

The Freeman Trends Report

+ 2024 Attendee Intent and Behavior

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+ Executive summary

It's trend season again, folks, and we have some important insights to share.

The Freeman Trends Report offers the largest, most comprehensive behavioral and intent assessment of B2B events in the industry. With a data-driven approach and an unrivaled scale, we maintain a role in virtually every aspect of the event experience, providing full-service solutions from retail to logistics to strategy. This reach also gives us access to the most valuable participants in the events' ecosystem: the attendees.

Following the release of our 2023 attendee and exhibitor reports, we are building on our insights by surveying attendees once again to see what's changed – and what's remained the same.

Before we dive in, you can breathe a sigh of relief: we're no longer comparing events to pre-pandemic times. We made it through some of the most challenging event cycles in our industry's history. Events are back, but we're not going back to the way things were before.

This year's research makes it clear that, although the pandemic is behind us, we now face a new set of challenges: **the disconnect between what organizers provide and what attendees (and exhibitors) value most.**

For those of you who are new, welcome. For those of you who were here last year, you know that [our 2023 attendee report](#) identified gaps, analyzed sentiment, and revealed expectations. **We uncovered a sea change – a new wave of attendees called the Next Gen Event-Goer (ages 22–44) – and unpacked just how much has changed since 2019:** budgets, priorities, technology. Yet, despite these changes, today's event strategies remain largely the same – and many are falling flat.

Although attendance is up, **attendees' demands have shifted.**

This year, we're doubling down. Maximizing event success requires **putting yourself in attendees' shoes.** Let's try it.

If no constraints existed, and you could attend any professional event, what would it be? What would you want it to include? What would you hope to gain?

No stakes are too high, no ask too lofty. Would you want to network with like-minded peers? Hear from an inspiring industry leader? Discover a new solution that helps grow your business? Attend a social hour? Or learn a new skill?

These are the types of questions we posed in this year's survey, and we have the answers.

It's time to rethink event excellence.

We know what types of experience, networking, learning, and commercial pursuits attendees are after, and we know what constraints they face. All that's left to do is listen and take heed as we plan for the future.

It's time to broaden your view and embrace the new. **It's time to ask yourself if your efforts are paying off.**

If you want to execute excellent events and measure that success, you must put attendee expectations first and make every minute of their time count.

It's not going to be easy, but it's going to be worth it. So get ready to roll up your sleeves.

It's time to reimagine what events can be from the eyes of the attendees. It's time to allow attendees' needs to drive our strategy and measurement methods.

And it's time to usher in a new era of event excellence that will meet everyone's expectations for 2024 and beyond.



Attendees of all kinds

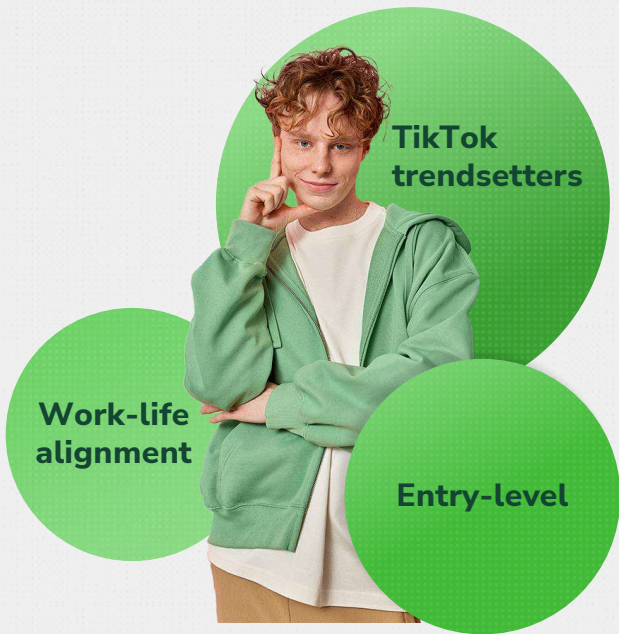
Who they are

Your event attendees are consumers first

We have historically viewed attendees through an industry-first lens, but research shows that age, gender, socioeconomic status, and event type serve as the greatest predictors of attendee values and behaviors.

NEXT GEN EVENT-GOER

TRADITIONAL EVENT-GOER



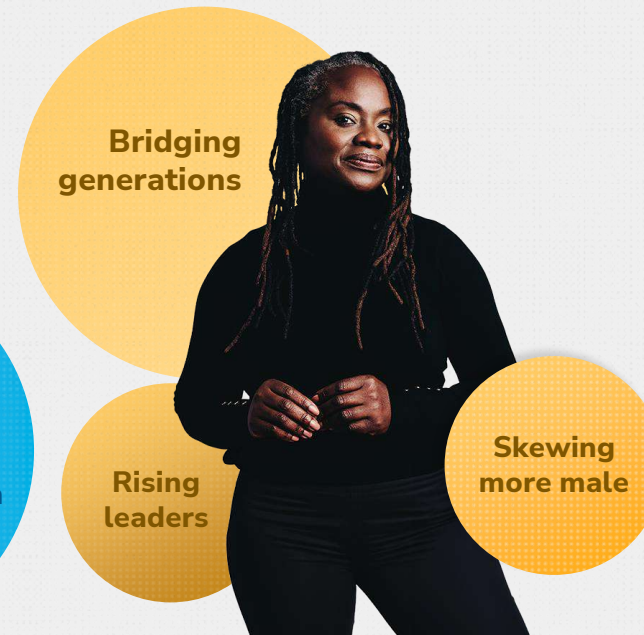
GENERATION Z

1997 - 2012



MILLENNIAL

1981 - 1996



GENERATION X

1965 - 1980



BOOMER

1946 - 1964

+ Generation(s) We

All we ever hear about are generational differences, but this year's research uncovered that there's at least one thing all generations have in common: the desire for personalization.

We all want to be seen, accommodated, and valued for our individuality.

The days of making decisions based on homogeneous assumptions are over. Whether you're a Boomer, Gen X, Millennial, or Gen Z, personalized experiences are paramount – and the rise of AI both drives and enables this demand.

Incorporating Individuality

There's no denying that a new wave of event-goers has arrived, which is evident from the increased number of Next Gen Event-Goers (NGEGs) in this year's sample.

NGEGs do share certain traits. They tend to care more about authentic connection and social causes than other generations – and it's imperative to recognize and act upon such generational commonalities.

However, we cannot over-rotate to one side of the generational spectrum and focus solely on NGEGs, nor can we put each generation in neat little boxes.

We have four generations of individuals to please – each on a personalized level.

With AI available for mainstream adoption, AI-powered personalization is possible at scale.

However, you can't personalize without knowing exactly what matters to each attendee.

This is why it's essential to analyze attendees on a matrix consisting of age, gender, role, and event preferences. These meaningful motivators allow you to understand exactly who attends your events and what type of experience they seek, so you can deliver the personalized value they've come to expect.

It's up to you to identify and understand your attendees. Fortunately, we are in this together. Freeman is here to help.



Attendee priorities must drive results

The Freeman XLNC Framework

(Pronounced “excellence”)



+ Let attendee goals be your guide

Right now, event planners design experiences without considering attendees’ end goals – and that’s setting everyone up for failure. Different attendees desire different outcomes at different types of events – and attendees are telling us how to optimize for impact.

Based on decades of extensive research that sought to uncover why people attend events, Freeman has boiled it down to four primary reasons: to have fun, to learn, to network, and to do business.

These goals translate to eXperience, Networking, Learning, and Commerce, and it’s these underlying motivators that unlock the true drivers we must focus on. So we developed a framework for planning, executing, and evaluating events based on these drivers. This year we took a deeper look at why and when attendees get the most value from each event element.

This report offers an inside look at experience, learning, networking, and commerce insights and shows you how to execute and assess your event with those insights as your guide.



EXPERIENCE

To have fun, feel emotionally fulfilled

Location
Environment
Sentiment



LEARNING

To be inspired, discover something new

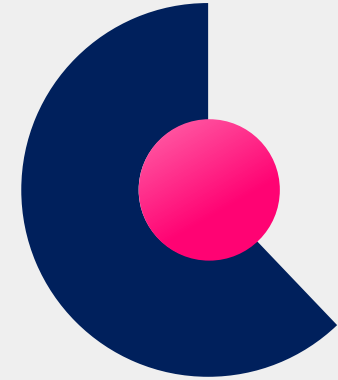
Education
Inspiration
Training



NETWORKING

Socialize with peers, develop relationships with attendees/partners

Connections
Formal & Informal



COMMERCE

Build awareness, introduce products/services, generate leads, complete sales

Brand Impact
Pipeline Building
Transactions



Experience

QUESTION

When thinking about your overall experience at any in-person event, what are the top 3 factors that most positively influence your experience?

+ Immersive activations, personalization, and technology are critical in creating memorable experiences

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

Attendees have a clear desire for immersive experiences, customization, and event-enhancing technology. Food, seating, and social events are relatively important to some attendees, but despite what some of your post-event surveys say, most attendees don't value games, natural lighting, and wellness.

However, many event organizers focus on orchestrating and promoting these less impactful

activities. We know how tempting it is to lean into low-effort elements, but it comes at the expense of delivering what attendees value most.

A yoga class or a fun run may be an easy add, but it's low-hanging fruit. The data shows that by forgoing the 5k and focusing first on high-effort event components like customization and immersion, event planners and attendees alike will yield higher returns.



EXPERIENCE

Most important experience elements

64%



Immersive experiences



Customized agenda plans



Technology that makes consuming the event easier



An immersive, visually appealing atmosphere

28%



Quality food and beverage offerings

28%



After-hours events

22%



More comfortable seating

6%



Games or competitions

6%



More natural lighting

3%



Wellness opportunities

4%



Other

QUESTION

Rank the following in terms of your decision to attend
keynotes/general sessions/plenary sessions.

