

2025



Event Networking Report

Understanding the value, challenges,
and future of in-person connections

Sizzabo

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Executive Summary

In-person event networking is no longer a side benefit, it's the primary driver of event value for organizers, attendees, and sponsors alike. Our 2025 survey of 300+ event professionals, attendees, and sponsors reveals a shared truth; people want better, more intentional connections and they're willing to prioritize the events that help them make those connections.

For organizers, networking isn't just a nice-to-have, it's a strategic imperative. 87% of organizers say networking is very important to the success of their in-person events, and another 11% call it somewhat important. Most are actively encouraging attendee networking, yet many still face challenges with execution: 42% say attendee engagement with networking features remains low or very low, revealing a gap between intention and impact.



87%

of organizers say networking is very important to the success of their in-person events

Attendees, meanwhile, are showing up with clear goals and expectations. Nearly half (46%) say they attend between 1-4 in-person B2B conferences annually, and another 41% attend between 5-9. But only 53% say those events include structured networking tools or opportunities, leaving many to navigate connections on their own. While 39% describe themselves as outgoing and eager to engage with others at events, the rest report a more selective approach, either based on event goals or a personal preference for one-on-one interactions. This range of preferences highlights the need for more flexible, inclusive networking formats.

92%

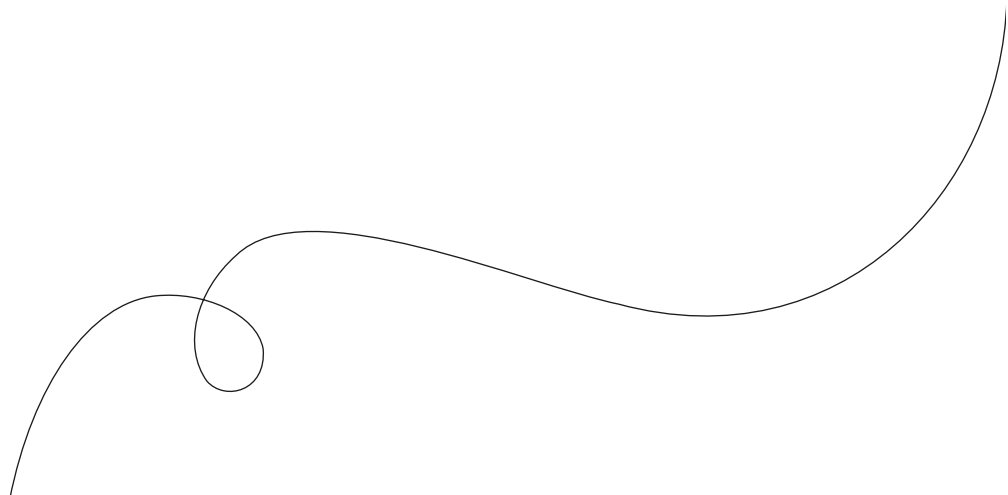
of attendees followed up with someone they met through a networking feature

34%

of attendees note that nothing ever came of the interaction

Despite these challenges, attendees are making the effort to build relationships. An overwhelming 92% say they've followed up with someone they met through a networking feature in an event app, but 34% also note that nothing ever came of the interaction. This points to a broader need for better matchmaking, more seamless follow-up tools, and stronger alignment between event content and connection opportunities.

Sponsors and exhibitors are rethinking their approach to networking as well. 84% say that attendee networking is important to achieving their event goals, and their strategies are shifting to match. More than half (57%) now prioritize branded experiences, like happy hours, curated dinners, or invite-only roundtables, over traditional booth space, in pursuit of more meaningful engagement. Another 24% say they still do both, but that experiential formats are proving more effective and are being actively prioritized. As sponsors seek more tailored opportunities to connect, many are also turning to technology: 47% report using digital tools to support networking, though 33% say those tools still leave room for improvement.



While networking remains a top priority across all three personas, clear challenges persist: engagement is inconsistent, discovery is fragmented, and impact is difficult to measure. Just 30% of sponsors say they're able to consistently identify high-quality leads, and despite 71% feeling confident in their ability to measure event success, 23% still cite poor booth traffic as a major obstacle, while 20% struggle with limited access to attendee data.

Still, there's clear momentum toward improvement. Across the board, event professionals are embracing more curated, tech-enabled networking experiences that emphasize quality over quantity. From AI-powered matchmaking and flexible meeting formats to enhanced pre-event access and real-time insights, the industry is leaning into innovation to create better, more valuable connections.

This report explores how networking is being perceived, prioritized, and delivered across the events landscape today and where there's opportunity to evolve the experience for everyone involved.

84%

of sponsors say that attendee networking is important to achieving their event goals

57%

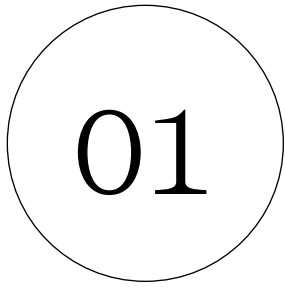
of sponsors now prioritize branded experiences like happy hours, curated dinners, or invite-only roundtables over traditional booth space

47%

of sponsors report using digital tools to support networking

Want to discover industry benchmarks and event trends for 2025?

[Download our 2025 State of Events and Industry Benchmarks report](#)



Organizers: networking as the core event value



“As a for-profit event organizer, our goal is to be a platform for buyers and sellers to meet. As such, networking and making connections for new business development is core to our success.”

said one Event Manager.



“If our events were just about the session content, we’d run them virtually, but delegates need (and ask for) in-person events to allow them to forge connections and partnerships with other delegates.”

said one Event Leader.

95% of organizers said that their in-person conferences, summits, and conventions are more effective than other event formats in achieving their networking goals. Similarly, the vast majority (87%) say networking is “very important” to the success of their in-person events. That importance is often tied to business impact.

Networking is seen as mission-critical

In fact, 99% of organizers agree that in-person conferences, summits, and conventions are effective in building and growing community, reinforcing the belief that live events are irreplaceable in this regard.

Structured networking is common but not universal

While 39% of organizers offer structured opportunities for networking (such as scheduled sessions or basic tools), 32% still rely on casual or unplanned interactions. Despite the informality of some approaches, 94% believe their networking offerings are effective in helping attendees build meaningful relationships.

Yet only 14% define success by the quality of connections made. Most base success on volume of connections (26%) or positive feedback



“Attendees want to network, they tell us this through post-event surveys and through their behavior at events. During session breaks it’s becoming harder to get attendees back into the main plenary — they want to socialize, talk, and network.”

said one Event Organizer.



“Our community spends a lot of time online, and events provide the opportunity to connect face-to-face. They crave concrete, personal contact and connections.”

said one Head of Events.



“Our attendees are typically the only person of their job description on a team. Therefore, networking with others in the same position (at different companies) is one of the most important aspects of our events.”

said one Event Leader.

37% of organizers said they currently use pre-event emails to communicate networking opportunities to attendees. Only 18% utilize push notifications via a mobile app, and 15% use live announcements

Top goals and pain points

Organizers are largely focused on attendee satisfaction, with 27% citing it as the top networking-related goal, followed by 21% who prioritize facilitating meaningful connections. Only 30% of organizers said that they plan to use attendee networking data post-event to improve future event experiences.

The biggest pain point? 25% of organizers said it’s low attendee engagement with networking tools, followed by 17% each for poor matchmaking and limited time/space. Organizers also noted that a lack of clear incentives or value (23%) and attendee social anxiety or discomfort (21%) can hinder participation, along with poorly designed networking formats (18%).

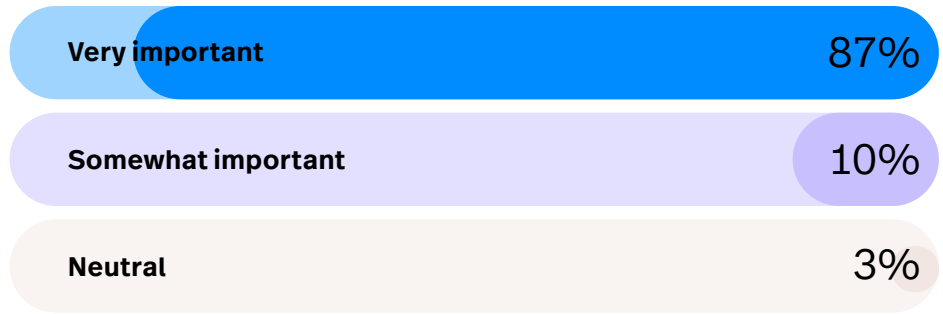
76% use an online event community for in-person conferences, summits, & conventions.

Tool fatigue and the push for personalization

A majority (65%) of organizers use 3–10 different tools outside their EMS to support networking, and 10% use none at all. Mobile apps are the most common tech used for networking (37%), however, only 25% said they use dedicated networking platforms. Manual scheduling tools like spreadsheets still account for 33% of methods.

52% of organizers said that they currently provide AI-powered or automated networking, and it’s working well, but 27% of organizers say better matchmaking would make networking more valuable or engaging, and 25% want more personalized suggestions.

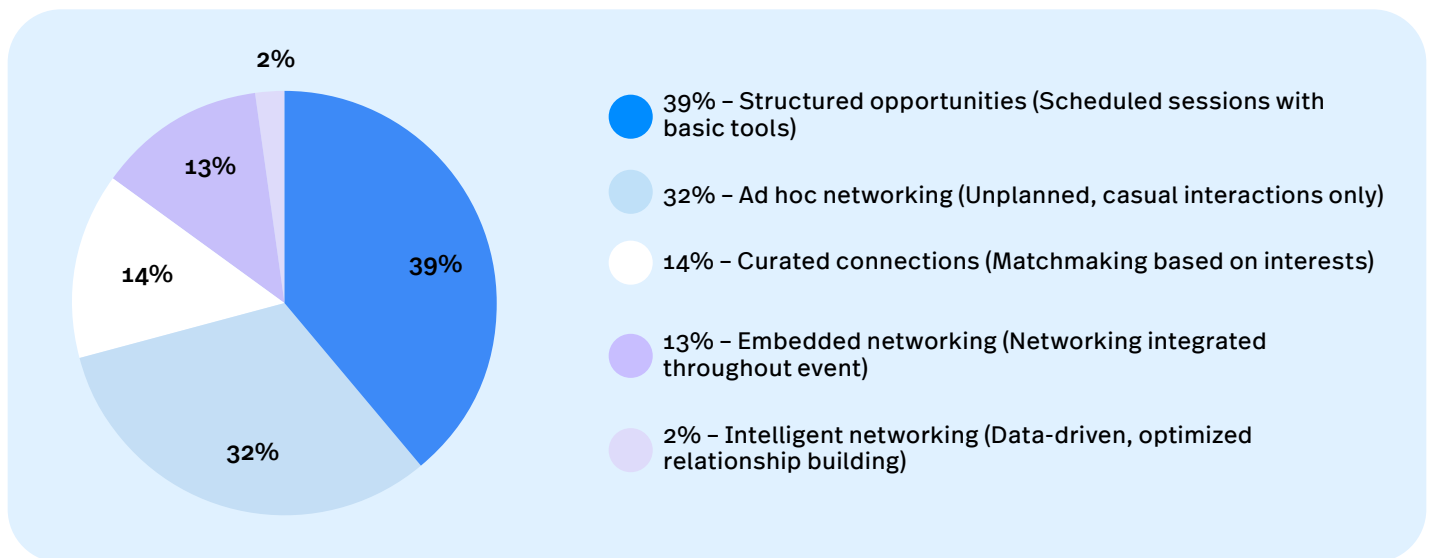
How important is networking to the success of your events?



How effective are the networking opportunities you currently provide at helping attendees build meaningful connections?



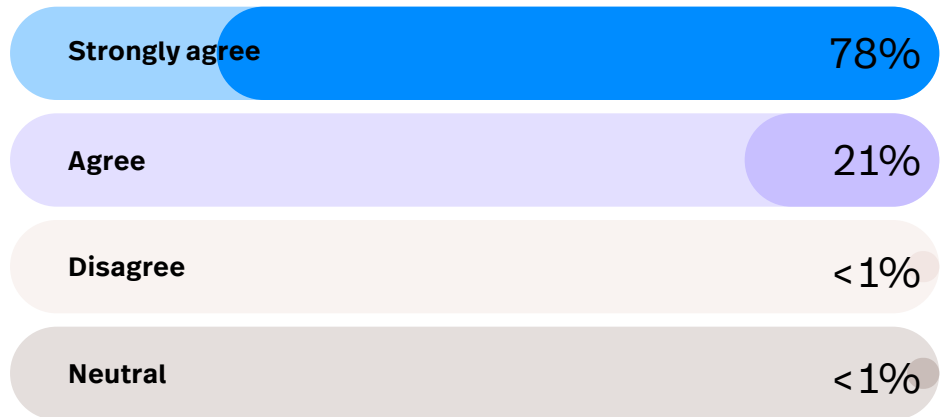
What networking experiences do you currently offer at your events?



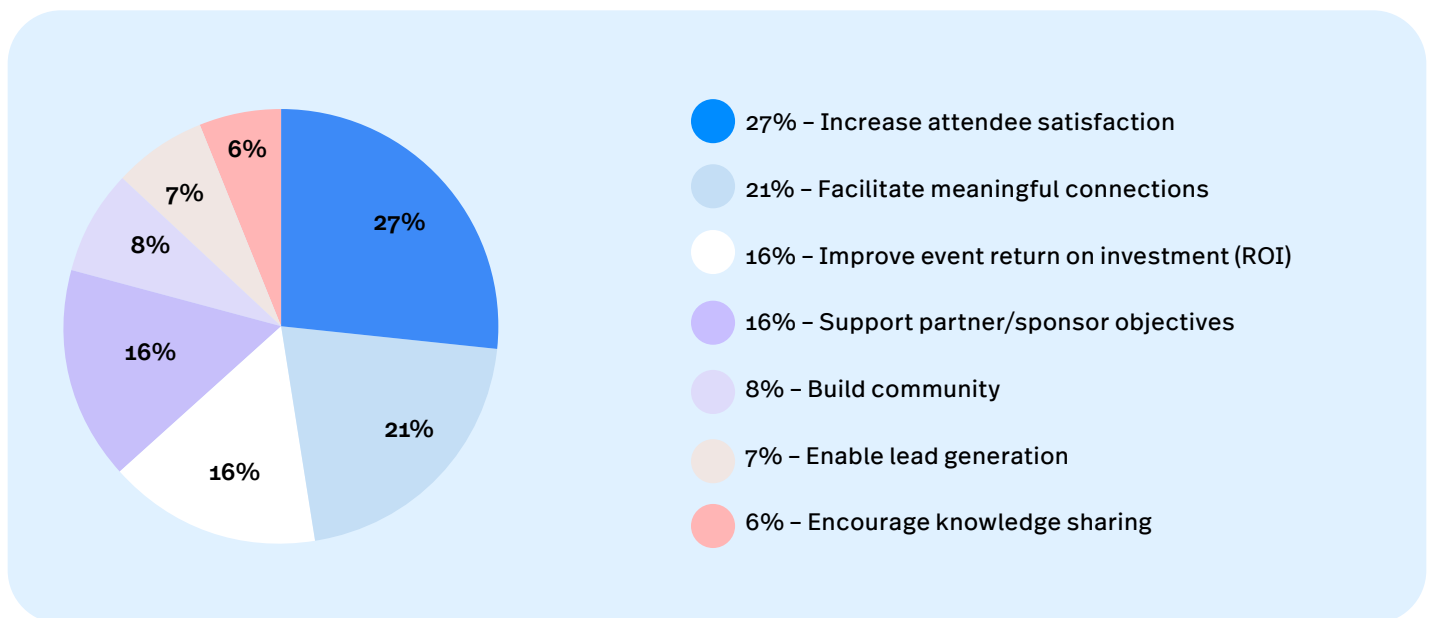
How would you rate the effectiveness of in-person conferences, summits, & conventions in achieving your networking goals compared to other event formats?



