



# Multigenerational Meetings

## Planners Face a Challenge When Dealing With Attendees of All Ages

By Cynthia Dial

Imagine the synchronized tasks of selecting a destination for a meeting or incentive that not only meets the criteria of the executive board, but an assortment of groups ranging in age, interests and rules of engagement? This is the world of meeting planners, circa 2019.

### Meet the Attendees

Defined by Business Insider, the generational makeup of many of today's insurance and financial events include baby boomers (ages 55 to 73, born between 1946-1964), Generation Xers (ages 39 to 54, born between 1965-1980) and millennials (ages 23 to 38, born between 1981-1996). Coupled with the typical trio of goals — encounter, educate and stimulate — today's meeting specialist is not unlike an under-the-big-top performer whose role is to keep several objects in the air while simultaneously transferring them from one hand to the other.

Sound familiar? The challenges are plentiful but the best way to manage this labyrinth of tasks is to realistically recognize them, propose a plan for

them and directly deal with them. The first step in this process is to understand the differences in, and the desires of, these attendees.

Baby boomers are the post-World War II generation, typically raised in an environment where the dad worked a

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TD Ameritrade, Jersey City, NJ**

9-to-5 job and the mom was a stay-at-home one. As well as being competitive and team- and-goal oriented, additional characteristics of this group are a significant commitment to the workplace, a strong work ethic, an adherence to authority and a high regard for networking opportunities. Motivated by job title, privileges and prestige, boomers seek professional development well beyond their work years.

Generation Xers — sometimes called the middle child of the generations —

are shaped by the predominance of growing up in the era of two-income families, translating to the appreciation of a career/lifestyle balance and the development of a work-hard/play-hard mindset. More ethnically diverse and better educated than their pre-

decessors, they are independent and resourceful, though less committed to a single employer over a span of years. Working and communicating through such devices as smartphones, laptops and tablets are second nature to Gen Xers. They value freedom and responsibility in the workplace, as well as a hands-off management style.

Millennials, who are known for multitasking, embrace the latest and greatest in technology to do that and more. Motivated by intellectual stimu-

lation and what they deem as meaningful work, they are open to change, aren't afraid to share their opinions and place a high value on workplace flexibility. Appreciative of a less formal environment, they want their job to be social and fun, they want to feel connected and they desire ongoing feedback from their boss as opposed to an annual evaluation.

### Concentrate on Differences and Celebrate Differences

This is quite a diverse collection of personalities. The solution to dealing with them all? Take advantage of these differences, integrate the groups and capitalize on their communication, the

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**Donna Brinson, Senior Meeting Planner, Corporate Events  
Jack Henry & Associates, Charlotte, NC**

sharing of talents and the melding of ideas. They all seek respect, value and interaction — not lengthy, meaningless meetings and seemingly forever award ceremonies.

One way to best reach all of these groups is to plan the event through a team, one that includes a voice from every period. After all, who knows better what a colleague desires than a generational peer? For example, with a goal to foster knowledge transfer, consider reverse mentoring, defined as the pairing of employees of different generations who can share unique experiences and perspectives. Have a younger generation employee mentor an older one — who consequently adds incalculable merit to this May-December relationship through their over-the-years wealth of networking contacts. And keep in mind that though the move is toward providing millennials with digital content, boomers still prefer printed handouts, so utilize both routes of communication.

### Eat, Love, Learn

As partialities extend to cuisine choices, with millennials and many Gen Xers preferring healthier options, it's possible to adhere to these preferences by offering a selection of fresh, locally sourced food choices at events and super foods at breakouts such as apples, walnuts, broccoli, carrots, dark chocolate, green tea and fruit- and herb-infused water. In a display of fondness for the earth, today's audiences are increasingly interested in the production of more sustainable/green events and the minimization of environmental impact. Weigh in the current desire to give back and contemplate a destination with

group's desire to interact on a more personal level.

- For millennials — incorporate the online marketing technique of gamification into the presentation to keep the attention of these tech-savvy, electronics-loving attendees who demand digital.

Along those lines, always adhere to this common-sense but critical detail and ensure a strong internet signal, one available on every device. Bottom line: Aim to personalize, not pigeonhole.

### Majority Rules

Generational diversity within an attendee mix is inherently interesting because if able to tap into ways for those from different generations to benefit from the other's presence, the experience is “richer all around,” says Katrina Kent, CMP, CMM, director, The Event Group, TD Ameritrade, a company geared to assisting clients pursue their financial

goals. “The key is to design relevant experiences that bring different generations together in mutually beneficial scenarios, instead of catering to them separately.”

Kent cautions about the importance of knowing the audience breakdown and not making assumptions about that generational balance without properly analyzing the data. “We have one client conference for which we were certain most of the audience were seniors, as they were in the past. But when we looked at new numbers, the crowd had begun to skew a lot younger than we perceived. It's important to be inclusive but it's also important to keep perspective about the majority and use this assessment as a guardrail when creating the event.”

