

Networking2.0

What will be the new metrics for meetings



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still enable our visitors
to shake, shape and
share in some form”**

The event sector is built on the business of networking, whether a business event, family celebration or partnering with likeminded suppliers.

We shake hands, shape ideas and share knowledge and the 2-metre distancing rule is sure to have a major impact on how meetings are managed and staged.

For some weeks we've been editing our meetings & events SOP manual to ensure that we maintain our hard-earned reputation for customer experience. Whilst it's still a work in progress and will continue to develop in line with on-going World Health Organisation and UK Government advice, our good practices and procedures for meetings & events should give organisers confidence and our guests assurances that Networking2.0 will still enable our visitors to shake, shape and share in some form.

We've reconsidered the entire customer journey and experience. From engaged couples who still want to celebrate with a large gathering of family and friends; the trade association or interest group who want to bring their membership together to unify and celebrate a specialist topic; to the corporate who may be more reticent in hosting face-to-face events as their employee duty of care will be a top consideration along with budgetary diligence. Ultimately it is Government advice on how to and how many we can bring together that will be the driver of the important business of networking.

Needless to say; the commercial toxic shock of lockdown has given us thinking time and space in preparation for Networking2.0. We've reviewed our customer experience, looked at how we ensure the safety and wellbeing of our teams and considered how we can work with our event partners and the wider supply chain under post COVID-19 considerations of: sanitisation, social distancing, wellbeing and a progression towards touchless processes.



FLOCK

— Sanitisation:
a new quality assurance

- Capital cities, major hotel chains and large-scale public spaces are creating minimum standards on how accommodation, public areas and shared spaces will be sanitised and cleaned. It's a move that will be replicated across the board from independent hotels and venues as corporates seek assurances that processes are in place to mitigate any spread of the virus in order to protect their delegates.

- It's not just accommodation that will see greater jurisdiction, corporates will be asking for proof of good practice and policy on their meeting spaces and out-sourced services such as team-building equipment, AV & sound and even floristry.

- Hand sanitising products are already standard in many lobbies and we will see sanitiser appear in every area of a hotel or venue for use at coffee and afternoon breaks, a pre-lunch or dinner cleanse, as well as back of house areas.

- Although the use of face masks is not mandatory at the moment, it is likely that those working in close proximity to the public, such as hospitality staff, will be required to wear gloves and masks. PPE is sure to be much more prevalent in all departments who are public facing and may likely be the next creative

challenge for uniform designers and suppliers.

- Food service for conferences and events will be transformative as lunchtime buffets and all-day coffee stations become as much in demand as an outmoded overhead projector.

- With buffets under huge scrutiny and canapes a no-go, we may also see salt and pepper shakers removed and cutlery, glassware and plates become individually packaged to safeguard delegates.

- We consider a sensible solution to be the return of family style service at mealtimes, butler style coffee service or the introduction of the contactless coffee machine.

- Food preparation standards will also see a heightened need for demonstrable, traceable sanitisation.

- Pads and pencils in meeting rooms may be removed to eliminate potential cross-contamination and the event goodie bag may become a thing of the past too.

Ultimately hygiene and sanitisation will become as important as provenance and seasonality both of which we uphold as a core pillar of our business.

— Social distancing and space per guest: a new minimum standard

- The 2m rule means a re-think of the traditional meeting room set up such as theatre and classroom style. And with the potential that large gatherings are fixed at 50, venues will need to be able to demonstrate the available space per delegate.

- In 1992 regulations were passed for offices stipulating 5 square metres per person. Without doubt this will change for the workspace and brings to light that the events industry, in consultation with the Government, needs to come to an agreed standard space per delegate to give a UK-wide assurance to event buyers and guests.

- New practices will come to light such as reduced capacities in breakout rooms, a reduction of the number of guests in the restaurant and, as a

consequence, greater spacing between tables.

- Queues for registration or food and drink will remain staggered, which is something we are all now accustomed to given our current 6 weeks' worth of practice!

- The long-standing day delegate set-up comprised of notepad, pen, glass, shared bottle of water and individually wrapped sweets will diminish as demand grows for light-touch meeting spaces.

- We'll certainly see an increased reliance on apps to minimise contact with other people. This will be played out through greater use of delegate apps at the conference or the longer-term ability to order food via an online platform for collection or for delivery to a delegate's allotted space.

As a hotelier it will be a carefully considered balance of maximising the customer experience while reducing the impact of service touch points. Irrespective, post-lockdown, there will be a higher value attached to meeting face-to-face. We have all become used to meeting online and a return to the office doesn't mean it will stop. However, greater value will be placed on bringing people together for the right reason and for the most productive output. After months of the nation being cooped up, organisers will be looking for venues that give their delegates a chance to stretch their legs and minds; paying heed to their mental health and ensuring maximum productivity. People

will naturally gravitate towards places with plenty of open air space not just because of the obvious social distancing benefits, but because being stuck at home has made people appreciate the endless benefits of being in the great outdoors.

Delegates will likely choose to take their breaks al fresco, sitting on the lawn to enjoy the sun on their face or exploring the local sights. Our venues have acres of land with a host of outdoor activities, jogging trails and lawn games perfect for delegate downtime. Walking meetings around the grounds will gain in popularity too as a way to inspire delegates and reduce time spent in the boardroom.



Wellbeing

Touch-less



Exclusive

WELLBEING: MENTAL-HEALTH, EXERCISE AND PERSONAL WELLNESS

- Exercise has been put on the entire nation's agenda during lockdown and the frustrations of inner-city living have been well documented. We foresee the ability to draw in fresh air becoming as desirable as natural daylight in a meeting room. The Sunday Times has already added carbon emissions as a measure for weekend breaks and it's a measurement that is sure to tick the box for the capital's corporate who wants to achieve maximum meeting success.
- A sustainable supply chain of local suppliers and artisans will also be in greater demand and follows a new nationwide outlook that endorses and champions small, local businesses.
- The introduction of immune boosting food items looks likely too. For some time, we have offered seeds and nuts as snacks, and you can expect to see a greater use of immune boosters such as local grown broccoli and spinach and freshly pulped juices in our meetings & events menus.

TOUCH-LESS: INNOVATION THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

- We will see technology bring greater solutions to Networking2.0. From the ease of streaming a keynote speaker from overseas, apps to keep delegates engaged and in the right place at the right time, to ordering hotel goods and services for your own personal device.
- Technology won't replace or replicate services and service levels, however it can enhance the customer experience and give insights and learnings to help future innovations and can help safeguard newly developed business procedures.

HOW DO THESE FACTORS PLAY OUT WITH EXCLUSIVE COLLECTION?

- We are already seeing a growing demand for exclusive use of our properties by corporates who are very aware they may need to re-boot their culture after weeks of home rules.
- While groups are more intimate, events are becoming slightly more protracted as these groups are staggered over a longer time span.

The finishing touches to our good practices & procedures are still being finalised and these SOPs will become part of our proposal process to help clients complete their own event risk assessment. We will continue to underpin all of our initiatives, actions and potential outcomes on our four business pillars; innovation, sustainability, high-performing teams and wellness so that we can give organisers confidence and guests assurances that:

“When Networking2.0 is back on the agenda we can help our visitors continue to safely shake, shape and share in a new era for face-to-face.”

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