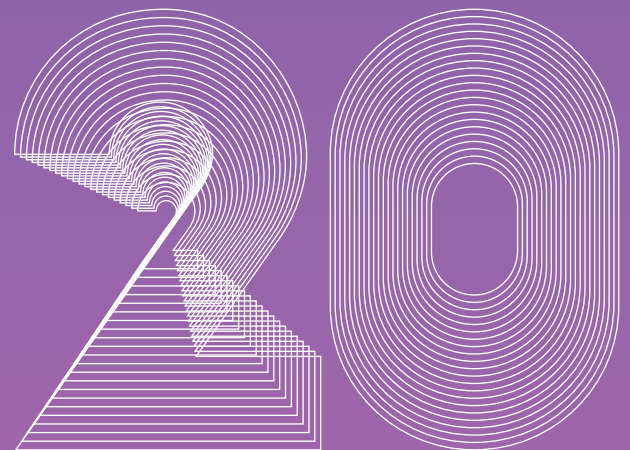# EVENT MARKETING 2020

Benchmarks and Trends Report

INTRODUCTION

Within the first months of 2020, the operations of thousands of event teams were brought to a pause. A novel strain of coronavirus and the COVID-19 illness resulted in many events being postponed while others were outright cancelled. It was a moment that understandably caused many event professionals to reconsider the viability of their strategies and, in some cases, their jobs.

The thing is, over the past three years, we've surveyed mid-to senior-level marketers to create a comprehensive picture of event marketing. In each year the data has shown that business leaders and their teams believe that in-person marketing is an irreplaceable channel.

For instance, last year we saw that the most successful businesses are spending 1.7x the average marketing budget on live events. And in this year we see that the majority (85%) of respondents in leadership roles have identified in-person events as critical for their company's success

As you will soon see for yourself, the results of our 2020 Event Trends report re-affirm the status of event marketing as a powerful channel for engaging audiences and driving business objectives.

For this study, we asked mid-to senior-level event marketers from companies like Yext, Forbes, Cloudera, SAP, Gartner, and more about their perspectives on the events industry and where the next decade of events will take us.

Our findings illustrate that leaders across industries understand the value of in-person events and are increasing their event marketing budgets accordingly. In fact, the majority (85%) of leaders and executives have identified in-person events as critical for their company's success. This number is more than double from survey respondents last year.

The ability to prove ROI is a key factor among these respondents. We see that event marketers who are able to prove ROI have increased buy-in from executives, willingly expand budgets, and see the impact on their events.

What's more, these event marketers are investing in technology to overcome obstacles around proving ROI, saving time, and driving attendee engagement.

The thing is, the future of event marketing isn't going to get any simpler. Audiences are increasingly expecting a frictionless, customer-centric experience that is personalized to their needs. Meanwhile, many businesses are investing in account-based go-to-market strategies that require precise event attribution.

As you'll see in the report, event software is empowering event teams to measure, manage, and scale to meet these needs in the way that marketing automation software has long empowered digital marketing teams, and CRMs have powered sales teams.

Events are here to stay. Don't take it from me. Take it from our hundreds of respondents.

Alon Alroy
Chief of Customer Success and
Co-founder, Bizzabo

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leadership teams are increasingly seeing the value of events. While marketers express difficulty showing return on their investment, those who are able to show ROI invest more in event technology, have more executive buy-in, and continue to increase investments in their event programming.

1 Leadership teams all the way to individual contributors are seeing the value of events. The majority (85%) of respondents in leadership roles have identified in-person events as critical for their company's success—double the number of leaders from 2019. Most (61%) respondents from our survey believe that in-person events are the most critical marketing channel—a 20% increase from last year's report.

2 Most marketers are investing at least 21% of their marketing budget in live events (48%), with the majority (62%) expecting to see a marketing budget increase for in-person events in the coming year. The majority of marketers from businesses that are overperforming in relation to their business goals (70%) expect to increase their budgets for in-person events.

3 Trends show that the biggest obstacles to achieving event success include attracting the right audience and demonstrating event ROI. More than half (54%) of respondents surveyed expressed difficulty in proving ROI.