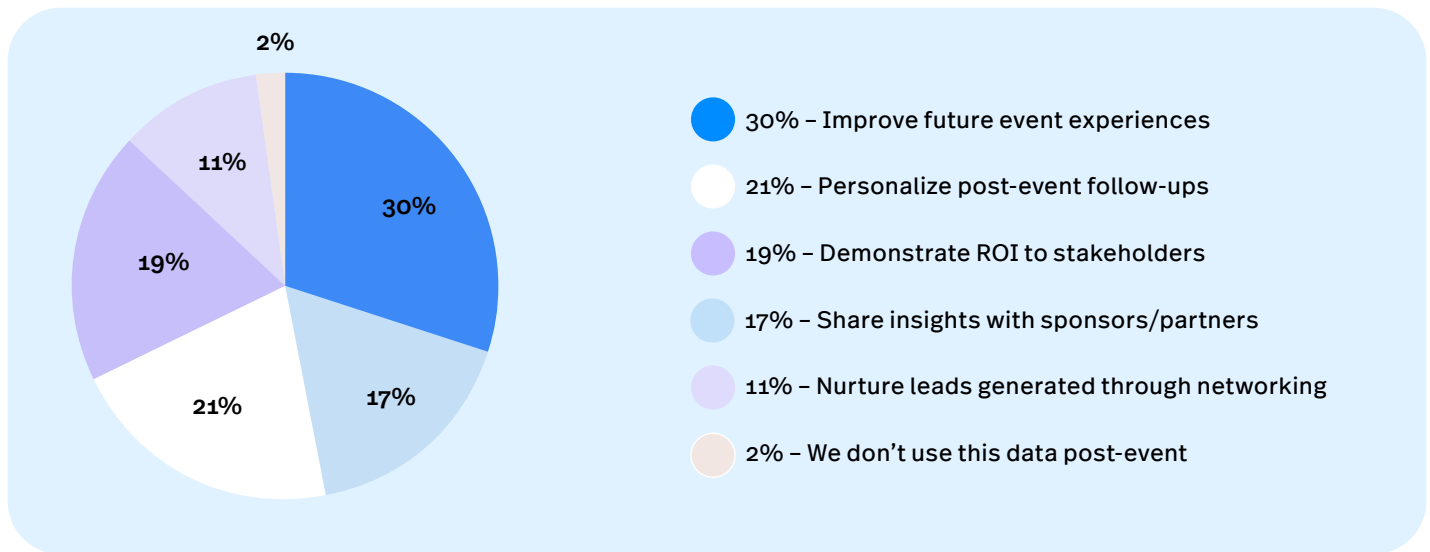
In-person conferences, summits, & conventions are an effective way to build and grow community.



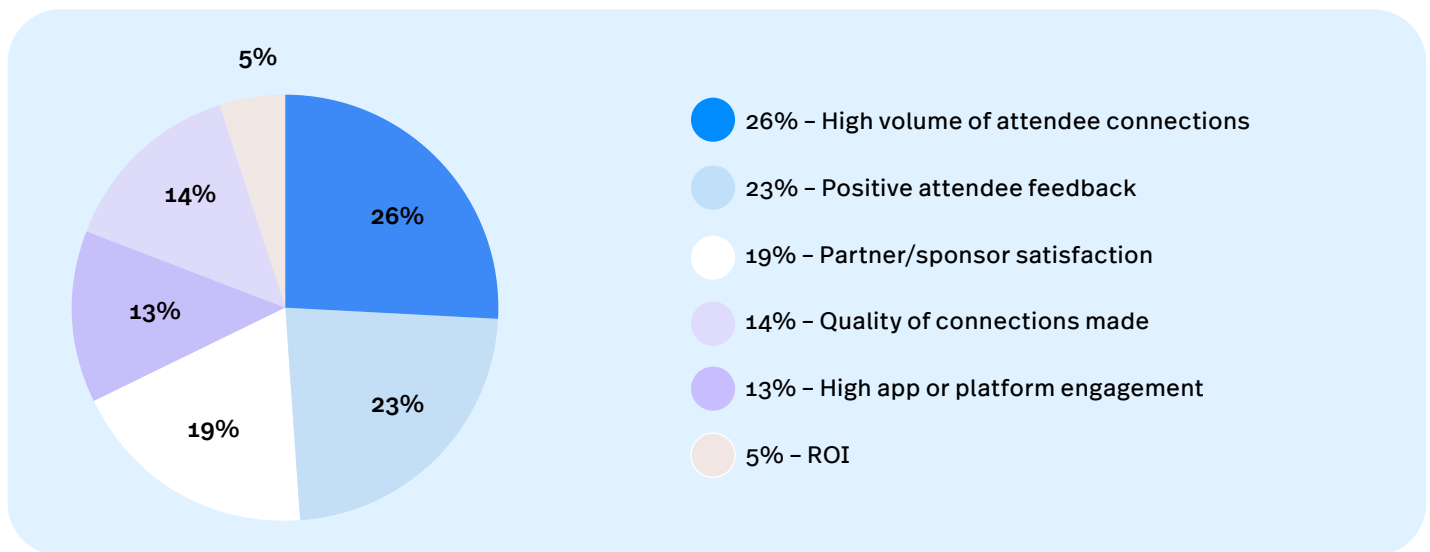
What are your top goals when it comes to attendee networking?



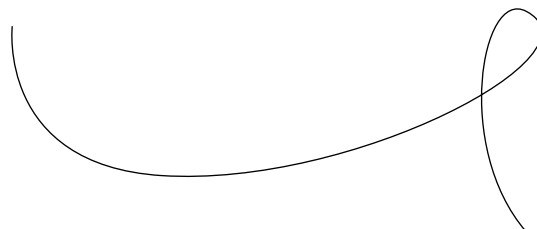
How do you plan to use attendee networking data post-event?



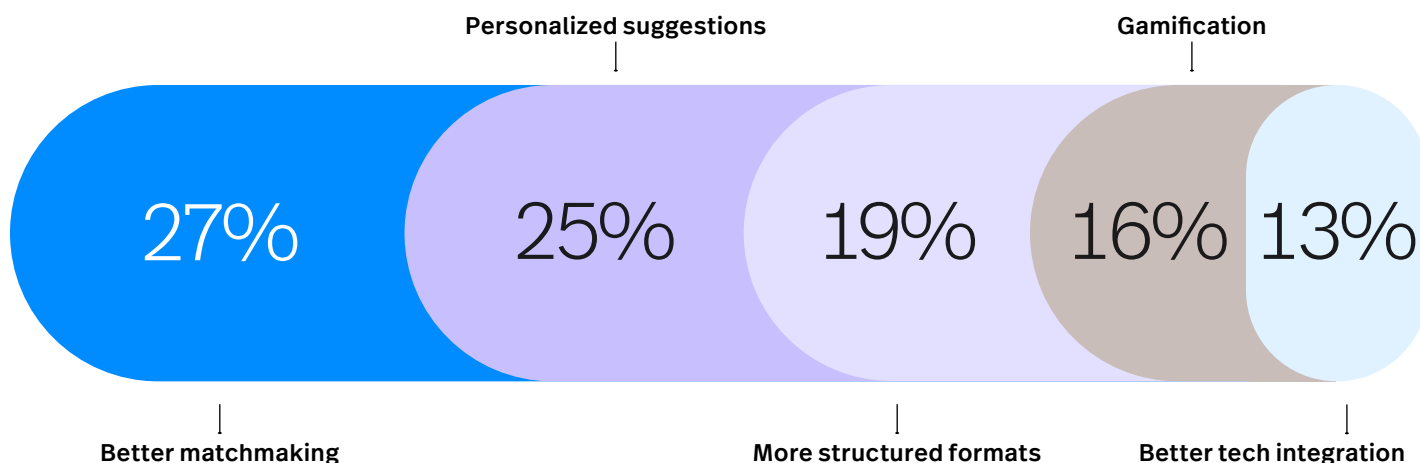
How do you define successful networking at your events?



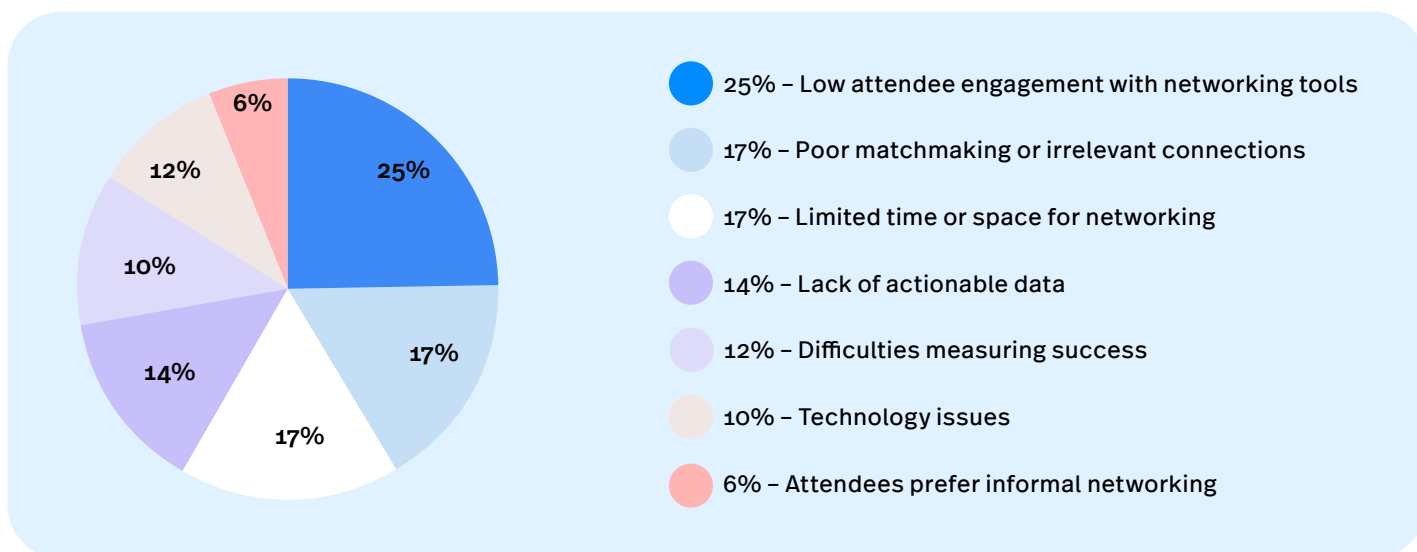
Want to master speed networking events?
[Read our article](#) for a proven planning and execution framework.



What would make networking more valuable or engaging at your events?



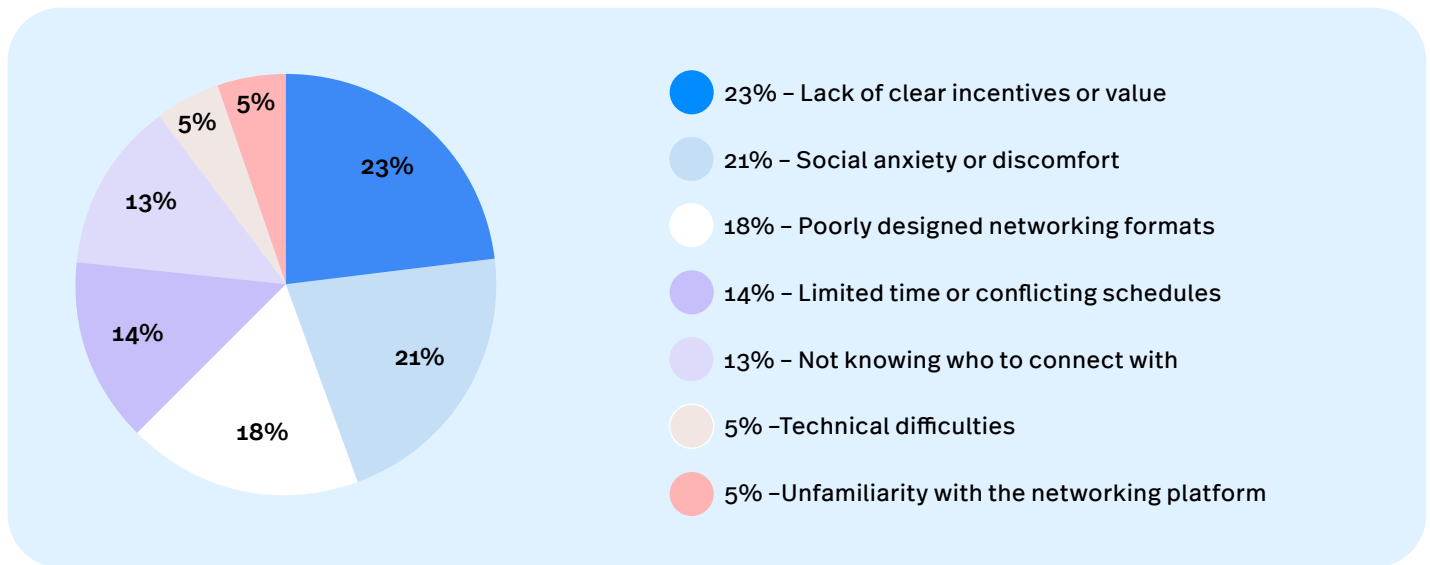
What are the biggest pain points you've experienced with networking at events?



