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THE HUMAN PREMIUM:

FIVE PREDICTIONS FOR
LIVE EVENT EXPERIENCES
IN 2027

An outlook report by Joe Blackman MBE

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AN OUTLOOK REPORT BY JOE BLACKMAN MBE

Artificial intelligence is going to make a significant number of things easier across the events industry. From a planning perspective, it can already perform detailed research and concept development, produce and manage budgets, and develop complex logistical and planning documents that might previously have taken days or weeks to create. Much of this work forms the invisible foundation of a well-planned event before anybody arrives.

For years, event planners have often competed through design, production and content. Bigger screens, better lighting, elaborate staging and increasingly ambitious content or entertainment have all been used to make an event feel distinctive. Those things will continue to matter, but generative technology will make it easier for agencies, in-house professionals and organisations to develop increasingly polished concepts, visualise them and present work with fewer resources.

As AI tools improve and become integrated not only into working practices but into production technology itself, planning and presentation alone will become less reliable sources of competitive advantage for event producers.

What remains harder for AI to assist with are the human factors of an event: the judgment, intuition and emotional intelligence involved in bringing people together in a way that feels natural, relevant and distinctive.

That matters not only because these will become increasingly important skills for the best event planners. It also aligns closely with what guests and attendees appear to be prioritising in the events they choose to attend.

That is what I mean by the human premium. It is the additional value we place on experiences that feel unique, personal, trusted and centred on human connection rather than content delivery or spectacle alone. Creating those experiences will become an increasingly important skill for event planners, just as experiencing them will become a greater priority for guests. **My central prediction for 2027 is that events will increasingly compete on connection, participation and atmosphere, rather than production or content alone.**

When I look at how AI is changing our business and personal lives, I also believe the time we spend together physically may become more valuable. As AI takes on a greater share of functional work and removes the need for human interaction from more parts of our lives, people will place a higher value on the time they do spend together, using those interactions to build relationships through trust, confidence and understanding.

THE OUTLOOK AT A GLANCE

This outlook predicts that artificial intelligence will change how live experiences are planned and where event organisers create the greatest value. As AI makes research, planning, content development and other functional work easier to complete, greater emphasis will fall on the human skills involved in shaping an experience: judgment, emotional intelligence, curation and a greater focus on designing how people interact and connect. At the same time, as technology reduces the need for human interaction in more parts of everyday life, the value of events for those attending will increasingly lie in connection, participation, atmosphere and emotional impact, rather than production value or content alone. Published industry research already points in this direction:

- *79% of people aged between 18 and 35 surveyed by Eventbrite planned to attend more events during 2026, while 74% of Gen Z respondents said in-person experiences were more important than digital ones.*

- *RainFocus reported a 69% increase in meeting participation at smaller events, while the average number of sessions attended declined from 5.3 to 4.2.*
- *Encore and Boldpush found that 49% of event professionals considered peer networking the most important factor in an event's success, but only 8% were allocating more programming to structured connection.*
- *Freeman found that 51% of attendees considered successful networking enough reason to return to an event.*

The five predictions in this report examine what that shift could mean for organisers, venues, brands and the wider experience economy during 2027.

As technology makes polished production more abundant and well-executed planning more commonplace, the differentiating value of a live experience will increasingly lie in how successfully it brings people together and creates the conditions for genuine human connection.

WHAT THE CURRENT EVIDENCE TELLS US

This outlook combines my experience of producing international events since 2005 with published consumer and industry research, while developing an idea I first explored in my MBA thesis on customer relationship management within event projects. I called the concept *Empowering the Heart*: placing emotional understanding and the human experience at the centre of event planning as a way of creating deeper connection, emotion and satisfaction for attendees.

That principle has always mattered in events, but I believe it has become more relevant as the technology available to organisers has advanced and face-to-face interaction has declined across many parts of our working lives. As more functional activity can take place without people needing to meet in person, understanding how to create meaningful human connection when they do come together becomes increasingly important.

There are already signs that people are placing greater value on physical experiences. Eventbrite's 2026 Social Study surveyed 4,051 people aged between 18 and 35 in the United States and the United Kingdom. It found that 79% planned to attend more events during 2026. Among Gen Z respondents, 74% said in-person experiences were more important than digital ones.

