

# The Virtual Event Experience

How B2B marketers are creating more engaging and more valuable virtual events in an all-digital world



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# Introduction

With the growing adoption of virtual events in our digital-first world, today's prospects and customers are no longer satiated with static, impersonal experiences. And the unfortunate truth is that the demo webinars and text-heavy slide-by-slide presentations of old simply don't cut it anymore, nor do they do much to accurately gauge interest and engagement.

With the recent lack of physical face-to-face interaction, the focus on and importance of virtual events only continues to grow as a source for thought leadership and driving demand. Now more than ever, it's crucial that organizations are able to take advantage of new opportunities to get ahead—and stay ahead—of the virtual event curve as well as their competition.

For B2B marketing and sales teams to emerge as leaders in this increasingly saturated virtual event market—especially against the traditional event planner—they must ensure their ability to truly engage and delight today's audiences, while also removing friction from their buyers' journeys. Today, organizations must deliver more: more intelligence, more interaction, more insight, more highly-personalized experiences through a variety of media and applications. Otherwise, customers risk falling through the gaps as organizations risk falling behind.

Now, and moving forward, it's critical for companies to nurture buyers and educate customers before, during, and after every virtual event to accelerate the journey, build loyalty, and drive rich engagement at every stage.

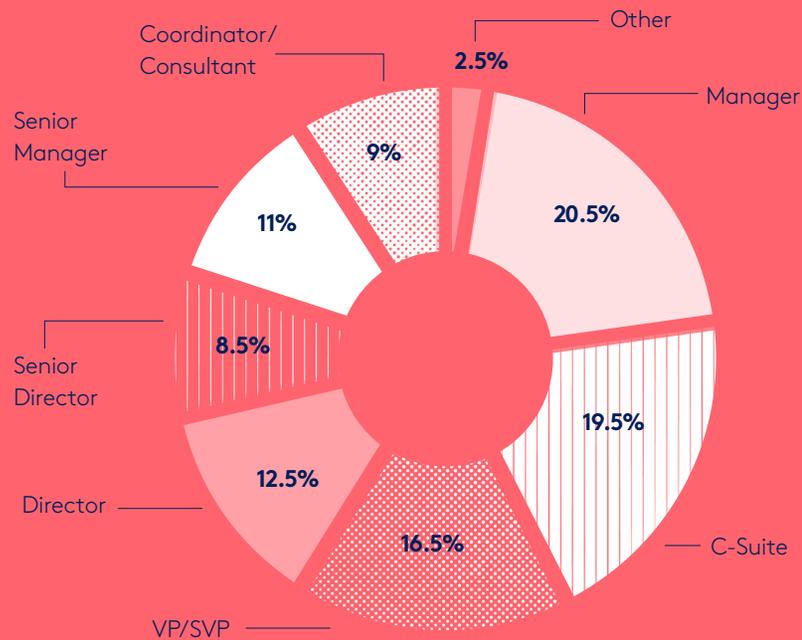
This new research from PathFactory and Heinz Marketing uncovers the foundations of today's virtual event experiences, deconstructing the entire virtual event lifecycle to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities for organizations to learn from, develop, and implement throughout their own virtual event programs.

**The virtualization of events is only just beginning—how will you lead the pack?**

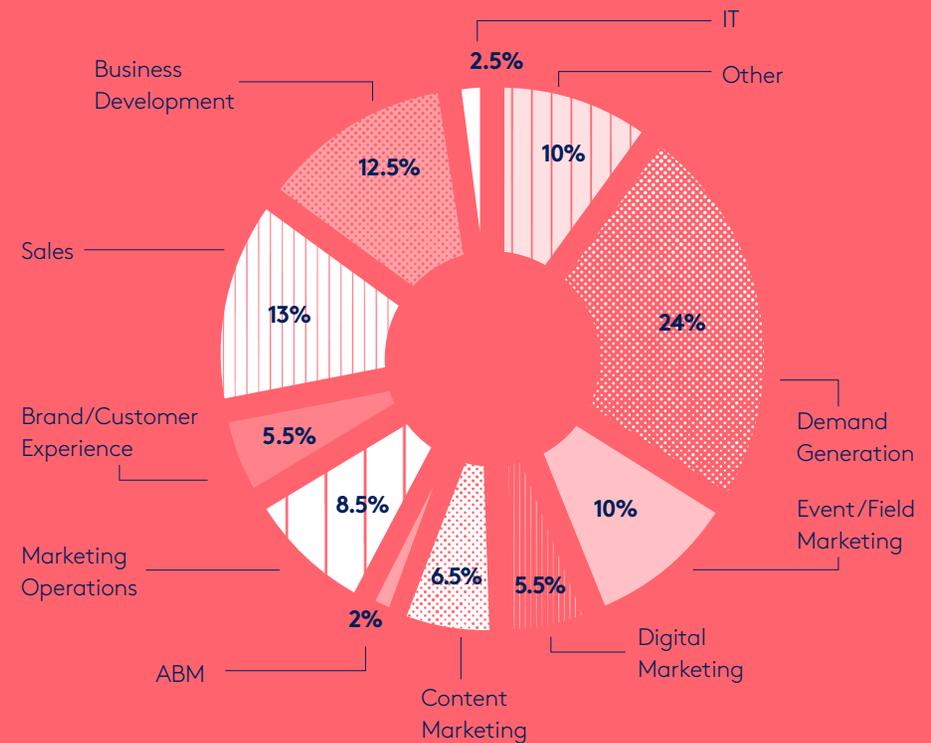
# Methodology

To better understand the B2B virtual event experience, PathFactory and Heinz Marketing conducted a survey in May 2020. The following data comes from 200 B2B professionals across multiple experience levels, company sizes, and industries.

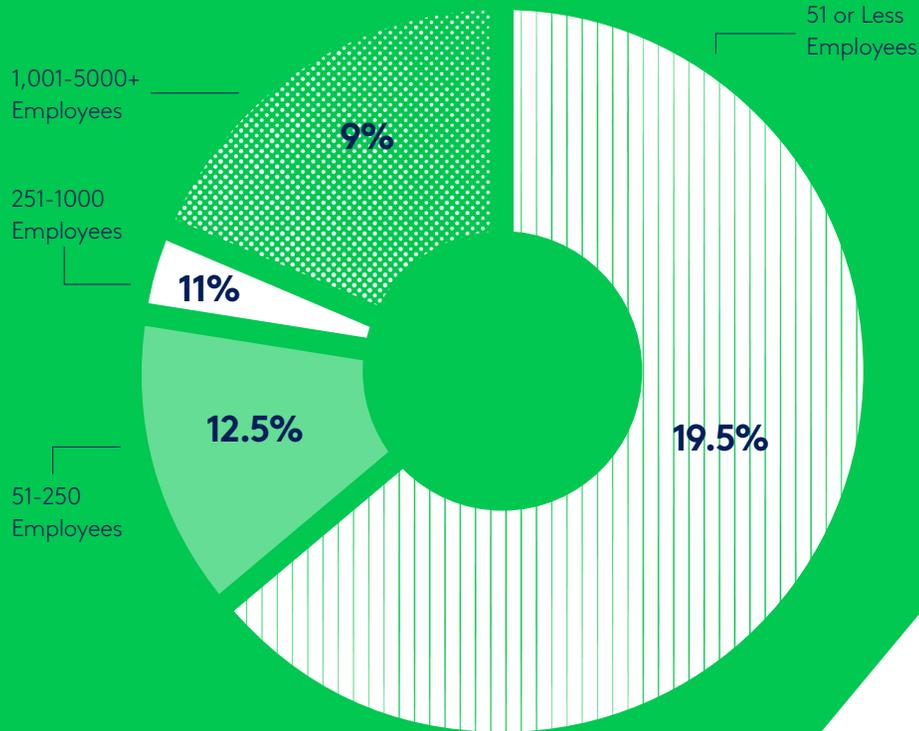
## Level of responsibility



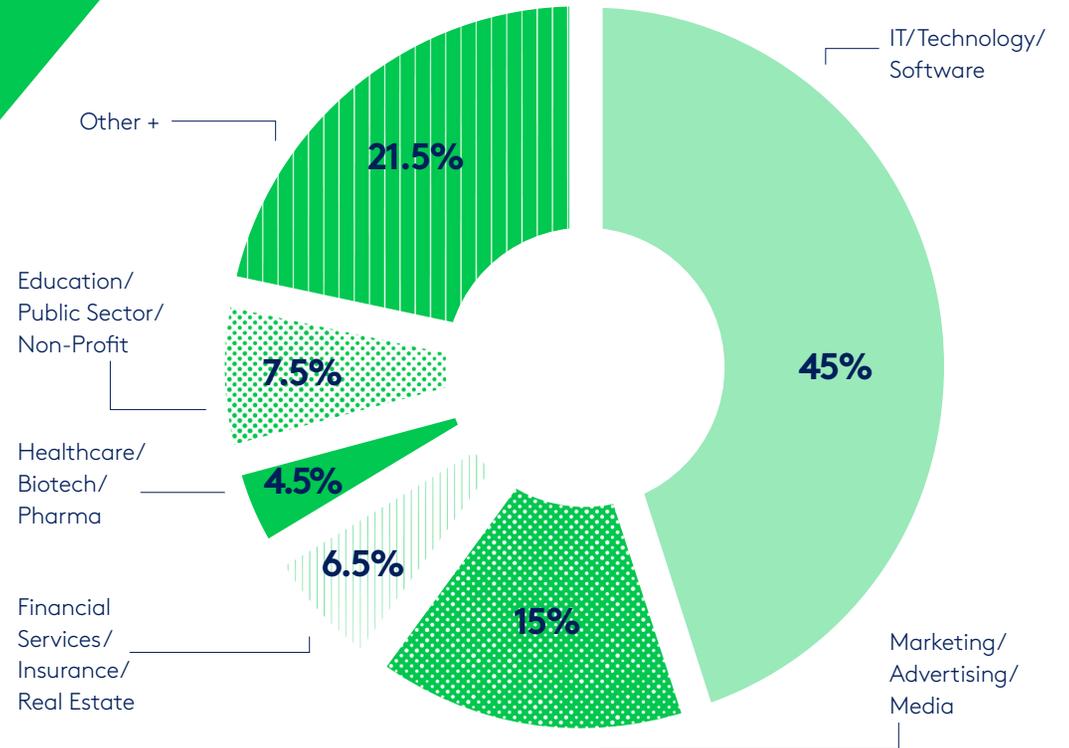
## Functional Role



### Company Size



### Industry



# Key findings

1. Audiences crave participation and interaction above all else.

# 67%

of virtual event attendees report that having opportunities to participate and interact with the speakers and other attendees makes them more inclined to stay, listen, and engage. Only 9% of respondents report that having virtual booths as a part of an event actually keeps them engaged.

