A night sky with star trails, creating a sense of motion and focus. In the center, there is a graphic of a four-pointed star surrounded by two concentric circles, all in a light purple color. The background is dark with some light trails from stars.

Guiding Principles in Experience Design

Six truths for innovative event strategies

Marriott
INTERNATIONAL



CEMA
CORPORATE EVENT
MARKETING ASSOCIATION

storycraft
LAB

Truths not trends.

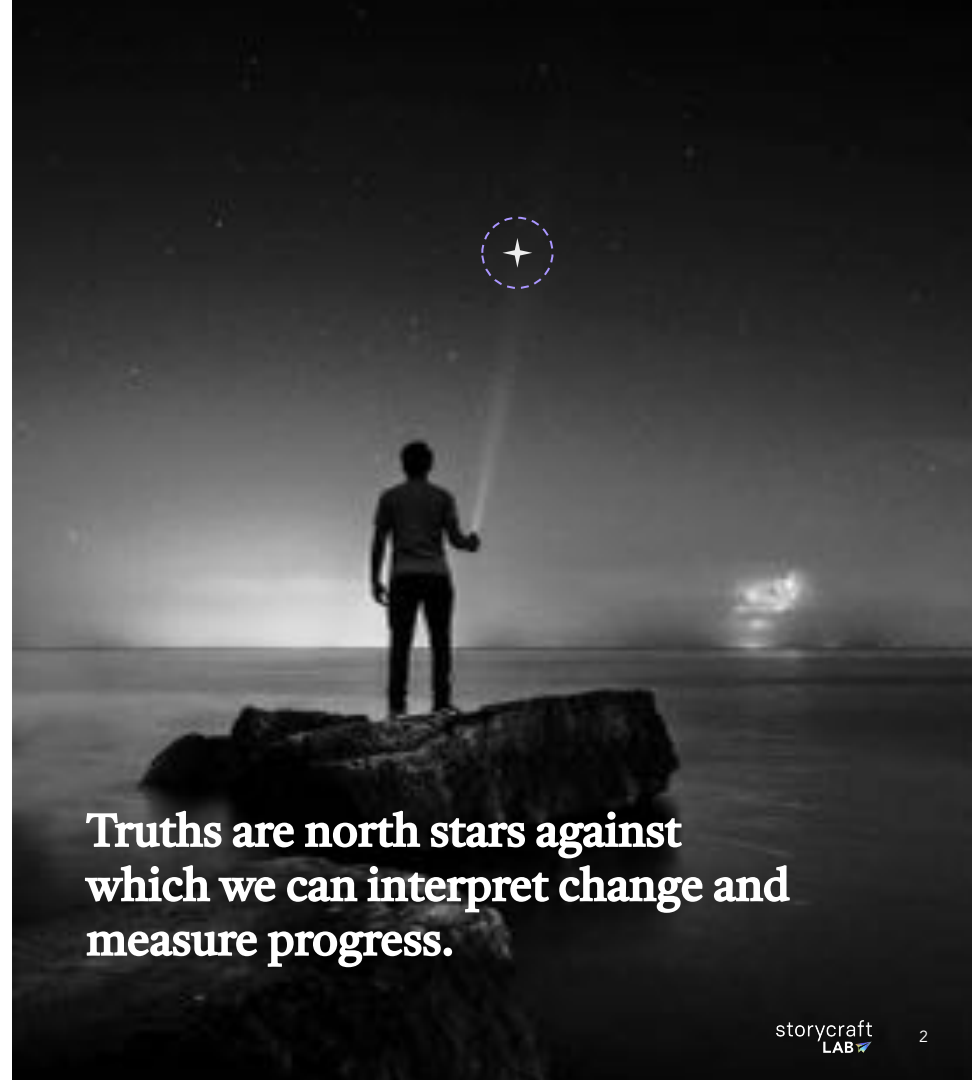
A Search For Constants Among Constant Change

The field of experience design is a nexus for innovation – we learn about our audiences here, test our products, launch our messages, drive our purpose. The unprecedented disruption wrought by the pandemic presents us with a unique opportunity to learn and shape our future-facing strategies.

The speed of experience innovation is amazing and difficult to comprehend. The rapid-fire of social media dialogue can be inspiring and dizzying. The pace of technological advancement and market evolution is increasing.

There is real fatigue in the overwhelm of constant change. It can be difficult to identify where and how to focus efforts among a clamour of voices and interests. Trend reports, part of the cyclical release of the industry content machine, only add to this noise.

This report offers the industry insights that *cut through* the noise to help us comprehend, analyze and assess where and how to drive experience innovation. The truths contained in this report are guiding principles – north stars – that orient us and provide sustained benchmarks that shape our strategies.



**Truths are north stars against
which we can interpret change and
measure progress.**

A Grand Experiment

Process overview

This report is the latest in a series of insightful industry studies started in 2015 thanks to a partnership between PCMA and Marriott International.

TRENDS

Our first phase of research resulted in more than **60** one-on-one interviews, generating approximately **1,987** unique comments. We asked our experts to use change as a lens to sense areas of focus and progress, and to forecast the drivers and frameworks that will guide experience design in the coming years.

TENETS

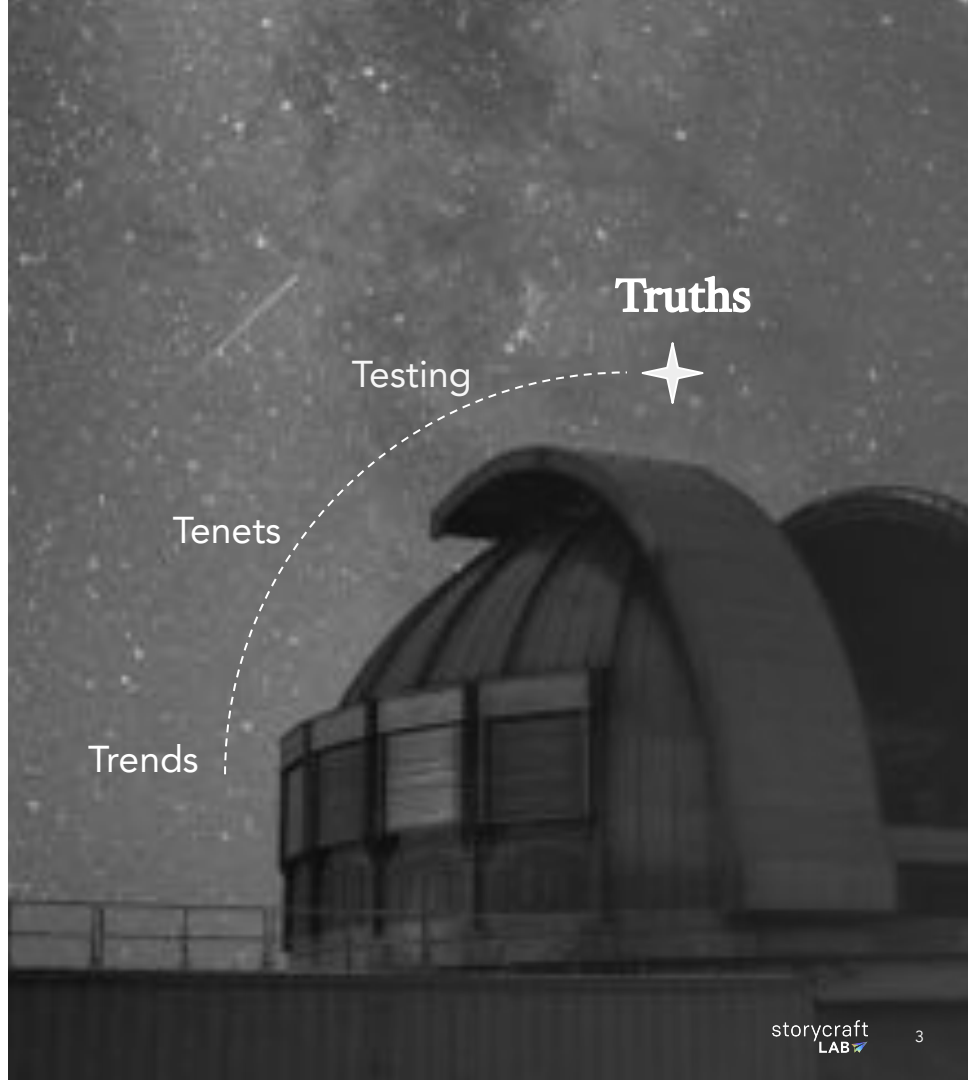
We brought together experts, in-person and remotely, for focused discussion. These global round tables examined the tenets that emerged from the interviews and assessed how these trends are being integrated and planned for in practice.

