

MODERATED PANEL | 60 MINUTES

Eventizing in Entertainment Food & Beverage

Engaging Gen Z

Theatres | Stadiums | Theme Parks
Campuses | Live Entertainment



Why This Topic Matters Now

- Gen Z is entering peak earning and peak going-out years — they are becoming the core entertainment audience, not a future one
- They spend on experiences over things, and F&B is the most repeatable experience purchase in any venue
- Per-cap growth increasingly comes from experience design, not price increases alone
- Their expectations set the standard other generations follow — win Gen Z and you rarely lose everyone else



The audience is already here.

MEET THE PANEL

Ryan Timm

Senior Sales Manager • The Coca-Cola Company

Ryan is a true customer service specialist. Over the past 12 years, he has held multiple roles across the organization and worked with a diverse range of foodservice customers. From independent operators to national chains across multiple channels.

His experience spans beverage strategy, consumer insights, and helping operators adapt to emerging trends that are shaping the future of the industry.

MEET THE PANEL

Michelle Malik

Director of Channel Strategy • Mars Snacking

Michelle brings 15 years of experience in the CPG industry. Throughout her career, she has led category strategy, category management, consumer and operator insights, and business intelligence initiatives across leading organizations including Sears Holdings, Walgreens, Kellogg, and Mars.

Michelle specializes in translating data, insights, and market trends into actionable growth strategies, helping brands and customers identify opportunities, optimize assortments, strengthen category performance, and drive long-term growth.

MEET THE PANEL

Michelle Barnes-Beauford

Director of Commercial Strategy & Experiential Marketing • Mars Snacking

Michelle is a marketing leader with more than 20 years of experience spanning across digital advertising, field marketing, and commercial strategy in the food and media industries. In her current role, she leads strategic initiatives for key customer segments across the Away From Home channel, driving growth through consumer-centered solutions and innovative partnerships.

Michelle is known for her creative problem-solving mindset and passion for building authentic relationships. She thrives on connecting people, brands, and ideas to create meaningful experiences that deliver business results and lasting impact.

MEET THE PANEL

Adam Gross

Vice President On-Premise Sales • J&J Snacks

Adam leads a cross-portfolio sales organization serving the Amusement, Family Entertainment Center (FEC), Theatre, and Sports & Leisure channels. Since assuming leadership of the broader On-Premise Sales Team in October, he has focused on driving strategic growth, strengthening national account partnerships, and supporting franchise and operator success across multiple brands. Adam leads a team of more than 30 sales and support professionals and has been instrumental in helping drive significant business growth throughout his career. Known for his customer-focused approach and commitment to accountability, Adam believes that investing in and supporting his team is the foundation for delivering exceptional results.

Prior to J&J Snack Foods, Adam spent 10 years with Six Flags America, where he developed his operational and leadership expertise through progressive roles in retail and food service management. He resides in Maryland with his wife, two sons, and four dogs.

MEET THE PANEL

Jason Maxey

Vice President of Hospitality Strategy • Levy Restaurants at Charlotte Motor Speedway

Jason is the Vice President of Hospitality Strategy for Levy Restaurants at Charlotte Motor Speedway. He has over 30 years of experience in the hospitality field. Originally starting in restaurants and then moving to sports and entertainment venues.

Jason has a passion for hospitality that is driven by connecting with guests; both internal and external.

He supports the team at Charlotte Motor Speedway, The Speedway Club, New Hampshire Motor Speedway, Echo Park Motor Speedway, and Darlington Raceway.

Who is Gen Z

Digital-native

Discovery happens on a phone. If it isn't findable and postable, it effectively doesn't exist.

Value-conscious

Price-aware but not cheap-seeking. They pay up when the value is visible.

Socially influenced

Peers and creators outrank advertising. Recommendation is the strongest driver.

Experience-seeking

They buy the memory and the moment, not just the product.

Authenticity-driven

They detect and reject anything that feels like it's trying too hard.

Highly visual

Presentation is not decoration — it's the product's first message.

CREDIBILITY

Authenticity and Messaging

- What earns trust: real ingredients, honest sourcing, and transparent pricing
- Local partners and staff who actually know the product they are selling
- What builds relevance: cultural fluency with the moments and flavors guests care about
- Showing up in the communities your guests already belong to
- What breaks it: borrowed slang, forced trend-chasing, campaigns that talk at Gen Z
- The risk of forced marketing is not indifference, it is public rejection



Snacking, Candy, and Impulse Moments

- Impulse is a design problem: placement, sightlines, and queue position drive attachment
- Snacking has moved from a between-meals occasion to an all-day way of eating
- The most multicultural cohort yet — bold, global, layered flavor is their baseline
- Value is judged in the moment: portion, price, and how generous the item looks
- Craveable, shareable, photogenic is the bar — labor behind the counter is the limit
- LTOs create urgency; cadence, and when to kill or keep one, is the open question



Beverage as an Experience Driver

- Frozen and specialty beverages: the most visual, most postable item in the building
- Functional and better-for-you options, energy, hydration, and lower sugar, without lecturing
- Mocktails and elevated non-alcoholic serves for a generation drinking less alcohol
- Coffee as an all-day traffic driver, especially in campus and park settings
- Limited-edition drinks and brand activations that create a reason to visit now
- Collectible cups: souvenir margin plus a keepsake that markets you afterward





Questions

Open discussion with the panel

We'd love to hear what you're working on — raise a hand and we'll bring a mic to you.



Thank You

Eventizing in Entertainment Food & Beverage: Engaging Gen Z

Thank you to our panel and to everyone in the room.

THE SHIFT

From Foodservice to Experience Design

- Old model: concessions as a transaction — speed, throughput, margin
- New model: F&B as a scene within the visit — anticipated, photographed, remembered
- Theatres: premium recliner service, chef-driven items, tie-in menus for tentpole titles
- Stadiums: signature local vendors, chef collaborations, all-inclusive seating tiers
- Theme parks: festival programming that turns eating into the attraction itself
- Campuses: late-night formats, global flavors, and social-first dining halls



The Power of Shareable Moments

- Design for the photo: color, height, layering, contrast, and a clear hero element
- Limited-time offers create urgency and a reason to post before it's gone
- Branded activations and collabs give guests something they can't get anywhere else
- Packaging is media — a well-designed cup or box travels further than a paid ad
- One signature item beats ten forgettable ones



PRODUCT

Menu Innovation That Resonates

- Global flavors: heat, tang, and bold seasoning treated as the norm, not the specialty
- Mashups and nostalgia with a twist — familiar comfort, unfamiliar execution
- Snackable formats built for grazing, sharing, and moving through a venue
- Customization: a small number of choices that make the item feel personal
- Premium indulgence at a clear step-up price, not a hidden one
- Operational reality check: can it be made in 90 seconds at peak?

