

The state of in-person B2B conferences

Analyzing organizer and
attendee insights on today's
most impactful gatherings

Sizzabo

2023



01 Executive summary p. 3

02 Key survey insights p. 8

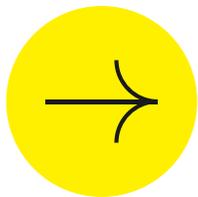
03 Part I: Event organizers p. 9

04 Part II: Attendees p. 43

05 Part III: Concluding thoughts p. 63



Executive Summary



Our latest survey has revealed some exciting findings about the importance of in-person B2B conferences for organizational success and attendee satisfaction. Conducted in June 2023, our survey shows that these conferences have reclaimed their dominance as the preferred event type for attendees and organizers alike.

More than half of the organizers surveyed (52.1%) reported **increased attendance** at their B2B in-person conferences in the past year, indicating a strong and growing preference for these events. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority (86.4%) of organizers planned to **maintain or increase the number of in-person events** in 2024 compared to 2023.

The survey findings also highlighted the growing recognition of just how business-critical in-person conferences – and the people who organize them – are. Nearly half of the organizers (47.2%) reported that their **events team had grown in the past year**, while a smaller fraction (23.9%) stated that it had remained the same. Notably, the number of organizers with events teams consisting of 10 or more individuals had tripled to 30.6% compared to 10.2% in 2020. ¹

¹"The 2020 Event Marketing Report." Bizzabo, 11 Dec. 2019, <https://welcome.bizzabo.com/reports/event-marketing-2020>.

The preference for in-person

Overall, this survey confirms the **increasing importance of in-person conferences** as a critical component driving meaningful experiences for attendees and success for organizations. With growing attendance, increased investment in events teams, and overwhelming support from organizers and attendees, in-person conferences have re-established themselves as the most impactful marketing channel and an invaluable networking platform.

Most organizers (76.6%) consider in-person conferences critical to their organization's overall success. Furthermore, 80.4% of organizers identify in-person events as their organization's **most impactful marketing channel**. These numbers have increased from Bizzabo's 2022 in-person sentiment survey, in which 72% of organizers said in-person events were crucial to their overall marketing strategy.

Although 71.2% of organizers say they struggle to prove in-person conference ROI to key stakeholders, 72.7% say their leadership team and C-suite actively support their in-person event strategies. As a testament to their significance, 75.9% of organizers believe in-person conferences will become **increasingly critical to their organization's success** in the coming years.

Attendees also strongly preferred in-person B2B conferences, citing them as the best opportunity to learn about new products or services (69.7%). Similarly, a significant majority (82.8%) of organizers believe in-person conferences provide the ideal networking environment – a sentiment 77.7% of attendees shared.

That said, hybrid conference experiences remained a priority, with nearly half of organizers streaming in-person sessions and more than one-third hosting virtual events in conjunction with their in-person conferences.

The truth about budgets and venues

The survey also delved into the role of budgets in organizing in-person conferences. Although a small fraction (0.7%) of organizers had events budgets exceeding \$5 million, most fell within the \$100,000 to \$2 million range, with 32.2% of organizers falling within the \$500,000 to \$1 million budget range.

Marketing emerged as the top budget item for organizers, indicating the recognition of its importance in driving event success. This was followed by investments in catering and venue costs, underscoring the significant contributions of place and experience to participant satisfaction.

Venues were a key theme throughout the survey for organizers and attendees alike. Venue selection fell in the top three major pain points for organizers, and respondents commented about facing a variety of venue challenges. According to 64.6% of attendees, a conference venue can **make or break their experience**.

The challenges of venue selection for organizers and the importance of the venue for attendees highlight the importance of allocating appropriate time and resources to ensure an impactful experience that doesn't break the bank.

The changing sponsorship landscape

Although only 2.4% of organizers said that sponsorship was their biggest challenge (and 3.8% said it was their second-biggest challenge), the free response field was filled with **frustrations about sponsorships**. Organizers named the following as major stumbling blocks: limited lead time, barriers to entry with large companies, no budgets at smaller companies, uncertainties in sponsor commitments, shifts in power dynamics, and overall shrinking sponsorship budgets.

Overcoming these challenges requires strategic planning, relationship-building efforts, and a willingness to adapt to changing market conditions.

The power of event technology

Organizers and attendees alike identified event management software, mobile event apps, and smart event wearables as crucial elements for the success of in-person conferences.

One of the most potent investments businesses can make to scale their event strategy is to invest in event management software tailored for in-person conferences. A majority of organizers (72.5%) recognized the **substantial contribution of their event platform to the positive outcomes** at their most recent conferences.

Even still, 67.4% of organizers expressed that they **switched or intend to switch event software vendors** in the next year. In the free response field, many organizers cited the need for more budget-friendly software with greater features and flexibility and better customer support.

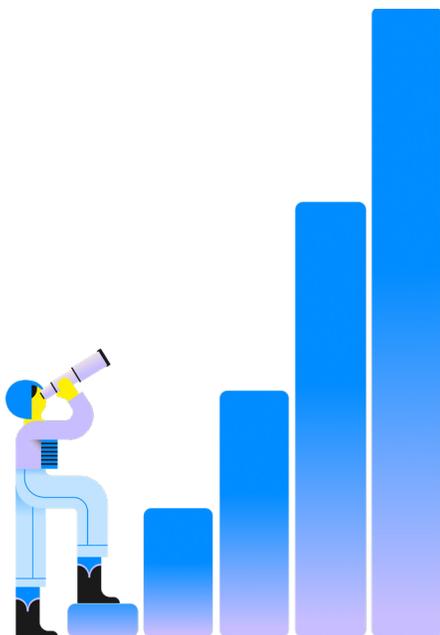
Attendees also reported high expectations for technologically advanced in-person conferences: 62.9% of attendees agree or strongly agree that they expect in-person conferences to use modern technology like smart badges and 67.5% agree or strongly agree that it's vital for events to offer a mobile event app.

Event technology will continue to play a critical role in differentiating conferences, and attendees will prioritize events that offer a forward-looking, high-tech experience. As a result, organizers must choose future-proof solutions that meet attendee expectations and deliver exceptional conference experiences.

Methodology

The in-person B2B conference survey was conducted online over two weeks in June 2023. The primary objective of the survey was to gain insights into the challenges, priorities, and expectations of both attendees and organizers about in-person conferences. To maximize participation, we used various promotional channels, including email and social media.

In total, we recorded 4,577 survey starts, with 4,075 individuals completing the survey. Among the respondents, 1,757 self-identified as event organizers and 2,318 as attendees.



Key survey insights

80.4%

of organizers say in-person events are the most impactful marketing channel of their organization

64.6%

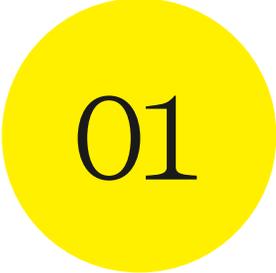
of attendees agree or strongly agree that the conference venue can make or break the event experience

67.4%

of organizers say they have changed or plan to change their event management software vendor within the next year

77.7%

of attendees agree or strongly agree that in-person B2B conferences offer the best networking opportunities



01

Event organizers

In-person conferences have reclaimed dominance as one of the most critical components of organizational success, and events teams are growing rapidly to keep up with the demands of today's attendees.

A significant number of organizers (87.1%) reported that at least half of their B2B events were now held in-person. Impressively, organizers reported growth in registration (61.7%), attendance (56.8%), revenue (62%), and overall participant satisfaction (62.8%) at their most recent conference versus past conferences.

Event planning budgets appear healthier than ever, with 54.5% of organizers managing budgets exceeding \$500,000 and 22.3% managing budgets of \$1 million or more. Marketing emerged as the top area where organizers allocated their budgets, followed by catering and venue costs. Organizers are still prioritizing hybrid conference experiences, with nearly half of the participants reporting that they stream in-person sessions and more than one-third hosting virtual events alongside their in-person conferences.

Event organizers cited integrating events into the overall marketing plan as their No. 1 challenge in the survey. Venue selection also emerged as a significant pain point, with timely proposals and execu-

utive alignment being key challenges. However, most organizers expressed confidence in receiving ongoing support and demonstrated positivity and alignment around the importance of in-person events.

Despite being at the bottom of the list of challenges, sponsorship came up repeatedly in the free responses as a key pain point: “Sponsor dollars are shrinking.” Budget concerns also appeared in free responses numerous times, despite not being in the top three challenges selected.

Event technology, particularly event management software, was cited as playing a significant role in the success of in-person conferences. Most organizers (72.5%) agreed that their event platform contributed significantly to the success of their most recent gathering. Attendees also had high expectations for technologically advanced in-person conferences, emphasizing the importance of organizers embracing smart badges, mobile apps, and other experience-boosting technologies.

Overall, the sentiment among event organizers remains positive, with a recognition of the critical role in-person conferences play in achieving business goals. Challenges related to demonstrating event ROI persist, but organizers feel supported by leadership and key stakeholders. Attendee engagement and attendance remain top priorities, while sustainability and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) are emerging as essential considerations.

Despite challenges, in-person conferences continue to be valued as a powerful platform for networking, revenue generation, and organizational growth. Organizations that recognize and invest in the power of in-person events are likely to enjoy substantial benefits and stay ahead in an increasingly competitive landscape.



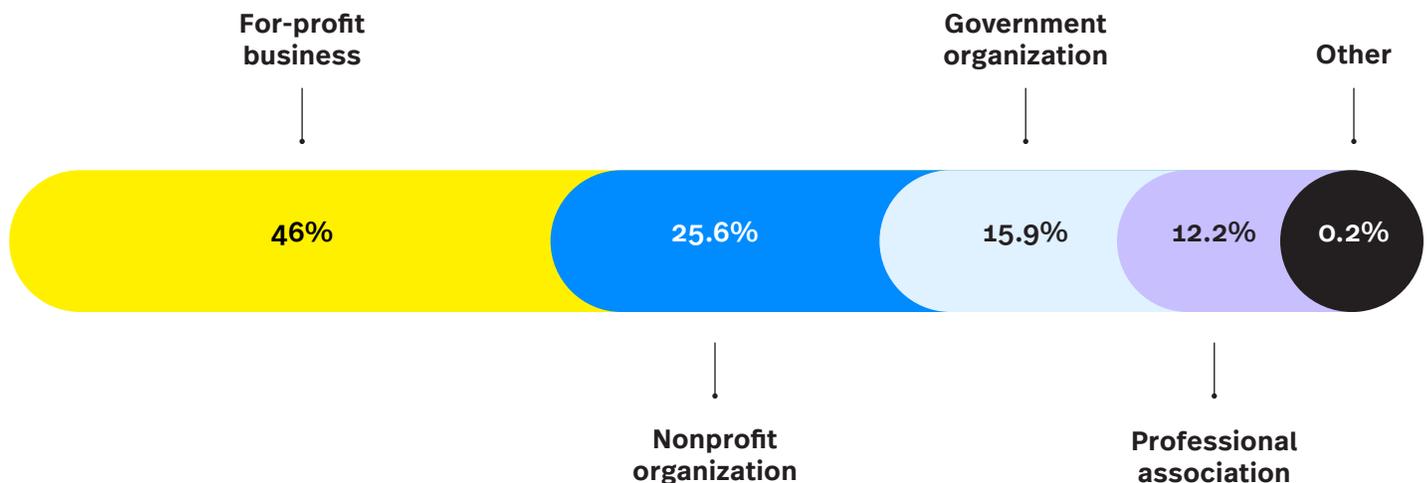
Event organizer demographics

This survey's organizer demographics cover a range of industries and types of companies. Of the 1,757 event organizers who participated in our survey, 46% work at for-profit businesses, 25.6% work at nonprofit organizations, and the remaining 28.3% work at government organizations, professional associations, and other types of companies.

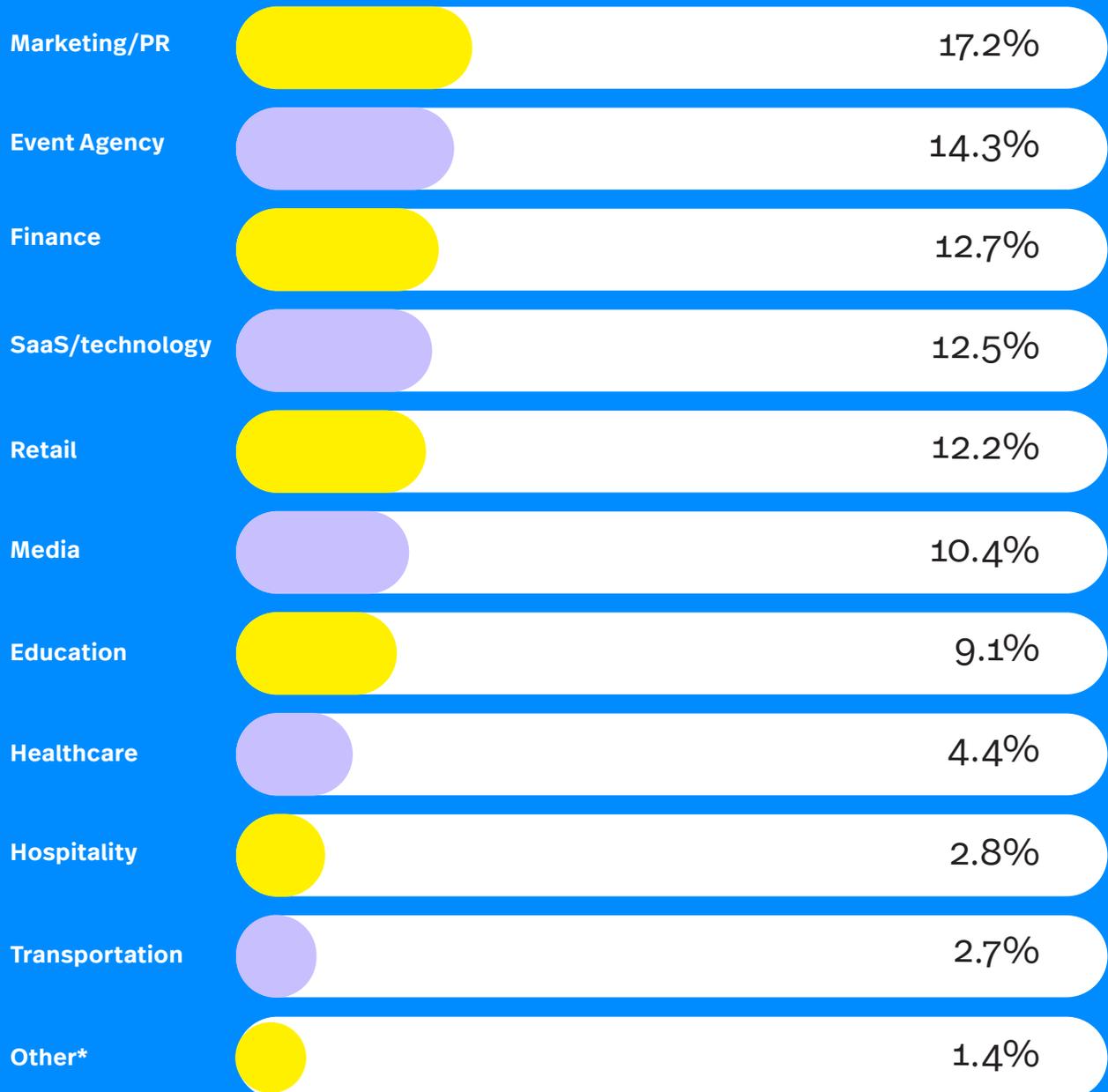
The top five industries represented in this attendee survey are marketing/PR (17.2%), event agencies (14.3%), finance (12.7%), SaaS/technology (12.5%), and retail (12.2%). The remaining industries – media, education, healthcare, hospitality, transportation, and others – account for 30.8% of respondents.

According to 47.2% of organizers, their events team has grown in the past year, while 23.9% say it has stayed the same. In fact, the number of organizers with events teams of 10+ people has increased to 30.6% compared to 10.2% in 2020, based on Bizzabo research.

What type of company do you work for?

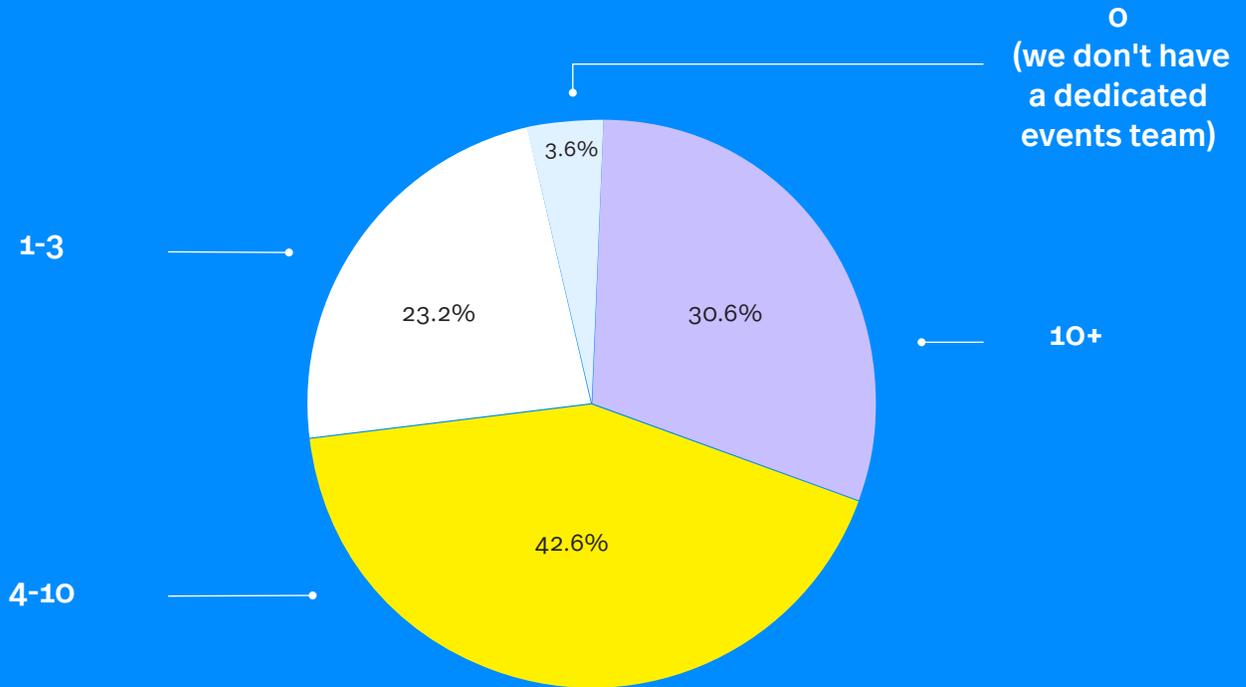


What industry are you in?



*Legal, Food Production & Processing, Religious Organization, Market Research, Manufacturing, Beauty, Agriculture

How many people are on your events team?



Has your events team grown or shrunk in the past year?



Key event organizer insights

86.4%

are planning to schedule more or about the same number of in-person B2B events in 2024 compared to 2023

80.4%

in-person events are the most impactful marketing channel of their organization

82.8%

say in-person conferences give attendees the best opportunity to network

71.7%

say their events team's size has grown or stayed the same over the past year

Event volume and attendance

In-person conferences are back — and the bang is bigger than organizers could have hoped for in a post-pandemic period of economic uncertainty.

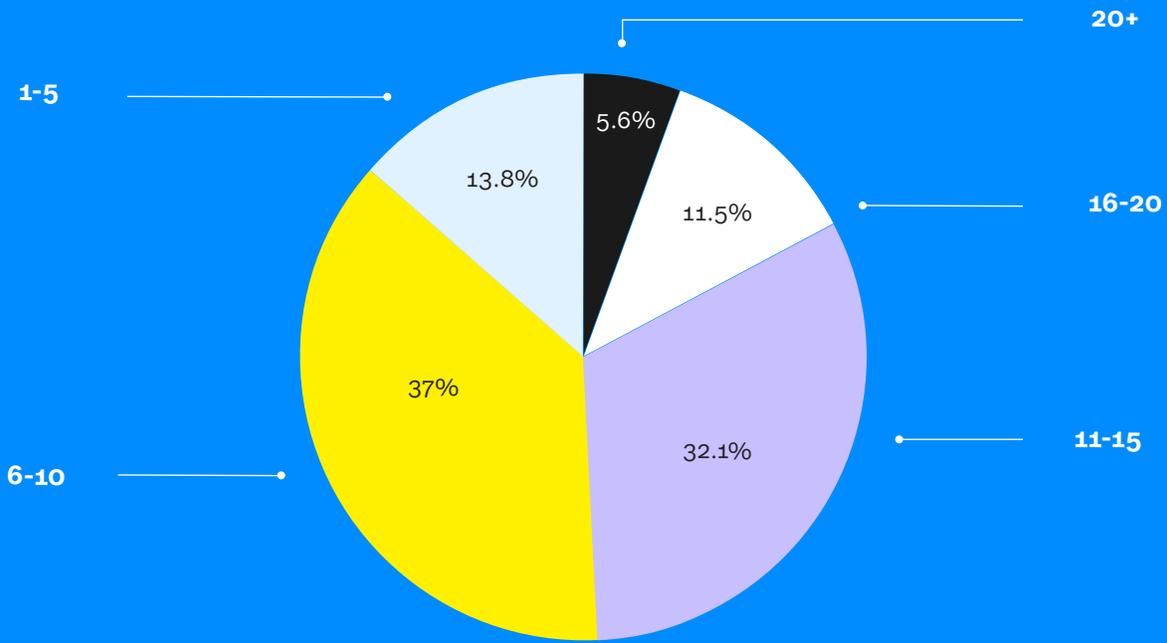
According to 87.1% of organizers, at least half of their B2B events are in-person. More specifically, 35.6% of organizers plan two to three in-person B2B conferences annually. Q2 is the most popular scheduling period for 42.4% of respondents, with Q3 coming in second at 28.7%.

