



**Live  
Union**

Re-imagining  
formats

# Format disruption

The sun's coming up, you're in a nightclub, ready to dance. But you've not been there all night, you've just arrived. That's because you're at Morning Gloryville, the "conscious clubbing" experience that turns the chaos of a nightclub into a morning exercise class, energising people for the day ahead.

Morning Gloryville is indicative of the innovation and creativity that's re-imagining traditional event formats, giving people the unexpected and immersive experiences they crave. And this isn't just happening for consumers, it's true of business events too.

NewCo is one such example: in a radical twist, rather than delegates travelling to a conference venue to hear from speakers, they go to the speakers' workplaces. NewCo's San Francisco event saw 2,000 people travelling to 150 companies across three days to hear presentations.

At Live Union, we're constantly drawing inspiration from the wider event world, exploring new ways to meet the needs of today's business audience. Below, we explore six formats to consider and give you our view on which will work best for you.

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# Experience rich audiences

Alighting on the right format for your event means starting with a deep understanding of the audience themselves.

In our report **Anatomy of a 2018 Delegate** we highlighted the five things today's experience rich audience most value:

## **Personalisation**

Tailored experiences

## **Brain-friendly**

Optimal learning

## **Connections**

Effective, efficient networking

## **Entertaining**

Surprising, fun interactions

## **Shareable**

Content for delegates' own communications

New formats are delivering on these expectations as well as creating the right experience of your brand.

# ① Unconference

**A format without a set agenda that puts the audience firmly in control.**

If you want delegates to be engaged, giving them complete control of the agenda is a great place to start. Participant-driven events, known as unconferences, tap into the passion of their audience. This format comes straight out of Silicon Valley, where tech audiences bored of traditional conferences seized control of agendas.

The event starts with attendees choosing subjects that will be explored at the event, brainstorming themes, individually electing their favourites and constructing an agenda. Writing down topics and sticking them onto a wall for all to see might sound simple, but is a powerful way of putting the agenda firmly in attendees' hands.

Many variants of unconferences exist but the principle is always the same: user-generated formats, highly participatory, the content provided by the audience. Although the unconference format is loose there is always an agreed set of rules, such as everyone presenting or facilitating in some way. And, participants are encouraged to share outputs online, sparking participation across geographies.

## When to use

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Perfect for passionate self-starters, and for when discussion is more valuable than controlling the message.

## ② Big Debate

**Putting discussion at the heart of an event.**

Today's event audience want a voice. They value conversational experiences that put them at the heart of things. If a traditional conference is a monologue from stage to audience, the Big Debate ensures as many voices as possible are heard.

Created by Live Union, the Big Debate format combines dramatic spatial design with smart use of digital channels and strong facilitation. The dramatic debating chamber architecture was first used as the epicentre of a senior partners' event for a professional services firm. The unconventional design put contribution, collaboration and connection at the center of the experience.

The Big Debate can be used on any scale from 20 – 200 participants. Topics are typically crowd-sourced in advance. Short stimulus films, microphone balls and voting via event apps add to the atmosphere of open debate.

Live Union offer six different configurations of the Big Debate. **Drop us a line** if you'd like more info on this highly participative format.

### When to use

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Ideal for senior internal audiences who value frank discussions about your business and marketplace

## ③ Active Learning

### *Focussing on brain-friendly environments.*

From office design to education, huge strides have been taken in understanding the physical settings and engagement techniques that help people absorb and retain ideas.

Open learning environments replace passive lecture-based formats with more fluid spaces that encourage active engagement. A campfire setting, for example, might see small groups exploring a topic in an intimate setting. Whilst augmented reality or a touch screen experience allows people to take their own journey through content and at their own pace.

Live Union created just such an experience for the leadership of a retail bank. The use of cardboard cubes as both seats and signage allowed us to quickly re-format the space to meet the needs of the audience. Huddle spaces, genius bars, workshopping areas and pop-up stages provided the architecture on which to run brain-friendly facilitation methods. Flipped classroom techniques saw delegates being asked to absorb content prior to the event, using the face-to-face time to build on what they'd learnt. Whilst 'WonderWalks' saw delegates pairing up to share ideas on strolls outside the venue.

Open learning environments recognise that in the knowledge economy the most valuable part of an event is often the opportunity for the audience to spark off one another.

### When to use



Ideal for audiences who value collaborative environments, and for situations in which you have a wide spectrum of content

## ④ Campus

***A festival approach: audiences personalise their own journey through diverse content.***

Pioneered by large user events, such as Oracle Open World, the campus format places emphasis on experiential zones over presentation spaces. Campus style events recognize that today's delegate wants to be able to personalise their experience.

