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From Boomers to Zoomers: Your Survival Guide to Five Generations of Event Guests

The event industry stands at an unprecedented crossroads. For the first time in modern history, five distinct generations are simultaneously active in the marketplace, each bringing fundamentally different expectations to the table. This convergence represents more than a demographic curiosity—it's a seismic shift that demands event professionals rethink everything from menu design and venue selection to marketing strategies and technology integration.



Editor's note: This is part two of our series exploring the changing consumer in catering and events. We've already explored consumer spending habits in the current economy, and in upcoming articles, we'll examine evolving beverage preferences, the increased focus on healthy choices with an emphasis on the growing impact of GLP-1 drugs, and the rising popularity of non-traditional events that break the mold of conventional gatherings.

The event industry stands at an unprecedented crossroads. For the first time in modern history, five distinct generations are simultaneously active in the marketplace, each bringing fundamentally different expectations to the table. This convergence represents more than a demographic curiosity—it's a seismic shift that demands event professionals rethink everything from menu design and venue selection to marketing strategies and technology integration.

The challenge extends beyond simply accommodating diverse preferences. Success requires creating cohesive experiences that resonate across generational lines while meeting each group's unique needs. It means moving beyond stereotypes and surface-level adjustments to develop a nuanced understanding of what drives each generation's choices and how to bridge seemingly incompatible expectations into unified, memorable experiences.

"That creates both challenges and opportunities for event organizers," said Rebecca DeLuca (Vice President of Destination Sales for the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority) in the 2026 Global Meetings & Events Forecast from American Express.

The demographic shift is impossible to ignore. Millennials now represent 35% of the workforce, followed by Gen X at 33%, Gen Z at 5%, and Baby Boomers at 25%, as noted by Kristin Banta (Kristin Banta Events) during Cater+Event 2026. The Silent Generation (sometimes called Traditionalists) still holds 2% of the workforce, while Gen Alpha is rapidly emerging as an influential demographic. According to the Skift Meetings Megatrends 2025 report, the average age of event attendees has dropped from 51 pre-pandemic to 45 today, signaling a significant shift in who's attending your events and what they expect when they get there.

"That's a lot of different generations, that's a lot of different consumer need," said Carey Kyler (Senior Director of Insights at AARP Services Inc.) during the 2026 National Restaurant Show session titled The Adults' Table: Winning Over the 50+ Diner.

For event professionals, this generational convergence presents both an unprecedented challenge and an extraordinary opportunity. The question isn't whether you should adapt—it's how to create experiences that resonate across generational lines without diluting your brand or exhausting your team in the process.

"With five generations in the workforce, it's crucial to consider the diverse needs of your attendees," said Gary McCreary (EVP Operations for GoGather).

The Silent Generation and Baby Boomers: don't count them out just yet

Let's start with the generations that have been setting the standard for decades. The Silent Generation (born 1928-1945) and Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) may not dominate workforce statistics anymore, but they control a disproportionate amount of spending power and shouldn't be dismissed as relics of a bygone era.

According to AARP, Americans aged 50 and older contribute a staggering \$12.5 trillion annually to the U.S. economy, and 90% of them own smartphones—so the assumption that older attendees are tech-averse is outdated at best. However, understanding how they engage with technology is crucial for event professionals looking to serve them effectively.

"Clients are very 'old school' and generally not great with technology," said Sebastien Centner (Founder & Creative Director at Eatertainment Events & Catering). "We expect them to be less open to more modern methods of communication and expect to work with us in person and via phone. They are less demanding in terms of timelines—responses, updates, etc.—but also take much longer to make decisions. From a food and beverage perspective they are highly traditional having grown up in war times and although not necessarily budget focused, they are value focused."

Baby Boomers share many similarities with the Silent Generation but present their own unique challenges.

"Interestingly they are very similar to the Silent Generation but their usage of technology makes them sometimes more challenging to manage as they use newer technology, but not necessarily well," said Centner. "For example, they like getting things by email but sometimes don't know how to download an attachment or sign a docu-sign, etc."