4 Despite this, the majority (90%) of marketers from companies that do not have trouble showing ROI believe technology can have a major impact on the success of their events. Of the marketers that are currently using event software, the majority (80%) do not have trouble showing ROI. Overperforming orgs are 1.2x more likely to use event software.

5 Technology plays a role in increasing operational efficiency. The majority of respondents (89%) who use event software believe that they save time when planning events using technology. The majority (89%) of event technology users save roughly 200 hours per year. In addition, some (20%) respondents see 360 hours or more saved per year with event technology.

6 The majority of marketers from businesses that are overperforming in relation to their business goals (95%) believe that providing their attendees with a personalized event experience is important to them. The majority (91%) of total respondents also agreed with this sentiment.

Demographics

Almost **500** marketers took the survey.

$370.2 billion in total annual revenue of companies represented.

74% of respondents are in leadership positions within their companies (Managers, Senior Managers, Executives, and Board members).

63% of respondents are located in North America.

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EVENTS STRATEGY AND INVESTMENTS

From leadership to individual contributors, respondents agree that in-person events are a critical component to a company's success. These results are compounded by increased support from executives and additional budget allocated to in-person events. Moving forward, the majority of organizations will allocate larger investments in events.

Leadership Prioritizes In-Person Connections

The majority (85%) of leadership (Senior Managers, Executives, and Board Members) believe in-person events are critical to their company's success while the majority (60%) of leadership believes that events are the most critical marketing channel for achieving business goals. Complimenting these findings, the majority (82%) of marketers believe their leaders support their event strategy.

Data shows cross-organizational alignment around in-person events. The majority (95%) of marketers believe in-person events have a significant impact on achieving primary business goals The majority of respondents (61%) believe that in-person events are the most critical marketing channel—a 20% increase from last year's report.

As more and more leaders identify events as a critical marketing channel for achieving business results, we will see more businesses investing in in-person events as a way to reach organizational goals.

Figure 1.1 **Marketers express a strong belief in the power of events**

By Sector

80%	believe that leadership is supportive of their events strategy.
95%	believe that in-person events can have a major impact on achieving their company's primary business goals.
93%	believe that in-person events provided attendees with a valuable opportunity to form in-person connections in an increasingly digital world.
93%	believe that providing their attendees with an event experience that is personalized to their interests is important to them.

> "We're seeing that the events are still the primary driver of marketing results. Events touch almost every single opportunity that progresses and ultimately closes. So it's a great place to be, and it's a great way to lean in and to provide business results. And that's why I love it so much."
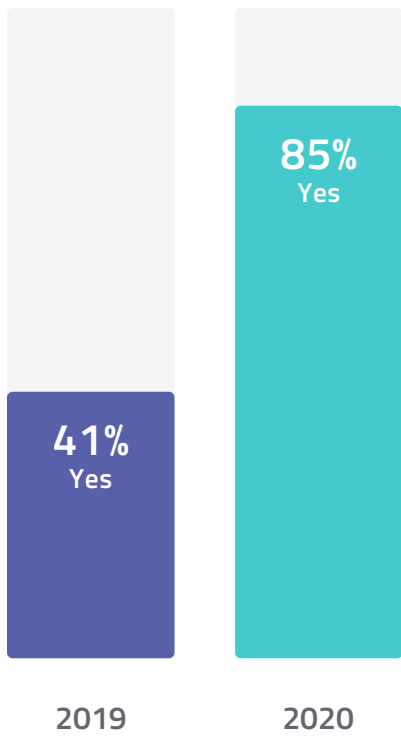
Colleen Bisconti,
VP Global Conferences and Events

IBM

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Figure 1.2 Double the number of leaders and executives believe in-person events are critical to their company's success in 2020 from 2019.

"In-person events are a critical component of my company's success"

41%
Yes

85%
Yes

2019   2020

"

"As much as we've changed and improved technology to be able to connect with people, nothing yet replaces real-time, face-to-face interactions in terms of creating new opportunities."