TESTING

Our content partner, Google Xi, shared case studies from their Xi Days event for this report. To diversify our data, we are now calling for your help to bring this grand experiment to a wider audience, by seeking organizations to test a truth over the course of 2023 and share their findings. [Which truth will you test in 2023, and beyond?](#)

TRUTHS

The results of testing and case studies will be included in a final white paper, to be released in January 2024.



The Power of Play

Infusing cultures of collaboration and innovation



Exploring Identities

Connecting the intersections that make us unique



Emotional Data

Assessing the feelings that generate behavior and action



6 Truths

Architecting Choice

Engaging audiences as agents of experience



The Value of Values

Understanding the ROI criteria that produce audience participation



Designing Belonging

A new strategic goal and driver of intentional design





Exploring Identities

Connecting the intersections that make us unique

This Truth reflects an increased awareness of the intersectionality of our multifaceted identities. As audiences seek to 'find their people' and make meaningful connections, 'network tribes' are helping us find like minds outside of our normal community bubbles. The role of the event designer and strategist will be concerned with reimagining networking, as we facilitate connections outside the comfort of the familiar.

Keywords

Networks | Comfort | Community | Home | Safety

“Community is important – tribalism is critical to survival and there is great familiarity and trust that resides in our communities. From an anthropological viewpoint, we were meant to live in smaller groups and are now reverting back to this by finding ‘**network tribes**’. What we’re essentially navigating is the process of legitimation. **We’re deciding ‘what do people like us do?’**”



Marcus Collins
Head of Strategy
Wieden + Kennedy

“Business is a mixture of localization and globalization. We are not sending expats to other countries as much as we used to, to do things our way. **We are hiring locally to understand local cultures** and power balances to build local networks that get things done faster and more efficiently. **Building those teams, getting the balance between global and local networks right, is hard but more efficient.**”



Mineyuki Matsushita
Senior Manager
Hitachi

“You have to be okay with being uncomfortable and putting yourself out there – **create conversations and camaraderie with people, hear other people’s points of view**. We need to be more intentional about creating safe spaces to facilitate this and create a sense of community to enable it.”



Jessica Charles
Vice President, Programming
+ Events
Forbes



Networked Communities

Demographics are no longer clean segments, as people spend more time reflecting on their identity and their intersectionality. Audiences have a profound desire to answer the question ‘who am I?’, and are discovering multidimensional needs for networking.

“People who have spent extended time abroad are more creative problem solvers because they have added experience reconciling their different cultural identities and social norms.”¹

As people venture further on these boundary-pushing journeys of self-discovery they consider the multi-faceted aspects of their identity. This increases the many unique groups they can identify or find commonality with – there is greater opportunity for engaging with diverse opinions outside the usual bubble, and finding multiple new intersections of connection with others.



The Places That Make Us

When we think about intersections of identity the idea of home – where we come from, or the places that shape us in a formative way – is a constant piece of cultural affinity.

“In [southeast Asian] countries, domestic travel has seen a 27% increase in growth year-on-year.”²

The value of locality is seen in business practice too, especially in the APAC region. The pandemic gave us a new appreciation for local connections, supply chains, resources, and insights. Organizations have found they can learn from local identities as opposed to imposing a central identity.

Local is sustainable, reliable, and has a more immediate impact on the community. Local chapters, satellite groups and communities have an integral part to play in the larger engagement strategy.



Discomfort + Delight

While there is an inherent comfort in the familiar, there is so much to gain from exploring beyond that. By embracing self-discovery people can see beyond their boundaries to intersecting communities that reflect their complexity. There is delight in thinking differently and seeking affirmation from unexpected places – to not being held to traditional geographic, ethnic, or racial boundaries.

Exposure to different viewpoints and ideas are both the risk and reward when we explore beyond the confines of our comfort zones. Showing audiences how being open to new experiences benefits them in terms of innovation, cross-applications and new relationships, might get them excited to get out of their comfort zones.

“Innovation happens at the intersection of ideas, concepts and cultures.”

– Frans Johansson, The Medici Effect



People are redefining their identities and seeking ways to reflect their individuality. While some feel a need for comfort and connections to local communities and customs, others are looking to explore new and different perspectives. We are all seeking to find the many dimensions where we fit and how that relates to the larger world.

How do we design experiences that allow attendees to network across multidimensional scales of identity?

“At its core, audiences want to gather to consume content, they want to connect and network. **Nothing replaces connection amongst our attendees; the real value in events comes from this aspect.** One of the key reasons we invest in events is because of the value they deliver through the face-to-face experience.



Stuart Frank
Senior Director, Strategic
Experiences APAC
Salesforce

“We realize how connected we are as a global community, but as demand increases, and supply decreases, we have more appreciation for local sources. In India especially, there is more interest in traveling domestically and having **more immersive local experiences.** There is interest in familiar food and customs. We are **thinking more about sustainability, such as carbon footprints and food waste and how that impacts the communities we serve.**”



SD Nandakumar
President + Country Head
SOTC Travel, Ltd.

“Our job is to create a safe environment that will encourage people to stretch outside of their comfort zone. It's also really tricky to do. I would love to see more behavioral science research across our discipline to tell us how to do that well and use that science to our advantage. There is a gap there, and it's such an opportunity.”



