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Rethinking the modern tech event



The technology events industry has spent years discussing hybrid formats, usually in terms of physical attendance versus digital participation. But another dimension is worth exploring: where events take place and how the location itself shapes the experience.

Would you hold a keynote a few steps from a roller coaster? A small but growing group of tech events says yes, and not everyone in the room is comfortable with it.

This setting challenges a familiar assumption about technology conferences: that serious business belongs in conventional exhibition halls, hotels and purpose-built conference venues.

At first glance, a theme park might seem an unlikely setting for executive keynotes, technology demonstrations and business negotiations. But several events are testing this model.

They are exploring whether a distinctive location can improve engagement, strengthen professional relationships and make an event more memorable. And they are very successful at it.

It remains a niche approach compared with established technology events such as CES, Web Summit and Mobile World Congress. However, these examples are worth exploring further because they challenge the idea that professional credibility depends on a traditional setting.

The opportunity is to make the location part of the proposition

The strongest argument for theme park events is differentiation. Technology conferences compete for the same executives, sponsors, exhibitors, and budgets.

Many offer similar formats, including keynote presentations, exhibition floors, breakout sessions, and networking receptions. A distinctive venue creates another way to stand

out.

CloudFest offers a well-established example. Now held at Europa-Park in Germany, the event combines industry sessions and an exhibition with social activities, parties, and access to selected attractions.

Its organisers position it as a cloud-industry festival rather than a conventional conference. The event has taken place at Europa-Park since 2012 (at Phantasialand in 2011, and at a more traditional location before that).

MSP GLOBAL, a CloudFest brand, follows a similar approach at PortAventura World in Spain. Its programme brings managed service providers (MSPs), technology vendors and channel partners together for business sessions, networking and entertainment.

The location supports its ambition to create a community-focused experience in an industry where partnerships and relationships drive growth.

Attendance figures and positive feedback alone do not demonstrate that a theme park venue produces better commercial results

Another example is **Javaland**, which had 1,500 attendees this year. Held at Europa-Park, it offered access to a few park attractions along with technical training sessions.

This shows the strategy can attract both commercial technology ecosystems and developer communities.

Attendees share an experience beyond the conference programme, creating additional opportunities to interact outside formal meetings. A memorable experience can boost attendee satisfaction and strengthen community ties. It can also give sponsors more opportunities to connect with audiences in informal settings.

However, organisers should measure these

outcomes. Attendance figures and positive feedback alone do not demonstrate that a theme park venue produces better commercial results.

The downside is that novelty does not guarantee value

Attendee costs could rise when you factor in accommodation, transit, flights, and registration fees. The biggest challenge is that hosting the event away from a central commercial hub makes it less convenient for nearby executives to drop in briefly or balance sessions with their daily workloads.

Because tech buyers attend events to inspect products, track trends, and network, overemphasising entertainment could backfire. It can cause both sponsors and attendees to doubt the conference's professional value.

Organisers need to design the experience around their audience, rather than expect the audience to adapt to the venue

Different audiences react differently to the same surroundings. While top executives in regulated businesses may prefer a more private, quiet environment, developers might enjoy a more informal, communal setting.

Some guests may also not want to be surrounded by theme park attractions and noise, or may have accessibility needs.

Organisers need to design the experience around their audience, rather than expect the audience to adapt to the venue.

There is also a distinction between hosting an event at a theme park and holding the main conference inside a convention centre located within a theme park resort.

The latter retains the infrastructure required for professional events while making the wider

destination part of the experience. Read the full event description before making a judgement.

Does the location undermine credibility?

Because theme parks can be associated with entertainment, leisure, and families, some C-level executives view the opposition as cultural.

These associations may initially seem at odds with the seriousness of executive strategy meetings or technology investment decisions.

But does a professional event need a conventional setting to be taken seriously? **Gartner IT Symposium/Xpo** illustrates a more conservative variation of the model.

Its Orlando conference programme includes an evening event at Disney's Hollywood Studios, where attendees can access attractions and entertainment after the main business sessions. The park extends the networking experience.

Organisers can preserve a rigorous business programme while using the location to encourage informal interaction

Organisers can preserve a rigorous business programme while using the location to encourage informal interaction. The objective should be to complement the professional content.

This year, MSP Global attracted internationally renowned keynote speakers such as Ralph Echemendia, aka **The Ethical Hacker**, who launched icorIQ and its Aegis Score, and cyberpsychologist Prof. Dr. Mary Aiken, author of *The Cyber Effect*.

Hybrid events are also about

place

The next chapter of hybrid event design should consider how location shapes the experience. The right choice depends on the audience, the event's objectives, and the value attendees receive for their time and money.

I'm all for innovation and trying new concepts, but I also understand that you can only go so far with event space. Growth may be limited unless you change the venue.

CloudFest, MSP GLOBAL, and JavaLand show that theme park settings can support serious technology communities and professional programmes.

Gartner's approach shows how organisers can introduce the same idea without moving the main conference.

Take the work seriously, not yourselves

I've said before that technology should impact people, not merely impress them. A theme park venue is a fair test of that idea. The setting might impress, but the outcomes have to make difference.

From my point of view, location is part of the message, and a theme park sends a clear one: take the work seriously, not yourselves!



In an industry that encourages companies to challenge established thinking, event organisers should be willing to examine their own conventions

That setting suits relationship-driven communities like hosting and managed services, where many partnerships are built face to face. It also suits an industry that says it wants to attract the next generation.

I'd stop wondering why a theme park and start asking who is in the room and what gets done there. If the right people show up and leave with real partnerships, the backdrop is doing its job. In an industry that encourages companies to challenge established thinking, event organisers should be willing to examine their own conventions.

Sometimes the most useful innovation is as simple as choosing a different place to bring people together.

Does the location help people learn, connect, and do business more effectively? If it does, the unconventional setting has a purpose. If it does not, the novelty is unlikely to justify the cost.

We are here to inspire the next generation, and for that, the world needs disruptive thinkers and visionaries willing to step out of their comfort zone.

Will more industries follow CloudFest, MSP Global, and Javaland, or will theme-park convention centre events stay a delightful exception? I'll be watching!