Hugh Forrest,
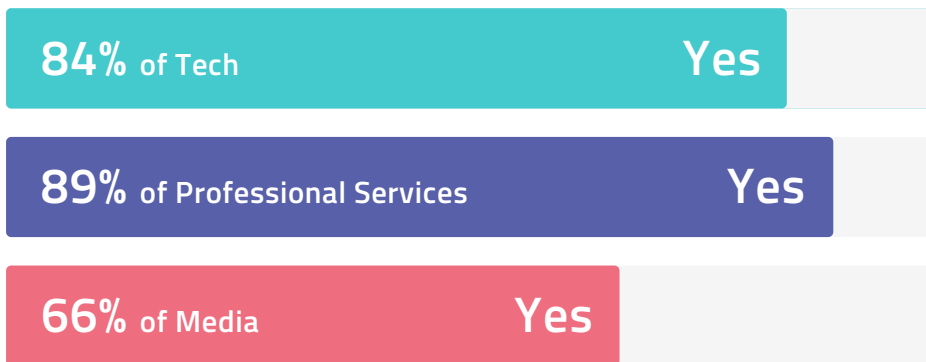Chief Programming Officer

SXSW

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In-Person Events Provide a Unique Opportunity to Connect with Audiences

While the majority of marketers surveyed believe in-person events play a critical role in company objectives, they also believe events provide the opportunity to create meaningful experiences with audiences.

The majority (93%) of respondents believe in-person events provide attendees with a valuable opportunity to form connections in an increasingly digital world. Similarly, the majority of marketers from businesses that are overperforming in relation to their business goals (95%) believe in-person events provide attendees with valuable opportunities to form in-person connections.

Figure 1.3 Leadership is supportive of event strategies across sectors.

"Our leadership team supports our event strategy"

84% of Tech — Yes

89% of Professional Services — Yes

66% of Media — Yes

While many marketing channels—like email marketing, content marketing, and paid performance marketing—are optimized for the digital landscape, events provide professionals with networking and educational opportunities that have the added value of bringing people together in-person.

Facilitating connections proves to be more and more critical for businesses as leaders recognize both the business value and personal value inherent to in-person event experiences.

Based on leadership sentiment and business sentiment, we can expect companies to host more events, expand their events budgets, invest in event technology, and become more proficient in providing their return on investment.

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The Largest Marketing Investments Are Reserved For Events

As a critical marketing channel for business success, events are a key investment area for marketers focused on face-to-face programing. Budgets towards live events see an uptick from 2019 as the majority of marketers (61%) believe event marketing is the most critical channel for business success.

The majority of marketers are investing at least 21% of their marketing budget in live events (48%), which is in-line with last year's findings. The majority (62%) expect to see a marketing budget increase for in-person events in the coming year.

In addition, the majority (70%) of overperforming businesses expect to increase their budgets for in-person events. The higher investments for in-person events from overperforming businesses suggests in-person events deliver impactful business results.

Reporting shows that marketers have a strong preference for hosted events over sponsorship and exhibition opportunities. More than half (55%) of respondents host three or more events per year. The majority (59%) of respondents plan to increase their budgets for hosted events in the future with most marketers (42%) prioritizing budget for one-day or multi-day conferences.

In the future, we expect to see strategic investments in hosted events to further business goals and provide meaningful experiences to attendees.

20%

increase in the number of marketers who believe in-person events are the most critical channel.

> "We hosted our first ever user conference. We went for it after asking the right questions and calculating the risks. We had the team to execute something like this, which is really important, so structurally and internally we could support this conference."

Erin Flannery,
Head of Events

Lattice

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Figure 1.4 In-person events can have a major impact on achieving primary business goals across sectors.