Considering that 67.8% of attendees prefer in-person and hybrid events versus 32.2% who prefer webinars and virtual events, it's clear that organizers are meeting attendees' needs. (Learn more about attendee preferences in Part II: Attendees.) This alignment between attendees and organizers is evident in conference attendance, which organizers report has grown (52.1%) or stayed the same (18.40%).

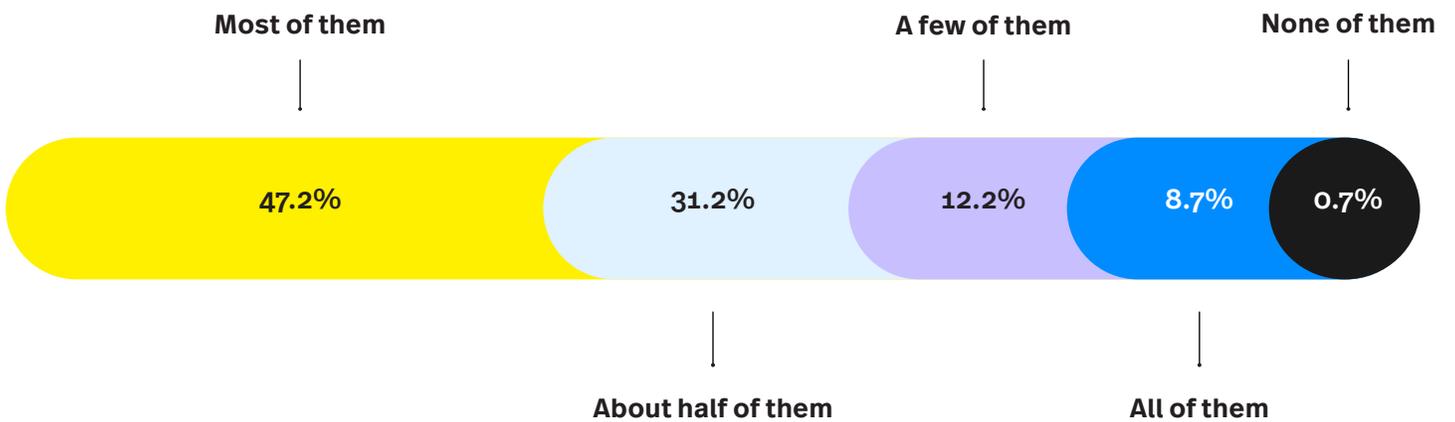
In-person attendance is on the rise in a big way. The survey found that 28.2% of organizers attracted audiences ranging from 501 to 999 people versus 21% in our 2022 in-person survey. Additionally, 31.80% of organizers hosted events attended by 101 to 500 individuals. That said, organizers are still concerned about driving registration and attendance numbers, with one organizer writing, "People may be over virtual, but they're becoming very choosy about the in-person events they're willing to attend."

Additionally, micro-events (or [satellite events](#)) are a favorite tool for organizers, with 45% holding smaller events throughout the year and 38.8% hosting smaller events in different locations on event day. These events are a thoughtful way of expanding the reach of your event content, reaching more people, and championing accessibility and inclusion.

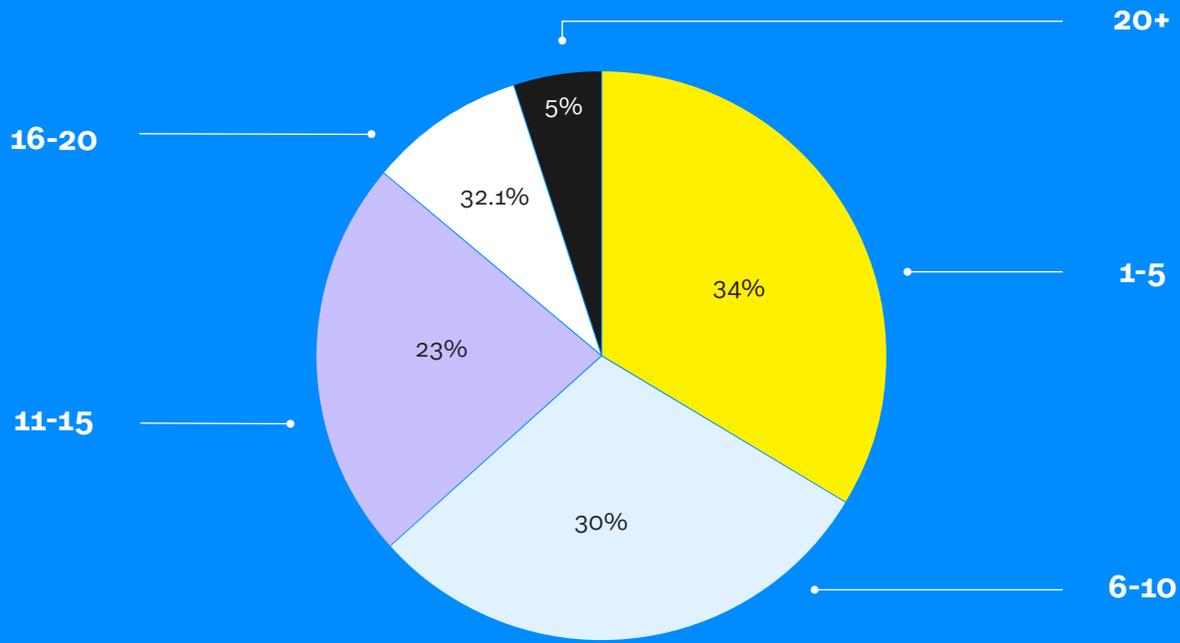
How many B2B events (all types and formats) do you plan annually?



How many of your B2B events are in-person?



How many in-person B2B events do you plan annually?



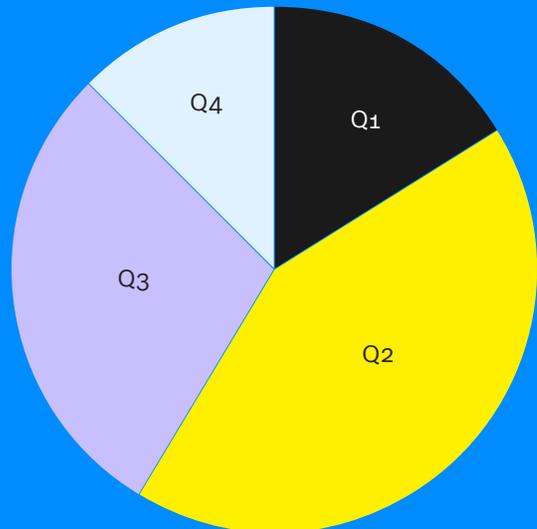
When do you schedule the majority of your B2B in-person conferences?

16.3%
Q1

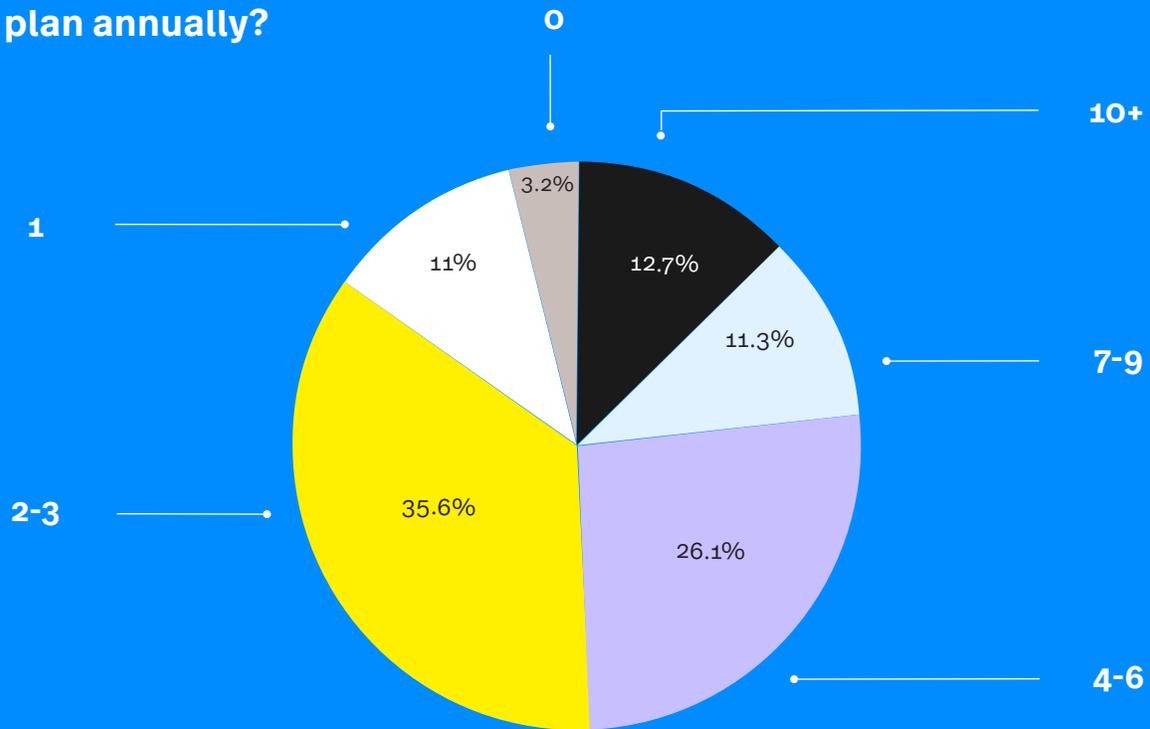
42.4%
Q2

28.7%
Q3

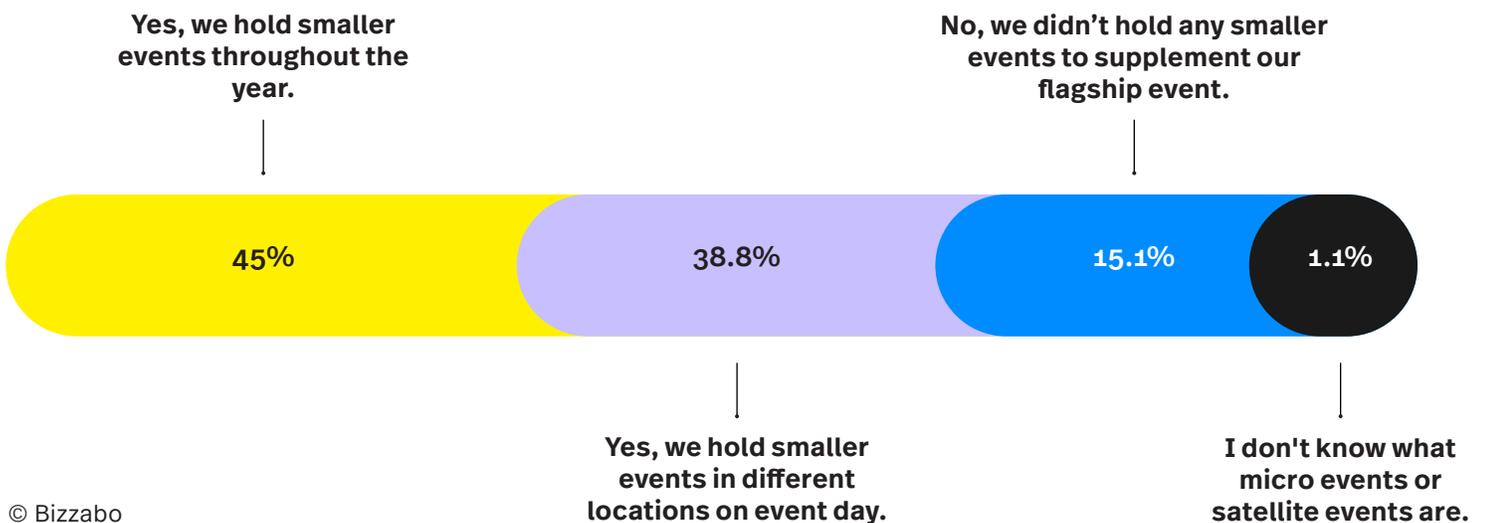
12.6%
Q4



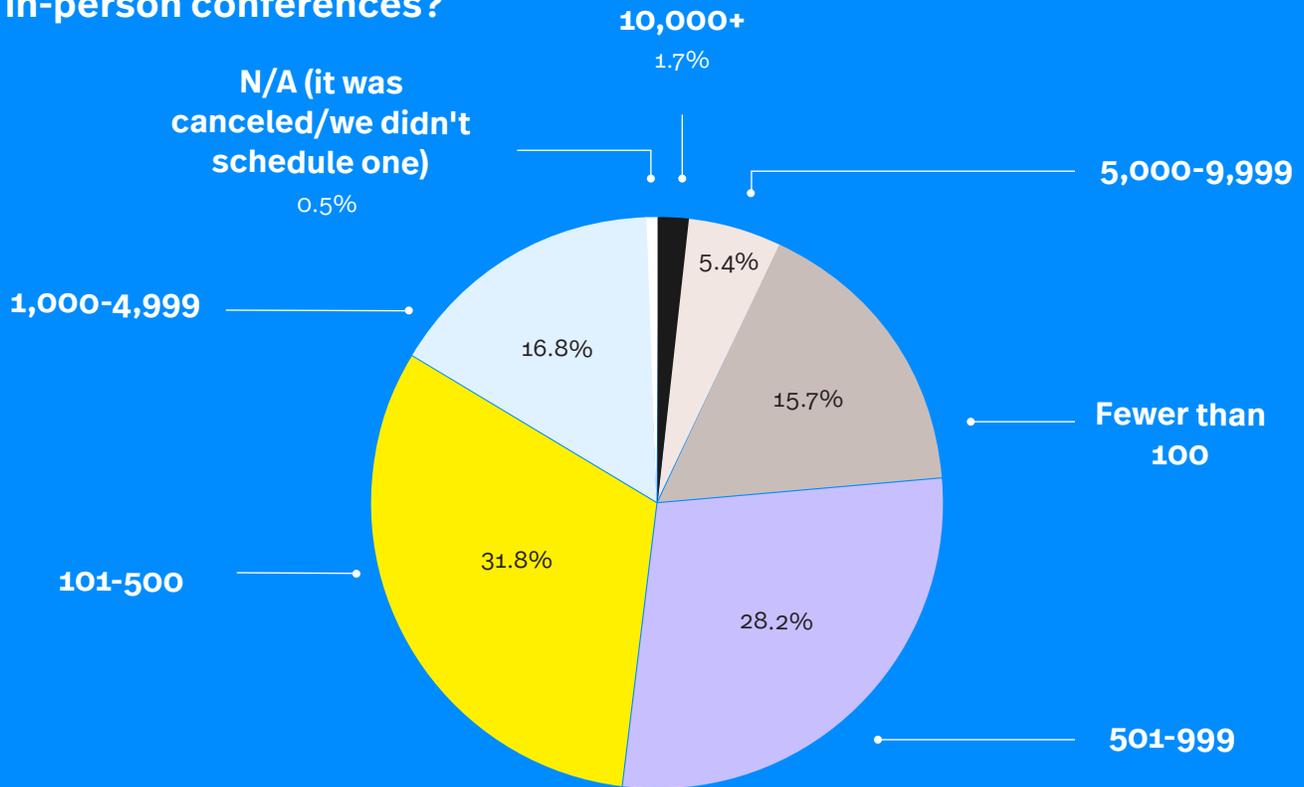
How many B2B in-person conferences do you plan annually?



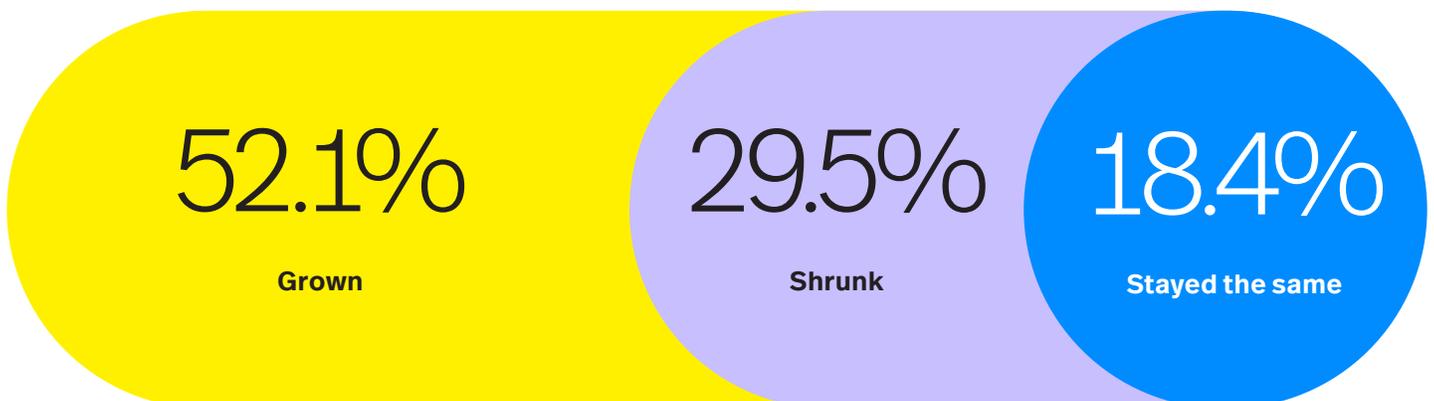
Do you host micro events or satellite events to supplement your in-person B2B conferences?



How many people typically attend your biggest B2B in-person conferences?



Has attendance at your B2B in-person conferences grown or shrunk in the past year?



Event planning

Despite the challenges and uncertainty that continue to reverberate globally post-pandemic, these survey responses prove that organizations are recovering.

Event budgets appear healthier than ever, with 54.5% of organizers managing budgets of more than \$500,000 and 22.3% managing budgets of \$1M or more. Marketing tops the list of where organizers spend their budgets, followed by catering and venue costs. And this spend is justified: 64.6% of attendees say the in-person B2B conference venue can make or break their event experience.

Hybrid conference experiences are still a priority for event organizers, with nearly half of the respondents (49.6%) streaming in-person sessions for online participants and 35.1% hosting a virtual event in tandem with the in-person conference. Notably, only 3.8% of respondents provided recorded on-demand content after the event, and 11.6% said they didn't offer any virtual component.

As major in-person conferences like HubSpot's *INBOUND* nix the virtual component from their flagship events, we anticipate that other events will follow suit – assuming registration numbers and attendee satisfaction continues to increase.

It can be costly and resource-consuming to run a hybrid event. Focusing wholly on the in-person portion can improve the quality of experience and event ROI. Even still, we believe that offering a virtual component is powerful for extending an event's reach and championing accessibility and inclusion – and shouldn't be dismissed entirely.

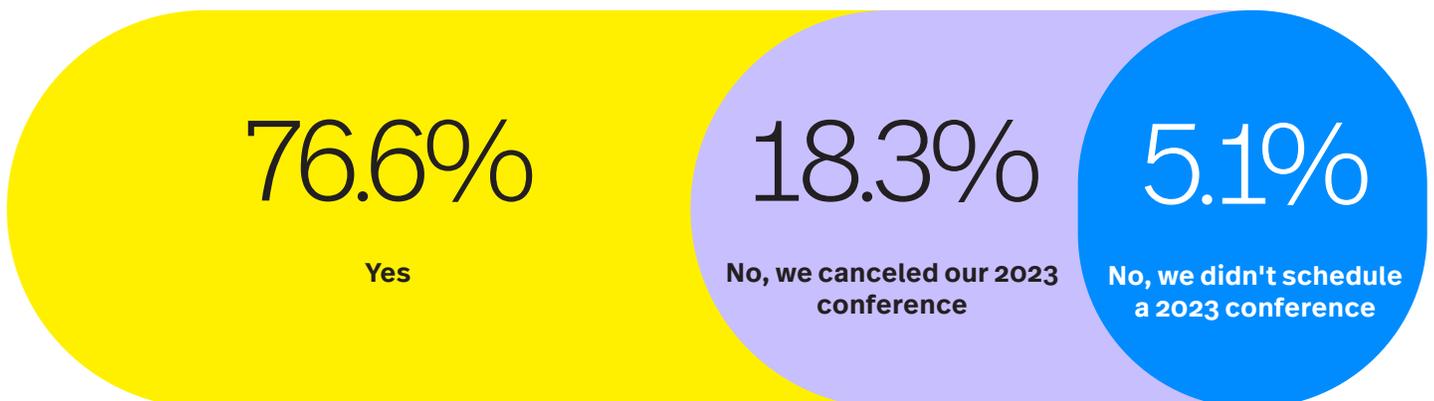
The second quarter of 2023 was the most popular (36.4%) time to schedule conferences, and Q4 was the least popular (13.5%). This aligns with what we know about the seasonality of events and the lull in the industry – and in most industries outside of retail and travel – that occurs from November to January.