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)



EXPERIENCE

+ Keynotes and general sessions should focus on topics of interest

After asking this question last year, many readers thought the response *had* to be an outlier. So we asked again, and it has been confirmed: when it comes to keynotes, content comes first. Attendees want substance, not celebrity. A thought-provoking, relevant topic will outweigh even the most prominent speaker.

Most important factors for attending keynotes/general sessions/plenary sessions

- 1** TOPIC
- 2** TYPE OF SPEAKER
- 3** SESSION FORMAT
- 4** DURATION
- 5** AWARD OR RECOGNITION



QUESTION

Which keynote speakers/topics do you prefer the most?

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)



EXPERIENCE

+ Innovation and industry experts prevail as the preferred keynote topics and speaker types

Much like last year, attendees want to hear about topics like innovation and from people like industry leaders and experts.

We repeat: celebrity speakers will not boost registrations. Unless they're experts in a relevant vertical, **celebrities don't drive behavior or outweigh what really matters.**

Preferred keynote topics and speaker types



“Breaking the myth: celebrity speakers don’t drive event registrations!”
Nicola Kastner

QUESTION

When you leave a keynote/general session/plenary, what feeling describes your ideal state?

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)



EXPERIENCE

+ Striking a balance between informational and inspirational is key

Last year, we asked attendees who they wanted to deliver keynotes. This year, we're also digging into how attendees want to feel post-keynote. Attendees want to hear about innovation from industry experts because they want to walk away from keynotes feeling both informed and inspired. Leaning into thought leadership and the latest developments is key to appealing to attendees' desired state of mind.

Interestingly, males prefer to feel informed (40%), whereas females want to feel inspired (47%). This is one of many examples that illustrate why it's essential to know your audience intimately so that you can deliver the most relevant content.

Ideal feeling when leaving a keynote/general session

38%



INFORMED

35%



INSPIRED/
MOTIVATED

13%



ENGAGED

6%



CONNECTED

4%

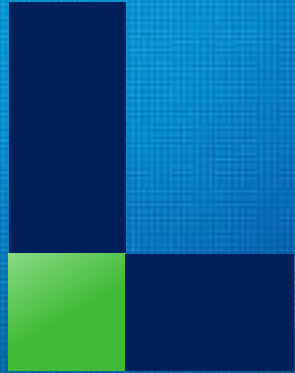


EXCITED

4%



OTHER



Learning



QUESTION

Where do you go for training and professional content?
(Select all that apply)

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)



LEARNING

+ Attendees prefer to receive training and professional content in person

When given a choice, attendees opt for in-person learning because of the irreplaceable experiential opportunities it offers. The 7% decrease in those who attend online events for training implies that some respondents are getting tired of Zoom rooms serving as classrooms and believe that learning is more valuable with real people, and real demonstrations, in real life.

A larger number of NGEs (58%) seek professional content online through sources like LinkedIn and YouTube, indicating that the digital divide between generations remains. Younger attendees in particular will continue to get training in all kinds of ways, but there's an opportunity to make training a priority at in-person events, as 70% of attendees seek it out.

Top sources for training and professional content



QUESTION

How would you like to receive education/technical information? (Select all that apply)

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)



LEARNING

+ Attendees want to make the most of in-person learning with hands-on demos and activities

Attendees get the most value from in-person learning opportunities when they incorporate demonstrations and hands-on activities.

Offering pre-recorded video demos and other online learning materials ultimately defeats the purpose of in-person learning. These passive activities are easier to execute and often included at in-person events, but the most valued educational content actively immerses and engages participants.

Preferred format for education/technical information

75%



Demonstrations / hands-on activities

52%



Unstructured interactions with experts

52%



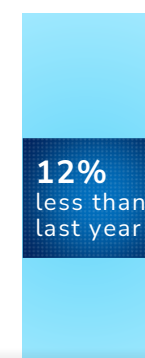
Printed materials

46%



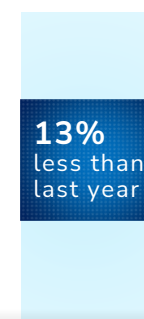
Peer-to-peer learning/special interest groups

44%



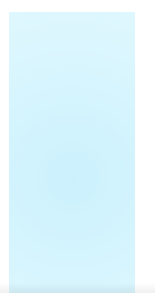
Structured sessions in a classroom with speaker or panel

37%



Video demonstrations

35%



QR codes with links to company online materials

QUESTION

When thinking about how you learn at any in-person event, what are the top 3 factors that most positively influence your learning experience?

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)



LEARNING

+ In addition to experiential learning, attendees value learning from experts most

In addition to hands-on, participatory learning activities, attendees most value informal meetings with experts. This type of interaction is much preferred to formal roundtable discussions and audience hall-style sessions, indicating that attendees prioritize interactions that facilitate face time with experts in their field.

Most important learning elements



56%

Hands-on interaction or participatory activations



48%

Informal meetings with SMEs



43%

Demos in a classroom, activation, exhibitor's booth



37%

Peer-to-peer learning opportunities



31%

Topic-specific classroom education sessions



30%

Short, scheduled times with an exhibitor for 1:1 discussion



23%

Roundtable discussions (e.g. Lunch & learn)



23%

General session audience hall-style sessions



1%

Other

QUESTION

Thinking about the value you received from attending online events, please allocate 100 points across the following event aspects. (Total MUST equal 100)

+ Easy access to educational content is the most valuable aspect of online events

When attendees consider the value of online events, access to educational content and overall convenience reign.

One may think that connecting with fellow professionals around the globe is a major value add for online events, but it turns out that attendees would rather learn online and connect with peers in person.

So, what does this mean for on-site events? When it comes to your general education sessions, leave the lectures for online formats and take advantage of what learners can get only when in person.

FREEMAN 2023 BENCHMARK

Those who attend virtual events (n=1,293)

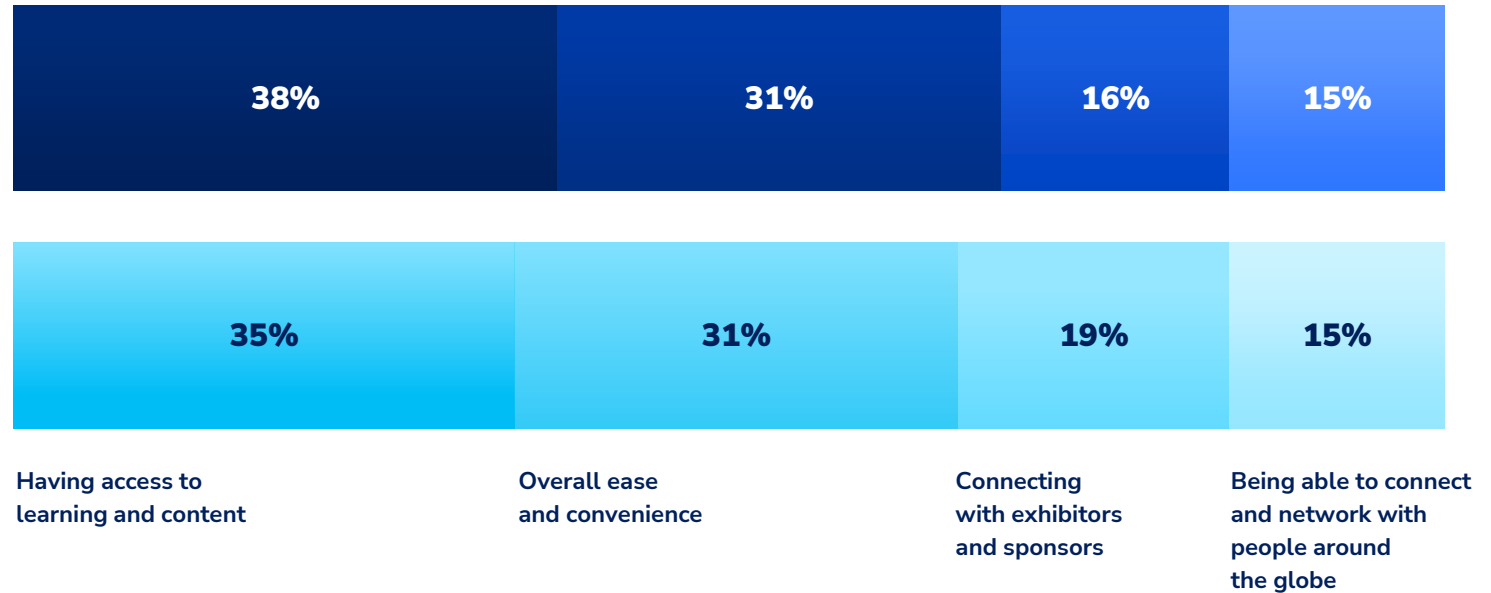
FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend virtual events (n=693)



LEARNING

Value of attending online events



● 2023 ● 2024



Networking

QUESTION

With regard to networking at events, please rate the following types of interactivity in terms of overall importance to your success?

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)



NETWORKING

+ Expert interaction is important when it comes to networking, too

When it comes to networking, attendees are less interested in discovering new career opportunities and obtaining/providing mentoring. Instead, they view networking as the most valuable when they can exchange ideas with peers, meet new people, and speak with industry experts who may otherwise be out of reach.

Attendees preferred types of networking



QUESTION

When thinking about networking at any in-person event, what are the top 3 factors that most positively influence your networking experience?

