



Sizzabo

Designing In-Person Events That Deliver: A Strategic Guide for 2025 and Beyond

Introduction

After years of transformation and recalibration, one thing is clear: in-person event success in 2025 is about more than filling seats. Today's most effective events deliver value across every touchpoint, fostering connection, deepening engagement, and driving measurable outcomes.

This eBook is your practical toolkit for making that happen. Built for event leaders navigating a more demanding landscape, it's designed to help you translate insights into action and deliver in-person events that perform.

Grounded in Bizzabo's latest research, spanning over 1,800 event professionals, sponsors, and attendees, it surfaces what's working, where expectations are shifting, and how to evolve your in-person event strategy to stay ahead.

“The real success of your eventsevents isn't about how many people attend — it's about the depth of connections and the value of every moment”



Alon Alroy

CMO & Cofounder, Bizzabo

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Inside this guide, you'll discover key trends, actionable strategies, and real-world examples to help you design events with clear strategy, strong attendee impact, and lasting business value.

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Chapter 1: In-person events have a new mandate



66%

of organizers said they
planned to host more
events in 2025 than in 2024

Through most of 2025, in-person events have continued to gain momentum. 66% of organizers said they planned to host more events this year than in 2024, and over half reported working with larger budgets to support those experiences. After years of cautious investment, teams finally had more resources to play with, and many used that opportunity to scale up.

With more money on the line and more events on the calendar, stakeholders expected results. Attendees, too, arrived with higher standards, looking for stronger networking, smarter tech, and more immersive content. Events had to prove they were worth attending.

That's the new mandate: More intentional, outcome-driven events that clearly demonstrate their value.

What this means for event leaders:

Success in 2025 has been about doing it better rather than doing more. That's meant aligning events with business goals, defining success metrics early, and building experiences that balance attendee satisfaction with strategic returns.

Where to focus now:

If your 2025 playbook leaned too heavily on volume over value, now's the time to reassess. For example, if you hosted more field events this year, review which ones actually moved the needle on pipeline, engagement, or satisfaction scores.

Not sure where to start? [This guide to measuring event ROI](#) can help you map goals to outcomes and inform smarter planning for 2026.

Chapter 2: Rethinking networking for real impact



83%

of attendees said
networking opportunities
influenced whether they
registered for events

Networking has always been a draw for in-person events, but in 2025, it's become a decisive factor. 87% of organizers said networking was critical to event success, and 83% of attendees said it influenced whether they registered. Despite this, only 53% of attendees encountered structured networking opportunities at the events they attended.

This disconnect reveals a larger issue: While the desire for connection has never been higher, many events still rely on outdated or unstructured formats to deliver it. Attendees are looking for tools and formats that make it easier to meet the right people and build meaningful relationships. They've told us that casual coffee breaks and end-of-day mixers aren't enough.

What this means for event leaders:

Networking can no longer be treated as a sideshow. It needs to be integrated into the core event design, with clear pathways for engagement before, during, and after the event. That means investing in formats that accommodate different personality types, leveraging AI-powered matchmaking, and making space in the agenda for purposeful connection.

Where to focus now:

If structured networking hasn't been a consistent part of your 2025 strategy, now's the time to raise the bar. Start by evaluating your attendee feedback and usage data from your mobile app or event platform. Which formats saw the most engagement? Which were underused? And how can you introduce more curated connection opportunities next year?

For a deeper look at what's working and where there's still room to grow, download our [2025 Event Networking Report](#). You'll find data-backed strategies, attendee preferences, and technology insights to help you turn networking into a competitive advantage.

Chapter 3: Experience is the differentiator

74%

of attendees said
immersive experiences
helped them disconnect
and engage more deeply

73%

of attendees expected
modern technology to be
part of the experience

Attendee expectations in 2025 are more varied than ever. People come to events seeking connection, clarity, and greater control over how they spend their time, rather than focusing purely on the content. 74% of attendees said immersive experiences helped them disconnect and engage more deeply, and 73% expected modern technology to be part of the experience.

The big takeaway is that a packed schedule or flashy production alone won't cut it. Attendees are making choices based on how well an event respects their time, enables interaction, and creates moments that feel personal and memorable.

What this means for event leaders:

Experience is now a key differentiator, and the most effective events this year have focused on simplicity with intention. Organizers are using technology to enhance the journey (not complicate it) and are designing agendas with space for reflection, connection, and personalized engagement.

Where to focus now:

Start by auditing your most recent experiences. Where did attendees linger or engage? Where did friction slow them down? These insights can guide what to simplify, amplify, or eliminate as you shape your 2026 strategy.

Looking to create more personalized, high-impact content moments?

Explore how [Bizzabo Studios](#) can help you design immersive, audience-first experiences, from branded stages and interactive formats to premium production support.



Chapter 4: Sponsorships are shifting toward quality

50%

of sponsors said they found greater value in sponsoring branded experiences like curated dinners or invite-only networking sessions than traditional booth space

Sponsors have signaled a clear shift in priorities, with more than half saying they found greater value in sponsoring branded experiences like curated dinners or invite-only networking sessions than traditional booth space. The goal wasn't visibility, it was deeper engagement, stronger brand affinity, and more targeted conversations with the right people.