Looking ahead to 2024, 41.60% of respondents plan to schedule more in-person B2B events than in 2023, while 44.80% anticipate maintaining a similar volume.

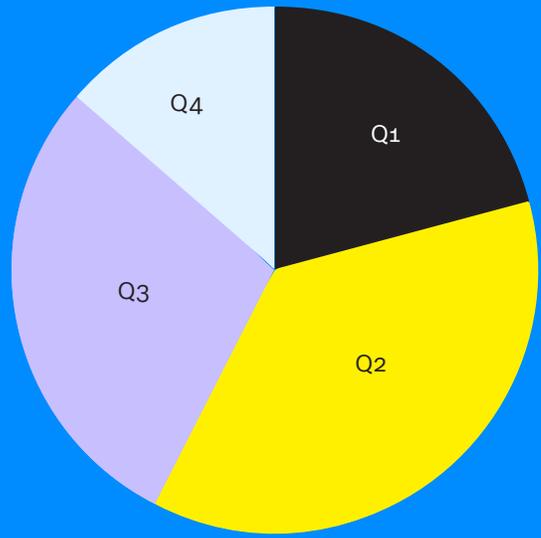
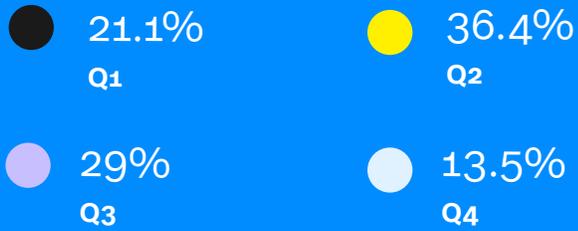
Most notably, organizers report that their most recent in-person B2B conferences grew, with increases in registration, lead generation, revenue, and satisfaction levels among attendees, speakers, and sponsors/exhibitors. In fact, 41.9% of organizers said that revenue increased a little, and 20.1% said it increased a lot. The numbers were equally impressive for registration: 36.9% said registration increased a little and 24.8% said it increased a lot.

These findings suggest that in-person conferences are the most valuable platform for networking and driving brand awareness and growth and that organizers are finally reaping the rewards they've been waiting for.

Did you schedule an in-person B2B conference for 2023?



When was/is your 2023 in-person B2B conference scheduled for?



Did you have a virtual element for your in-person B2B conference?

Yes, we streamed in-person sessions for online participants.

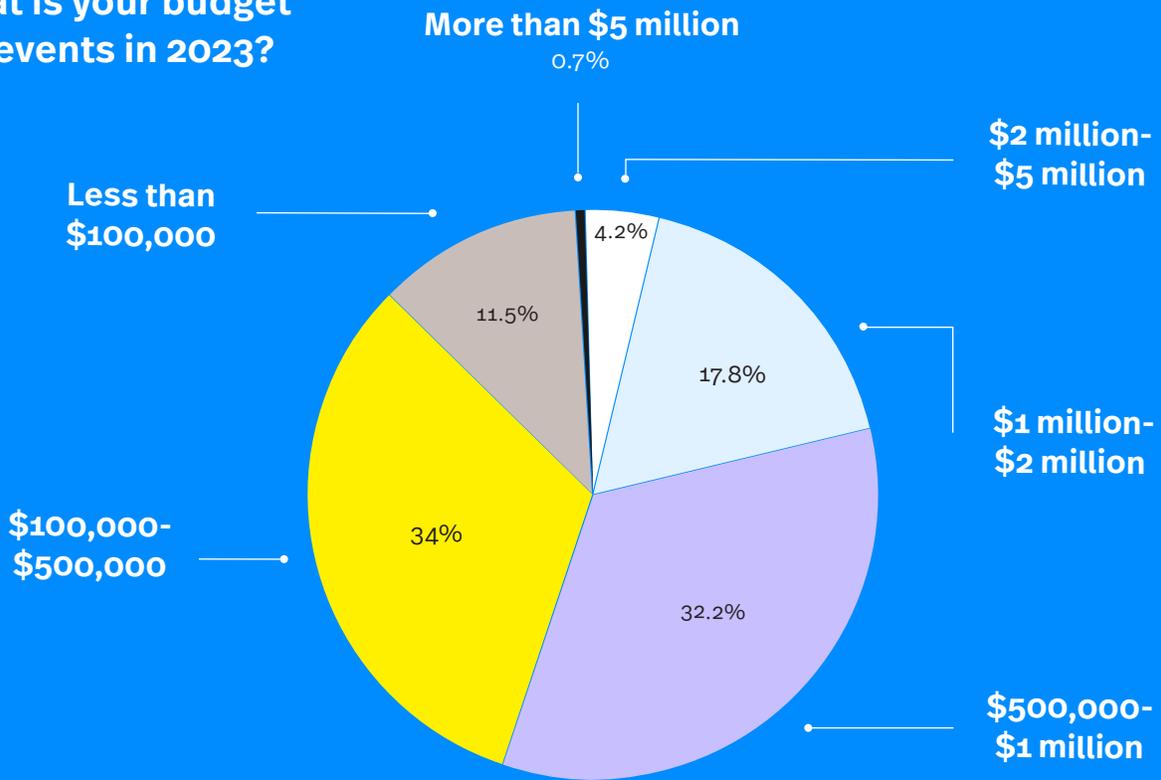
No, we didn't offer a virtual component.



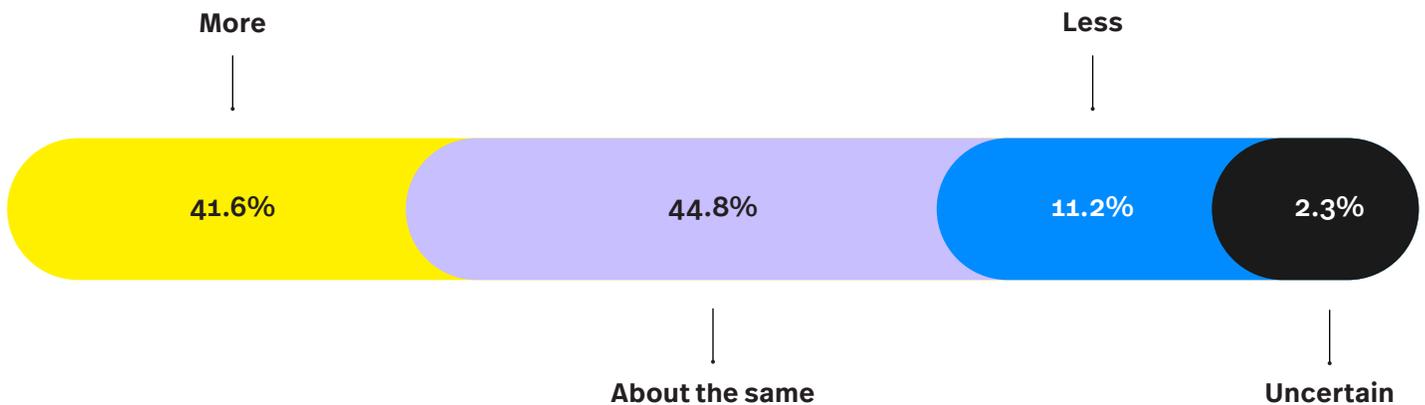
Yes, we had a virtual event in tandem.

No, but we did offer recorded event content on-demand afterward.

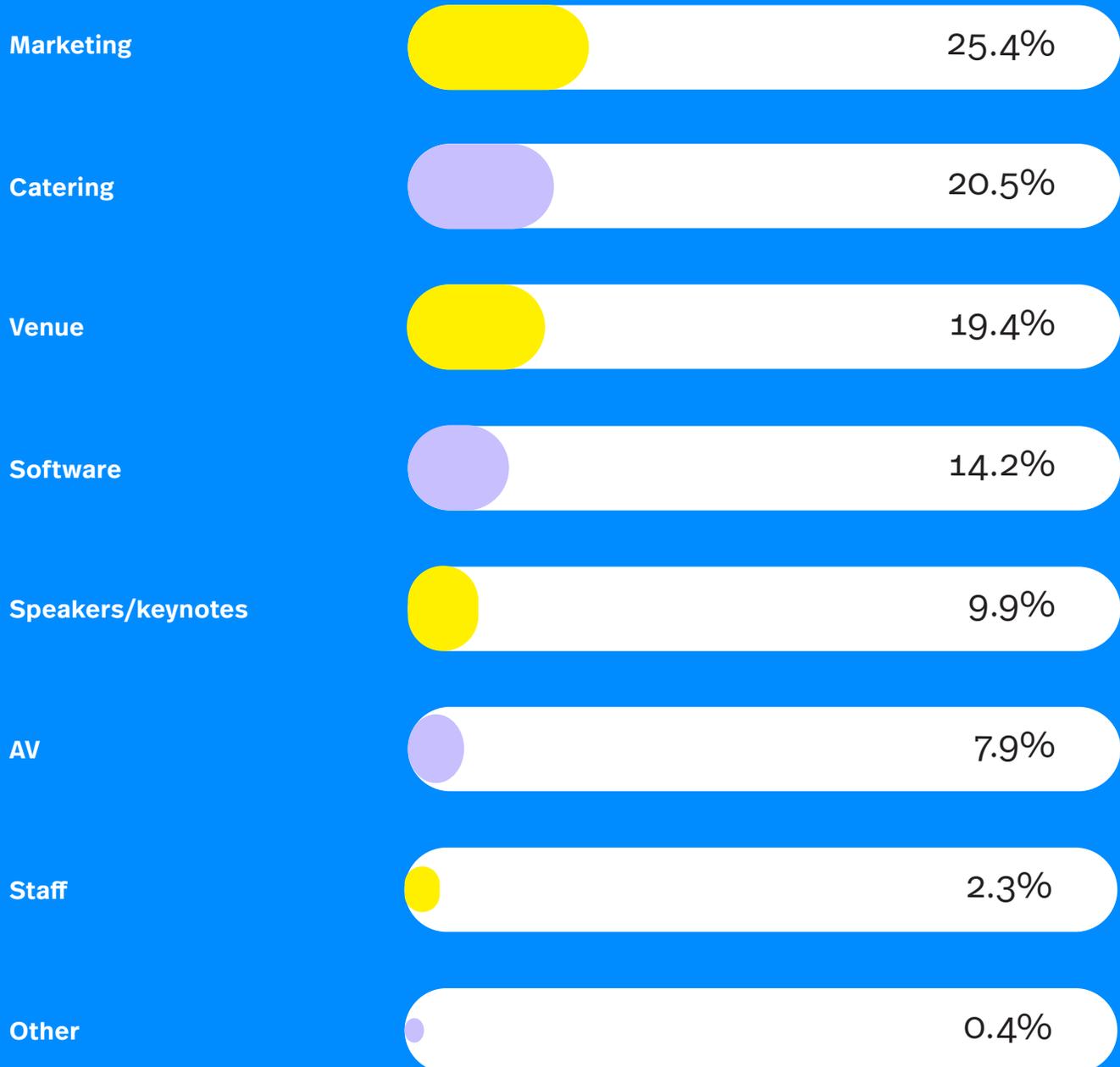
What is your budget for events in 2023?



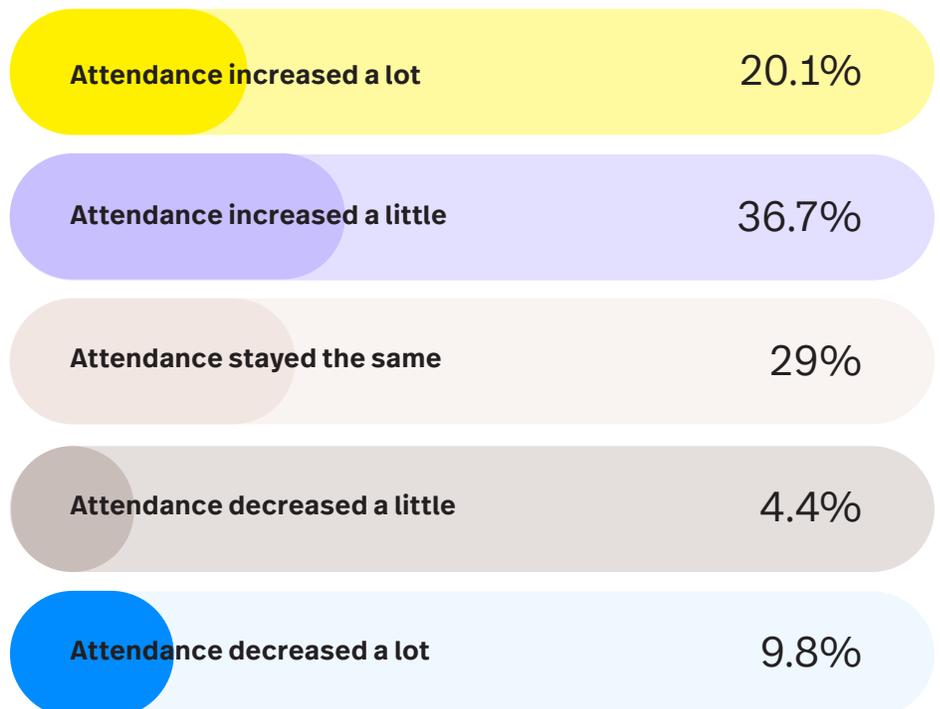
In 2024, are you planning to schedule more or less in-person B2B events than you did in 2023?



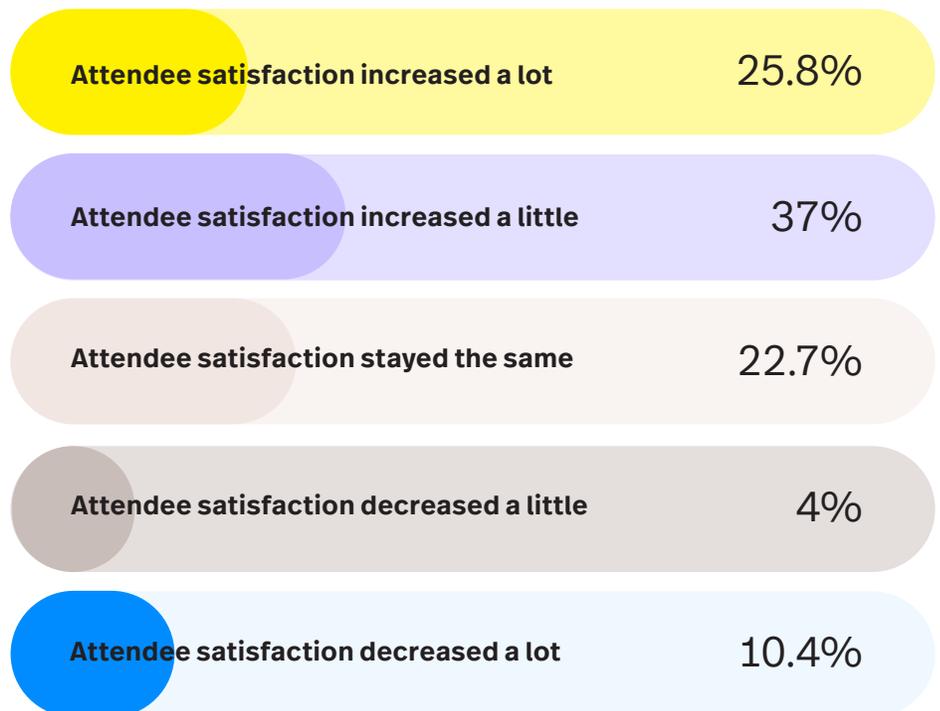
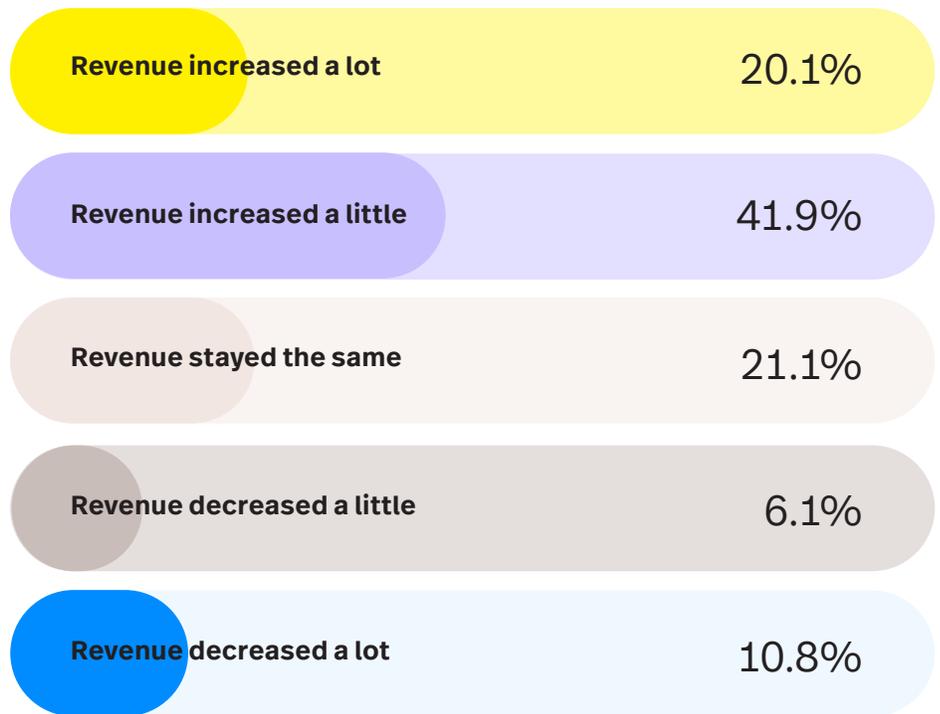
What was the majority of your recent in-person B2B conference budget spent on?



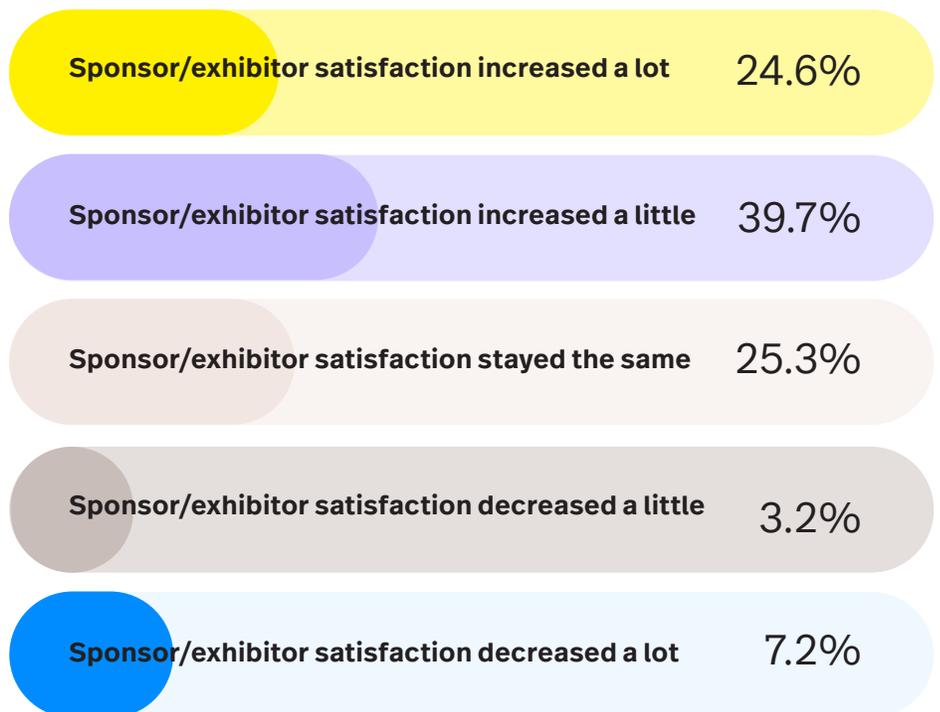
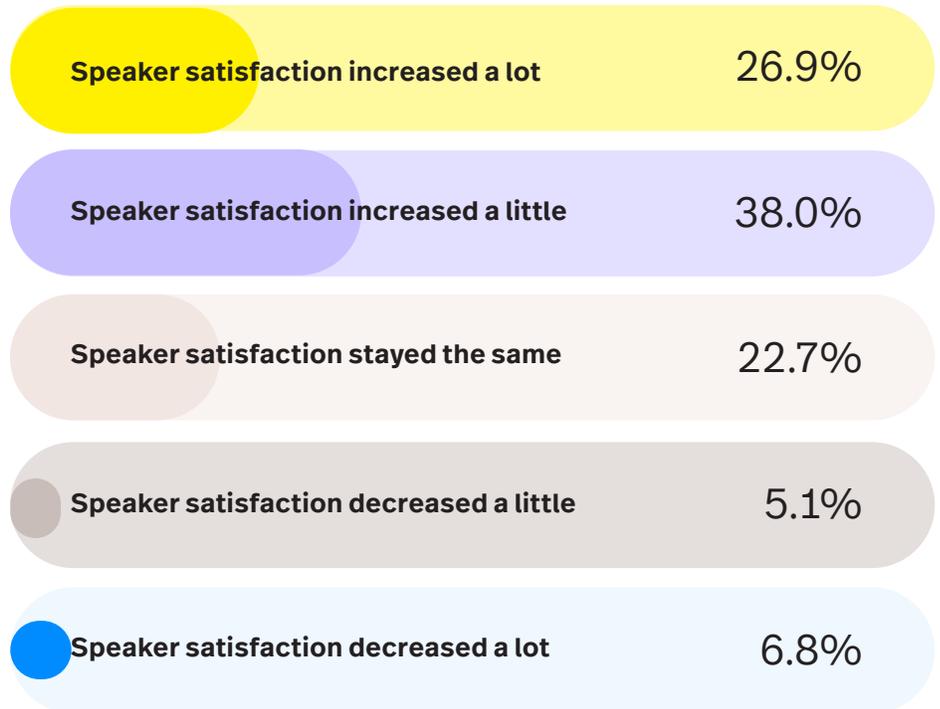
How did your recent in-person B2B conference compare to your previous in-person conference in the following categories:



How did your recent in-person B2B conference compare to your previous in-person conference in the following categories:



How did your recent in-person B2B conference compare to your previous in-person conference in the following categories:



The biggest challenges for organizers

Today's event organizers face many of the same challenges they've tackled head-on in the past — budget and sponsorship constraints, marketing alignment, vendor and venue selection — but with a twist of economic uncertainty and rising costs.