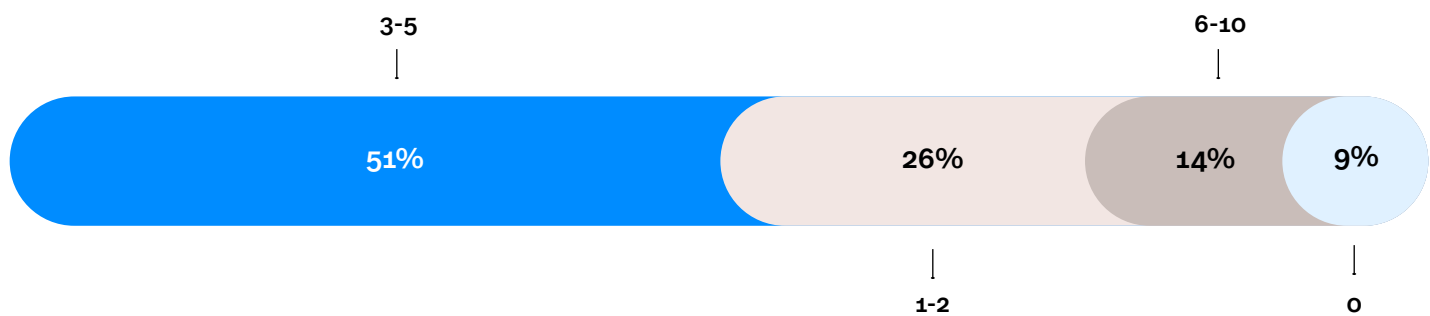
Learn how to simplify event logistics for large-scale, in-person enterprise events

[in this article.](#)

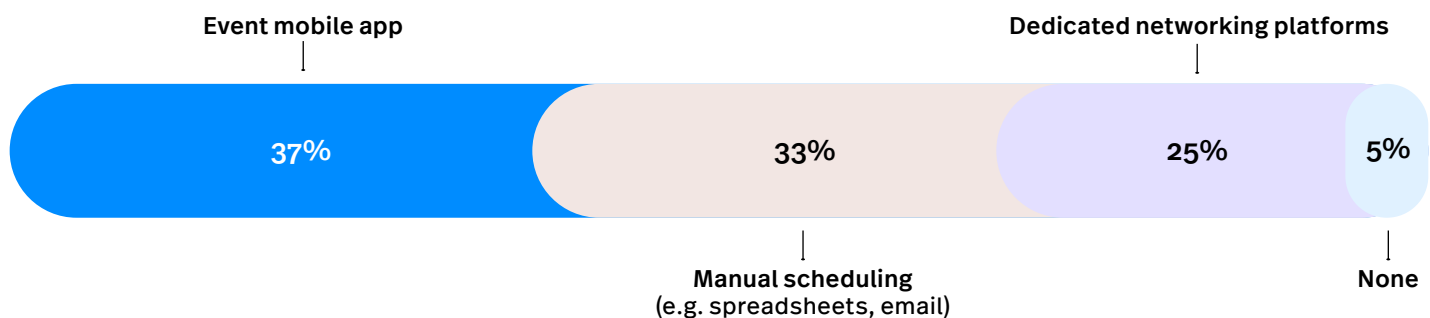
What prevents attendees from taking full advantage of networking opportunities?



How many apps, tools, or platforms (outside of your event management system) do you use to support attendee networking at your events?



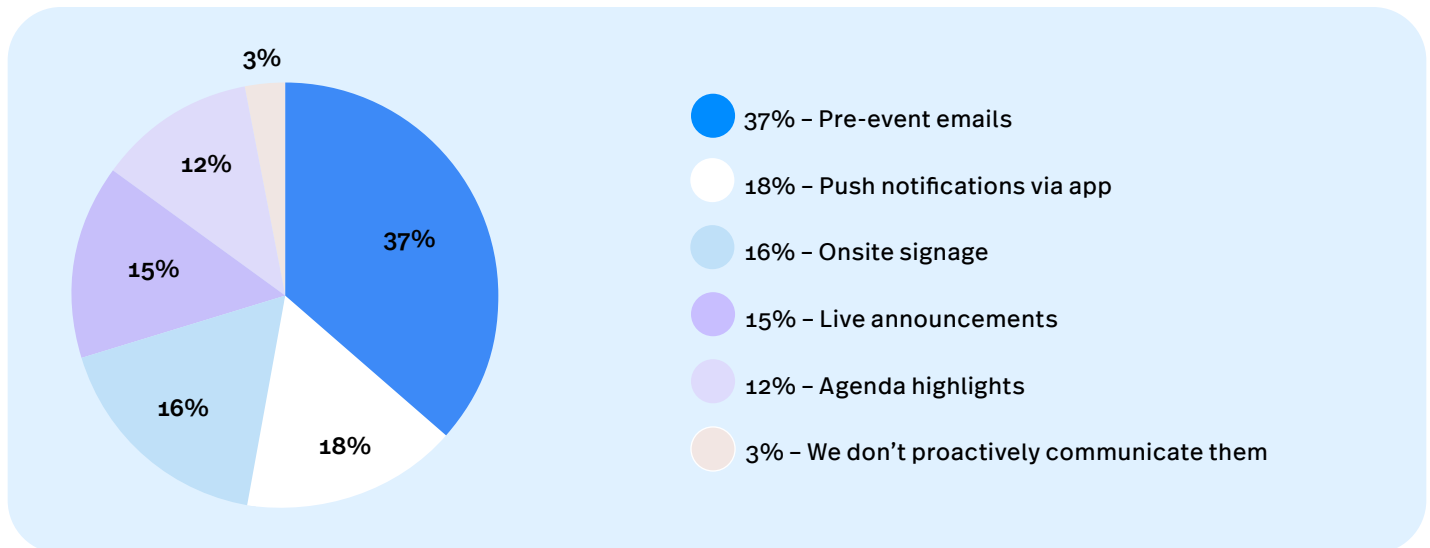
What are those tools or platforms?



How satisfied are you with your current networking solution?

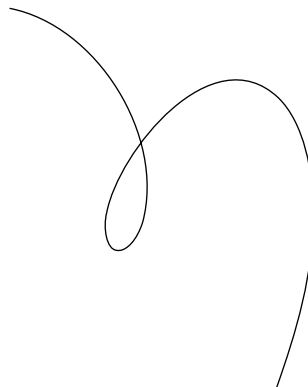


How do you currently communicate networking opportunities to attendees?

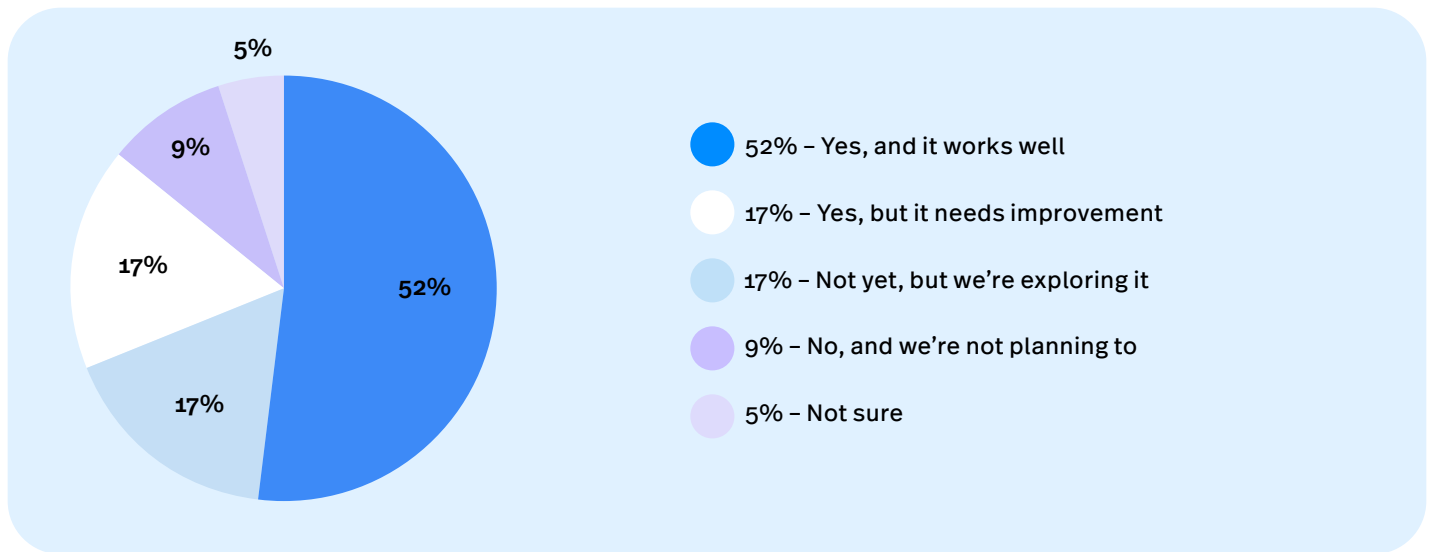


Read our blog on event announcements:

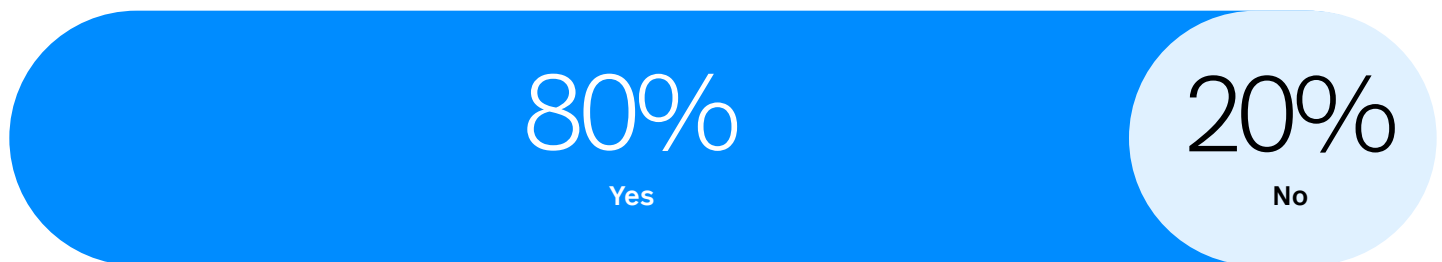
[a complete guide with templates and examples](#)



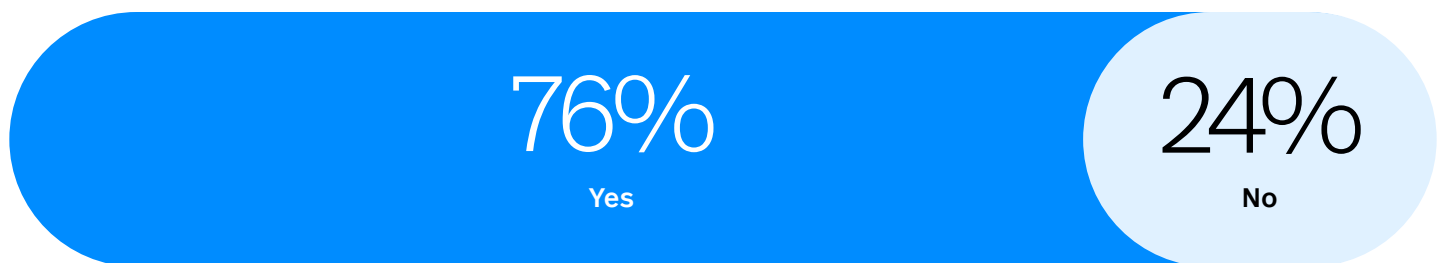
Do you currently provide any AI-powered or automated networking?



Do you use a mobile app at your in-person conferences, summits, & conventions to support attendee networking?



Do you use an online event community for in-person conferences, summits, & conventions?



02

Attendees: a demand for deeper, more personalized connections

Attendees are actively engaging in the in-person event landscape, with 46% attending 1-4 B2B conferences each year, and another 41% attending 5-9 annually. Despite this high level of participation, only 53% said that some of those events (between 1 and 4) actually offered structured networking opportunities or tools.

Still, networking remains a highlight: 39% of attendees gave the networking opportunities at the events they attended last year a perfect 5 out of 5 rating.

46%

of attendees say they attend between 1-4 in-person B2B conferences annually

53%

of attendees said that only some of these events actually offered structured networking opportunities or tools



“When I attend a face-to-face event, I’m there to connect with people. I want to see dedicated time and space for meeting people, not just a happy-hour style event.”

said one Manager.



“I am often strategic about the events I attend, in person, due to time constraints. So, the events I do attend need to provide solid networking opportunities.

said one Director.



“Networking is the primary goal [of in-person events]. It helps with future job opportunities, sales, exposure, future connections, etc.”

said one Business Development Representative.

Networking drives attendance

For attendees, networking is not just a benefit, it’s often the deciding factor. 83% say networking opportunities are important when choosing to attend an event, and 82% believe in-person events offer the most opportunity to network.

Mixed preferences for structured and informal networking

When it comes to networking styles, attendees are far from one-size-fits-all. 47% of attendees prefer a mix of structured and informal networking. Still, 29% prefer structured only, showing that some attendees appreciate formats that help reduce friction.

39% consider themselves outgoing and enjoy engaging with lots of people at events, while 34% said their approach depends on the specific event or their personal goals. Meanwhile, 24% prefer more reserved, one-on-one interactions, highlighting the need for flexible networking formats that cater to a range of personalities.

Barriers to networking still exist

Attendees say the biggest blockers to networking are a lack of information about others (22%) and not enough time to network (20%). Despite widespread app adoption, only 16% typically use the event app to find people to connect with, with most relying on random encounters (30%) or introductions by others (29%).

Digital tools help. 73% said they enhance the networking experience, but attendees still want better support: 21% asked for calendar integrations, and 16% requested personalized matchmaking.

What attendees really want from event networking

Networking doesn’t end when the event does, but it doesn’t always deliver, either. 92% of attendees said they’ve followed up with someone they connected with through a networking feature in an event app. However, for 34% of those people, the conversation didn’t lead to anything meaningful, revealing a missed opportunity for more structured or strategic follow-up support.

As for what attendees are actually hoping to gain from these connections? The top motivation is to find potential partners or collaborators (19%), followed closely by job opportunities (18%). Lead generation and sales and learning from others are tied at 16%, suggesting that attendees are seeking both professional advancement and meaningful knowledge exchange when they network.