2. Pre-event effectiveness is an uphill battle.

# 27.2%

of respondents claim they are effective at generating registrations and attendees for a virtual event. The biggest challenges identified included working against short timeframes, underperforming emails and ads, the inability to reach the right audience, and lacking consistent messaging to market the event.

### 3. Driving attendance is a challenge for most.

If you think you're alone in your attendance woes, you're not. Only 7.5% of respondents report that they see a typical attendance rate of more than 75% for their virtual events. And even when attendees are present, lacking audience participation, missing the typical human interactions associated with in-person events, and mid-event drop-off are challenges that even the best companies are still working to overcome.

### 4. Post-event tactics are just as tricky.

Just as the pre-event and in-event stages have their roadblocks, post-event tactics prove just as challenging. Only 18% of respondents are effective at continuing to generate engagement post-event. While producing on-demand recordings, launching event-specific nurture flows, and creating repurposed content from the event are all being done, these tactics don't seem to drive the kind of meaningful engagement with attendees that organizations hope for.

### 5. A lack of individual attendee data hinders virtual event experiences.

Without the right data on their audiences or their audience's journey through the event lifecycle, it's no wonder respondents feel their virtual event efforts are going to waste. 38% of companies say they are most challenged by not knowing what content from an event resonated with attendees the most. And 33% feel they lack the right data to effectively measure live event engagement at all.

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#### The takeaways

To drive meaningful engagement and provide rich, relevant user experiences, organizations must work to ensure they not only provide audiences with opportunities for interaction and participation, but that they also have the capabilities to capture attendee data and appropriately utilize it throughout their virtual event lifecycle.

The needs for personalization and interaction are high priorities for today's audiences. And to truly reap the rewards of a virtual event program, organizations must deliver both in spades. But not in a way that feels generic or uninspired—but in a way that feels truly meaningful and relevant.

# Overview

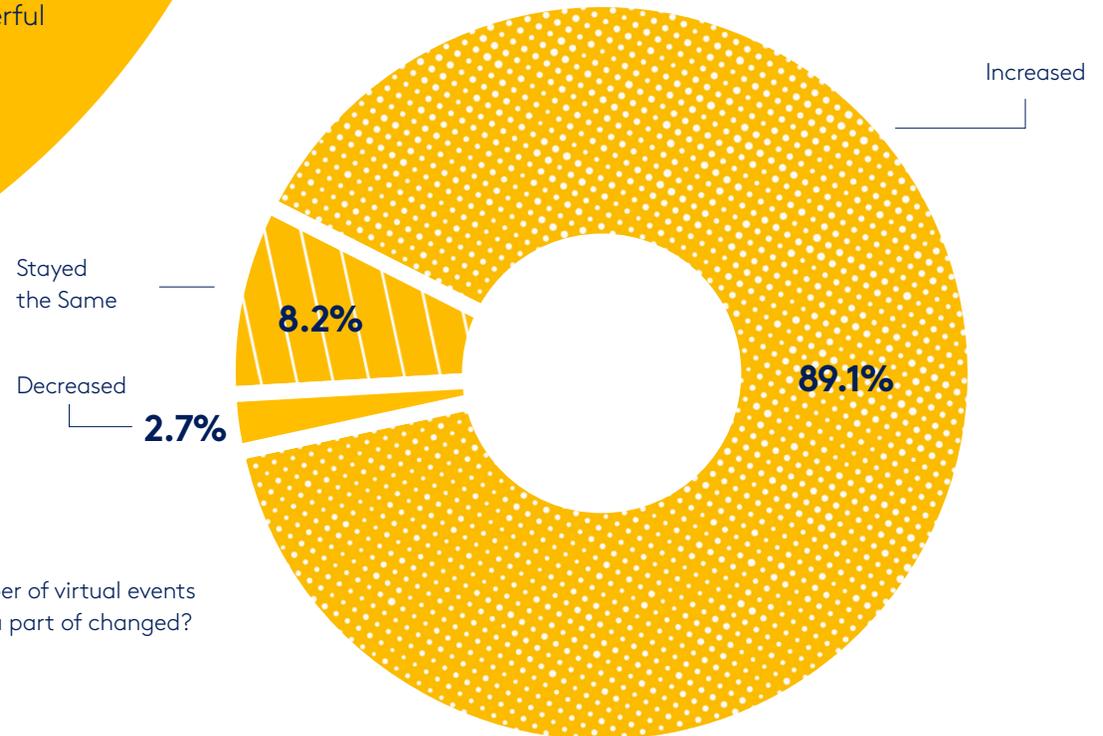
Before we dive into the different stages of a virtual event, let's first set the stage of where we are today.

Like we said, the recent lack of physical face-to-face interaction has only grown the necessity and importance of virtual events. And now, this digital avenue has been recognized as a powerful way for organizations to stay relevant and in front of their peers, prospects, and customers.

## Virtual events are growing

Nearly 9 in 10 B2B professionals have increased the number of virtual events that their organization either hosts or is a part of has increased in the last 90 days.

But increasing the number of virtual events is no small undertaking. Providing virtual experiences that offer true value to leads, prospects, and customers alike requires a thorough understanding of those buyers' journeys, what engages them, and how they ultimately make decisions.

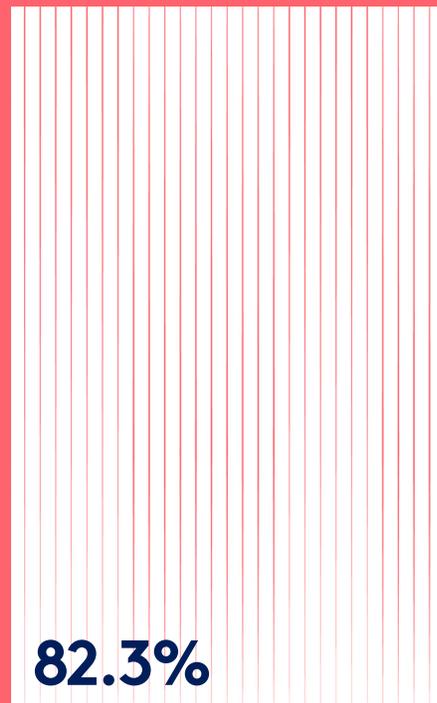


Q. In the last 90 days, how has the number of virtual events that your organization hosts or been a part of changed?

# Sales and marketing collaboration is critical

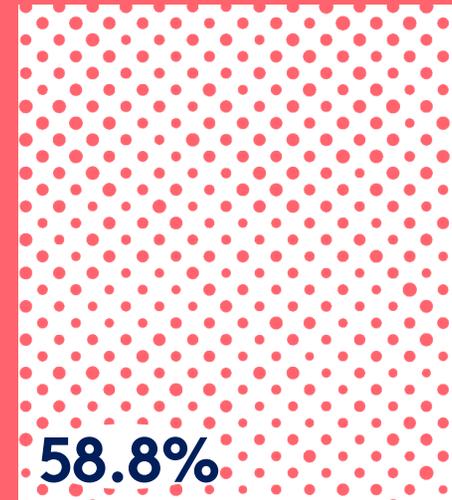
82% of marketers and 59% of salespeople report they help plan or are a part of their virtual events in some way. As to what role they play? That requires further determination.

However, one thing is clear: virtual events are a full-funnel opportunity. And therefore the planning and execution of virtual events relies on the collaboration of sales and marketing—not only to share the load of the event itself, but also to ensure that the topics, lessons, and content are appropriate and relevant for the audience taking part.



Marketing

Q. Typically, what is your role in a virtual event (webinar, virtual trade show, etc.)?



Sales

## Webinars, virtual vendor events, and fireside chats lead the pack

The format of the event itself also lends a big hand in the experiences of the audience.

While webinars and webinar series are—unsurprisingly—the virtual event of choice for 95% of respondents, other popular avenues include small-scale, single-vendor virtual events (68%) and more casual virtual chats like coffee talks or fireside chats (63%).

