Live Experiences: This Time It's Personal

How to make intentional connections with your attendees

Freeman

You know you love personal experiences — we all do — but WHY?

When an event fits like a custom suit, it can make you feel welcomed, special, and understood. It makes interactions more relevant, so when you leave, you have positive memories and are satisfied.

Personalization surrounds us every day, from ecommerce algorithms, to the latest hits on our music streaming platforms. It's an expected part of our everyday lives, so live events should be no different.

Savvy planners know personalizing an event around individual needs and interests is essential, and success starts with data collected from previous events. It's the best way to confirm knowledge about your attendees, and then develop meaningful connections they'll appreciate.

Tailor with Data

The value of in-person events continues growing, and much of that has to do with planners finding new ways to relate with attendees — particularly when it comes to personalizing the live event experience (just like that custom suit). And a key way to do that is leveraging available data from surveys, apps, registrations, and other event tech.

But how can planners and organizers be strategic with this information?

Based on our own Freeman Trends Report, we know that there are four main buckets for why people attend events: to learn, to network, to have fun, and to do business. In this guide we'll address all four, as well as some of the common feedback that often accompanies them.

Spoiler alert: You can use your own data to make your live experience unforgettable.

Personalization primer

Get started by learning (and re-learning) your evolving audience.

Learn as much about your audiences as you can, even if you are already familiar with them. If you have a treasure trove of data already, that's great! And if you've recently started collecting information directly from them, you're on the right track. Either way, here are a few ways to get even more data:

- **Host a focus group of some of your attendees** – both seasoned and new. Dialoguing with your audience is the best way to learn exactly who they are and what they like/dislike.

- **Pull virtual event data**. This could speak directly to content, since that is a main driver of virtual events.

- **Talk with your exhibitors.** They can contribute feedback based on exhibit experiences at previous events, and would appreciate being involved to improve their experience as well as attendees' experiences.

Need a data jump start?
Get this helpful guide. ❯

Also, if you aren't sure where to begin, but have general audience demographics, you can start with some basic categorizing by generation.

Millennials and GenZ are united in their expectations for personalized nuances like …
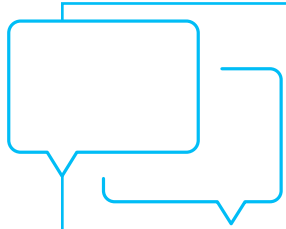
- Having curated agendas in the event's app.
- Persona-based signage on-site that gives different options, which allows attendees to personalize their experience.
- Hosting interest-driven meetups that are interactive and involve participation.

Supplement your Gen Z approach with this report. ❯

Gen X and Boomers appreciate personal touches they can count on.
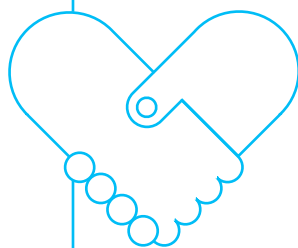
- Boomers are closing in on retirement age and appreciate mentorship opportunities to build on their legacies. Consider a mentoring program pairing them with emerging audiences to forge new relationships and welcome newcomers to the community.
- Gen X bridges the gap between newer and traditional attendees. As rising leaders, they can exist in two spaces: finding value in both thought leadership content and pop culture references. They'd appreciate a throwback 80s/90s music-themed event or concert that offers just the right amount of nostalgia.

Once you know how your attendee audience has shifted, you can tailor all sorts of content and occasions for them throughout the event.

Go All In

Focus on the ENTIRE experience

That means you'll want to think about unique details pre-show, at the show, and even extending their experience as they depart. **Here are some ideas to consider:**

Pre-show

- **Agendas can be jam-packed.** If data shows your audience can feel overwhelmed, craft "recommended pathways" based on sessions and activities. Attendees can then participate alongside peers of similar backgrounds and feel more at ease with their schedules.

- **Offer a "Know Before You Go" webinar** and reference materials. Think short and digestible videos and snippets on social media. Maybe use a member of your team from each generation represented at your event to focus each group's attention on the more personalized options you're offering.

- **Because you don't always need to spend more money,** sometimes it's simple to build in personalization from existing pieces. For instance, at the reg desk, give attendees a colored or tinted lanyard based on their objectives – such as whether or not they're seeking out product demos, want to make networking connections, or dive into interactive learning.

During the show

- **Make personalization options** for them to share the experience at the event, such as a selfie station, or a postcard wall where they can design handwritten notes to send to friends or loved ones.

