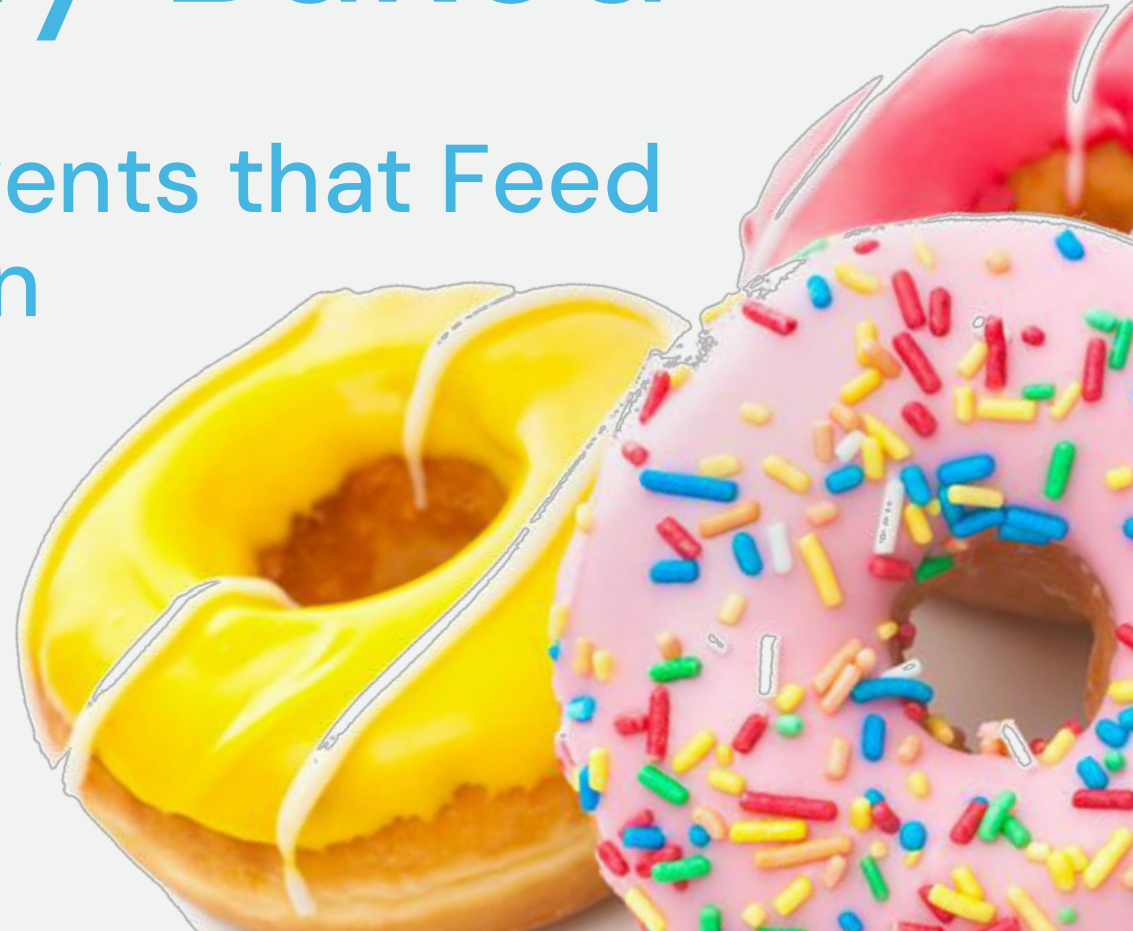




Freshly Baked

Building Events that Feed Connection



iaee expo!
annual meeting
& exhibition
2025

#expoexpo

Meet the Speaker

Angela Strahan

Vice President of Creative Services

Imagination is my favorite design tool. For 15+ years, I've been turning big ideas into immersive spaces that surprise, delight, and occasionally inspire a selfie (or three). That curiosity and drive extends to how I lead. My role is to rally teams around bold thinking, purposeful design, and the occasional wild idea that turns out to be the freshest one in the room. I believe constraints are where creativity thrives—and where the magic happens.

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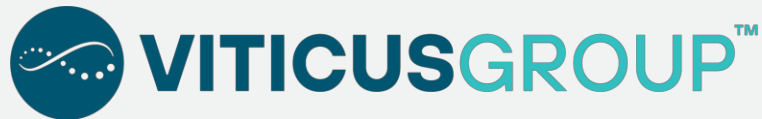


Meet the Speaker

Sara Taylor

Senior Director of Conference Operations

Sara Taylor is the Senior Director of Conference Operations at Viticus Group, where she leads a team overseeing all aspects of conference operations, exhibits, and sponsorships for two flagship annual veterinary events—WVC Vegas and WVC Nashville. With over 20 years' experience in the convention and trade show industry, Sara brings expertise in strategic event planning, vendor management, and large-scale logistics.



