

# 9 Predictions to See You Through the Next 20 Years

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Scan this page with the PYM+ app to reveal what things used to be like way back in 1998.

## Time is running out.

You stopped to check email and now you'll never make your next appointment. Whipping out your iPhone, you text: "Traffic looks horrible, can you meet virtually?" You get the go-ahead, send a [Google Hangout](#) link and begin the meeting on time. By sharing your screen and documents, all hosted in the [Cloud](#), you amend the contract and get the signatures you need as if you were there in person. During the call, you save everything to a shared notebook in [Evernote](#). Now your event team can pull everything they need from the Cloud while on-site. None of this was possible 20 years ago.

Unless you worked in tech or were in college in 1995, chances are you didn't have an email address. If you did, it was probably hosted by AOL, which connected you to a gated version of the Internet via a dial-up modem. Google didn't exist to index what little Web content there was, so the only thing people did online was participate in chat rooms, read news feeds and — if that's what they were into — look at porn. Cellphones existed, but they weren't commonplace, and no one was texting. If you were late, people just fumed until you finally showed up to explain.

It's easy to forget how fast things

change. "When I started at Passkey in 1998 doing hotel housing, I had to work a [telex machine](#)," says Meeting Pool founder Dahlia El Gazzar.

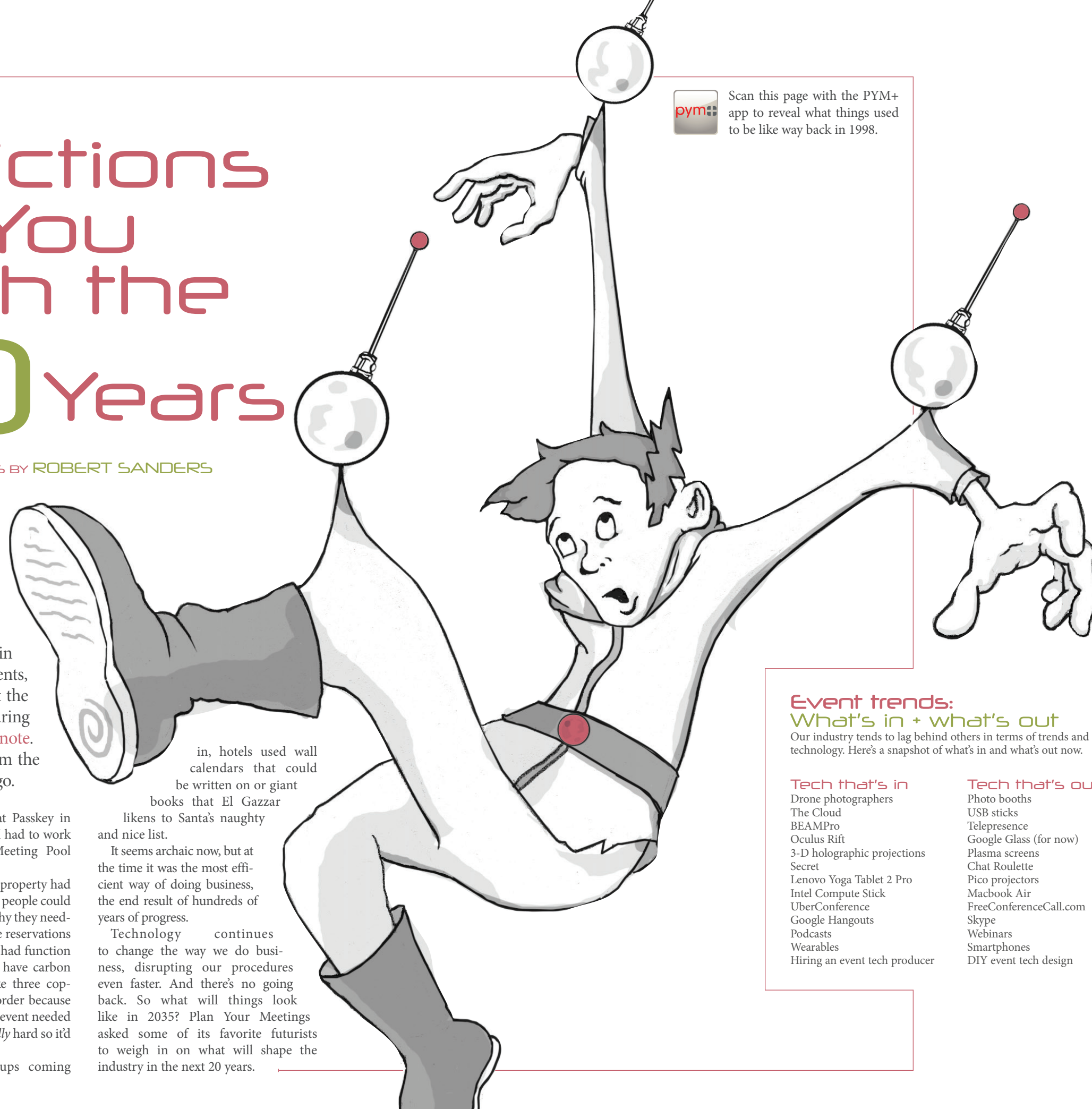
"You'd be lucky if a hotel property had one email address that their people could share. They just didn't see why they needed them. Hotels had to have reservations by telex or faxes. Then you had function books. The sheets used to have carbon copies. You'd have to make three copies of each banquet event order because everyone involved with the event needed one, so you had to write *really* hard so it'd go through all the copies."

