

Eventbrite



peerspace

Thinking Outside the Ballroom

The Rise of Nontraditional and Unique Event Venues



Contents

Introduction	03
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The rise of nontraditional event venues	05
---	----

Take advantage of nontraditional event venues	07
---	----

Choose a nontraditional event venue	10
-------------------------------------	----

The takeaway	17
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This guide is for... Event professionals working in an increasingly competitive industry. If you host conferences, workshops, or other business-related events, keep reading. More specifically, read this if you want your event to stand out from the rest and deliver quality event experiences to your attendees.

What you'll learn: You'll learn why innovative, creative venues have becoming a popular choice for event professionals. Discover how major events are taking advantage of this trend. And, in the end, know how to take action for your next event. We've teamed up with [Peerspace](#), which has been helping event organizers turn underutilized spaces into memorable experiences for their attendees since 2014. With their help, you'll find out:

- Why event professionals are ditching conventional venues
- Ways to leverage nontraditional venues to help grow your event
- How to choose the right nontraditional venue for your event
- How to leverage suppliers and vendors to deliver the ultimate event experience — even in an unconventional space

What do you mean by “nontraditional venue”?

When we refer to nontraditional venues, we're talking about venues that weren't created with events like conferences, fundraisers, and galas in mind. This could be everything from photo studios and warehouses to castles and villas.

Part 01 The rise of nontraditional event venues

Traditional event venues remain [the most popular choice](#) for event professionals. But the erosion of formal business culture and the growing demand for unique event experiences have paved the way for change. And with the help of venue marketplaces ([like Peerspace](#)), event organizers are starting to think outside the hotel ballroom.

Here's a closer look at key factors that have led to the rise of nontraditional venues.



Factor #1: The erosion of formal business culture

Companies are ditching cubicles in favor of open offices. They're also adjusting policies to address the increased usage of personal, less traditional services.

According to American Express's [2017 Global Meetings and Events Forecast](#), a growing number of businesses now accommodate employees who use services like Uber, rather than company cars or cabs. [Supporting data](#) from SAP subsidiary Concur saw Airbnb usage for business travel grow by 44% year-over-year in the second quarter of 2016.

This shift in preference is now influencing the way organizers meet the demand for unique, one-of-a-kind experiences from attendees.



Factor #2: Demand for unique experiences

"Until recently, conferences have been mostly about knowledge building and networking," [says Juraj Holub](#), Marketing Manager at [Sli.do](#) — an audience interaction app for meetings and events. "But this paradigm is shifting; attendees are attending conferences with a new objective in mind – to gain a unique experience."

To meet attendee expectations, organizers are increasingly looking at

the venue as a way to deliver one-of-a-kind experiences. Global Hoteliers predicts that the demand for nontraditional meeting and event facilities will increase by 3.8% in 2017, while the demand for others will remain relatively flat.



Factor #3: Transformative technology and venue marketplaces

Transformative technologies like Uber and Airbnb have turned underutilized assets, such as cars or vacation homes, into billion dollar industries. According to a report from McKinsey Global Institute — [“Independent Work: Choice, Necessity, and the Gig Economy”](#) — this concept is expanding to commercial properties.

Since launching in 2014, Peerspace’s venue marketplace has been at the forefront of this trend’s expansion.

"Easier access to shared assets will transform the event industry, as consumers understand there are options beyond the confines of hotel space and traditional event locations," says Kristina Skinner, Senior Manager, PR & Communications at Peerspace.

"People generally know that hotels, restaurants, and convention centers offer event space. But now, these same people are learning that a more interesting — and ultimately more inspiring — option exists."

As Event Manager Blog’s Julius Solaris [recently reported](#), venue marketplaces have already changed the way event professionals search for venues. "The overwhelming majority of event professionals go online to research venues," says Solaris. "Search engines and venue marketplaces are the clear winners in the research stage of the selection process."

According to the previously mentioned McKinsey report, we have "only just begun to see the impact" of these new marketplaces.

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Part 02 Take advantage of nontraditional event venues

While informal business culture may be encouraging organizers to think outside the ballroom, there are numerous ways nontraditional event venues can help you meet your goals and objectives.

That's what Google did in 2016, when it moved its flagship event, Google I/O, from San Francisco Premiere conference center, Moscone Center, to the Shoreline Amphitheatre in Mountain View. Google turned this outdoor music venue and its surrounding parking lot into a "village" with 10 enclosed stages and several open-air tents. This showed developers that Google considered them to be artists, not just "code writers", as Google executive producer Amanda Matuk puts it.