This generation is more budget-conscious than their predecessors and more demanding when it comes to pricing, sometimes struggling to understand the reality of rising costs that younger generations accept as inevitable.

"They still consider themselves closer to the Gen X sometimes in terms of what they think they want but when presented with it generally fall back to more traditional offerings," said Centner. Understanding this tendency helps event professionals guide them toward selections they'll genuinely enjoy rather than what they think they should want.

What these generations value most is quality service, comfort, and face-to-face interaction. They appreciate structured agendas, elegant venues, and attention to detail, thus demonstrating respect for their time and investment. When it comes to food, they lean toward familiar presentations with premium ingredients—think classic preparations executed flawlessly rather than deconstructed interpretations that prioritize style over substance.

"If an event feels disorganized or impersonal, I'm likely to skip it," said Linda Hurlley (Events Operations Director at Wendy Porter Events) in an article. "But when the logistics are smooth and the environment is welcoming, I'm all in."

"I've spent decades contributing to my industry, and when I attend an event, I want that experience to feel valued. When the environment is welcoming and the logistics are seamless, I'm not just attending—I'm fully present."

The dining experience for Boomers centers on comfort and conversation. They're twice as likely as younger generations to say noise levels matter, according to AARP, and they prioritize comfortable seating and adequate space between tables. This doesn't mean your events need to feel like country clubs—it means thoughtful design that allows for meaningful conversation without shouting over ambient noise or competing with overly energetic soundtracks.

Marketing to these generations requires a multi-channel approach that doesn't rely solely on social media. Email remains highly effective, as does direct mail for high-value events. When crafting messaging, focus on the tangible benefits and outcomes of attending. These guests want to know exactly what they're getting for their investment, and they respond to clear, professional communication that respects their intelligence and experience.

One often-overlooked opportunity with Boomer and Silent Generation attendees is their loyalty. Once they find an event, planner, or caterer they trust, they become devoted advocates. They're the guests who return year after year, refer colleagues, and provide constructive feedback that actually helps you improve. The key is earning that trust through consistency and genuine care—qualities that never go out of style regardless of generational trends.

"Older diners climb the loyalty ladder through habit, history, and feeling known," said Kyler, "and once they're there, they stay."

Generation X: the bridge between worlds

Gen X (born 1965-1980) occupies a fascinating middle ground in the generational spectrum. They remember life before the internet but adapted seamlessly to digital transformation. They value both traditional professionalism and modern convenience, making them perhaps the most flexible generation to serve—and paradoxically, the easiest to overlook in the conversation about generational differences.

"This is our biggest demographic of clients currently representing the decision makers and 'bill payers' for most of our corporate and social events," said Centner. "They are less demanding on the price front but have high expectations with regards to deliverables. They believe 'you get what you pay for' but they also 'expect to get what they paid for'."

This generation prioritizes efficiency and authenticity above all else. They want events that respect their time while delivering genuine value. They're comfortable with technology but don't expect it to replace human interaction entirely. When Gen X guests arrive at your event, they're looking for a well-organized experience that allows them to accomplish their goals—whether that's networking, learning, or celebrating—without unnecessary friction or performative elements that waste time.

"As a Gen Xer, I've always been a practical optimist. I show up to events for the real value—not the flash for flash's sake," said Wendy Porter (Founder and Chief Events Strategist at Wendy Porter Events) in an article.

Food-wise, Gen X initiated the healthful eating movement and championed the farm-to-table trend that now permeates the industry. They appreciate knowing where their food comes from and how it's prepared, but they don't need the story delivered with theatrical flair or overwrought presentations. Clear menu descriptions with relevant details about sourcing and preparation methods resonate well with this demographic, allowing them to make informed choices without feeling lectured or manipulated.