To keep track of groups coming

in, hotels used wall calendars that could be written on or giant books that El Gazzar likens to Santa's naughty and nice list.

It seems archaic now, but at the time it was the most efficient way of doing business, the end result of hundreds of years of progress.

Technology continues to change the way we do business, disrupting our procedures even faster. And there's no going back. So what will things look like in 2035? Plan Your Meetings asked some of its favorite futurists to weigh in on what will shape the industry in the next 20 years.



## Event trends: What's in + what's out

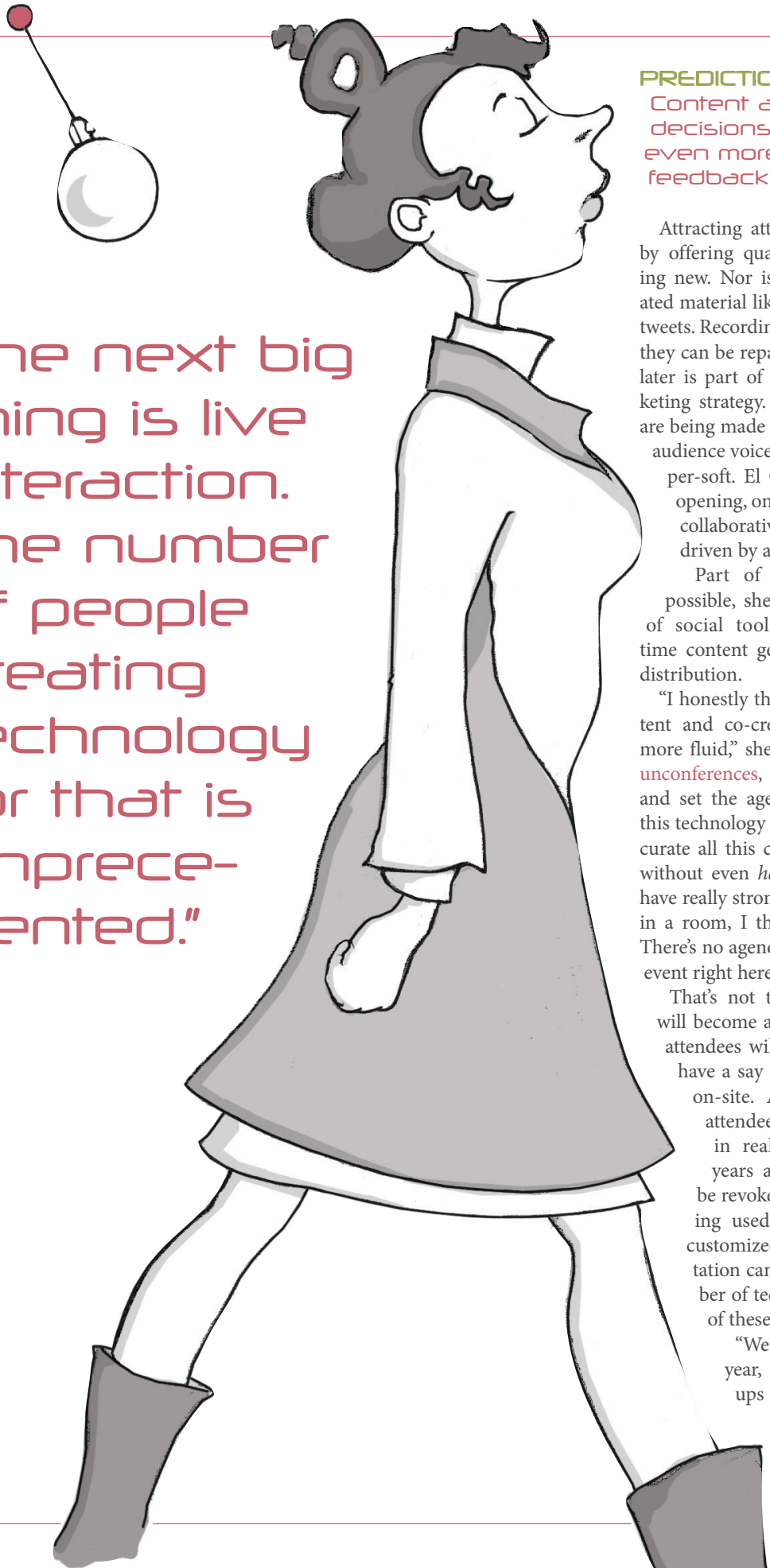
Our industry tends to lag behind others in terms of trends and technology. Here's a snapshot of what's in and what's out now.