Q: Of the marketing channels listed below, which one will be most critical in helping your company meet key business objectives next year?
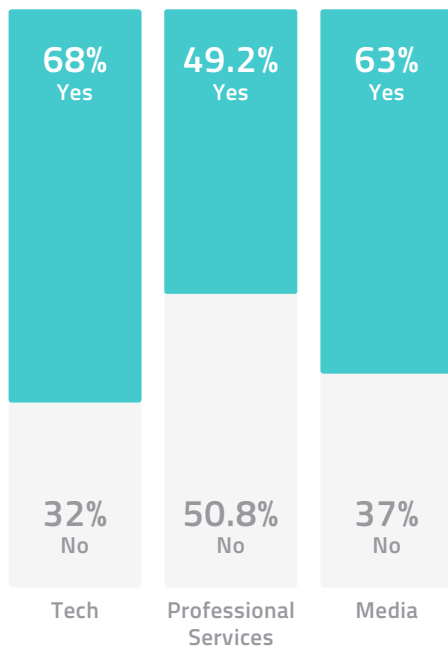
64%

Of marketers expect an overall increase in event budget next year

98% Yes	99% Yes	97% Yes
Tech	Professional Services	Media

Figure 1.5 Marketers expect an event budget increase in the coming years

Q: Do you expect your overall budget for events will increase in the coming year?

68% Yes	49.2% Yes	63% Yes
32% No	50.8% No	37% No
Tech	Professional Services	Media

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EVENT TRENDS AND TECHNOLOGY

We're seeing an increasing number of organizations using event software. Those that are using event software are seeing the benefits of leveraging technology. Respondents that use event software are more likely to have the ability to prove return on investment, increase operational efficiency, gain executive buy-in, and achieve business results.

Event Marketers Still Struggle With ROI

Despite the value of in-person events, more than half (54%) of respondents surveyed expressed difficulty in proving ROI.

Trends show that the biggest obstacles when hosting events include attracting the right audience and demonstrating event ROI. While many event marketers are facing similar challenges, there are some trends shared among the most successful of these organizations.
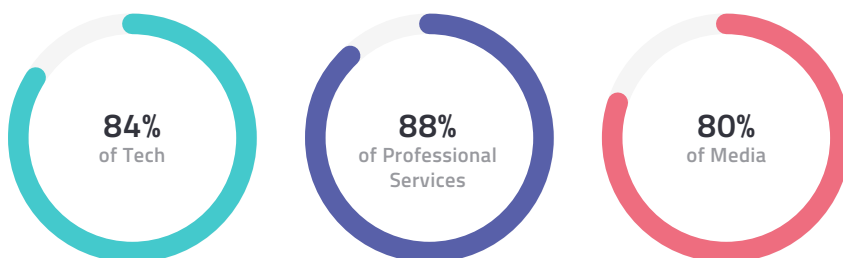
Our results show the majority (90%) of companies that do not have trouble showing ROI believe technology can have a major impact on the success of their events. Across industries, the majority (92%) believe that event software makes it easier to achieve business goals.

88%

Of leaders support event strategies when teams are able to prove ROI

Figure 2.1 **"In the coming years, in-person events will become increasingly important to our company's success."**

By Sector

84%
of Tech

88%
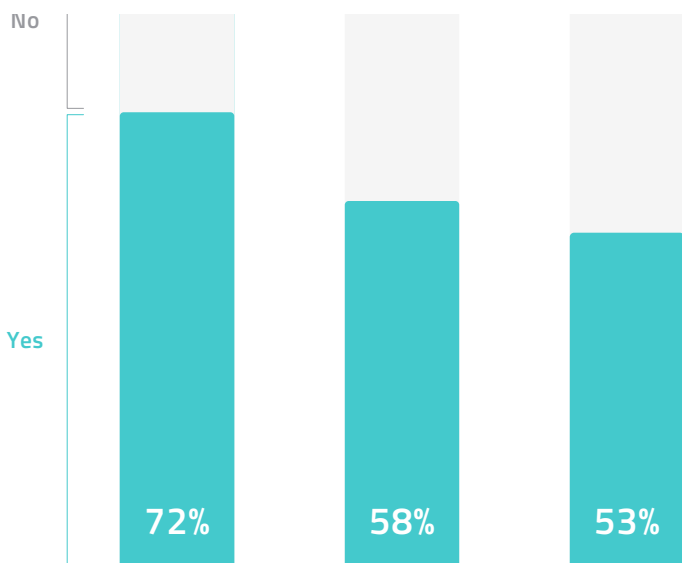of Professional Services

80%
of Media

Of the companies that are currently using event software, the majority (80%) do not have trouble showing ROI. The majority (60%) of companies that do not have trouble proving ROI believe that event software makes it easier to achieve business outcomes. Both cohorts that use event software and those that indicate they do not have trouble proving ROI share similarities.

