

EXPERIENCE INTELLIGENCE EMEA

BY GPJ

June 2026

From behind-the-scenes creative content and anti-AI cafes to intentionally slow gatherings, attendees are rejecting manufactured marketing and over-hyped events in favor of radical transparency and highly functional, physical spaces.



Work-in-progress is the new visual language



AI brand foreground the human



A tale of two Gen Zs finding common ground



Attendees are demanding more value from events



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Work-in-progress is the new visual language

Brands are sharing the raw creative process to prove real human effort.

As generative AI sparks waves of skepticism, consumers crave unscripted, human authenticity. Some of the social sphere's largest content creators have pushed back against out-of-touch perceptions with seemingly spontaneous and unproduced content.

European luxury brands such as Bottega Veneta, Loewe, and Balenciaga are increasingly [spotlighting artisans, sketches, fittings, and production processes](#) as a form of "proof of work" marketing – using [visible human effort and craftsmanship](#) to build trust and authenticity in an era when AI can generate polished creative outputs instantly.

01



What it means

Ultimately, pulling back the curtain showcases authentic craftsmanship, reassuring skeptical viewers that genuine people are still creating the ads they love. Audiences crave the meaningful, messy reality of human effort. Moving forward, the raw process of creation is officially more valuable than the final, curated outcome. Imperfection is the baseline for trust.

Key Takeaway | In experiential, transparency, and human effort are becoming key levers of trust-building. As audiences grow more skeptical of AI content, brands can use behind-the-scenes storytelling to show the real people and work that goes into creating experiences, making them feel more thoughtful and authentic.



AI brands foreground the human

Counter Positioning and cafes in the face of AI backlash

Axios calls it the “[AI hate wave](#),” a groundswell of negative public sentiment that AI is moving too fast, will steal jobs, intensify social inequality, increase electricity costs, and hurt the environment. Even those working in the tech world, more predisposed to optimism, are fatigued by marketing hype and top-down pressure to adopt AI tools.

In the face of this, brands are putting the tech in the background and foregrounding counterpositioning and curated gatherings to humanize AI. Wiz posed a challenge: “How do you talk about AI when no one wants to hear about it?” Their answer: the “[No-AI Zone](#)” –a nostalgic networking space with postcards, newspapers, coffee, and soft-serve ice cream. Other AI brands are [using coffee shops](#) to signal coolness, elevated taste, and cultivate community.

02



What it means

Experiential is not just a channel to select from in the marketing mix, but an essential way to connect with audiences seeking third spaces and physical, IRL experiences as an antidote to social media and smartphone addiction. AI companies have the added need to confront trust issues and to show they value the intrinsically human – something the most anxious worry AI will strip away.

Key Takeaway | Stop pitching, start hosting, and invite your critics in. There's an opportunity to turn third spaces into places with dialogue and debate between skeptics and advocates. Don't just message trust, try to build it in real time.



A tale of two **Gen Zs** finding common ground

Generational bifurcation is reshaping how people gather IRL

The Gen Z split is a generational bifurcation between [Gen Z 1.0 \(1997–2003\)](#) and [2.0 \(2004–2012\)](#), rooted in their distinct life stages during the onset of COVID-19. Gen Z 1.0 entered adulthood pre-pandemic, leans more progressive, and tends to prioritize community and social impact, while Gen Z 2.0 spent formative years in lockdown, [leading to institutional skepticism](#) and a focus on financial security and autonomy. Yet across both cohorts, a broader shift is emerging – from online discourse to ["an analog moment" of physical reality](#). Holistically [feeling tech-isolated](#), they embrace offline behaviors like ["Soft Socializing,"](#) vanguard the [retail revival](#), and favor [Dinner Social Clubs](#), including Berlin's supper club scene, via intimate dinner parties and gatherings.

03



What it means

The divide isn't creating disconnected audiences, but rather distinct routes to the same core need. For a generation raised totally online, in-person experiences increasingly function as places to form identity, exchange social currency, and access something that can't be replicated, endlessly scrolled, or LLM-ed.

Key Takeaway | While both cohorts are currently driving a resurgence in in-person experiences to combat isolation, [they prioritize different formats](#). 1.0 seeks community and brand action, while 2.0 values spontaneity and phygital hybrids. While they seek to find common ground, it's important for brands and planners to recognize their differences, and tailor experiences accordingly.



Attendees are demanding **more value** from events

04

Experience planners are scaling back as audiences grow more selective.