### Years Versus Yearning

“When I'm planning a trip, I don't focus on the age differences but more on the activities of interest to our qualifiers, as well as whether we offer something for everyone in the low-, medium- and high-impact activities. You will find



wine lovers joining a wine tour and adventure seekers on a whitewater rafting tour, regardless of age," explains Donna Brinson, senior meeting planner, corporate events for Jack Henry & Associates, one of the top three players

watching and jeep tours. And for those who love action, she specifies whitewater rafting, zip lining and kayaking.

"At Montage Deer Valley, we bused everyone to a ranch that covered

tions. In planning incentives, we look for a property/area that has universal appeal, and we consider all income levels and activity levels of our attendees."

When adhering to a conservative budget, the planner looks for places that offer "free" activities. "Most of all, I look for attendee experiences for which I don't pay — here I call it the Coeur d'Alene 'vibe.' It's perfect with the beauty, outdoor activities and shopping within minutes — all different, all unique." And

when budgets are more generous, this insurance planner believes this resort meets that standard as well — from playing the resort's golf course and experiencing the 14th hole's famous floating green, a renowned hole on the "play list" of most golfers (very likely a boomer) to enjoying the Hiawatha bike tour, a downhill ride through old railway tunnels. A personal favorite of this meetings specialist is Silverwood Theme Park. With the park's designation of its approximately 40 rides and slides as "high, medium and low intensity," as well as a wide selection of shows and dining, it makes for a full day of fun for all. Further meeting the measure of across-the-ages activities are hiking, jet skiing and zip lining, in addition to fishing, there are gentle river float trips and clay shooting.

#### Safety in Numbers

"I believe there is a challenge when groups try to pick one activity to appeal to a multigenerational audience because interests, levels of exertion and sense of adventure vary so much between individuals," says Jamie Cornell, director of sales and marketing, The Coeur d'Alene Resort. "It seems to work best when three to five activity options are offered that are somewhat different, allowing each attendee to select which works best for them." She cites the success of an incentive for 600 guests of varying ages last summer. The choice of varied daytime activities included kayaking, wine tasting, whitewater rafting, a silver mine and railroad museum



**Jamie Cornell**, Director of Sales and Marketing  
The Coeur d'Alene Resort, Coeur d'Alene, ID

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in providing technological solutions to the financial services sector in the U.S. and Canada.

Responsible for planning her company's annual sales incentive reward trip for the Golden Circle, a club of sales force personnel who have met their goals, Brinson gives details of this elite assembly. It started in 2006 within the ProfitStars brand when a group of qualifiers and their plus-ones visited The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs. The four-night stay at this five-star venue was so successful that all Jack Henry brands — JHA Banking, Symitar and ProfitStars — now participate. With a knockout 2018 sales year, the result was a trip for 170 qualifiers and guests totaling 340 attendees to The Lodge at Edgewood Tahoe. Citing other resort choices which have met her five-star resort benchmark with 300 or fewer sleeping rooms and a wide spectrum of low-, medium- and high-impact activities, Brinson names One&Only Palmilla in Los Cabos, Mexico; The St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort, Puerto Rico; Four Seasons Resort and Residences Anguilla; and Montage Laguna Beach and Montage Deer Valley.

"We have a strong mix of millennials and baby boomers," Brinson says. In a nod to lower-impact activities, she continues, "Wine and olive grove tours never fail to fill up and we have offered culinary classes." Outdoor medium-impact possibilities have included catamaran sailing, water excursions, whale

all impact levels where they had the choice of participating in all or none. Wagon rides, fly fishing, ATVs, archery, horseback riding, cornhole and even lounge chairs from which to simply sit and enjoy the fresh air and stunning scenery were possibilities. With white cowboy hats and bandanas for all, the day's top off was a barbecue and the best of western entertainment."

Beyond activities, however, Brinson pays homage to the initial greeting. "I feel the welcome reception is the event that sets the mood and brings the common denominator to all. Who doesn't like to gather on a dock, pick up a beverage or cocktail, board a boat and meander through the marsh accompanied by a resident dolphin enroute to the outdoor venue that features an incomparable view, adult tree-house, oyster roast and southern buffet under the stars as we did at Montage Palmetto Bluff? Or maybe it's a champagne gondola ride to the top of Aspen mountain during a stay at The St. Regis Aspen Resort?"

#### Destination, Meet Desires

Locating a destination that meets the needs of multiple ages is a significant piece of this detailed puzzle — a challenge met by the meeting planner from one of the nation's largest publicly held property and casualty insurers with the selection of The Coeur d'Alene Resort in Idaho for the company's incentive. "This resort covers all genera-

## Think Outside the Box

The best ways to effectively cross the barrier of years and get everybody excited about the meeting or incentive are to go beyond the norm in terms of destinations and look beyond the ordinary for activities. Though off the radar of many planners, here are some locations that spark of creativity — for attendees and in attendees.