Successful campus events are informed by both museum and festival design; individual experiences curated to give a coherent narrative. Presented content is often scheduled at pop-up stages, the more informal setting allowing delegates to drop in and out of a session. Keynote speeches are live streamed from the plenary space to the campus, giving people a choice of how they consume the content.

A major European payments event was re-imagined by Live Union as a campus-style event. Four navigable zones brought to life the future of payments merging live and digital experiences. Thirty interactive partner experiences, including concept cars and future retail experiences, were combined with guided tours, pop-up stages and fringe content allowing delegates to tailor their own journey.

There's no doubt that today's delegate wants control over how they spend their time at an event. A campus format that achieves both a personalised experience and great networking is a powerful form of engagement.

### When to use

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Ideal for audiences who want to personalise their own experience, and for brands with access to rich experiential content

## ⑤ Connection Rich

**Technology and spatial design combine to offer a sophisticated intelligent networking experience.**

Today's audience is the first to value connections over content. And, where in the past networking was incredibly inefficient, matchmaking apps now enable us to spark the right connections. Take Web Summit, which has grown from 150 attendees to more than 22,000 through the power of bringing like-minded people together. The event now employs statisticians and data scientists to create algorithms that optimise connections for delegates. Often this is focused on introducing start-ups and VCs – the potential value of smart connections is clear.

Technology is though only half the story. At C2, “where commerce meets creativity”, attendees are compelled to leave their comfort zone to connect with colleagues and peers. 2017 really was a chair-raising experience. Guests were seated at round tables when they found themselves lifted many feet above the ground, leaving participants in a suspended circle with nothing to do but talk.

Oracle asked Live Union to design an experience that created new connections within their sales organisation. A matchmaking app saw people self-profiling to trigger connections, but it was the creative format - christened the Oracle Jam Sessions - that energised the behaviour. A band jammed live throughout the event, demonstrating the value of cross-pollination. Speed presentations injected further energy that fed into intensive collaboration sessions between newly connected employees.

### When to use

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The ideal format when delegates value making connections over pure content

## ⑥ Retreat

**Taking delegates off-grid to open minds and change behaviours.**

Nothing inspires like fresh air. It's an ethos that has spawned a fast-growing trend for taking events off-grid. It's less about the great outdoors than the benefits that come with it - better conversations, time to think in a less pressured setting and an enhanced sense of team.

Organisations are waking up to the power of leaving the office behind. Superdry held its global store managers meeting in a festival setting near Glastonbury. Some 300 store managers shared ideas, workshopped in circus tents and discussed their roles around campfires before retiring to teepees.

The Do Lectures is another conference in an unusual setting. Tents on a farm in deepest Wales is about as far removed from the traditional plenary hall as you can get, and this format generates great energy. The event hails itself as "a safe space to ask better questions".

For businesses that really want to change the rules of engagement, who want to use events to go deeper, and have people think and behave differently, a retreat demands consideration.

### When to use

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When you have an audience prepared to commit and content that can be brought to life in unconventional locations

## ⑦ TED Style

### *Harnessing the power of incredible presentations.*

TED is the blueprint for amazing presentation content, performances you can binge-watch like the latest Netflix blockbuster series. Today's successful business leaders understand the power of live to get noticed and communicate their message. They also know that audience expectations have never been higher. If you're demanding delegate engagement with a presentation-led format, you need to be sure your speakers will meet a very high standard.

Powerful presentations take craft, passion and time - TED take months to hone narratives and craft stage skills. Supporting your speakers to succeed in a TED format means being prepared to offer support in writing, designing and presentation coaching. It also means embracing the creative opportunities for screen content, whether that's super-wide formats, live data or non-linear content. Presentation-led formats should never be seen as an easy option. To deliver this format takes real commitment from presenters and their support team but the results can have an incredible impact on audiences.

### When to use

When you have speakers with the talent and drive to deliver great content and an audience hungry for thought-leadership

# Endless possibilities

Like all areas of the experience economy, business events are re-imagining how they engage their audience. This report introduces some of the event architectures we're passionate about, but the combination of experience rich audiences and brands embracing the power of live, means there's amazing creative potential to generate new event formats.

Disrupting traditional formats to find the right one for your event means getting under the skin of your audience and identifying what they really value – who knows where this might take you.

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*Amazing creative potential to generate new event formats*

IDEAS  
START  
HERE

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