Events are [shrinking](#), and rising costs are only part of the story. The reality is, most attendees don't believe they're walking away with what organizers think they're giving. New [research](#) reveals that when outcome-driven experiences aren't delivered, most attendees simply don't return. Instead, they opt for smaller, local, or personal experiences that deliver more value in exchange for time spent. Micro-events across both [B2B](#) and B2C landscapes are surging, where informal meetups, like VIP dinners, and [community events](#) like running clubs, neighborhood art walks, block parties, and microfestivals are replacing larger, more traditional formats.

What it means

While consumer budgets are strained and business event budgets are under scrutiny, event audiences are leaning on grassroots, community-oriented formats to deliver more meaningful experiences. At the end of the day, people show up where they feel the experience is genuinely worth their time, and opt out where they don't.



Key Takeaway | The events that are driving retention are prioritizing care, convenience, support, and in some cases, the highest density of interactive formats. To build and sustain conference loyalty, treat everyone like a first-timer and create easier on-ramps to drive participation. One single meaningful experience can define an attendees' decision to return.

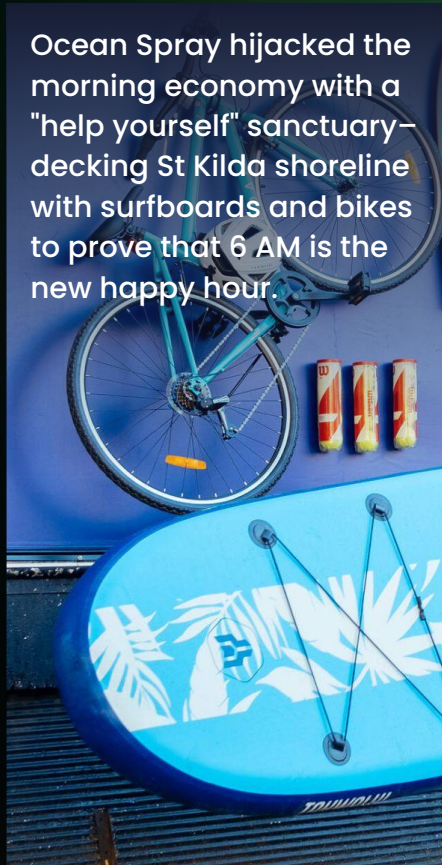


OUT-THERE EXPERIENCES

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

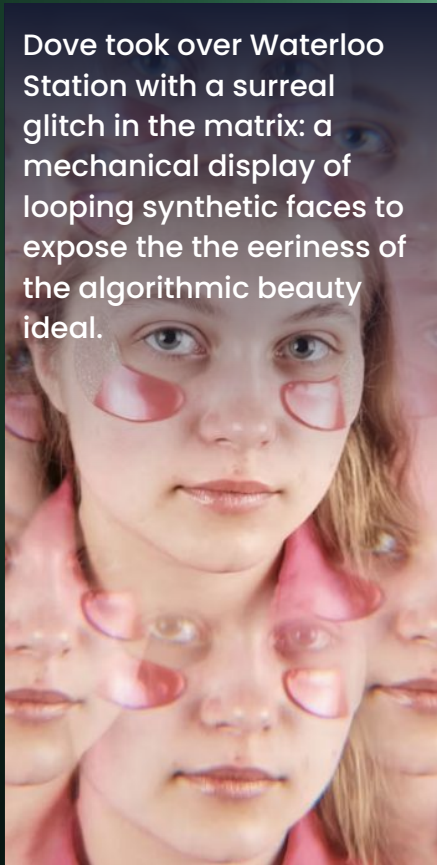
The Dawn Takeover

Ocean Spray hijacked the morning economy with a "help yourself" sanctuary—decking St Kilda shoreline with surfboards and bikes to prove that 6 AM is the new happy hour.



The Beauty Machine

Dove took over Waterloo Station with a surreal glitch in the matrix: a mechanical display of looping synthetic faces to expose the eeriness of the algorithmic beauty ideal.



Best Friend AI

Pedigree haunted São Paulo with a cryptic "Friendship AI," unmasking the tech as a matchmaking engine designed to drive real-world adoptions for shelter dogs.



Hobbit
3 years old



Lucho
4 years old

ND . AI |

The Symphony of Stitch

Hermès brought Parisian workshops to the Shanghai Exhibition Center for visitors to view master artisans stitch iconic Kelly bags, hand-paint fine porcelain, and assemble luxury watches live.