Freshly Baked

Building Events that Feed Connection



Digital Fatigue is Real and Rising



From morning alarms to late-night scrolling, our daily routines are driven by digital interfaces



Countless screens by noon and at least seven hours per day on digital



Algorithms create echo chambers narrowing our perspective

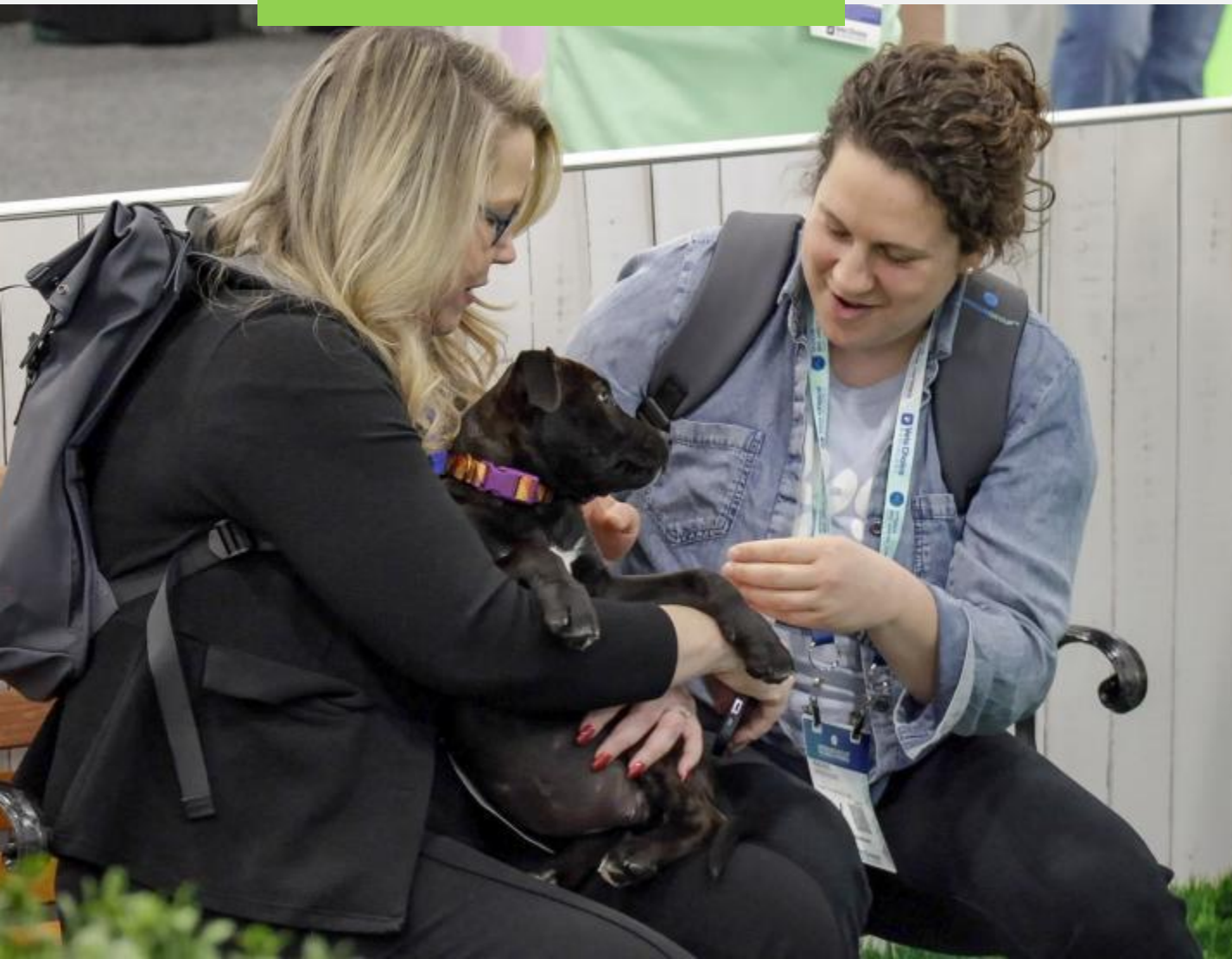


Novelties often miss creating real connections



Attendees are hyperconnected but more disconnected than ever

Connection is the Secret Ingredient



1 Experiences that drive emotion, and participation deliver the highest engagement



2 Experiential learning and co-creation see up to 2x dwell time compared to passive ones



3 Personalized activations increase conversion intent by 80%



Connection Across Generations

Generation	Birth Years	2025 Ages	Mindset	Event Relevance
Gen Z “The Authenticity Generation”	1997–2012	13–28	Digitally saturated, emotionally drained	Want unplugged moments, tangible interactions, and spaces that feel real
Millennials (Gen Y) “The Experience Generation”	1981–1996	29–44	Tech-fluent but screen-weary	Seeking purposeful engagement and experiences that build wellbeing
Gen X “The Bridge Generation”	1965–1980	45–60	Skeptical of digital noise	Value the trust that comes from in-person connection
Baby Boomers “The Relationship Generation”	1946–1964	61–79	Pre-digital pragmatists	Need networking and follow-through, value face-to-face for credibility