- **Plan thoughtful activations** that speak to your audience personas' needs, interests, and pain points. And connect those to giveaways (and memories!) that are actually meaningful.

Departing and extending

- **Good manners are always in style,** so make sure to thank your community in person. It may seem super-simple, but face-to-face gratitude is meaningful for forthcoming meetups and roundtables beyond the live event. What final image/experience do you want attendees to take with them? Surprise and wow in ways so that you'll already know the answer to the question, "Will we see you next year?"

- **Engage your sponsors!** Maybe with a special swag item or branded rideshare pickup area. This is a great way to add to your profitability and give a valued partner more visibility.

There are many different ways to add personal touches, along with several different tools to help figure out which one works best for your event.

Tactical Triple Threat

Tech tools, experiences, and journeys

Technology and data are your BFF's when better understanding audiences, audiences, which includes the following tools that enhance attendee engagement:

Sensor-enabled Technology	Mobile apps	Digital Signage
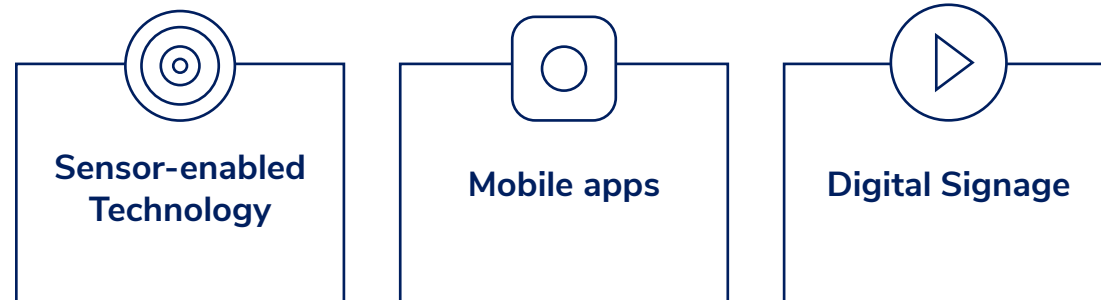
They can all help achieve personalization goals by providing relevant content and interactive options based on individual interests.

> For example, we worked with a large tech client to build customized agendas based on six unique personas for their attendee base. When the app optimized schedules based on those personas, a friendly message popped up to offer recommendations. **80% of these users opted in to follow the suggestions.**
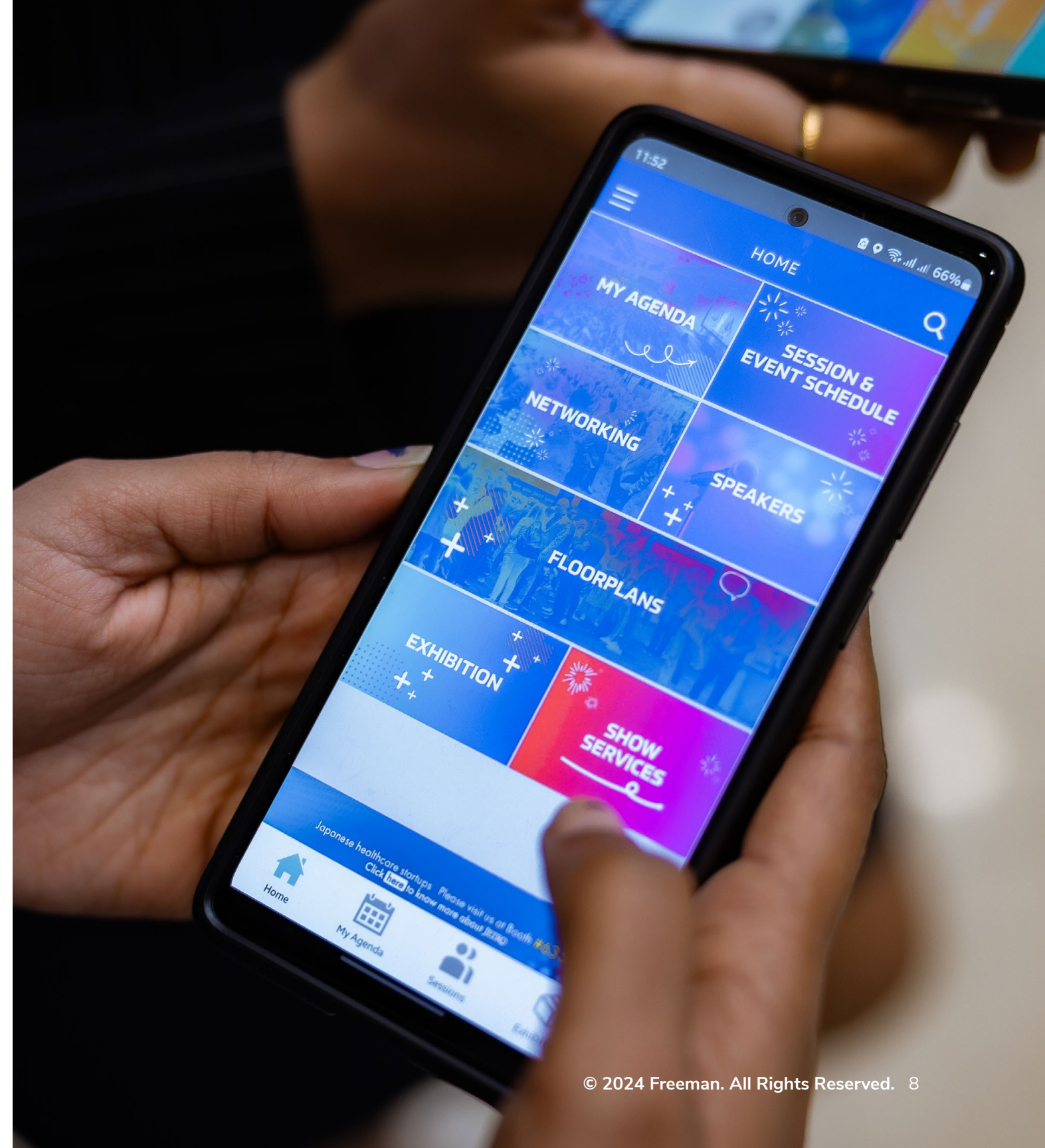
Here are other simple, medium, and complex ways to apply each idea, depending on your team's budget and resources. You can easily mix/match since one size doesn't always fit all!