Here are some of the advantages of nontraditional venues and how they are best used to meet your event objectives:



Support a flagship event

For multi-day conferences with multiple sessions and a tradeshow floor, a traditional venue will often be the best choice. But when hundreds or thousands of attendees converge for these larger, flagship events, you may also need spaces for smaller, ancillary events.

From receptions and breakout sessions, to exclusive invite-only meetings with high-profile clients, nontraditional event venues can help you serve up the unexpected.

"We definitely try to stick to nontraditional venues for receptions," says Karina Belyea, the events manager for Eventful Conferences. "After being inside a hotel all day, we try to plan a fun, offsite receptions for people to enjoy. We have found ourselves in JP Morgan's oldest bank vault in NYC, in House of Blues venues, and in rented out breweries." In the future, Belyea has her eye on the Space Museum in Houston or the National History Museum in New York.

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Break down barriers

Imagine your attendees catch the keynote address at a nightclub in the morning, attend breakout sessions in the the open air tents covering the parking lot next door, and then network at a cocktail party on a rooftop two blocks away. Who needs a convention center?

When you host your event across multiple venues, you can tap into what David Adler, CEO and Founder of BizBash, calls the "festivalization" of events. Adler says that conferences are starting to look more like Lollapalooza, increasingly adding elements that engage the attendee's senses.

Multiple, nontraditional venues have helped Techweek become the nation's leading technology conference and festival. "We want Techweek to stay interesting, quirky, and full of character," says Techweek's Director of Operations Tom Lawlor.

"We find that a nontraditional space gives people extra incentive to break out of their shells and enjoy what's around them with others. By holding our events in multiple venues, it highlights unique companies and spaces in the community that people might not usually get to experience. It also gives people who live and work in different geographic parts of the city multiple chances to engage in the conference."



Take your show on the road

Hosting a series of smaller events across multiple, strategic locations is a great way to extend your flagship event's brand, create deeper connections in local communities, and expand into new markets with high concentrations of customers.

In 2013, Techweek saw the opportunity to expand their conference beyond Chicago, and have since grown to six different cities. With the help of local community partners and sponsors, the organizers were able to develop content that appealed to local attendees and select venues that showcased the local spirit.

"Every city has it's own culture — especially within tech industry," says Lawlor. "Since Techweek's mission is grounded in the economic development of an entire market, we love to show off the best spaces the area has to offer, especially if they are owned by successful companies that are meaningfully contributing to the local tech ecosystem."



Deliver jaw-dropping event experiences

Event Manager Blog's recent report, "[The Venue of the Future](#)," found that "unique" venues — such as theatres, museums and art galleries — are the second most frequently chosen type of venue.

"Events are increasingly more about creating wow factors," says Event Manager Blog's Julius Solaris. "The same people in the same room won't cut it for modern audiences. Unique venues stimulate curiosity and engagement with the experience... [These] venues are often incredibly creative spaces that challenge attendees to break traditions and evaluate the event on the basis of what they see, rather than on their expectations."

“ The same people in the same room won't cut it for modern audiences. Unique venues stimulate curiosity and engagement with the experience.”

Choosing a unique venue gives attendees something to talk about, and encourages them to share the experience on social media. Imagine attendees on a rooftop loft sharing the view with followers on Instagram, using the event hashtag!