Despite generational differences, all attendees are driven by the same emotional needs: discovery, belonging, and self-expression

Study in Success

What's working at Viticus Group's WVC



Experiential Learning

Hands-on learning redefines engagement by shifting attendees from observers to participants

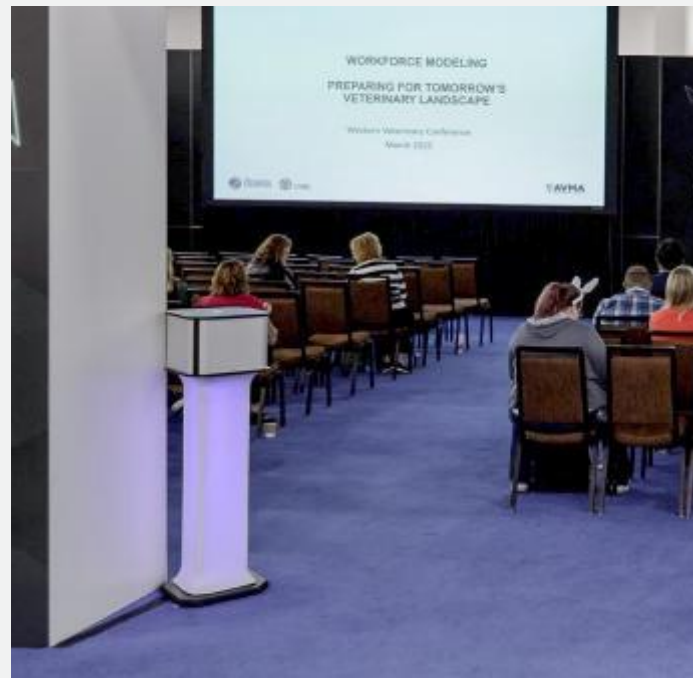
- WVC introduced Learning Hubs combined with Labs and Lounges — interactive elements with live demos, small-group collaboration, and skill-based training
- Inspired by Pinterest Labs and maker culture, attendees could touch, test, and try new tools and techniques
- Result: increased dwell time, repeat participation, and sponsor ROI



Passive Digital Engagement

Digital doesn't have to dominate; it can quietly enhance discovery and connection

- WVC leveraged passive digital tools—like badge tracking to understand traffic flow and preferences
- Digital acts as the invisible layer that amplified human interaction, not replaced it
- Sponsors and exhibitors gain from this information as it shows what's working and what's not, helping shape future investments



Personalization

Personalization transforms attendees from passive participants to co-creators.

- WVC and exhibitors and sponsors leverage food customization stations and personalized swag experiences
- Attendees selected materials, icons, and textures that reflected their interests or personality
- Participants increased dwell times in locations at these activations and were more likely to share these experiences on social media



Sensory Design

Multisensory environments stimulate emotion, memory, and belonging—turning events into experiences