This shift reflects a broader expectation: sponsorship must be meaningful for everyone involved, not just a logo placement or a badge scan.

What this means for event leaders:

Success now hinges on co-creating experiences that benefit both sponsors and attendees. That requires earlier collaboration, clearer access to audience data, and formats designed for intentional connection. Organizers who positioned sponsors as experience partners, not just vendors, saw stronger results.

Where to focus now:

As you plan for 2026, use post-event debriefs to spark new conversations with sponsors. Ask what helped them engage meaningfully this year and what support they still need. Then use those insights to build sponsorship packages that go beyond exposure and deliver real value.

If you want to build sponsorships that actually convert, [check out our guide](#) to creating high-value event sponsorship packages that align with attendee needs and partner expectations.

Chapter 5: Making ROI more than a metric



70%

of organizers said they still struggled to measure ROI in 2025

Despite increased budgets and rising expectations, 70% of organizers said they still struggled to measure ROI in 2025. But the challenge often wasn't a lack of data, it was a lack of clarity. Without defined objectives from the start, it became difficult to assess what "success" really meant once the event was over.

As stakeholders push for more accountability, ROI is shifting from a reporting exercise to a foundational part of event planning.

What this means for event leaders:

Those who began with measurable goals, aligned with business priorities like pipeline growth, brand engagement, or customer retention, were better equipped to capture and communicate impact. They used data not just to prove outcomes, but to improve outcomes.

Where to focus now:

Treat ROI as a strategic lens from day one. Set clear KPIs tied to broader business goals, and ensure your event tech is set up to track and surface the right insights.

If you want a deeper dive, our guide to [maximizing event ROI](#) walks through how to connect objectives to outcomes with measurable clarity.

Chapter 6: Smaller formats, bigger value

64%

of organizers said they planned on hosting local events in 2025 and more than 80% found it effective for community-building

Field events and microevents are continuing to take on a larger role in event strategies. 64% of organizers said they planned on hosting local events to complement their flagship conferences in 2025, and more than 80% found those formats effective for community-building. Webinars also continued to grow in relevance, with 67% of attendees naming them a top learning channel.

These formats proved that impact doesn't always require scale. Whether focused on regional engagement or topic-specific education, smaller events offered more targeted value and kept audiences engaged between larger touchpoints.

What this means for event leaders:

High-touch, lower-lift formats have emerged as a critical part of a year-round engagement strategy. They give teams the flexibility to test ideas, nurture relationships, and extend the reach of their broader event ecosystem.

Where to focus now:

If your 2025 strategy leaned too heavily on big tentpole moments, look at how smaller formats can drive consistent engagement. Field events, VIP dinners, and virtual roundtables are not just supporting acts, they're strategic tools for building lasting audience connections.

For ideas on how to execute them with agility, check out [our guide on micro-events](#).

Chapter 7: Technology as a strategic advantage



79%

of organizers said tech had a significant impact on event success

Event technology is proving to be the backbone of great in-person experiences. 79% of organizers said tech had a significant impact on event success, and 64% considered switching vendors to gain more flexibility, consolidation, or better performance.

From AI-powered matchmaking and personalized agendas to seamless check-in and real-time analytics, technology shaped not just how events ran but how they were remembered.

What this means for event leaders:

Tech is a strategic enabler, not just a toolset. The most effective teams used their platforms to deliver smoother operations, more relevant experiences, and clearer insights into attendee behavior and business impact.

Where to focus now:

As you evaluate your 2025 tech stack, look beyond features. Ask whether your systems empowered your team, simplified the attendee journey, and helped you tell a compelling story about value. If not, it may be time to explore a more unified platform.

For guidance on how to approach a smooth, strategic transition, read our blog on [how to successfully migrate event tech platforms](#).

Conclusion

More tools, more opportunities, more responsibility

This year's research and real-world experiences have made one thing clear: event professionals are working with more resources, more tools, and more opportunities to engage their audiences than ever before. But with those opportunities comes a renewed pressure to deliver outcomes that matter to attendees, to sponsors, and to the business.

Turning insight into action

The most effective organizers in 2025 have focused on building experiences that felt intentional from start to finish. They've treated networking as a strategic priority rather than a side activity. They used smaller formats to build community between tentpole events, and they leaned into technology that helps them streamline planning, personalize touchpoints, and capture meaningful insights.

As you look ahead to 2026, this is the time to reflect on what made your events successful this year and where there's room to improve. Stronger results will come from aligning every event decision with clear goals, thoughtful design, and the flexibility to adapt as your audience evolves.

We created this eBook to be a practical resource as you move through that process. Whether you're planning your next flagship conference, expanding your field strategy, or updating your event tech stack, the insights here are meant to help you lead with confidence.

And if you need a partner along the way, Bizzabo is here to help. Our Event Experience OS is built to support every step of your journey, from strategy to execution to measurement.



[Get in touch with our team to learn how we can support your goals](#)