“Structured puts everyone on a level playing field - forces the conversation and ability to make more connections in a shorter period of time.”

said one Manager.

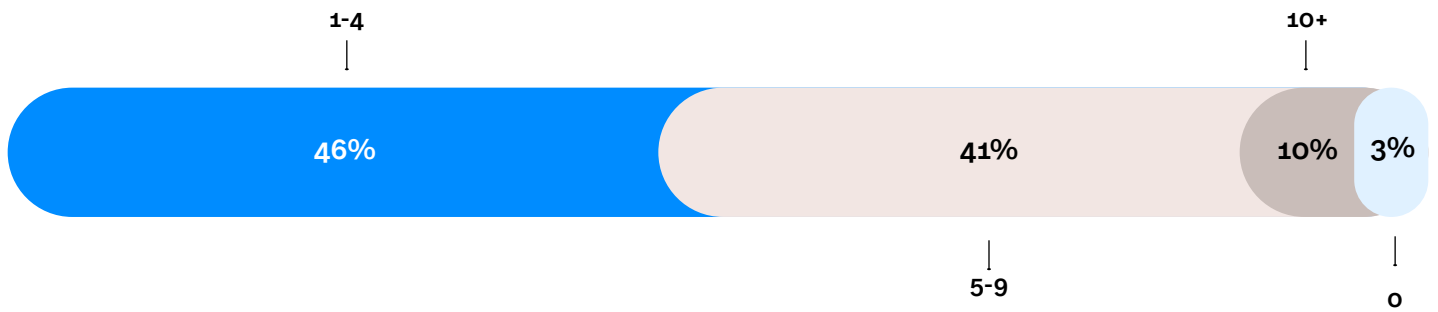
On the other hand:



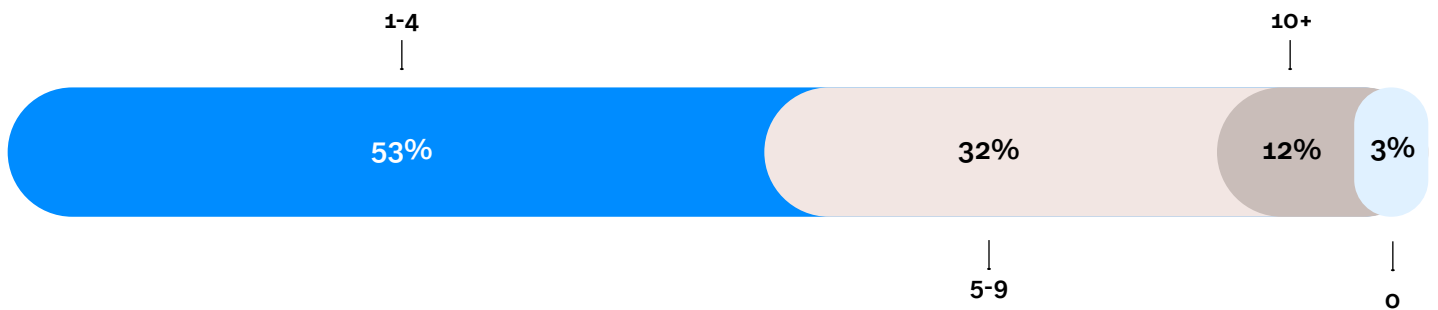
“Too much structure feels forced; too little may lead to not enough opportunities unless you’re extremely outgoing.”

said one respondent.

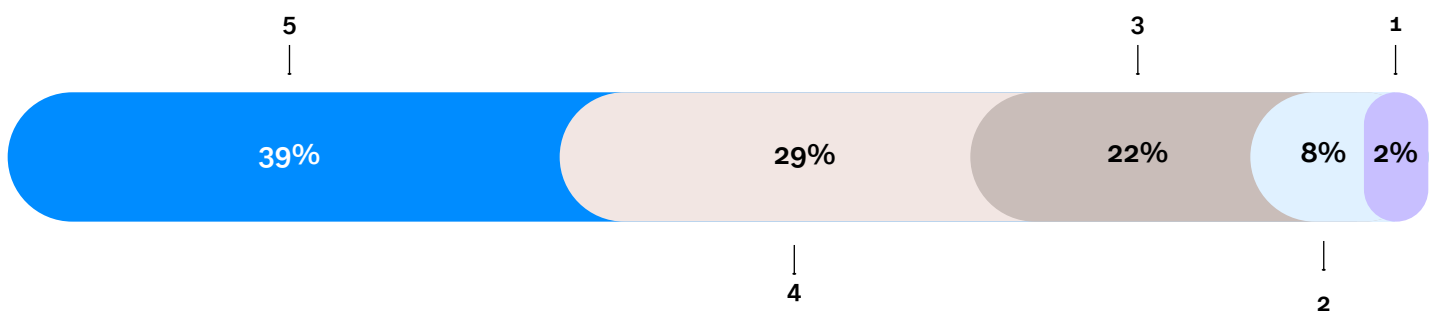
How many in-person B2B conferences do you attend annually?



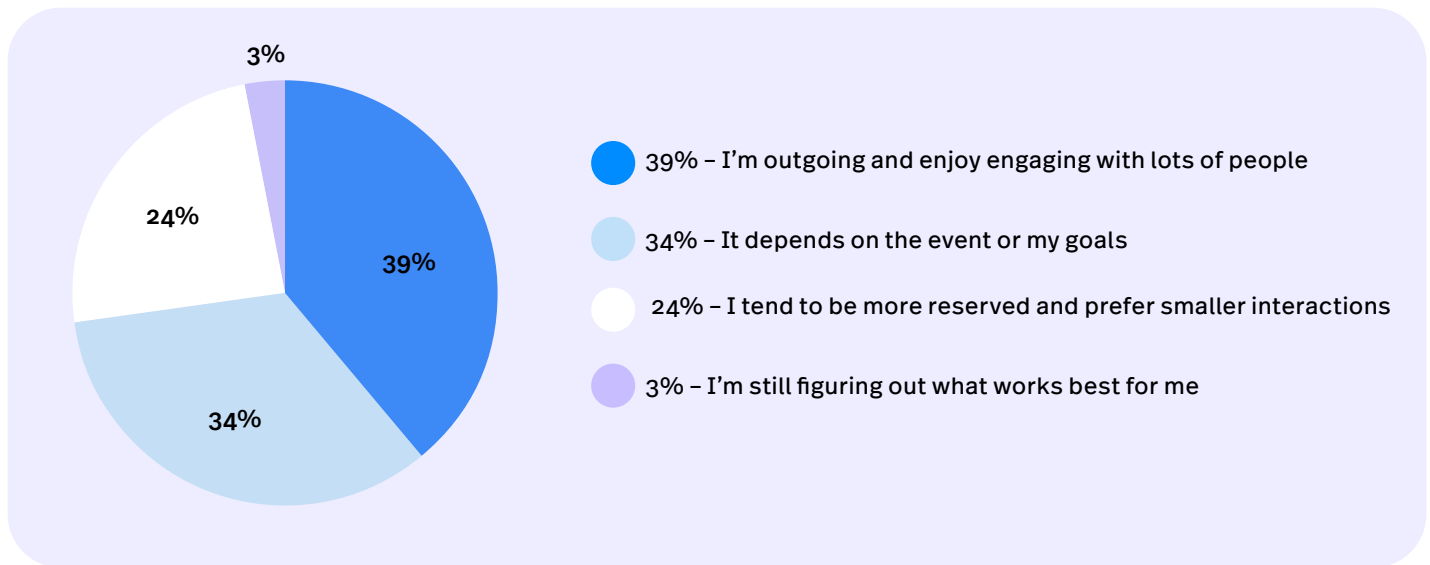
How many of those events offered structured networking opportunities or tools?



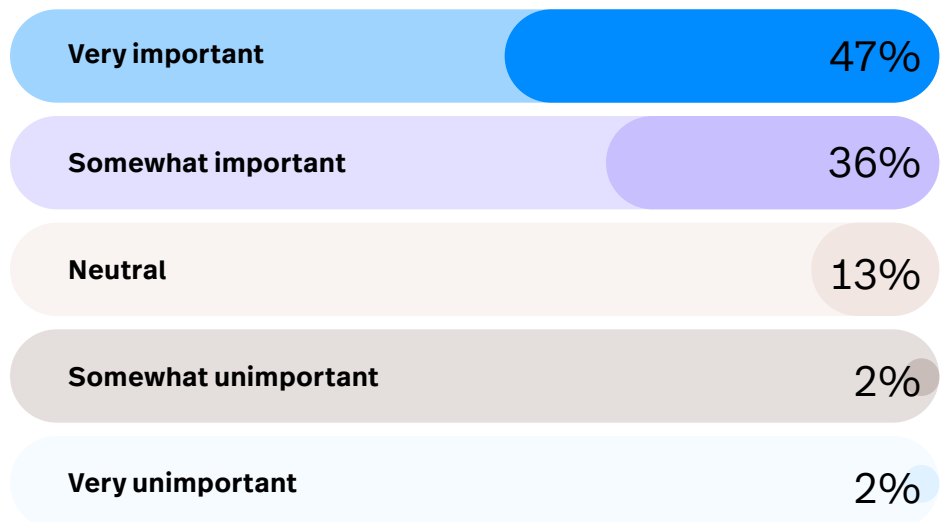
If there were networking opportunities, on average, how would you rate them from 1-5?



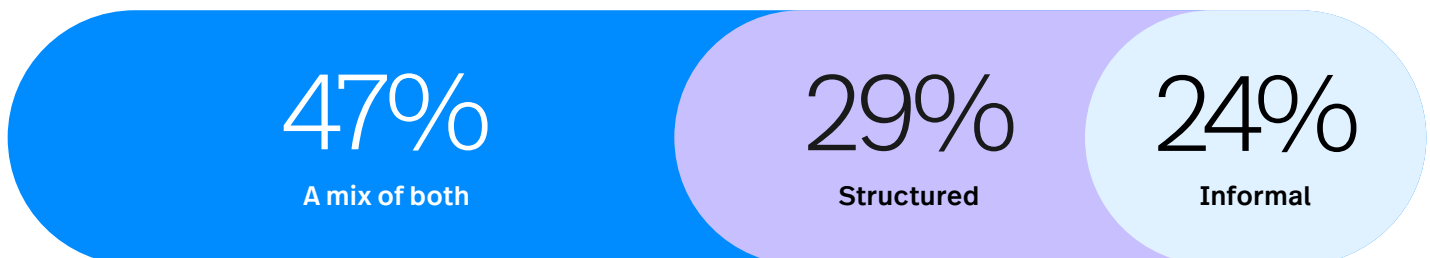
Which best describes your networking style at events?



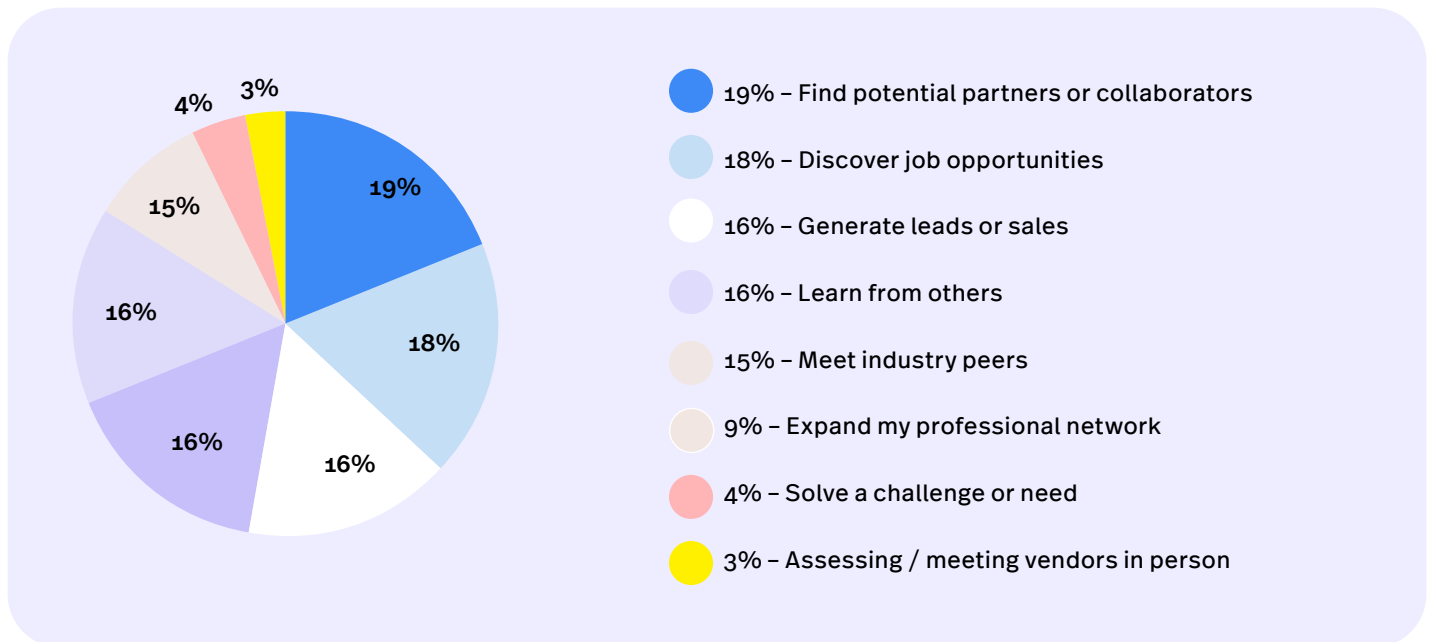
When deciding whether to attend an in-person event, how important are the networking opportunities?