Fitting events into the wider marketing plan was identified as the most significant challenge by 23.8% of respondents, and 19.1% said it was their second-biggest challenge. Event organizers commented that the event strategy often doesn't align with the overall marketing strategy, creating misalignment and frustration. One respondent said, "Passive metrics like session attendance and survey methodologies haven't kept up with the complexity and sophistication of the kinds of questions our marketing teams are asking when determining ROI."

The comments suggest an urgent need for better alignment and integration of events and marketing teams to optimize event success and impact. Event data needs to pass seamlessly into marketing systems of record to connect the event's contributions to larger marketing goals. It's vital for events to be baked into the 365-day marketing calendar to drive ROI and keep attendees engaged and retained until the next event touchpoint. Events are never a "one and done" — at least, they shouldn't be.

Although event budgets and sponsorship dollars didn't fall into the top three challenges for organizers, budgets came in fourth with 14% saying it's their biggest challenge and 10% saying it's their second-biggest challenge. Sponsorship came in last — cited by 2.4% as the biggest challenge and 3.8% as the second-biggest challenge — but organizers had a list of grievances to air about the state of finances in the free response field:

- “Travel budgets are down, and our costs are up.”
- “Sponsors don’t want to commit to event spends ahead of events and only confirm attendance/sponsorships last minute.”
- “Sponsor dollars are shrinking.”
- “Venue costs, material costs, and labor costs have all inflated dramatically since the return from lockdown.”

The rising costs of venues, transportation, materials, and labor continue to plague the industry as it ramps up in-person events. Yet, budgets seem healthy and organizers seem optimistic throughout the survey about continued support for in-person conferences. Additionally, most organizers reported that registration, attendance, revenue, and overall participant satisfaction increased a lot or a little at their most recent conference versus past conferences.

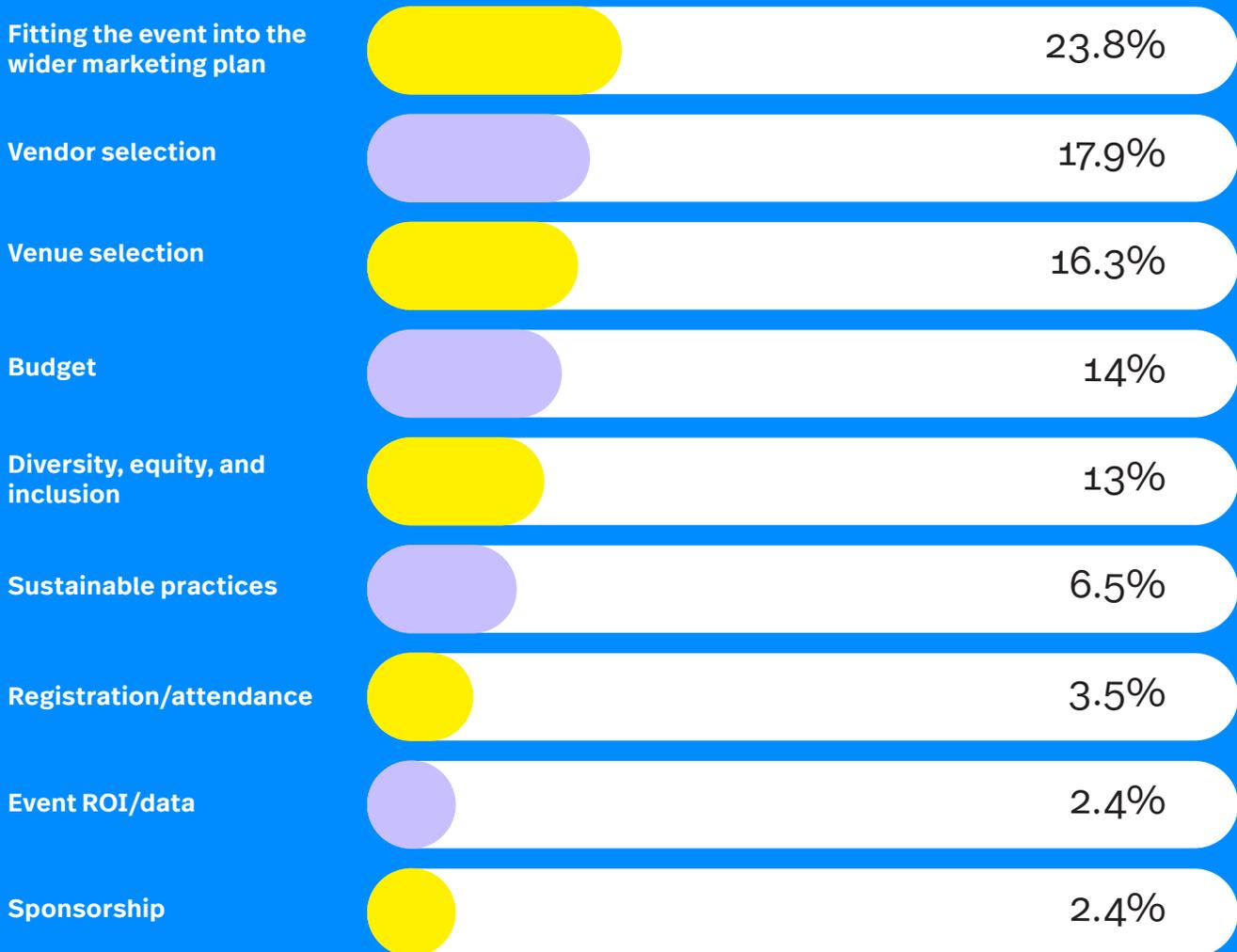
Finally, DE&I and sustainable practices emerged as notable challenges for organizers: 19.5% of respondents said it’s their biggest challenge and 20.3% said it’s their second-biggest challenge. Considering that 26.8% of attendees said sustainability and DE&I are their No. 1 priority, it’s more important than ever for organizers to meet attendee expectations in a meaningful way.

On the topic of sustainability, one of the most potent free responses from an organizer highlights the importance of genuine, rather than performative, practices: “Real sustainable practices are hard; greenwashing is easy.”

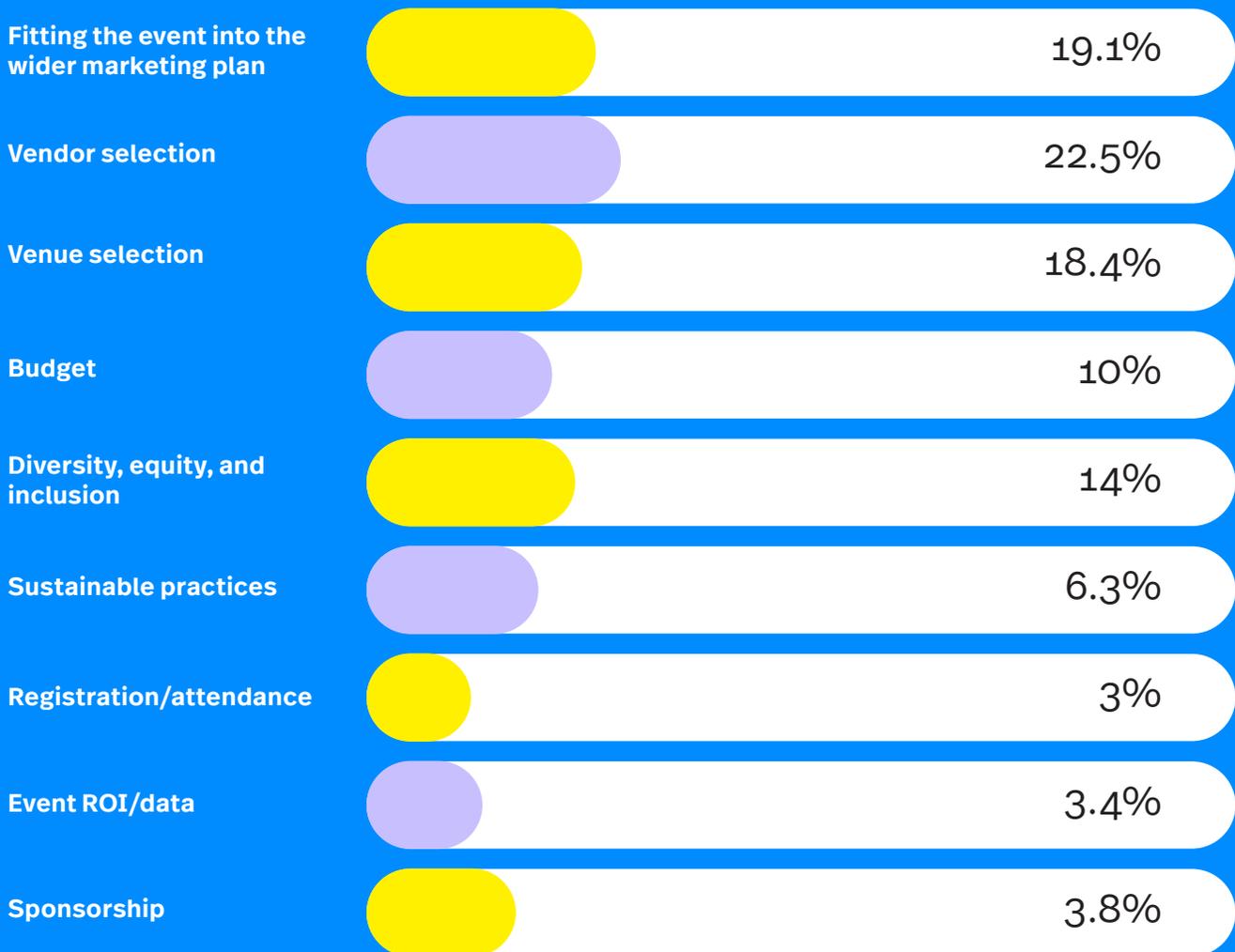
Note: Venue selection was among the top three concerns for organizers, with 16.3% saying it’s their biggest challenge and 18.4% saying it’s their second-biggest challenge. We dive deeply into this challenge in our section on “The role of event venues.”



Which of these has been the *biggest challenge* for you when planning your most recent B2B conference?



Which of these has been the *second biggest challenge* for you when planning your most recent B2B conference?



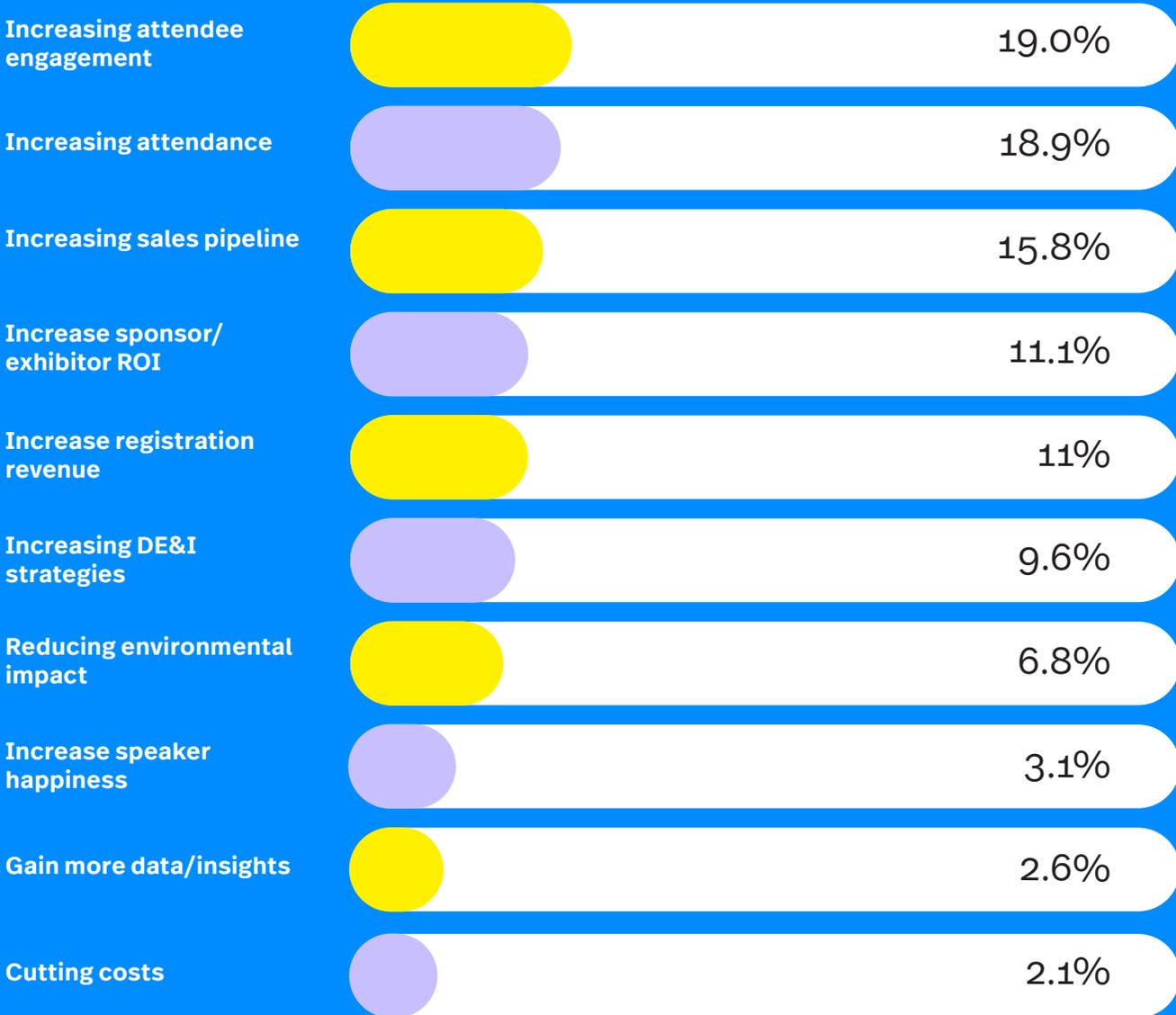
The biggest priorities for organizers

In our [2022 in-person survey](#), organizers said their top five priorities were increasing attendee engagement and attendance numbers, budget, COVID-19 safety, and event content. Interestingly, priorities haven't changed much from last year — except for the pandemic piece.

As organizers plan their next conference, they're still hyper-focused on increasing attendee engagement and attendance. They're also still prioritizing increases in the sales pipeline, sponsor/exhibitor ROI, and registration revenue.

Despite what we know about attendee preferences around value-based considerations like sustainability and DE&I, these aren't top priorities for organizers. If organizers place more emphasis on sustainability and DE&I, we believe they can reap the benefits in registration revenue, sponsor ROI, and the sales pipeline. The more attendees, sponsors, and exhibitors see their values on display at events, the more likely they are to buy, stick around, and share your brand with the world.

Which of these is the highest priority for your company for planning your next conference?



The role of event venues

One of the major pain points of today's organizers that came up repeatedly was venues — finding venues attendees want to go to, affording venues, getting proposals in on time, aligning with leadership on the right location, and more.

In fact, venue selection is one of the top three challenges for event organizers, and 19.4% of respondents said venue costs accounted for the majority of their most in-person B2B conference budget.

The top venue sourcing challenge (42.6%) for organizers is getting venue proposals promptly, which highlights the importance of efficient communication from venues when responding to inquiries and providing proposals. However, organizers expressed that many venues are booked so far in advance that it's impossible to know when to reach out.

Getting executive alignment is another significant challenge for organizers (27%). Overcommunicating is the name of the game when getting buy-in with the C-suite and other stakeholders. Even still, all the communication in the world might not change minds. As one organizer wrote, "Our former president chose the venue without any financial considerations, and we were stuck with it."

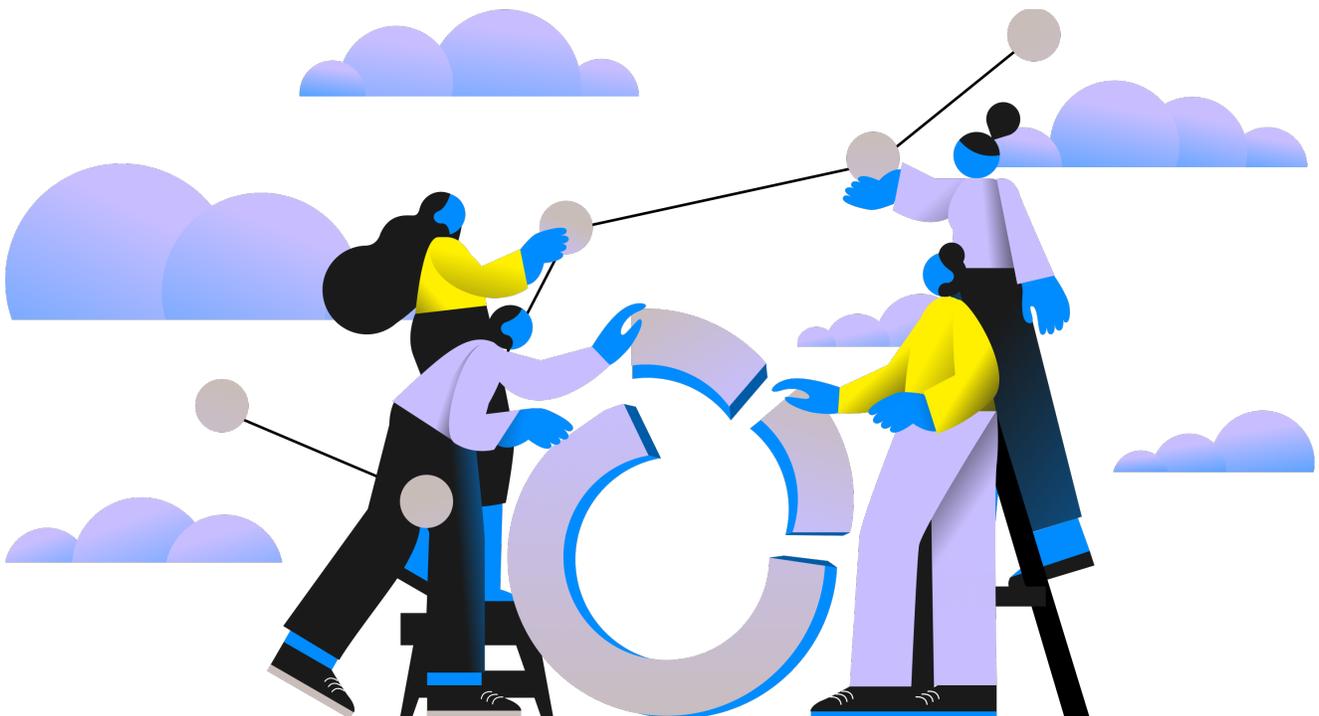
Interestingly, most organizers (43.2%) search for venue recommendations through Facebook, WhatsApp, or Slack event communities. Another 28.6% of organizers rely on Google or other marketplace platforms to find the right event location. However, only 10.9% rely on recommendations from friends and colleagues.

There were many free responses to the question of venue recommendations, but several things kept coming up: AI, venue consultants, and reusing past venues. The last response — "I've been in the industry long enough to know the venues I prefer" — tells us

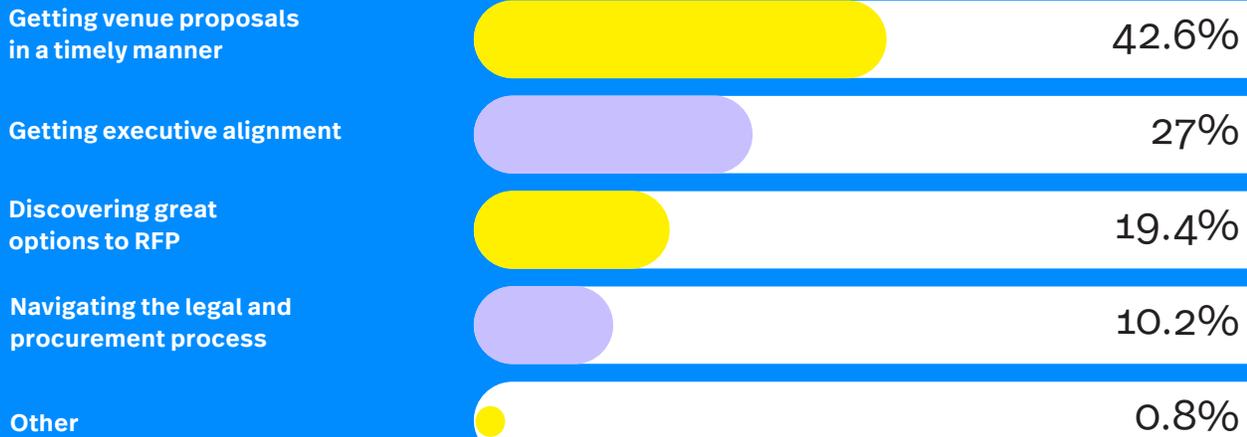
that some event organizers are better with the devil they know. Going back to the same venue year after year offers plenty of benefits. You can likely get discounts, work with vendors and staffers you build relationships with, and know the lay of the land, so you're not reinventing the wheel every year.

