

Cognitive Event Spaces

How to design a successful meeting environment

For exhibitors and event organizers, making an impression at a trade show or conference is easy. Making a positive, lasting, and inspiring one takes a bit more effort. Every aspect of a show's design—from physical structure to lighting—influences attendee experience.

While logistics and brand reinforcement are important considerations, satisfying human needs first empowers all participants to achieve the goals that brought them to the event in the first place.

1 Create open space

Giving the appearance of greater space—whether using plants, projections, or increased walkway width—frees the brain to focus on learning and interaction.



Use clean, simple lines, and reduce environmental clutter.

2 Vary the environment

Frame distinct areas by color and presentation style to account for differences in attendee profiles and the brain's need for balance.



Choose high ceilings when possible, but watch for signage and rigging that might bring down the visual space.

5 Optimize lighting for outcome

Uplighting and LED fixtures create mood and focus attention; adjust lighting schemes to influence attendee mood.



While bright light can increase the perceived size of a room, it is also unfavorable on faces and can lead to harsh interpersonal judgments.

3 Create central gathering places

People migrate to where they'll find friends and colleagues. Town squares, lounges, and hashtags help attendees connect with ease.

4 Provide novelty

New technology—such as video mapping and large touch screens or other interactive activities—activates the senses.

Seamless panels and broad screens attract attention by contrasting saturated environments with clean, bright content.



6 Create user-friendly wayfinding systems

Alleviate commonplace navigational angst with simple, comprehensive systems that cross-reference people and presentations.

7 Keep up on emerging technologies

Once a breakaway technology, mobile event apps are now essential to major gatherings. Keep a lookout for tech that affects design and experience.

9 Pull the outdoors in

Studies show greenery and natural settings—even projected ones—promote concentration and reduce stress. Real outdoor seating areas do so even more.

10 Provide spaces for fun and relaxation

The mind, like any muscle, fatigues over time. Environments that provide opportunity for effortless attention enhance mental recovery.

8 Evoke emotion with space

Lighting, color, sound, scent, and architecture can all help produce and shape specific experiences and moods.



The brain prefers curves. Stage-sets, props, and video mapping can all be leveraged in order to achieve a pleasing atmosphere.