### Tech that's in

- Drone photographers
- The Cloud
- BEAMPro
- Oculus Rift
- 3-D holographic projections
- Secret
- Lenovo Yoga Tablet 2 Pro
- Intel Compute Stick
- UberConference
- Google Hangouts
- Podcasts
- Wearables
- Hiring an event tech producer

### Tech that's out

- Photo booths
- USB sticks
- Telepresence
- Google Glass (for now)
- Plasma screens
- Chat Roulette
- Pico projectors
- Macbook Air
- FreeConferenceCall.com
- Skype
- Webinars
- Smartphones
- DIY event tech design



"The next big thing is live interaction. The number of people creating technology for that is unprecedented."

**PREDICTION NO. 1:**  
Content and design decisions will depend even more on audience feedback and needs.

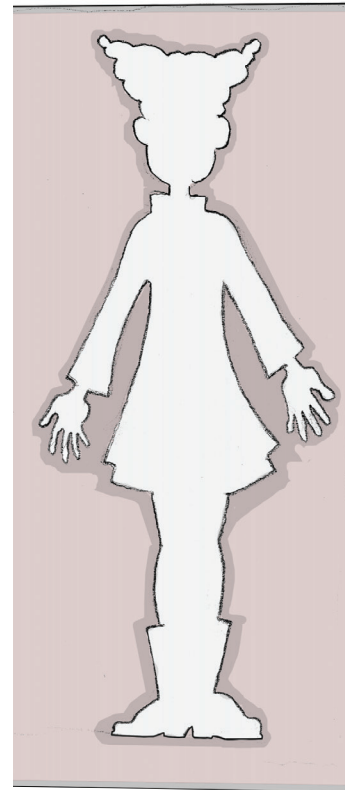
Attracting attendees to a conference by offering quality education is nothing new. Nor is displaying user-generated material like Instagram photos and tweets. Recording conference sessions so they can be repackaged and repurposed later is part of every savvy event marketing strategy. But all those decisions are being made from the top down. The audience voice is present, but it's whisper-soft. El Gazzar sees a floodgate opening, one that will result in more collaborative events designed and driven by attendees.

Part of what will make that possible, she says, is the prevalence of social tools that allow for real-time content generation, curation and distribution.

"I honestly think user-generated content and co-creation are going to be more fluid," she says. "You know about **unconferences**, right? People show up and set the agenda. Well you have all this technology that makes it possible to curate all this content during a session without even *having* an agenda. If you have really strong subject matter experts in a room, I think you could just say: There's no agenda, we're co-creating this event right here, right now."

That's not to say that every event will become an improvised affair. But attendees will increasingly expect to have a say in what they experience on-site. After all, Twitter gave attendees the ability to complain in real time more than five years ago. That privilege can't be revoked. People also are growing used to having experiences customized for them. That expectation can't be ignored. The number of tech tools catering to both of these desires is growing, too.

"We run an analysis every year, and when more start-ups are doing the same thing that becomes a trend for us," says Julius Solaris, founder of Event Manager Blog and author of

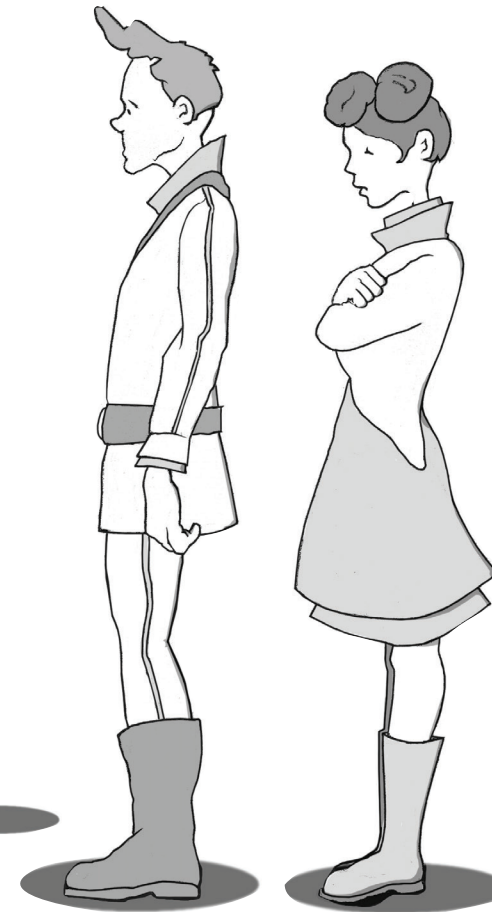


an annual event technology trends report. "The next big thing is live interaction. The number of people creating technology for that is unprecedented."

