

HANDS OFF

SAFE MEETINGS

6 ways to decrease event touchpoints

by Wendy Helfenbaum

As face-to-face events re-emerge, planners must reimagine their event strategy and design to focus on attendee comfort and confidence. That means having fewer touchpoints, developing safety protocols and clear communication. Here's how planners and venues can go touchless.

ASK PEOPLE TO PRINT BADGES AT HOME

Name badges are often handled by one or more people before the attendee gets it, but you can skip this touchpoint, says Sheila Wong, senior vice-president and founding partner of BBW Event Staff, which has a COVID ambassador program that supplies staff training for events.

"Printing at home makes things easier: People walk in, show their badge and then vaccine checks can be done at the door," says Wong.

Put lanyards on a tree where people can pick them up. Or, consider distributing RFID bracelets, suggests Mary Jo Sterns, a Victoria-based consultant, educator and pandemic compliance advisor with Hospitality.ca.

"Registration information is all uploaded pre-event so you can scan it on-site," says Sterns. "Guests can then interact with different activation stations."

CREATE & INSPIRE

ESTABLISH SAFER TRAFFIC FLOW

"Have one point of entry and one point of exit at events," says Wong. "I'm seeing more automatic doors at venues, where you just wave your hand and the door opens."

Clear signage—especially in large venues with many hallways—guides delegates to avoid bottlenecks.

"Many venues now have touchless hand sanitizers and water dispensers already in place, but make sure that's in your contract," adds Sterns.

OFFER SELF-SERVE OR VIRTUAL SWAG BAGS

Encourage exhibitors to have grab-and-go items guests can fill their own bags with, or better yet, provide digital coupons they can redeem online.

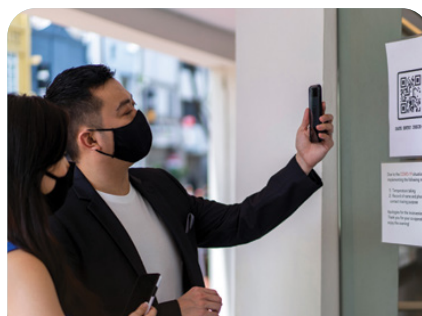
"People understand that they don't need to have a swag bag given to them at the registration desk filled with things many others have touched," says Wong.

USE MOBILE APPS OR QR CODES

Instead of handing out physical conference schedules, make information available digitally.

"Having a QR code at registration or in different locations allows attendees to scan it and be able to get the agenda," says Wong.

Planners can use tablets or smartphones to scan delegates' vaccine QR codes upon arrival, too.



SWAP OUT BUFFETS FOR PLATED FOOD OR BOXED MEALS

Seat four guests at tables for 10, and avoid standing receptions that encourage mingling, says Sterns.

"F&B really needs to be customized with individual service where possible," she says.

"When people arrive, give them a signature cocktail and lead them to their assigned seats. You can also create catering bubbles, where the same staff serves the same tables, so you're reducing the number of people coming into contact with your attendees."



ASSIGN SEATING FOR EVERYTHING

Sterns recommends pre-assigning seats for meals and large presentations. "Early on in the pandemic, the Marriott coined the phrase 'sanctuary seating'; that really helps with the crossover of people and traffic flow," she says.

Pandemic compliance advisors can help planners navigate the logistics in advance to ensure smooth, safe events. 🔥