How free Wi-Fi is changing the trade show industry

By Sam Smith

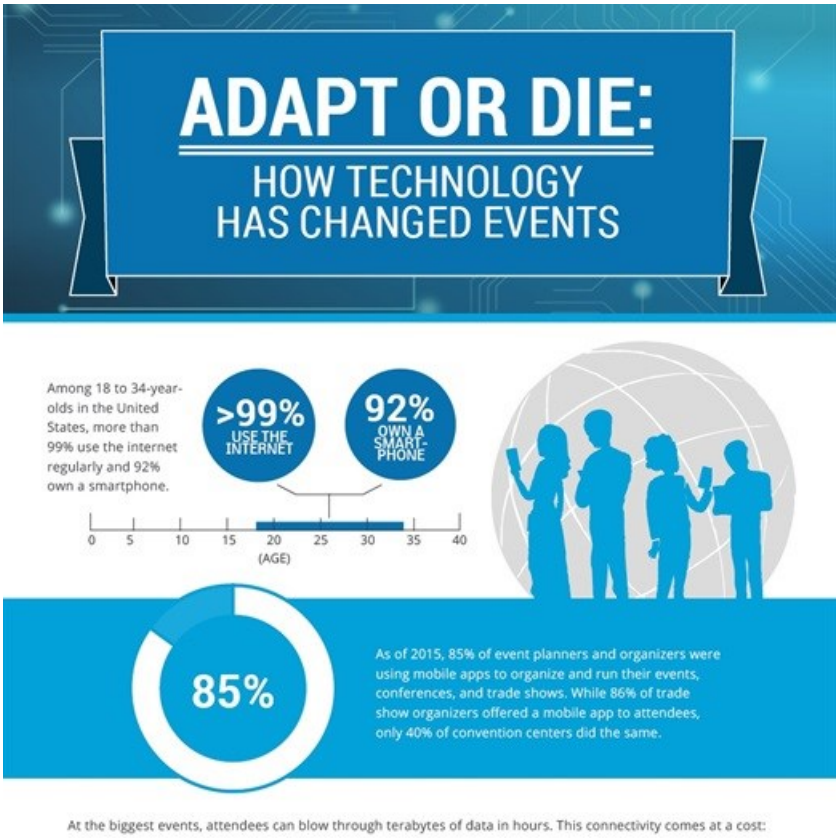
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Technology changes the way the world works, that's a fact. It revolutionised communication with the radio, made entertainment widespread with the television, and gave everyone access to information and a voice with the internet. It has become a basic necessity for the majority, with 92% of youths owning a smartphone.

But what does that mean for rest of the world? Specifically, what does that mean for businesses?

As of 2015, 85% of event planners used mobile phone apps to organise or run events, conferences, and exhibitor trade shows. Young people and business professionals alike are using technology to simplify their daily and professional lives.

With a push of a button, you can invite thousands of entrepreneurs and executives to a local venue to showcase their business and their merchandise, or even to promote yourself and your company.



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At larger events, like the North American Auto Show, which hosted 14,640 attendees, that can mean massive data usages. Some 3.06TB (terabytes) of data was used, costing the conference roughly $2 million.

In other words, there's a high demand for internet at events, specifically high-speed internet. After all, the world runs on social media.

But would that $2 million have been a bad investment? If it was used at the venue by the individuals in attendance, that means tens of thousands of tweets, Facebook posts, and SnapChat messages by individuals that, presumably, paid for attendance.

That's a lot of advertisement.

If it wasn't a profitable venture to have Wi-Fi available for use by attendees and customers, why would so many businesses promote it as part of their services offered?

Let's look at the Las Vegas Convention Center, for example. It's been providing Wi-Fi as of January 2017. It has a price tag of $18 million, for 2,100 Wi-Fi access points, and a capacity of near 100,000 people.

At a glance, $18 million may seem like a lot, but it likely pales in comparison to the profits gained from making the venue more attractive. Because that's what services like free Wi-Fi do, they make venues more attractive to individuals. Events like exhibitor trade shows, which rely on attendance for a lot of their profits, can only benefit from having an attractive venue.

What about the apps?

But what about the apps that make all this possible? Quickly creating events, mass-marketing, and connections all from the palm of your hand can't be the only reasons so many businesses use them. What are the reasons behind the preference?

Professionals have stated that the top five benefits of mobile apps are:

1. Attendee convenience
2. Attendee engagement
3. Save printing costs
4. Gather data and measure ROI (return on investment)
5. Sponsorship opportunities

The two top ones to note are attendee engagement and sponsorship opportunities. Getting sponsorships for your event can save you lots of money, especially if the sponsor offers to take on some of the financial burden. Drinks, food, and more could be waived off if you have the right sponsor.

Attendee engagement is the most important, however. If your attendees are engaged, they're more likely to think favourably of your event, and thus your business. They'll be sending social media posts to all their friends about it, commenting online, and getting shared or liked, ultimately driving up brand awareness.

That's tens of thousands of ads that you didn't even have to pay for.

ABOUT SAM SMITH

Sam Smith is co-founder, president and CEO of Network Events, founded in 1999. Smith, a leading executive in the exposition industry, has been a highly rated speaker at major industry events and has provided sales and marketing consulting and training to top associations and private exposition management organisations. Network Events is a health/wellness event development, marketing and management firm. www.networkevents.tv.

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