This means meeting and event planners will need to figure out how to incorporate attendee feedback without derailing the total event experience. This requires a skill that goes beyond just being a strategic meetings manager. "It's understanding how [tech] tools work and how they add value to the event," Solaris says.

"Just like you should create a process map of how social media can add value to every point in your process for every person on your social team, you need to create a process map of where technology is needed at your event, where it adds value, and base it on what people will actually use. You have to connect it to the real needs of your attendees."

In other words, resist the temptation to incorporate the new just because it's new or just because someone says you have to have it. If no one coming to your event will use it, you're better off saving your money for something your audience will embrace.



**PREDICTION NO. 2:**  
Meetings will get smaller, more mobile and be produced on-demand.

At the 2015 Consumer Electronics Show (CES), Lenovo introduced the Lenovo Yoga Tablet 2 Pro, a portable tablet computer with a built-in projector. It's designed for people who want to create an instant home theater and can be used to project PowerPoint presentations and share desktop content.

"I thought 'mind blown,'" says Cheryl Lawson, founder of the social marketing firm Party Aficionado and the annual Social Media Tulsa conference. "Where will that take us in the future? Will our phones have projectors on them?"

Mammoth annual conferences may never disappear completely, but having technology that allows you to project your thoughts without having to hire an AV team gives meeting and event planners incredible flexibility. Not to

## Glossary of Terms

Things change fast, as does the lingo. Here are definitions of terms we've highlighted in red throughout the text.

### Google Hangout

A videoconference call that can happen though desktop/laptop computers or using apps on phones, tablets or Google Glass. Users can share files, collaborate on documents and broadcast content directly to YouTube.

### The Cloud

Short for Cloud computing. A catch-all term to for a series of remote servers and software networks that store information so it can be accessed by any connected device.

### Evernote

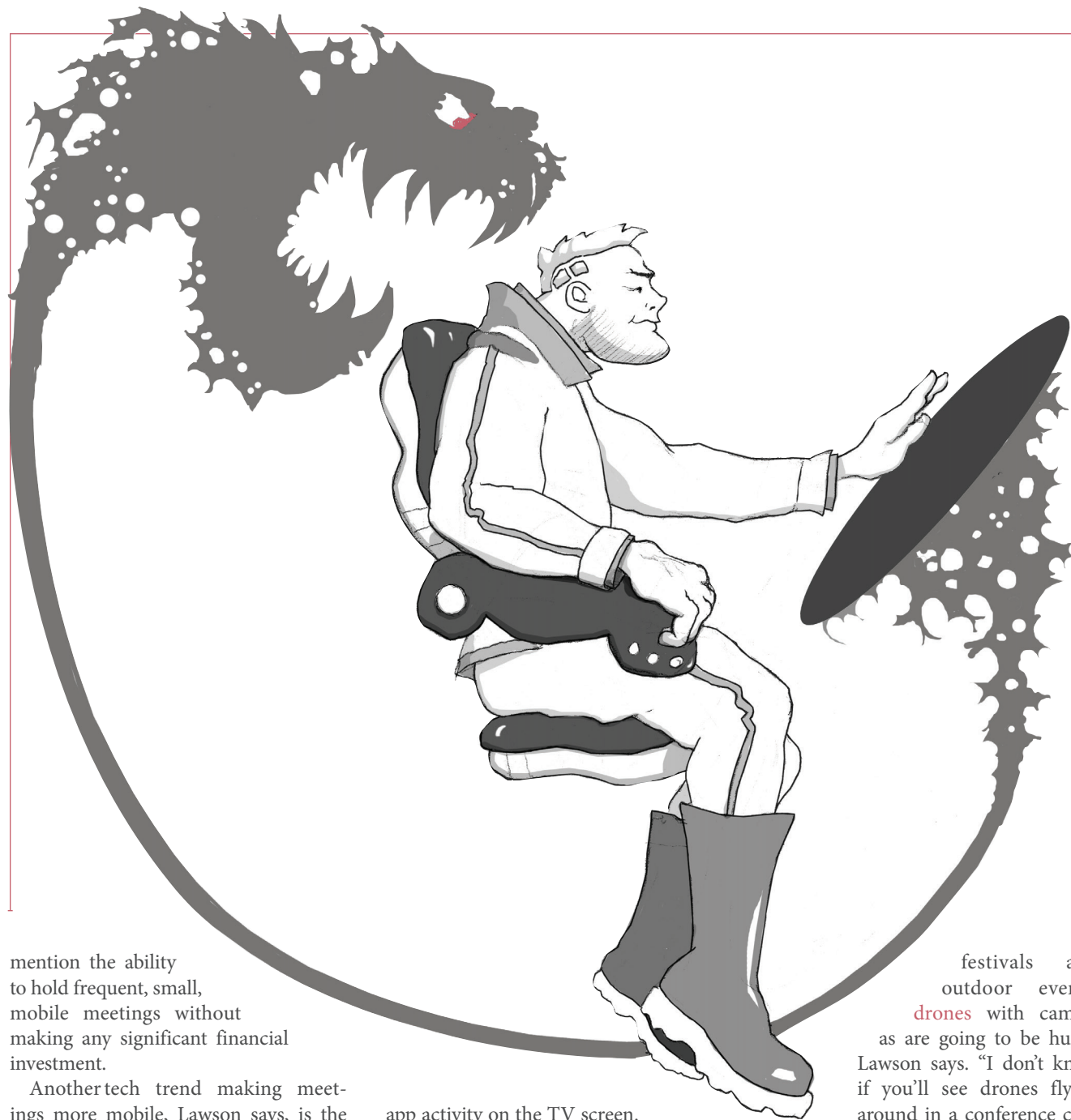
A Cloud-based note-taking system accessible online, through mobile apps and desktops/laptops. Users create "notes" in which they can embed audio, video, images, websites, text and other content and organize it into notebooks that can be shared.