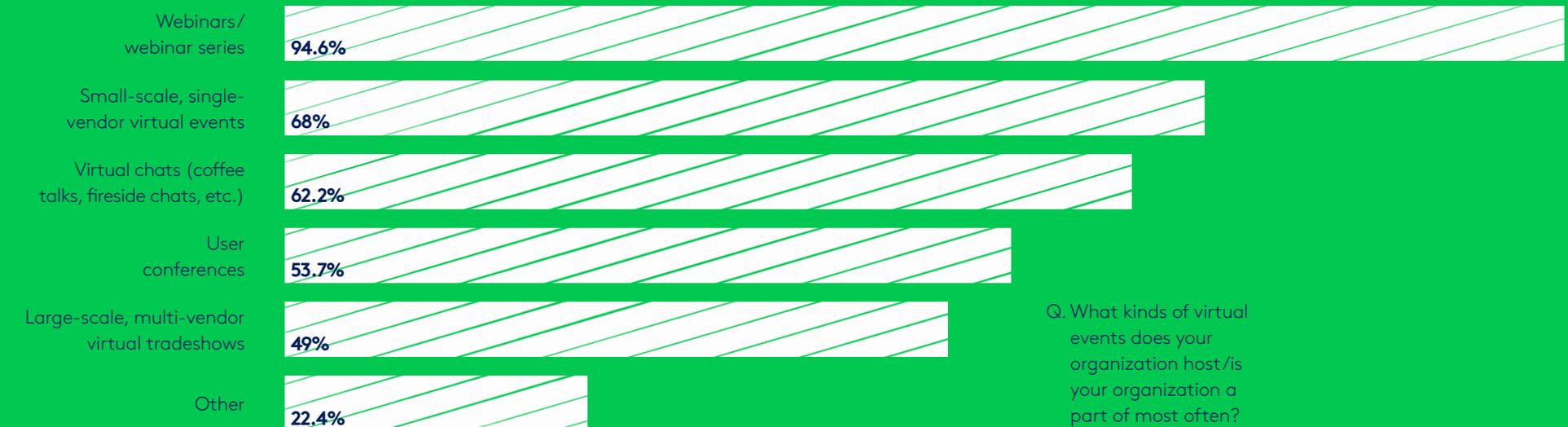
On the larger end of the virtual event spectrum, we see user conferences and large-scale, multi-vendor tradeshows on the radars of 54% and 49% of respondents, respectively.

And, rounding out the virtual event space, respondents have also utilized virtual events for online training, presentations, and kick-off events like SKOs.

## A hypothesis on large vs. small-scale virtual events

While larger virtual events open a multitude of doors to new audiences, new networks, and new opportunities, they are also increasingly expensive—in terms of people, time, and money—to produce. On top of the production costs, large-scale virtual events also typically require new tools to support the complex requirements of the program. And unfortunately, a handful of tools that are used for these larger experiences have historically felt clunky, outdated, and offered poor experiences for all involved—planners, sponsors, and attendees.

Smaller virtual events, on the other hand, require far fewer resources to produce effectively. And these events, arguably, offer comparable if not better experiences for the attendees, feeling more personal, more authentic, and more engaging. Paired with quicker production times and readily-available technology, small-scale virtual events like webinars, chats, and panels offer powerful alternatives for companies embracing digital-only experiences, but aren't able (or wanting) to spend the time or money required for larger events.



# Observations in attendance rates and event types

When it comes to the types of events utilized by companies with better attendance rates, we see the following:

- The most successful companies (those with over 75% attendance rates) most often utilize large-scale, multi-vendor virtual tradeshow and user conferences.
- Moderately effective companies (those with 51-75% attendance rates) most often utilize small-scale, single-vendor virtual events and webinars.
- And companies with less than 25% attendance rates most often utilize—and are nearly twice as likely to utilize—virtual chats than any other cohort.

## Is the higher attendance of large-scale virtual events an effect of sponsors helping extend the reach?

It might be. After all, the more companies marketing an event to their own specific audiences, the more people you're able to reach.

**The implication:** Co-promotion is a powerful way to drive attendance to a virtual event, big or small. The more you can do to extend your reach to new audiences, the better chances you have to drive greater attendance to your virtual event.

# Food for thought

What might this data suggest? As attendance rates grow, your marketable audience (as word and influence spreads) grows too, as well as your confidence in being able to utilize and get the desired ROI from larger and larger events.

On the other side, organizations that show poorer performance rely more on smaller endeavors that require less planning, less content, and less investment overall. With these types of events, organizations can hone their skills, find what works, and continue to refine that formula with fewer risks involved.

But regardless of the size of the virtual event, identifying the objectives of the event, ensuring alignment with the proposed audience, and clearly defining the ideal attendee experience are three steps to take before selecting vendors or tools to use to execute the event.

The audience and their experience should always set the path.

## Cutting through the noise

Traditional, externally focused, in-person events still serve as a great source for MQLs. But the rise of virtual events has made it easier than ever to do this and more, providing thought leadership, community building, and access to others all from the ease of your computer.

But this ease comes at a price. And as virtual events have proliferated, so too has the noise needed to cut through. Because while organizations can utilize as many types of virtual events as they desire, all that work is for naught if no one attends or engages with your content.

How do you ensure that your virtual event can cut through the noise? What hindrances challenge your ability to find success? As we'll discuss in the following sections of this report, the virtual event experience relies on more than a catchy title and flashy speaker. And to deliver a truly valuable, relevant virtual event experience for your audience, the entire lifecycle of a virtual event must be put into view: before the event occurs, while the event is on, and long after the event is over.

# Pre-event

How will your audiences know about your event? That's the primary focus of the pre-event. Ensuring that you're equipped with the right message, the right audience, and the right channels to not only reach the right people but to also provide them a compelling enough reason to register.

But this is easier said than done. Take email for example: fewer than one-quarter of email offers are interesting enough to even open, according to a 2019 UK Adobe survey, meaning that over three-quarters of your emails are left unread and ignored. On LinkedIn, 89% of companies might be increasing their use of the platform for advertising, according to a 2018 Digiday survey, but this also means increased competition, more expensive ads, and more saturated news feeds with content that all looks and sounds the same.

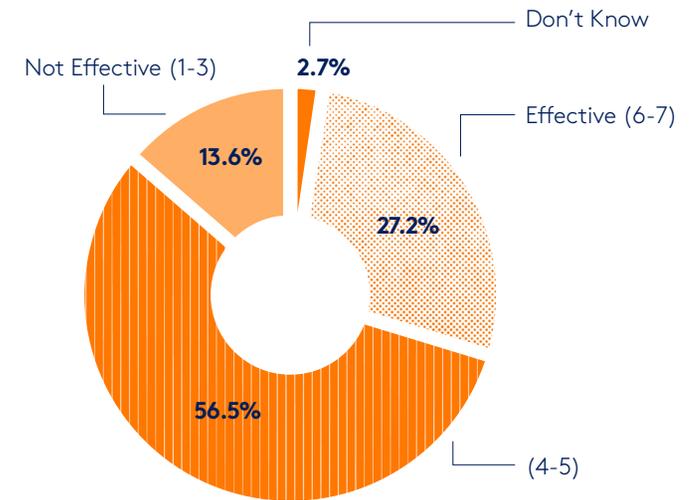
As the influx of virtual events continues, so too will the barrage of offers asking people to register for this and save the date for that. And for a user, that's a lot to sift through!

## Generating registrations is an uphill battle—for everyone

Only 27.2% of respondents rate their company as effective in generating registrations and attendees for a virtual event. And even organizations with over 75% attendance rates seem to struggle: only 18% of these respondents believe their company does this effectively.

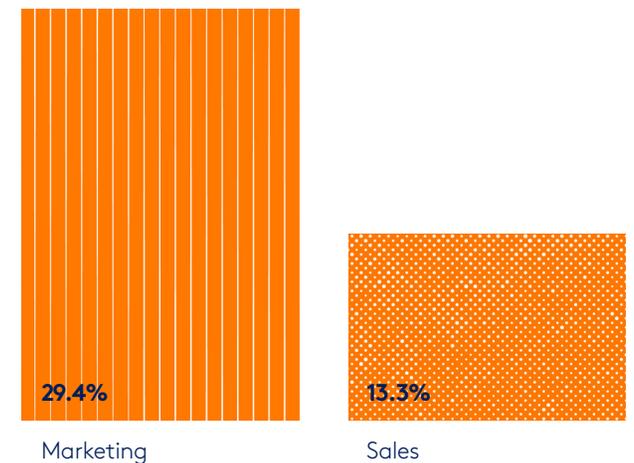
Marketers and salespeople echo the same sentiments with 29% and only 13%, respectively, rating their pre-event tactics as effective.

If you feel like your pre-event tactics aren't delivering the results you hoped for—you're not alone.



Q. On a scale of 1-7, how effective is your company at generating registrations and attendees for a virtual event? (Where 7 is very effective and 1 is not effective at all.)

### Effective (6-7)



# Pre-event challenges

Why might respondents feel their pre-event efforts are lacking punch? The data suggests a few challenges that may impede effectiveness.

## Universal roadblocks

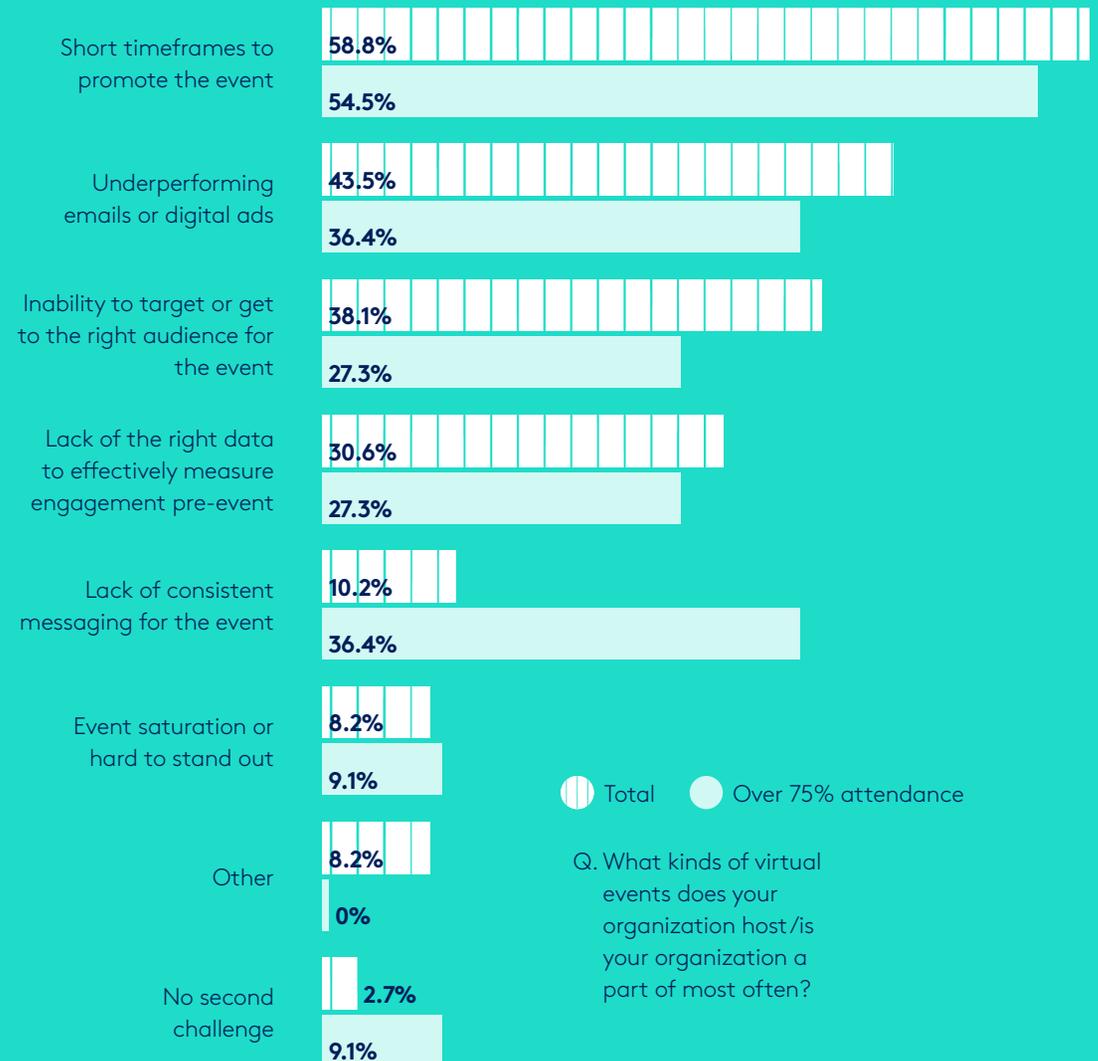
These roadblocks aren't only hindering the average company from finding pre-event success—even organizations with greater than 75% attendance rates have areas that need improving.