Megan Henshall
Events Strategic Solutions Lead
Google



Co-created Networks

Design ways for people to define and build their own communities. Create your own profile, co-created galleries, dedicated docents for specific identities, and user-generated sessions allow for self examination and expression of identity. Provide space for local, regional or other identity groups to gather. Consider how those groups intersect in unexpected ways to build more globally connected communities.

Getting uncomfortable means helping participants feel comfortable 'putting themselves out there' in order to find connections less immediately apparent. Networking – meaningful connections – happen throughout an event, not just in a lounge or other specified time and place. Look at interstitial spaces and activities and consider how connections can flow through all aspects of your experience design.



Scales of Intimacy

With so many options available – in-person, regional, global, digital, hybrid, satellite – viewing your goals from multiple angles and global-to-local scales will help you adapt to reach the maximum number of people and gain more engagement.

This could mean smaller gatherings, messaging incorporating local dialects and customs, or simply a more considered approach to how you present your content via technology. For example, **restaurants from London to San Francisco are trying experiential dining and focusing on immersive experiences, more like “dining at the home of a friend who happens to be a world-class chef.”**³

Design modular activations that you can test at a small scale throughout the year, then celebrate those communities via your global or national platforms.



Inclusive Invitations

When we design with comfort in mind, we create more inclusive environments for community building that allow for diverse discourse and moments of connection.

To create a safe and comfortable atmosphere for expression and make your audience more receptive to risk, you need to demonstrate a clear and tangible reward. Create an environment of psychological safety – the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated if they speak up – where people are open enough to stretch their minds and fully participate.

Planners could incorporate psychological safety into their risk management plans, offer social equity training so that staff can engage with all social identities in the case of conflict, and communicate clear boundaries for participants engaging in discussion.⁴

It is possible to create rewarding and comparable experiences on both a micro and macro level. Start small with local or regional targeted experiences to find successful themes and ideas, and then scale up for broader audiences or whatever your specific needs. With the recent advent of ChatGPT, technology, now it is better able assist us in scaling projects from a micro to macro level. Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage will help companies distinguish themselves from their peers and help elevate the emotion engagement within their scaling efforts as they better engage their consumers with relevant content to drive a more personalized experience.



Forecast Contributor:
Shane O'Flaherty
Global Director
Microsoft

In the coming years, creating events where people feel safe – safe to show up as their authentic selves, to share their voices without fear, and free of undue stress or harm – will be synonymous with engaging and meaningful experiences.

Incorporating tactics and policies that support individual safety is necessary for various reasons. On the most basic level, if someone feels unsafe, they're likely to experience some form of a stress response. When people feel unsafe, they can't be present. As we work intentionally to minimize sources of harm, it will encourage participants to share their voices, leading to further growth.



Forecast Contributor:
Tim Mousseau
Principal
Create Safe

 **Start by rethinking your approach to networking to facilitate meaningful connections**



Architecting Choice

Engaging audiences as agents in shaping experiences

This Truth reflects audience desire for choice, and a wish to be involved in that process. At the same time, audiences are looking for support to make clear and informed choices. For experience creators, this represents a shift away from controlling defined outcomes towards a new role as curators of choice.

Keywords

Choice | Guidance | Co-Creators | Flexibility | Personalization



“We've got to remember what we're trying to achieve out of this. People are there to learn, to interact, to participate. You can't just open a floodgate. If you open up the floor completely, everyone just stands there. **You've got to give them something to choose. Give them a small meaningful number of choices that they can make**, but keep it to the key points.”



Ron Anderson
Co-founder + CEO
Unicorn Group

“There's a really fine balance between **assumptions and curiosity when you're designing events because there's challenge and risk in giving all the authority to the audience**. It's important to find the middle ground between your own assumptions, which are beyond the data bias, and keeping the curiosity alive in your audience.”



Sarah Adeel
Senior Manager, Inclusion, Diversity +
Equity
Amazon

“A major change that is pervasive in most industries: **the fundamental relationship with where you do work has changed – it has to do with elements of autonomy, agency, and empowerment**. Where at one point in time we would be meeting in conference rooms, we now often all meet virtually in different rooms, or in smaller groups. Our utilization of space has changed.”



Lisa Britz
Director of Workplace Design
LinkedIn



Choiceful Choice

From 'create your own adventure' to the messy middle of the consumer journey, audiences are looking for tools to aid them in reducing complexity and help them make confident, informed choices. As the number of pathways to choose from continues growing people are exploring how the roles they play – consumer, employee, collaborator, analyst – might lead to different journeys and experiences.

There is a balance that needs to be found between too much choice and not enough choice, however. And it may depend on where you are. A recent study found that **“65% of respondents in Brazil had less choice than their ideal, compared to 35% in the US.”⁵**



Charting Pathways

There is a driving need to connect how people, function, and environments interact to bring us together for connection and that essential spark of innovation. How we prefer to encounter people is a primary driver of choice, and can be heavily influenced by the technology we use and the physical spaces that we inhabit.

“The Journal of Happiness Studies reveals that when it comes to happiness, having a choice is key. People who choose to be in a social situation are likely to get more out of it. But well-being is likely to drop if you didn't choose it.”⁶

As designers we often design around solving our own problems, rather than the problems of the audience. Ultimately, the audience may not care about the same things that experience creators care about. Knowing the audience, and *why* they are coming to an event, is the first step in charting pathways.



Accommodating Change

Change is a constant, and providing options allows our audiences to adapt and evolve within an architecture of choice. Technology has an important role in accommodating change.

New technology and systems allow us the flexibility to find each other anywhere, but allow us the *choice* to be together. This will shape the architecture of physical spaces as well as narrative experience journeys.

For example, **LinkedIn's new headquarters was designed for hybrid work, with the layouts “guided by how much time is spent in a space, what kind of work is being done there, and the ergonomic needs of the workers – from solo work to large collaboration spaces.”⁷**



Audiences are seeking pathways that provide freedom of choice. By providing them with guidance and the tools they need we can help audiences make confident, informed decisions without creating a paralysis of choice.

Being architects of choice represents a shift for the role of experience designers and strategists. Education around tools and methods to organize this complexity will increase the importance of facilitation skills during the design process.

How might we provide the right amount of choice?

“It’s not just who you are designing for, but who you are designing with. Ideally we should meet people where they are and engage them as thought-partners to co-create a better way forward. Through honest engagement, we better our chances of shaping a relevant experience that will truly make a difference in their lives.”



Kevin Bethune
Author of *Reimagining Design: Unlocking Strategic Innovation*

“When you’re going into an event that has a VIP area, how does it feel to not be the VIP? Are you missing out? Does that impact how you experience the event versus what everybody else is experiencing? In order to be open to these pathways you have to be at ease. We have to build that in for our audiences so that they have a baseline and then they can go explore their next step.”



