

Event Technology Awards Judges' Spotlight: Scott Cullather

By Sam Hyland - 28th May 2019



Full Name: Scott Cullather

Company: INVNT

Job Title: Co-Founder and CEO

Scott Cullather has more than 25 years of brand communications and live event experience. He co-founded INVNT in 2008, and under his leadership, INVNT has redefined the way organizations communicate to their employees, customers, and business partners. Across his career, Scott has led teams in the design, production, and execution of hundreds of large-scale B2B and B2C events in more than 40 countries, for dozens of the world's leading brands, companies, and trade associations.



- **What experience can you draw upon to successfully judge the ETAs?**

Over the last 30 years I've led teams in the design, production, and execution of hundreds of large-scale B2B and B2C events in more than 40 countries, for dozens of the world's leading brands, companies, and trade associations. I've seen technology and its use at events evolve in that time, including the dos and don'ts when it comes to effectively integrating it into live experiences.

- **How long have you worked in the events industry and what keeps you interested in it?**

I grew up in the business – my father was the thirteenth employee at Jack Morton before establishing his own business, Williams/Gerard Productions, which I joined a year after I graduated. I stayed there for 18 years, running the agency's New York office, and then Kristina McCoobery – our COO – and I co-founded INVNT in 2008.

Building out INVNT's global footprint – we now operate across eight offices, five countries, four

continents and six time zones – has been an incredibly rewarding task as it's an expansion that has been driven by our clients' desire to take their events overseas. We're now able to help them ensure they maintain consistency of messaging, yet also ensure their campaigns are delivered authentically in local markets. At INVNT we've created a high-performance culture for our people, one where they have skin in the game, where they are recognised and rewarded, and heard, and this is something that we're constantly fine-tuning.

The other thing that keeps me interested at present is the fact that our sector has undergone an incredible transformation over the last few years, as marketers come to recognise the strategic relevance of live events. They now know that in order to connect with experience loving millennials and Gen Zs they need to engage them through experiences where they can see, feel, hear, touch and even smell their products and services. With these generations expected to gain more and more buying power as they work their way up the ranks in the corporate world, events will become essential to the success of every marketing campaign, which is an incredibly exciting prospect. I think acting as a thought leader and elevating our industry as a whole is an important piece of this success puzzle for our sector, and I plan to continue to devote time to sharing my thoughts and experiences through speaking and judging engagements, and editorial contributions.

- **Best (and worst) moments working in the events industry?**

The best would be launching INVNT, and growing the business to a point where Time Inc. acquired us in 2015. Then buying INVNT back from Time Inc. in 2017 as things didn't work out the way we wanted them to. Kristina and I balanced running the agency and ensuring its continued success by day, and then we devoted all of our time to re-acquiring it by night. It was hard work and long hours, but successfully taking the business back, and having our employees and clients stick with us throughout the process made it incredibly rewarding. It's been nearly two years since we went independent and we're experiencing record-breaking growth.

The live events business is a very personal business. You make life long friendships with clients, vendors and employees. The most difficult thing that I went through in my career was when Fred DeLuca, the founder of Subway – who became a friend and mentor to me for over 20 years, passed away from Leukemia. Fred played an instrumental role in guiding me throughout my career and he was there when Kristina and I started INVNT in 2008, providing us with his thoughts and guidance whenever we asked for it. It was a tragic loss for us and for the world at large.

- **Favourite piece of tech for work and personal life?**

Kristina introduced me to the meditation app, Headspace a few years ago and it's become an important part of our lives. We recognise how vital it is to take a few minutes out of our busy schedules to reflect and reset for a few minutes each day. It actually allows us to be more present, effective and efficient, and ensures we're best equipped to support our teams. The app is based on a simple premise, it's quick, cheap and effective. A no brainer really.

- **What's your go-to piece of tech when working on an event and why?**

We're real advocates of creating live brand storytelling moments that empower attendees to become citizen journalists. Of creating those experiences that are so engaging, they feel compelled to share them with their networks via social media. It's a simple one and not exactly new, but social media is powerful in that it enables us to extend the reach of our events far beyond its four physical walls, so it's important to leverage it.

I am also seeing the trend whereby events drive social – there are peaks in social activity around an event now – whether its something like Coachella or the ETAs, so the two are essentially engaged in a symbiotic relationship.

- **What was the last event on which you worked?**

As the Co-Founder and CEO of the business I've taken a step back from the physical delivery side of events, however I am actively involved in the pitch process and remain across all of the events we work on.

A recent highlight for the agency was the Genesis Mint Concept launch in New York – which was the first official event to be held at New York's new Hudson Yards development. The exclusive experience featured live music, choreographed dance performances, and a fashion show curated by Vogue, which showcased the fashions of world-renowned designer Prabal Gurung.

- **From your experience, what's the best way to utilise tech at an event?**

Event technology is most effective and best utilised when it serves a true purpose – it's not just there because 'everyone else is doing it' or to momentarily entertain. Event technology must enhance the attendee experience. Importantly, it must help a brand tell its story too. It's vital to consider, for example, virtual reality might be cool and interest an audience initially, but does it tie back in with the client's product and/or service offering? Will it help a delegate better understand what they are about? If the answer is no, it's not the right fit.

- **We all learn from our mistakes! What was the biggest lesson you learned from a mistake since being in the industry?**

In the live events industry, we only get one chance to get it right. No matter how prepared and organised we are, it's very likely that there's something that won't go as planned. Therefore the biggest lesson I've learned is to not only be prepared, but to be flexible and responsive. Learn to expect the unexpected. That way, if something does go wrong you'll be able to think quick and devise a solution without attendees realising what's going on behind the scenes.

- **What are you most looking forward to at the ETAs?**

To celebrating and recognising creative applications of technology in the live space, the innovative nature of our industry – it's fast paced, constantly changing and always inspiring – and networking with my fellow industry professionals.

What do events, such as the ETAs, mean to you?

The ETAs are important as they enable the industry to come together to reflect on the role that technology plays in the success of our events, to celebrate the suppliers we partner with, and the work that we produce together. Event technology is essential to the success of the modern day event, so it's vital that those guys who work behind the scenes receive the recognition they deserve.

- **If you could only use one piece of tech when working on an event, what would that be?**

The technology I most want to see incorporated into events hasn't been developed yet, and that's predictive analytics. We live in a world of customisation now – we're able to control almost everything we do, from ordering a cab to exactly where we want it within minutes, to when and where we'll watch a movie, and the way we're marketed to online – take retargeting as an example. Our lives are tailored to our personal preferences, and events should provide this same experience, seamlessly.

That's where predictive analytics comes in. Once this technology is sophisticated enough and can be adapted to live events, we'll be able to extract true data sets and behaviour patterns from previous events, analyse them, and see what worked and what didn't work for different attendees. We can then draw on this data when it comes to future projects, ensuring every aspect is tailored to every want and need of each attendee.