Yet at a time when 64.6% of attendees agree or strongly agree that the conference venue can make or break their event experience, sticking with the same venue might not be the method to increasing ticket sales, driving pipeline, or boosting engagement.

Event organizers face challenges in receiving timely venue proposals, obtaining executive alignment, finding suitable venues, and navigating legal and procurement processes. They consult various channels, including event communities, online platforms, news and review websites, and personal networks, to aid their venue search. Overcoming these challenges requires effective communication, access to diverse venue options, and leveraging trusted sources and networks within the industry.



What's the most challenging part of sourcing a venue for an event?



When searching for venues, what channel do you consult most?



The role of event technology

Event management software plays a significant role in the success of in-person conferences for many organizers — 72.5% agree or strongly agree that their event platform was a significant contributor to the success of their most recent conference.

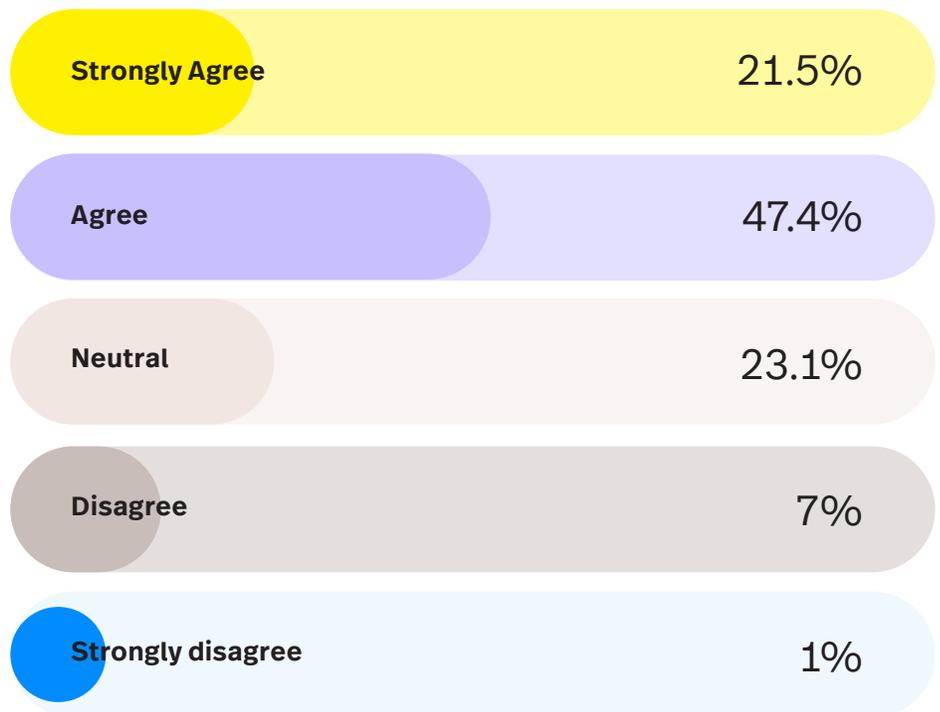
The importance of event technology could account for the 67.4% of organizers who say they have changed or plan to change their event software vendor within the next year.

Attendees also have high expectations for in-person conferences to be as technologically advanced as possible, with 62.9% saying they expect conferences to use modern technology like smart badges and 67.5% saying a mobile app is vital. We believe event technology will continue to grow as a differentiating factor for in-person conferences, and that attendees will prioritize events that deliver a seamless, connected, high-tech experience.

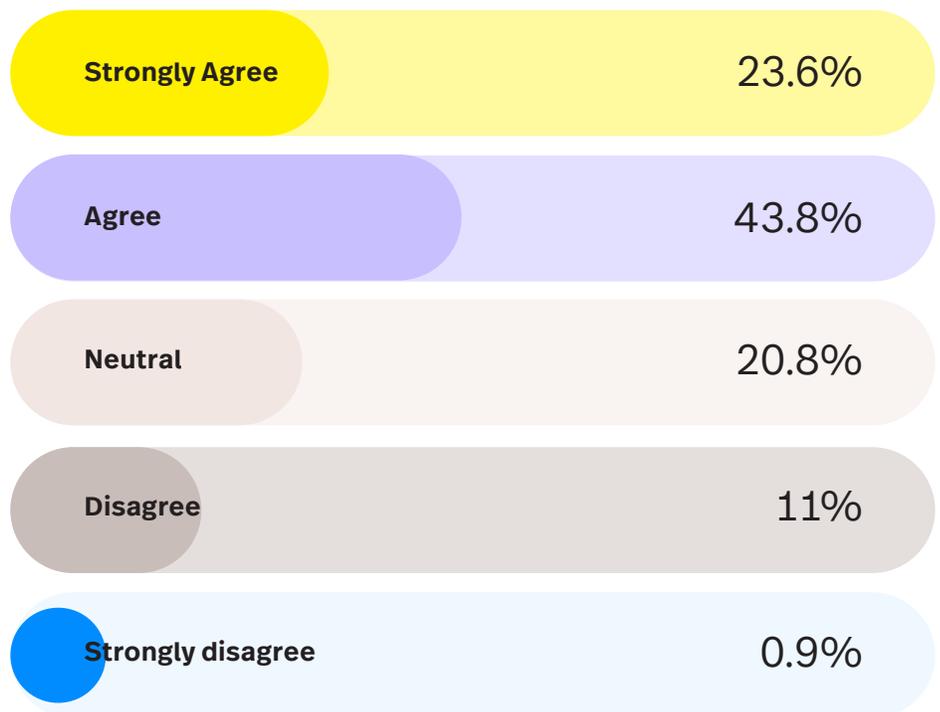
"We see software as a facilitator of our experience strategy, and we use tools that we think are best suited to that. So, it's not about the software but how we use it as part of a broader experience strategy."



Event software has a major impact on the success of my events.



I have changed or plan to change my event management software vendor within the next year.



Event organizer sentiment

In-person conferences are critical to achieving business goals. In our *2020 Event Marketing Report* — which was published in December 2019 — 95% of marketers said in-person events help achieve business goals.²

Three-and-a-half years and one pandemic later, the temperature around in-person has cooled slightly, but in-person conferences are still crucial to business success. According to 76.6% of organizers, in-person conferences are critical to success, and 80.4% believe in-person events are the most impactful marketing channel for their organization.

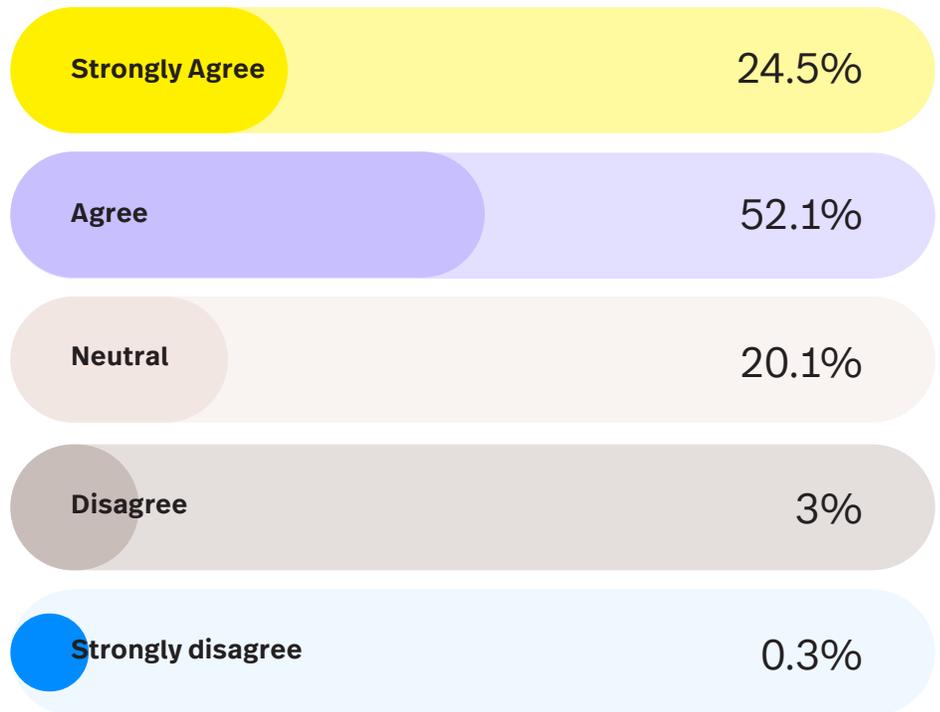
These sentiments underscore the power of face-to-face interactions and support the 77.7% of attendees and 82.8% of organizers who agree or strongly agree that in-person B2B conferences offer the best networking opportunities. (Learn more about attendee sentiment in Part II: Attendees.)

Although 71.2% of organizers agree or strongly agree that demonstrating event ROI is challenging, most respondents (72.7%) feel that leadership and key stakeholders support their in-person event strategy. Despite struggling to prove ROI, organizers are confident they'll receive ongoing support, which shows strong alignment, positivity, and a shared vision around the importance of in-person events. On the other hand, this highlights a strong – and ongoing – need for improved measurement and reporting tools for event professionals.

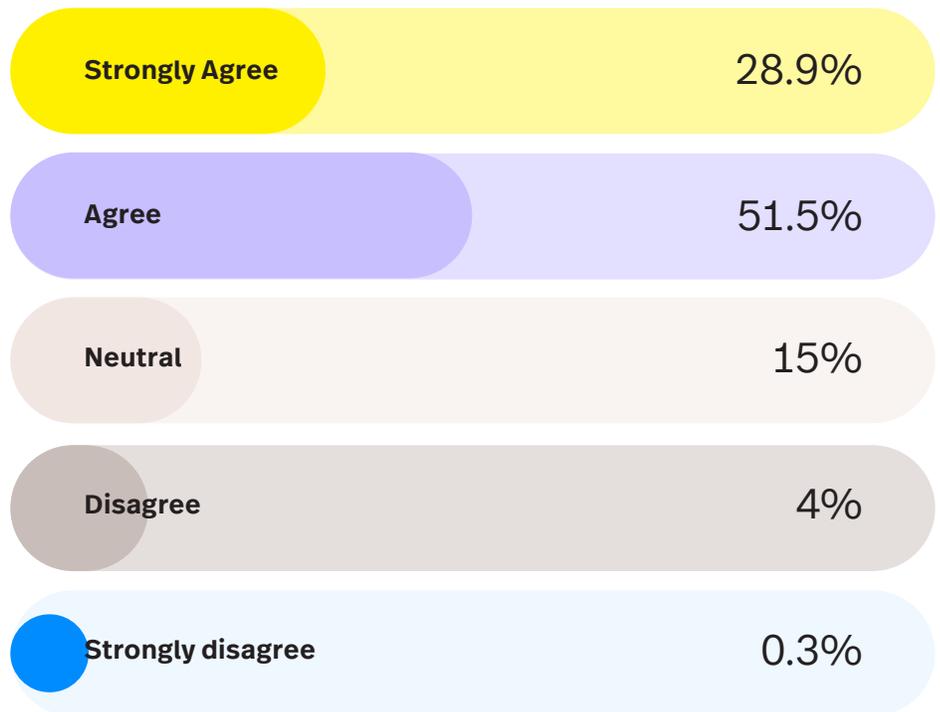
These findings highlight the overall positive sentiment among event organizers and their commitment to leveraging in-person conferences for organizational growth and success.

² Ibid

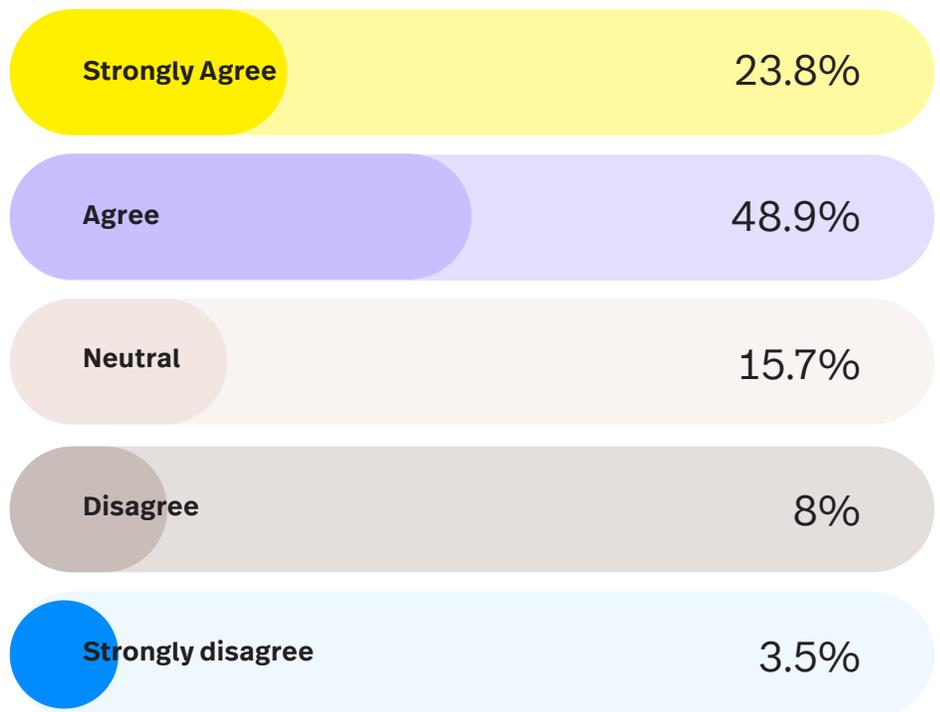
In-person conferences are a critical component of my organization's success.



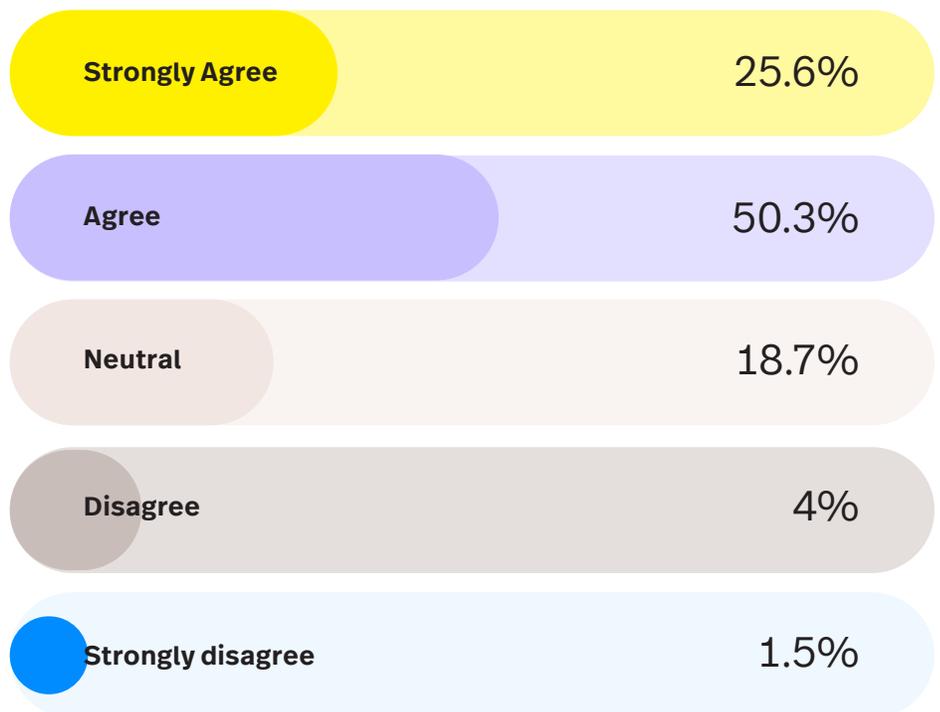
In-person events are the most impactful marketing channel for my organization.



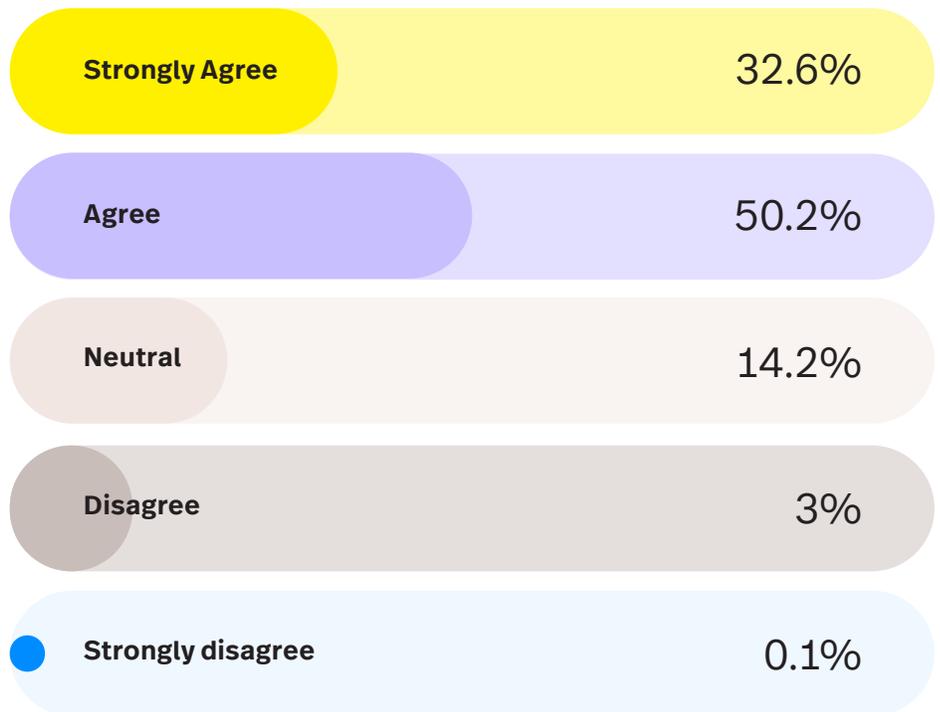
Our leadership team and the C-suite support our in-person event strategy.



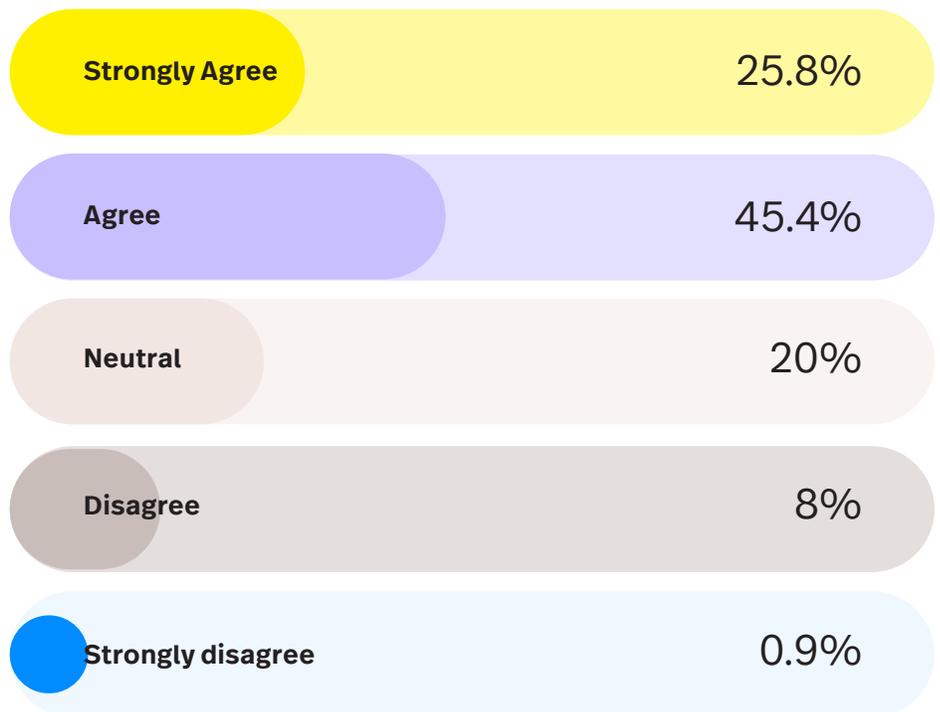
In the coming years, in-person conferences will become increasingly important to my organization's success.



In-person conferences give attendees the best opportunity to network.



I struggle to prove in-person conference ROI to key stakeholders.



02

Attendees

More than 2,300 attendees participated in our survey on in-person B2B conferences, providing valuable insight into what matters most to today's attendees.

With the costs of in-person event registration, travel, and accommodations increasing yearly, attendees must weigh many competing options and factors when deciding which events to attend – or whether to attend in-person events at all.

It's no surprise then, that the top priorities for attendees when deciding whether to attend an in-person event are venue location, DE&I efforts, travel/accommodation costs, and sustainable practices. Today's attendees weigh the most practical considerations (costs and location) with value-based considerations (DE&I and sustainability).