Colette Schabram
Senior DEI Specialist
Amazon

“There is more flexibility in our choices because we are being offered more options. People are becoming more accepting of having diverse choices. People appreciate having the optionality to choose. Especially with in-person event experiences, people are looking for more elevated aspects that make it worth their time.”



Amanda Ma
Founder + CEO
Innovate Marketing Group



The Role of Architect

Too many options can become meaningless, so finding the right level of choice – the Goldilocks effect – is important. Instead of asking people to shape an open-ended experience, designers must architect optionality within their experiences. Architecting journeys that are diverse and provide flexibility without overwhelm requires that we consider wayfinding and communication to guide the process of exploration and discovery.

The innovative processes of product design shape how we map experiences and journeys. This includes mainstreaming workshops and focus groups to help us establish a balance. Seek facilitators that can help your team create a process that works for you, and dedicate time to creating journey maps. Resources such as the [Interaction Design Foundation](#) and [IDEO U](#) provide tools and exercises that can help you incorporate these design thinking strategies.



The Role of Audience

In order to develop the user experience, we need to understand the problem from the perspective of the audience we're solving for.

Tools such as audience personas can create distinct, personalized pathways to design around, creating clear channels of choice designed around your audience. Learn more about how this tool can be used as a vehicle for assessment of design in [Emotional Data](#).

Bring audiences into the development to leverage their feedback at key checkpoints in the process of design. As an example, look at how the [Smithsonian](#) system for exhibit development integrates these standardized moments of feedback in a 10-35-65-100% model.



Setting the Space for Success

Helping audiences find the right environment for them is just as important as guiding them to the most relevant content.

For neurodivergent audiences, [The Neu Project](#) suggests allocating recovery spaces like quiet rooms for when minimizing crowds, noise, and other potential triggers isn't possible. Create zones where socializing or interacting is not expected, or set up more intimate options for networking. Even using iconography or badges to help attendees identify people who want to connect is a simple and efficient option to put people at ease.



Experiences need to be valuable in order to get people to attend in the current climate. Justifying new experiences and unplanned moments has become challenging, as value must be demonstrated up front.

The desire for unplanned, magical, and serendipitous experiences will remain in five years time; however, the use of technology to accomplish this may be difficult unless done very discreetly. The human-to-human connection aspect of magical moments is ultimately what makes a meaningful impact, and we must find ways to maintain that as we move forward.



Forecast Contributor:
Claus Raasted
Director
College of Extraordinary Experiences

We are going to be in the era of information and with the era of information, there is a lot of implementations that will be present in our industries such as contact list technologies like mobile check ins, digital payments, mobile close, which are starting to happen now, but in five years I think it's going to be an industry standard.

Another important thing is the hospitality industry will adapt to the evolving customer. A customer who is a lot more measured in their decisions and reliant on companies to be transparent and responsive to their needs.



Forecast Contributor:
Mauricio Best
Deputy Director of Communications
Seguros Monterrey New York Life

✦ **Start by mapping the problems being solved for both the organizer and attendee**



Designing Belonging

A new strategic goal and driver of intentional design

Belonging emerged as such a pervasive Truth that it underpins the majority of the new principles in design. Belonging is a mission, a measurement, and it is central to the meaning and even magic of the experiences we create. While Belonging is omnipresent, this particular truth focuses on how responses to the ascendance of Belonging will significantly impact the future of experience design.

Keywords

Belonging | Empathy | Inclusion | Dialogue | Self-awareness



“Building frameworks for inclusion, belonging, empathy — we need organizations to be behind these social movements. Organizations have a responsibility to be part of social change. We need to figure out how to measure empathy and compassion so that it matters to the people in charge. Because it does matter, and it’s becoming a priority to the newer generations.”



Megan Henshall
Events Strategic Solutions Lead
Google

“Creating a welcoming, belonging, inclusive place is difficult, but at the end of the day, we’re still human.

Attendees want to know you care about them. They want to know you’re going to help them get their needs met and guide them in a way that helps them find value.”



Janet Sperstad
Faculty Director
Madison Area Technical College

“It is important to look within ourselves before we start trying to design for others. You need to ask yourself ‘what does belonging mean for me?’ You have to be able to answer that before you can design around the experience of belonging for others.”



Mateo Salvatto
CEO
Asteroid



Defining Belonging

“Empathetic practices have been equated with Belonging as an extension of the many diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives taking place in companies today. Belonging is an extension of inclusion. It is the intellectual understanding and emotional certainty that a person is an essential part of the group, and their absence would be keenly felt.”⁸

Belonging stops us from reducing diversity, equity and inclusion to simple metrics by requiring that we examine the extent to which these practices produce meaningful results and enable audiences to impact the social and cultural structures within the experiences created. It involves the right to both contribute and be heard by the institutions and organizers that invite participants to engage in an experience.



Authentic Dialogue

A true sense of Belonging brings out the best in us and it can enable people to feel understood, accepted, valued, and secure enough to be their most authentic selves. When this happens people feel successful and able to engage and participate most actively.

Recent studies show a strong business case for Belonging: **A recent study found that “workplace belonging can lead to an estimated 56% increase in job performance, a 50% reduction in turnover risk, and a 75% decrease in employee sick days.”⁸**

Furthermore, **higher belonging was linked with a “167% increase in a willingness to recommend to others.”⁹** All of this emphasizes why belonging is a key ingredient to successful experiences, businesses and the process of innovation.



Reflection + Awareness

The past five years have seen a significant growth in DE&I roles and these professionals have been busy working to advance meaningful Belonging. The work of Belonging is moving beyond internal HR functions to shape how we develop products and engage and build relationships externally with consumers or communities.

“D&I jobs in EMEA grew 1.65x times faster than HR jobs. Strikingly, 77% of all new D&I roles are either senior or director positions with 22.8% of these roles in leadership positions.”¹⁰

There is a mindful awareness of Belonging as a noble pursuit at both an organizational and individual level. Recognizing that belonging means something different for everyone, practices and frameworks are emerging to support the process of inquiry and understanding.



Belonging is the extension of inclusion that ensures equity is experienced as more than a checklist.

Belonging becomes a way to assess the success of our experiences, and this means that we must design intentionally for Belonging. As an evolution of human-centered design, belonging-centered design has positive outcomes for all stakeholders.

How might we design experience journeys that facilitate belonging for our audiences?



“The whole aspect of belonging – we love to design for others, but need to question ourselves too – what does belonging mean for me? If you can't answer that you shouldn't be designing for others. Creating these spaces starts with leadership.”



Gokul Krishnan
Inclusive Guidance Lead
Google

“Increasing empathy in every person – I understand how you got there, even if I have a different view. I don't see it the way you do. But I understand.’ Having more empathy allows us to coexist better. When we find ourselves in a place of coexistence where we're empathetic, *cognitively* empathetic, it requires radical intimacy. The things that feel so divisive, aren't as divisive anymore.”