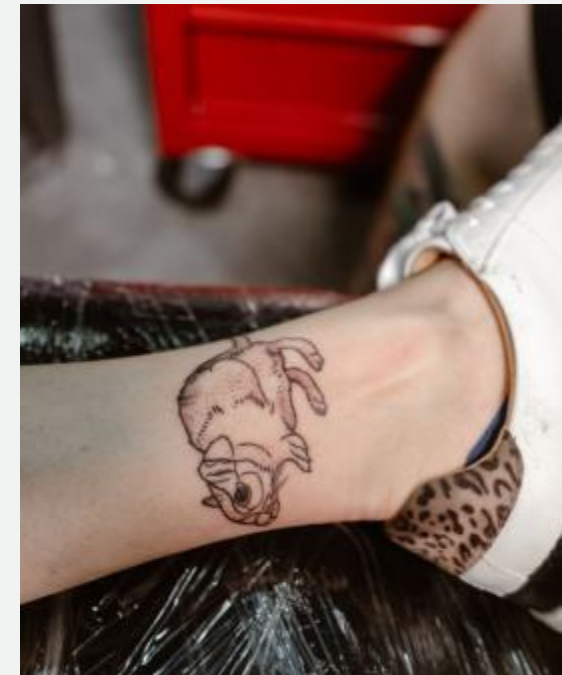
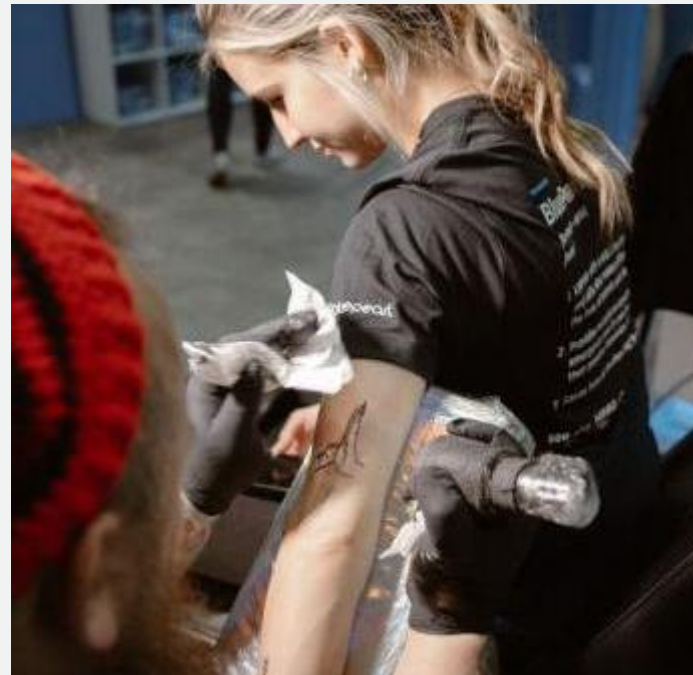
- The WVC After Party was designed as a multisensory journey: immersive lighting, layered soundscapes, entertainment, photo-ops, and curated F&B
- Participants share the experience and its energy and joy helping create community
- Attendees described it as the “highlight of the week,” citing its emotional atmosphere as what stood out most



Disruption

Unexpected, authentic moments create emotional stickiness and story value

- A WVC sponsor featured a live tattoo activation—an intersection of art, storytelling, and personal identity
- Attendees connected whether they watched, discussed, or participated
- The experience generated major organic social engagement and became a word-of-mouth driver for the show



How Show Organizers Can Bake Connection into Your Events



Sweet Spot Framework

Where strategy, story and senses align

Modern events must blend emotional storytelling with sensory design. The most powerful balance **Feeling**, **Function**, and **Flavor** — creating connection that's both emotional and measurable, both human and scalable.



Feeling

Emotional storytelling brought to life through sensory triggers — sound, texture, light, scent, and interaction. It's what makes people feel something genuine, not just see or hear it.

Function

The strategic backbone — every element serves a measurable purpose. From engagement metrics to ROI, Function ensures creativity aligns with clear outcomes and business goals.

Flavor

The distinctive cultural, tactile, or brand-specific ingredients that make an experience unforgettable. Flavor gives each event its personality — that “only here, only us” quality people remember and share.

Tactics for Sweet Spot Design



Design by mindset

Map emotional drivers and behavioral goals, not demographics

Layer sensory cues

Plan visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory moments intentionally

Personalize through choice

Build in micro-decisions that allow attendees to shape their own experience

Facilitate discovery

Use passive digital tracking and real-time feedback to understand where energy flows

Build third spaces

Create connective environments that transcend roles, generations, and functions

Curate disruptors

Incorporate surprise in authentic, brand-aligned ways to spark curiosity and social sharing

Exercise

The Flavor Challenge — Reimagining Connection

The Flavor Challenge



Energy

What brings vibrancy to your experience?



Curiosity

What types of moments would invite discovery?



Calm

How would you design in serenity that still sparks connection?



Connection

What would make conversation effortless?



Play

How would you add moments of delight and surprise?

Creating Connections

Innovation in modern event design is about creating deeper human connections.

What we're building together – using imagination and creativity – make the Sweet Spot work:

- Feeling = the emotion you designed for
- Function = how it helped people interact
- Flavor = the sensory signature that made it memorable





***Feed connection not
just attendance!***

Questions & Sweet Learnings



Download our Building Events That Feed Connection White Paper, an extension of today's session that dives into the sweet spot combination of event engagement and connection.

Let's Connect!

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING THIS SESSION!

We truly appreciate your participation and engagement. If you have any questions or would like to continue the conversation, please feel free to reach out.

Angela Strahan

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Session Evaluation

OPTION 1

- Scan the QR Code here and follow instructions.
- You will be asked 1 time to fill in personal information.
- You will not be asked again when completing additional session evaluations.

OPTION 2

- Open the IAEE Expo! Expo! show app from eShow
- Find the session you want to evaluate.
- Under the documents and link section click on Evaluation icon.
- Your info will auto-populate – rate session.

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