



Making IT Personal

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Kurt Paben is a 30-year veteran of the loyalty industry with experience in the motivation of employees, business partners and customers for some of the most notable brands in the world. He leads the Channel and Employee Loyalty team for Aimia, including the company's events business, and is past-president of the SITE Foundation Board of Trustees. Kurt is passionate about connecting the science of data with the development of personal relationships — believing more engaged employees and higher-performing business partners deliver long-lasting loyalty.

Today you hear a lot of talk about the importance of making business personal to achieve your bottom line, and incentive travel, inherently personal in nature, sits at the center of that approach.

Incentive travel is one of the most impactful ways that companies can spend their sales and marketing dollars. It helps improve their business relationships, and motivates employees and channel partners to achieve specific business objectives. But only if it's done right — only if the programs are personal, relevant, and focused on the client's strategic objectives.

Today's collision between technology, analytics and incentive travel means that we can — and have the obligation to — design and deliver programs that are more personal and relevant than ever before. We have five generations of people in the workplace, and each generation is a set of individuals with varying interests. Data helps us better understand them as individuals — and today's tools and technologies are changing the way we interact with participants to deliver highly personalized program components.

Mobile and social technologies are revolutionizing the way we communicate with participants prior, during and after the trip. We now have the ability to create very specific communication personalized to each participant. And, mobile apps allow participants to interact prior to and after the trip, and even schedule onsite activities with other participants before the trip begins.

During the event, mobile apps and wearable devices like bracelets or small tokens provide information to participants at their fingertips in real-time. Planners can integrate experiential technology like photo booths, mobile sharing and creative ways to capture “the wow moments”. Mobile apps are also an excellent tool for administering surveys and polls during and after an event. However, in today's world, it is equally important to know what participants are sharing on social platforms in order to capture candid, real-time responses on how they perceive the incentive travel program.

Using technology to provide a better understanding of the participants in your programs and with a commitment to doing things in a very personal way, planners can create an incentive travel experience that is much more meaningful, motivational and memorable — with measurable results.

Social media amplifies the impact of an event and makes it easier to share and update information. A social wall allows you to monitor the conversation going on during an event and react to it as it's happening, providing a pulse of how the event is going and what people are talking about. It gives you a chance to change content on the fly and deal with situations as they arise versus finding out after the event that something was wrong.

Everyone wants to extend the engagement of their event. Leveraging social media for sharing accomplishes this. Snapchat is the latest and most engaging social tool with real-time video and pictures. Snapchat has the ability to create an experiential element that allows attendees to share their timely and most authentic event moments with all their followers – those at the conference and back home. On-demand Geofilters, which share the where and when of a Snap, will continue to grow in popularity.

Photo sharing and video technologies sustain the memorable aspects of the incentive travel experience. It used to be if you would take pictures during an event you might send out a photo album, video or pictures afterwards. You now you have the ability to share visuals of the event as they happen. For instance, using drones to capture video and photography not only provides a different and more unique perspective, but offers the option to edit onsite and provide clips so people can share them

with each other and also immediately post to their social channels to share with their friends and family.

Effectively leveraging these tool sets requires a new level of stakeholder and participant engagement. Planners need to spend time researching participants to understand what they are interested in, what will motivate them, and what will connect them in a very personal way. It may be an understanding of their preferences in communication, destination, what kinds of food and beverage they like, what activities they enjoy, and even the selection of room gifts and amenities. Then we can begin to ensure that what we design delivers on the personal aspect of the business.

And of course, data and the unique ways that you can acquire it ensure that you can clearly measure progress to goals. Did you drive incremental sales because of the incentive program? Were you able to attract new talent because you offered a program? Did you strengthen relationships long term? And, just as important, were you able to retain top talent?

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