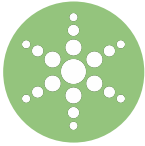


Marcus Collins
Chief Strategy Officer
Wieden + Kennedy

“Realizing that everyone is human creates a larger sense of empathy in people. The experience of trauma from the pandemic almost mandated that we all find our communities and get in touch with empathy; it is increasingly important to seek intersectionality and connect with others to break patterns of exclusion.”



Karen Robinovitz
Co-Founder
Sloomoo



Begin with Dialogue

Engage your audience in dialogue at the beginning of the design process. Belonging is a journey – dialogue is the best way to understand varied preferences and needs and, ultimately, it will provide you with guidance on where they're starting from as they enter the experience you're creating.

No one knows their current state, values, aspirations or feelings more than they do, so let them be the ones to tell you. Quizzes, focus groups or interview conversations can gain feedback ahead of the event experience and build connection.

Once you have identified your audiences' starting point and your desired end goal, the [Wheel of Belonging](#) is a design framework you can use to map a belonging journey to design for.



Make Space for Authenticity

In the shorter term organizations will continue to utilize spaces for authentic presence and unfiltered conversations that are peer supported and led. We'll see these content-free spaces as cultural connectors.

We'll also see influencer culture coming to work in these spaces and events will increasingly be understood as a channel for empathetic engagement with employees as well as audiences.

Consider how experiences accommodate and extend the work of ERGs or affinity groups. Engage with your community organizers to examine opportunities and allocate resources in your budget to activities that allow for expression. Employ tools like [Braindate](#) to support peer to peer conversations, or provide spaces with '[Chatham House Rules](#)' that exist purely to support authenticity, rather than the content funnel.



Be Curious + Proactive

When we design for belonging we are nurturing space for a diverse community and powerful innovation. Be proactive in considering different disabilities and non-typical conditions, including mental health, and be curious to assess and test what it could mean to accommodate these needs.

Show your audience that you're seeking to accommodate these varied preferences and needs and ask what you can do better to meet them. Be open to feedback and hearing about opportunities to improve.

"The worst mistake you can make is to do nothing at all."
- ***Onyinye Udokporo***



I think as human beings, we will always be in search of meaningful interactions and conversations. Whatever that experience does to make us feel alive, to reconnect to ourselves, or to our environment and our communities, it makes us feel good. I think that's a lasting truth that is going to be here as long as humans are humans. I don't see that going away.



Forecast Contributor:
Ana Paula Hernandez
Vice President, LATAM
BCD Meetings +Events

Belonging is an individual journey, where you have to accept that there may be feelings of discomfort, difficulty starting the conversation, or *I just don't know what I'm doing*. We need to talk about this more in our organizations, from the top down approach. Leadership is used to having the answers or if they don't, figuring out how to make it seem like they've got the answers. It's important to start those conversations by saying, you're not going to know the answer, and that's okay. And I don't either, so let's figure out what's the next step from there.



Forecast Contributor:
Lisa Britz
Director of Workplace Design
LinkedIn

★ **Start by engaging your audience in dialogue to understand where they are starting from**



The Value of Values

Understanding the ROI criteria that produce audience participation

This Truth responds to the broadening set of criteria that audiences assess when determining whether and how to participate. Audiences are looking for experiences that provide value beyond the dollar, and design choices like sustainability, venue selection, diversity, hybrid channels, communities, time and uniqueness are all elements that make up the value of an investment.

Keywords

Values | Time | Activism | Sustainability | Ethics



“People are caring more. The seeds to make a more inclusive and greener world through sustainability will lead to the biggest change in history. We are starting to see a movement occur, in a sustainable and thoughtful direction.”



Mateo Salvatto
CEO
Asteroid

“We have influence and a far reach – we need to acknowledge the impact we have sustainably on events, but also the impact we have on humans by bringing them together. Once we acknowledge the impact we have, we need to act on that and offer better solutions and better ways of running our events in a more sustainable way.”



Jack Owens
International Association
Conference Executive
Dublin Convention Bureau

“Spend your time as wisely as you can – time is a type of currency and it’s woven into all aspects of life. People are much more disciplined and focused on how they will spend their time, and they’re invested in getting the best experience for themselves. We want to maximize that investment for our attendees, clients, and partners as much as possible.”



David Peckinpaugh
President + CEO
Maritz Holdings



Needs + Values

Values are influencing consumer participation as audiences think more about sustainability, policies, budgets and travel footprints. Accenture notes that **“66% of consumers have cut down on at least one external leisure or entertainment activity, choosing instead to stay indoors.**

Millennials and gen Z immerse themselves in gaming and podcasts – while more traditional activities such as reading and radio are important among gen X and baby boomers.”¹¹

New measurement systems are developing that focus on values accountability, whether that is [The Global Destination Sustainability Index](#) or the Human Rights Campaign’s [Corporate Equality Index](#).

There is an empowerment and even a sense of urgency about how experiences represent values-based advocacy. Audiences are asking how experiences are designed to meet their needs and the needs of society.



Actions + Activism

People like to know they are ethically aligned to the brands they consume and interact with. The activist consumer uses their buying power and their social networks to influence issues – aka impact – at a grassroots level. They are far more cynical than in the past, and will analyze actions to verify that a brand ‘walks the talk’ of appealing messaging.

According to Business Wire, “75% of US and UK consumers are not comfortable purchasing from a brand with poor personal data ethics.”¹²


This is not a passive desire to be a part of doing good, but an activist sentiment to create meaningful change.



Time + Community

“Customers have proven time and again that they will pay premium prices for innovative and compelling experiences, including accessibility to an exclusive club. The pay-for-access model offers an opportunity for brands to monetize exclusive and premium offerings – such as metaverse worlds, games, in-game tiers, individual events, voting rights or items.”¹³

The ways in which individuals assess the value of experiences has changed. Time and community connection are top of mind when our audiences make choices about investment of their energy and personal resources. People are investing their time like the precious resource that it is, and making their choices based on essential value. Organizations must lead with a compelling experience or product to be rewarded by the consumer.

A person stands on a beach at night, looking up at the sky where the Milky Way galaxy is visible. Two small blue boats are on the sand in the foreground. The scene is illuminated by the soft light of the galaxy and the ambient night light.

In the coming years, experience design will be organized around new narrative currencies, featuring the audience as intentional collaborators in solutions and outcomes. Experience offerings will need to convey an understanding of audience value systems in order to maximise participation and engagement.

How might we adjust our communications to convey all the values an experience provides?



“People are more focused and have more specific interests in what they are going to accomplish at in-person events. There is more choice overall, and people are more selective about who will be there. From an experiential perspective, it's making us, as the agencies, ensure that we're providing a much more meaningful experience.”



Ben Nazario
Chief Growth Officer
MC2

“Our audience is smart. They expect unique and out of the box experiences that speak to them. They want more than the information from a brand's marketing campaign. For any brand, if they really want to stand out they have to maintain that authentic connection with their audience's values.”