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

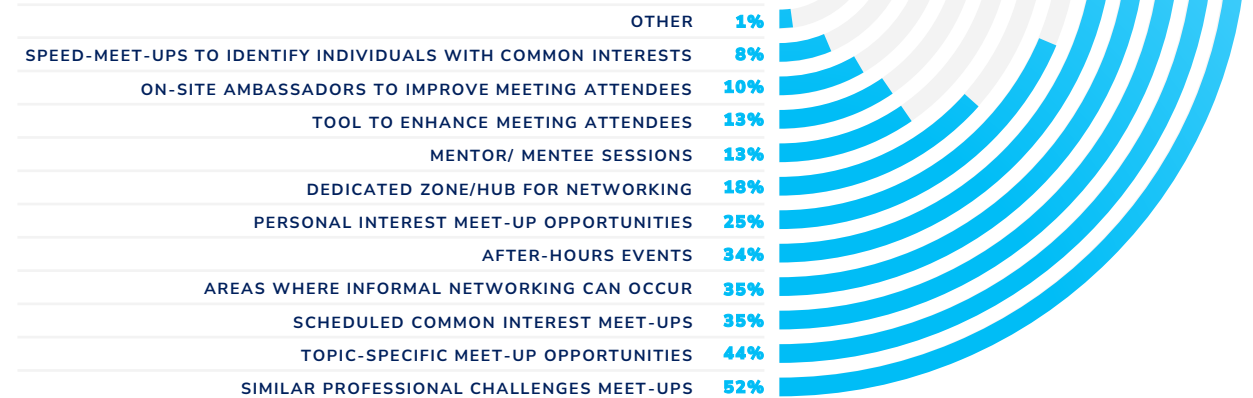


NETWORKING

+ Attendees want to connect with peers over shared challenges and specific topics

Just like with keynotes, content is critical when it comes to networking. Attendees want to bond with peers over shared professional challenges and topics. They aren't as keen to speed-date over hors d'oeuvres or meet with an on-site ambassador at a phone charging station. These types of networking elements can be useful ancillaries – but they're not sufficient on their own. Event attendees would be better served if organizers devoted more time to valued forms of networking and reduced their efforts on less-desired elements.

Most important networking elements





Commerce



QUESTION

Where do you go to discover new products and services?
(Select all that apply)

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)



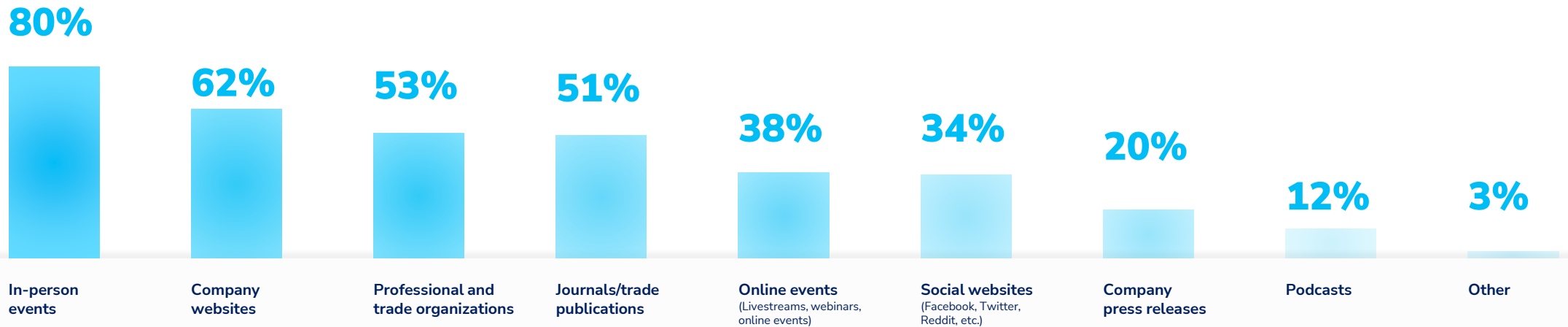
COMMERCE

+ In-person events are the most-visited source for new product/service discovery

The first stop for product research is often a company website, but attendees report that in-person events trump webpages for new product and solution discovery. This is likely because we're seeing more misinformation online and an increased amount of trust in in-person sources.

NGEGs are more likely to use social media (44%) for new product discovery in addition to in-person events. As we think about extending the customer landscape, social websites are a great medium to promote products in advance of events or continue a conversation online after the event ends. [According to our exhibitor report](#), 54% of Millennial exhibitors prefer to make product announcements on social, but there are still many exhibitors who do not take advantage of social channels to connect with attendees outside of the exhibit hall.

Top sources to discover new products and services



QUESTION

When thinking about how you build awareness of and evaluate products/services at any in-person event, what are the top 3 factors that most positively influence how you experience that?

+ Attendees see samples and hands-on demonstrations as the most valuable commercial components

Despite the opportunities that social media provides, nothing can replace the hands-on demonstrations that in-person exhibits offer. Attendees value online accessibility, but they are more interested in getting their hands on products and seeing solutions in action in real life.

FREEMAN 2023 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n= 5,144)

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)



COMMERCE

Most important commerce elements



68%

Samples or service demos at booths/activations



61%

Hands-on demos, sessions at booths/activations



35%

Vendor swag, giveaways



33%

Printed product/service description materials



20%

Preset meetings with qualified exhibitors



20%

After-hours events



19%

Informational signs displaying vendor insights



18%

Event site to learn more about exhibitors



17%

QR codes providing vendor information



1%

Other

QUESTION

Imagine you are attending an in-person business event, allocate a total of 100 points across the below areas based on how important each component is to your overall experience. Enter "0" in a box if the component does not influence your experience at the event. (Total MUST equal 100)

+ Although attendees value commerce the most, all event components are essential and dependent on your attendees.

With commerce ranking as the most important event component for all respondents (and for decision-makers in particular), it's clear that attendees want an inside look at the latest products and services that can influence their careers and businesses for the better.

However, we must acknowledge that this is an average – not an absolute. Networking, learning, and experience are still top priorities for many respondents. As we dug deeper, we uncovered how varying priorities influence decision-making and desires. It all comes back to personalization. You must understand who attends your events and what their unique preferences are so you can deliver the right event elements in the right way. It's time to move from "We have lots of activities" to "We have invested in the type of experience/ learning/networking/commerce that you need."

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

Importance of event components to overall experience



20%

EXPERIENCE

30%

COMMERCE



26%

LEARNING

25%

NETWORKING



Tracking the Trends

We posed many new questions in this year's survey as we explored exactly what different attendees seek from experience, learning, networking, and commerce at in-person events. We also posed some of the *same* questions to calibrate our research, see what has changed, and learn what has held steady.

Here's what we found.

In-person attendance trends look promising

QUESTION

Do you anticipate that your reduction in planned attendance at in-person events is permanent or temporary?

+ Growing optimism that attendance reduction at in-person events is short-lived

Good news: After a year of economic uncertainty, 56% of respondents believe that attendance reduction at in-person events is temporary, and only 10% believe it to be permanent (a 7% decrease from last year).

These perceptions tell us that more attendees see in-person events as a normal part of the marketing mix again.

Considering that 2023 brought improved event attendance, this doesn't come as a surprise. However, not all event organizers have seen restored attendance rates. Those who have may be moving in the right direction but cannot sit back and relax just yet. Those who have not are not alone and will need to implement attendee-centric strategies.

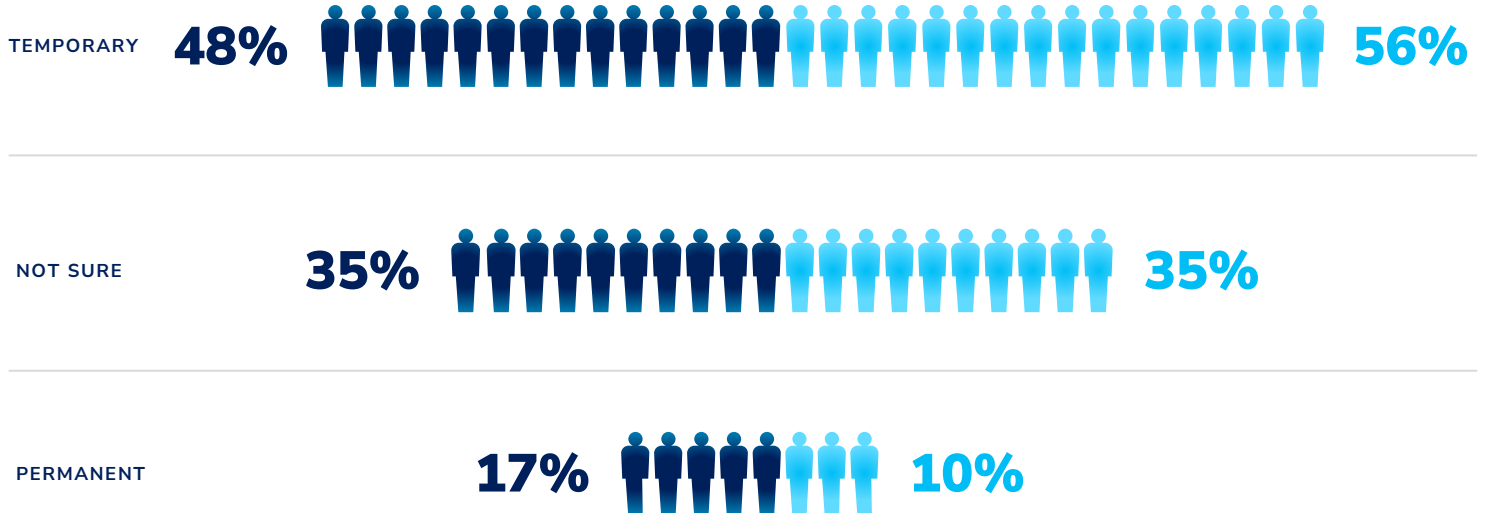
FREEMAN 2023 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=5,144)

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

The perception of attendance reduction at in-person events



● 2023 ● 2024

QUESTION

Given the opportunity to attend the same event in-person or virtually, (and regardless of other factors such as funding or calendar availability), you would: (Select One)

+ When given a choice, attendees prefer an in-person format

More good news: A growing number of respondents prefer to attend in-person events compared to online events (82%).

However, 17% of respondents report that the specific event influences their preference to attend remotely versus in person, suggesting that there is still a place for online events depending on factors like budget and ability to travel.