### Telex machines

Operate off phone lines like a telegraph, but on a separate frequency than voice lines. Telex machines could transmit messages at 60 words per minute to one or several telex machines simultaneously. Messages on shiny paper tape could be prepared in advance, saving users time and money, or they could be typed and sent in real time, using an attached typewriter-style keyboard. Abbreviations like CU l8tr were first used by real-time telex operators. Developed in 1930s Germany, they were a dominant form of business communication until email began to replace them in the mid-1990s.

### Unconferences

Conferences for which no agenda exists beforehand. It's created by audience demand on-site. Sessions are voted on and then led by attendees who volunteer to take on that topic. Several variations exist for conference organizers who like the idea but want a more structured event.



mention the ability to hold frequent, small, mobile meetings without making any significant financial investment.

Another tech trend making meetings more mobile, Lawson says, is the Intel Compute Stick, a USB drive that turns any display into a computer when plugged in. Lawson predicts these pocket-sized computers will increase the speed at which people can share ideas as they turn non-computers into connected machines for impromptu live or virtual meetings. As soon as you check into your hotel room, for example, you could turn the TV into your personal PC.

The last piece Lawson says needs to happen, and will happen soon, is a way to fully connect your phone to your TV and other mobile and computing devices. Now those connections tend to be one-way: You can turn your phone into a remote control, but you can't display

app activity on the TV screen. You can email yourself a file and open it on another device, but you can't swipe across a file on your tablet and see it appear on your conference screen. Expect to see that change rapidly with the launch of products like Lima, which makes any file you have accessible on up to eight connected devices.

**PREDICTION NO. 3:**  
Make way for drones,  
drones and more drones!

Remember that remote-controlled helicopter you played with as a kid? Well now it has a camera and may just be the future of event photography. "For

festivals and outdoor events, drones with cameras are going to be huge," Lawson says. "I don't know if you'll see drones flying around in a conference center, but every city has at least one outdoor music festival and one of the difficulties is getting a photographer close enough to get great photos of the crowd and the band." Drones capture images from angles inaccessible to human photographers.

Businesses like Amazon use drones primarily to pick through warehouses to deliver products, but Lawson sees many other applications, especially as drones become less toylike. "You could deliver food and drink to people in movie theaters. Or you could place an order while you're driving in your car and the drone could pull up next to you and give you your coffee." Who's to say that in 2035

your banquet server won't be a drone?

"Right now they look weird," Lawson concedes, "but eventually, they'll be part of what we see all the time."

Video and audio-enabled drones like the BEAMPro units showing up at events have another function: giving virtual attendees a more interactive event experience. The motorized device features a screen from which its controller can see, hear and speak to others despite physically being several thousand miles away.