When it comes to food, the older generations lean toward familiar presentations with premium ingredients—think classic preparations executed flawlessly rather than deconstructed interpretations that prioritize style over substance. Photo courtesy Eatertainment Events & Catering

When marketing to Gen X, balance is essential. They engage with social media but also respond to email and value professional websites with comprehensive information. They research before committing but don't require the exhaustive digital presence that younger generations expect. Focus on demonstrating competence and reliability while showcasing your ability to deliver modern, relevant experiences that honor both tradition and innovation.

The opportunity with Gen X lies in their decision-making power. Many hold senior positions and control significant event budgets. They're also entering their peak earning years, making them valuable clients for both corporate and social events. Building relationships with Gen X clients often means long-term partnerships, as they value consistency and proven track records.

Perhaps most importantly, Gen X serves as a bridge between older and younger generations. They understand the expectations of Boomers and the Silent Generation because they worked alongside them for decades, but they're also attuned to the preferences of Millennials and Gen Z because they're raising them, managing them, and collaborating with them daily. This unique position makes them invaluable allies in creating truly multigenerational events that satisfy diverse expectations without feeling fragmented or disjointed.

"This is our low hanging fruit," said Lizzie Freier (Senior Director, Menu Research & Insights at Technomic) during the National Restaurant Show. "They have the money and they have the time."

Millennials: experience is everything

Millennials (born 1981-1996) fundamentally transformed what events mean and how success is measured. Now in their late 20s to early 40s, they're not emerging consumers—they're established professionals with families, mortgages, and substantial purchasing power. And they've brought their values-driven, experience-focused expectations with them, reshaping the industry in ways that continue to reverberate. Since 2016, Millennials constitute the major part of the labor force and are consequently the largest proportion of event attendees.

This generation doesn't just want to attend an event; they want to be part of something meaningful. They seek authentic local experiences, opportunities for genuine connection, and moments worth sharing with their networks. The Instagram-worthy aesthetic matters, but only if it's backed by substance. Performative sustainability or hollow gestures toward social responsibility get called out quickly and can damage your reputation faster than any negative review.

"I've got a lot on my plate—leading teams, raising kids, managing life—so my time is valuable," said Jaime McKenzie (Senior Events Manager and Tech Wizard for Wendy Porter Events) in an article. "If I'm investing it in your event, it needs to be worth it. I want meaningful connection, content that challenges me, and an experience that feels intentional from start to finish. Bonus points if it's innovative without being over-engineered."

"I'm not just showing up to attend—I'm showing up to engage. And when an event meets me at that intersection of curiosity, credibility, and connection, I'm all in."



For Millennials, high energy and high ambiance define the ideal event experience. They prioritize visual engagement and expect environments that feel dynamic and shareable. Photo courtesy Eatertainment Events & Catering

Today's consumers are inclined to buy into a brand after having attended an experiential activation. Positive memories and connections with brands and fellow attendees foster brand loyalty, so event professionals must figure out how to engage them authentically rather than simply creating photo opportunities that lack substance.

"Millennials and especially Gen Z are extremely socially and environmentally conscious. They're optimistic about the environment and they feel that they can actually make a difference," said Banta. "So, sustainability, inclusivity, and social responsibility always need to be on the forefront of our designs."

For food and beverage, Millennials have taken elevated expectations around customization and dietary accommodation to new heights. They expect you to handle vegan, gluten-free, and allergen-conscious requests seamlessly, not as special favors that require extensive back-and-forth or apologetic explanations. Action stations and interactive elements appeal to their desire for personalization and experience. They want to see their food prepared, understand the ingredients, and feel like they're part of the creation process rather than passive recipients of whatever the kitchen decides to serve.

"From a food perspective they are very well travelled, and very knowledgeable about food and beverage," said Centner, "but sometimes they have unrealistic expectations matched with a lack of time or willingness to discuss solutions."

Venue selection for Millennial-heavy events should prioritize unique spaces with character over traditional ballrooms. Repurposed warehouses, rooftop venues, and outdoor locations with flexible layouts create the backdrop for the experiences they crave. The space itself becomes part of the story they'll share with their networks, extending the life and reach of your event far beyond the actual date.

