THINKWELL'S 5TH ANNUAL

2020 GUEST EXPERIENCE TREND REPORT: FAN FESTIVALS + EVENTS

People want to find their tribe.

Whether they're basking in all things pop culture at San Diego Comic Con, meeting up to party the night away on the anniversary of a classic movie, or making new friends on an epic AR quest to "catch 'em all" at Pokémon GoFest, people are looking for connection, and they'll go a long way to find it. Sharing an affinity for something fosters instant connection—it's easier to strike up a friendship with someone that shares a passion than struggle to find common ground with a new acquaintance.

Fan gatherings are big business.

Corporations, studios, and IP holders are seizing the opportunity to reach targeted groups of die-hard fans and brand evangelists across a variety of global experiential events. The demand for events and spaces where people with common interests can meet and mingle is growing every year as more and more people seek out their tribe.

73% Physical experiences still matter.

73% of 13-65-year olds surveyed across 11 countries agreed with the statement: "Now, more than ever, I want to experience real rather than digital life," in a Live Nation research study conducted in 2018.1

Global spending is growing.

Global spending on experiences is predicted to grow by 38% to reach $8 trillion between 2017 and 2030, according to a Euromonitor study.

38%

$5 And so is spending in the US: BILLION PER YEAR

Spending on live experiences has grown by $5 billion per year in the US alone over the last decade! 3

What makes these gatherings meaningful, fun, and worth the cost?

Whether they're basking in all things pop culture at San Diego Comic Con, meeting up to party the night away on the anniversary of a classic movie, or making new friends on an epic AR quest to "catch 'em all" at Pokémon GoFest, people are looking for connection, and they'll go a long way to find it. Sharing an affinity for something fosters instant connection—it's easier to strike up a friendship with someone that shares a passion than struggle to find common ground with a new acquaintance.

Here's what we heard: Fans want special social experiences–in real life.

People want to experience and share something special with other like-minded folks, ranking social experiences with other fans highly when it comes to most appealing event features. Respondents ranked the following as their top 3 must haves:

1. Character and/or celebrity meet & greets
2. Social experiences with fellow fans
3. Exclusive merchandise & shopping opportunities

Other respondent selections included:

- Access to an "Artist Alley"
- Exclusive content
- Exclusive food & beverage
- Exclusive/themed photo opportunities

Willingness to spend is HIGH

People are willing to spend a lot of cash to hang out with their affinity group.

46% Nearly half (46%) of respondents reported a willingness to spend up to $1,000 for an experience of this nature. An additional 17% were ready to spend up to $2,500.

40% Fans in the survey also reported expecting to spend 40% of their money on exclusive merchandise.

Willingness to travel is even HIGHER

The right gathering is worth fans' time, as well as their money.

71% 71% of respondents reported they would be willing to travel up to 500 miles for an event.

58% 58% reported they would be willing to travel by plane.

Planning and logistics matter.

Fan-focused experiences can't rely entirely on guests' passion for brands, characters, or IPs. If guests are distracted by long lines and overpriced food, they're less likely to want to commemorate their experience by purchasing exclusive merchandise or raving about the event to their social networks. Practical considerations matter.

1. Well organized layout
2. Easy lodging/central hotel hub
3. Parking and transit options

Takeaways

1

Don't overlook the value of creating spaces and experiences within your events where fans and friends can simply hang out.

Fan gatherings allow for intimacy in large scale groups of people who have congregated based on interests, and giving people an unstructured place to talk and take photos is an important part of that. Global and national fan events are planning for these spaces more and more, from the food court area of your local Renaissance Faire to the organized fan hangout areas that surround the convention centers for San Diego Comic Con and WonderCon. These places are not only another congregation space for community members, but also represent an additional opportunity for food, beverage, and merchandise sales.

2

Happy people spend money. If it's worth it, they will spend!

People are drawn to these events by the promise of gathering with their tribe, but cementing a positive memory of an exclusive moment is why people will continue to spend once they arrive. The lure of exclusivity for the event itself brings people through the doors, and they are often driven to wait in excruciatingly long lines for exclusive merchandise and other offerings that can only be found onsite. If the event delivers on the guest experience basics, then fans will spend.

3

A fan is a guest at heart, and no amount of adoration for the subject matter will make up for a bad guest experience.

When thinking about operations and logistics, fanfest planners should concentrate on creating a fluid, seamless experience, which lets guests focus on the amazing memories they're making. It's critical to consider experiences as guest experiences first and foremost. Fans don't just want to get their comic book signed by the artist, they want to have a frictionless experience while they get to that artist, so that they don't have to think about anything other than meeting the person they admire, and how they're going to post about it afterwards.

4

Affinity allows for immediate intimacy in large settings. That's what folks are searching for.

They come to see old friends, make new ones, and create memories in a space where they are surrounded by people as passionate as they are. The experiences that are ultimately successful and likely to make the most money are those that prioritize all aspects of their guests' experience–from waiting in lines, to creator meet & greets, to cultivating spaces where fans can simply hang out together to share theories, play trivia, or compliment each other's costumes.