The most prevalent challenges faced by respondents, including those with greater than 75% attendance rates, include:

- Short timeframes to promote the event (59% on average)
- Underperforming emails or digital ads (44% on average)
- The inability to reach the right audience (38% on average)

The greatest challenge for organizations with less than 25% attendance rates is the inability to reach the right audience.

**The implication:** Build a robust, marketable database, use other channels besides email, and do more co-marketing to cut through the noise and reach the audience you desire!



● Total ● Over 75% attendance

Q. What kinds of virtual events does your organization host /is your organization a part of most often?

# A lack of consistent messaging is a key challenge for high-attendance companies

While most respondents are challenged by timeframes, promotion tactics, and reach, high-attendance organizations are also dealing with a lack of consistent messaging to effectively market the event itself.

So while this cohort is able to draw people to attend the event (with the added help of sponsors extending their reach), the process is all but refined. But why?

We know that high-attendance organizations prioritize larger-scale virtual events. And as an event grows larger and more complex, so does its scale, content, and the number of people involved. And these complexities grow, messaging becomes much harder to define and control.

The solution? Establish a clear set of messaging and branding guidelines well-before any pre-event promotion can begin. Make these guidelines clear and actionable, that way you're able to easily share them with anyone who's interested in helping promote the event.

## Sales and marketing woes

### Marketing's biggest challenges:

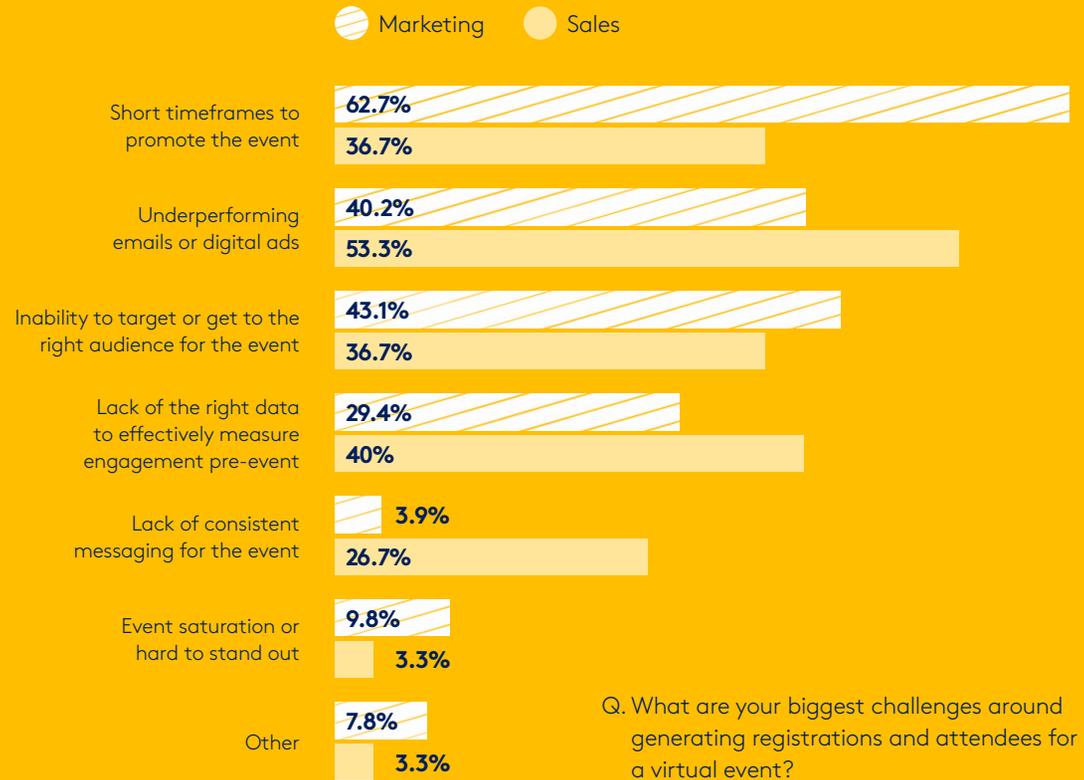
- Short timeframes to promote the event
- Inability to target or get to the right audience
- Underperforming emails or digital ads

### Sales' biggest challenges:

- Underperforming emails
- Lack of the right data to effectively measure engagement pre-event
- Short timeframes to promote the event
- Inability to target or get to the right audience

## The challenge of lacking consistent messaging is 7x greater for sales than it is for marketing.

While only 4% of marketers are challenged by a lack of consistent messaging to promote a virtual event, 28% of salespeople feel this lack of messaging is a challenge, further emphasizing the need for tighter collaboration and sharing between the teams.



## Sales struggles with consistent messaging.

**The implication:** Marketing must deliver more than marketing messages—they must provide sales the materials they need as well. Collaboration across both teams must be stronger to ensure a cohesive, consistent virtual event experience.

# A lack of audience insights prevents better pre-event outcomes

In today's increasingly complex, results-driven market, data is your most powerful tool in ensuring that decisions are justified. And the data used for and taken from your pre-event tactics is no different.

While a lack of pre-event data may not be a top challenge for organizations, it certainly has the potential to impact your entire event lifecycle. Because to cut through the noise, pre-event materials must be relevant to your audience. They must take into account their needs, interests, goals, and challenges. They should consider where they've been and what they've already interacted with. Otherwise, your promotions may as well fall on deaf ears.

Unfortunately, the research suggests that an overall lack of audience insights may be what's truly impeding organizations the most in their pre-event efforts. Insights like:

Which destinations keep visitors engaged the longest

- Which destinations convert visitors to registrants most effectively
- Which channels are driving the best outcomes
- Which emails and ads are performing the best and why
- Which topics and value propositions are most engaging and resonant with audiences

While only 31% of respondents identified their lack of data as a challenge, the truth is that data impacts everything. Underperforming promotions, the inability to reach the right audiences, and a lack of consistent messaging are all outcomes of having poor or underutilized audience insights to influence respondents' pre-event tactics.

If you're to improve your pre-event outcomes, ensuring you have the right data to justify your decisions and tactics should be your first area of focus.

# Pre-event best practices

Based on the challenges identified, how can organizations turn their greatest pre-event challenges into opportunities of greatest improvement and growth to drive results, registrations, and engagement before the event even occurs?

## Short timeframes

If you find you never seem to have enough time to promote your virtual events, consider developing an editorial calendar as well as event-specific production schedules for your virtual event program.

- **Develop an editorial calendar** to plan out your live dates, define topics and themes, establish promotion channels and timeframes, and document any other key details you need to know in order to effectively produce and market your virtual events.
- **Develop a production schedule for every virtual event** to define specific tasks, owners, due dates, and deliverables that each virtual event relies on. Here, you can keep track of the entire process from pre-event to post, and also better manage, plan, and adjust your virtual event should anything unexpected arise.
- **Make these resources easily accessible** by all relevant members of the virtual events team, enabling them to know what they're responsible for, when tasks are due, and what's on the horizon.
- **Set a goal for registrations** and map that goal against your calendar milestones to measure the effectiveness of your tactics and determine what adjustments need to be made in order to get back on track.
- **Leverage your best performing channels** from prior events so you can make the most of the momentum you've already built.

## Underperforming emails or digital ads

As we saw with Adobe's research, email users deem fewer than one-quarter of email offers interesting enough to even open, which leaves over three-quarters of emails left unread. This only emphasizes the need for greater personalization and relevance in what you bring to market and send to prospects.

- It's no longer enough to produce a webinar, send a single email, and hope prospects attend. Just because you build it, doesn't mean they're guaranteed to come.
- Audiences expect more: interactivity (which we'll explore more of later), unique perspectives, thoughtful topics, and relevant subject matter are just some of what today's viewers expect.
- As virtual events grow more and more commonplace (even more so than they already are), these expectations will only continue to grow and evolve.

## The inability to reach the right audience

While email and social media are common ways to promote a virtual event, organizations that utilize these channels also have to compete with the thousands of other posts filling peoples' feeds. To reach the right audience, the right data is key. Ask yourself these questions about your audience:

- Who are they? What do they do?
- What do they truly care about? What are they challenged by? Why would they attend your event... in other words: "What's in it for them?"
- Where can you find them? How likely are they to respond?
- How do they make decisions about what (and what not to) engage with?