The majority (80%) of companies that indicate they are performing as expected or are overperforming against business goals do not have trouble proving ROI on events. Overperforming orgs are also 1.2x more likely to say they used event software vs. all other groups (Performing as Expected, Underperforming, Severely Underperforming).

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Figure 2.2 Overperforming companies are 1.2x more likely to have event software.

Q: Does your company use event software?

53%

More than half (53%) of companies that do not have trouble proving ROI are also "very committed" to investing in in-person events.

What Industry Leaders Are Saying About ROI

"Everything we do has goals and metrics tied to it to ensure that we are creating opportunities to close business for the company. The hyper-focus is growing revenue for the sales team within all of the activations that we have."

Lindsay Niemic McKenna,
Vice President of Revenue Marketing

"We have a lot of data points. We set KPIs for all the initiatives and objectives under our four pillars at Cisco of amplify, accelerate, innovate, and inspire. We do pre-show, post-show measurement, on-site measurement, alignment to our KPIs in all of our reporting. But when you boil it down to how we evaluate success, again, I keep it pretty simple, and I always tell people, 'Did we move the needle for Cisco?' Because in the simplest form, that's what we're here to do."

Heather Henderson Thomas,
Sr. Manager, Strategic Ops & Event Experience

"We look at our media reach. So it's really important for us to understand how far out in the media world we've gone, because when we go around the world with 130 stories or 200 stories, or whatever it is, that means the message of the startups that were at Disrupt went with them."

Joey Hinson,
Director of Operations

"You have to look at things holistically. You can't always piece and compartmentalize. But again, I challenge the events industry as a whole to really consider what that means for value, what value means to you, and to be thoughtful about how it might have to be fluid depending on the events that you're supporting."

Eleni Thomas,
Director, Events and Meetings

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Overperforming Companies Value Event Experiences

Respondents who identified as belonging to overperforming organizations in regards to company goals value personalized event experiences.

When hosting events, most respondents (30%) expressed difficulty in attracting the right audience.

Notably, the majority of overperforming companies (95%) and the majority of total respondents (91%) believe that providing their attendees with a personalized event experience is important to them.

While attracting the right audience is an immediate concern for marketers who host events, overperforming companies indicate that a personalized event experience is a priority when building their event strategy.