Simple

Use QR codes with journey options on signage. Creating a digital attendee journey mapped to each industry, persona, and outcome creates more robust customer profiles.

Host meetups on-site, like a running club, peer challenges, or mocktail happy hour.

Create three different attendee journeys that speak to your different audience segments, and be creative with how you brand them. Use color, icons, etc. for easy visibility and wayfinding.

Medium

Offer in-app quizzes with three simple questions like "What is your perfect show experience?"

Scale journeys with different personas that have contrasting looks, feels, and moments.

Dive deep into your data for extensive persona work to create specialized marketing and experience plans.

Complex

Send out individualized journey programs via email, text, or push notifications.

Tap into year-round communities, and create a chance for them to reconnect on-site.

Hosting and curating booth tours are other ways to connect attendees and showcase offerings.

Utilize insights to expand your event via new tracks and launches to reach new audiences and communities.

Feedback fixes

You may be thinking, "This is all great, but we could really use some examples that address some specific feedback." You're in luck! Here are some suggestions on how to personalize by easily pulling from registration data to address often-received post-event comments. And remember that sending out post-event surveys is a simple way to find out what did/didn't work, so you can continue adjusting and elevating your event personalization tactics.

Not enough networking or social opportunities.

PERSONALIZE IT: Discuss shifting resources to carve out specific time in the agenda for networking, and consider converting existing space into a lounge. You could also utilize backstage green room space for VIP mingling to create a more exclusive experience in a previously unutilized area.

More food options.

PERSONALIZE IT: F&B can be both expensive and limited – especially when accommodating diverse food needs and palates. But there are ways to make it work, like presenting attendees with a card they can place on the table to denote their food preferences so servers recognize that they need special meals.

" Limited options for breakout sessions.

PERSONALIZE IT: Why not turn the flow of traffic on a bustling expo floor into a captive audience? Create a dedicated space for content based on popular breakout sessions or keynotes that couldn't accommodate more people. Or use it for an out-of-the-box experience, like a diversity meet-up or interactive product demonstration. It could even turn into a sponsorship opportunity that creates additional revenue.

Now that you have the tools, from taking a deep dive into all the data that's available, you'll be able to find the perfect fit for you and your attendees. It's easier than you think!

Ready to start personalizing your event?

Let's talk.