value of investing in green measures.

In addition, I think we can all agree that people want live experiences nowadays. Venues and hotels are already working very hard to provide more exclusive and unique services that will make the participants remember what a great time they had at their last annual convention.

Lastly, I think making life easier for the planner is one of the main priorities for 2020. Pressure has never been this high to deliver never-before-seen events within budget restrictions. It's our job to inspire planners and help them reach their objectives!

### What trends do you see in venue offering?

Upcoming trends in venue offering are very much based on experience delivery. This somewhat overused term is beginning to solidify into a tangible priority. Attendees want experiences, and event planners want to deliver them! Virtual reality, gamification, new food trends and so on are very popular.

I have also heard multiple times that wellness is the new golf in our industry. Yoga and other activities related to better health are now part of the program. Venues need to offer healthy food options and accommodate vegetarian and vegan diets. Time for "bleisure" is also very much appreciated.

Personalization is also a must now. We see a lot less one-size-fits-all programs; attendees want more options and venues need to be flexible enough to facilitate them. Technology today allows for many novel experiences to be delivered simultaneously in a small space. For example, try placing all the keynotes in the same room and providing attendees with headphones that let them choose which to listen to.

## IN CONCLUSION

The smart venue is a new breed of supplier that supports designing experiences and helps event professionals cater to the ever-changing needs of attendees.

The smart venue is transparent in the way it does business with event professionals.

**Here is a checklist of features for sourcing a smart venue for your next event:**

### TRANSPARENCY

- No food and beverage minimums
- No gratuities or service charges
- Waived cancellation fees
- Group discounts for select periods
- Discounts for non-profit groups
- Budgetary guidance from the venue's event manager

### EXPERIENCE DESIGN

- Bespoke custom set design for next-level brand storytelling
- Huge blank-canvas spaces with movable walls and highly flexible layouts
- Immersive digital environments via huge wrap-around screens and light projections
- Intelligent lighting that allows you to switch up the ambiance on a beat
- Charging stations that feature lockers, and mobile charging docks
- Enhanced WiFi to guarantee optimal coverage and bandwidth throughout the venue

### SUSTAINABILITY

- Reduced reliance on CO<sub>2</sub>-heavy forms of transportation
- Renewable energy to power buildings
- Compensation for emissions with carbon offsetting
- Rooftop real estate used to generate solar power
- Rooftop real estate used to cultivate urban gardens and install apiaries
- Harvested rainwater and recycled "greywater"

### ACCESSIBILITY

- Wheelchair loan services
- Enhanced customer service for people with disabilities, including telephone hotline guidance and personalized support services
- Braille text and elevator signage
- Visual and auditory cues in elevators and for emergency alarms
- Hearing loop systems designed to send audio signals directly to hearing aids
- Assistive listening devices
- TDD (Telecommunication Device for the Deaf) telephones for the hearing impaired

### INCLUSIVITY

- Proactively contribution to community projects
- Charitable drives
- Donation of unused food and other goods to charities
- Support groups for minority workers and inclusivity within the workplace

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### EventMB Studio Team

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