Marketing to Millennials requires authentic storytelling across multiple platforms. They research extensively before making decisions, reading reviews, comparing options, and investigating your values and practices. Your social media presence needs to be active and genuine, showcasing real events and real people rather than overly polished promotional content that feels manufactured. User-generated content and testimonials carry significant weight with this demographic, often outweighing traditional advertising or self-promotion.

They're comfortable with technology and have a positive outlook on AI. They're actively using artificial intelligence tools in their work and personal lives, but they're cautious about sharing personal data and expect transparency about how their information will be used. This comfort with technology doesn't mean they want everything automated—they still value human connection and personalized service, but they expect the logistics and administrative elements to be streamlined through smart technology.

Millennials are frugal and incredibly financially savvy, shaped by coming of age during the Great Recession. They're reaching major life milestones such as becoming parents and homeowners, and many are flexing their spending muscles on things like luxury travel and events. However, they greatly value experiences over material possessions and are willing to invest in events that align with their values and deliver genuine moments worth remembering.

The challenge with Millennials is meeting their high expectations while managing their budget consciousness. They want premium experiences but are also savvy about value. They'll invest in events that align with their values and deliver genuine experiences, but they expect transparency about pricing and won't pay for unnecessary frills.

While Millennials currently hold the economic reins in the event industry, a significant shift is underway that event professionals cannot afford to ignore. The relationship between Millennials and Gen Z represents more than a simple handoff—it's a fundamental reimaging of what events can and should be.

"Millennials constitute the major part of the labor force and are consequently the largest proportion of event attendees. They're providing the buying power, but Gen Z are reshaping the where, the why, and the how we're all thinking about things," said Banta. "They are reshaping the landscape actively."

This distinction is crucial for event professionals to understand. Millennials may be signing the checks and making the final decisions, but Gen Z is increasingly influencing those decisions—as junior team members whose preferences matter, as children whose input shapes family celebrations, and as emerging consumers whose expectations are setting new industry standards. The most successful event professionals are those who recognize that serving Millennials effectively now requires understanding Gen Z's influence on their choices. It's not enough to design for the generation with the budget; you must also appeal to the generation shaping the vision.

Generation Z: digital natives demanding authenticity

Gen Z (born 1997-2012) is rapidly becoming a dominant force in event attendance, with 73% having attended an event in the past six months—the highest rate of any generation—according to Julius Solaris' 2026 Event Industry Outlook & Trends. Currently aged 12-27, they're entering the workforce, planning their own events, and influencing family and corporate decisions.

"Gen Z is a little bit of a challenge right now," said Freier. "because they're cash strapped and they're dealing with unemployment."

This generation is bringing expectations shaped by growing up entirely in the digital age, where instant access to information and seamless technology integration are simply baseline expectations rather than impressive features.

"We call them the 'Foodie Kids' because of how much time they spend on social media looking at food ideas and trying out recipes on their own," said Centner. "This generation is likely peripherally involved in the event process and not a decision maker, but they have lots of opinions. Since they are not normally the one paying the bill or making the final decision, they are often a factor but not 'the factor'."

The relationships you build with Gen Z clients today will pay dividends for decades to come.

With Gen Z emerging as a significant audience segment—expected to make up 27% of the workforce and become the largest generation by 2035—traditional event formats are being reimagined to meet their expectations. To engage with this group, event professionals are focusing on interactive, memorable experiences that go beyond passive attendance.

"Gen Z have shown that they don't need a reason to celebrate," said Banta, "that unremarkable moments to others are remarkable to them and meaningful."

They host unconventional celebrations that are based in life causes, life stages, jobs, seasonal celebrations like Equinox and Summer solstice and Day of the Dead. They recognize the importance of their relationships with Galentine's Day and Friendsgiving. They celebrate non-traditionally with events such as dog parties, divorce parties, and everything in between.