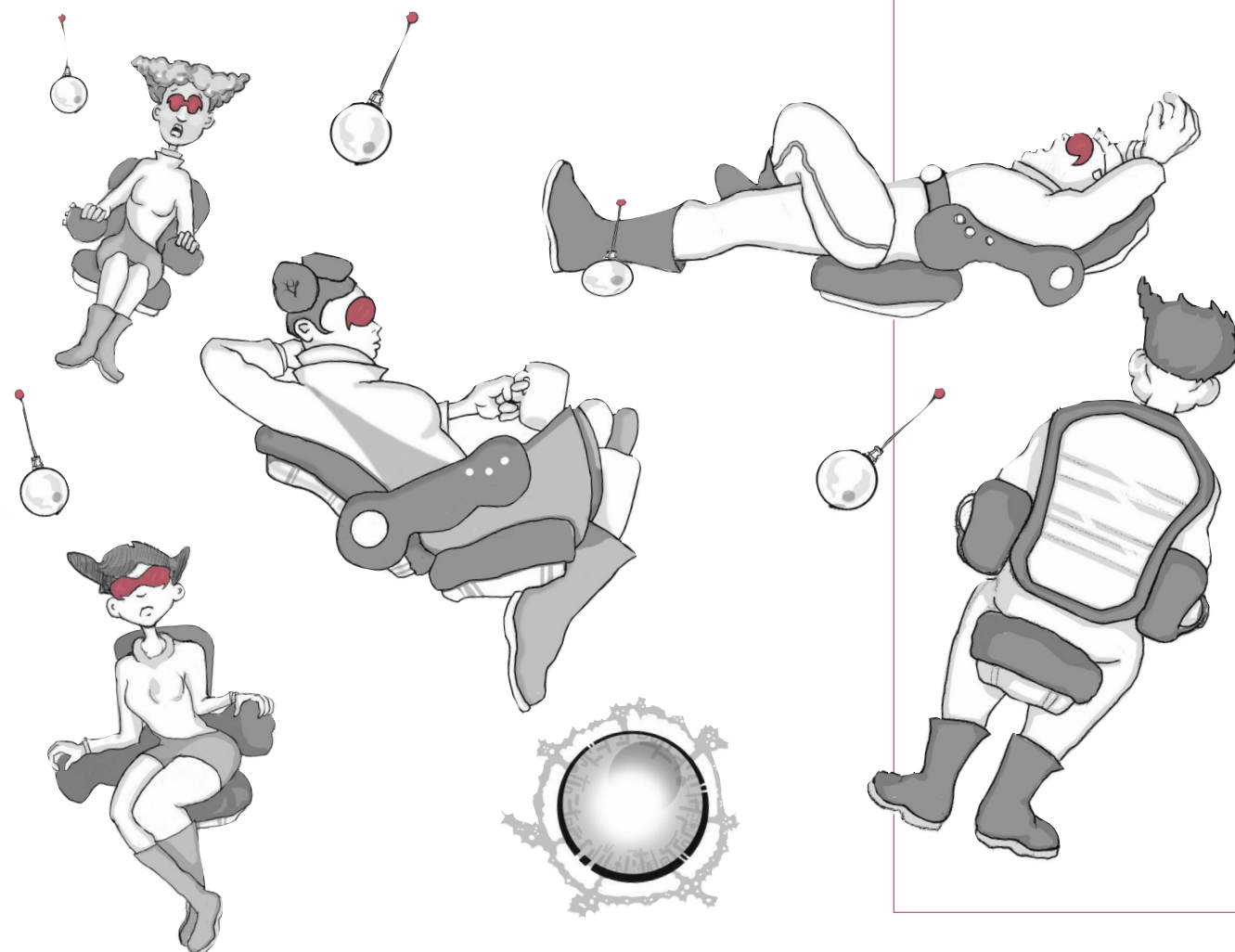
The risk-management and attendee applications of this technology excite Lawson. "If a conference center houses two or four of these things, and your speaker is stuck in an airport due to a rainstorm, it's no longer a problem," she says. "You'd go get a BEAMPro and connect your speaker. They'd be able to network, do their presentation and move around the conference, interacting with attendees. This is the future of events. I saw a girl 'walking' around CES but I have no idea where she was physically. My vision of the future of meetings is attending a conference in Europe via these things."

**PREDICTION NO. 4:**  
Backchannel chatter  
about events will go dark,  
real dark.

If Twitter hashtags make you anxious, you'll hate where the cool kids are sharing their opinions now.

"On Twitter I may not tweet publicly how I'm feeling, but on so-called anonymous apps like Secret, people are sharing what they *really* think about your event," Lawson says. Not having comments tied to a public profile gives app users the freedom to share very private thoughts without repercussion. The result is very NSFW, she says, but the proliferation of these apps means it's a trend that will continue to grow.

"Secret marketed itself at CES as the place where you could hear the real backend conversations," Lawson says. "Talk about **backchannel!** It was very sleazy ... but there were some interesting conversations. As event planners, we do have to pay attention to the backchannels of our conference chatter.



## Drone

A remote-controlled pilotless aircraft, sometimes referred to as an UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle). The term also applies to any robot vehicle that is piloted remotely.

