

Whitepaper

Ethics and Education

Essential requirements for successful use
of AI by association event organisers

The **Hague.**
& Partners



Introduction

It is widely accepted that the term Artificial Intelligence (AI) was first used in August 1955 in a proposal for a '2 month, 10 man study of artificial intelligence' submitted by John McCarthy (Dartmouth College), Marvin Minsky (Harvard University), Nathaniel Rochester (IBM), and Claude Shannon (Bell Telephone Laboratories). The workshop, which took place in 1956, is considered as the official birthdate of the field of AI¹.

However, despite nearly seventy years of research, implementation and discussion on the subject, it is arguable that widespread interest and usage of AI is a far most recent phenomenon - mostly due to easily accessible tools such as ChatGPT, Bard, DALL-E etc, which have become mainstream in the last 18 months, primarily since ChatGPT launched in November 2022, with an alleged 100 million users after two months².

This upsurge in global media interest and usage by individuals and organisations around the world has directly impacted the global business events industry, with event technology experts, industry leaders and associations all seeking to understand how best to use AI, its ramifications, and opportunities for early adopters.

Within all the 'noise' surrounding AI, it is apparent to all that there are real benefits and real challenges. However, what they are is understood by few and unknown to many.

In response to the hype and hyperbole, Ottawa Tourism and The Hague & Partners Convention Bureau³ set out in October and November 2023 to gain a better understanding of AI and its potential impact.

The findings include the facts that amongst associations/not for profits:

- ◆ 63% are using AI already to organise their events;
- ◆ 8% say they never will;
- ◆ 26% are upskilling in the use of AI;
- ◆ 23% say they never intend to;
- ◆ 63% think governments should regulate on the use of AI;
- ◆ 52% are in favour of an ISO;
- ◆ 65% don't think governments have the knowledge to legislate.

The rest of this whitepaper explores these results, and many more, in greater depth, it seeks to provide context, and questions where we go from here.

¹ www.forbes.com/sites/gilpress/2016/12/30/a-very-short-history-of-artificial-intelligence-ai/?sh=3b2f6ae86fba

² www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/feb/02/chatgpt-100-million-users-open-ai-fastest-growing-app

³ For brevity, going forward Ottawa Tourism will be referred to as Ottawa and The Hague & Partners Convention Bureau as The Hague

Method

Due to a lack of research and information on the subject in relation to the business event sector, we decided to follow the successful research process used earlier in 2023 when The Hague released a whitepaper entitled 'What Is Legacy?'

Qualitative research and direction

To gain initial insight and help distil a very broad topic into specific and mana-geable areas for further research, we brought together a group of 16 association industry professionals for a 90-minute workshop in late September 2023. During the workshop we explored the concept of AI within the business events industry as a whole, before splitting into sub-groups to discuss individual topics in more detail.

The workshop was facilitated by Ottawa and The Hague's PR consultant (Adam Baggs, from Soaring Worldwide), who has also co-authored this document. The attendees included:

- ◆ 2 x in-house association PCO
- ◆ 3 x association agency PCO
- ◆ 3 x association board director
- ◆ 1 x venue representative
- ◆ 1 x association community manager
- ◆ 2 x technology focused academic

- ◆ 2 x representatives The Hague
- ◆ 2 x representatives Ottawa

Quantitative survey

Following the round table discussion our team was able to decide on a more focused direction for the research, which led to the drafting of a survey to be completed by members of the industry during October 2023. The survey was distributed to a database of external association and business event professionals, as well as being shared across social media channels. To encourage completion, a draw for a € 200 Amazon voucher was offered as an incentive.

We received 109 responses with the following breakdown:

56	Association	51%
17	Charity / Non-for-profit	16%
3	Government / Public sector	3%
1	Corporate company - 500 or more employees	1%
3	Corporate company - 500 or less employees	3%
10	Conference / Event agency - focused mostly on corporate business	9%
10	Conference / Event agency - focused mostly on association business	9%
3	Freelance conference / Event organiser	3%
2	Association consultant	2%
4	Other	3%

Note - all percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent

Only one individual responded from each organisation. To simplify the results, these were subsequently pulled together into three distinct groups as follows:

- ◆ association, charity/not for profit, government/public sector and agencies focused on these sectors. Total - 91 respondents - described as associations/not for profits henceforth;
- ◆ corporate company 500 or more employees, corporate company less than 500 employees, agencies focused on the corporate sector. Total - 14 respondents - described as corporates henceforth;
- ◆ the remaining 4 responses were excluded as industry suppliers.