"Literally everything becomes a cause for a party," said Banta, "They're pushing new ways to celebrate identities and to connect."

This generation expects technology to work flawlessly and immediately. Slow WiFi isn't just an inconvenience—it's a dealbreaker that can tank an otherwise well-executed event. Complicated check-in processes seem absurd when they can order anything online in seconds with a few taps on their phones. Mobile-first everything—from booking to check-in to room controls to checkout—isn't a nice-to-have; it's a baseline expectation. If your event requires paper forms or manual processes that could be digital, you're already behind in their eyes.

But here's where Gen Z surprises many event professionals: despite being digital natives, they crave genuine human connection. They spot scripted service and inauthenticity instantly, having been raised in an environment where influencer culture and performative behavior are omnipresent. They want real interactions with real people who share their values and treat them as individuals, not demographics or marketing targets. The key is delivering efficiency through technology while preserving opportunities for meaningful human engagement that feels spontaneous and genuine.

"I'm drawn to events that feel authentic, inclusive, and connected to a larger purpose," said Abby Staudt (Event and Marketing Coordinator for Wendy Porter Events) in an article. "Overproduced, one-directional experiences often miss the mark. Instead, our generation seeks opportunities to contribute, collaborate, and be part of something meaningful. If an event doesn't align with our values or reflect the way they engage with the world, we're unlikely to participate."

They view events as experiences that should feel dynamic and engaging, treating attendance as more of an event in itself rather than simply a functional gathering where they show up, sit down, and passively consume content.



Interactive and immersive experiences (such as a robot serving canapés) will continue gaining prominence as Gen Z becomes a larger portion of the client base. Photo courtesy Eatertainment Events & Catetring

Collaboration in all ways has changed how this generation intakes content. Consumers currently trust brand collaborations with influencers over those that don't have them. Events have become equally collaborative between hosts and attendees and their online communities, blurring the lines between who's creating the experience and who's consuming it.

Food preferences for Gen Z lean heavily toward visual appeal and shareability, but with substance behind the aesthetics. They're the most diverse generation in history, with nearly 50% identifying as BIPOC and almost 20% identifying as LGBTQ+, according to National Public Radio, which translates to expectations for inclusive menu options that go beyond token gestures. They want globally inspired cuisine, bold flavors, and food that tells a story—preferably one that aligns with their values around sustainability and social responsibility.

This generation is also driving the shift toward non-alcoholic options at events. With an estimated one-third of attendees no longer drinking, Gen Z expects sophisticated mocktails and zero-proof options that feel just as special as traditional cocktails. Creating intentional "sober spaces" and non-drinking social activities resonates strongly with this demographic, who view sobriety not as a limitation but as a lifestyle choice worthy of celebration and accommodation.

Marketing to Gen Z requires meeting them where they are—on social media platforms, through influencer partnerships, and via short-form video content that captures attention quickly and delivers value immediately. They trust peer recommendations and authentic reviews over traditional advertising or polished corporate messaging. Your brand values need to be clearly communicated and shown, not just stated in a mission statement buried on your website. They research your environmental practices, diversity initiatives, and community impact before deciding to engage, and they'll call out inconsistencies between what you say and what you do.

The opportunity with Gen Z is their loyalty once earned. They're passionate advocates for brands and experiences that align with their values. They'll share their positive experiences widely across their networks, creating organic marketing that money can't buy. But earning that loyalty requires genuine commitment to the values you espouse and consistent delivery of quality experiences.

Gen Alpha: the future is already here

Gen Alpha (born 2010–2024) may seem too young to consider seriously, but they're already influencing family event decisions and will soon be planning their own gatherings. Understanding their emerging preferences positions you for long-term success as this generation matures and begins wielding its own purchasing power.

Growing up with AI assistants, voice controls, and seamless technology integration as the norm rather than the exception, Gen Alpha expects personalization powered by data. They assume businesses know their preferences without repeatedly asking. They're accustomed to instant gratification and customized experiences as the default, not the exception or premium offering.