### Southern California's Mountains

Only 90 minutes by car but a world away from the Los Angeles bustle is Lake Arrowhead Resort and Spa, Autograph Collection, a legendary 27-acre resort 5,106 feet up in the San Bernardino National Forest, known as the Alps of Southern California. Though its initial roots date back to the 1920s, in 1982 it was destroyed by fire, reconstructed and reopened. Its reopening was so exclusive, former President Gerald Ford and his wife, Betty, attended.

Nearby are such activities as mountain biking on professional trails, a private 780-acre alpine lake and the McKenzie Water Ski School. There is also archery, bungee jumping and roller skating. When coupled with treatments at the 8,000-sf AAA Four Diamond Spa of the Pines during the day and s'mores on the beach and under the stars at night, the result is irresistibly rewarding.

### Beyond Denver

"Imagine watching 225 horses led by cowboys gallop in from pasture or having your own horse for a week," says David Craig, general manager, C Lazy U Ranch, Colorado's premier luxury guest ranch with 8,500 acres of adventure less than 100 miles from Denver. This is where everyone, regardless of age, can disconnect from the internet and connect with each other through activities such as horseback riding, line dancing, tepee building and hatchet throwing.

Typical of the dude ranch scene, many meals are served family style, but atypical of many is Chef Dennis Kaniger — formerly with Ma Maison, Spago, Venue and his own four-star restaurant in Kansas City — at the helm. Along the lines of corporate social responsibility (CSR) prospects is the opportunity to volunteer at the Colorado Horse Rescue, a nonprofit dedicated to saving disadvantaged horses, located on the front range of the Rocky Mountains, just outside Denver.

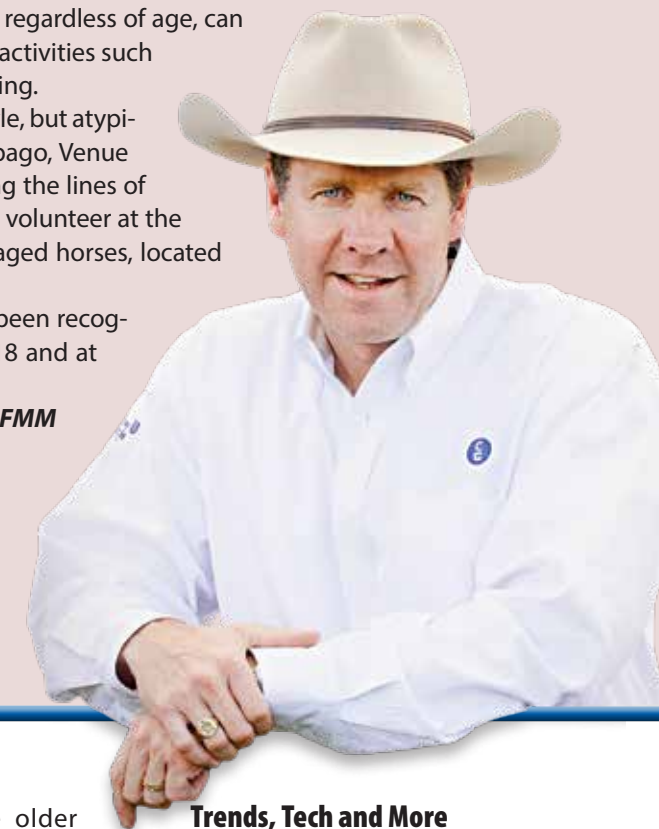
Celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, C Lazy U Ranch has been recognized by *Condé Nast Traveler* as the No. 1 resort in Colorado in 2018 and at *Travel + Leisure* as No. 3 in the America West in 2018.

Saddle up!

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**David Craig**, General Manager  
C Lazy U Ranch, Granby, CO



tour, spa time, golfing and a culinary activity. "In the evening, we cruised to our owner's private botanical garden for an on-the-lawn reception with a harpist, then a boat ride to the Hagadone Event Center, the resort's flagship indoor/outdoor meetings and events center situated on Lake Coeur d'Alene, for a themed dinner," Cornell says.

#### Check it Out

With respect to destination choice, Kent adds, "Sometimes the instinct

is to assume that the older generation most appreciates high-end destinations, and the younger generations appreciate those that are fun." Her advice: As most destinations have venues that check all the boxes, check it out first if in doubt. Getting specific, she says, "A hotel may look edgy or too hip for your group on paper, but when you get there, you may find that the atmosphere is inclusive and comfortable."

#### Trends, Tech and More

Kent sees trends in what planners are seeking for multigenerational meetings and incentives — personalization, surprise and delight, tech capabilities and ease of travel. She also issues a warning: "Avoid generational stereotypes. Boomers are not [all] tech averse. Millennials don't [all] have short attention spans. The more we work to help our participants across generations to connect authentically, the more successful our programs become." **I&FMM**