Part 03 Choose a nontraditional event venue

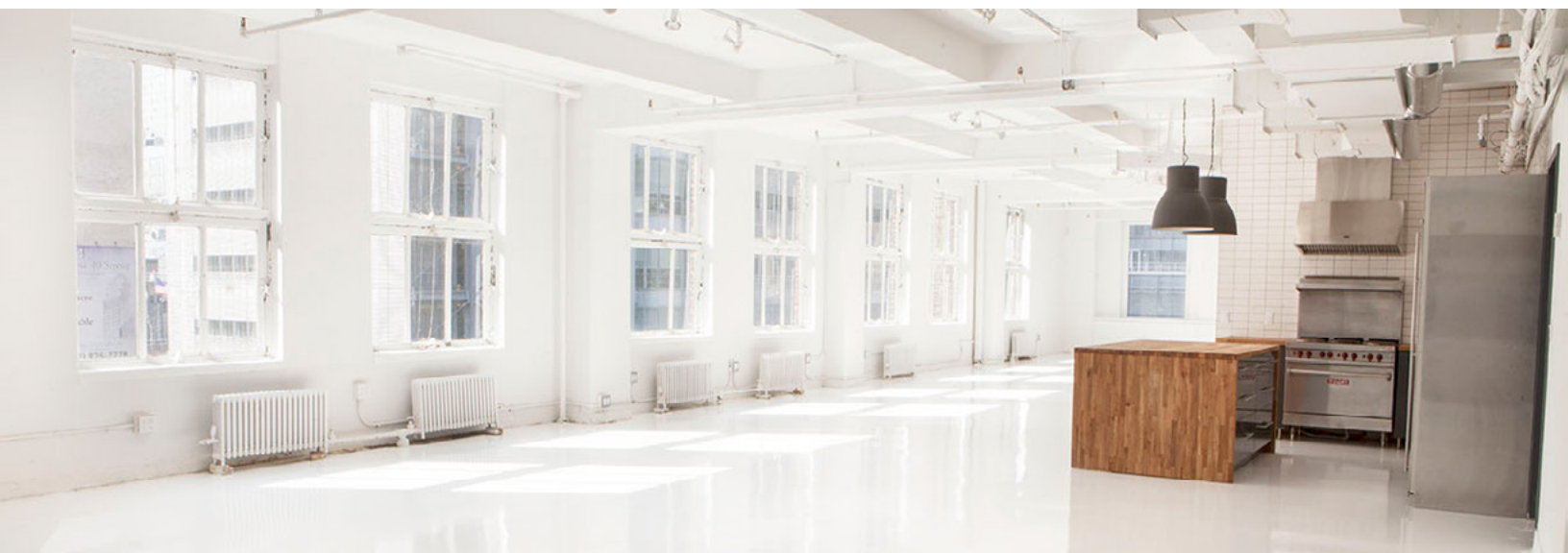
Finding the right venue has always been a challenge. Traditionally, you've had to rely on word of mouth recommendations, industry exhibitions, and hotel sales representatives to find the right space for your event. Today, it's easier to run Google searches for venues, but difficult to do so efficiently. Luckily, venue marketplaces like Peerspace can help you narrow your search based on your event needs.

You'll want to find a venue that supports your event's objectives, complements your event brand, and delivers the “wow” factor to attendees. To help, here are four types of nontraditional venues, and the benefits of using each for different types of events:

Warehouses and studios

These old nuts-and-bolts factory locations have transitioned to multi-purpose spaces that lack pretension. Their pared down architecture makes them versatile and appealing.

- Best for: Pop-up dinners, corporate events
- Impact on guests: These spaces often provide a simple, uncluttered environment. The result is that the space never feels too upscale, so guests will feel at ease and inspired.



Lofts and rooftops

These mid-century modern spaces combine the cozy comforts of home with a stylish aesthetic. They can spark creativity and encourage collaboration.

- Best for: Retreats, cocktail parties, meetings
- Impact on guests: The chic design and relaxing organic elements can immediately make your attendees feel at home. And with rooftops that overlook the cityscape, partygoers will have something to talk about as they unwind from a long day at the main event.



Art galleries and museums

With artwork covering expansive white walls, these venues merge design with a clean aesthetic. Galleries are ideal for planners looking for spaces that are low-maintenance but make a big impact.

- Best for: Galas, fundraisers, cocktail parties
- Impact on guests: These creative spaces encourage your attendees to have an open mind and break out of their comfort zones. The informal atmosphere of a gallery can also motivate people to interact and mingle with one another.



Farmhouses, vineyards, and villas

These spaces are typically in rustic locations, or in cozy urban locations with cottage-style elements. They often have French-country inspired decor that has a well-loved and worn appearance.

- Best for: Retreats, sustainable events
- Impact on guests: These venues encourage attendees to show up, have fun, and leave their worries behind. Guests will feel like they're a part of a relaxed and timeless experience.



"Nontraditional venues help deepen your attendee's connection with the event, or the emotion you are trying to evoke," says Kristina Skinner of Peerspace. "The right space can bring everyone together or break them into close-knit groups. It can elevate the event or help people feel at home."

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Questions to consider when choosing a nontraditional venue space

Sometimes choosing a venue is difficult. When that happens, Peerspace helps organizers avoid common event roadblocks by asking the following questions. Read through each one, and let the answers guide you towards the perfect venue.

How much space do you need?

This question goes beyond guest count. Does your event need standing room, rows of chairs and a stage, or tables for a seated meal service? Make sure you're considering the entire event experience to determine how much space you will require.

What time of year is it?

An outdoor space in Austin might seem like a great idea, until your guests have to bear the August heat. Your location and the time of year will play an important part in deciding between an indoor or partially outdoor venue.