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

Attendees' event format preferences

17%

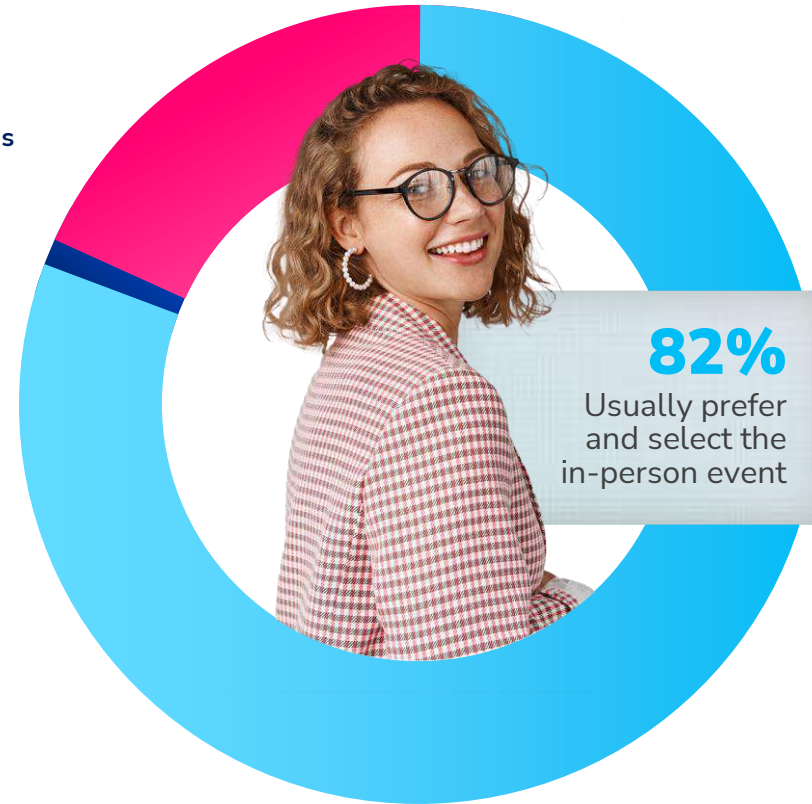
My preference depends on the specific event

1%

Usually prefer and select to attend the event remotely

82%

Usually prefer and select the in-person event



QUESTION

Which factors are most important to ensure your participation in an online event?

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend virtual events (n=693)

+ Most attendees select online events for unique content and convenience

We are not proponents of an “either/or” event strategy. Both in-person and online events offer pros and cons. Respondents who attend online events do so primarily due to unique content that can't be found elsewhere and convenient, on-demand access.

It is important to recognize why attendees value online event formats so that you can incorporate the right type of online events into your holistic event strategy. For example, if an industry expert cannot speak at an in-person event but can broadcast online, it may warrant a digital forum.

Most important factors for choosing online events

67%



Unique or compelling content

60%



Ability to access on-demand

48%



Price

47%



Compelling speakers

44%



Concise content

QUESTION

How trustworthy are the following sources of information?

+ In-person events are seen as the most trustworthy sources of information

It comes as no surprise that, in the age of AI (and an increasing amount of misinformation), in-person events are viewed as the most trustworthy sources of information – even more so than last year.

Significantly fewer people trust academic institutions, webinars, and thought leaders compared to 2023, and media outlets, blog posts, and social media influencers continue to be among the least trusted sources.

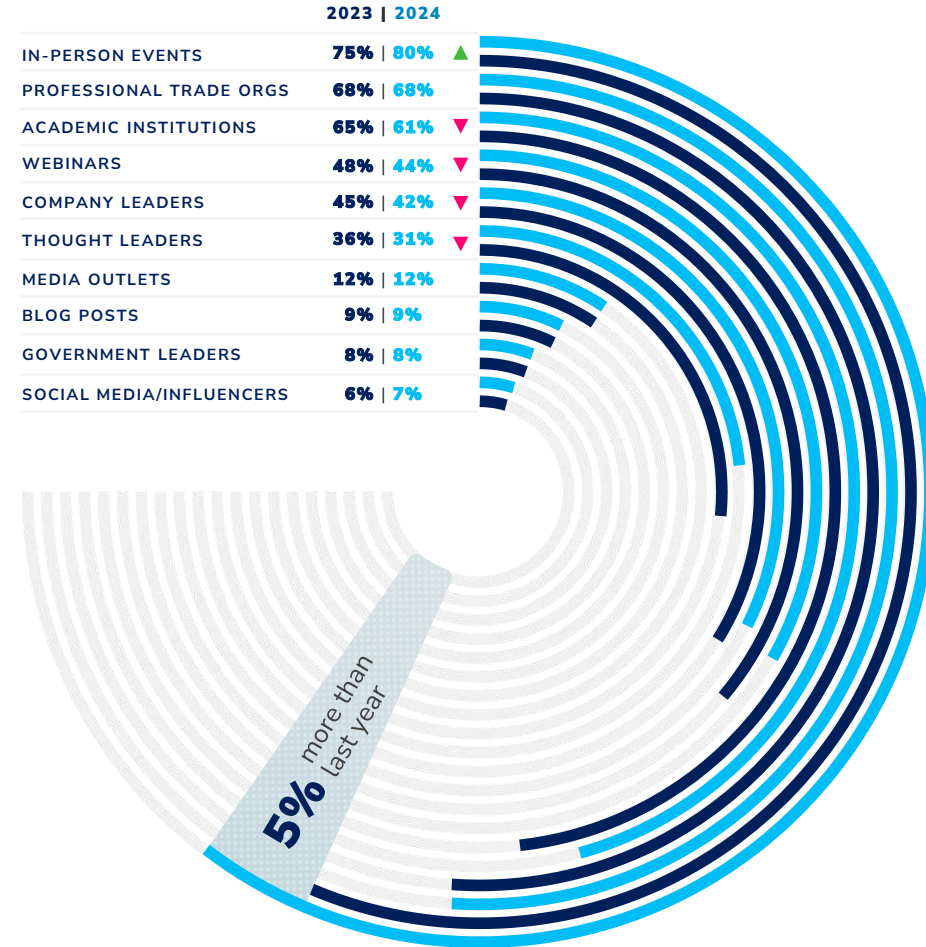
Amidst global strife, political and cultural clashes, and intergenerational change, face-to-face interactions are more than the most trusted sources of information, but an invigorating source of ideas, innovation, connection, and collaboration.

FREEMAN 2023 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=5,144)

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)





Keeping up with the business environment

QUESTION

Rate the impact on each of the following on your attendance at in-person events.

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

+ Contingency plan for decreased travel budgets, inflation, and economic concerns

Despite the overwhelming desire to attend in-person events, business challenges are evident, and we must plan for contingencies accordingly.

We've heard from event planners who voice concerns about the impact that local politics and global affairs have on in-person event attendance. However, a low number of respondents report this to be true. On the contrary, attendees say budget fluctuations and financial concerns are the top circumstances impacting their in-person event attendance.

Women and NGEs (which make up 21% and 33% of our sample, respectively) are particularly impacted by these financial elements.

Circumstances impacting event attendance

50%



Decreased travel budget

44%



Inflation

44%



Economic concerns

42%



Perceived safety in event location

38%



Decreased training budgets

23%



World affairs

18%



Local/state policies and politics

QUESTION

What are the most significant professional challenges you experience in your work currently? (Select all that apply)

+ Respondents report more time management challenges and burnout

Respondents face more than financial concerns: they also report a lack of time and energy. Time management challenges and burnout are on the rise. Attendees are working harder than ever before as they try to prove their worth and earn promotions (26% on average and 35% of NGEGs) amidst a volatile economy and the rise of AI. According to [Randstad's annual Workmonitor Report](#), 52% of respondents are worried about the impact of economic uncertainty on their job security right now.

What respondents do not lack this year are opportunities to meet with their professional network in person, indicating that many professionals have returned to the office.

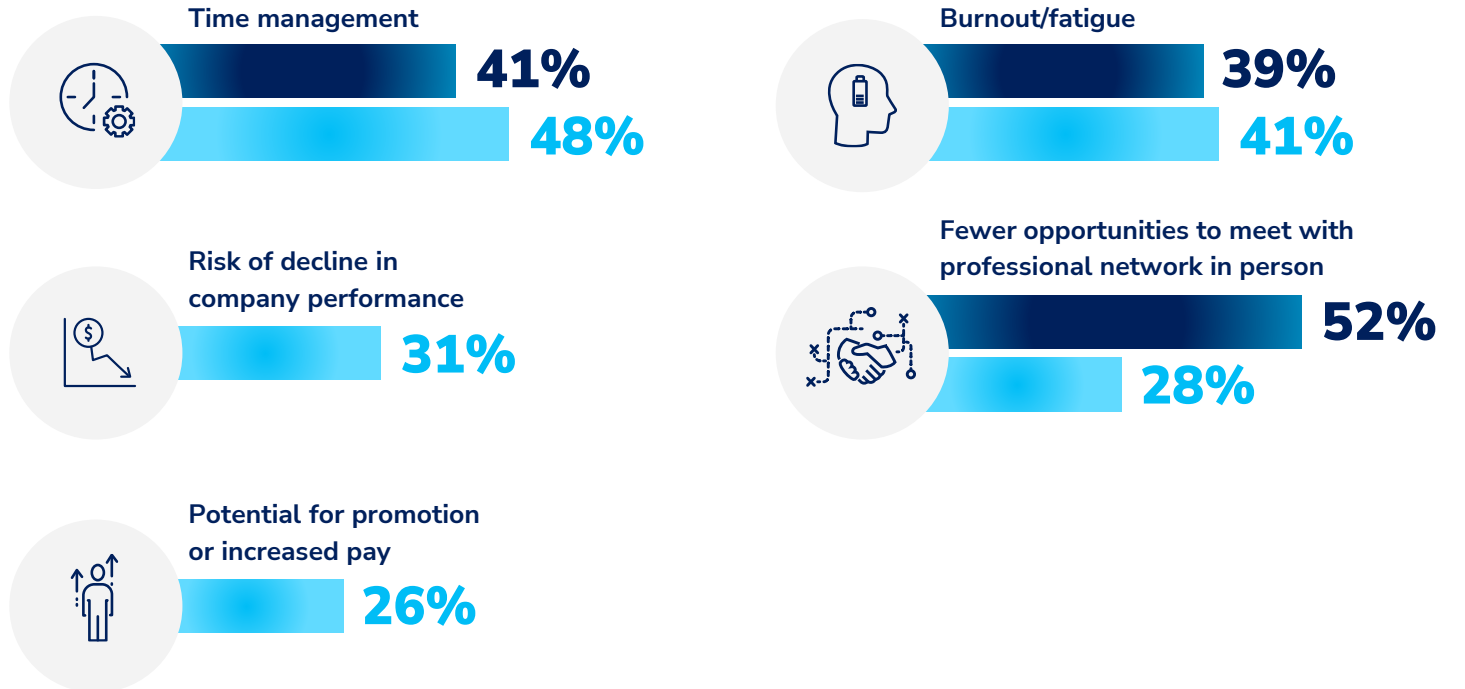
FREEMAN 2023 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=5,144)

