

EXPERIENCE INTELLIGENCE

BY GPJ

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From invites that ignite pre-party buzz, to airports and expos as living storyscapes, and AI tempered by human reality, today's experiences are about moments you can feel, share, and carry along the journey.



Invitations should be inviting



Terminals transform into immersive brand theaters



AI's big promises met a misaligned reality at SXS



MWC's overload demands clarity, not clutter



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Invitations should be **inviting**

Trend spotted by **Britt Meyer**

Digital invite platforms are growing as communities ache for gatherings and commitment.

Digital invite platforms are [having a breakout moment](#) with [Partiful](#), [Posh](#), and [Luma](#) leading the charge. After Evite and Facebook Events defined earlier eras of online invitation, the new players are creating a social experience in the invite itself—allowing attendees to talk to each other, create a group photo album, and connect even after the party is over. Beyond managing RSVPs, these platforms package [logistics, identity, and discovery](#) into one social product with a clear outcome instead of an endless scroll.

01



What it means

By adapting invites to how younger users actually organize (texts, links, etc.) rather than email or Facebook, these digital invite platforms have become their own social experience before the event even starts. What was once ubiquitous and static, has now become social and alive filling the need to meet Gen Z and Millennials off social media.

Key Takeaway | The rise of these digital invite platforms reflects a broader shift from ‘invitation as utility’ to ‘invitation as culture’. How you’re invited is the first touchpoint to any gathering, and the rise of these platforms are hitting the mark for creating commitment and expressing taste.



Terminals transform into **immersive brand theaters**

Trend spotted by **Taylor Tartt**

Brands are transforming the terminal and converting travel stress into a sensory spectacle.

The traditional airport experience is being dismantled. As [luxury travel sees a massive resurgence](#), terminals are repositioning as lifestyle hubs, where the journey is as significant as the final destination. Brands are building "Story Stages," immersive spaces designed to disrupt the boredom of non-stop queuing—from [Delta's](#) Olympic-themed takeover to [Netflix's](#) gold bar luggage belts, and a myriad of beauty brands launching global pop-ups. By leveraging the unique psychology of the traveler—someone who has cleared their schedule, finished their "chores" (TSA), and is seeking a dopamine spike pre-flight—brands are seeing up to a [70% increase](#) in return and converting transient travelers into lifelong advocates.

02



What it means

The airport is the last frontier of focused, [high-intent](#) physical dwell time. In a world of digital fragmentation, the airport offers a rare environment where consumers are physically present, relatively idle, and in a "treat yourself" mindset. By occupying the time between arrival and take-off, brands aren't just selling product: they're becoming part of the traveler's personal narrative.

Key Takeaway | Design experiential environments that transform idle moments into immersive, continuous brand journeys. By using integrated narratives, lifestyle-driven touchpoints, and activation corridors, brands turn audiences from passive dwellers into active participants—where aspiration meets real-world context and every interaction becomes a live, sensory extension of the brand.

AI's big promises met a **misaligned reality** at SXSW

Trend spotted by **Shane Quinn**

Big AI narratives dominated SXSW, but real-world experiences felt more tangible and human.

At SXSW, AI was framed in extremes: world-ending or world-changing. This “[apocaloptimism](#)” dominated the discourse, with panels predicting massive, near-term disruption across every industry. On the ground, the reality was far more practical. AI showed up as useful, playful, and human-scale. From [IBM's AI Sports Club](#), to [Yamaha's beat-making studio](#), to a [helpful Waymo](#) taking attendees across town, the AI that was seen—not just heard—was engaging, helpful, and far removed from the discourse dominating stages. With SXSW more distributed than ever, the experience felt similarly fragmented. Big ideas were everywhere, but connecting them—or navigating them—was left to the attendee.

03



What it means

We're deep into the AI hype cycle—where expectations are outpacing lived experience. The opportunity for brands isn't to amplify the noise, but to close the gap: turning abstract futures into tangible, human-centered moments. Without clear throughlines, even the strongest ideas risk feeling disconnected.

Key Takeaway | When narratives are big and stakes feel high, experience design becomes even more critical. As AI continues to dominate the discourse at events like SXSW, the brands that win will be those that make complex ideas feel clear, connected, and real at a human level.

MWC's overload demands **clarity, not clutter**

Trend spotted by **Heidrun Scholten**

High-impact brands at MWC 2026 prioritized clear, structural booth design for instant understanding.

At an event where AI, 5G, and [roaming robots](#) dominated attention, strategic simplicity became the true competitive advantage. Effective brand experiences, like those from [Samsung](#), [Infosys](#), and [Telefónica](#), cut through the spectacle and digital overload by translating complex innovation into structured and instantly digestible narratives. Successful exhibitors created knowledge hubs—using learning theaters to generate leads and dialogue, and strategically adapting engagement mechanics for multicultural audiences. This dialogue focus aligns with research on what [younger professionals seek from high-value trade shows](#).

Key Takeaway | At high-density events, prioritize strategic design, clear navigation cues, and structured content over digital clutter. Leverage dedicated learning environments to share knowledge and spark conversation. Adapt engagement strategies—like interactive or gamified mechanics—to reflect the cultural expectations of diverse audiences.

04



What it means

At MWC, simplicity and well-structured storytelling cut through the noise. Resonant experiences were human-centered, designed for calm, and anchored in a narrative linked to key industry conversations. Today's most effective experiences are content and dialogue platforms—not just product showcases—balancing global messaging with localized, authentic touchpoints.



OUT-THERE EXPERIENCES

People, brands and marketers continue to push the boundaries of physical and digital experiences, with new and creative executions popping up across the globe.

Brick by Bucket

Nike and LEGO took over the Brooklyn Bridge pier for a high-heat "Built to Ball" moment, where families dodged a 20-foot inflatable head, customized fresh kicks, and hit the court for pickup games.



Whodunnit in High Style

Neil Patrick Harris transformed luxury travel into a high-stakes murder mystery weekend—where guests donned personas, decoded cryptic clues, and sipped cocktails while unmasking killers.



A Slice of Maranello

Casa Ferrari brought the soul of Italy to Albert Park with an invite-only sanctuary, where Tifosi sipped bottomless Negronis, feasted on wood-fired pizzas, and Charles Leclerc chased the podium.



A Blessing in Purple

Hulu haunted the streets of Austin with an eerie fleet of Aunt Lydia's "Plums," delivering cryptic mini pies and somber bows to herald the next chapter of Gilead, *The Testaments*.