61% of the respondents were from Europe (including UK), 31% from North America and the remaining 8% from the rest of the world, allowing us to create a whitepaper that is reasonably representative of such a global industry.

Due to the business activities of Ottawa and The Hague this research was deliberately focused on the Association sector, resulting in far fewer responses from corporates, too low in fact to provide a truly useful data set. However, for the sake of openness and as a comparison the corporate responses will be included throughout.

Survey challenge and late delivery of results

In a somewhat ironic turn of events, we believe the Amazon vouchers we were offering acted as an incentive for an individual to use some form of 'bot' or

online tool to respond to the survey multiple times with bad data but genuine email addresses. It is our belief it was the intention of this individual to provide an overwhelming number of entries ensuring they would win the vouchers.

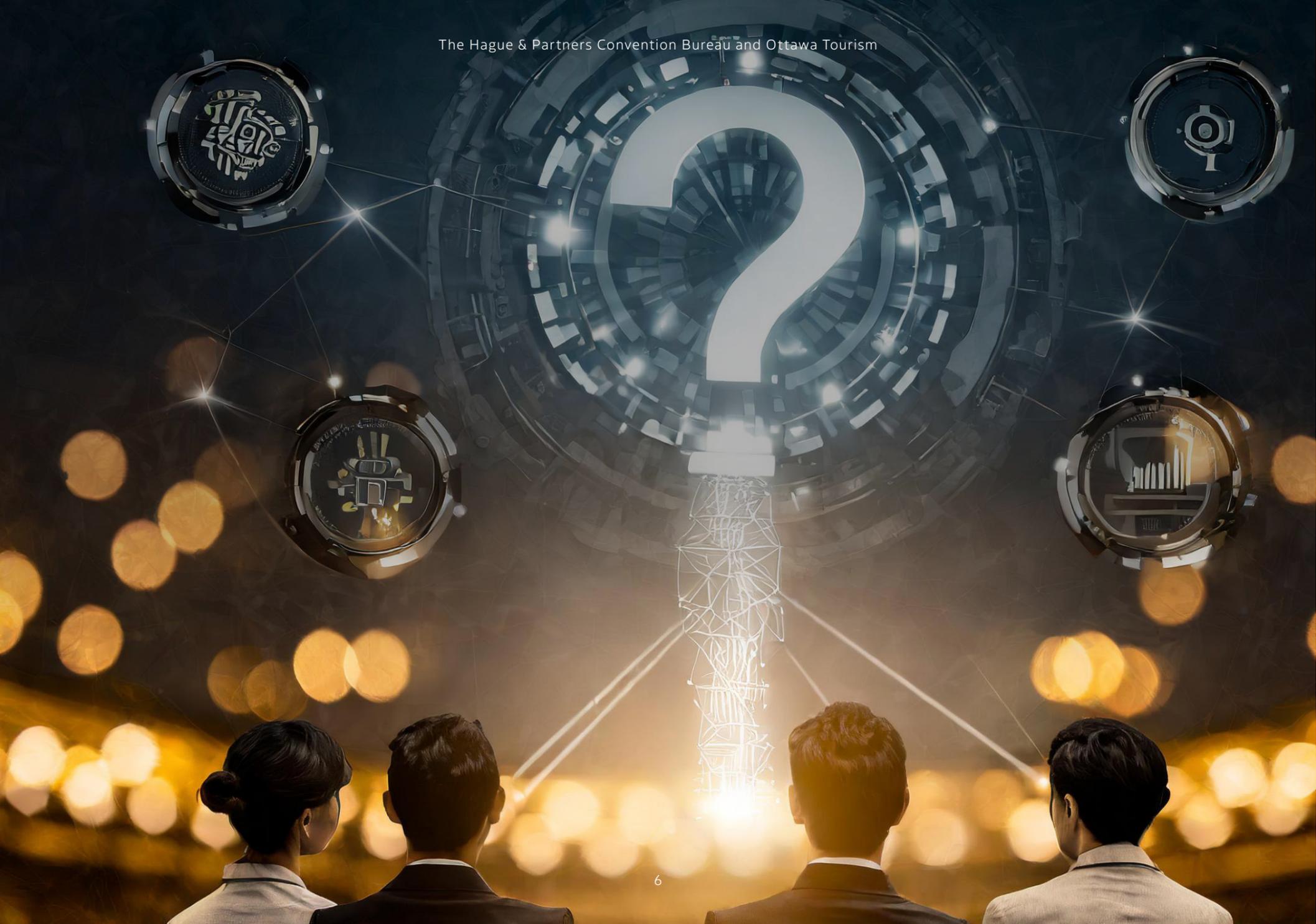
Though we considered the use of an AI tool to examine all the data and remove the false entries, we felt this would be unethical as the responses included personal data and email address, which we did not have permission to share with third parties. Instead, each entry was reviewed individually and kept / discarded based on:

- ◆ the individual being known to a member of the team;
- ◆ having a LinkedIn profile showing they were genuinely part of the company they worked for or the industry;
- ◆ being listed on the website of their organisation in the role listed in their response;
- ◆ providing coherent and relevant answers to the "text entry" questions in the research.

In all 524 responses were deleted from the results.

The lengthy manual process required to cleanse the data of the fake entries delayed the release of the final results beyond our initial target of 28th November.





Lack of knowledge is our biggest challenge

It became clear from the outset that the biggest challenge in conducting the research, understanding the results, and presenting them back to the industry is lack of knowledge. Even as a research team we were unsure where to start until given direction through round table discussions.

Fundamentally and most importantly the round table showed us that there are a minority in the industry who feel they understand AI, its potential and even, in some case, how to use it. However, the greater majority do not. Their understanding is limited to generative AI (GAI) such as ChatGPT and they are still trying to understand both a business case and a practical case for its use.

The round table participants all acknowledged that it is a powerful tool that they expect to offer great benefits, but they really don't see what those will be as yet or how to use them. This was confirmed in the survey, where only 19% of the associations/not for profits expressed a good or advanced understanding of AI, whereas 46% had limited to no understanding. The remaining 35% expressed moderate understanding⁴. Despite this lack of understanding, on an emotional level, the associations/not for profits respondents appear to be reasonably positive about the impact of AI on their work, with 57% either quite or very positive and only 4% quite or very negative, leaving 38% ambivalent at this point in time⁵.

It was in the next question that provided the first surprising result, particularly given the recent media coverage of AI, both inside and outside of the business events sector. When asked on a scale of 1-10 how much they think AI will impact their event organising, with 1 being not at all and 10 being completely revolutionise, the authors were surprised to see 23% of the respondents give a score of three or less with an overall average of 5.5/10⁶.

These numbers seem extremely low compared to the round table, where even amongst those least knowledgeable of the subject, everyone expects AI to have a significant impact on the sector. Interpreting the reason for this is a challenge, however we believe it might simply come back to the lack of understanding of AI's potential. The round table attendees included a higher number of individuals with in-depth knowledge of AI than the more generic survey, so it is likely this greater knowledge and understanding of the technology led to greater expectation of change brought about by AI.

⁴ Corporates - 7% advanced understanding, 57% moderate understanding, 36% limited understanding

⁵ Corporates - 26% very positive, 43% quite positive, 29% ambivalent

⁶ Corporates - 6/10

Do we even know when we are using AI?

When asked if they are using AI in their current work, 63%⁷ of associations/not for profits say that they are. This is split further into:

- ◆ 7% using AI frequently;
- ◆ 31% using AI occasionally;
- ◆ 25% using AI rarely.

On closer examination, amongst those who are using some form of AI, most of the tasks it is being used to perform are marketing (by 58% of respondents) and content curation (by 51% of respondents). This is compared to data analysis by 26% and real time analytics by 11%⁸. This, combined with the fact that ChatGPT was by far the most cited tool / system mentioned by those willing to say how they are using AI, suggests that the industry is only scratching the surface when it comes to its use.

This also suggests; though this is speculation based on the round table discussion, survey data, recent industry events and industry media coverage; that most individuals and organisations don't think of AI beyond these tools. This is perhaps backed up by the 8% who never intend to use AI as well as the 11% who expect to only use it rarely⁹.

Such responses clearly show a naivety and lack of understanding when we consider that AI is already in use in so many areas - whether it be the computers that help fly the planes to events, online tools to build registration systems, or indeed the growing number of features integrated into something as ubiquitous as Microsoft Office. Just because we aren't actively choosing to use AI for a specific task, doesn't mean it isn't already affecting our lives and our work.