While it's too early to make definitive predictions about Gen Alpha's event preferences, observing their current behaviors and influences provides valuable insights. They're growing up in an era of unprecedented access to global cultures, diverse perspectives, and instant information.

They're being raised by Millennials who prioritize experiences and Gen X grandparents who value authenticity, creating a unique blend of expectations that will likely push the industry in new directions we're only beginning to imagine.

Balancing generational expectations without compromise

The real challenge isn't understanding each generation in isolation—it's serving them simultaneously. Your event might host Baby Boomers wanting traditional service, Millennials seeking authentic experiences, and Gen Z expecting seamless technology. All at once. All with the same level of excellence.

This is where many event professionals feel overwhelmed, but it's also where the greatest opportunities exist. The key is identifying common ground while offering flexibility for individual preferences.

"If we understand the audience that we're communicating with, what's influencing them, and what they're responding to, we can effectively adapt our event design to create impressions by providing relevant content tailored to the attendees that they will respond to," said Banta.

Planning Events for Gen X vs Millennials vs Gen Z			
	 Gen X	 Millennials	 Gen Z
 Event Marketing	Traditional Email Channels	Social Media Heavy	Short-Form Video
 Communication Style	Email Updates	Push Notifications	Real-Time Social
 Registration Timing	Early Planners	Last-Minute Decisions	YOLO Decisions
 Registration Form	In depth	Max 3 screens	Name, email, payment
 Session Length	60 Minutes Acceptable	30 Minutes Maximum	20 Minutes Maximum
 Content Type	Formal Presentations	Mixed Media	Short Videos
 Learning Style	Lecture Based	Interactive Workshops	Peer-to-Peer Learning
 Type of Speakers	Industry Experts	Peer Presenters	Content Creators
 Content Access	In-Person Only	Hybrid Access	On-Demand Expected
 Event Format	Traditional Conference Style	Hybrid Options Available	Microevents Preferred
 Schedule Structure	Fixed Agenda	Flexible Options	Self-Directed
 Engagement	Structured Networking	Interactive Sessions	Constant Participation
 Activations	Product Demonstrations	Experiential Learning	Instagram-Worthy Moments
 Networking Style	Business Card Exchange	App-Based Matching	Social Media Connections
 Venue Preference	Traditional Hotels	Unique Spaces	Instagram-Worthy Locations
 Social Program	Evening Receptions	Activity-Based Networking	Festival-Style Events
 Food & Beverage	Traditional Meals	Health Conscious	Diverse/Custom Options
 Alcohol	Open Bar Expected	Balanced Options	Mocktails Preferred
 Wellness Elements	Not Priority	Some Interest	Highly Important
 Sustainability	Nice to Have	Important Factor	Deal Breaker

Information courtesy Julius Solaris and Boldpush

Start with universal principles that resonate across generations: genuine hospitality, quality execution, attention to detail, and respect for guests' time and investment. Every generation appreciates being treated well, even if their definition of "well" varies slightly.

Then layer in flexibility that allows for personalization without creating operational chaos. Offer both traditional plated dinners and interactive food stations so guests can choose their preferred dining style. Include comprehensive dietary options—from traditional choices to plant-based alternatives—ensuring everyone finds something appealing without feeling like an afterthought. Provide structured networking sessions for those who appreciate organization alongside casual mingling opportunities for those who prefer organic connections. Create quiet spaces for conversation alongside energetic social areas for those who thrive in high-energy environments. Use technology to enhance efficiency while preserving human touchpoints for those who value them.

Venue selection requires similar thoughtfulness and strategic planning. Choose spaces that offer both intimate areas for conversation and open spaces for mingling, allowing guests to self-select their comfort zone. Consider acoustics carefully, using design elements like acoustic panels or separated sections to manage noise levels without sacrificing energy or making the space feel sterile. Provide varied seating options—from traditional tables to lounge areas to standing cocktail spaces—allowing guests to choose their comfort level based on their preferences and physical needs. Prioritize physical comfort with ergonomic seating and adequate space to move, ensuring accessibility for all attendees regardless of age or mobility.