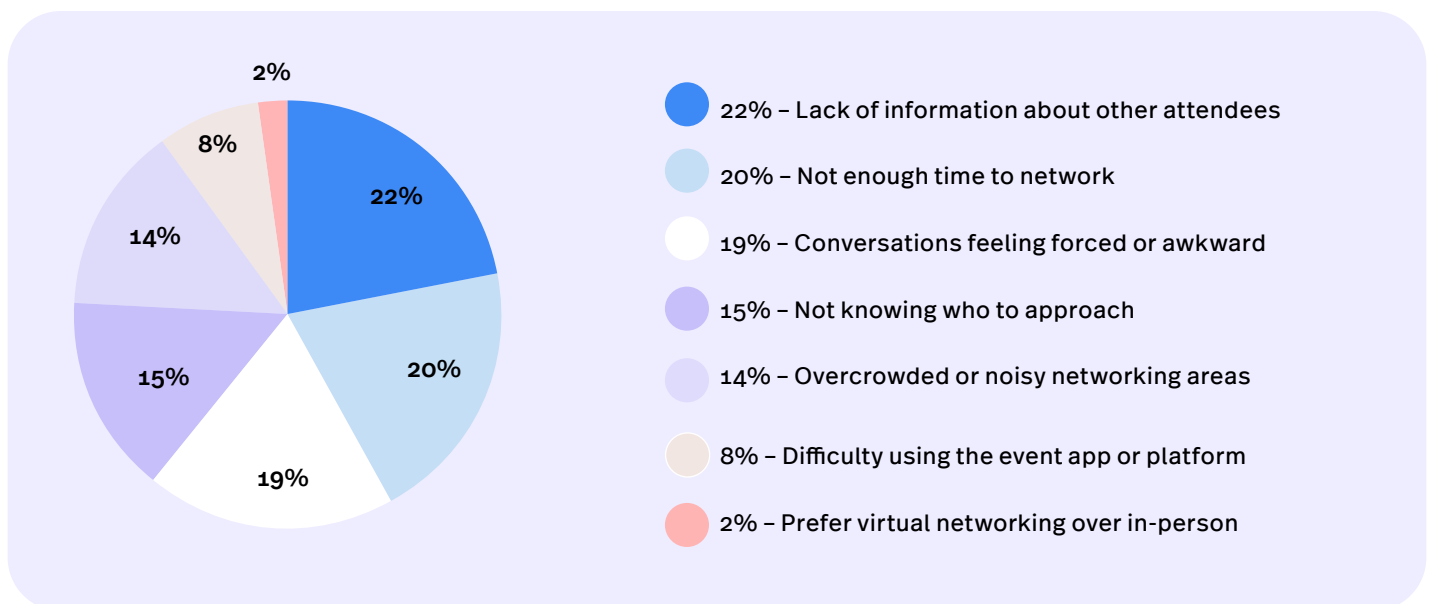
Do you prefer structured networking (e.g. speed networking, matchmaking) or informal networking (e.g. coffee breaks, happy hours)?



What are you hoping to get out of networking at events?

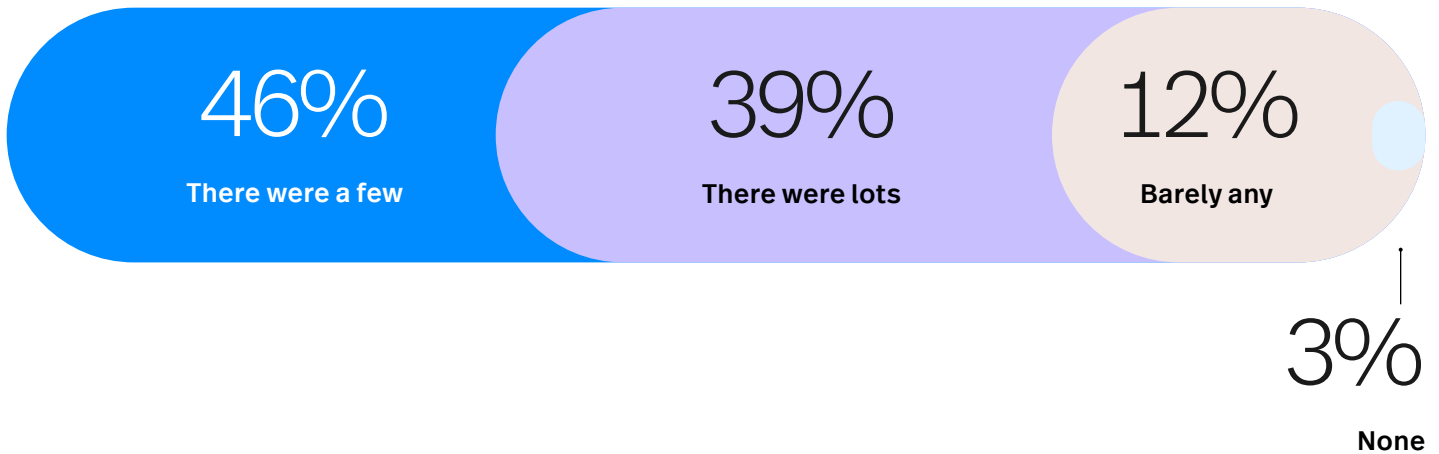


What are the biggest challenges you face when trying to network at events?

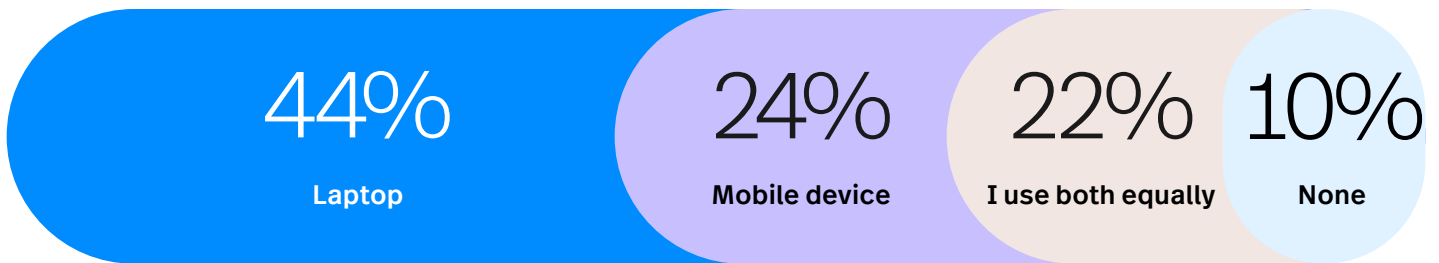


Learn why in-person events are thriving in 2025 [in this article](#).

At your most recent in-person conference experience, tell us about the number of networking opportunities that were offered.



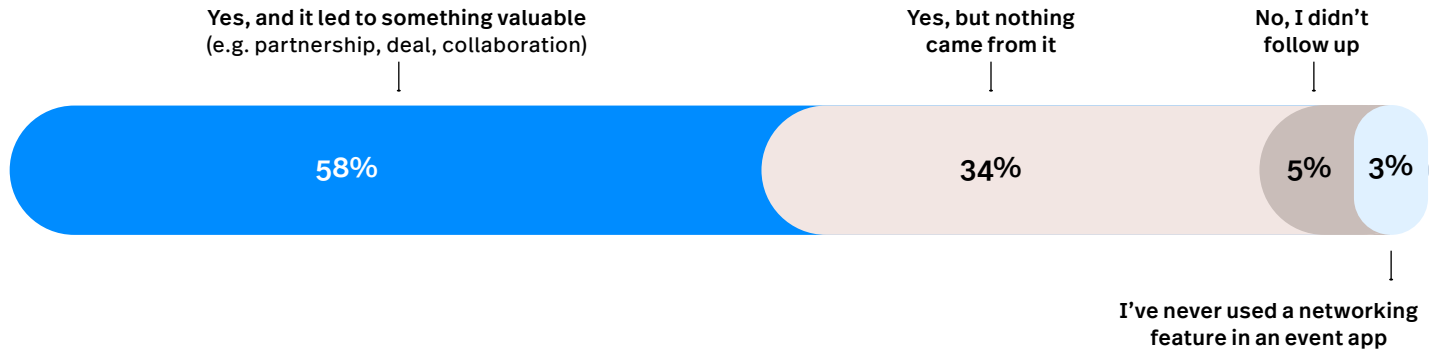
Would you prefer to use your mobile device or laptop for networking?



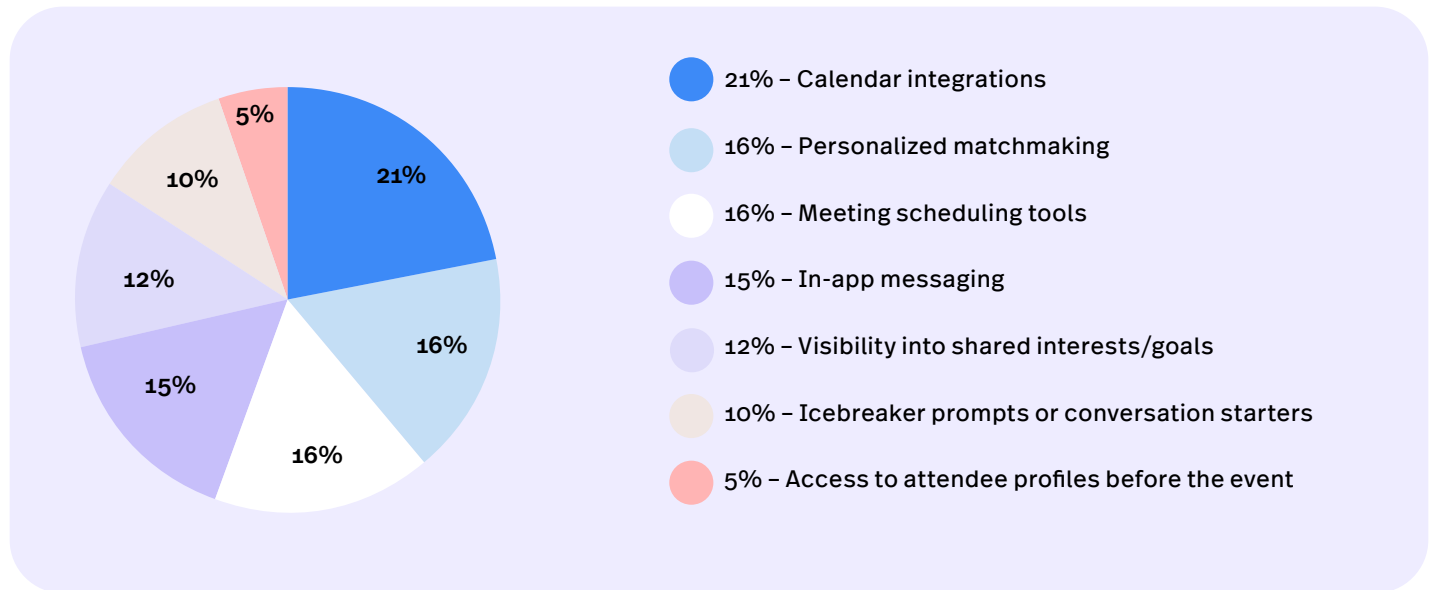
How helpful are digital tools (like event apps) in enhancing your networking experience?



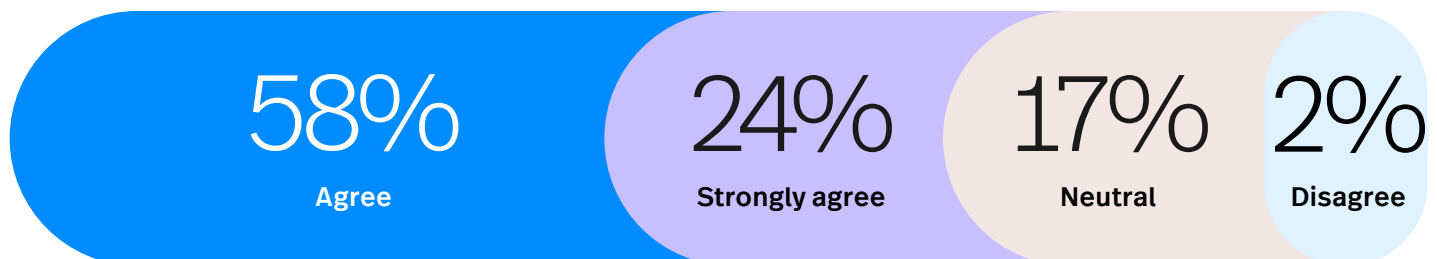
Have you ever followed up with someone you met through a networking feature in an event app?