The more you can do to define your audience—their intent, interests, needs, challenges, habits—the easier it becomes to reach them at the right time, in the right place, and with the right channel, message, and offer.

# In-event

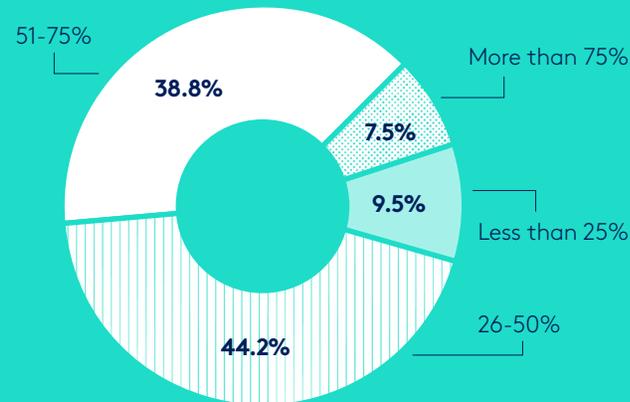
It's the day of your virtual event, your audiences are logged in, and the show's about to begin—are you ready? When it comes to in-event tactics, it's all around maximizing engagement with your audience. How do you keep their attention? How do you make the most of your time with them? How do you accelerate their buying journeys and improve advocacy?

## Attendance rates are tricky to predict

44% of respondents report they most typically hit attendance rates of 26-50%. Better attendance rates of 51-75% follow closely behind, but only for 39% of respondents.

However, for a rare few, 7.5% of respondents report they see attendance rates of greater than 75%.

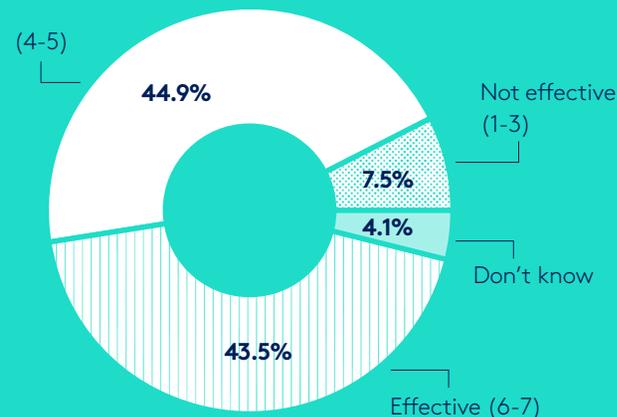
What's needed to produce greater and greater attendance rates?  
What factors are at play?



Q. What is your typical attendance rate for your virtual events?

## Keeping audiences engaged is challenging

Only 44% of respondents believe their company is effective at keeping their audiences engaged during a live virtual event. 45% believe that they're somewhat effective, but that improvements could still be made.



Q. On a scale of 1-7, how effective is your company at keeping your audience engaged during a live virtual event? (Where 7 is very effective and 1 is not effective at all.)

# Give the people what they want!

## Interactivity keeps audiences engaged

When respondents were asked about what they—as audience members—found most engaging in virtual events, the need for interactive participation opportunities rose to the top of the list.

Live Q&As, chat consoles, quizzes and polls, and other means of facilitating audience involvement are all incredibly important for attendees who want to stay engaged and present during the event

## Other ways to keep audiences engaged include:

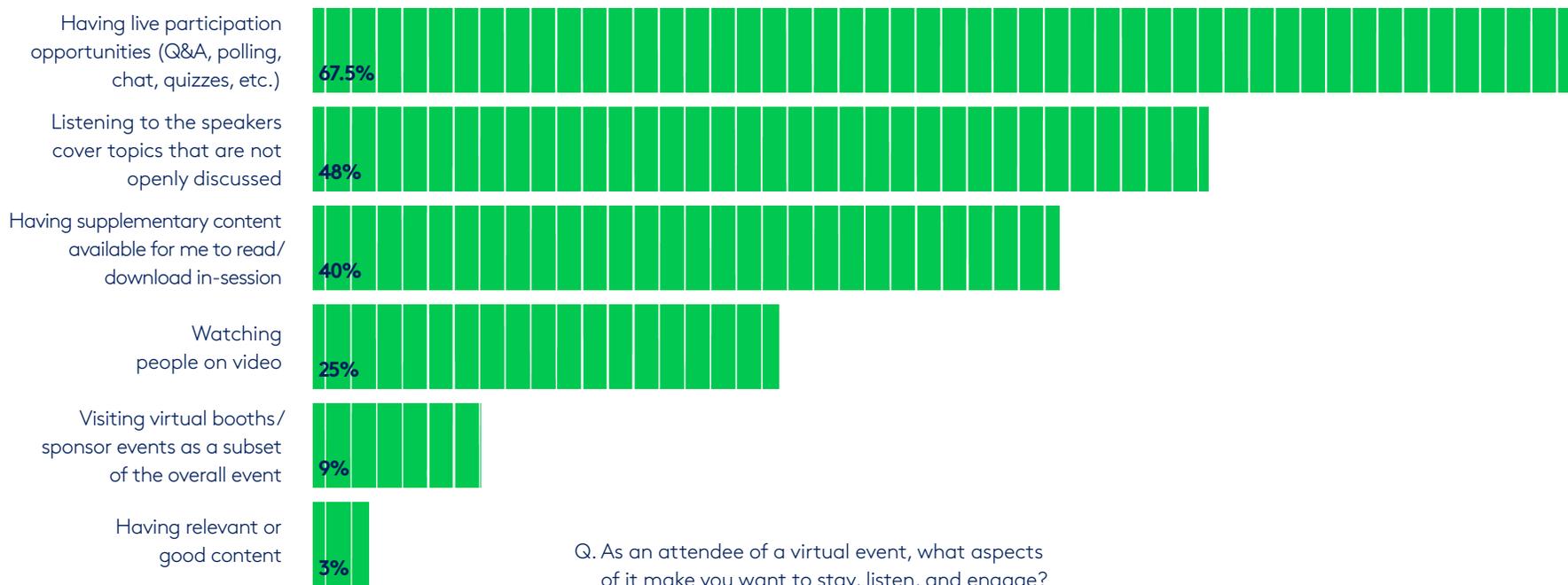
- Having the speakers cover topics that aren't regularly or openly discussed (48%)
- Having supplementary content made available in-event (40%)

While not asked about in this survey, many people we've spoken to have also expressed missing the ability to network. If only someone could invent a networking application for Virtual Events! Think of a virtual meeting generator pairing you with vendors or like-minded attendees, and you having the option to accept or decline the invite.

# Virtual booths: Are they worth it?

Only 9% of respondents report that having virtual booths as a part of an event actually keeps them engaged. The rules of virtual booth visits and booth manning are precarious at best and are already in great need of refinement. When so few people actually visit these booths, you've got to wonder why you should bother with them in the first place.

In the short term, however, instead of spending time (and hours of headaches) attempting to build a virtual tradeshow floor, put your resources into giving the audience more ways to interact and engage with the virtual events they're already a part of.



# Doubling down on audience interaction

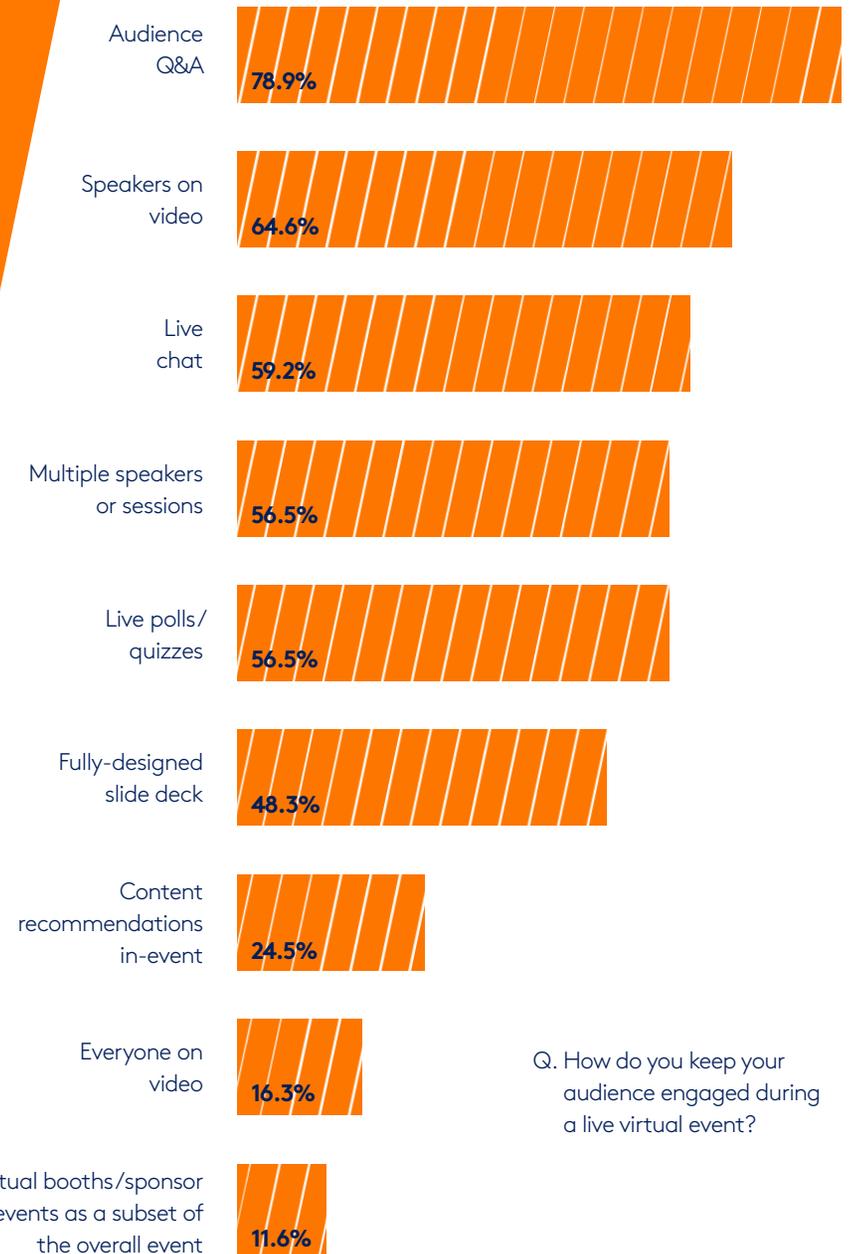
Fortunately, many virtual events do deliver the interaction that audiences crave. 79% of companies utilize live Q&As to keep their audiences engaged.