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

Significant professional challenges



● 2023 ● 2024

QUESTION

You have indicated you have not attended either an in-person or online event in the last 12 months. Please indicate all the reasons why. (Select all that apply)

+ Workload & budget changes have prevented event attendance in past 12 months

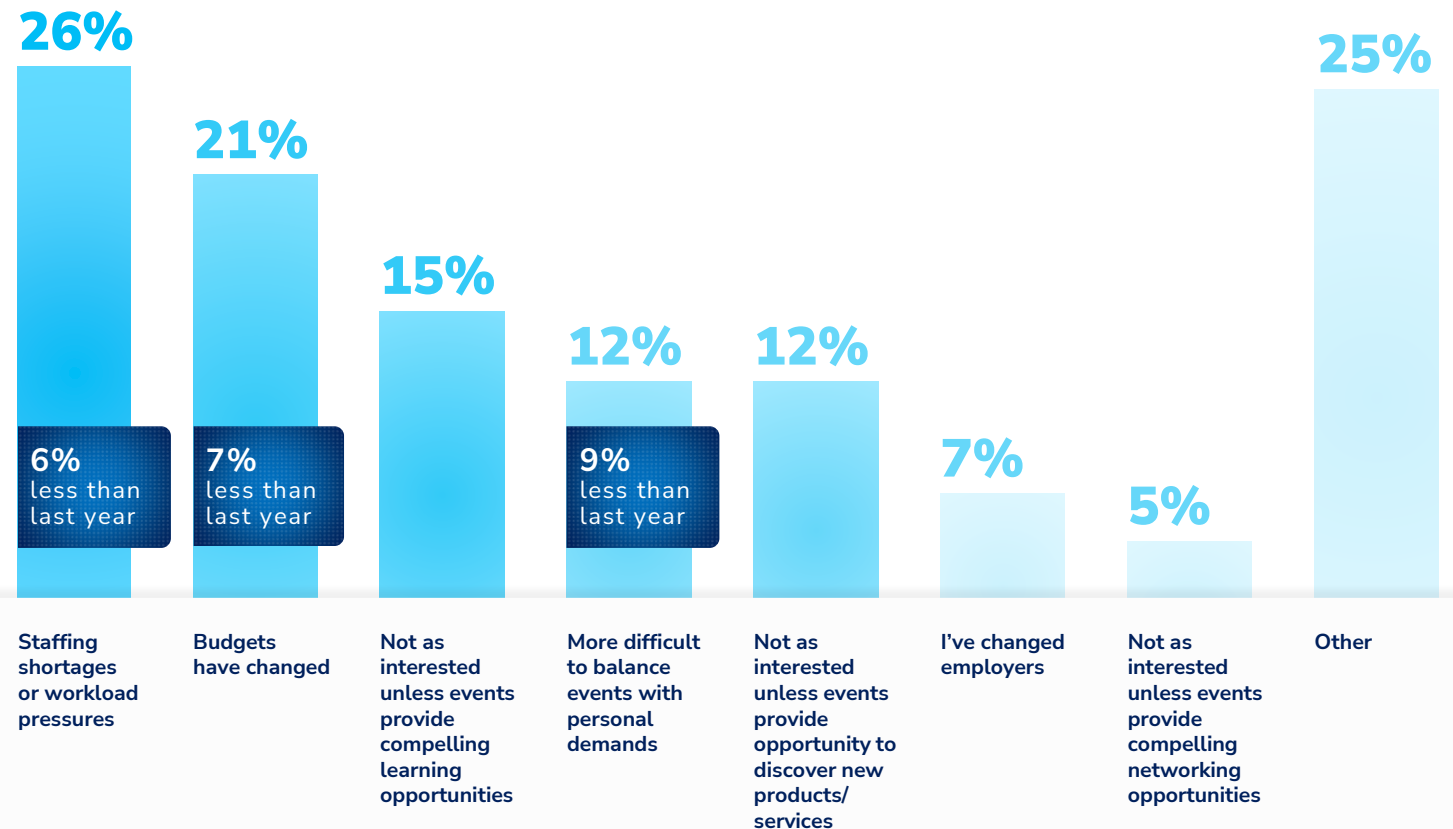
Of the 4% who have not attended any events in the past 12 months, staffing shortages and budgetary changes are primarily to blame, albeit less so than last year.

NGEGs were more likely to turn down an event experience in the last 12 months due to a lack of compelling learning opportunities. This indicates that these younger professionals make attendance decisions based on the quality of content: if it isn't going to help them learn and advance, they're not going to waste their time. It's in event planners' best interest to accept presentation topics intentionally and put quality of content before quantity of sessions filled.

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

Reasons for not attending in-person events in past 12 months



QUESTION

You have indicated you are now planning on attending fewer events in the next 12 months relative to the prior year. Please indicate all the reasons why. (Select all that apply)

FREEMAN 2023 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=5,144)

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

+ There is a 50% decrease in those who plan to attend fewer events

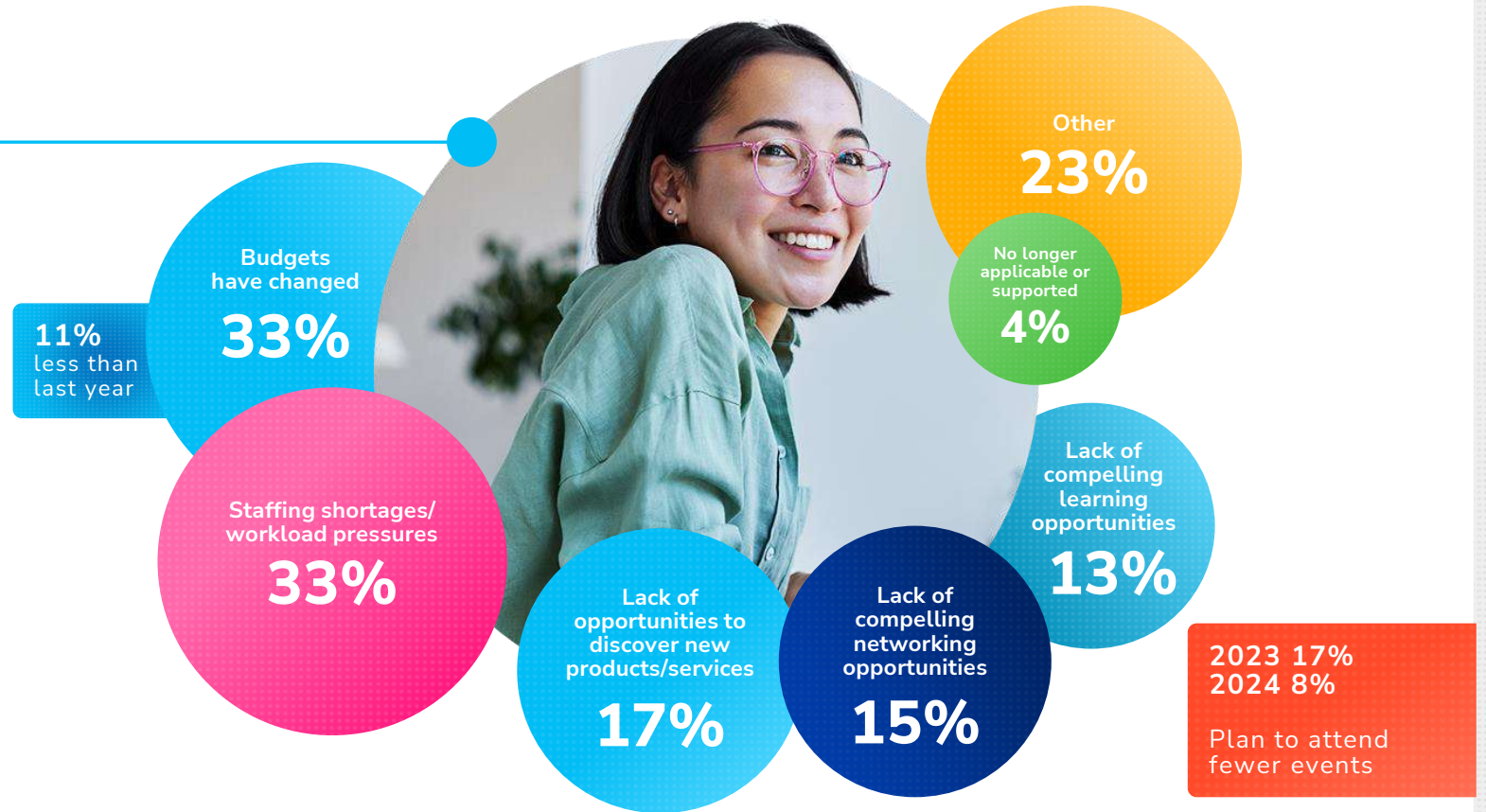
Only **8% of attendees** (primarily females and NGEs) plan to attend fewer events next year.

Of the 8%, we once again see staffing shortages and budgetary changes as the top constraints. With this being said, 11% fewer respondents cited budgets as a barrier, which we believe is a positive sign.

Other reasons included things like: events need to be local, venue changes, schedule conflicts, and events must meet current needs.