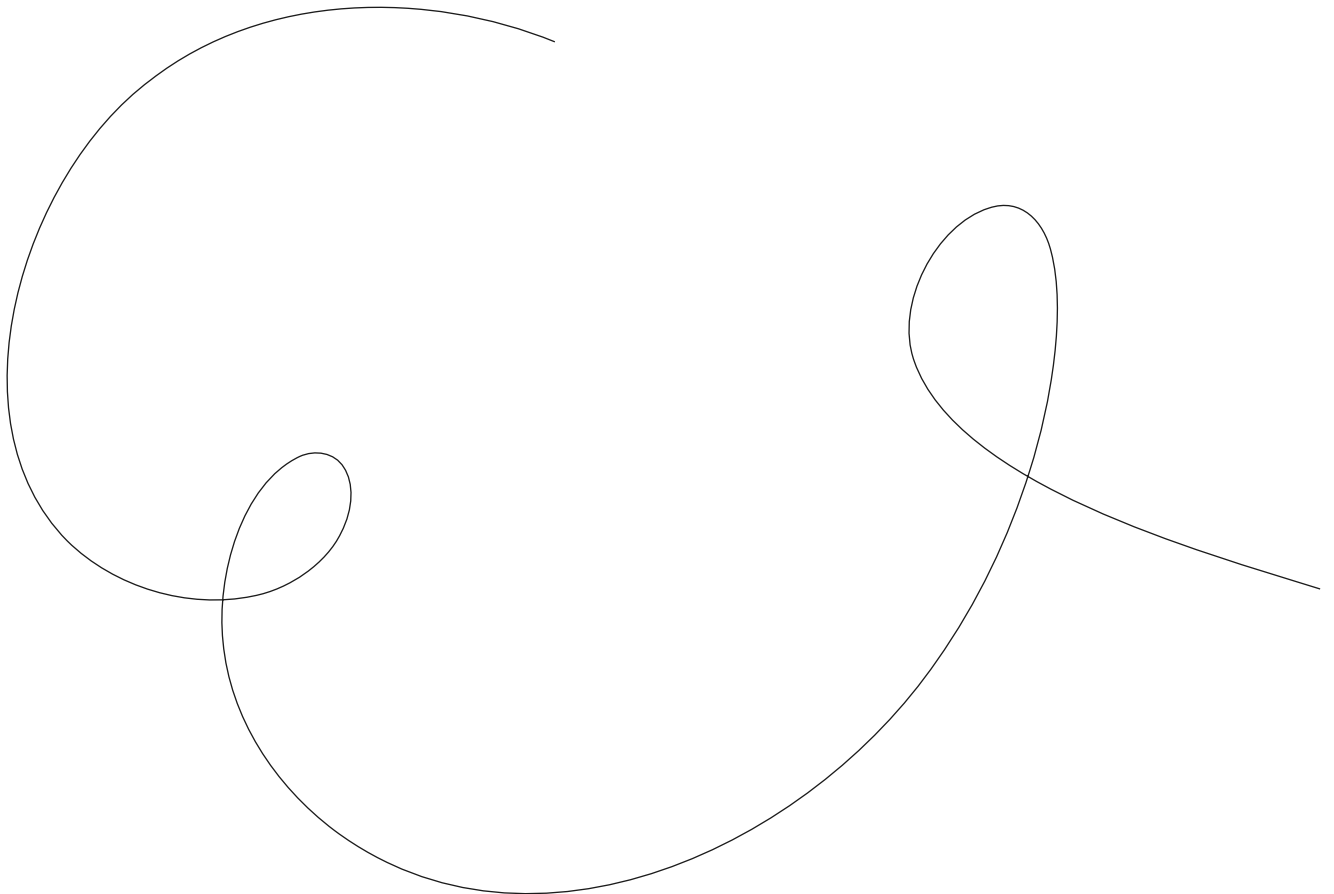
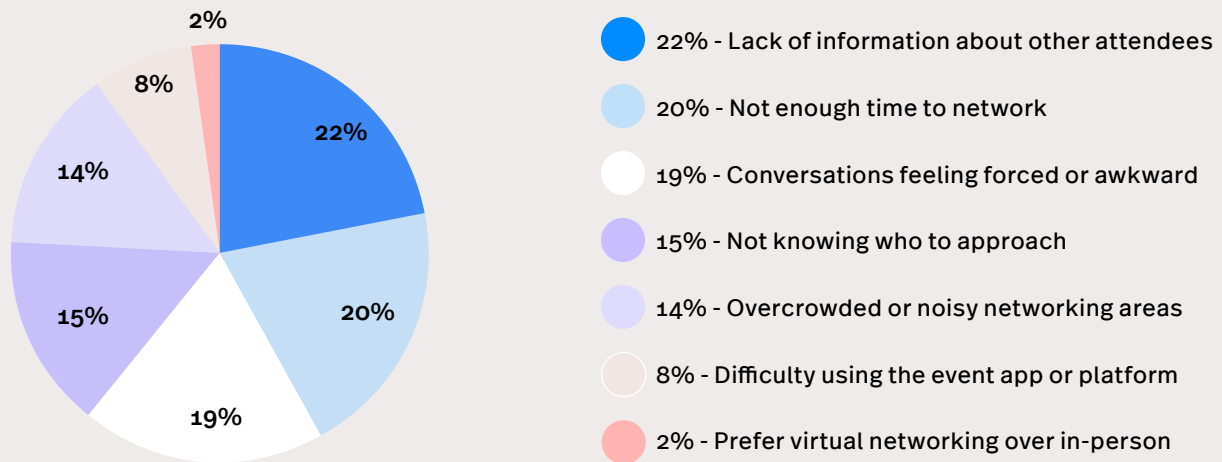
What features would make networking easier or more effective for you at events?



In-person B2B conferences offer the most opportunities to network.



What are the biggest challenges you face when trying to network at events?





02

Sponsors and exhibitors: investing in experience driven engagement

Today's sponsors want more than foot traffic; they're looking for moments that drive brand affinity and deepen relationships. 57% said they see greater value in sponsoring branded experiences like happy hours, dinners, or curated networking sessions over traditional booth space. Another 24% still do both, but emphasized that experiential sponsorships consistently yield better results, and they're now prioritizing them in future plans.

Networking is central to sponsor success

84% of sponsors and exhibitors say attendee networking is important to achieving their event goals, with a growing focus on brand-building and long-term relationship development, not just lead capture.

55% of sponsors prefer a mix of structured and informal networking at events, while 29% favor informal formats like organic conversations over coffee or at happy hours. This shift in preference aligns with how they're choosing to engage onsite: 22% typically connect via

57%

of sponsors and exhibitors said they see greater value in sponsoring branded experiences

24%

of sponsors and exhibitors host both traditional booth spaces and branded experiences

25%

of sponsors and exhibitors rely on the event platform for follow-ups

24%

of sponsors and exhibitors want better tools to pre-schedule meetings

booth visits and pre-scheduled meetings, followed by 20% who engage through sponsored sessions or roundtables.

High volume, higher expectations

75% of sponsors and exhibitors participate in 6–10+ events per year, making efficiency and ROI measurement critical. After events, 29% of sponsors follow up with leads using personalized gifts or messages, while 25% rely on the event platform to continue the conversation, underscoring the value of tools that extend engagement beyond the show floor.

Sponsors are turning to tech to boost impact

47% use digital tools or platforms to support networking during events, though 33% say those tools could be improved. Smart badges are gaining traction, with 18% using them for lead capture and 30% saying they're the most effective way to collect high-quality leads. Lead retrieval apps remain widely used, with 32% preferring them over business cards or manual entry.

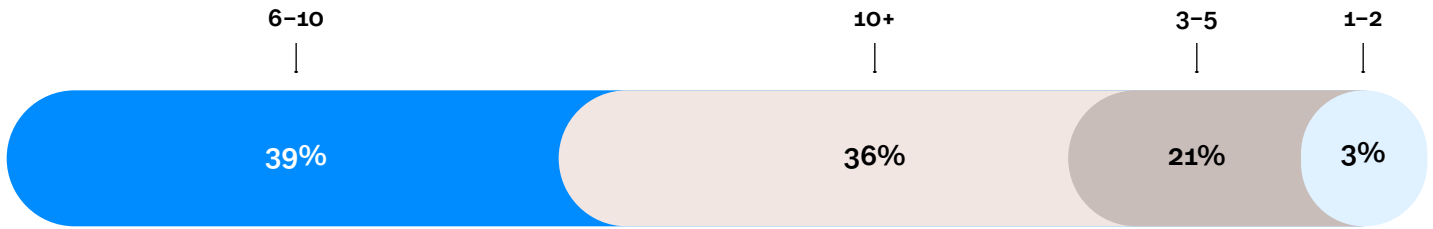
But even with better tech, challenges persist. 23% cite poor booth traffic as a top obstacle, while 20% say they still face limited access to attendee data. Sponsors are asking for more: 24% want better tools to pre-schedule meetings, and 23% say advance access to attendee profiles would help them maximize every interaction.

Confidence in measuring success is high

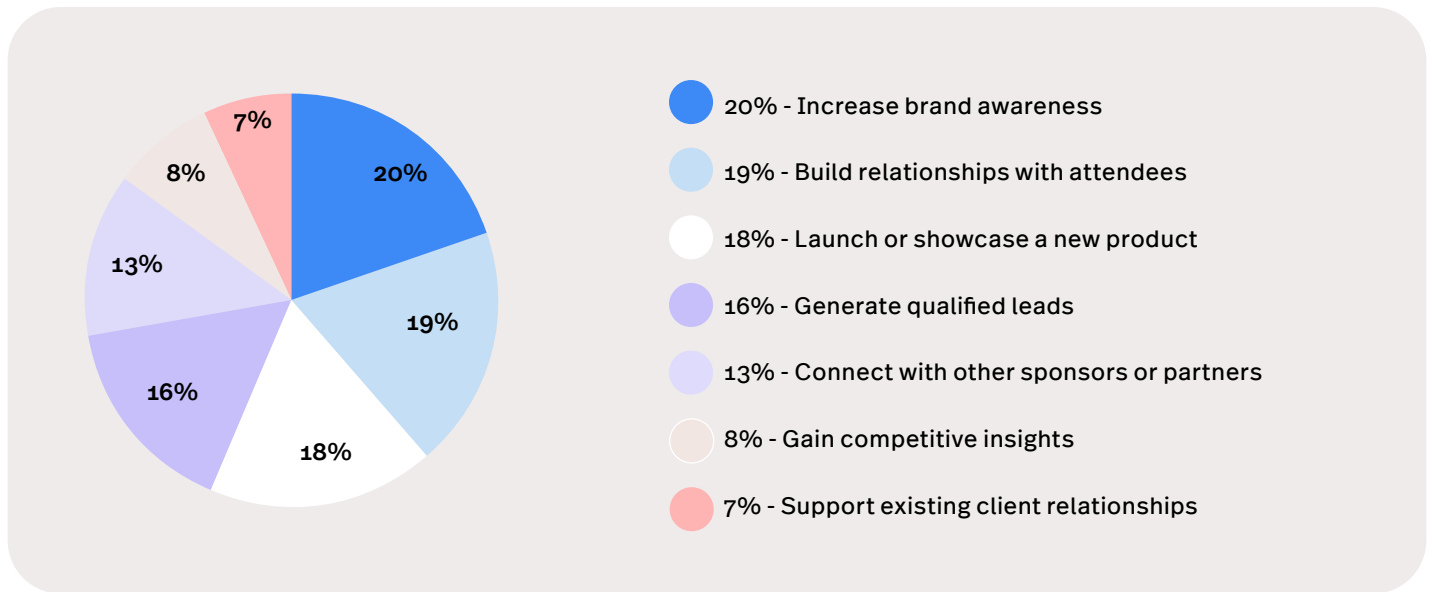
71% of sponsors say they can accurately measure their event goals, and the results are promising: 27% say their goals are always met, while 48% say they're met most of the time. When asked what matters most in evaluating event ROI, 30% said lead quality was the top data point, followed by pipeline generated at 23%.

This reflects a broader shift away from volume-based metrics toward meaningful engagement and long-term value, a sign that sponsors are rethinking what successful event participation really looks like.

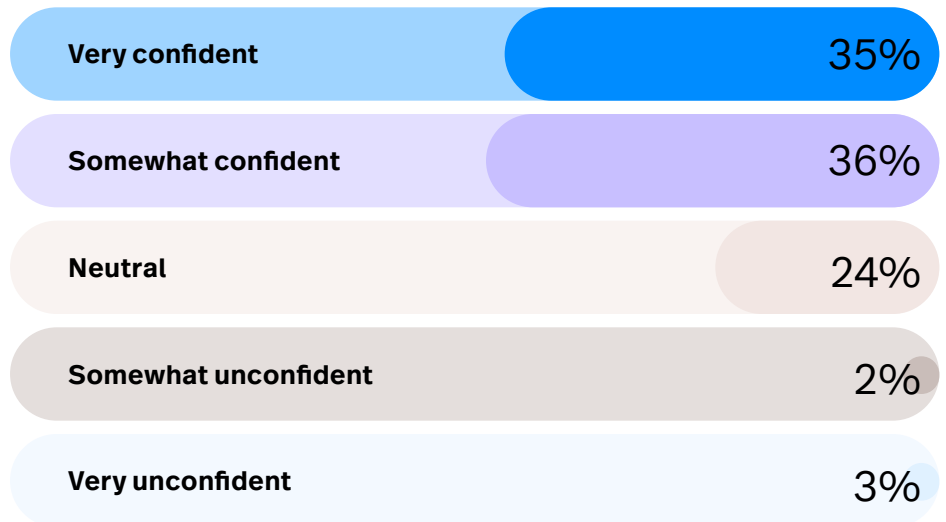
How many events do you sponsor or exhibit at annually?



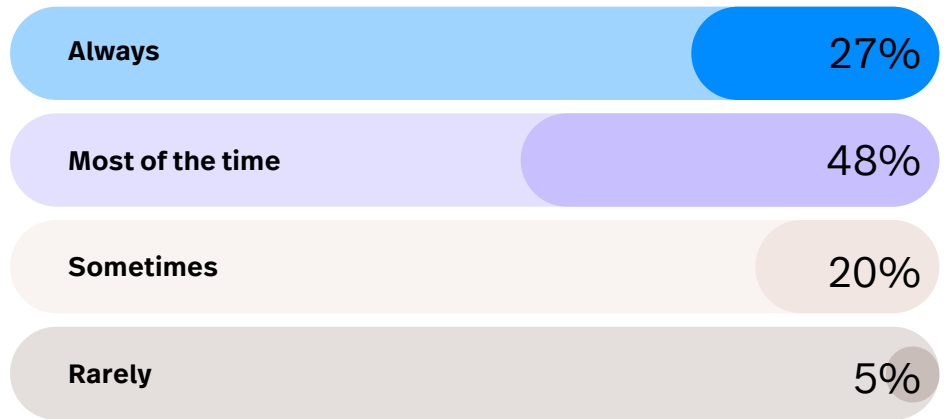
What are your primary goals when sponsoring or exhibiting at an event?



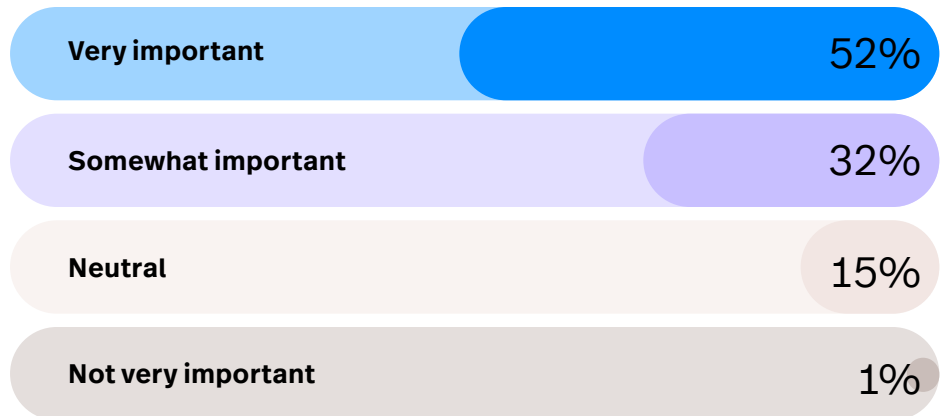
How confident are you in measuring these goals?



