

# THE FUTURE OF EVENTS REPORT

How Marketers Maximize Return on Engagement (and ROI) with Virtual & Hybrid Events

<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>THE CURRENT PICTURE FOR EVENTS</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>STRATEGY AND OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>PERFORMANCE</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>ADDRESSING THE EVENTS CHALLENGE</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>HYBRID PLANS</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>WHAT EVENT ORGANIZERS CAN DO FOR THEIR SPONSORS</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>THE FUTURE</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>KEY RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>31</b>

# FOREWORD

Meeting clients and prospects alike in a face-to-face setting is always a pleasure. That's likely why, of the 200 B2B marketers we surveyed, most say they are planning some kind of physical event within the next 12 months.

**But the reality is that the days of bringing in attendees from long distances multiple times each year are gone.** The Global Business Travel Association's [2021 Business Travel Index](#) predicts that, globally, it won't be until 2024 that business travel will recover to 2019 levels of spending. However, this global figure doesn't tell the whole story. **In the United States, indexed spend on business travel will be lower in 2024 than it was in 2005.** No, that's not a typo.

Aside from finance directors looking to keep savings from travel, there's another reason physical conferences are unlikely to return to similar levels: B2B buyers overwhelmingly prefer digital interactions. A [study by McKinsey](#) found that more than 70% of B2B decision-makers prefer remote interactions or digital self-service.

And among the marketers taking our survey, **97% are satisfied with the performance of their virtual events**, while 93% describe their ROI as good or excellent. **Almost eight in ten (78%) also agree that virtual events deliver higher ROI than physical events.**

But when we want to build the strongest relationships with our customers, what is the potential answer? **Hybrid events offer the potential to offer the best of both worlds**, combining the benefits of face-to-face and virtual interactions. **Some 95% believe that a hybrid approach will become more widely used in the coming years** and three-quarters (74%) have them planned for the coming year.

**However, there's also a risk that B2B marketers will fail to make their hybrid events a success.** Just 24% of respondents claim to be adopting a new strategy in this area, while 33% will simply mirror their physical event strategy.

At ON24, we believe that every attendee — regardless of whether they are there physically or digitally — should get a full event experience. Given that 94% plan to run more events of any kind in the next 12 months, the competition to attract and engage attendees will become even greater. Engaging attendees is also the top challenge for today's B2B marketers.

**So whatever events you run in the coming years, make sure to provide the experience your audience expects and demands. We look forward to seeing the events you'll create.**

## METHODOLOGY

To understand the current state and future plans for virtual and hybrid events, Heinz Marketing, Market2Marketers, and ON24 conducted an online survey in May 2021 of 200 B2B marketing professionals, of which 70% worked at companies with more than 250 employees.

All respondents worked for organizations that produced or sponsored events and were at the manager level or above. Panel recruitment was managed by OnTarget Consulting + Research.

**The survey aimed to explore the perceptions and performance of virtual and hybrid events, the strategies and tactics employed, and the challenges and issues faced by today's B2B marketers.**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## THE CASE FOR VIRTUAL AND HYBRID EVENTS IS STRONG

In 2020, marketers were forced to move almost all their face-to-face events into digital environments. In fact, figures from the Center for Exhibition Industry Research show that 97% of B2B events in Q4 2020 were canceled.

Despite this huge shift — which also saw [virtual attendee numbers rise by 251% on the ON24 Digital Experience Platform alone](#) — performance was exceptionally strong, with marketers in widespread agreement on their benefits.

- **The vast majority (97%) of those running virtual events are satisfied with their performance**, with 93% saying the ROI has been “good” or “excellent.”
- **More than eight in 10 agree that virtual events “are easier to scale than physical events” (88%)**, “provide greater reach than physical events” (85%), and “contribute significantly to pipeline” (85%).
- More than three-quarters also agree that **virtual events “make it easier to predict pipeline” (79%) and “deliver higher ROI than physical events” (78%)**.

In an attempt to capture the benefits of both virtual and physical events, **74% have hybrid events planned for the next 12 months**. Respondents about what they expect from hybrid events. A massive 88% agree that hybrid events will “contribute significantly to pipeline” while 79% agree that they “provide more data than physical events.”

