Industry Update: New Data on Trade Show and Event Marketing
INDUSTRY PULSE SURVEY

FINAL REPORT

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Where We’ve Been

The Timeline of Trade Shows Pre and Post

2019

Companies exhibited at an average of 55.5 trade shows, including 28.6 regional events, 16.9 national events, and 10.0 international events.

COVID begins causing event cancellations in February (internationally) and March (domestically). For two years, companies participate in an average of 15 in-person events. Virtual trade shows and events become commonplace.

20/21

The entire live-events industry was decimated by COVID. But trade shows are (finally) back! The question is to what degree – and what will next year look like?
COVID loosens its grip on the industry. Companies exhibit at an average of 39.9 events, more than double 2020 and 2021 numbers.

Trade shows are back! Companies plan to exhibit at an average of 47.2 in-person events – 19 percent fewer than in 2019 (but 6 percent more than in 2018).

**REGIONAL**

During COVID, many theorized that smaller, regional events would incur less of a hit due to the fact their attendance rates may allow them to skirt bans on “mass gatherings.” The data backs that theory, as regional events have already returned to pre-COVID levels. But that trend may be on the decline in the coming year.

**INTERNATIONAL**

International trade shows took, perhaps, the biggest hit in terms of exhibitor participation. In 2019, companies exhibited at an average of 10.0 international trade shows compared to 4.9 currently planned for 2023.

**VIRTUAL**

Now that in-person events are being held safely, companies’ interest in virtual trade shows has dwindled. In 2020, companies exhibited at an average of 4.6 virtual events but only plan to participate in an average of 1.5 in 2023.

**NATIONAL**

National trade shows have not yet returned to pre-COVID levels. While companies were attending an average of 16.9 national trade shows in 2019, they currently plan to exhibit at 14.4 in 2023. Still, that number is definitely moving in the right direction.
How many trade shows per year?
How many trade shows per year?
How many trade shows per year?
AVERAGE NUMBER OF 2023 IN-PERSON TRADE SHOWS
47 EVENTS

BREAKDOWN OF 2023 SHOWS

REGIONAL 27.9 Events
NATIONAL 14.4 Events
INTERNATIONAL 4.9 Events
VIRTUAL 1.5 Events

How many trade shows per year?
39% of Companies are Still Exhibiting at Fewer Events than Before COVID

- **Budget Limitations/Reductions**: 27%
- **Lower Anticipated Attendance**: 20%
- **Reduced ROI Concerns**: 15%
- **Reallocation of Funds**: 14%

Some Events Didn't Survive COVID
Nearly nine out of 10 companies will return to pre-COVID exhibiting levels by the end of 2023.
How Could Show Organizers Change Your Mind?

One-Third of Companies Say Nothing Could Alter their Plans

- 63%: Reduce the Cost of Booth Space
- 50%: Reduce Material Handling/Service Fees
- 40%: Guarantee Minimum Attendance
- 37%: Provide Audited Attendance Data
Where are Exhibit-Marketing Budgets At?  
AND WHERE ARE THEY HEADING?

More Than Half Have Returned  
$1.25M

2023 Budgets Should Increase  
34%

Some Could Take Longer to Return  
24%

Some Might Never Return  
10%

Has Your Exhibiting Budget Returned to Pre-COVID Levels?

60%

MOST EXHIBITING BUDGETS HAVE RETURNED
How Does Your Per-Show Investment Compare to Your Pre-COVID exhibit-marketing investments?

- 32%: We are spending more per show
- 43%: We are spending the same amount
- 25%: We are spending less per show
The 14 percent of companies planning further cuts to their exhibit-marketing budgets in 2023 are looking to curb costs by exhibiting at fewer events, sending fewer staffers to work their booths, and reducing the size of their booth space at shows.

**How Will You Cut Exhibit-Related Expenses in 2023**

- **13%** Exhibit at Fewer Trade Shows & Events
- **9%** Send Fewer Staffers to Work the Booth
- **6%** Reducing the Size of Booth Space at Shows
GO BIG OR GO HOME?

In 2022, roughly one-quarter of exhibitors reserved smaller booth spaces than they were used to prior to the pandemic. And according to the data, that trend will continue for some while others plan to enlarge their booth spaces moving forward.

24% Reduced Booth Space
Currently, one-fourth of survey respondents are exhibiting in smaller booth spaces than they were prior to the pandemic.

8% Plan Further Reduction
Less than one in 10 companies intend to further reduce their booth space sizes in 2023.

87% Will Maintain or Grow Spaces
While 73 percent of companies plan to maintain the size of their booths in 2023, an additional 14 percent plan to reserve larger booth spaces in the coming year.
The Issue of Attendance

**THE FACTS**

**ATTENDANCE IS DOWN**
Roughly eight out of 10 companies say attendance at their post-COVID shows has been lower (56 percent) or significantly lower (27 percent) than before.

83%

**SOME MEET EXPECTATIONS**
Despite lower attendance, a little over one-third of exhibitors say attendance rates have met or exceeded their pre-show expectations.

36%

**ATTENDEE QUALITY IS UP**
Nearly half of exhibitors say attendee quality is somewhat higher (36 percent) or significantly higher (10 percent) than at pre-COVID events. An additional 37 percent say attendee quality is roughly the same.