What is your budget?

Nontraditional venues are often rented by the hour, but don't be afraid to ask for the venue's day rate and what it includes (hours, personnel, and access time). As with traditional venue contracts, pay attention to the fine print and take note of the hidden charges. Don't let items like damage or security deposits, overtime for staff, or taxes surprise you.

Will you have music?

Want attendees to raise the roof and dance the night away, or have speakers walk on stage to pumping music? Make sure there are no noise restrictions or curfews for sound. Some venues may require amplified music to end by 10pm, others might not allow it at all.

Does the venue require you to use their in-house services?

Some nontraditional venues insist that you use their in-house services or choose from a list of preferred vendors. This may seem restrictive at first, but these audio/visual vendors or caterers are usually familiar with the venue space and can help you when it comes to planning and setting up.

If you want a venue that lets you bring your own suppliers and vendors, check out our tips in the next section (Part 4: Deliver the Ultimate Event Experience).

What in-house assets does the venue offer?

Nontraditional event venues like warehouses and lofts are often blank canvases that can transform to fit your needs. This means you may need to bring everything in — from the tables and chairs to the kitchen sink.

Check with your venue of choice to see if they have A/V and lighting, a kitchen with a stove, a refrigerator, running water, and basic rentals such as chairs, tables and linens. If not, you'll need to source outside vendors.

Make sure you cover all your bases when using your own suppliers and vendors. For instance, you'll want to make sure there's enough power in the building for your sound, lighting and video vendors to tap into — otherwise, you'll need a power generator. In addition, ask if the use of venue requires any permits.

How will you accommodate transportation?

Verify that attendees driving to your event will be able to park. A venue with parking included is ideal, but there are other options to explore. Consider renting a parking lot nearby, or offer credits with a rideshare service like Uber or Lyft.

How much time will you need for set-up and clean up?

When working with a nontraditional event venue, leave ample time to set up before the event, and to clean up after.

If you're hosting your event in a museum, for example, you'll need to wait until the space closes to the public before you start setting up. So if the museum closes at 5pm and your event starts at 5pm, you're not giving yourself a wide enough window.

Some venues might give you access to the venue the evening before, so you can load in and start set up at no additional cost. It never hurts to ask.

Part 04 Deliver the ultimate event experience

One advantage of traditional venues and hotels is their all-inclusive soup-to-nuts offerings. So when event professionals think of bare bones venues, they're often deterred by the thought of finding and supplying their own vendors.

One solution is to ask for the help of experienced event planners who know the best vendors to use. Or you can take matters into your own hands.

Even without the help of an event planner or a service, finding and supplying your own vendors may be simpler than it seems. Here are some suggestions to help you find the right people and deliver the ultimate event experience.



Catering

Of all the vendors and suppliers you'll need to create the ultimate event experience, catering should be the least of your worries. Check with your venue to find out their list of preferred vendors. But if you want to deliver a truly personalized experience, hire a catering service that will work with you to create a menu tailored for your guests.



Beverages

Before renting a van for a big trip to the local liquor store, check online to see if any on-demand alcohol delivery services are available. Feel free to ask if they'll help you estimate your needs and connect you with bartending staff to serve event attendees. But before you do, make sure your venue has a liquor license!



Decor and design

Nontraditional event venues can often be empty spaces. Before you book a space, ask the venue if they have basics like tables, chairs, and linens. If there's still something you need, check with local event rental companies.



Security and safety

Safety and security should always been a priority at your events. If your venue doesn't have it's own security, consider looking into a service that provides highly-trained, experienced guards with current licenses, and FBI and DOJ background checks. You'll rest easy knowing they're your eyes and ears during the event.



Transportation

If your event is in a major metro area, rideshare services like Uber and Lyft let you offer attendees door-to-door rides for free or discounted prices. Taking advantage of a remote venue like a vineyard? No worries. Look for local businesses that charter buses, limos, and vans to take your attendees from A to B.

The takeaway

The erosion of formal business culture and the growing demand for unique event experiences have forced event professionals to think outside the ballroom. It's easier than ever to find and book a nontraditional space thanks to online venue marketplaces. And armed with the advice in this guide, you can use nontraditional venues to evolve with an ever-changing industry.

Whether you want to support your flagship event or take your show on the road, nontraditional event venues can help you deliver jaw-dropping event experiences to the attendees demanding them.

If you're interested in more ways to grow your event and create meaningful event experiences, talk with one of Eventbrite's experts at (866) 902-2531 or visit us at www.eventbrite.com/blog/overview.

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