The more interesting point is not simply that people want to attend events. It is what they want to do once they arrive.

RainFocus reported that meeting participation at smaller events had risen by 69%. Its research also found that average session attendance declined from 5.3 sessions per attendee in spring 2025 to 4.2 in spring 2026, while participation in meetings increased. People appeared to be choosing conversation over another hour spent watching somebody on a stage.

Research from Encore and Boldpush found a similar disconnect. Almost half of the event professionals surveyed, 49%, identified peer networking as the most important factor in an event's success. Only 8% were allocating more of their programming to structured connection.

InEvent's 2026 research found that 90.4% of more than 2,000 event professionals considered in-person events very important, while 78% regarded them as the most impactful format. At the same time, 72% considered AI valuable or essential. That combination matters. The industry is not choosing between technology and physical events. Both are gaining importance, but they are serving different purposes.

Freeman's 2025 Networking Trends Report, based on responses from 4,114 attendees, exhibitors and organisers, found that 51% of attendees considered successful networking enough reason to return to an event. The report also found that many people still find conventional networking awkward, overly sales-focused or difficult to begin. This supports the idea that people value connection, but expect organisers to create better conditions in which it can happen.

1. HUMAN CONNECTION BECOMES THE DIFFERENTIATOR

I learned early in my events career that the people attending an event, and the way they interact, can matter far more than almost anything else. You can spend significant amounts on the venue, production and content but still get the experience wrong if the atmosphere feels wrong or people simply do not connect.

Whether it is a corporate event where you can carefully curate every name on the guest list or a festival where you have little control over who buys a ticket, the conditions in which people meet and interact can be critical to success.

A modest room containing the right people can change careers, businesses and relationships, while a beautiful gala dinner can be completely underwhelming if the chemistry in the room is wrong. At concerts and festivals, value will increasingly come not only from the headline performer, but from the sense of community and shared experience built around the event.

AI can help with some of this. It can identify shared interests, professional connections and patterns in attendee information. What it cannot reliably understand is the full social context of how people will actually interact. It does not know who will dominate a table, who needs to be drawn into a conversation or why two people who appear perfectly matched on paper may not get on at all. That is where judgment, intuition and emotional intelligence still matter.

Good event design therefore involves more than production knowledge. It also means understanding how people behave in a space. Sometimes that is as simple as leaving enough time for conversation. Sometimes it is about creating areas where people naturally meet. At a festival, it may mean designing shared experiences that help people feel part of something rather than simply watching from the sidelines.

This is why I believe human connection will become a more important differentiator. Organisers will not always control who attends, but they can shape how people participate, how easily they connect and whether they leave feeling that they were part of something rather than merely present for it.

2. SMALLER FORMATS GAIN VALUE

Large conferences, concerts and outdoor events are not going anywhere. There are things a large-scale event can achieve that a dinner for 20 could never do.

However, size is no longer as reliable a measure of value as it once was. In corporate events, scale has often been associated with efficiency, reach, content delivery, grandeur and spectacle. Smaller events offer something very different, and something that can be much harder to create in a large room: enough time, intimacy and flexibility for genuine connections to develop.

The RainFocus findings are particularly relevant here. Meeting participation at smaller events increased by 69%, while attendees were choosing fewer passive sessions. That suggests people are becoming more selective about how they use their time. They may still attend a large conference, but the smaller meeting around it is often where the useful introduction, candid discussion or insightful conversation takes place.

A small event is not automatically intimate or worthwhile, and I have attended many that felt less personal than conferences involving thousands of people. The difference comes from the purpose of the gathering, the people attending and whether the format gives them enough opportunity to participate. That brings us back to the importance of human connection and curation as central skills for an event organiser.

For brands, this may mean producing more focused gatherings around a flagship event. It could also mean replacing one enormous annual production with a series of smaller activations throughout the year, supported by virtual events that allow relationships to continue between them. The point is not to make everything private or exclusive. It is to make each gathering relevant enough to justify the guest's time.

3. THE UNEXPECTED MATTERS MORE

The events industry, along with hotels and venues, has spent much of the past decade designing for the camera and social media. There was an obvious commercial reason for that. A visually impressive event or venue could reach far beyond the people who attended it.