46%
The majority of exhibitors who track ROI say their returns from post-pandemic trade shows are the same or higher than their pre-COVID returns, indicating that despite lower attendance rates, face-to-face marketing is still a solid investment.
The Value of Virtual Events

Or Lack Thereof

FREE

DEFINITELY/PROBABLY: 41%
MAYBE: 33%
PROBABLY NOT/DEFINITELY NOT: 26%

PAID

DEFINITELY/PROBABLY: 14%
MAYBE: 21%
PROBABLY NOT/DEFINITELY NOT: 65%
How Important

We asked exhibit managers to rate how significant each of the following factors was in their decision to exhibit or not exhibit at a given trade show (on a scale of one to five).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01. Attendee Quality</td>
<td>★★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02. Estimated Attendance</td>
<td>★★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03. Cost of Booth Space</td>
<td>★★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04. Audited Attendee Info</td>
<td>★★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05. Material Handling Cost</td>
<td>★★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06. Additional Mktg Opps</td>
<td>★★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07. Competitors’ Plans</td>
<td>★★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08. Cost of Labor/Services</td>
<td>★★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09. Internal Bandwidth</td>
<td>★★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Show Dates/Location</td>
<td>★★★★★★</td>
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Two-thirds of corporate travel bans are attributed to budget cuts/concerns, while 22 percent are still being attributed to COVID-related concerns.

**CATEGORIZATION OF CORP. TRAVEL BANS**

- **COVID**: 9%
- **Budget**: 8%
- **Other**: 1%

- **Only 9 percent of companies are still enforcing travel restrictions.**
- **Most bans consider some trade shows “essential travel.”**
- **Only 1 percent of companies prohibit all event-related travel.**

**2023 TRAVEL PLANS**

- **More travel in ‘23**: 45%
- **Maintain travel in ‘23**: 46%
- **Less travel in ‘23**: 7%
- **Unsure/Don’t know**: 2%
Companies Are Committing Earlier

Uncertainty is never good for business, and the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19 and related variants caused companies to delay their booth-space commitments. But it appears that trend has shifted, as the vast majority are committing on more traditional timelines. Today, nearly seven in 10 companies are committing to exhibit at shows at least six months out from show dates.
How do you view sponsorships in the context of exhibit marketing?

- Significant Potential
- Moderate Potential
- Minimal Potential
- Waste of Money

How much of your budget do you invest in sponsoring trade shows/events?

- None
- Less than 3%
- 3-5%
- 6-10%
- 11-20%
- More than 20%
Roughly seven out of 10 companies proactively establish measurable goals to gauge the effectiveness of their trade show/event sponsorships.

68% Meet Objectives

Less than half of sponsorships meet marketers' objectives

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metrics</th>
<th>% That Tracks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/Participation</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booth Traffic</td>
<td>44%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sales Leads</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brand Impressions</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media Coverage</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Media Impressions</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Return on Investment</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Website Traffic</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Show Surveys Data</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data Provided by Show Org.</td>
<td>28%</td>
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Reduce Costs

Customizable Options

Flexible Pricing

Audited Data

2023 Plans

- Increase Spending
- Maintain Spending
- Decrease Spending
- Unsure/Don't Know
Exhibit Marketing Outlook

BY THE NUMBERS

What Makes You Optimistic About Your Exhibit Marketing Program?

- Increased Attendance: 22%
- Improved Economy: 17%
- Exhibiting at New Shows: 15%
- Improved Execution: 19%
- New/Improved Exhibit: 16%
- Enhanced Lead Management: 12%

Optimistic: 77%
Hopeful: 23%
Cautious: 0%
Pessimistic: 0%
WHAT CAN SHOW ORGANIZERS DO TO INCREASE YOUR ROI?

- Reduce Exhibit-Related Expenses
- Drive Attendees to the Exhibit Hall
- Ensure Dedicated Exhibit-Hall Hours
- Comp Educational Offerings For Exhibitors
- Allow More Free Passes for Exhibiting Companies
- Provide Exhibitors With Audited Data
“As an exhibitor, I worry show organizers are not doing as much as they can to combat increasing show services costs. If show services are two or three times more expensive, that cuts into what we spend on booth space and sponsorships.”

- Manager, Trade Shows & Events
“Work with GSCs to reduce material handling fees, and ensure that exhibitors aren’t paying for services that impact the show organizer more than the exhibitors or attendees.”

-Event Marketing Specialist
“If there is a learning component, managers are more apt to approve the travel because their direct reports are getting market info, technical education, etc. rather than it just being T&E for booth duty.”

-Senior Marketing Communications Specialist
“Focus on connecting attendees to the exhibit hall, whether it’s through F&B on the show floor, dedicated exhibit-hall hours, or activities on the show floor. If attendees come for the education but never set foot on the show floor, it’s a missed opportunity for us and them.”

-Director, Sales & Marketing
“I can’t understand why we’re still forced into buying countless hours of service we don’t need. Case in point: Two technicians for a minimum of two hours to install a TV rented through a third party. It literally took them four minutes, but it cost me $2,000 in labor alone.”

-Event Manager
“Exhibitors need a seat at the table. We pay the bills, yet it usually feels like our voices aren’t being heard and that organizers see us as little more than a necessary evil. If you aren’t going to work with us, at least try not to work against us.”

-Manager, Global Events