Other popular features of virtual events include:

- Speakers on video (65%)
- Audience live chat (59%)
- Having multiple speakers or virtual sessions to watch (57%)
- Live polls and quizzes (57%)

Nearly 3 in 4 organizations whose attendance rates are greater than 75% utilize a mix of both Q&A and live polls and quizzes drive audience engagement in-event.

**The implication:** A comprehensive, multi-media event is critical to engagement.



# Interactive opportunities are the most important to have—but also the biggest challenges to overcome

While companies may be utilizing interactive channels in their virtual events, there's still room to refine what's being done.

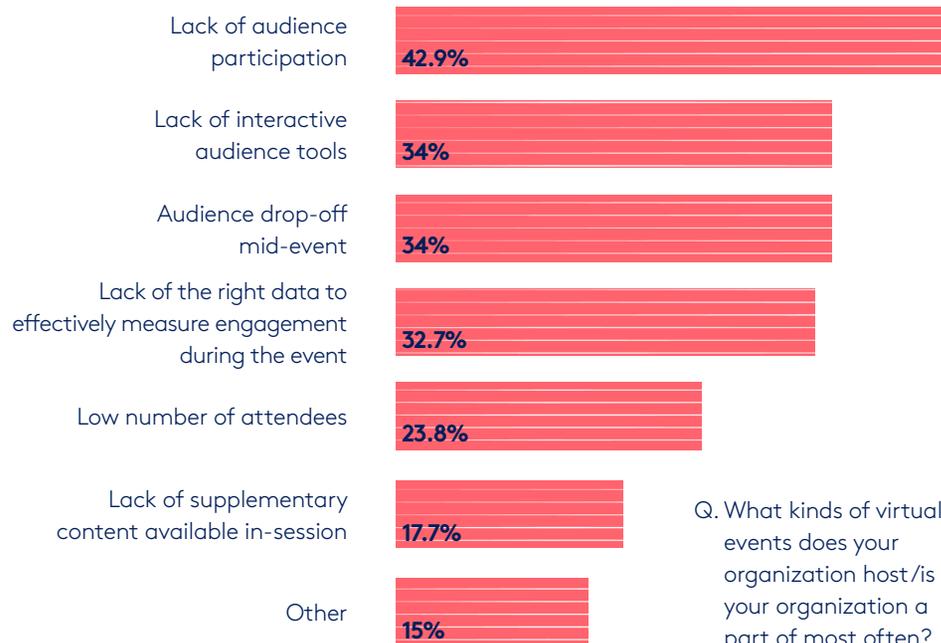
- 43% of companies say they are still most challenged by a lack of audience participation
- 34% of companies say they also struggle with a lack of interactive audience tools
- Another 34% are also challenged by mid-event drop-off
- And 33% feel they lack the right data to effectively measure live event engagement.

## High-attendance organizations face similar struggles

Of organizations whose attendance rates are greater than 75%, 46% say they also struggle with a lack of interactive audience tools. However, 46% of these respondents also say that a lack of data to effectively measure engagement during a live event also poses a challenge.

## Interactive components aren't a precursor to success

The research confirms that simply having interactive components doesn't guarantee success. And that even the best organizations still have some room to improve what they're doing in an event to further drive audience engagement and interaction.



# Data remains a central challenge

**Just as we saw in the pre-event, a lack of data to effectively measure engagement during an event proves to be a central challenge here as well.**

It's difficult to effectively produce virtual events when you don't know what specifically audiences found to be most intriguing or what individuals resonated with most. And when you're unable to accurately capture the insights from an event, making adjustments to future events becomes less of a strategy and more of a guessing game.

Virtual event vendors or partners who can capture the data about the customer experience associated with virtual events will be the winners in the virtual experience race. Knowing what sessions, booths, and activities an attendee has participated in while at an event, married with the data from pre-event and post event efforts, will enable companies to truly understand the buyer's journey, the intent of their audiences, and the core subject matter they find most meaningful and relevant.

# In-event best practices

From a lack of participation and tools to mid-event drop-off, even the most successful organizations are looking for ways to bridge their virtual event gaps. Based on these challenges, how can organizations improve their in-event experiences to more reliably interest and engage their audiences during their virtual events?

## A lack of interactive tools or audience participation

If you find your audience is quieter than usual, or you just want to find ways to get them more involved, utilizing interactive activities that are quick, fun, and relevant can have powerful long-term impacts for their enjoyment, engagement, and experience throughout your virtual event.

Don't let a lack of pre-built tools slow you down!

Here are some ways to involve your audience, tools or not:

- **Gamify the experience:** Encourage more participation during your events by gamifying activities, questions, and responses. Send top respondents a special gift, offer them a complimentary 30-minute brainstorm, or just feature their names at the end of your event for fun. Make participation easy and valuable for attendees.
- **Ask them questions** pertaining to the information you're presenting. Have they had similar experiences? Do they agree or disagree with your perspectives? What kinds of challenges have they had to endure? Where have they found the greatest success?
- **Create worksheets or suggest readings** for your audience to do before the event. Then, during the event, set time aside to conduct a live discussion where you and your attendees can review, converse, and share what they've done.
- **Conduct live polls or short quizzes** throughout the webinar. If you have a tool that enables you to do this, great. If not, utilize the chat feed to have attendees type their answers in. Use their answers as a discussion point and invite audience members to elaborate—digging into why they responded the way they did while also adding additional voices to the conversation to keep it fresh and dynamic.
- **Create follow-up materials** using your audience's participation. Don't let your audience's activities go to waste—use them to help drive future content creation and follow-up efforts! Utilize audience responses in your messaging strategy. Take poll and quiz results to influence short-form content and infographics. Compile worksheets into best practice guides. There's so much you can do with the data gathered during your event—and the sky's the limit!

## A lack of data to effectively measure live event engagement

Data is tricky, especially when you're measuring it live during a virtual event. Without it, it's hard to accurately measure and report on the ROI generated by your virtual event. But ensuring that you're tracking the right live metrics in the first can be just as challenging. To help make certain that you have the right data you need to measure the success of your virtual event, consider these tips:

- **Identify the in-event metrics that you'd like to be able to track.** While not every data point may be readily available for you to track, defining a set of metrics you want to see allows for a more robust reporting dashboard that more accurately tells the stories you want to tell. Here are some common in-event measures of success:
  - Total watch time
  - Drop-off rate
  - Response/engagement rate
  - Poll and quiz data
  - Chat logs and chat engagement
  - Supplementary content CTR and download rate
- **Coordinate with your event or operations team** about what engagement data can actually be measured during the event. With your list of ideal metrics in hand, gain an understanding of what data is actually able to be tracked, how it's going to be tracked, and what impact those data points have in the larger context of the customer's buying cycle. Tie this data, if available, with the data of pre and post event engagement and you gain a holistic picture of your attendees and non-attendees.
- **Utilize live event participation to identify interest and intent.** Taking the best practices outlined above, utilizing audience interaction is a great and easy way to enhance their experience and also gain a better understanding of how your audience is responding to your virtual event. Save and organize individual attendee response and consumption data to paint a more detailed picture of individual attendees so you can more accurately identify their interest and intent to purchase.

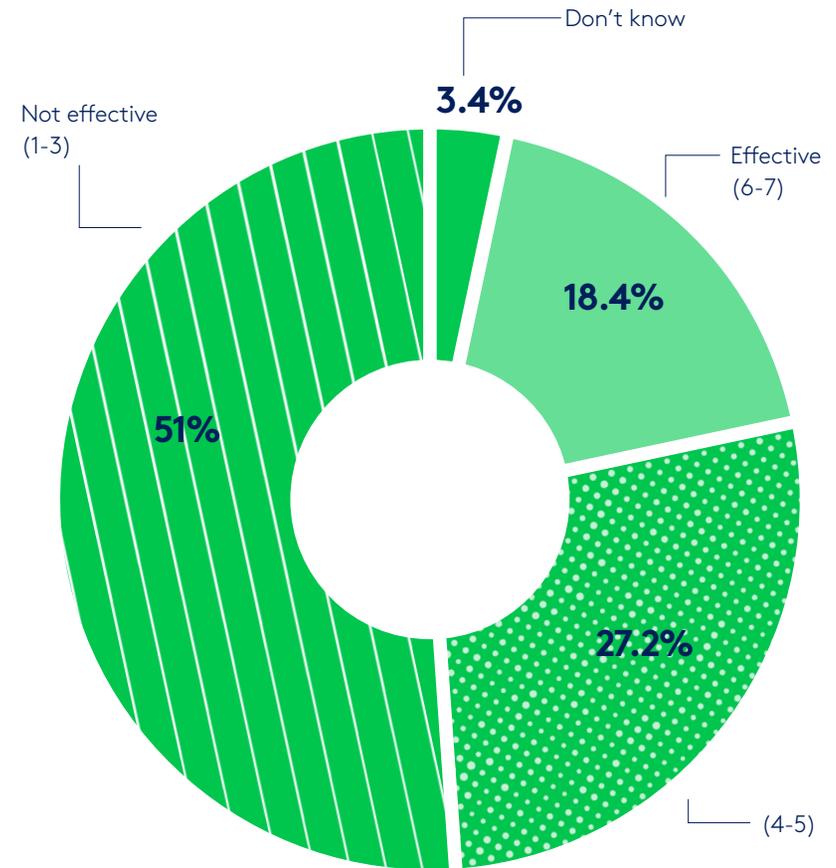
# Post-event

While the event itself may be over, the experience of your attendees is far from it. In the post-event, your focus should be around utilizing what you know about your attendees to serve them relevant, timely, and personalized content experiences that continue the conversations from the event. What did they interact with? What did they respond to? What questions did they ask?