Sonali Nair
Executive Producer + CEO
Segment Agency

“There is a need for people to be at the center of consideration. People create the organizational culture, and it's that culture that enables things to last. The awareness of how valuable people are, from companies to events and audiences, that's what matters. Knowledge can be transferred in lots of different ways, but relationships are forged in person.”



Anna Abdelnoor
Co-Founder, CEO
Isla



Knowing What Matters

Experience designers will still need to expand more unique and targeted experiences to capture participation, and will continue to focus on ways to make these experiences more rewarding for the audience. Having a system in place that can identify what is important to your audience can help you get the right stories to the right people quickly to capture their attention.

Tools such as [Valuegraphics](#), a dataset of global human values, can recognize what your audience cares the most about, and help you determine the meaningful messaging that will resonate the most. They have identified 56 core human values and their ranking importance to communities globally, to help you understand any group of people anywhere.



Showing You Care

How do you embed Corporate or Social Responsibility in your design? This may be in terms of community engagement and outreach, establishing partnerships to increase the importance of attendance, and creating a greater good in the local and global community.

Craft your content with values in mind, and connect with your audience by sharing how your organization lives your values and shows up in your communities by highlighting partnerships or employee volunteerism. Think more creatively about sustainability, more authentically about your messaging, and consider using local voices and stories to talk to communities when applicable.

For example, through their [SponsorX](#) initiative, Smartsheet donates the marketing space and budget they would use for themselves on McLaren F1 cars to local charities at different races around the world.



New Value Propositions

Distinct offerings – and value propositions – continue to be needed to meet audience values. For the time-conscious, the virtual-hybrid experience will remain essential in order to be connected to their communities wherever they are.

Articulate value propositions that address time, community access and demonstrate the ROI for the audience in terms of advocacy. How will the investment of time and limited travel funds return an impact for, say, local communities, or policy advancement? Organizations like [Giving Bag](#) are making the connection between event venues and values.

Experiences will continue to offer scales of access and experience, to capture audiences in the channel they occupy. Opportunity exists to monetize premium add-on experiences that respond to specific values – these creative offerings will generate new sponsorship models.

It's easy for a brand to write a mission statement, but it's much more difficult for brands to follow through in a meaningful way. Humans naturally want to build deeper connections with the things they care about. In the next five years we are going to see consumers increasingly choosing brands that demonstrate thoughtful impact in their communities, values, and products.



Forecast Contributor:
Quinn Cox
Co-founder
Giving Bag

There's a new community social standard of people having strong interest in companies not only being forces for producing goods, services, or revenue, but good quality of life. And I think that's here to stay.

People inside companies are going to push management to keep working on these principles. People make organizations, people make teams, people make political parties. So at the end of the day, it's a lot of effort and a lot of responsibility on us to keep pushing ourselves and keep continuing that conversation and creating awareness within every community that we are a part of.



Forecast Contributor:
Mateo Salvatto
CEO
Asteroid

★ Start with your audience's values and communicate and demonstrate how you will walk the talk.



Emotional Data

Assessing the feelings that generate behavior and action

This Truth reflects the considerable shift in how business regards emotion. Once something that was seen to limit sound logic, emotions are now seen as a key to driving loyalty and important decision making. For experience designers and strategists, there is much to be discovered about how we make use of this data, measure it consistently, when, where and how it is collected, and what we can glean from its analysis.

Keywords

Analytics | Ownership | Responsibility | Behavior | Sentiments



“As we influence changing behavior, none of it happens without understanding people – the better we are at understanding the human condition, the better we’ll be at responding to these change.”



Marcus Collins
Head of Strategy
Wieden + Kennedy

“Most surveys do not measure how people feel. Rather, they measure how people feel about the choices you gave them, resulting in inherent confirmation bias.”



Chris Laping
Author of *People Before Things*

“The typical response rate for an online/email survey is 30%, compared to 57% in-person. According to researchers, survey results are also becoming more inaccurate or unreliable. The future of understanding the audience’s voice could be by capturing their emotions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in context.”



Google Xi 2022 Report



Emotions Mean Business

As we seek a deeper, more predictive, knowledge of our audiences, there has been a questioning of how well traditional methods – particularly the Net Promoter Score (NPS) – meaningfully measure our outcomes.

“By studying consumer’s unconscious physical reactions, Zaltman found that what they really think or feel often contradicts what they say. Why aren’t consumers truthful about their purchasing thoughts and feelings? Well, a big reason is that they are driven by unconscious urges, the biggest of which is emotion. Emotion is what really drives the purchasing behaviors, and also, decision making in general.”¹⁴

From McKinsey’s Emotion Archive in 2020, to [Emotion Mapping Experiments](#) with Google in 2021, to the development of a [Return on Emotion framework](#), an array of emotional experiments are gelling into usable applications primed for adoption and testing at scale.



Measurement Systems

At Google’s Xi Days, an evolving measurement system utilizing Experience, Performance and Outcomes (ExPO) was shared by Ryan Howard. With the [ExPO methodology](#), a maturity of perspective emerges where we circle back to ROI as a baseline driver, but using emotion as a means to measure experience.

“Nothing at our disposal, except post event surveys, gave much insight into the *experience* of our audience, our presenters, or even the event host – the person who represents business needs to have an event. This specifically was a problem for those of us designing the event ecosystem capabilities and operating them.”¹⁵

Experience creators are leaning in to measuring sentiment, often one step removed from quantitative assessment, through use of keywords and emojis.



The Feedback Loop

Collecting data is a huge responsibility, but that is how we give people the agency to shape their own story.

Finding new, more strategic ways to return data to the audience, clarify how and what it is used for, and make people comfortable with sharing emotional states, are the way to move forward. Empower the audience to own their own zero party data and exchange it for what they value.

Investigate what it would take to ensure your audience feels comfortable sharing, confident in the reason, and curious about how their input will manifest in the experience design.

“82% of global consumers are prepared to engage with the data economy. Consumers are increasingly comfortable with data sharing, especially if there is a clear benefit of doing so.”¹⁶



The emotional state of participants is key to measuring an experience and furthering the relationship between organizer and audience. We are figuring out what it means to measure emotion – when is it most accurate and how data fidelity is affected by context. To understand the progress along a consumer’s journey – whether this is the marketing funnel or a ladder of engagement – we must provide ways for audiences to feel comfortable sharing their emotional data.

How do we best assess the emotional state of participants ?





“The long-held notion that the primary purpose of business events is to push attendees toward the host organization’s desired outcomes, like revenue and membership, has created an industry more focused on coercion than community. To re-engage our audiences, we need to offer the possibility of co-creation and agency.”



Google Xi 2022 Report

“Data is a responsibility – to keep it safe and in consideration to how we use it. We must be intentional about what we ask people to share, how we use it, and consider where it is made personal or viewed as a broader test.”



Junior Tauvaa
Chief Business Officer
PCMA

“It doesn’t stop at measurement: we must use the data we collect to inform our practice. How are we creating and delivering events that use emotional data to improve our audience experience?”