Visual impact will remain important, but highly polished digital content is precisely what generative technology is making abundant. If almost anybody can produce a beautiful image or video, looking spectacular online becomes less convincing evidence that the experience itself was remarkable.

Generative technology and widely available design tools now allow even small organisations to appear highly polished online. At the same time, the sheer quantity of generated and manipulated content is making visual polish a less reliable signal of quality or authenticity.

As a result, people may begin to find greater value and originality in imperfection. Something does not always need to look completely polished to feel authentic, and increasingly the imperfections themselves can make an experience feel more real. Sometimes the detail that was not planned, or the moment that could not have been reproduced for a camera, becomes one of the most important parts of the experience people remember.

Eventbrite found that 79% of young adults valued spontaneity over a perfect plan, while 49% wanted events to feel less curated and more real. That does not mean abandoning professionalism and hoping something interesting happens. It means creating enough structure for guests to feel comfortable while leaving enough space for the event to acquire a life of its own.

I have worked on events with enormous production budgets, but years later people rarely tell me about the lighting rig. They remember who they met, where they were sitting, something somebody said over dinner or the group that was still talking at two in the morning in the hotel bar.

Those moments are valuable because they cannot be repeated on demand. They depended on a particular place, a particular group of people and the mood of that evening all coming together at the right time. I think organisers will place greater importance on unusual locations, unscripted elements and formats that give guests some agency over what happens, not as a substitute for good planning, but as part of designing an experience that has enough freedom to become genuinely memorable.

4. THE AUDIENCE BECOMES PART OF THE EXPERIENCE

As information becomes easier to generate and access on demand, simply presenting information to an audience at an event will become less valuable. A guest who wants the principal points from a keynote speech or panel can increasingly obtain them without attending the event at all. Training is becoming more available on demand and virtually, while performances and other forms of entertainment can increasingly be experienced remotely with greater quality and realism.

I predict that this will be one of the most significant changes to traditional corporate event formats. The content will still matter, but it will increasingly need to be accompanied by something that cannot be consumed in quite the same way afterwards: participation, interaction and the experience of sharing the moment with other people.

One of the core advantages of being physically present is the ability to question, challenge, contribute and respond. It is being able to take a conversation in an unexpected direction, hear what somebody says when they move away from their prepared remarks, exchange thoughts with the people around you and understand how the rest of the room reacts. At a concert or festival, the equivalent may be the collective energy of a crowd, the shared reaction to a particular moment and the feeling of experiencing it together rather than alone.

I expect more corporate events to be designed around roundtables, workshops, live problem-solving, moderated debate, networking and smaller conversations attached to a larger programme. This means recognising that the people in the audience bring experience, knowledge and connections of their own, and that those contributions can become part of the value of the event itself.

The strongest events will not treat an audience as a collection of seats to be filled. They will make the audience part of what makes the event worth attending.

5. RELATIONSHIPS BECOME A CORE MEASURE OF RETURN

The events industry has often placed heavy emphasis on measures such as attendance and audience reach. Those figures are useful, but they do not necessarily reveal whether an event created anything of lasting value. Qualitative information about emotional impact, relationships, atmosphere and how people felt during an event will become increasingly important to how we measure success.

The Freeman finding that 51% of attendees considered successful networking enough reason to return is commercially significant. A worthwhile relationship can influence not only what happens during an event, but whether somebody returns the following year or continues to engage with a brand. This is not limited to corporate events. The most successful festivals and outdoor events create communities, shared identities and relationships that continue long after the event itself. The best have done this for decades, but I think it will become increasingly difficult for events to build lasting loyalty if they treat the audience simply as ticket buyers rather than as a community.

Organisers should therefore place greater emphasis on what happens after the venue empties. Did guests arrange another meeting? Did a festival community continue to communicate? Did an introduction lead to a partnership, investment or new piece of business? Did people form relationships that brought them back the following year? What emotional impact did the event create, and did people continue to feel connected to it afterwards?

Not every relationship or emotional response can, or should, be reduced to a number. An event organiser's intuition and assessment of the atmosphere, combined with qualitative feedback from attendees, can provide insights that conventional reporting misses. The value of an event will increasingly be judged not only by the audience it attracts or the content it delivers, but by the relationships, memories, communities and emotional responses it helps to create.