## Post-event effectiveness is the greatest area of opportunity

Only 18% of respondents are effective at continuing to generate engagement with their attendees post-event. A greater 51% say that they are somewhat effective. And 27% say that they're not effective at all.

Even companies whose attendance rates are greater than 75% have a challenge in the post-event stages. Only 36% of those organizations deem their post-event tactics as effective.

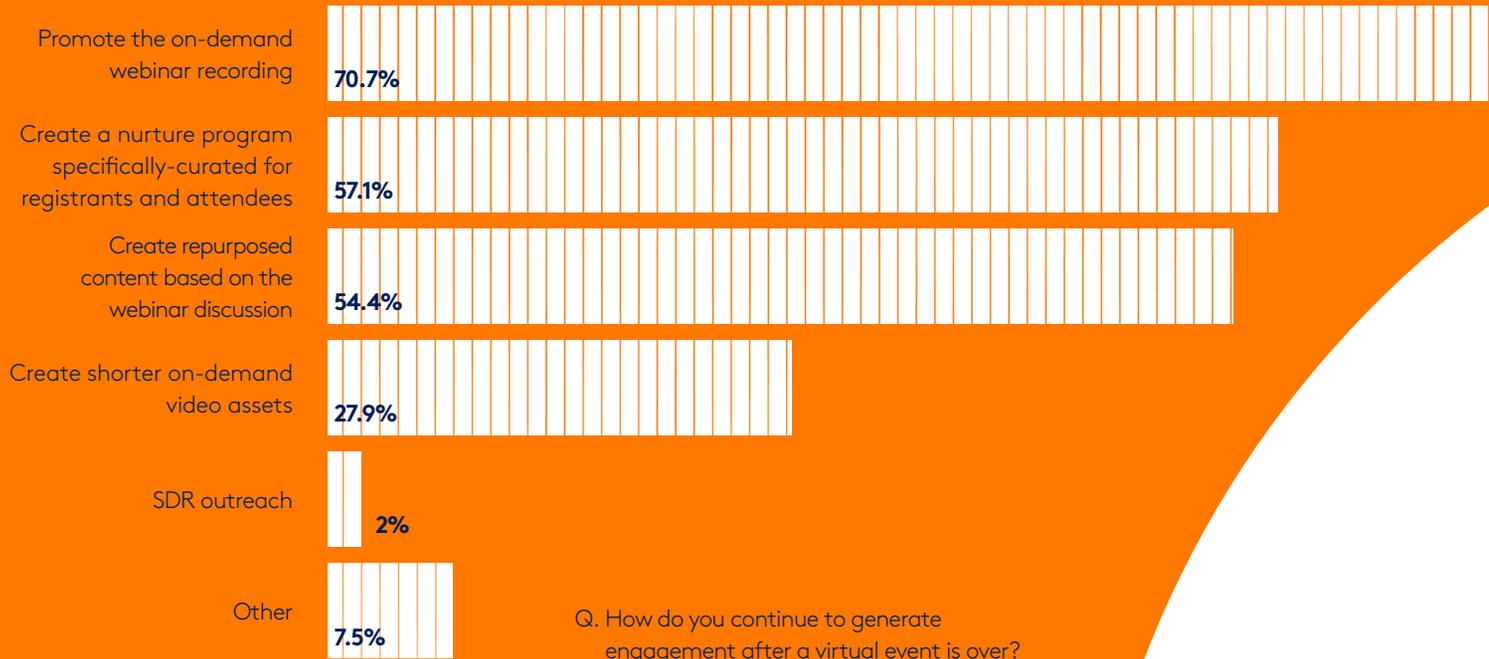


Q. On a scale of 1-7, how effective is your company at continuing to generate engagement from attendees after a virtual event is over?

## On-demand, nurture programs, and repurposed content are favored post-event tactics

To drive engagement post-event, 71% of respondents promote on-demand recordings of their virtual event, 57% create a nurture program specifically designed for their registrants and attendees, and 54% create repurposed content based on the discussions from the virtual event itself.

High-attendance companies prioritize creating nurture programs (46%) and repurposed content (46%) over promoting the on-demand recording (27%).



# Post-event challenges

But, as our data suggests, post-event tactics aren't immune from the negative impacts caused by a lack of attendee data.

## A lack of attendee data lessens the effectiveness of post-event tactics

Not knowing what content or topics individual attendees engaged with the most is the number one challenge for organizations of all attendance rates.

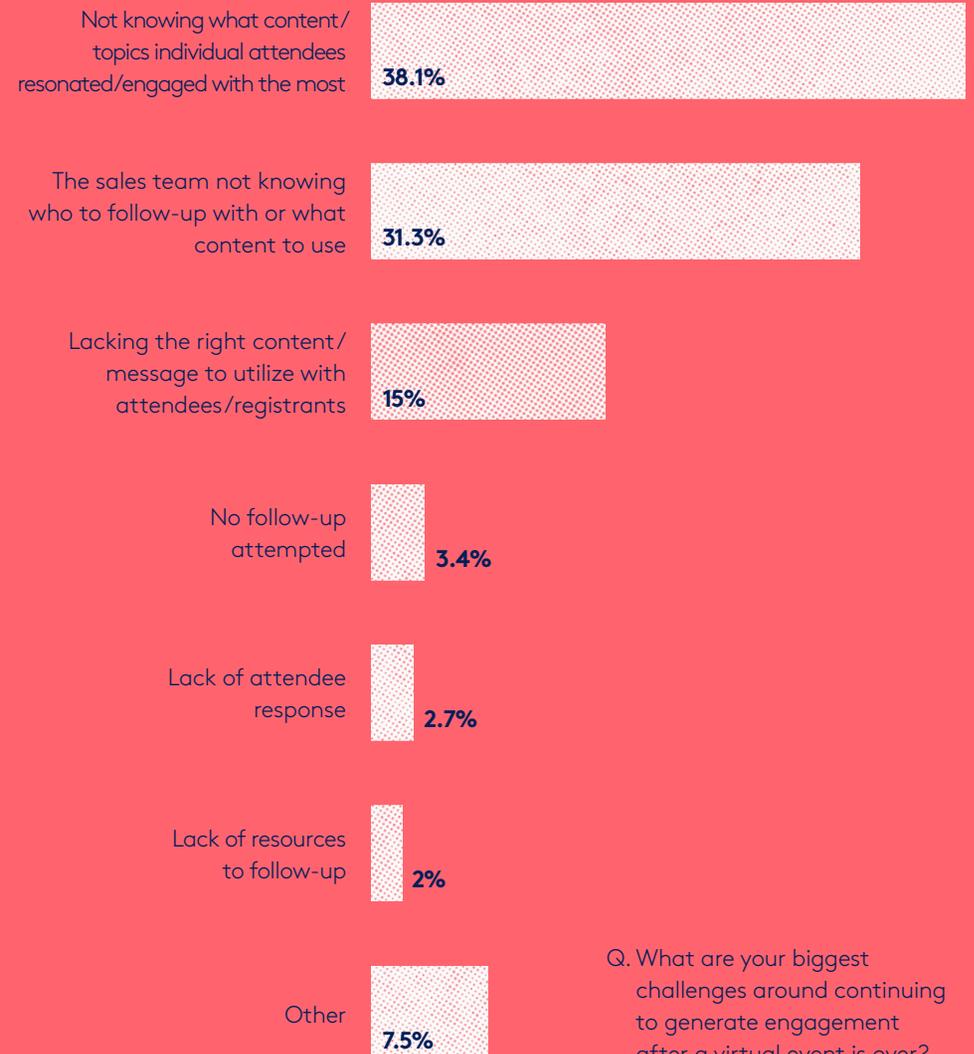
**The implication:** Find a vendor who provides the actionable insights through data about content and topics that resonate with your attendees.

To add to the data story:

- 31% of all respondents and 27% of companies with greater than 75% attendance report challenges in their sales team not knowing who to follow-up with post-event.
- And 15% of all respondents and 27% of companies with greater than 75% attendance feel they lack the right content or message to utilize in their follow-ups.

It may be that the reason companies see such poor success from their post-event initiatives isn't caused necessarily by what they do, but more about the content of what they produce.

However, none of these can be achieved without the right data to influence what gets changed. So please, if you're reading this: Don't forget the data.