Technology integration should enhance rather than replace human interaction, serving as a tool that empowers your team rather than a replacement for genuine hospitality. Use mobile apps and digital tools to streamline logistics and provide information, but ensure staff are available for guests who prefer personal assistance or have questions that technology can't answer. Make sure websites are easy to navigate with intuitive design that doesn't require a degree in computer science to understand. Offer both digital and traditional communication channels for pre-event information and post-event follow-up, recognizing that different generations have different preferences for how they receive and process information.

Cross-generational events create unexpected opportunities

While much of the conversation around generational differences focuses on challenges and potential pitfalls, significant opportunities exist for event professionals who can bridge generational divides and create experiences that bring diverse age groups together in meaningful ways.

"Guests come to feel included, they come to interact," said Banta. "They want to walk away with memories that they can't get anywhere else. If we get this wrong, they leave unimpressed, but if we get this right, they become brand advocates and loyal fans and repeat attendees. This is the opportunity that we have with events today, which is pretty exciting."

Consider programming that explicitly leverages generational diversity as a strength rather than treating it as an obstacle to overcome. Panel discussions featuring speakers from different age groups offer varied viewpoints on industry topics, demonstrating that wisdom and innovation aren't confined to any single generation. Mentorship programs connecting experienced professionals with emerging talent create lasting relationships that benefit both parties and strengthen your community. Collaborative workshops mixing age groups spark innovation through diverse thinking, combining the experience and institutional knowledge of older generations with the fresh perspectives and technological fluency of younger ones.

“As you get older you realize that you are not in the same age group or mindset of your customers, so you have to keep rethinking; and value the input of your younger staff,” said Tom McDowell (The Pavilion Catering and Connecticut Wedding Group founder and 2024 Michael Roman Lifetime Achievement Award recipient). “I’m excited to see what the younger generation is going to bring, not only what they have for ideas, but what they have for expectations.”

Food and beverage offerings provide another opportunity for cross-generational appeal that satisfies diverse palates without feeling disjointed. Elevated comfort food—classic dishes prepared with premium ingredients and modern techniques—satisfies traditional tastes while appealing to younger guests’ appreciation for quality and craftsmanship. Offering both classic cocktails and innovative mocktails ensures everyone finds something they enjoy, whether they’re a Boomer who appreciates a perfectly made Old Fashioned or a Gen Z guest who’s embracing the sober-curious movement.

Venue design can facilitate cross-generational interaction through varied spaces that accommodate different preferences simultaneously without feeling fragmented. A well-designed event might include a quiet lounge area for conversation where Boomers and Gen X can connect, an energetic bar area with music that appeals to Millennials and Gen Z, interactive food stations that draw crowds of all ages, and traditional seating for those who prefer it. Guests naturally gravitate to spaces that suit their preferences while remaining part of the larger event, creating organic opportunities for cross-generational interaction.

The business opportunity in serving multiple generations extends beyond individual events and into long-term client relationships. Establishing yourself as an event professional who successfully navigates generational differences positions you as a valuable partner for organizations grappling with the same challenges in their workforces and customer bases. Corporate clients particularly value this expertise as they work to engage diverse teams and create inclusive cultures that honor different perspectives and working styles.

Five generations demand one unforgettable experience

As we look toward the future, generational shifts will continue accelerating at a pace that demands constant adaptation. By 2030, Millennials and Gen Z will comprise 75% of the workforce. Gen Alpha will be entering their teenage years and exerting increasing influence over family decisions and beginning to plan their own events. The Silent Generation will largely exit the workforce, and Baby Boomers will continue transitioning to retirement, though their influence as consumers will remain significant for years to come.

“The world is aging up,” said Merrell. “We’re living longer and change is our only constant.”