WHAT EVENT PROFESSIONALS SHOULD DO NOW

- **Use AI to create more time for the human work.** Research, planning, budgeting, logistics and administration are all areas where AI can remove friction and reduce the time spent on functional tasks. We should use those efficiencies to spend more time on the areas where human judgment matters most: understanding the audience, applying emotional intelligence, making better decisions and thinking more deeply about the overall guest experience.
- **Design interaction as deliberately as content and production.** Production, entertainment and content will remain important, but we should give equal consideration to how people participate, encounter one another and experience the event together. That may mean creating better spaces for conversation, building interaction into the format, considering the mix of people in a room or giving an audience more opportunity to contribute rather than simply observe.
- **Choose scale according to purpose rather than prestige.** Bigger is not automatically better, and smaller is not automatically more intimate. We should consider whether the format is relevant to its purpose and gives attendees enough time and opportunity to connect. For some brands, that may mean smaller gatherings around a flagship event, more focused activations throughout the year or intimate formats within much larger programmes.
- **Leave enough room for something unexpected to happen.** Strong planning creates the structure in which people feel comfortable, but scripting every minute can remove the possibility of spontaneity. Unplanned conversations, shared reactions and moments that acquire a life of their own are often what people remember. An events planner's skill is not to manufacture spontaneity, but to create the conditions in which it can happen.
- **Treat the audience as part of the experience.** As information and entertainment become easier to access remotely, being physically present needs to offer something more than passive consumption. Corporate events should create more opportunities for questioning, debate, problem-solving and exchange. At concerts, festivals and public events, we should think about collective energy, community and the ways attendees themselves contribute to the atmosphere and identity of the event.
- **Think beyond the moment the venue empties.** Attendance and reach remain useful measures, but we should be asking what remained after people left. Did people form relationships? Did a community continue to engage? Did an introduction lead somewhere? Did attendees want to return? Follow-up should help useful conversations, relationships and communities continue rather than simply deliver

photographs and a satisfaction survey. The research shows that connection and the quality of those interactions are important to how attendees value an event and whether they choose to return. We should therefore become better at measuring not only who attended, but how successfully we created the conditions for meaningful interaction.

CONCLUSION

The growth of AI will make many parts of event planning faster, more efficient and more accessible. Research, budgeting, logistics, concept development and administration that once required significant time and resource can increasingly be supported by technology. That is a positive development, particularly for smaller teams and organisations.

But as those capabilities become more widely available, they will become less useful as a point of differentiation. Good planning, strong production and polished content will remain essential, but increasingly they will be expected rather than exceptional.

The greater opportunity for event professionals will be in the areas that remain much harder to automate: judgment, intuition, emotional intelligence and a deeper understanding of human behaviour within events. It will be about understanding what happens when a particular group of people comes together in a particular place, and using that knowledge to create the conditions for meaningful connections to develop. The strongest events will not simply look impressive or deliver useful content. They will create atmosphere, encourage participation, make unexpected moments possible and give people a genuine sense that being there mattered.

This becomes even more important as technology removes the need for face-to-face interaction from more parts of our working and personal lives. If people have fewer practical reasons to gather, the occasions when they choose to do so will need to justify their time in a different way. The research already points towards a growing emphasis on human connection and participation among event attendees. Content can increasingly be accessed elsewhere. Information can be summarised. Entertainment can be streamed. What is much harder to reproduce is the chemistry of a room, the collective reaction, the conversation that changes direction or the relationship that begins because two people happened to be in the same place.

That is the human premium. It is not an argument against technology. It is an argument for using technology to take care of more of the functional work, while we become better at the part of events that still depends on people.

The opportunity for our industry is not simply to use AI to create events more efficiently. It is to use the time and capability it gives us to create events that feel more human.

ABOUT JOE BLACKMAN MBE

Joe Blackman MBE is a British entrepreneur and events planner. He founded his first events company in Britain in 2005 and spent two decades creating private events and experiences for an international clientele including entrepreneurs, celebrities, business leaders and members of royal families. He was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for services to business and charity and was presented with the insignia by King Charles III. Based in the United States, he now plans international events and experiences for clients around the world.

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