Overperforming companies have identified providing attendees with a personalized experience as a clear priority. In the future, we predict overperforming companies will find ways to attract the right audience by leveraging a targeted event experience for their attendees.
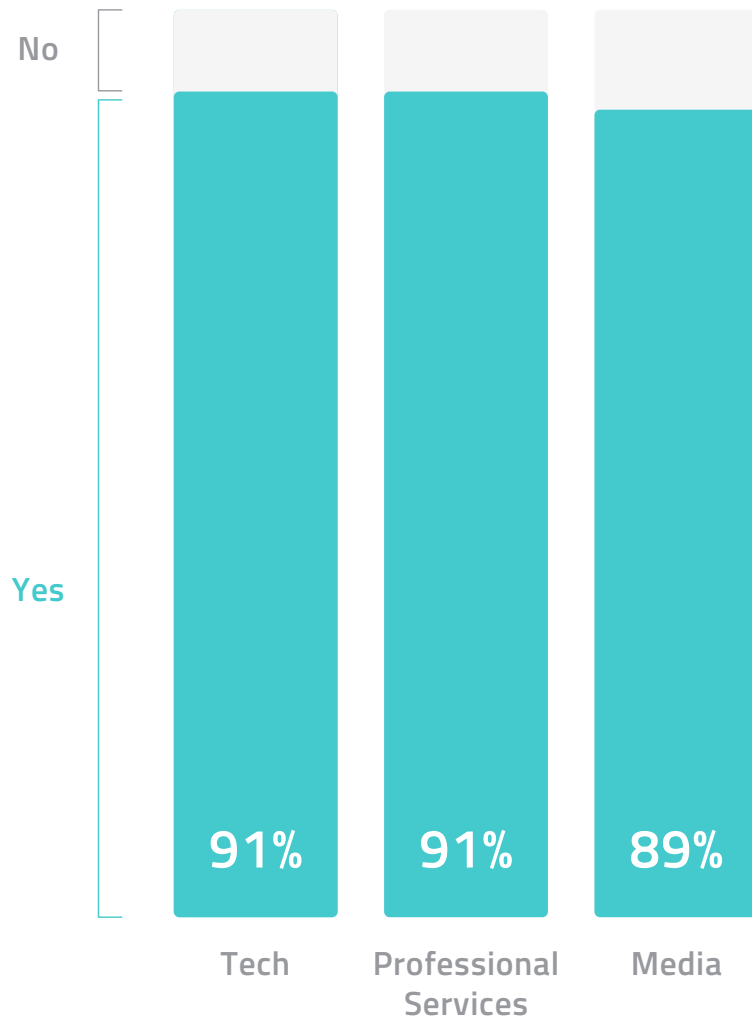
Figure 2.3 **Creating a consistently branded experience is important to the vast majority of respondents.**

"Creating a consistently branded experience is important to me."

1%
Disagree

92% Agree   8%

Agree

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Figure 2.4 **"I believe providing attendees with an event experience that is personalized to their interests is important."**

By Sector

No

Yes

91%   91%   89%

Tech   Professional   Media
        Services

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Organizations Are Investing More in Event Technology

Marketers are facing clear challenges around proving event ROI and attracting their target audience. However, reporting also shows companies are putting more investments towards event software.

Overall, the majority of respondents (92%) believe event software makes it easier to achieve business outcomes. More than half (57%) of companies are using event software—an increase from last year's respondents.

Bizzabo's reporting found that the majority (63%) of respondents see event registration management tools as the single functionality making the greatest contribution to event success. Following event management registration tools is an attendee mobile event app (48%), event analytics and actionable insights (40%), and event promotion and email marketing tools (39%).
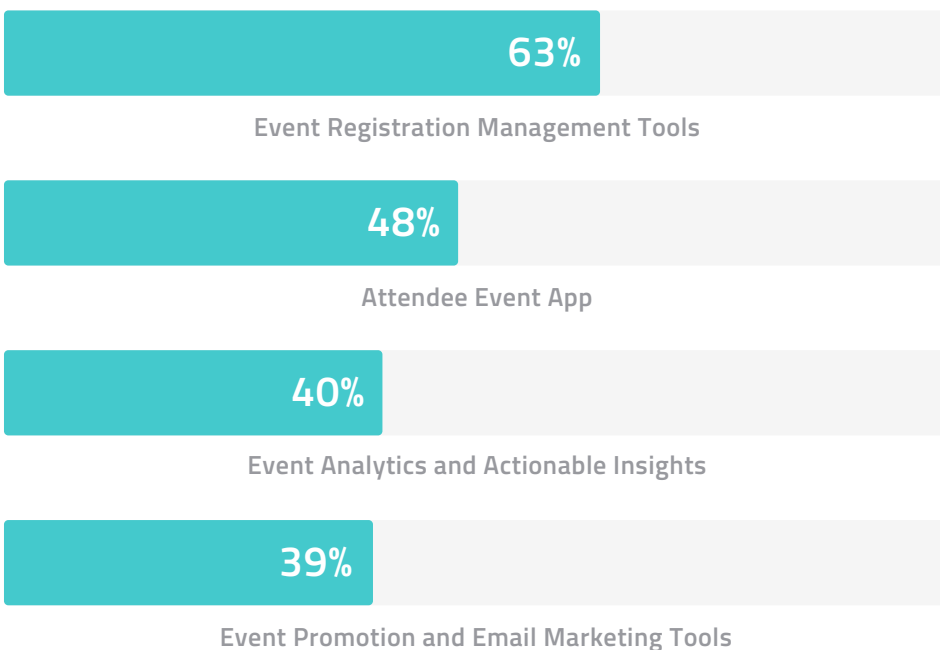
These findings suggest that event marketers are looking to technology to assist with event registration, event engagement, and analytics to optimize their promotional and engagement strategies.