Jessica Charles
Vice President, Programming
+ Events
Forbes



It's Still ROI

At the Xi Days event, the ROE survey was conducted on the final day, and measured via numeric scale how the attendees felt about five key emotions: hopeful, adventurous, accepted, active, and motivated. This approach provides an alternate metric to NPS. There is a familiarity to the model (they recommend a score of 8.6) that is a comfortable first step for those not quite ready to let go of the post survey.

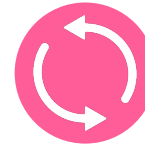
Ultimately, what we see from the variety of experiments is that our measurement of events still ladders back to ROI. This has always been difficult to capture exactly – sales and relationships can take months or years to convert. Emotions can help us better gauge and predict at an event what our return might be.



No More Post Event Surveys

Technology provides options for jettisoning the dreaded exit survey. For example, PCMA partnered with [Zenus AI](#), a tool that captures the emotional state of participants through facial recognition, at Convening Leaders 2023. At Xi Days, Meeting Pulse used sentiment polling at every activation, which employed a quick and simple system of emojis and keywords to collect responses.

Both tools collect this data as anonymous – so it is used by organizations to interpret the success of particular program elements rather than generate personally tailored actions or insights. This balances frequency and timing of data collection – in the moment feedback captures the highest intensity of an emotion, whereas post event captures the feelings that lasted. Both are important for us to understand.



Curiosity, Comfort and Confidence

“The Experience Profiles factor in more ‘personhood’ than anything else we’ve found to-date. Results are built from characteristics across preferences (needs and traits), psychographics (what the person finds important and valuable), and behavioral clues (what inspires the person to engage).”

- [Google Xi 2022 Report](#)

Dialogue connects emotions and data, so dialogue becomes an important means of data collection. Audience segmentation tools use personalization to create dialogue. Using these tools pre-event as a vehicle for experience design demonstrates how the emotional data collected has been used to create better experiences for the audience. This will establish trust and encourage further sharing.



The increase of privacy regulations make personalization derived from personal data difficult, and will continue to make it even more difficult over the next five years.

However, if we start looking at targeting very specific groups within our audience, we can start to draw curated personalization from those groups that will be relevant to their interests, which will allow us to make more progress.



Forecast Contributor:
Ryan Howard
Technical Program Manager, Experience Design
Google

Consumer expectations about personalized and seamless experiences are undoubtedly on the rise. But attendees behave differently on-site compared with their stated preferences before the event.

As a result, meetings and event organizers need to go one step further and consider real-time adjustments. It has created a need for ongoing monitoring of the visitor experience in real time.

We are starting to see the first steps in this direction and expect to reach the early majority of the innovation curve (50% of the market) within the next five to 10 years.



Forecast Contributor:
Panos Moutafis, PhD
CEO + Founder
Zenus, Inc.



Start by determining why you want the data you collect and what you intend to do with it



The Power of Play

Infusing cultures of collaboration and innovation

This Truth is a compelling design mindset that benefits wellness, innovation and productivity. Play connects function and experience, helps to catalyze content, build teams, define cultures, introduce new ideas, synthesize learnings and spark joy. Audiences want to get hands-on and be free to tinker as they make sense of new concepts, and designers will create play-first spaces that celebrate testing and experimentation.

Keywords

Innovation | New applications | Collaboration | Experimentation

“Storytelling and narrative is the way we make sense of the world, and that's one key way which we can help people make sense of all these multiple tools. Breaking something apart and putting it back together – that's a shortcut for understanding and making sense of it. Play is interesting, because it solves many of its own problems – we put the parts together, blow them up, and put them back together in a new ways.”



Ryan Howard
Technical Program Manager,
Experience Design
Google

“There's no topic more serious than play. Stuart Brown, a neuroscientist, said that the opposite of play isn't work, it's depression. The misconception is that as we grow up, we're not supposed to play like we did when we were kids. But as we develop, we're designed to play for our entire lives. It's the way that we continue to learn, continue to enhance, continue to evolve.”



Zach Fisher
Founder
Kinflow

“I love the concept of play. You're doing something that's in the moment, and authentic. You're not trying to impress anybody. It would be amazing to consider the role of play and pleasure and how people enjoy something in an experience space – allowing people to just be, without them seeking feedback. I wonder how our industries would change if that was embraced more?”



Lisa Britz
Director of Workplace Design
LinkedIn



Play and Productivity

The process of playing with something, breaking it apart, and putting it back together – in new and unexpected ways – is the key to innovation. People want to take an active role in design and development, instead of waiting passively for new tools and ways of doing things to be delivered.

We can drive experience and technology forward by creating a new playscape process – one that supports creativity through play, mindfulness, and imagination. New solutions, better work-life balance, and more joyfulness in the experience itself benefit everyone. In fact if ennui reduces productivity – **“last year the US saw a 4.8% drop in productivity” – then the “20% boost that results from the joy of play”** is more needed than ever.^{17 18}



Unprogrammed Play

The notion of play in a professional setting is incredibly valuable, as it allows for innovation without a goal. Play is a mindset – it will change the way we innovate; when you are playing there is less at stake and less pressure if mistakes are made. When playing, people leave their ego at door, which allows them to get radical and creative.

Companies like IDEO say that “play keeps employees engaged in their projects and makes them better innovators, on top of making the company a satisfying place to work.”¹⁹

Play should not be confused with games, however. Competition changes the nature of play and produces the opposite of innovation, experimentation, and collaboration that we are discussing here.



New Tools for Collaboration

New developments in AI are opening new avenues for experimenting and playing with new tech tools that can facilitate communication and connection. AI may show us new perspectives we couldn't see, by giving us an opportunity to get out of our own heads and focus on new possibilities and applications.

However, reliance on AI will raise ethical, business, and security questions as this technology spreads throughout industry. The human factor – thinking and feeling – will continue to be necessary as a check to AI.

Film makers are “expanding their tool kits by experimenting with AI to create adaptive experiences.” These films “detect the emotions of the audience and use that data to reconfigure the narrative in real time, creating a truly immersive experience.”²⁰



Play opens your mind so that you can be your best, most creative and most innovative self. In a stressful and constantly changing world, we could all use more opportunities for mindfulness, reflection, connection and joy. Play promotes this by opening the mind, allowing you to reset and recharge.

Play moves us beyond the scoreboards of gamification and creates opportunities for the ideation, experimentation, and collaboration that drives innovation.

How do we design spaces where play and joy can thrive?



“Play is a lifestyle, it doesn't have to be necessarily chess or sports, it's a mindset. Infusing play into events, whatever that looks like, has to be fundamental. It can't be a luxury or something that we do occasionally, it has to be infused into the fabric of the experience.”



Zach Fisher
Founder
Kinflow

“We need to get people to play more. The moment you play more and are more playful, you experience new things and are open to new stimuli and ideas. Having a more playful attitude towards life, I think, would make society better and lead to more experimentation and understanding.”