Overall, the data provides in-person attendance assurance.

Reasons for attending fewer events in the next 12 months



QUESTION 1

Approximately how many in-person events do you attend annually? (Select one)

QUESTION 2

Looking ahead to the next 12 months, how many in-person events do you expect to attend? (Select one)

FREEMAN 2023 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=5,144)

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

+ The majority of attendees expect to attend more in-person events in 2024

Constraints aside, 92% of attendees expect to attend more in-person events in the next 12 months compared to the average number of events they attend annually.

However, when compared to 2023, this year's respondents claimed to attend fewer annual events than last year's respondents.

Since nearly half of attendees are planning to attend only a select few events per year (2-3), it begs the question: how are you going to earn their presence?

Although attendance is expected to hold steady in the next 12 months, **attendees don't want more of the same. Professional priorities have changed.**

Number of in-person event attendance current vs. in-person events expected to attend in 2024



On average, attendees expect to attend four events over the next year

● 2024 CURRENT ● 2024 LOOKING AHEAD



Events solve top professional challenges

QUESTION

Please indicate what statement best reflects your alignment of professional and personal interests.

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

+ Work-life integration is in, work-life separation is out

Attendees' desire for professional and personal alignment comes as no surprise considering that an increasing number of professionals seek work that provides purpose and prioritizes work-life integration.

Although NGENs are more likely to seek close overlap (36%), whether you're 25 or 55, most respondents feel that at least some overlap is important.

With this being said, just like there's a vast range of personal interests within generations, there is a vast range of professional interests to account for too.

Importance of professional and personal interest alignment

It is important that there is some overlap between my professional and personal interest.

44%

It is important that my professional and personal interests are aligned.

31%

It is NOT important that my professional and personal interests are aligned.

25%

QUESTION

What are your top priorities in your work/career?

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

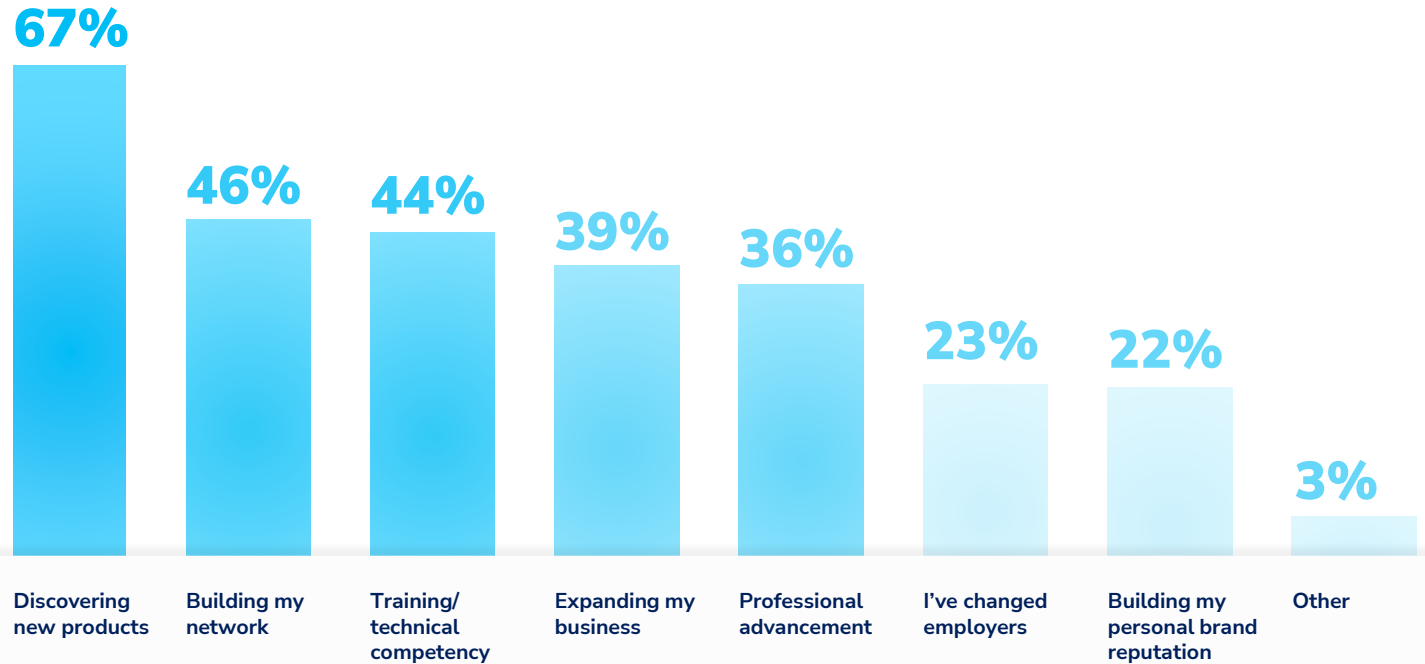
Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

+ Top professional priority is discovering new products

Overall, respondents prioritize “discovering new products” in their work/career. However, “discovering new products” is most important to respondents who view experience and commerce as the most important event elements (62% and 87% respectively). Conversely, those who prioritize learning at events ranked “training/technical competence” as the top professional priority (69%), and those who prioritize networking ranked “expanding my business” as their top professional priority (69%).

Discovering new solutions is particularly important for decision-makers. This preference, combined with the constant rise of new, cutting-edge innovations, like AI-powered software, suggests that professionals want access to products that have the power to impact their industries, their organizations, and their careers.

Top priorities in attendees' work/career



QUESTION

When it comes to in-person events, rate the importance of the following elements in your on-site experience.

+ Product discovery is considered the most important in-person event element

There is a clear alignment between the advantages an in-person event offers and attendees' professional priorities.

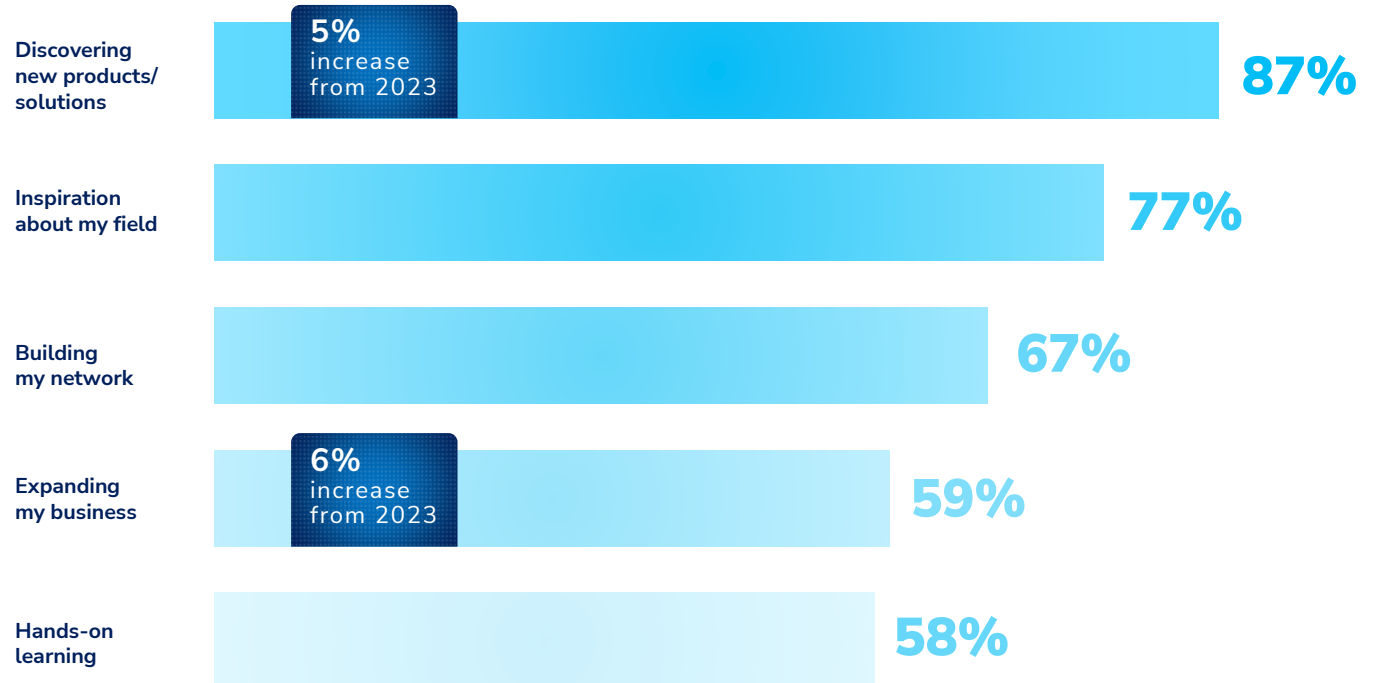
Just as more respondents prioritize discovering new products and solutions in their careers, more respondents prioritize discovering new products and solutions at events.

An increased number of respondents believe that expanding their business is an important in-person event element, and there is a slight decrease in those who view building their network as important. That may indicate that attendees want to expand their business by purchasing impactful new products, not meeting new people.