Of respondents currently using event software, more than half (53%) plan to provide more people within their organization access to their event software.

92%

of respondents believe event software makes it easier to achieve business goals.

Figure 2.5 Event Registration Management Tools Make The Greatest Contribution To Event Success

"Which event software function(s) has had the greatest contribution to achieving event success?"

63%

Event Registration Management Tools

48%

Attendee Event App

40%

Event Analytics and Actionable Insights

39%

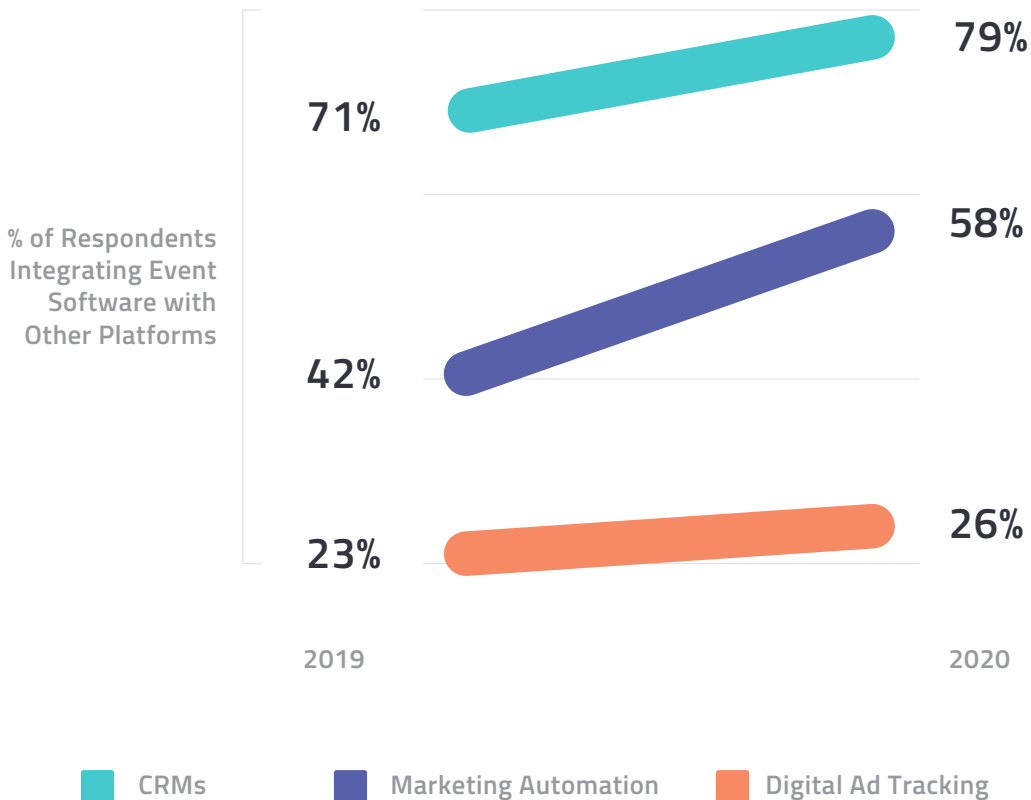Event Promotion and Email Marketing Tools

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Event Data And Integrations Are Increasingly Important to Marketers

Over the last two years, data trends show an increasing demand for integrations with existing databases as more businesses adopt event software.

The majority of respondents who use event software (63%) integrate into other core business platforms—a 10% increase from last year's respondents. Of those who integrate event software with other core platforms, the majority (79%) integrate with CRMs, followed by Marketing Automation Software (58%), and Digital Ad Tracking Pixels (26%).