## NSFW

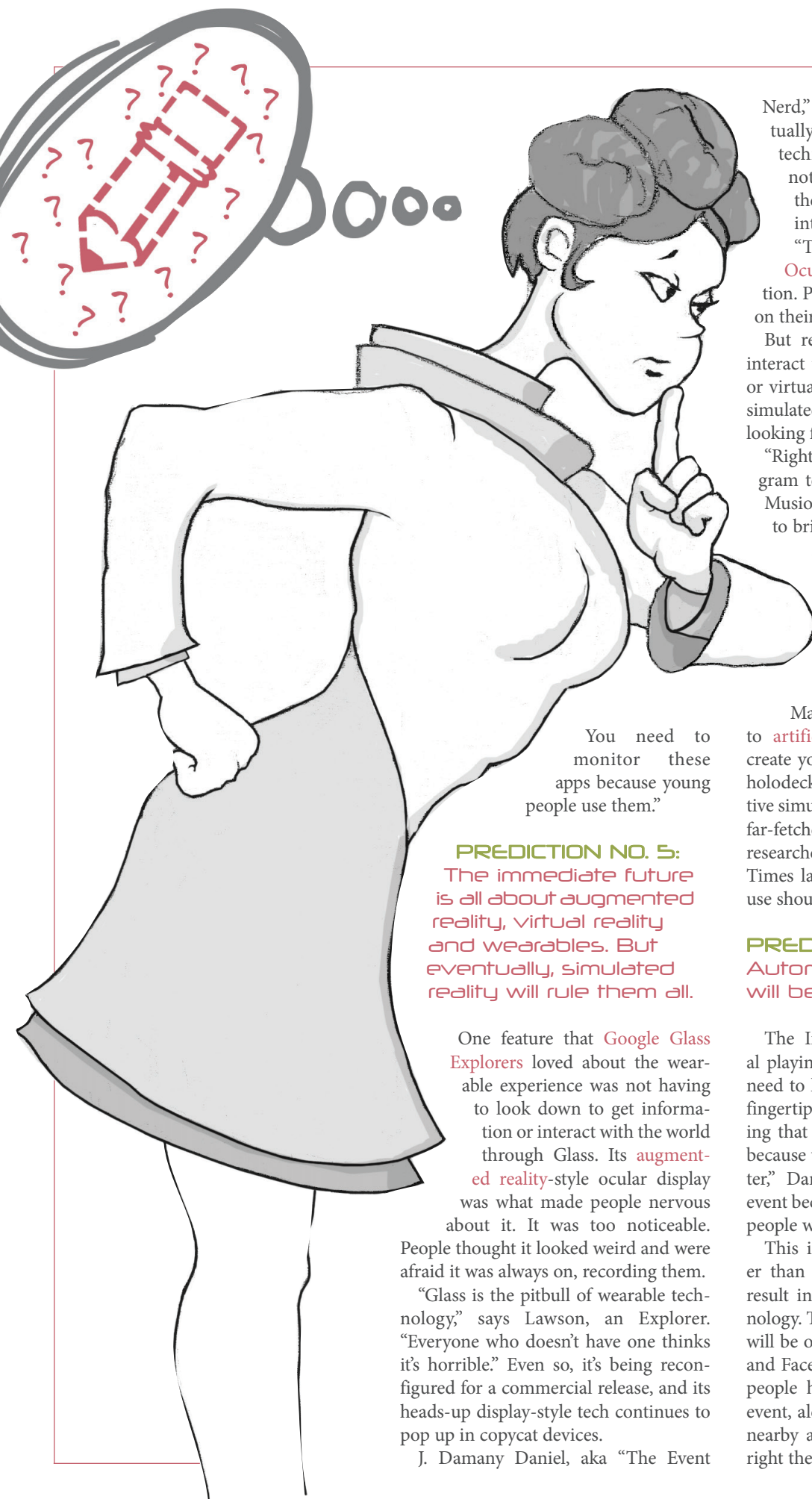
Not safe for work, often because of sexual, violent, lewd or shocking content.

## Backchannel, or dark channel

An unauthorized, often private, mode of communication online or, increasingly, through mobile apps that promise anonymity. "Dark" is a reference to when spies go off the grid — technically where these conversations happen.

## Google Glass Explorers

A name given to a group of people who beta-tested Google Glass, a wearable computer with an augmented reality-style eye-level display screen. The program began in April 2012 and was disbanded in January to make way for a consumer launch.



Nerd,” predicts that people will eventually move away from wearable technology. “Google Glass failed not because people didn’t want the information, but because the interface was flawed,” he says. “That’s also the challenge for **Oculus Rift** if they want mass adoption. People don’t want to have a thing on their face.”

But remove the object you have to interact through, move past augmented or virtual reality and enter the realm of simulated reality — that’s what Daniel is looking forward to.

“Right now you have [projected hologram technology] like Hologauze and Musion, which was what they used to bring **Tupac to Coachella**, but you have to set up the screen just right and the lighting has to be perfect,” he says. As the cost decreases and the technology becomes more stable, Daniel predicts it also will become mainstream.

Marry the holographic projections to **artificial intelligence** and you can create your own version of “Star Trek’s” holodeck, a room filled with interactive simulated reality experiences. Sound far-fetched? According to scientists and researchers quoted in The New York Times last year, holodecks for personal use should hit the market by 2024.

**PREDICTION NO. 6:**  
**Automated networking will be the killer app.**

The Internet leveled the educational playing field. Almost everything you need to know about anything is at your fingertips. “More and more we’re seeing that people aren’t coming to events because they care about the subject matter,” Daniel says. “They come to the event because they want to be around other people who are just like them.”

This increased interest in who rather than what will be at the event will result in better event networking technology. The killer event app, Daniel says, will be one that aggregates his LinkedIn and Facebook data to suggest the Top 5 people he should connect with at the event, alerts him when those people are nearby and lets him request a meeting right there.