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

Most important elements for valuable in-person experiences



QUESTION

Rate how the following factors influence your participation in an upcoming in-person event. Results shown for Extremely Influential, Very Influential

+ Product discovery improves attendee experience and engagement

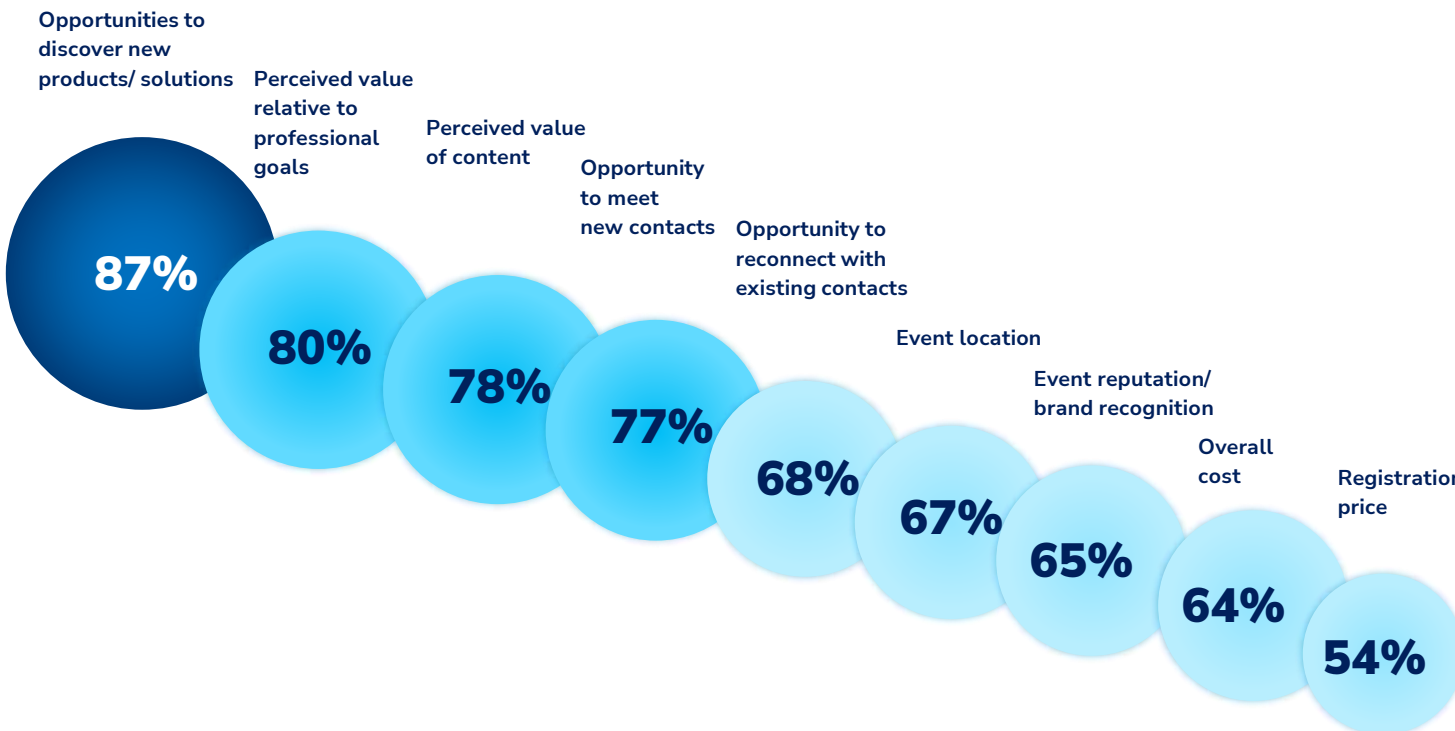
Not only does product and solution discovery improve attendees' overall on-site experience, but it also positively influences their participation, therefore increasing the likelihood of making genuine connections with exhibitors.

Product discovery is not the only factor that significantly improves engagement. 81% of females are influenced by the opportunity to meet new contacts and 72% of decision-makers are influenced by the opportunity to reconnect with existing contacts.

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

Top factors influencing participation at in-person events





Embrace exhibits and acknowledge unique needs

It's time to embrace the commercial nature of events. Most of the time, our spur to sell doesn't need to be kept a secret or softened with a happy hour. Many attendees are not only aware of events' commercial aspects, but they're okay with them.

In fact, the average attendee pursues innovative products so they can keep up with the latest solutions and excel in their careers. However, this is not the case for everyone. Different attendees want different expo experiences. It's up to exhibitors and event planners to work together to create an action plan for optimal attendee/exhibitor engagement.

QUESTION 1

Rank order the following elements in order of their importance when you attend in-person events.

+ Exhibits matter the most at in-person events (on average)

Exhibitors will be pleased to know that, on the whole, exhibits are ranked as the most important element at on-site events.

In 2023, 80% of exhibitors planned to exhibit at the same number of events or more in the next 12 months – which we can definitively claim was a good move.

However, not all exhibit experiences are created or promoted equally. Meeting organizers must take a closer look at the type of exhibits that appeal to different event-goers so that they can maximize everyone's experience.

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

Importance of In-Person Event Elements*

- 1 EXHIBITS
- 2 NETWORKING
- 3 EDUCATION SESSIONS
- 4 KEYNOTE/GENERAL SESSIONS
- 5 SPECIAL EVENTS



QUESTION 2

Rank the following ways you interact with companies/vendors/exhibitors while you are at an in-person event.

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

+ Attendees want hands-on, meaningful exhibitor interactions

Attendees don't just want to swing by an exhibit booth and grab a pamphlet. They want to engage with exhibitors intentionally through hands-on activities.

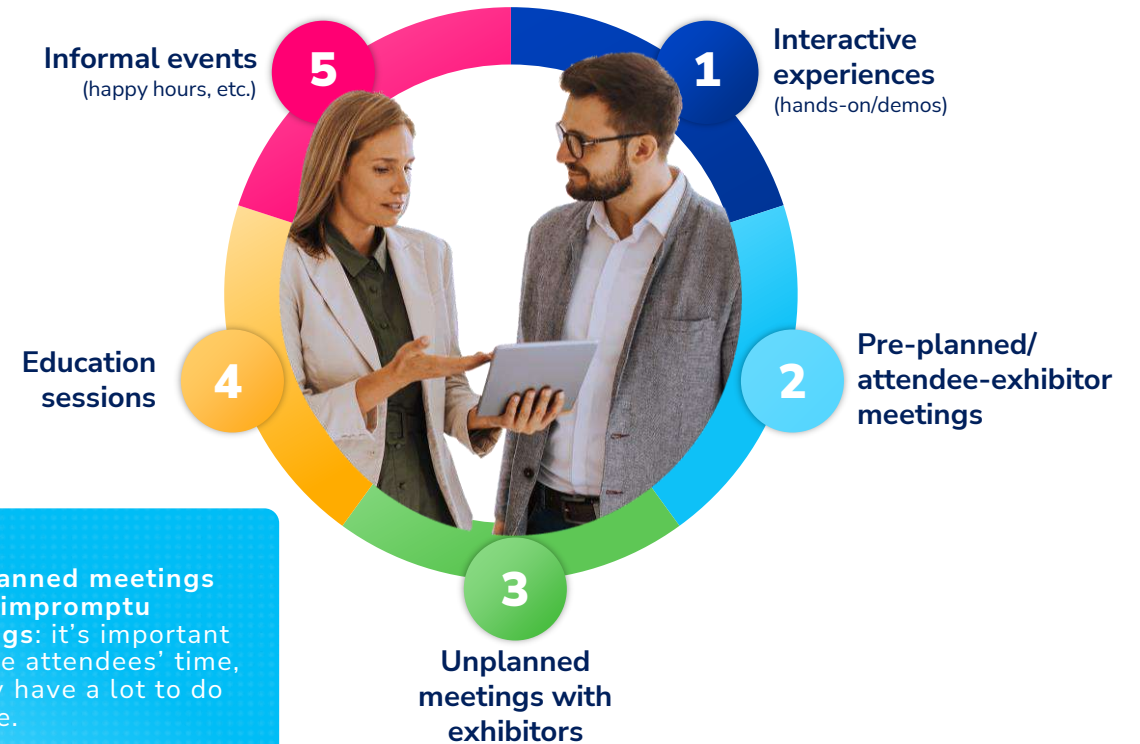
However, our 2023 exhibitor report uncovered that only 7% of exhibitors believe that lead nurture and engagement are top priorities.

There lies an issue. Exhibitors and marketers have long used badge scans and booth size as the critical indicators of a successful event, but the future is about measuring and monetizing quality connections over quantity of connections – and it's going to take work.

There is an opportunity for exhibitors to use the untapped time between registration and day one to schedule pre-planned, meaningful interactions with attendees.

It's time to close the gap between exhibitor and attendee objectives, and meeting organizers can help facilitate better connections between exhibitors and attendees.

Preferred Interaction with Exhibitors





So, what now?

QUESTION

If the most important in-person event you attended in the last year were to increase the cost of registration, what are the 2 most important enhancements you would need to see from the event to justify the additional cost?

+ Attendees require more innovation and improved education sessions to justify increased costs

We know that revamping your event strategy and measurement methods requires an investment of time and resources. So we asked attendees what would warrant an increase in registration cost. The average answer? More innovative providers, better educational topics, and enhanced networking opportunities.

However, once again, when we analyze responses based on XLNC preferences, we see varying results. Learners are more likely to require improved education sessions (52%), networkers want enhanced networking (55%), product-first people want more innovative vendors (46%), and experience-seekers care more about food and beverages (32%). The bottom line? Attendees won't flee at the sight of increased costs, as long as you're delivering what they want.

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

Event enhancements that justify increased registration cost



34%

More innovative vendors/ providers



30%

Better education session topics



27%

Enhanced networking opportunities



23%

Tours, offsite industry experiences



19%

Improved food and beverage offerings



18%

After-hours events



16%

Better event navigation, agenda planning



14%

Elevated after-hours entertainment



11%

Improved visual displays



4%

Other



A new era of events is here.

If we want to succeed and track our progress, we need to let attendees' motives guide our measurement methods.

Effective measurement examples include, but are not limited to:



EXPERIENCE

Sentiment
Location
Design

Show Floor Density
Experiential Activation
Visitors
Page Visits
Social Media Mentions
Social Media Sentiment



LEARNING

Training
Inspiration
Discovery

Attendees Engaged in Content
Attendees Taking Notes
Attendees Answering Polls
Total Sessions
CMEs/CEUs Claimed



NETWORKING

Social
Professional
Commercial

Connections Made
Meetings Held
Networking Participation



COMMERCE

Awareness
Evaluation
Purchasing

Decision Makers/Buyers
Total Leads
Show Floor Growth
New Exhibitors
Searches for Exhibitors



Key Takeaways

Although attendance trends are positive, we cannot become complacent. After all, event success relies on more than attendance alone, and there is no one-size-fits-all event strategy. Attendees have wildly different needs and they've become more intentional with how they spend their time, money, and energy. It's time for event planners and exhibitors to be more intentional too, by taking a closer look at who attendees are, what they want, and why they want it.