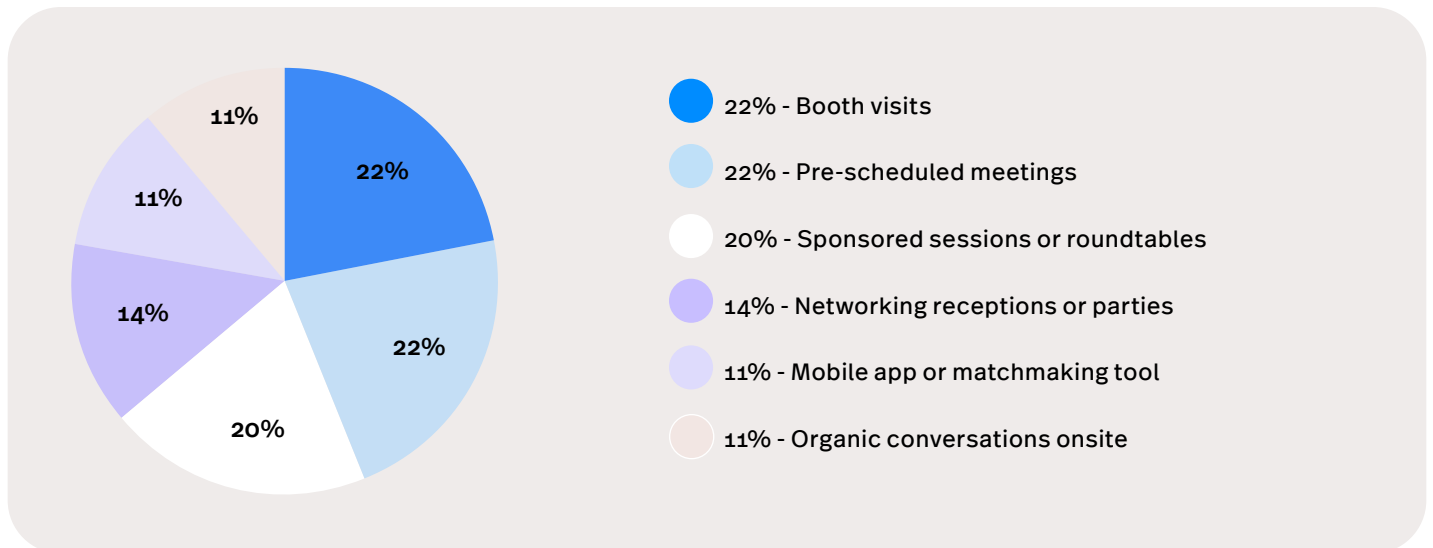
Do the third-party events you participate in typically meet your sponsorship goals?



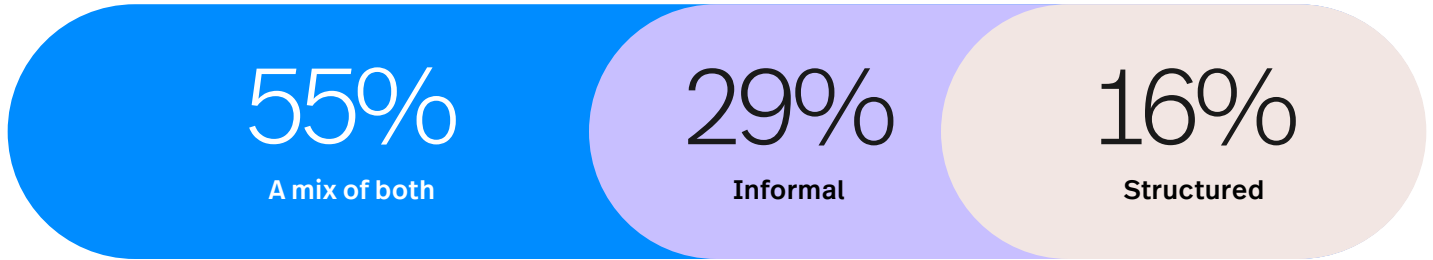
How important is attendee networking to achieving your event goals?



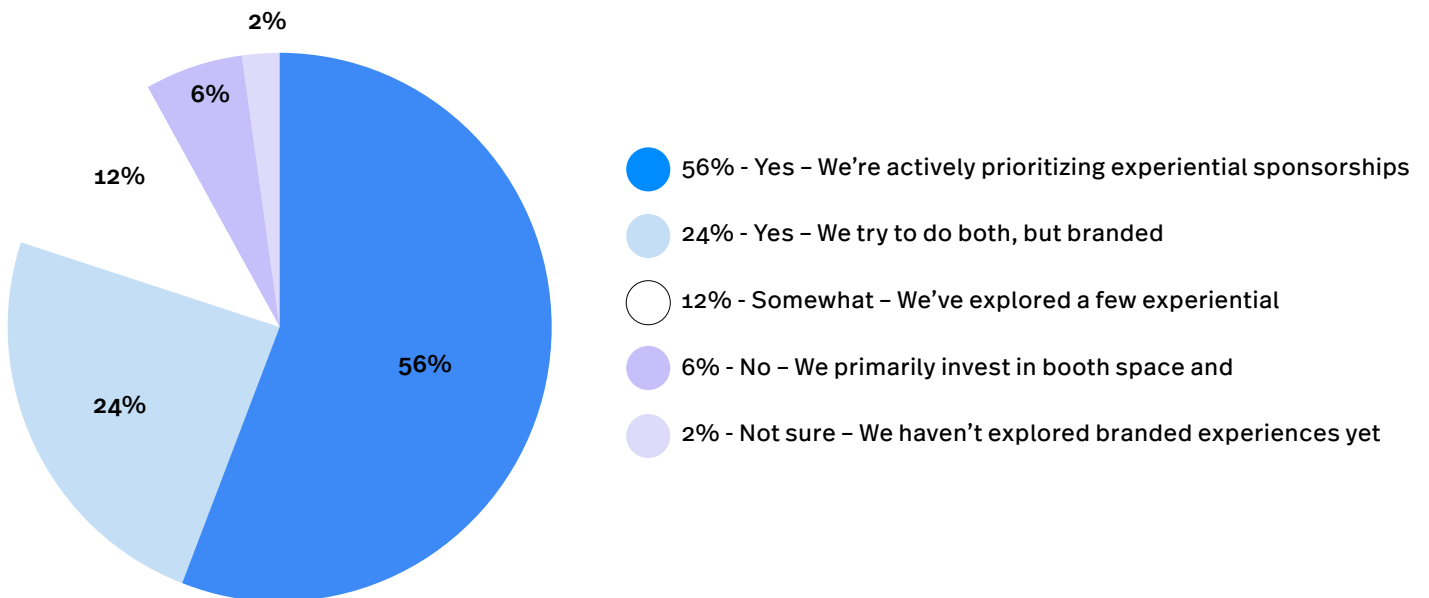
How do you typically connect with attendees during in-person events?



Do you prefer structured networking (e.g. speed networking, matchmaking) or informal networking (e.g. happy hours, booth chats)?



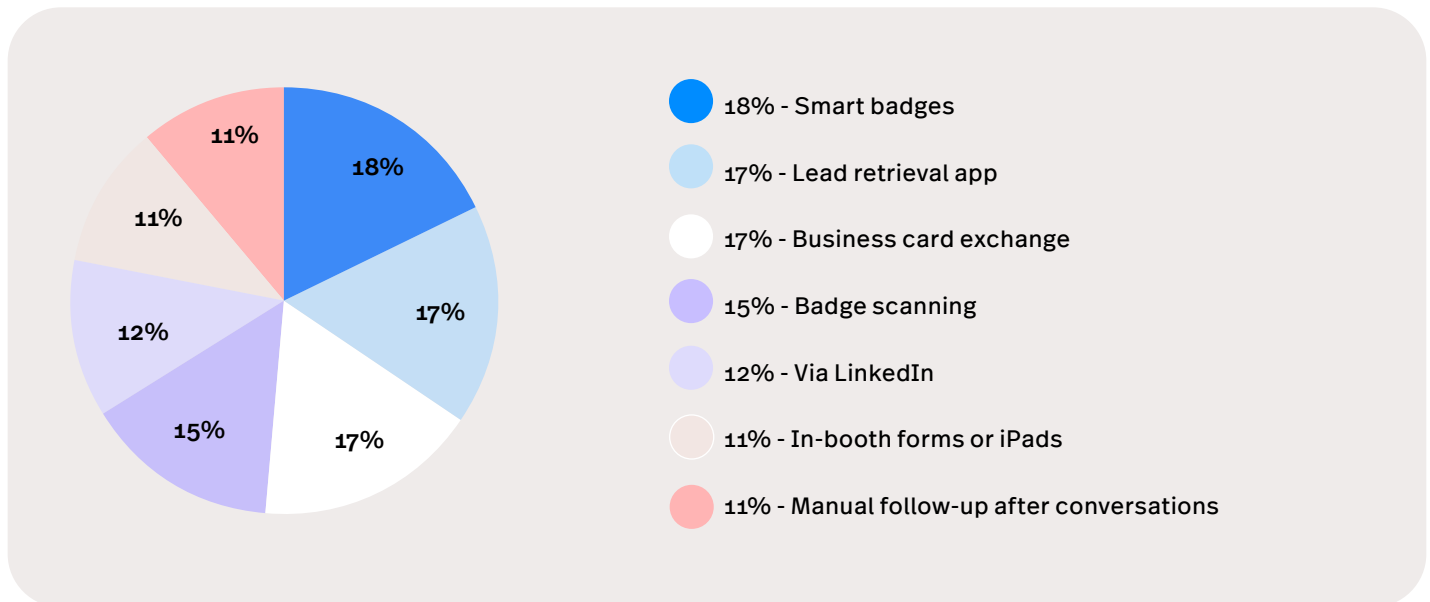
Are you seeing more value in sponsoring branded experiences (e.g., happy hours, dinners, sunset cruises) over traditional booth space?



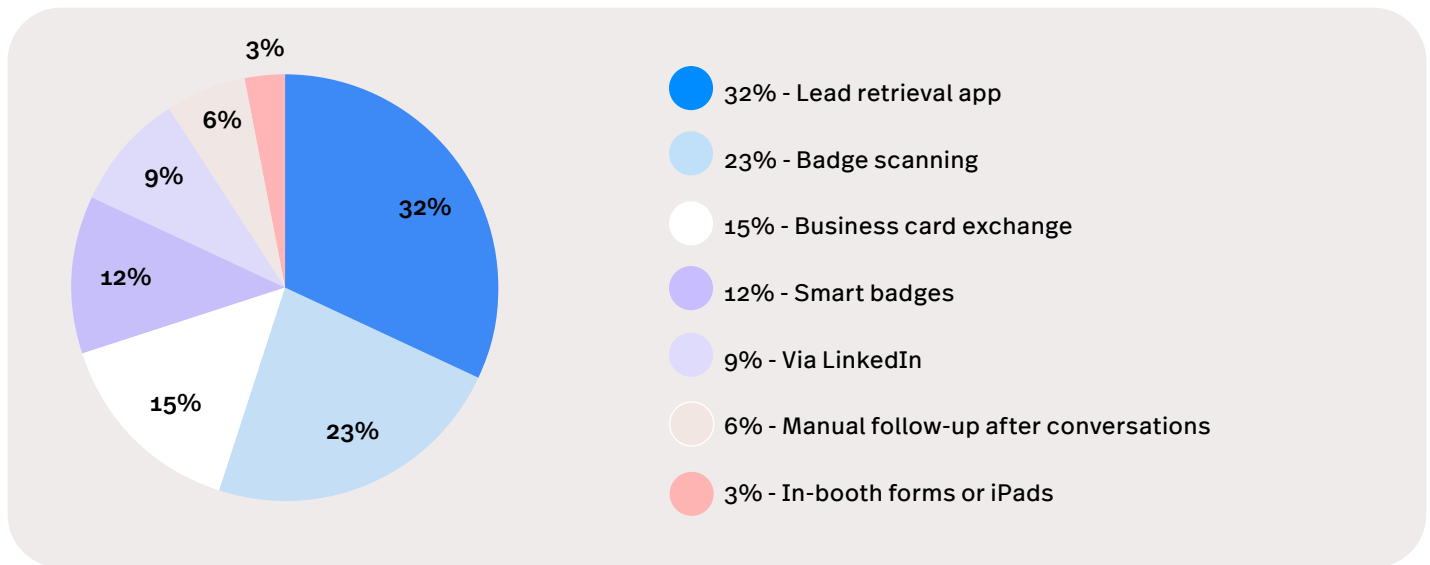
Do you use any digital tools or platforms to support networking during events?



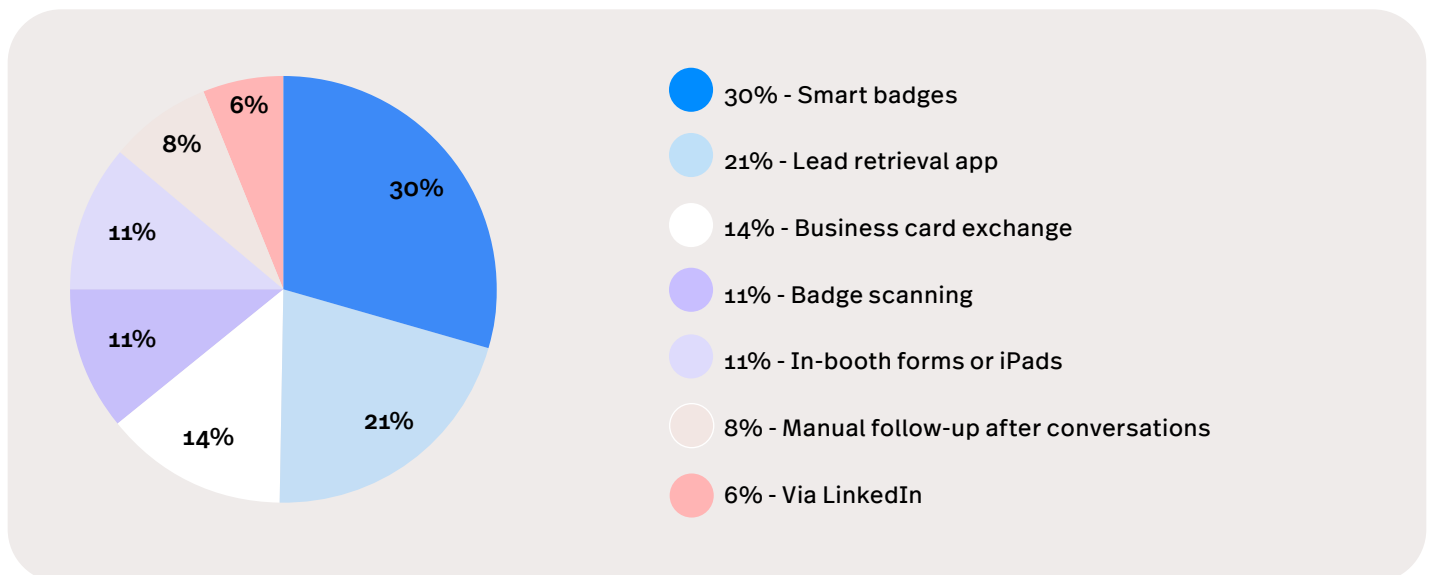
What lead capture methods do you typically use at events?