These kinds of computer-generated connections may not replace the synergy of meeting someone on the shuttle bus or in the buffet line, but it will help exhibitors, sponsors and high achievers prove the business value of attending live events.

**PREDICTION NO. 7:**  
**Enchanted objects will be everywhere.**

“People have a desire to gain instant access to information,” Daniel says. “This is made possible by the **Internet of Things**, or what David Rose [of MIT] likes to call ‘enchanted objects.’

“The things in our daily life will become smarter, and we’ll be better able to react as a result. It’s not natural for us to interact with the world through a flat, black rectangle, which is what we’re doing with smartphones. We like story and interacting with things. More and more, the things that humanity has spent hundreds of years designing to be perfect (like an umbrella or chair) will become connected to the Internet.”

Eventually, Daniel says, having plants that tell you when to water them, umbrellas that remind you to grab them and chairs that automatically adjust to ease muscle tension will just be the way things are.

**PREDICTION NO. 8:**  
**Every event team will have an event technology producer or chief technology officer.**

Today event technology resides in the realm of line items that every planner must manage, along with linens and hotel rooms. “They don’t understand technology, so they don’t use it,” Daniel says.

His advice? “Stop trying to *understand* technology.” You wouldn’t do a menu tasting and then go into the kitchen to start cooking with the chef, he says. Meeting planners are generalists. If they have to do an opening session, they work with a production manager who hires and coordinates the work of the subspecialists for sound, light and other functions. Similarly, Daniel insists, meeting planners need to entrust technology decisions to someone who specializes in applying them to event design.

Solaris agrees. “Planners are amazing,” he says, “but they already have a lot on their plate. They shouldn’t have to handle technology, too.” Plus, the metrics used to define an event’s success differ from those that prove event technology return on investment.

Daniel recommends that meeting planners treat technology like any other aspect of an event that requires a specialist. “Find people who can work with you and be part of your team,” he says. There aren’t a lot of event professionals who can do this now, but eventually everyone will need a chief technical officer or event technology producer on staff.

**PREDICTION NO. 9:**  
**Some things should never change, but we’ll need cross-generational mentorships to ensure they won’t.**

Will the next generation of conference sales managers ever send a handwritten thank-you note?

Will budding meeting and event planners feel more comfortable texting their sales contact than having a conference call?

Reminding industry newcomers of interpersonal communication best practices may be the biggest challenge the industry will face in the next 20 years, says Joyce J. Ginsburg of JG Meetings.

“Despite all the technology that has come into play, the hospitality industry is still based on ‘service,’” she says. “Service can only be provided by people. An app, a paper copy of instructions given to a meeting planner on how to accomplish something within a property is not service. Communication is key.”

So before you retire, take time to mentor a newbie. Teach him or her how to communicate effectively and respectfully with clients and co-workers face-to-face and in a timely way. Explain the ethics of the business and encourage them to create their own standards of professional behavior. Show them the value of long-term relationships and the leverage you gain by being nice. Because there never will be an app for that. ☞

*Curious to read more about what the future may bring? You’ll find 31 more predictions at [tinyurl.com/31futuretrends](http://tinyurl.com/31futuretrends).*

## Augmented reality

AR provides a thin layer of information over what you see. This illusion may be viewed through a mobile device, display screen or other overlay delivery system like steam, water, gas or light projection.

## Oculus Rift

These high-tech goggles provide a visually immersive 3-D virtual reality experience while blocking the user’s view of what’s really there. Wildly popular with gamers, they’ve also been used by hotel chains like Marriott and other marketers to “transport” users to exotic destinations. Because the technology is costly and each experience must be hard-coded to the last detail, they more closely resemble movies rather than unfolding, interactive adventures.

## Tupac at Coachella

In 2012, Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre rapped with a holographic projection of Tupac Shakur, who died in 1996, onstage at the Coachella Music Festival. Digital Domain, the company that produced the stage illusion estimated it cost between \$100,000 and \$400,000. See how it worked by watching this video: [tinyurl.com/hologramtupac](http://tinyurl.com/hologramtupac).

## Artificial intelligence (AI)

Intelligence exhibited by, or programmed into, machines or software. The goal is to create a machine that can think, behave, predict and react like a human being.

## Internet of Things (IoT) and Big Data

A vast amount of data is available to anything that connects to the Internet. Small computing devices called microcontrollers can be programmed to perform simple tasks based on triggers found online or in real space. When attached to an inanimate object or sewn into clothing, it makes the object “smart” and capable of interacting with people and other smart objects. You can program your houseplant to tell you when it needs water, your coatrack to text you when the kids come home or your thermostat to automatically adjust to save you money (think Nest). All these devices collect data about you. This data can be used to make the objects smarter. When tied to your online and mobile behavior profiles, it becomes part of your “Big Data” profile, which helps marketers target appeals to you and create customized on-demand experiences.