Personalization prevails

Different attendees desire different things, but they all expect their unique needs to be met. Now that AI enables personalization at scale, it's up to event planners to incorporate personalized experiences like curated agendas, persona-based wayfinding, and interest-driven meetups.

Objective-based measurement is essential

Acknowledging that, across the board, attendees want more personalization, quality content, and innovative experiences is only the first step. Now you need to look at who attends your events, discern how they're different, and calibrate your strategy and measurement methods to deliver an attendee-centric event.

Content comes first

Content can make or break an event, whether it's online or in person. The success of your keynotes, networking sessions, learning opportunities, and exhibit halls all depends on quality content. The key is knowing what attendees need so you can deliver the right content at the right time to help them achieve their goals.

The hardest tasks yield the greatest results

You don't need to do it all. In fact, you shouldn't. There's no need to expend significant resources on low-impact elements like speed meetups and wellness activities. Instead, refocus your efforts on immersive experiences, customization, and innovation, and recognize that improvement is possible only when we observe attendee objectives and tackle challenges head-on.

Change is the only constant

The world around us changes faster each day – we can't continue planning our events the same way as years past. We must always monitor the pulse of our social and economic landscape and begin planning from ground zero each year in order to maximize our efforts and impact.

Close the exhibitor/attendee gap

Our 2023 exhibitor report illuminated the gap between what exhibitors deliver and what attendees expect. It's up to event organizers to collaborate with exhibitors so that *all* stakeholders maximize their time and leave events satisfied.



If not now, when?

No one can deny that change is hard – but it’s also inevitable. We can’t continue to design events using the same strategies we always have and expect different results. Nor can we achieve excellence without putting in the work.

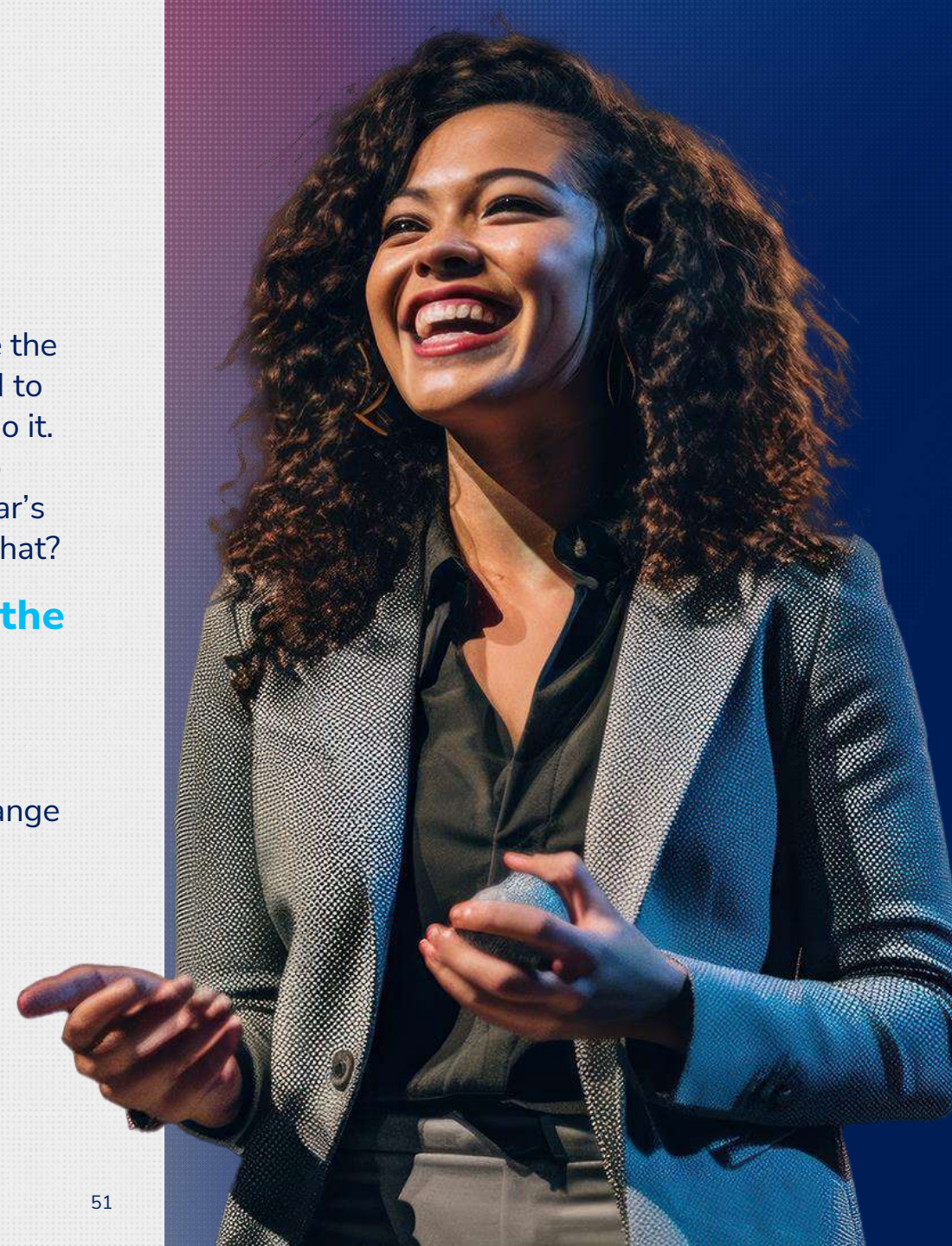
Attendees are more and more selective about which events are worth their time. It’s time to move from “Will they come?” to “What do I need to do to ensure that they come?” and from “We offer so many opportunities” to “This event is designed to optimize your time and growth.”

It may seem daunting – but you are equipped to succeed. Freeman is here to give you all the data you need about the status of events (and their attendees), to hold you accountable, and to help you achieve your goals.

But ultimately, it’s up to you to take the next step. You know what you need to do, and you have the resources to do it. So there is only one question left to answer: if not now... when? This year’s event? Next year’s? The year after that?

The reality is that now is the time. Your attendees will not keep coming back for more of the same.

Let’s get to work and create the change attendees want to see, together.



+ Get in Touch

Have a story about an event success or failure? An attendee trend you see? A recurring challenge you face? We want to hear from you. Contact us with your own firsthand findings.

For more data-driven insights into strategic event management and/or the XLNC framework, please reach out.

We are always seeking participant organizations invested in improving the event ecosystem. To participate in an upcoming survey or learn more about your stakeholders' needs, contact us.

Connect with

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Appendix

+ Methodology

This report is focused on **Freeman 2024 individuals** who attended in-person and online events over the last 12 months compared to the broader Freeman 2023 Benchmark.

The **Freeman 2024 Benchmark survey sample** comprises of mid-sized to large B2B convention and tradeshow attendees. The survey was conducted online in November 2023 with Freeman for-profit and not-for-profit event organizers.

All survey respondents were given the option to opt into a drawing for a \$100 Amazon gift card. Ten winners were randomly selected for \$100 gift cards. One was selected at random for a \$1,000 gift card.

	Freeman 2023 Benchmark	Freeman 2024 Benchmark
Fielding dates	Jan 9–23, 2023	Nov 16–30, 2023
Responses	5,523	2,094
Margin of error	±1.3%	±2.1%
Attend only in-person events	45%	63%
Attend only online events	2%	0.8%
Attended both in-person and online	48%	32%
In-Person = attended in-person + both	93%	96%
Online = attended online + both	50%	33%
Didn't attend events in last 12 months	5%	4%

FREEMAN 2023 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=5,144)

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

+ Profile of respondents

TOP BUSINESS TYPES

	Freeman 2023 Benchmark	Freeman 2024 Benchmark
Consumer Goods/Retail	19%	16%
Business Services	18%	6%
Government	10%	17%
Medical/Healthcare	8%	4%
Food/Beverage	7%	1%
Communications/IT	7%	4%
Building/Construction/ Home and Repair	6%	4%
Financial, Legal, and Real Estate	5%	1%

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

	Freeman 2023 Benchmark	Freeman 2024 Benchmark
Northeast	24%	14%
Southeast	18%	18%
Midwest	19%	31%
Southwest	10%	7%
West	20%	11%
Canada	4%	14%
All other countries	5%	4%

TOP JOB TITLES/FUNCTIONS

	Freeman 2023 Benchmark	Freeman 2024 Benchmark
Corporate Management	43%	33%
C-Level	7%	4%
Owner/Partner/President	20%	16%
Director	7%	4%
Technical functions	11%	15%
Sales/Business Dev.	8%	9%
Healthcare	6%	3%
Production/Ops/ Maintenance	4%	9%

FREEMAN 2023 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=5,144)

FREEMAN 2024 BENCHMARK

Those who attend in-person events (n=2,002)

+ Profile of respondents (continued)

ROLE IN ATTENDANCE DECISIONS

	Freeman 2023 Benchmark	Freeman 2024 Benchmark
I am the key decision maker	51%	44%
I have significant influence in getting attendance approved	33%	34%

GENDER

	Freeman 2023 Benchmark	Freeman 2024 Benchmark
Male	62%	77%
Female	34%	21%
Non-binary/Non-conforming	<1%	<1%
Prefer not to say	4%	2%

COMPANY SIZE

	Freeman 2023 Benchmark	Freeman 2024 Benchmark
Small (up to 100)	61%	57%
Medium (101–2,000)	22%	28%
Large (> 2,000)	15%	13%
Don't know	2%	2%

AGE

	Freeman 2023 Benchmark	Freeman 2024 Benchmark
Gen Z (18–26)	1%	6%
Millennials (27–42)	23%	27%
Gen X (43–58)	38%	39%
Boomers (59+)	33%	26%
Prefer not to say	5%	2%
Average Age	49	49