

Events are becoming increasingly techno-centric. The days of paper sign-in sheets and printed schedules are rapidly coming to a close. Instead, we are seeing emerging technology that allows us to do a lot more: greener events, more cost effective events, and just plain cooler events.

As we celebrate the new year, Kelly looks ahead at what technologies we will be seeing more of in the event space in 2010. Some of these technological advances are brand new, and some have actually been around for quite a while, but only now are starting to emerge as viable and valuable event solutions.

1 Mobile Event Updates

For years, event attendees have relied on printed schedules and agendas. We believe that the rise of smart phones lends itself well to event agendas and updates happening in near-real-time, on the attendee's smart phone. With "push" technology and the popularity of texting, we envision an easy way for your attendees to "opt in" to event updates when they register for the event. These updates would start before the event, happen throughout the event, and could even be used for post event follow up. We believe that a clear "opt in, opt out" policy will make people comfortable enough giving out their mobile numbers and the convenience of real time event updates will make this a common practice in 2010. Not to mention that it's a very "green" way to run a conference as well!

2 Self-Serve Digital Kiosks

We see technology converging that will enable attendees to check in to the event, email themselves collateral, sign up for optional activities and communicate directly with other attendees, all through an intuitive touch-screen event kiosk. As a matter of fact, we believe so strongly that this will be a common practice at events this year and into the future, that we are currently building a prototype kiosk for one of our clients!

3 Touch-Screen Technology

Touch screen technology has been around for a while, but only recently has the cost of the screens gone down and the size of the screens gone up enough to make demos, collateral kiosks, and other forms of "self-serve" interactions at events practical. The possibility for touch screens at events are limitless...and their intuitive nature makes them more approachable than a traditional keyboard and mouse for less technology savvy attendees or for people who may not speak English natively. Plus, with open source frameworks like and mobile touch devices becoming more common, developing useful applications for touch screens has never been faster or easier.

4 RFID

A lot has been said and predicted over the years about the use of RFID at tradeshow and events. While it's not a new technology, we believe that 2010 is the year that battery technology and public acceptance of the benefits (versus privacy concerns) will intersect to drive wide spread acceptance of RFID at events. The advantages are numerous...accurate tracking of sessions popularity, ability to expand or contract a session based on attendance, immediate and automatic "opt in" for follow up without use of a badge scanner or filling out forms. Obviously, the benefits and challenges of RFID are applicable to many aspects of modern life...but we feel 2010 will be a year of great adoption in the event industry, which tends to be a leading indicator for other everyday uses.

5 Bar Codes

Much like the possibilities of RFID, bar code technology represents an underutilized way to quickly and accurately gather and process information at an event. Not to sound like a broken record, but today's smart phones allow users to snap pictures of bar codes and immediately get more information about whatever the bar code represents. And with the latest bar code technology, "matrix" or "2D" codes, even more information can be crammed into a single bar code allowing your attendees to learn more about your products, services, or business in a very personalized and relevant way.



6 Audience Polling Devices

While studio audiences have been using the “applause o meter” since the golden age of television, only recently has audience polling technology become mobile, accurate and affordable enough for greater acceptance into corporate events. The ability to get feedback from your audience in real time exists in a variety of ways...from proprietary systems that can be rented specifically for an event...to the use of the existing mobile network...and attendees handsets...as an inexpensive yet effective way to poll an audience without additional hardware. People are already updating My Space, Facebook and tweeting during your conference anyway...why not take the step to harness those opinions into actionable insight that can help you improve the quality of your event immediately and in the long term.

7 LED Lights

Due to their hyper-efficiency, low heat output, and long life, in the world of lighting, LEDs are all the rage. However, until recently, their capacity to compete with conventional lights has been limited due to lower brightness, fewer color choices, and more expensive manufacturing processes. Well no longer. Today LEDs come in any color or color temperature that you can imagine, they are bright, reliable, and due to their rising popularity, cheaper than ever to manufacture. We see LEDs being used not only for stage and tradeshow lighting at events, but also as a way to light up areas that would have been difficult to light in the past due to the need for a high voltage power source and heat from the lights. Imagine every center piece at a dinner function being lit with color from a small, hidden battery pack. Or image handing out paper brochures for your product that include a built in reading light. The possibilities are lonely limited by what ideas we can come up with to enhance our attendees overall experience and impression of our events.

8 Custom Event Apps

Today's world is full of “custom applications” designed for niche audiences. We believe that these will become more and more common at events in 2010 and beyond. The reason is simple: custom applications can enhance an attendees' experience at an event greatly, help you tailor the event to your audience, and automate the process of getting your message out in a fun and convenient way via kiosks, Web applications or mobile applications. We're not suggesting that every event needs its own game for the iPhone or Androi OS, but we do believe that the low barrier to entry in developing custom applications will lead to an upswing in the practice in 2010.

9 Interactive Projection

One thing that we've seen a lot of lately, and we feel will hit critical mass this year, is interactive projection using infrared technology. Systems like “Respondr” use a technology similar to what you'd find in a Nintendo Wii to take interactivity to a whole new level. Imagine your attendees playing virtual air hockey over drinks at a custom table or virtual volleyball during a break between sessions. Interactive projection provides a platform for incredible virtual experiences that your audience will find enjoyable and memorable.

10 Multi-Touch Technology

We mentioned the increasing popularity of touch-screen devices, but why not take it a step farther? The company Perceptive Pixel (www.perceptivepixel.com) has taken the idea of touch-screen and fused it with intuitive controls, multi-touch capabilities, and a 3D engine. This goes beyond a simple tap to click interface, and becomes a more organic user experience. You may have seen these displays on CNN... they allow the user to zoom, rotate, and visualize assets in a 3D environment.

Imagine using multi-touch technology at a trade show to allow users to explore a 3D model of your product or browse demo videos. The technology could, and will, also be used to enhance the presentation experience. Instead of a linear PowerPoint presentation, presenters will be able to move from topic to topic as the discussion evolves, all within a 3D cluster of topics and ideas.