⁷ Corporates - 64% are using AI in their events - 29% frequently, 14% occasionally, 21% rarely
⁸ Corporates - Marketing 67%, content curation 67%, data analysis 33%, real time analytics 33%
⁹ Corporates - 0% expect to use AI rarely or never

We need to invest in our knowledge

The data so far has demonstrated both positives and negatives regarding AI and its use in business events, but more than anything it shows significant disparities in knowledge.

The round table participants strongly wanted to expand their knowledge both of AI's capabilities and its potential impact on their work. It has been said in various ways in the media and by a number of global leaders on the subject of AI, including Mo Gawdat during an interview with Steven Bartlett that 'AI will not take your job. A person using AI will take your job...'¹⁰. Such a sentiment supports the imperative for learning and knowledge.

There are however some worrying data points when it comes to upskilling: 72% of associations/not for profits are not currently upskilling¹¹, which given the fast-changing nature of AI and its relative newness in the sector is not a surprise, particularly when supported by the fact that 85%¹² have no budget to upskill. This is a real concern! We invest money in everything from first aid training to data privacy, diversity and inclusion training to risk assessments - why would we not put budget aside for an inevitable shift in the way the sector works. Hopefully, this is due to budget cycles at the time the survey was complete and change in this area will come.

¹⁰ www.youtube.com/watch?v=bk-nQ7HF6k4
¹¹ Corporates - 64% not upskilling
¹² Corporates - 71% have no funds available
¹³ Corporates - 14% no intention to upskill
¹⁴ Corporates - 3/10

Most worrying of all in this part of the research is the 23%¹³ who say they have no intention to upskill at all. Someone who started in the sector in the 80s or 90s possibly started out using a typewriter. They probably remember the telex and certainly used a fax. They will now be communicating via email, SMS and WhatsApp, whilst promoting their events on a range of social channels. The suggestion that they would not upskill to some extent in the use of AI is a concern.

Perhaps their lack of concern about upskilling lies in the fact that when asked on a scale of 1-10, 'to what extent they are concerned that AI will threaten jobs in the event organising sector', with 1 - no concern at all and 10 - very concerned, the average was only 3.5/10¹⁴.

This again suggests confidence amongst the respondents. However, such confidence must be born from a position of knowledge. Consequently, to support this, we must upskill urgently and put budget aside to support the individuals who are the life blood of our industry. They are expressing their confidence so we in turn need to support them and ensure they are ready for any future changes.

As an industry we do however have to consider where we should be upskilling and increasing knowledge within the sector. It is fair to say that the coding

and technical knowledge of AI can remain firmly within the realm of the event technologists and developers creating the software we use on a day-to-day basis. No event organiser needs to actually understand how to create an AI tool from scratch. Instead, we need to understand where it interacts with our work, and which systems can be improved through the addition of AI tools built by others. We need to appreciate and understand its value and the implications of its use. Then, we can task those skilled in its development and creation to integrate it into our systems to achieve the maximum value, and in turn improve our efficiencies and events.

Most event professionals use social media and registration systems for example, and we often link them together, but we would never consider building one from the ground up or developing the tools to link them together, whilst simultaneously managing delegates and organising a conference. Instead, we allow those with the right expertise to do the technical elements for us. We do however need to know enough to understand what might be possible, what benefits we are looking for and how that will improve our event. Our need for knowledge about AI is no different.

Perhaps most importantly though, through this upskilling we need to understand the usage of the data we manage and the ethical implications of application programming interfaces (APIs - which are a common tool to link two pieces of software) and data exchange between our own organisations and those supporting us through the provision of AI.



Ethics and trust

Perhaps the biggest area of discussion during the round table and the area where greatest education is required surrounds ethics and the safe and legal use of AI.

One subset of AI is referred to as machine learning, and this term is very useful when reminding us that ultimately the more knowledge we feed the machines, the more useful they become. So, to get the most from AI we need to feed it data - but who does that data belong to, where has it come from and do we have permission to share it?

Interestingly, despite 63% of associations/not for profits using AI to some extent in their event organising work, 73%¹⁵ are NOT telling their delegates and stakeholders that they are doing so. Though the research did not go far enough to ask what data those 63% are sharing with the AI tools, it is likely that some of it belongs to third parties. Whether that is personal data, abstract submissions or simply session titles and names, it is entirely possible that data is being fed to external organisations without the permission of the original data owners. And in 73% of cases they are unaware.