Integrations into core business platforms have seen a distinct increase from 2019. Last year's respondents reported integrating with CRMs (71%), Marketing Automation Software (42%) and Digital Ad Tracking Pixels (23%) respectively.

Figure 2.6 From 2019 to 2020, more marketers are integrating core business platforms with their event software.

79%

71%

58%

% of Respondents Integrating Event Software with Other Platforms

42%

26%

23%

2019

2020

CRMs

Marketing Automation

Digital Ad Tracking

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Event Technology Can Help Marketers Save Time and Streamline Operations

In addition to integrating with existing software and tools, event technology is also helping marketers drive operational efficiency. The majority (89%) of those who use event software believe that they save time when planning events.
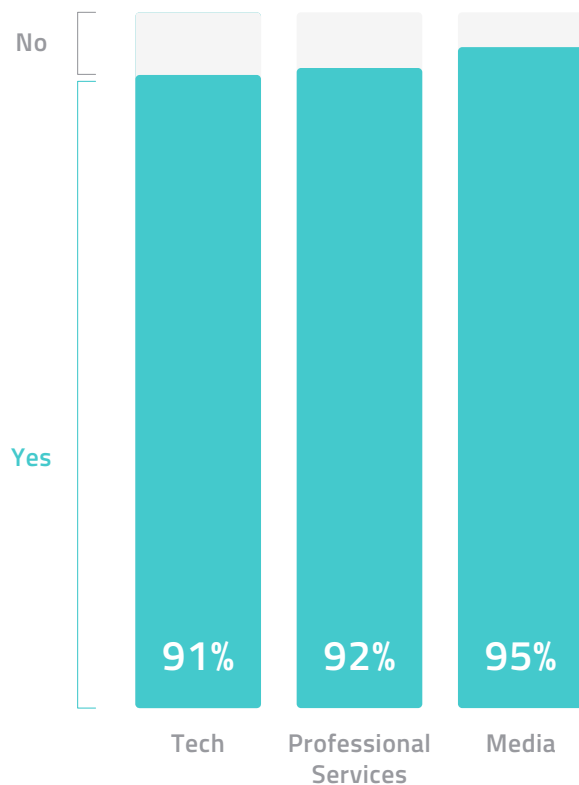
The majority (89%) of event technology users save roughly 200 hours per year. In addition, some (20%) respondents see 360 hours or more saved per year with event technology—a 60% increase in hours saved from 2019.

Moving forward, most marketers (19%) believe API and integration options hold the greatest potential for improvement. This is followed by end-to-end functionality (14%) and branding and customization (13%).

Event technology can assist marketers in streamlining operations and saving time. Moving forward, marketers hope to see further advancements in the ability of platforms to sync data and solve a variety of needs.

Figure 2.7 Marketers that use event software and believe that they save time when using event technology to plan events.

"Yes" indicates that respondents have saved at least 1- 10 hours or more.

No

Yes

91%   92%   95%

Tech   Professional   Media
        Services

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CONCLUSION: EVENT EXPERIENCE IS A PRIORITY

Despite the setbacks at the beginning of 2020, event marketing has a history of being the single-most important marketing channel for businesses.

The latest data from business leaders and their teams indicate that the channel will continue to grow in the coming years as investments, strategies, and technologies continue to facilitate the growth of professional events across industries.

In fact, we are seeing the most successful organizations are investing in the the technology to streamline processes, unlock valuable insights, and proving ROI.

"At the end of the day, live events and business events have to really surprise and delight your attendees to be memorable. That's what attendees of the future do already demand, and will demand even more from event professionals."

Carina Bauer,
CEO

ijmex

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Bizzabo is the world's most loved event software. Our events success platform empowers over 10,000 marketers across the globe to better manage, measure and grow their professional events. We believe in making events more impactful and rewarding for everyone involved. Companies like HubSpot, EA, and The Wall Street Journal all leverage Bizzabo to unleash the power of their events.

Trusted by over 10,000 marketers