These shifts don’t mean abandoning everything that’s worked in the past or throwing out decades of accumulated wisdom. The fundamentals of excellent hospitality—genuine care for guests, attention to detail, quality execution, and creating memorable experiences—remain constant across generations and time periods. What changes is how these fundamentals are expressed and delivered, adapting to meet evolving expectations while maintaining core values.

The most successful event professionals will be those who develop range—the ability to adapt service style and event design to match different generational expectations while maintaining their core identity and values. This requires ongoing learning, willingness to experiment with new approaches, and genuine curiosity about what different generations value and why they make the choices they do.

It also requires letting go of assumptions and stereotypes that limit your ability to see clients and guests as individuals. Not every Millennial wants an Instagram moment, and not every Baby Boomer prefers traditional formats. Individual preferences vary widely within generations, and the most effective approach is treating each client and guest as an individual while understanding broader generational trends that inform but don't dictate their choices.

"We often stereotype certain demographics and make assumptions about their needs, wants, and attributes," said Austin-based entrepreneur and marketing specialist Chad Price in an article for BizBash "Often, there are more similarities between different generations than we might realize, and finding common ground can help to forge connections between a diverse range of people and facilitate a successful event. Look for shared priorities, passions, and purposes in the people attending the event, and be sure to highlight these."

Investing in your team's development is crucial for navigating generational diversity successfully and building a sustainable business. Training that goes beyond technical skills to include communication styles, cultural competency, and adaptability prepares your staff to serve diverse guests effectively and with confidence.

Creating a multigenerational team brings varied perspectives and natural understanding of different age groups, allowing you to tap into authentic insights rather than relying solely on research and assumptions.

"The arrival of social media and now AI has accelerated the need for caterers and event planners to stay ahead of the curve," said Centner. "Event professionals are now relied upon by clients not only for suggesting and finding the best new dishes, activities, and venues, but they're also competing with those same clients who have access to resources they've never had before. Imagine sourcing a venue in a different city before AI helped point you in the right direction or coming up with dishes around a specific theme or season without the instant inspiration that technology now provides. Since social media has become the primary information tool for younger generations, event professionals must take on the role of guide, explaining why some things clients see on Instagram may not be suitable for their event due to logistics, budget, or other practical considerations."

The five-generation marketplace isn't a problem to solve; it's an opportunity to demonstrate that exceptional hospitality transcends age, adapting to meet diverse needs while maintaining the core values that define your brand and your commitment to creating memorable experiences.

"Interactive and immersive experiences will continue gaining prominence as Gen Z becomes a larger portion of the client base," notes Centner. "People want to be part of your event, not just passive spectators watching from the sidelines.

This applies to event production itself—think immersive event spaces that transform throughout the evening—and this same phenomenon applies to catering, where guests want to participate, adding their own personal touches at food stations, interacting with servers and chefs, and feeling like co-creators of their experience rather than simply consumers."



Interactive and immersive experiences will continue gaining prominence as Gen Z becomes a larger portion of the client base. Think: immersive event spaces that transform throughout the evening. Photo courtesy Eatertainment Events & Catering

The opportunity is enormous for those willing to do the work. As the event landscape continues evolving, the ability to navigate generational differences while maintaining your core values and delivering consistent excellence will separate the thriving businesses from those struggling to stay relevant.

Start by truly listening to your clients and guests across all age groups. Ask questions. Observe behaviors. Test new approaches. Build a team that reflects generational diversity and brings authentic insights to your planning process. Invest in training that goes beyond technical skills to include communication styles and cultural competency.

Most importantly, remember that behind every generational label is an individual with unique preferences, expectations, and stories. The data and trends provide valuable context, but your success ultimately depends on your ability to see each client and guest as a person deserving of genuine care and attention—regardless of when they were born.

"I believe the future of event planning lies in embracing diversity and crafting experiences that connect everyone," said Jaye Harrison (Owner and Founder of Parties Made Personal) in the BizBash article. "But, above all, it's about creating a sense of belonging, making everyone feel like the event was tailored just for them."