

Slush 2023: what French tech events can learn from the Finnish conference

A one-of-a-kind event, Slush is redefining the standards for tech conferences in Europe. In Helsinki, there are some great ideas for event organisers to pick from the ecosystem.

At the end of each year, Slush closes the ball of the world's leading tech events, before the Christmas break that will end with the CES in Las Vegas in early January. And if the tech caravan makes the trip to Helsinki, it's not just for the snow, the sauna and the sweet life that Finland is known for. To make people forget about the mercury that easily falls into sub-zero temperatures, the organisers of Slush want to impress the participants. And to achieve this, the Finns don't do things by halves.

The first thing that strikes you about Messukeskus, Helsinki's exhibition centre, is the atmosphere. Rather than using high-powered lamps to illuminate the aisles and stages as if it were daylight, the organisers opted for a more subdued light, not hesitating to plunge most areas of the event into relative "darkness" to better highlight its assets. This conscious choice has the merit of contributing to a more peaceful climate, when most trade shows that rely on powerful artificial light can quickly become stressful in spite of themselves. This is not surprising, as the inhabitants of the land of thousand lakes have been pioneers when it comes to wellbeing. And it is clear that this reputation is justified.

A proper show rather than just a conference

In addition to putting the participants in better conditions, this subdued lighting makes it possible to highlight the stages and their spectacular light show. Slush is not designed as a simple conference, but as a real show. And you can see it right from the opening ceremony.

As short as it is, it sets the tone for the event in a spectacular way. Indeed, the organisers did not skimp on the means with a unique scenography of its kind for a tech event. Take a look at the flurry of light shows and lasers, a large waterfall and an acrobat who multiplies tricks in the air, all with a big sound system vibrating the ground to spice things up. It made you wonder if Martin Garrix or David Guetta weren't going to pop up on stage to turn the event into an electro festival!

The devil is in the detail

By taking this approach, Slush immerses the participants in a unique atmosphere. It builds the excitement more than a simple jingle between two roundtables. The organisers have thought of everything, including transforming the restaurant area into a space worthy of a Parisian guinguette on the banks of the Seine. It may seem trivial, but it helps to create a warm atmosphere. The devil is in the detail after all...

Of course, this requires a high budget that not everyone can afford, but it is worth it for those who can afford it. In the same way that sport has shifted in recent years into the realm of entertainment (even if it means being on a first-name basis with excesses like Formula 1 in Las Vegas a few weeks ago), tech events have everything to gain by offering a memorable show to their participants. However, the line-up must be equal to the means deployed, otherwise the exact opposite of the desired effect will be achieved.

This is Slush's greatest strength: to offer a selection of quality speakers. This is a huge challenge at a time when the competition between tech events has probably never been fiercer. And the Covid-19 pandemic has also weakened the sector's players financially. In this context, demonstrating its added value at all levels (speakers, scenography, services to optimise the experience of participants, etc.) is more than ever a necessity.

Don't have your eyes bigger than your belly

Far from the gigantism of a CES or a VivaTech, which welcome more than 100,000 visitors each year, Slush has chosen to remain a human-scale event. For this 2023 edition, nearly 13,000 participants were expected. A choice that pays off since it allows to have an event where visitors don't get lost navigating through countless halls. At Messukeskus, it is perfectly possible to walk around the fair several times during the day, which facilitates discussions between participants. In this sense, Slush's mobile app is also an asset. The "Matchmaking" feature is therefore a must-have to schedule appointments throughout the event.

The only downside is that the booths dedicated to startups are at the same level as any tech show. However, this is not a big surprise, as Slush has built its reputation on the quality of the conferences offered, its spectacular scenography and its side-events that allow all participants to find what they are looking for. The most well-known French event internationally, VivaTech, could go even further by picking up some inspiration from our Finnish friends at Slush. The creation of the VC Night ahead of VivaTech, modelled on Slush Street, to bring together participants in bars and restaurants has already proven its worth.

Article by MAXENCE FABRION