Claus Raasted
Director
College of Extraordinary
Experiences

“AI tools don't encapsulate knowledge in the same way that other design tools and instruments do. They're trained on a this-versus-that model, by collecting samples of past output, including systematic bias and blind spots, and responding to whether it fits some preconceived idea. The byproducts of these systems are patently unexplainable; there's a whole genre of emergent AI right now attempting to re-explain AI outcomes. So we need to ask ourselves, 'Is this helping me to continue the creative process on my own?'”



Prof. Jonathan Healey
Associate Director, Ethics Lab
Georgetown University



Play Place-Making

Play is a mindset that is fundamental to humanity and allows people to set aside their ego and break down limits. **The Google Xi 2022 Report indicates “emerging terms and trends like [Nowstalgia](#) and [Kidulting](#), along with the mainstreaming of [LARPing](#), indicate a mass acknowledgement of the value of getting lost in imagination and fun for the sake of it.”**

Creating dedicated spaces that are flexible and without too many rules will encourage play. Create unstructured play, instead of competition, so people can lean into the moment and feel free to experiment. If we are serious about integrating play, our leaders need to be the starting point. If play starts on a leadership level, it will feel safer to do at lower levels. So find a champion to lead by example.



Positive Resonance ²¹

Imagine a future of “community hubs focused on inclusive environments for healthy social engagement and relationship building. With opportunities for family engagement, individual renewal, and biohacking for optimal performance, alongside humanities programming in partnership with organizations like [The International Arts and Mind Lab](#) and [The Human Flourishing Program](#).”²²

Whether it is the Puppies of PCMA CL 2023 or Google’s [Kittens and Kinetic Joy](#) – the act of play can benefit everyone including observers, not just the individual at play. This drives a need for organizations to curate well-being opportunities that are more targeted, earnest, and omnipresent in the culture of everyday work and life.



AI, a Creative Co-Pilot

AI has the potential to be a powerful tool to assist in the facilitation of creativity and design, and gives people opportunities to create things that they otherwise would not have been able to do.

Just like other team members, though, AI needs oversight and accountability. It needs human direction on goals, parameters, and modeling. It is how humans interpret and utilize AI, as part of a diverse set of tools at the designer’s disposal, that matters.

Carve out a role for AI on your team, or find a space for AI to play with your meeting participants, and for them to play with it – celebrate the messy and the authentic product as a co-created art piece.

AI will be an amazing collaborator. It will empower people to create things that are inconceivable. I think it will be your therapist, it'll be your friend. In some ways, it's going to disrupt a lot- it's such a powerful tool. AI is the formative technology that's going to allow for a real-time immersive world.



Forecast Contributor:
Josh Goldblum
Founder, CEO
Bluecadet

With technological advances moving at such speed, technology and innovation will continue to play a significant role in shaping the future of events. AI and blockchain will be integrated much more in enhancing the attendee experience as well as in analyzing data to help improve ROI. We will continue to evolve how we do experiential events. We will have more interactive installations and sensory elements that will increase our engagement and enjoyment with play and beyond.



Forecast Contributor:
Monique Ruff-Bell
Head of Conferences
TED

 **Start by giving yourself permission to be messy and authentic.**

Call to Action

This study completes the first stage of our research, comprising interviews and round table discussions from experts in the field. Our next phase is testing before the final white paper will be released in 2024.

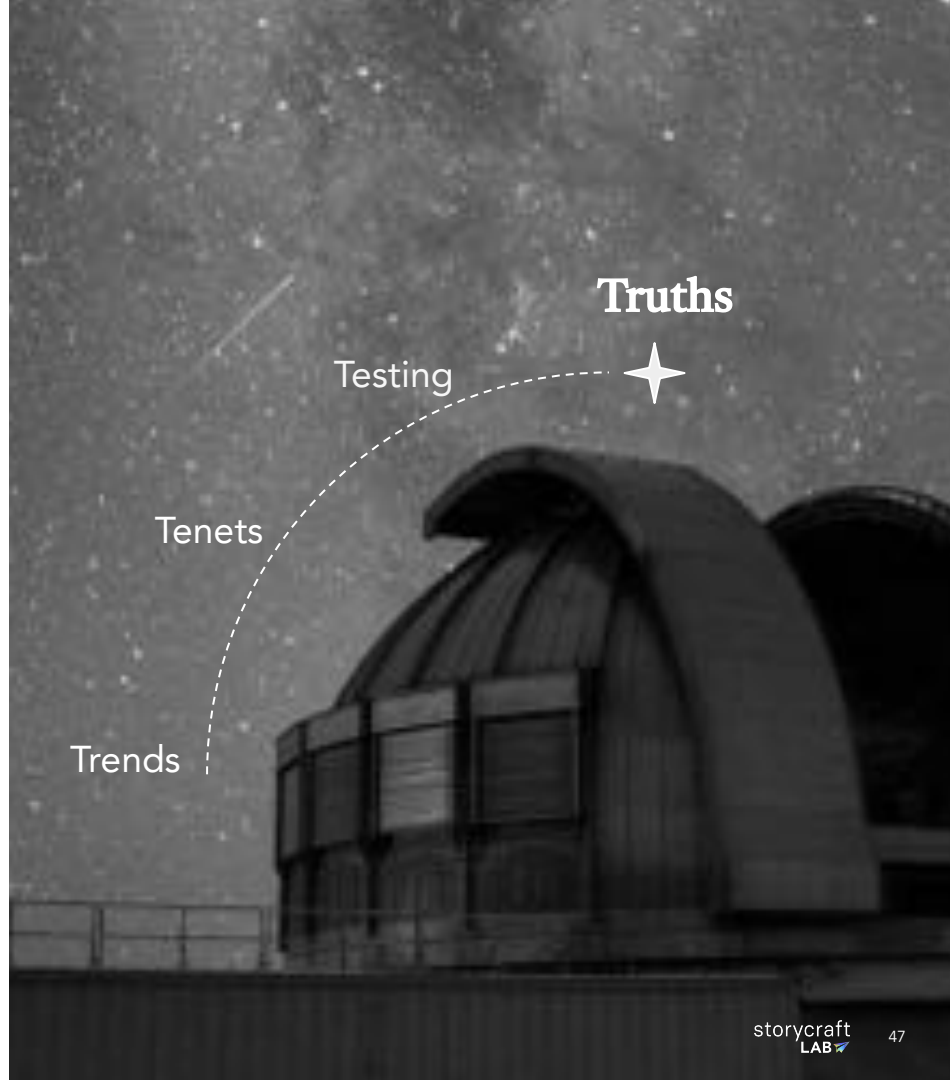
Our content partner, Google Xi, shared case studies from their Xi Days event for this report. To diversify our data, **we are now calling for your help to bring this grand experiment to a wider audience, by seeking organizations to test a truth over the course of 2023 and share their findings.**

Join us in the Truth Lab to ideate the truths you'll test and sign up to be a case study in the 2024 white paper at Marriott, CEMA, and PCMA events occurring throughout 2023.

For further information, please contact:

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