For several decades privacy and the use of data by large organisations has been the concern of many. AI and its ability to learn from such data is the latest

iteration of these discussions and anyone using such tools must understand this. In fact, it was this lack of permission to use AI that stopped the authors of this whitepaper from using some form of data analysis tool to cleanse it of the 524 fake entries.

Such misuse of AI and data has raised concerns at many levels around the world, and the respondents to the survey do recognise there is an issue, with 63%¹⁶ of respondents concerned about the ethical implications of using AI in event organisation. This extends to 78%¹⁷ who think AI could introduce bias in event organisation due to its use in content curation, marketing and data analysis.

However, solutions to this challenge are not clear. 63%¹⁸ think governments should step in and regulate, 52%¹⁹ think they should create an ISO specifically for AI in event to do so but there is no consensus, particularly given the fact that 65%²⁰ don't think those very same governments have the knowledge to do so.

This is hardly surprising when you consider the level of discord at the recent COP28 event in the Middle East. Eight years after The Paris Agreement was signed at COP21 and 27 years after the Kyoto Protocol. Climate change is an existential threat to us all, but in terms of pace, it is sloth-like compared to the development of AI. Perhaps though, the pace of change in climate impact is

¹⁵ Corporates - 44% are not telling delegates and stakeholders about their use of AI

¹⁶ Corporates - 50% are concerned and ethical implications

¹⁷ Corporates - 79% think AI could introduce bias

¹⁸ Corporates - 71% think governments should legislate

¹⁹ Corporates - 79% think an ISO should be created

²⁰ Corporates - 71% don't think governments have the knowledge to legislate

what has led to such slow work on solutions. Maybe the speed AI is moving will force governments to act equally swiftly.

Saturday 9 December, 2023²¹ might have seen the EU reach an agreement on the creation of the first set of AI rules, but at this stage all they have agreed is to create rules that won't come into force until 2025, by which point AI will have moved on even further. As the round table members pointed out, we have already seen the pace of change outstrip policy makers, first with the rise of the internet, then social media, the only difference with AI will be that this happens faster.

As the participants of the round table agreed, at this point in time, our most likely avenue for success is to come together as an industry, agree on best practice based on the knowledge we have, supported by tech and academic experts and use those frameworks to self-police.

21 www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20231206IPR15699/artificial-intelligence-act-deal-on-comprehensive-rules-for-trustworthy-ai

Conclusions and key messages

Firstly, AI is not just inevitable, it is a reality, here and now. It is not something we should be thinking in about in terms of 'if'. Instead, it is something we should, as an industry, be thinking of in terms of 'how'.

AI will change the way we work, it is already doing so in the way we shop, drive, create documents and organise data. Why, therefore, should we believe for a moment that it will not change the way we organise events? It is however up to us how we choose to implement such technology into our work and day-to-day activities. At the very least tools exist to enhance our productivity and make our data usage and manipulation more effective. AI is far more than tools that generate content, images and marketing materials, it has the potential to be a tool that drives forward change across every part of our industry if we only give it the chance to do so.

Such change, like all great shifts, whether it be the invention of the wheel, steam, internal combustion engine or the jet engine, cause changes to the people around them and the world in which they live. They don't necessarily destroy workforces or negatively impact on individual lives, but they do require changes amongst individuals to ensure they aren't left behind. Jobs and skills will need to be adjusted, budgets will need putting in place for upskilling, and capital investment will be required to support the changes. However, that is

no different to the process that moved event registration from handwritten postal forms to modern day online microsites.

Throughout all of this we must be mindful of privacy and data. AI is a ravenous beast that gets bigger, more powerful and more useful the more it is fed. However, we must only feed it what it needs and what we have permission to do so. Even then we must consider what is best practice in our industry. We cannot rely on external support, we must come together and work as one to ensure no-one is left behind, everyone benefits and the tools that will guarantee a future for our industry work on behalf of us not against us.

As a truly people-focused industry that relies on people being face to face, what we do is irreplaceable by machine. Covid taught us that digital and hybrid meetings are useful but there will always be a need for people to meet in person.

AI has the potential to be the most powerful tool we have ever used in our industry; it is up to us to make the most of it in the most responsible way possible, allowing its power to help us optimise processes, increase knowledge and provide us with the capacity to focus on what matters most - human contact.

info@thehague.com
thehague.com/partners



info@ottawatourism.ca
ottawatourism.ca