Even still, attendees continue to have high expectations for event venues, event apps and modern technologies, and networking opportunities. According to respondents, the quality of each of these factors can make or break the overall event experience.

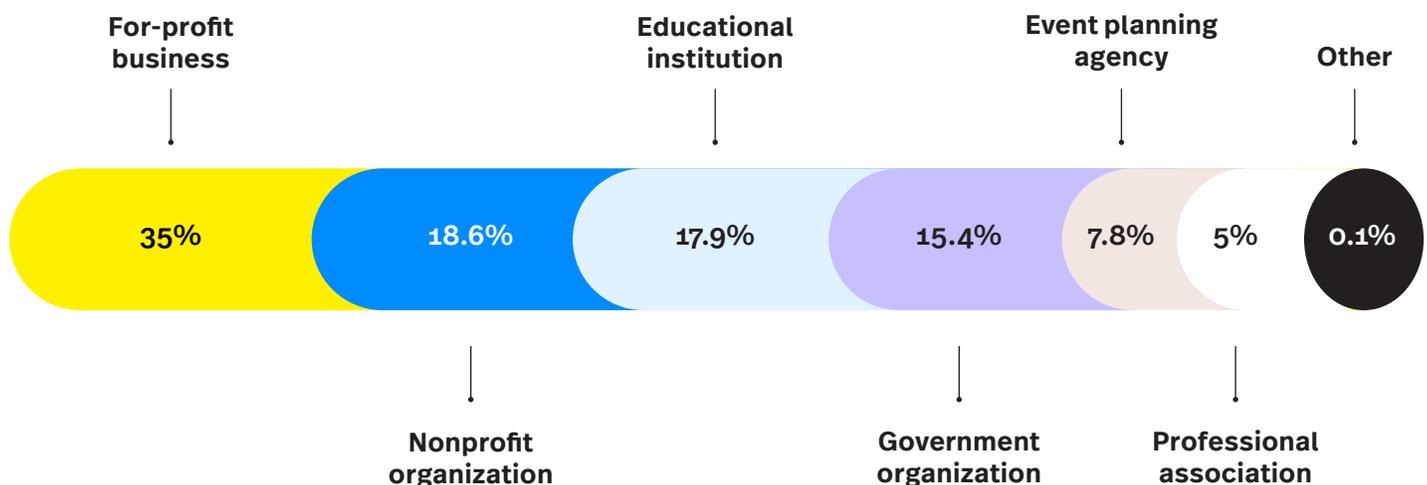
Now more than ever, organizers must balance competing attendee priorities and expectations while championing value-based factors. Choosing green venues, working with local vendors, ensuring a diverse and representative speaker lineup, and putting corporate social responsibility commitments on display are now table stakes.

Attendee demographics

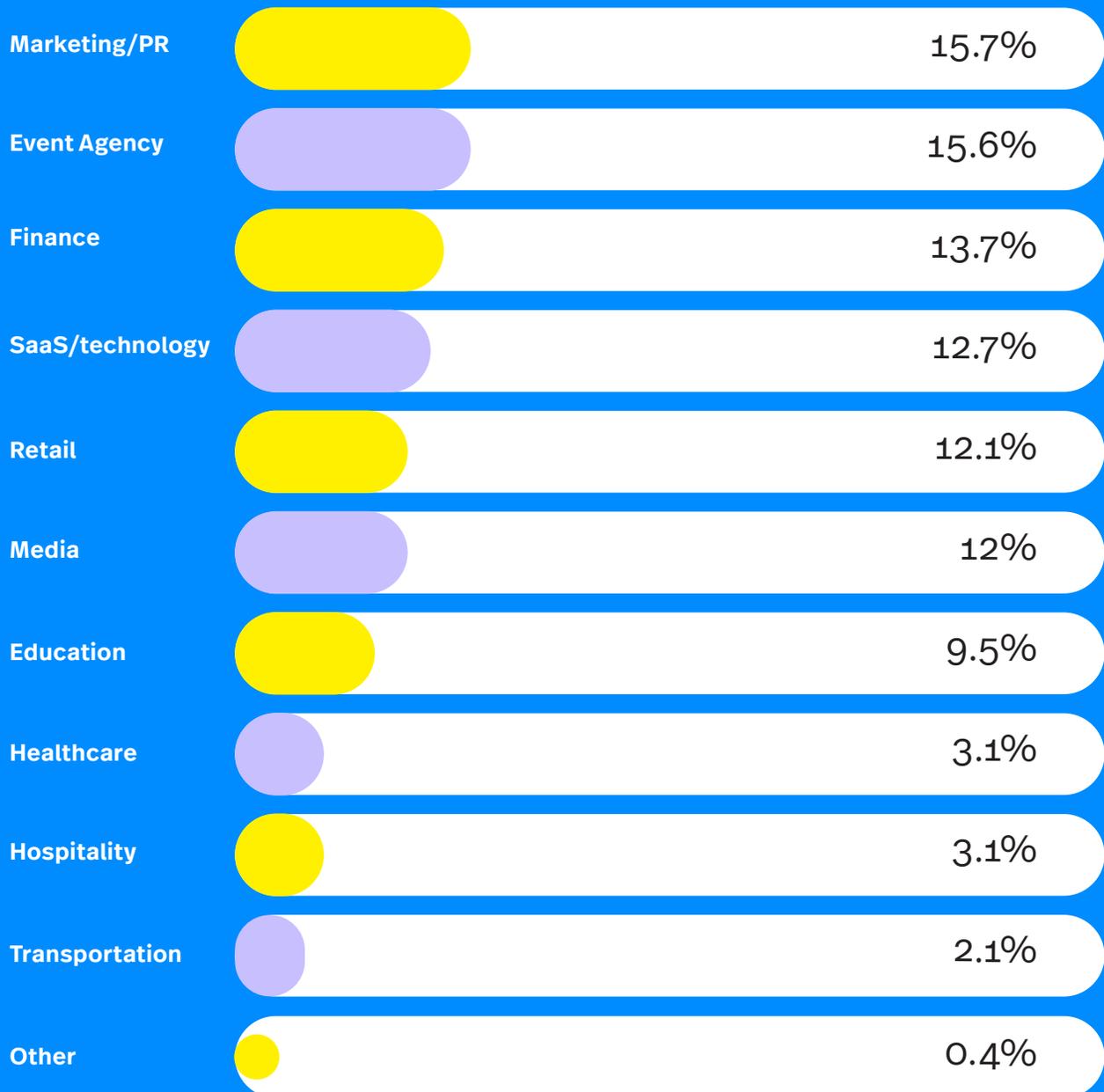
This survey's attendee demographics cover a range of industries and types of companies. Of the 2,318 attendees who participated in our survey, 35% work at for-profit businesses, 18.6% work at nonprofit organizations, and 17.9% work at educational institutions. The remaining 28.3% work at government organizations, event planning agencies, and professional associations.

The top five industries represented in this attendee survey are media (15.7%), education (15.6%), event agency (13.7%), retail (12.7%), and marketing/PR (12.1%).

What type of company do you work for?



What industry are you in?



Key attendee insights

40.6%

say hybrid events are their favorite event format

62.7%

say sustainability was emphasized at the most recent conference they attended

77.7%

agree or strongly agree that in-person B2B conferences offer the best networking opportunities

64.6%

agree or strongly agree that the conference venue can make or break the event experience

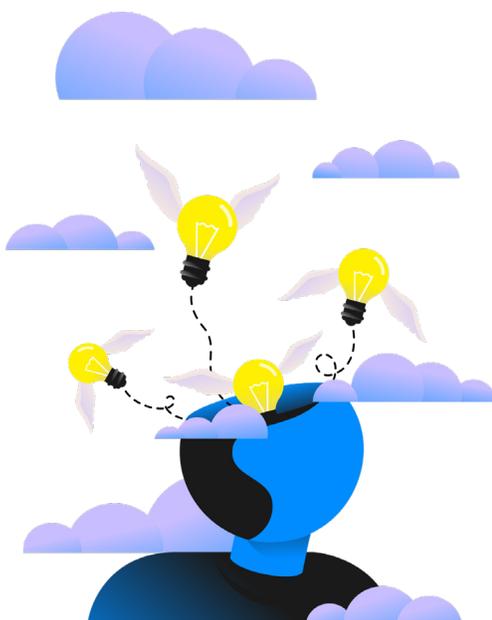
Event attendance

In-person B2B conferences are back in a big way, and attendees are here for the resurgence. An impressive 42.7% of respondents attend one to four events and 39.6% attend five to nine events annually. According to responses, attendees actively attended in-person events last year: 53.3% of respondents say they're attending "about the same" amount of in-person events this year as in 2022. On the other hand, 31.7% say they're planning on attending more this year.

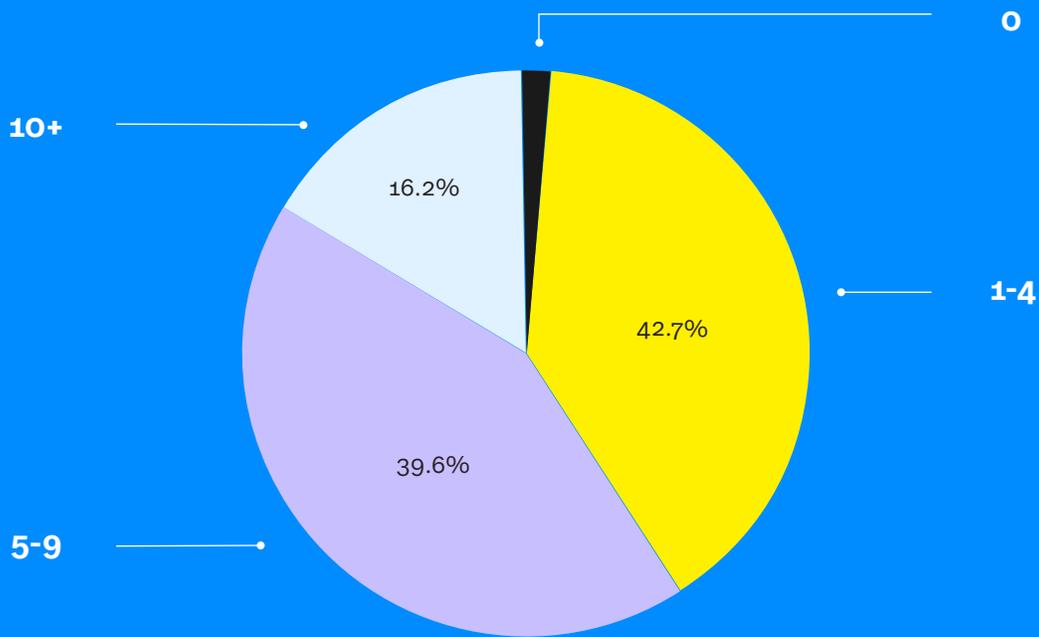
Even as in-person conferences regain dominance, 40.6% of survey respondents said they prefer hybrid (in-person with a virtual component/offering) over other formats. That said, 27.2% preferred in-person events over other formats, and 25.4% opted for virtual events above other events.

Just 6.8% of respondents chose webinars over other formats, which is interesting, considering the fact that 29.1% of survey respondents said they planned to attend more webinars in 2023 than in previous years.

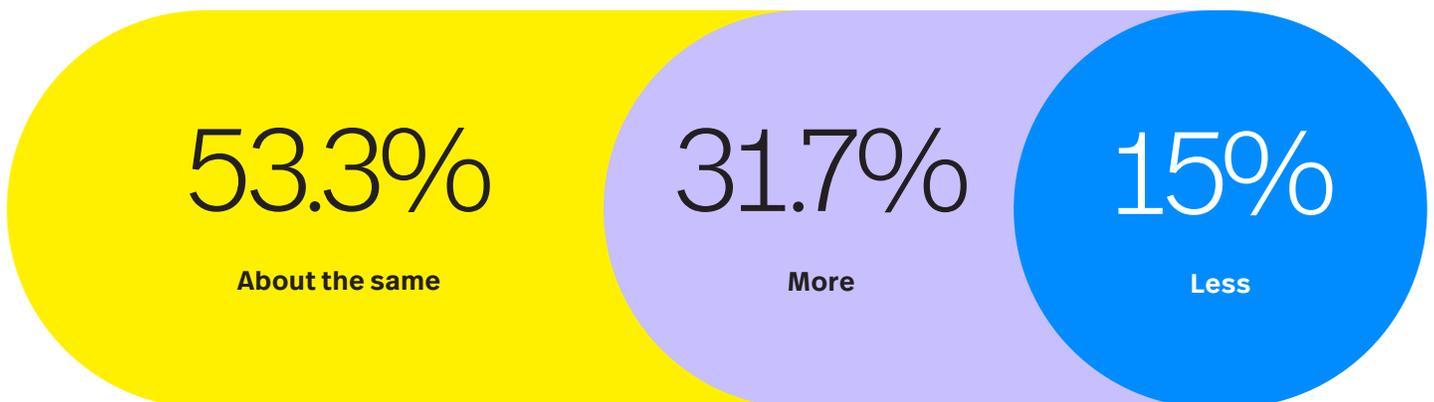
Webinars will continue to be vital to B2B event marketing plans because they are low-cost, high-reward ways of filling the funnel. But knowing that in-person conferences are the most impactful experience for attendees, event marketers must focus on driving demand and excitement for IRL experiences.



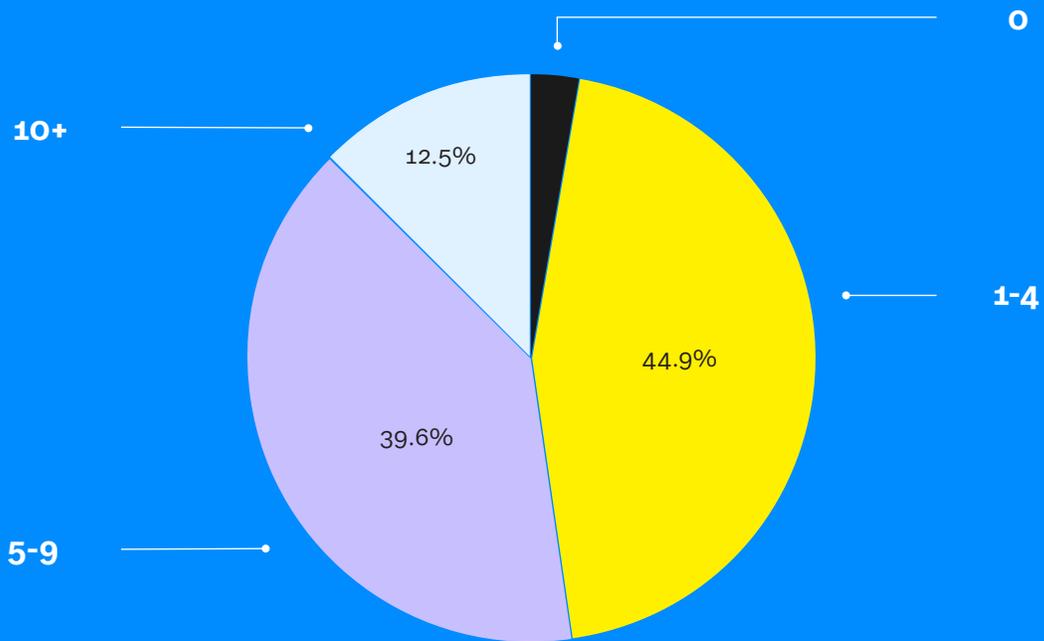
How many events do you attend annually?



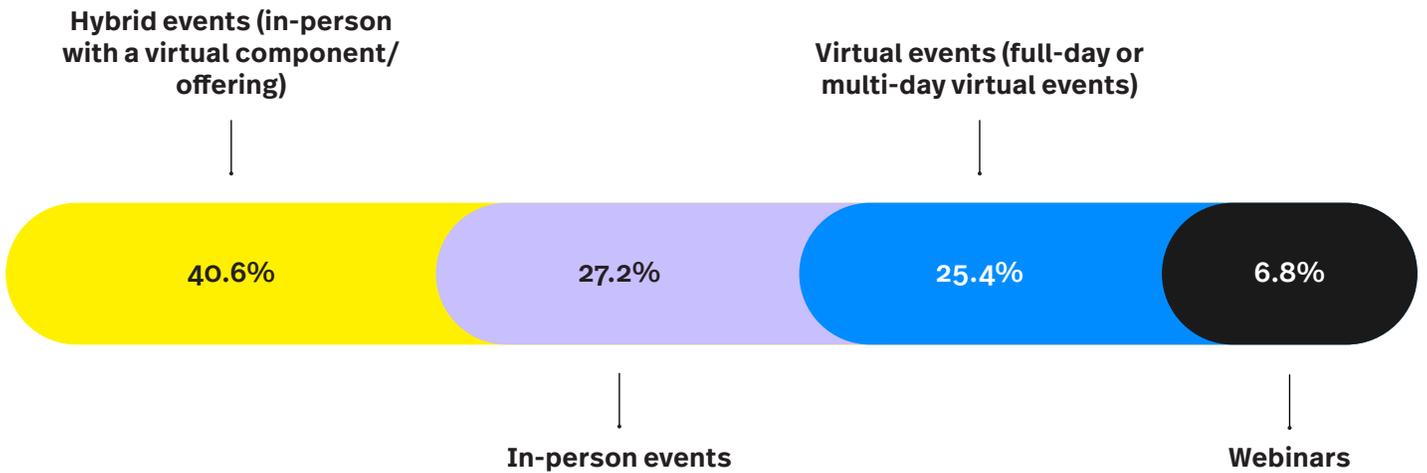
In 2023, will you attend more or less in-person events, compared to 2022?



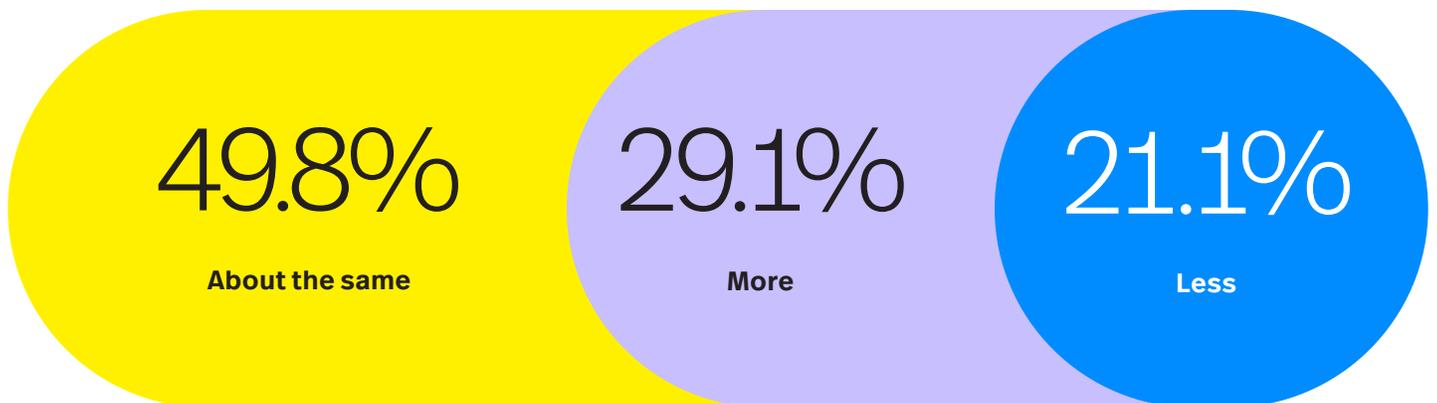
How many in-person events do you attend annually?



What is your favorite event format?



In 2023, will you attend more or less webinars, compared to 2022?



Attendee priorities

Value-based considerations are becoming a stronger motivator for attendees, compared to more traditional considerations like registration and travel/accommodation costs.