Which lead capture method do you prefer using at events?



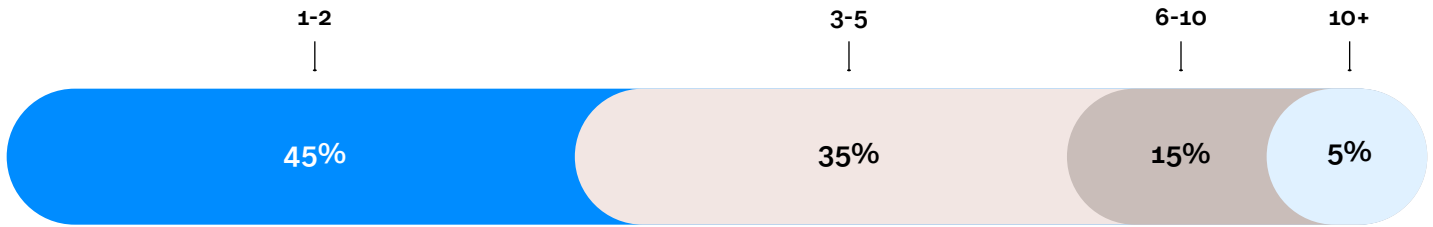
Which lead capture method do you find the most effective at generating quality leads?



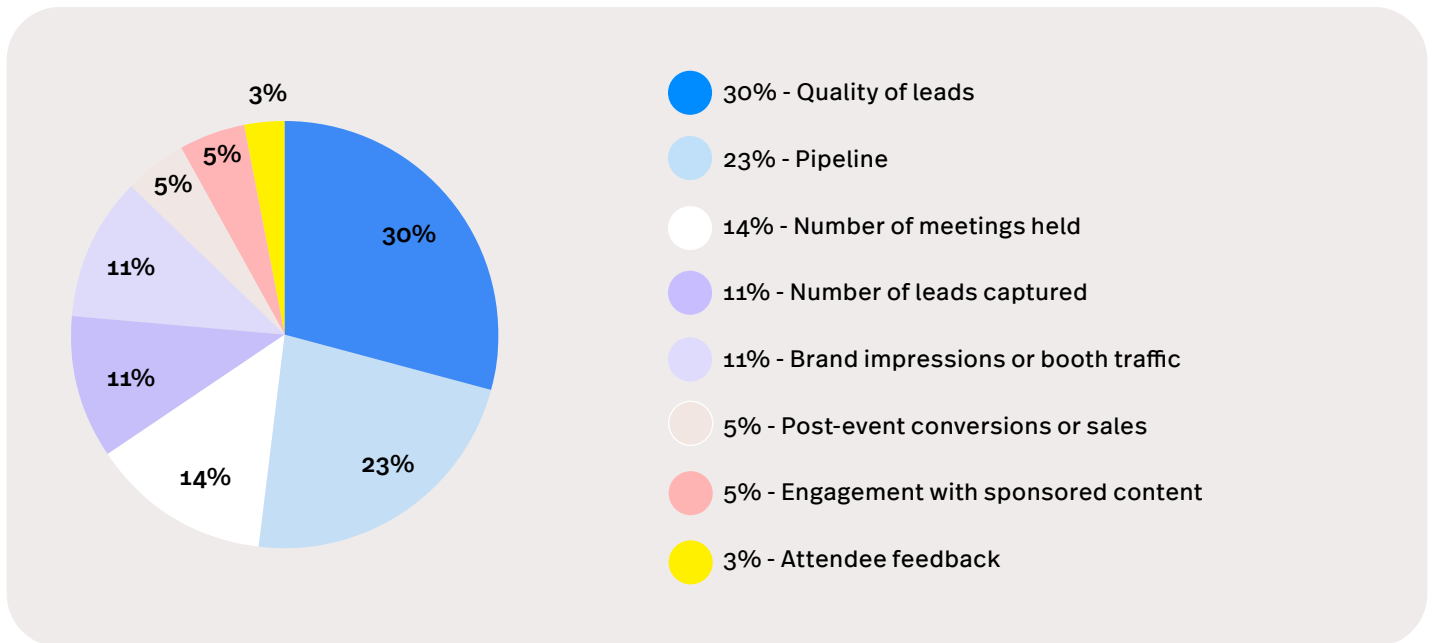
Who typically determines the lead capture method at events you attend?



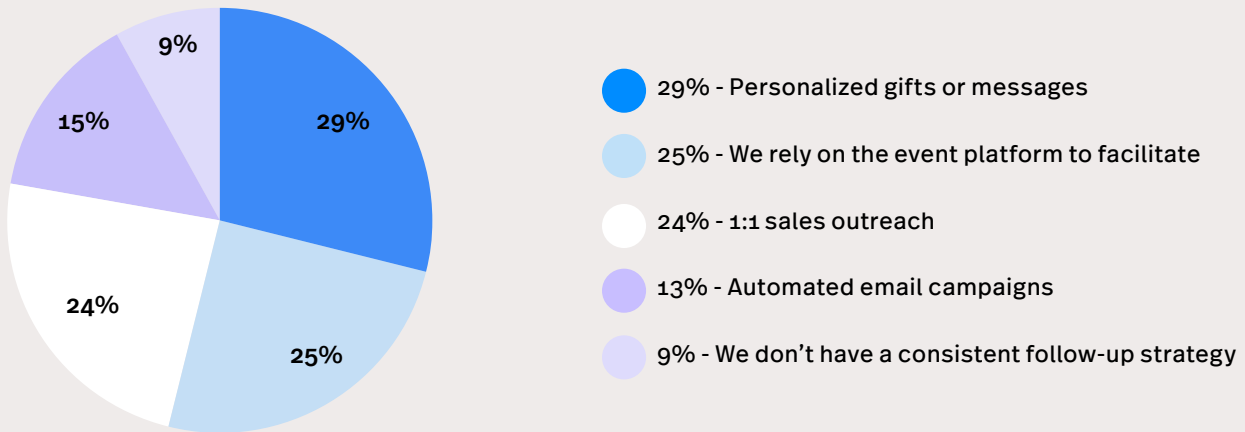
How many different tools do you use to capture leads at events?



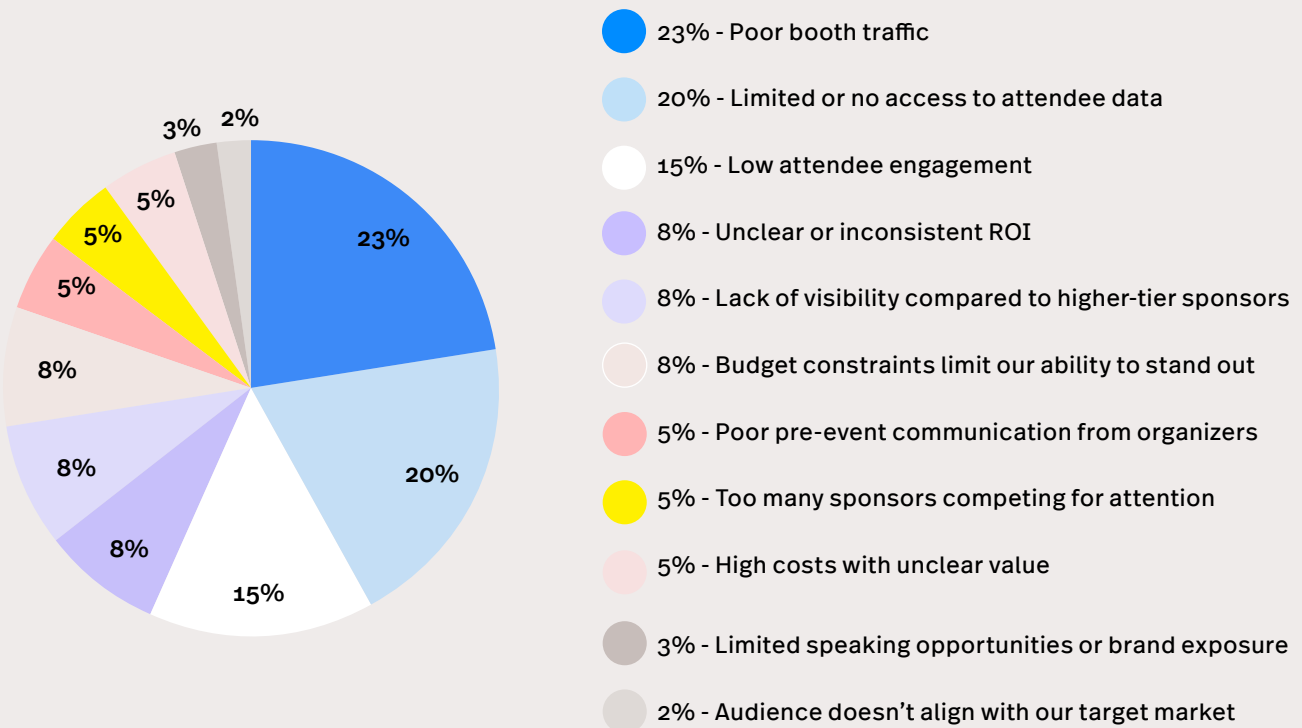
What kind of data do you value most when evaluating event ROI?



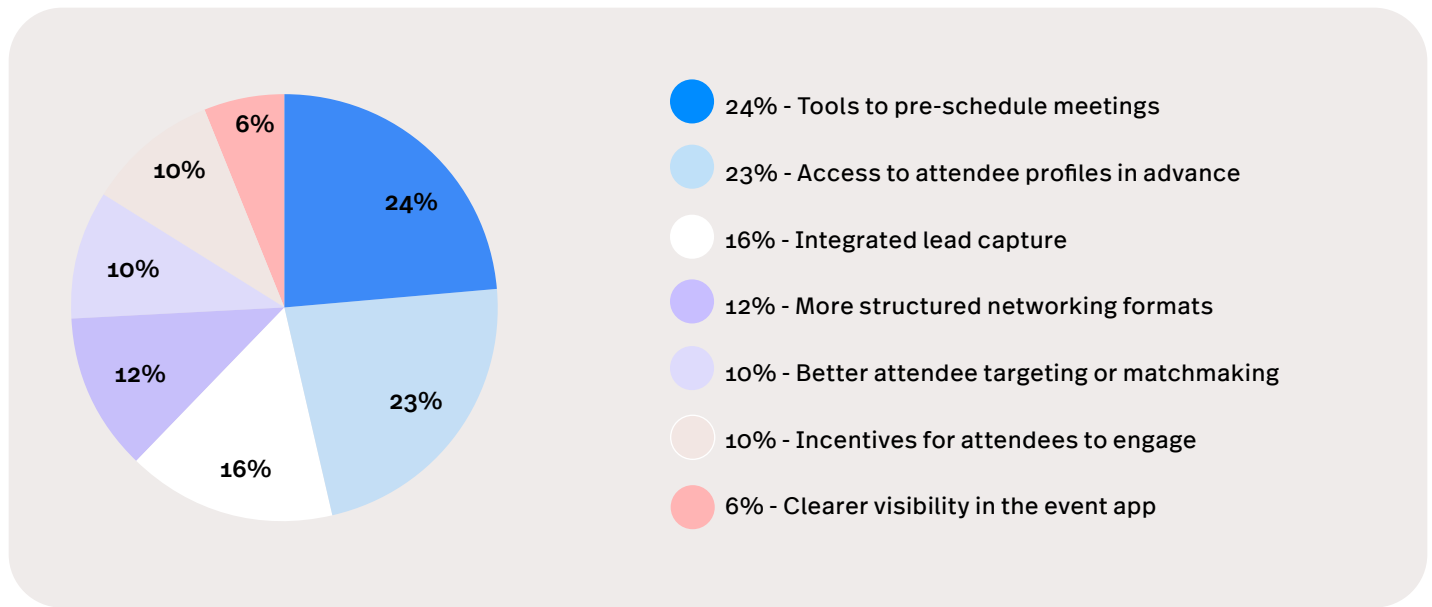
How do you typically follow up with leads after an event?



What are the biggest challenges you face when sponsoring or exhibiting at events?



What would make it easier for you to connect with the right attendees?



If your team is ready to level up its sponsorship game, [download our strategic event sponsorship handbook for event leaders.](#)

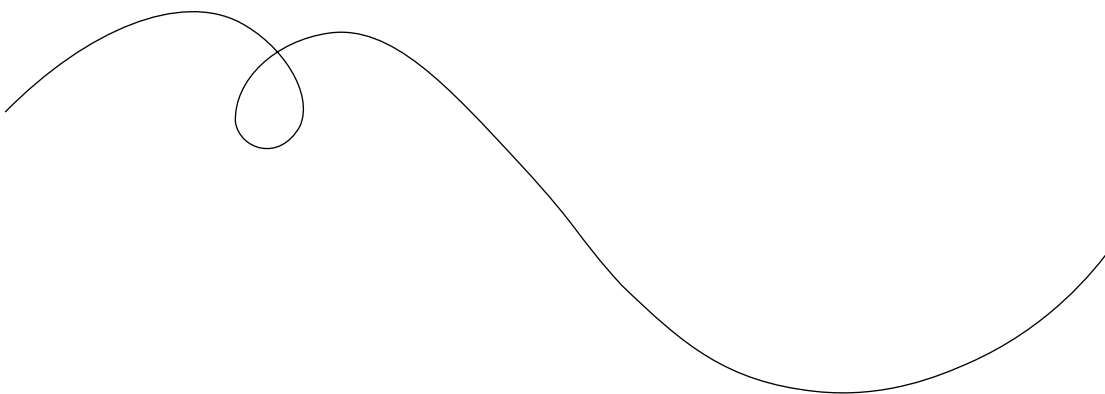
04

Conclusion: connection is the currency

The data reveals a clear consensus: networking is central to the success of in-person events, but it's not a one-size-fits-all experience. Organizers, attendees, and sponsors each face unique challenges, and each sees opportunity in better tools, personalization, and formats.

Attendees want structure to ease into conversations. Sponsors want premium ways to connect beyond the booth. Organizers need solutions that balance engagement with logistics.

The good news? Everyone agrees that in-person events deliver. Now, the focus must shift from simply offering networking to designing it thoughtfully for every persona in the room.





Bizzabo

Ready to elevate event
networking?
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partner.

Bizzabo's networking suite is purpose-built to foster meaningful, measurable connections at your next event. From AI-powered matchmaking to seamless scheduling to engagement insights, our fully integrated solution helps you create networking experiences that truly deliver.

Let's make every connection count.

Contact us to learn more