Q. What are your biggest challenges around continuing to generate engagement after a virtual event is over?

## Is it relevant? Is it personal? Is it timely?

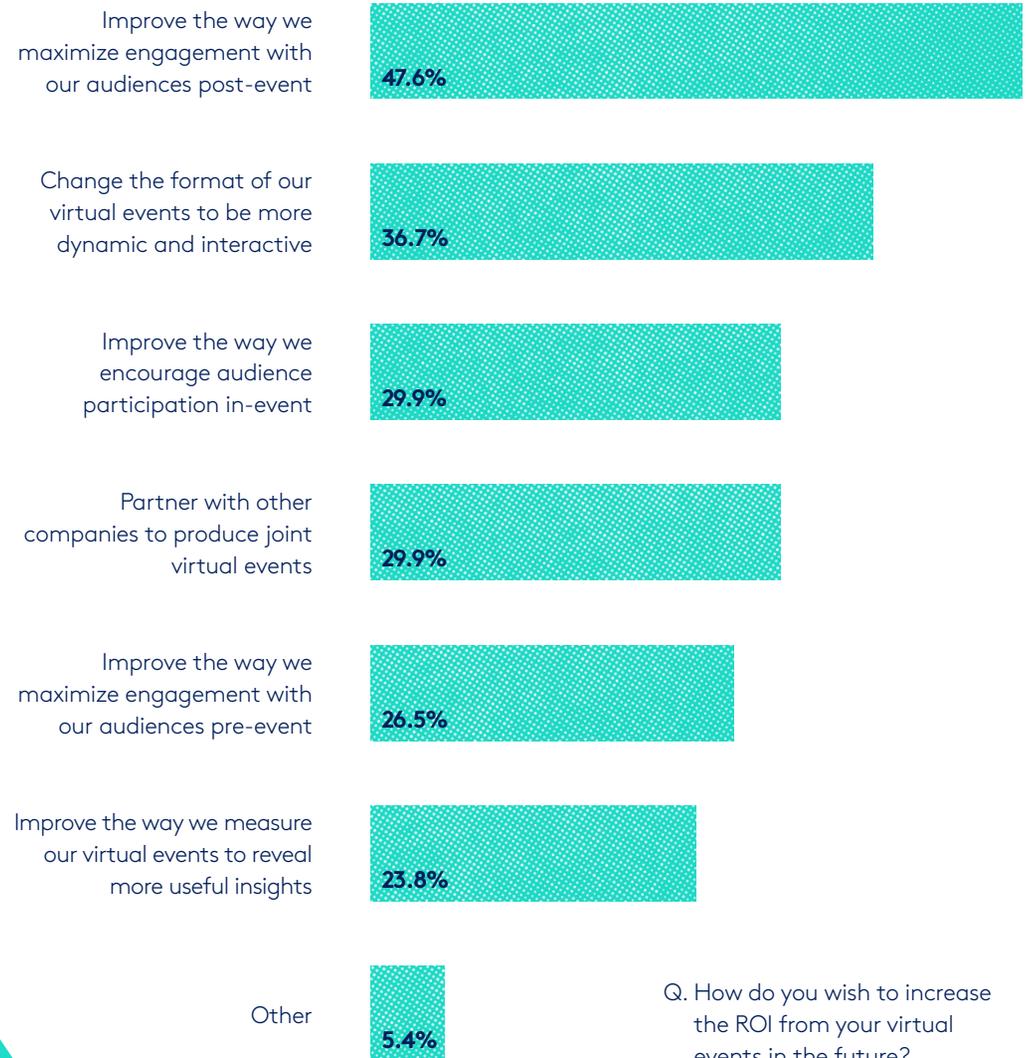
Lacking the data to know what resonated the most with individuals throughout an event can have significant impacts after the event is over. How do you know what content to send or what message to use? Suddenly, there's a lot of uncertainty following the success of an event. And without the data to know what went wrong, what could be improved, and how to best follow-up with attendees to maximize engagement, it's all too easy for ROI to be lost in the shuffle.

### Improving virtual event ROI

To improve the ROI generated by virtual events, the data suggests a few areas where respondents wish to focus their attention:

- 48% of companies want to improve the way they maximize post-event engagement.
- 37% want to change the format of their virtual events to be more dynamic and interactive (echoing what attendees wish to see).
- And 30% want to improve the way they encourage audience participation overall.

However, none of these can be achieved without the right data to influence what gets changed. So please, if you're reading this: Don't forget the data.



Q. How do you wish to increase the ROI from your virtual events in the future?

# Post-event best practices

After the event is over, sales' and marketing's responsibilities are still far from done. Utilize these best practices following the event to maximize engagement, continue meaningful conversations, and further accelerate your buyers' journeys to foster intent and facilitate conversion.

## A lack of post-event content

After your event, content is the last thing you should be short on. Consider these tips to fill your post-event content gaps:

- Release the event recording as a standalone on-demand webcast
- Break out your full-length event recording into smaller, more consumable videos
- If possible, take the audio and release it as a podcast episode or MP3
- Take the conversations from your event and turn them into transcripts and blog posts
- Utilize the lessons discussed in the event to create best practice guides and tip sheets
- Utilize audience participation data to create trend reports

## Not knowing what resonated best with audiences

Don't let your audience's engagement actions during your event fall through the cracks! This type of engagement is extremely valuable in all aspects of your customers' journeys and can help you paint a far more accurate picture of who your customers are, their interests, and their intent.

## If you're having trouble knowing what resonated best with audiences, consider these tips:

- Cross-reference the names of attendees with your website's recent downloads: If you're not able to easily track which attendees downloaded what directly from within your virtual event platform, try cross-referencing your list of attendees with the downloads on your website. For some additional insight, expand the date range so you can see if there's been any activity shown by attendees previously and use this data to further influence your post-event outreach plan.
- Send a post-event survey to registrants and attendees: After your virtual event is over, send attendees a short survey asking them why they registered, what they found most interesting, and what could be improved. You can also send a survey to registrants who didn't attend asking them why. Utilize these responses to not only further refine your virtual event program, but also to influence what you send to these prospects in the future.
- Follow-up individually with specific, high-value attendees: If you noticed that someone from a target account registered or attended your virtual event, make sure that activity is flagged so the right people on your team can follow-up with them specifically. In the follow-up, ask them similar questions from the post-event survey to better understand their intent. With this, you not only open the door of communication with someone at a target account, but, just like the survey, you can also use this data to further influence what gets sent to that account to improve engagement in the future.

# Not knowing who— or with what—to follow-up with

**While all attendees and registrants should always be followed up with in some way after an event, orchestrating a holistic post-event follow-up strategy isn't as straightforward as many of us would like.**

To make the process easier, and to bring greater clarity and effectiveness to your follow-up plan, try segmenting your attendees into specific tiers based on criteria from your ideal customer profile, level of intent, and target account list. And within each tier, utilize tier-specific messages, content, and communication cadences. Consider these tips:

## Tier A

Tier A attendees are your best of the best. These are folks who meet nearly every aspect of your ideal customer profile, spent a significant amount of time consuming content from your live or on-demand virtual event, and/or are associated with a target account.

- **Nurture Program:** Create account or contact-specific nurture programs to maximize the amount of personalization and authenticity you're able to provide. The good old ABM approach should be in full-force here!
- **Follow-Up Cadence:** Utilize a combination of highly-personalized individual marketing and sales touches with the attendee. These should be focused entirely on providing value, continuing the conversation, and offering useful resources to accelerate their decision-making process, remove friction, and address hesitations. Ensure that your isn't only to the attendee, but also to other contacts within the account.
- **Messaging and Content:** These should be entirely specific to the needs, challenges, and goals of the individual or account. Don't lose your footing by jumping straight into product features! Utilize your in-event data as well as other data you have to determine what content and message fits best.

## Tier B

Tier B attendees are those who meet some criteria from your ideal customer profile and show engagement, but are not associated with a target account.

- **Nurture Program:** Similarly to the Tier A approach, create account or contact-specific nurture programs for these attendees as well. While they may not be part of your target account list, their high involvement in your virtual event demonstrates a potential to engage further. Make the most of it!
- **Follow-Up Cadence:** Utilize a combination of personalized marketing and sales touches with the attendee. While you may not know other contacts within the account, use this follow-up as a way of opening the door. Provide value and relevant resources as a way of organically continuing the conversations had during the virtual event.
- **Messaging and Content:** Again, these materials should be thoughtfully curated for the attendee and their focus areas. If you aren't sure what to send them, try reaching out and asking them what they thought about the event. Continue the conversation from there.

## Tier C

Lastly, those that remain are your Tier C attendees: those who meet very few (if any) characteristics from your ideal customer profile and show no meaningful signs of intent. These folks are also not part of any target account.

- Your Tier C nurture program should be entirely marketing-owned, utilizing content related to the virtual event itself.
- However, while these folks may not be high on your list of who to follow-up with, don't take their attendance for granted. Be sure to always thank your attendees for coming. Send them a 2-3 touch follow-up sequence offering the on-demand recording and other related content to the event.
- And don't forget to add them to your database for your next virtual event!

# Where do we go from here?

To find success in your virtual event experiences, content must prioritize interaction, seamless engagement, relevant subject matter, and rich user experiences throughout the entirety of the event lifecycle: before, during, and after. However, as we've seen, without the right data to fuel these experiences, success becomes harder to achieve. And it's, perhaps, the data that separates the best-in-class companies from the rest of the pack.

With the right data, a company can emerge as a leader in their virtual event experiences. They can more strategically and intentionally provide relevant recommendations to their attendees based on individual behaviors. They can paint a more accurate picture of who attendees are, their interests, and their intent. They can more thoughtfully

engage their audiences before, during, and after an event to continue conversations and accelerate journeys. And with the right data in hand, organizations can ensure that their virtual events drive outcomes like accelerating demand generation, increasing deal velocity, and improving win rates while simultaneously positioning the user experience at the forefront.

**Throughout this report, we've deconstructed the different phases of an event to better understand the trends, challenges, and opportunities that come before, during, and after.**

# About



Leading enterprise and mid-market B2B companies use PathFactory to accelerate nurture, improve win rates, and understand content performance by delivering intelligent content experiences across the buyer's journey. Using insights and automation to connect people with content, PathFactory removes friction for B2B buyers. PathFactory was recently recognized by Deloitte as one of North America's Technology Fast 500 and Canada's Technology Fast 50 companies. It was also named the 2020 Top-Rated Content Marketing Software by TrustRadius, a Spring 2020 Content Experience Leader by G2, and a 2019 Cool Vendor in Technology Marketing by Gartner. Learn more about PathFactory's Intelligent Content Platform and the companies that use it at [PathFactory.com](https://www.pathfactory.com).



Heinz Marketing is a B2B marketing and sales acceleration firm that delivers measurable revenue results. Every strategy, tactic, and action has a specific, measured purpose. Instead of focusing on the activities, we focus on the outcomes. What really matters is sales pipeline, closing business, and accelerating revenue. For more information, visit [heinzmarketing.com](https://www.heinzmarketing.com)