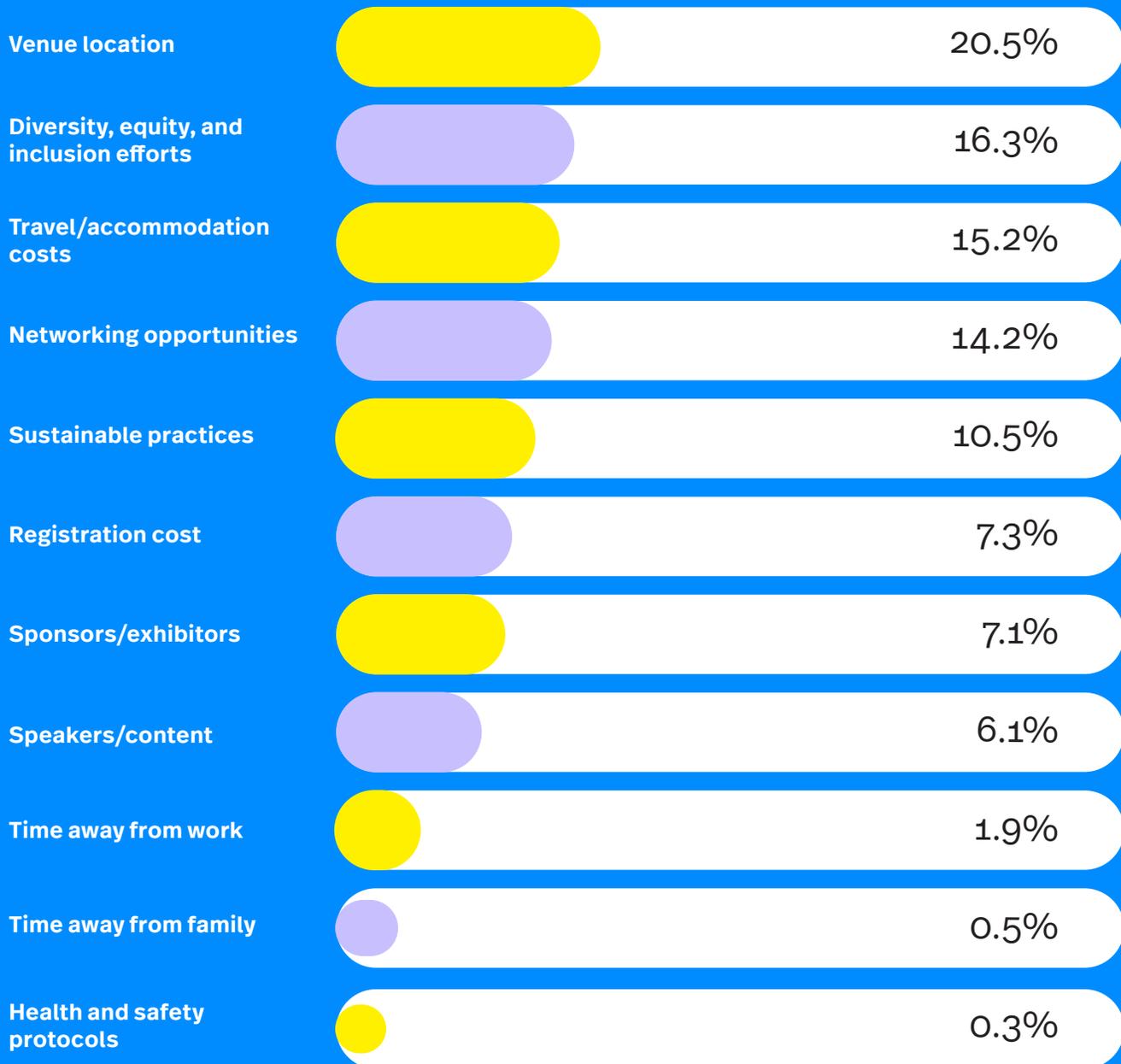
When deciding whether to attend an in-person event, 26.8% of attendees said sustainability and DE&I are their No. 1 priority, and 31.2% said they're their No. 2 priority. Sustainable event management ensures that events are organized and executed using venues with third-party sustainability certifications (e.g., LEED), vendors that source food locally, compostable or recyclable materials, and so on. Event organizers who champion DE&I efforts ensure a diverse speaker lineup and event staff, neuro inclusion, accessibility, and more.

Despite these gains, venue location is the dominant factor for attendees, with 20.5% saying it's their No. 1 priority in deciding whether to attend an event and 15.9% saying it's their No. 2 priority. Venue location can trickle down, impacting other considerations like airfare, accommodations, time away from work or family, and more.

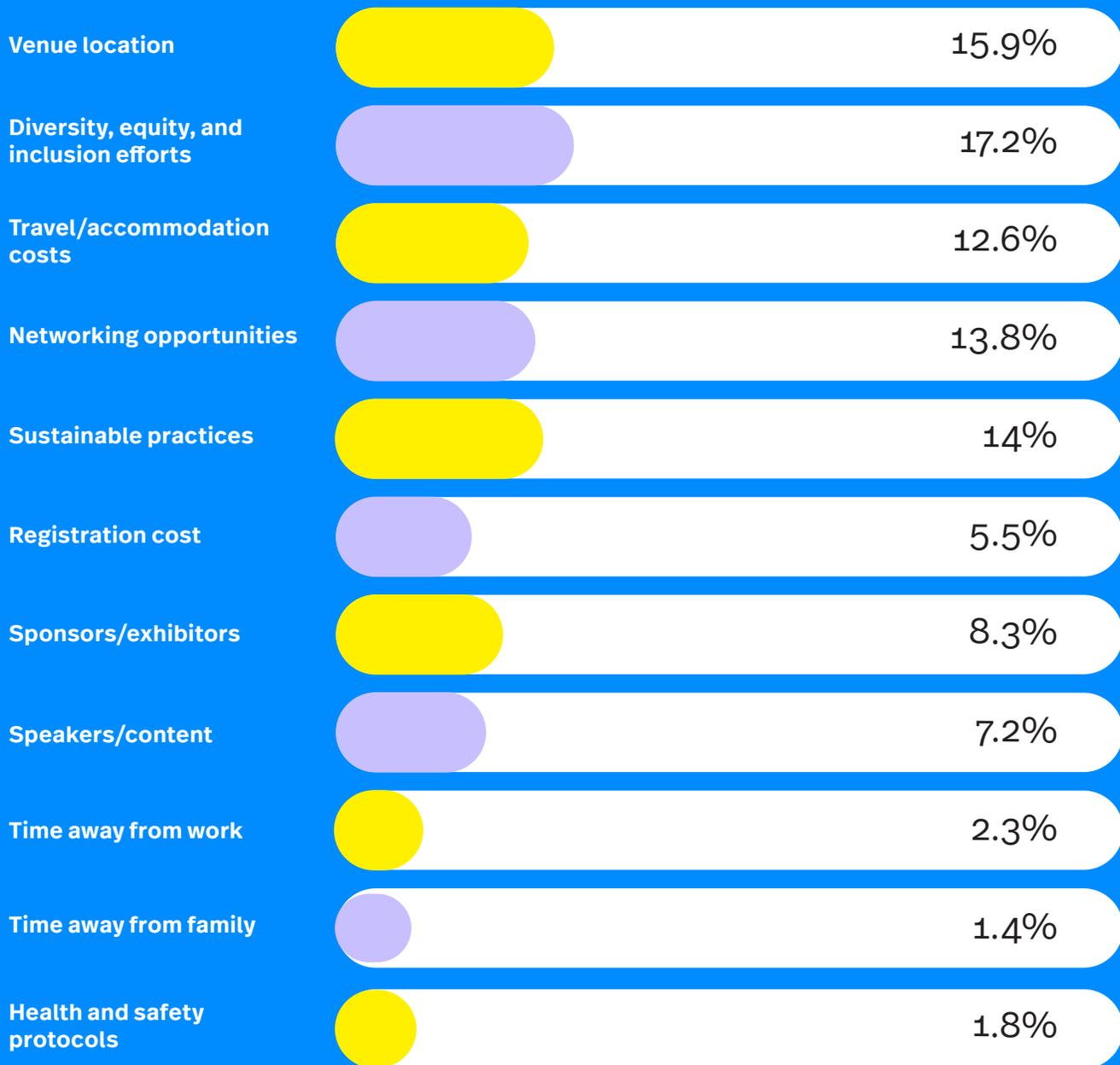
Whether ticket costs have gone down or other costs to attend outweigh the costs of registration fees, covering the cost to attend doesn't seem to be a primary concern for today's in-person B2B conference attendees. Only 7.3% said it was their No. 1 priority and 5.5% said it was their No. 2 priority.

The good news for event organizers is that health and safety protocols are no longer a major concern for in-person attendees. Just 0.3% said it was their No. 1 priority, and only 1.8% named it their No. 2 priority. It appears we're finally out of the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When deciding whether to attend an in-person event, which of the following is the No. 1 priority for you?



When deciding whether to attend an in-person event, which of the following is the No. 2 priority for you?



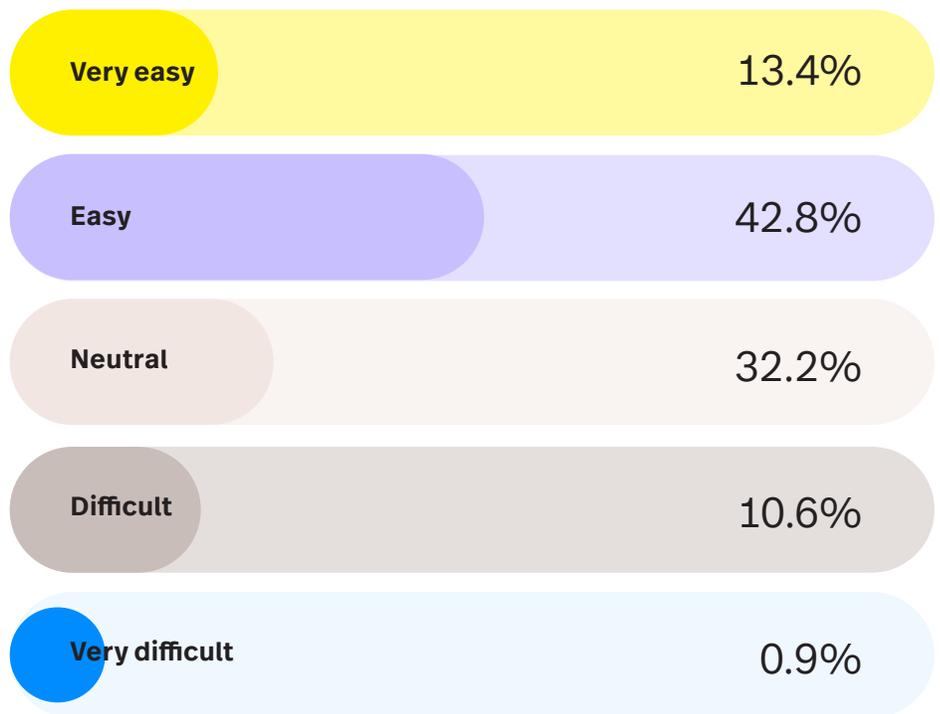
Attendee experiences

We asked respondents to reflect on the most recent in-person B2B conference they attended — from registration to the event venue and beyond. When reflecting on their experiences, respondents had overwhelmingly positive feedback across the board. It's hard to say whether this is because attendees are just excited to be out of the home office and schmoozing in-person or because in-person events have leveled up the attendee experience, but it's likely a blend of both.

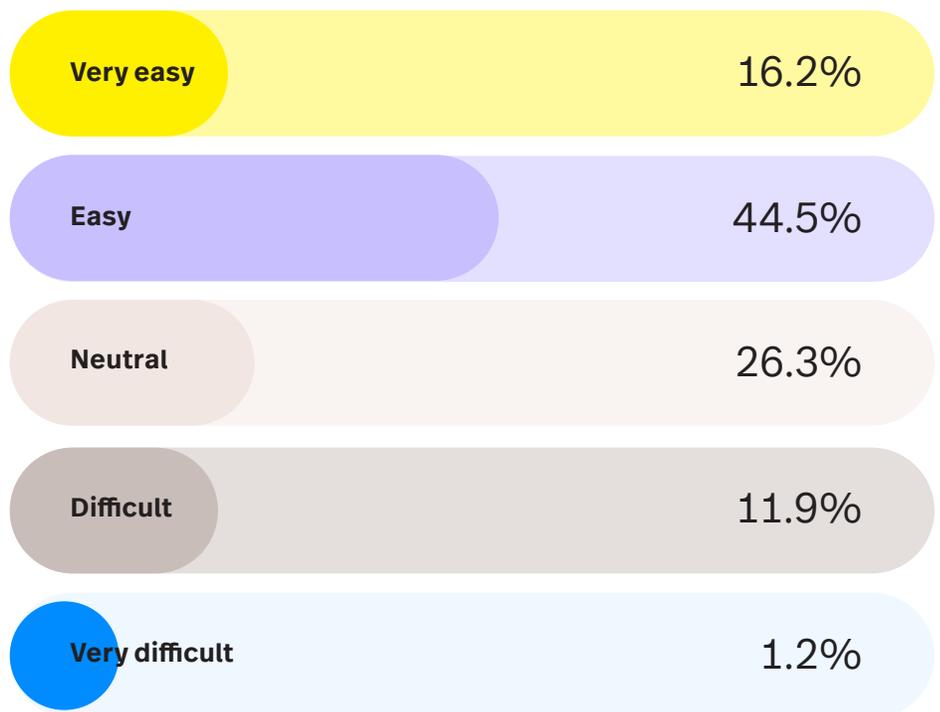
Overall, most attendees (56.2%) said the registration process was easy or very easy and that onsite check-in was easy (44.5%) or very easy (16.2%). Event venues continue to play a vital role for attendees, with 52.7% of participants reporting that they liked or loved the venue. Plus, when speaking to values-based attendee considerations, 62.7% of respondents said sustainability was emphasized at the most recent conference they attended.

The resounding positivity in attendee satisfaction speaks to the continued efforts of today's event organizers to ensure attendees are getting exactly what they need, want, and expect at in-person B2B conferences. These efforts contribute to attendee and customer retention from one event touchpoint to the next and ensure ongoing business success.

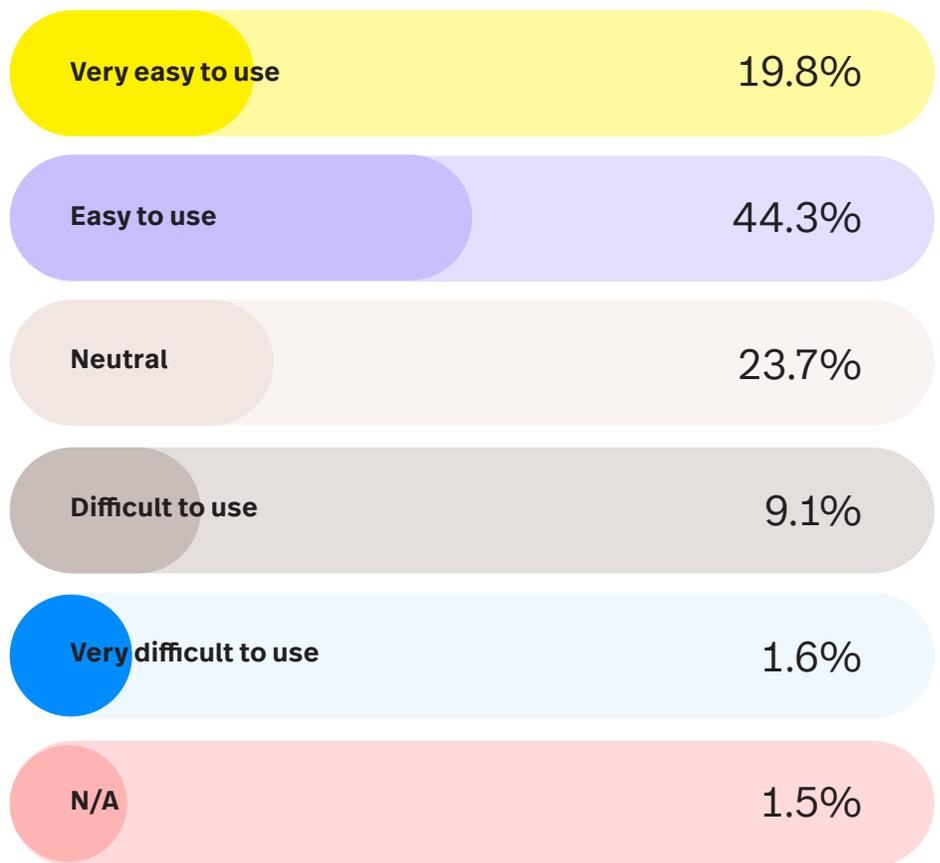
**How was:
The registration
process**



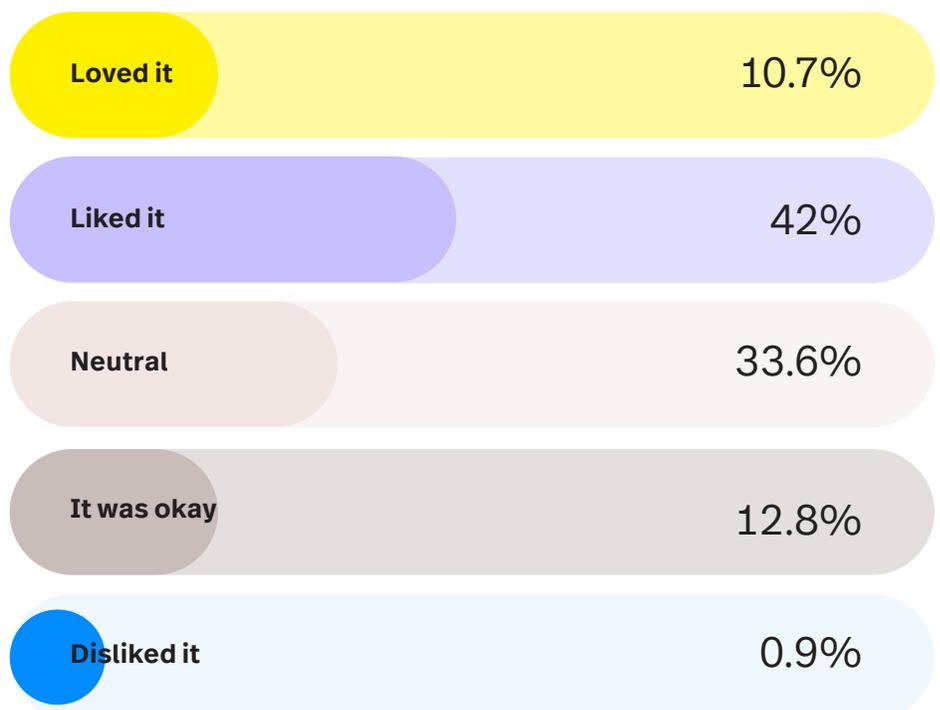
**How was:
Onsite event check-in**



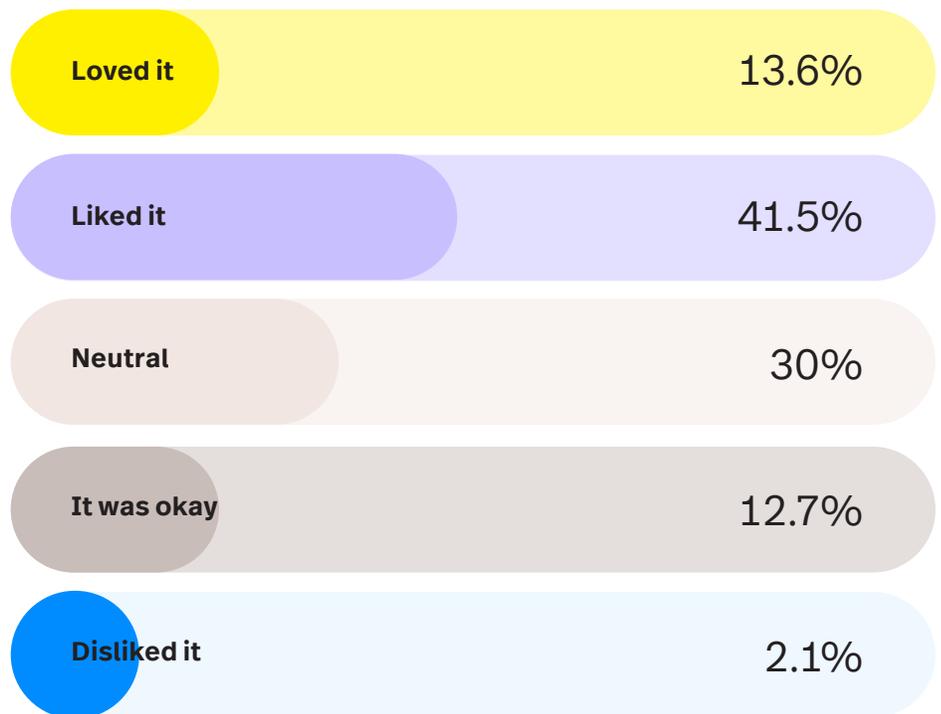
How was: Mobile event app (if there was one)



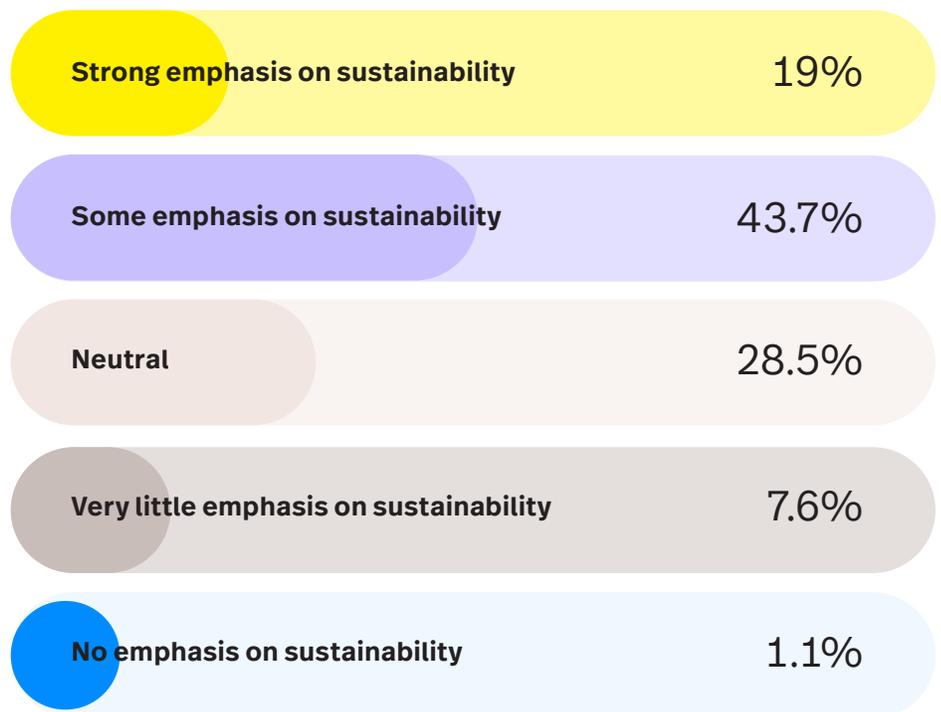
How was: The event venue



How was: Food and beverage



How was: Sustainability and environmental impact



Attendee expectations

Looking beyond attendee priorities and experiences, we have attendee expectations. Expectations can shape the overall attendee experience at any event, but at in-person B2B conferences, meeting — and exceeding — expectations is everything.

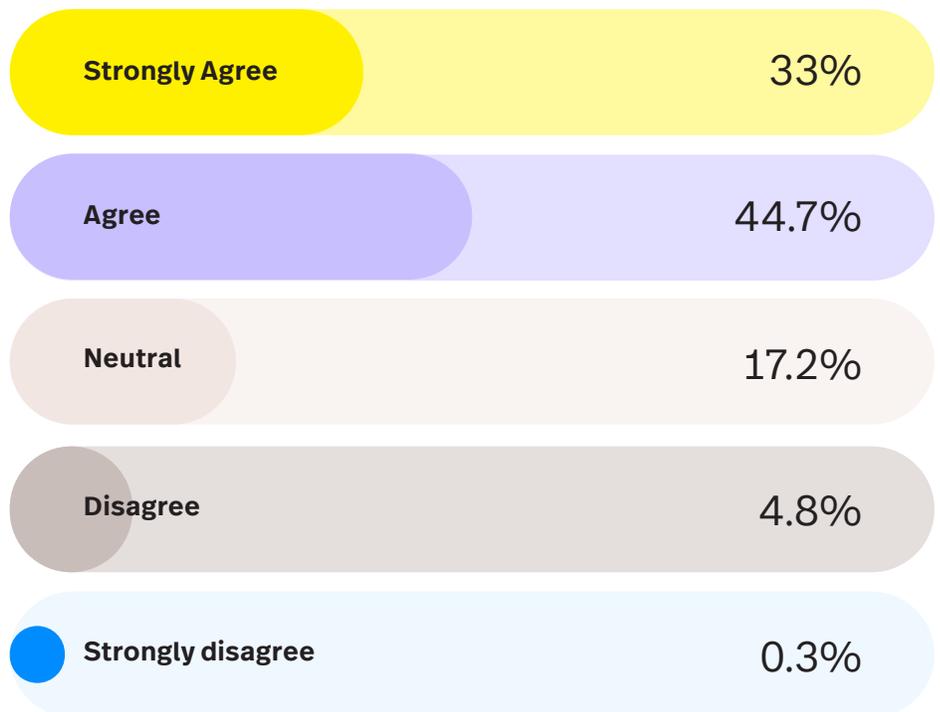
Carefully selecting an impactful event venue, offering a mobile app, and incorporating cutting-edge technologies are table stakes for meeting attendee expectations. According to 64.6% of attendees, the conference venue can make or break their experience and 67.5% said it's vital for there to be a mobile event app.

Expressing a desire for conferences to leverage innovative solutions for an enhanced and immersive experience, 62.9% of attendees expect in-person conferences to embrace modern technology, such as wearable event technology.

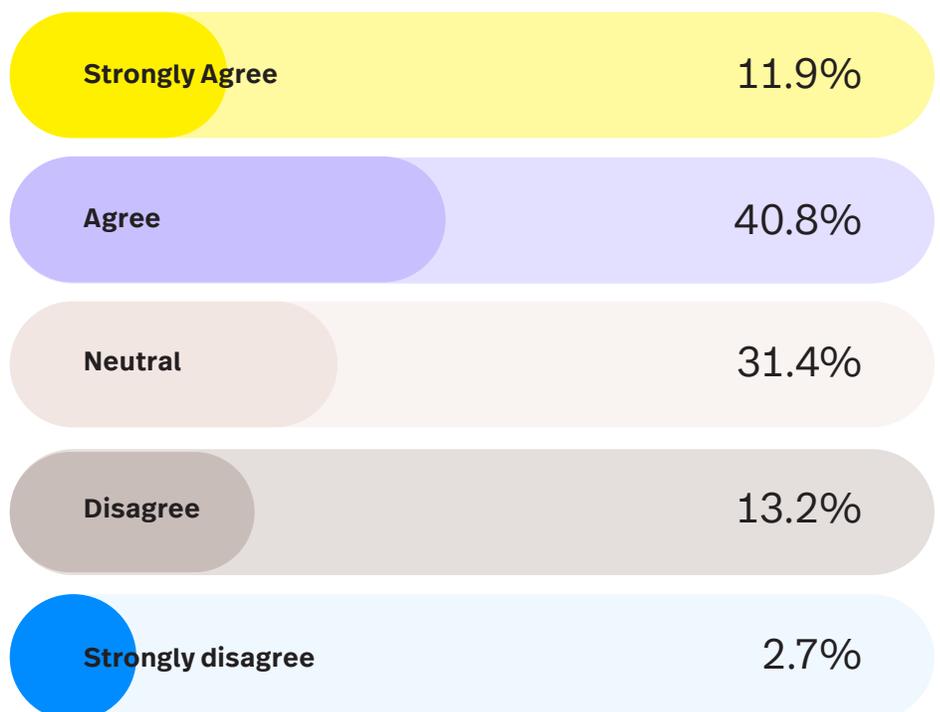
Despite the best efforts of virtual events to create meaningful networking opportunities, in-person events continue to reign supreme: 77.7% of respondents agree or strongly agree that in-person B2B conferences offer the best networking opportunities. Unstructured time is also vital for attendees, with 67.6% saying they agree or strongly agree that free time – beyond networking, sessions, and parties – is vital to their event experience.



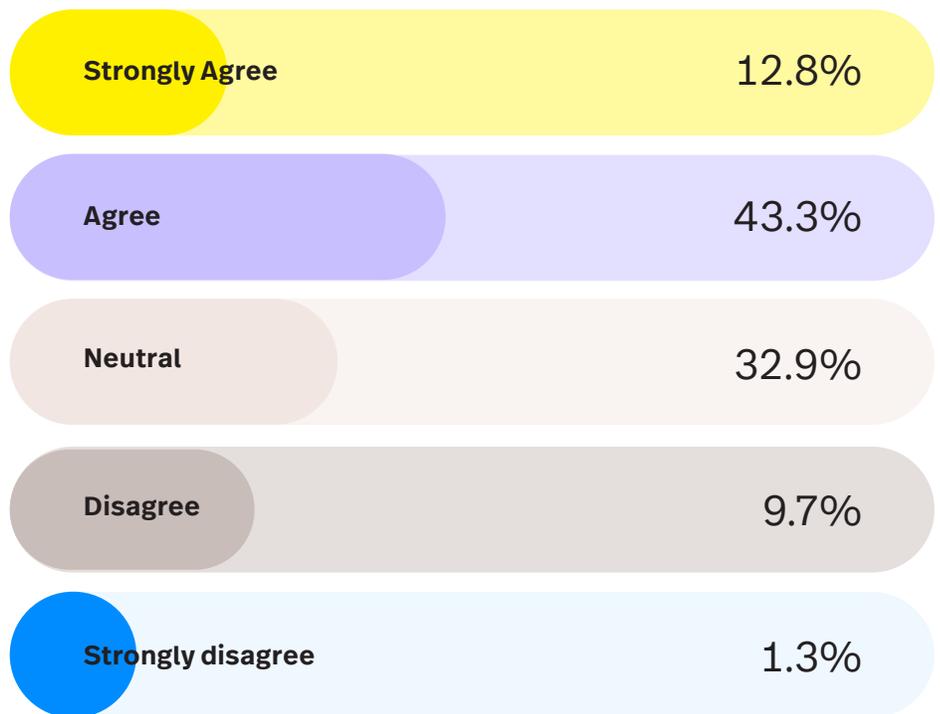
In-person B2B conferences offer the best opportunity to network.



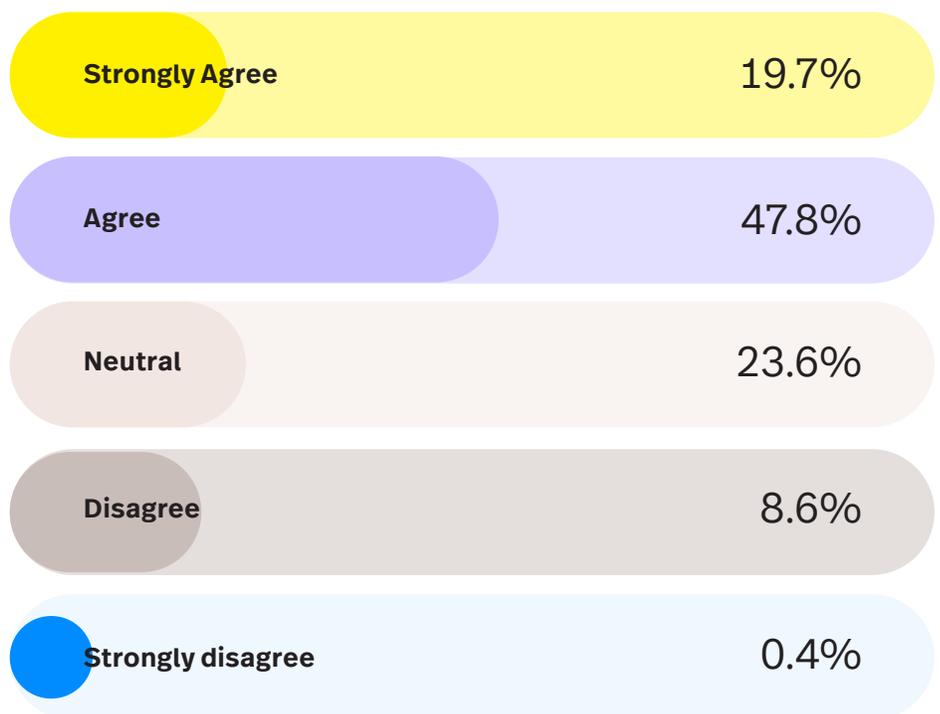
Ease of check-in at an in-person B2B conference can make or break my event experience.



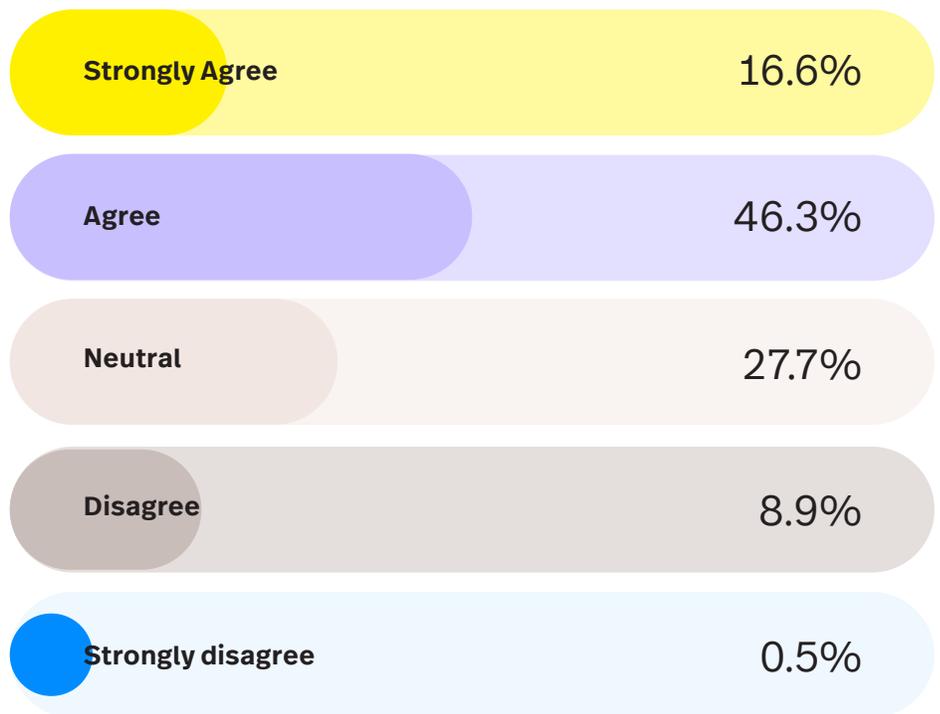
The in-person B2B conference mobile event app can make or break my event experience.



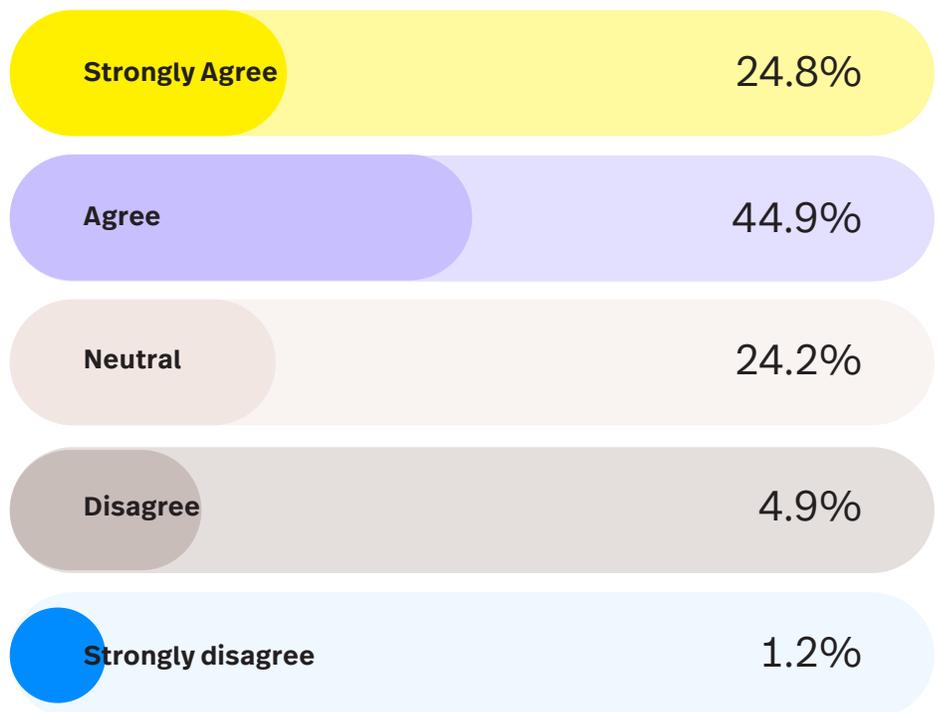
It's vital for me that there is a mobile app so I can ask questions and participate in polls during event sessions.



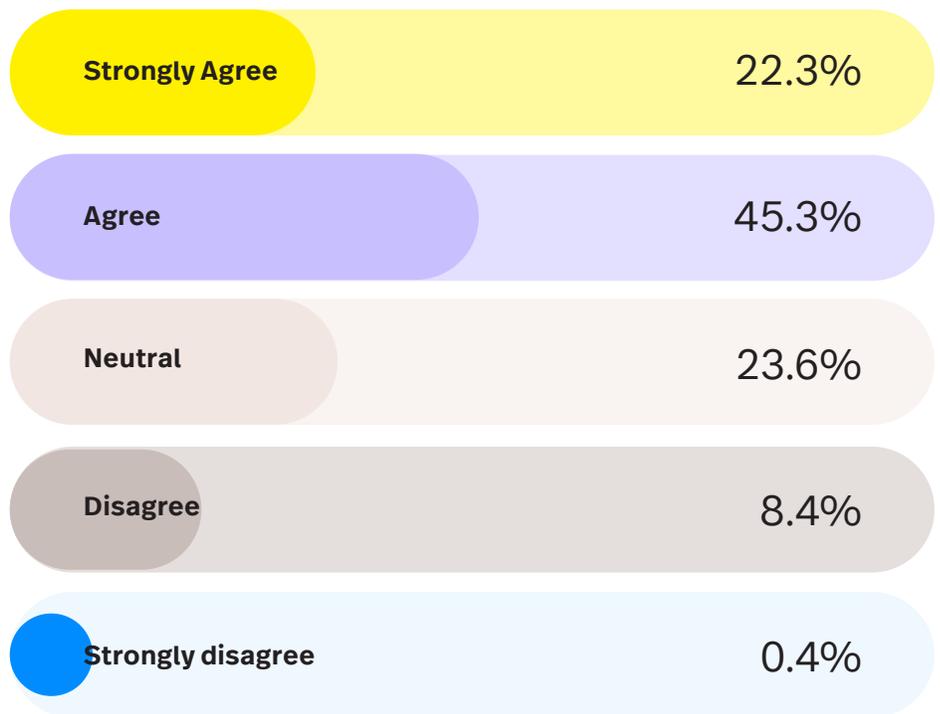
I expect in-person conferences to use modern technology (e.g., wearable event technology).



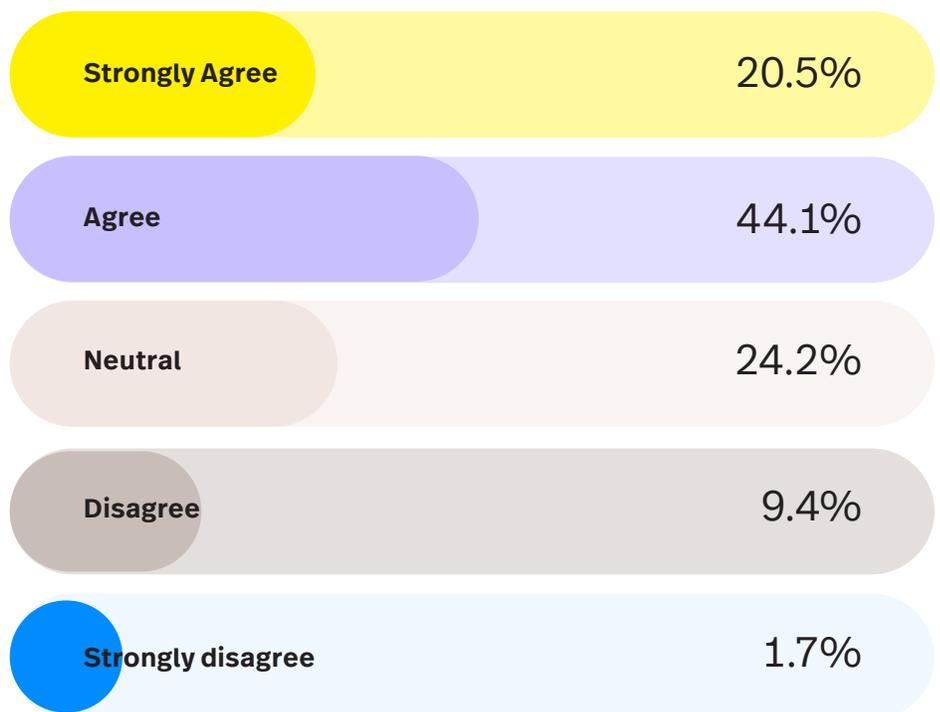
In-person B2B conferences offer the best opportunity to learn about new products or services.

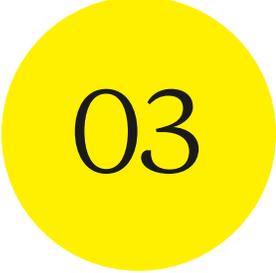


It's vital to me that in-person events have plenty of free time and aren't fully booked with networking, sessions, and parties.



The in-person B2B conference venue can make or break my event experience.





03

Concluding thoughts

These survey findings from more than 4,000 event organizers and attendees highlight the resounding importance and resurgence of in-person B2B conferences as a driving force behind organizational success and attendee satisfaction. The results show increased attendance at in-person conferences, with a majority of organizers planning to maintain or increase the number of such events in the coming year. This demonstrates a strong preference for face-to-face interactions and networking opportunities.

Organizers recognize the critical role of in-person conferences, considering them a vital component of overall organizational success and the most impactful marketing channel. Despite the challenge of proving ROI, organizers report active support from leadership and a belief that in-person conferences will become increasingly crucial in the future. Attendees also value in-person conferences, considering them the best opportunity to learn about new products or services and to network.

Overcoming challenges around sponsorships, venue selection, budget allocation, values-based considerations, and other attendee expectations requires event leaders to prioritize strategic planning and build stronger relationships with marketing while adapting to changing market conditions.

Ultimately, investing in in-person conferences and recognizing their power as the most valuable marketing channel and networking ecosystem is crucial for organizational success. As one organizer commented, “People may be over virtual, but they’re becoming very choosy about the in-person events they’re willing to attend.”

On that note, the success of in-person conferences will hinge on how event organizers can leverage event management software, mobile event apps, and smart event wearables to meet – and exceed – attendee expectations. Organizers will need to choose future-proof, all-in-one solutions from providers that prioritize innovation and top-tier support.

By embracing the value of in-person events and implementing effective strategies, organizations can stay ahead of the competition and reap substantial benefits in an increasingly competitive landscape.



About Bizzabo

Bizzabo powers the events of world-leading brands — from Fortune 100 enterprise organizations and financial institutions to creative agencies and scaling tech companies.

The Bizzabo Event Experience OS is a data-rich open platform that allows Event Experience Leaders to manage events, engage audiences, activate communities, and deliver powerful business outcomes — while keeping attendee data private and secure.

To learn more about Bizzabo, visit www.bizzabo.com.

Bizzabo