## HOWEVER, MANY ARE YET TO ADOPT BEST PRACTICES FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

Although positivity is abundant for virtual events, there is also an opportunity gap B2B marketers need to close.

For example, **while 92% of our survey respondents agree that “the attendee experience is critical to the success of an event” only 41% say they rate their event experience as “excellent.”** This gap exists even though attendee engagement is the most commonly-used metric to measure event success.

One reason why event engagement is the most common challenge marketers face is that many tactics used to encourage engagement — and, as a result, the attendee experience — are simply not used.

- **More than half say they do not “use polls, surveys or Q&A” (51%), with the same figure also failing to “make sessions available on-demand.”**
- Similarly, 45% do not “have sales teams interact or answer questions in real-time,” and 44% do not “personalize the attendee experience.”

Furthermore, **while 85% agree that “virtual events contribute significantly to pipeline,” only 53% measure the opportunities/pipeline that their events generate.**

This gap in adopting best practices may be caused by two reasons. First, given that ROI from events is strong, B2B marketers may simply be resting on their laurels. Second, given the rapid and almost total switch to virtual events, many B2B marketers may not have taken the time and effort to learn and adopt best practices for their virtual and (future) hybrid events.

Given that 94% of respondents plan to increase the number of events they will produce or sponsor over the next 12 months, and that buyer expectations are increasing, those that fail to address this gap risk reduced levels of performance in the future.

## **HYBRID EVENTS ARE SET TO GROW, BUT MARKETERS RISK MISSING OUT ON THE BENEFITS**

B2B marketers are clear on the value that hybrid events can offer. But the hybrid approach many marketers are taking means a large share may not achieve the success they expect.

One reason why is that **only one in four marketers (24%) say they are planning a brand-new strategy for hybrid events**, with one-third (33%) simply looking to mirror their existing physical event strategy. Such an approach may lead to virtual attendees being dissatisfied with the experience they can get from hybrid events.

In addition, **even though 79% agree that “hybrid events provide more data than physical events,” fewer plan to take advantage of this.** Just 64% plan to “connect events with our technology” while only 56% want “attendee engagement data to be made available to us.”

## WHILE B2B MARKETERS WANT FACE-TO-FACE OPPORTUNITIES, EVENT ORGANIZERS NEED TO DO MORE TO WIN BACK AND RETAIN SPONSORS

On the surface, event organizers should be happy that there is a desire to return to physical events. **Some 72% of respondents expect that by 2022 the number of physical events they run will be the same as in 2019.**

But event organizers cannot afford to be complacent, given **49% of respondents say they expect to produce a larger share of their own events in the future**, compared to the 8% expecting to sponsor more events. Separate research also supports that total spend is set to stay lower for some time, with a 2020 forecast by PwC showing that spend on B2B trade shows isn't set to recover until after 2024.

To have a chance at returning sponsor spend to previous levels, event organizers need to address both existing complaints and cater to their desires.

**Top complaints from B2B marketers include that sponsored events were “not properly branded or designed” (36%), provided “poor-quality data” (34%), and that there were “not enough leads” (34%).**

Meanwhile, **if sponsoring a hybrid event, the most valuable elements for marketers are the “ability to connect in real-time with attendees” (54%) and ensuring that “engagement data is made available” (52%).** Close to half (46%) also want these events that are “available on-demand.”

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR B2B MARKETERS

To continue achieving success with events, B2B marketers should consider the following actions:

- Develop a strategy that considers virtual and hybrid behaviors.
- Align people, processes, technology, and data to your event strategy.
- Consider making your event hybrid when you want to increase the reach of an event, when you want to target multiple geographies, when you want to extend the life of an event, when you are running training or enablement sessions, and/or you want to offer more value and reach to event partners.
- Avoid making your event hybrid when it makes little sense.
- Drive engagement by offering an excellent experience.
- Define how you will measure engagement success.
- Aspire to make your virtual, hybrid, and physical experiences equally good.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EVENT ORGANIZERS SEEKING SPONSORS

To win back and retain the B2B marketers that have sponsored events in the past, event organizers should consider the below points.

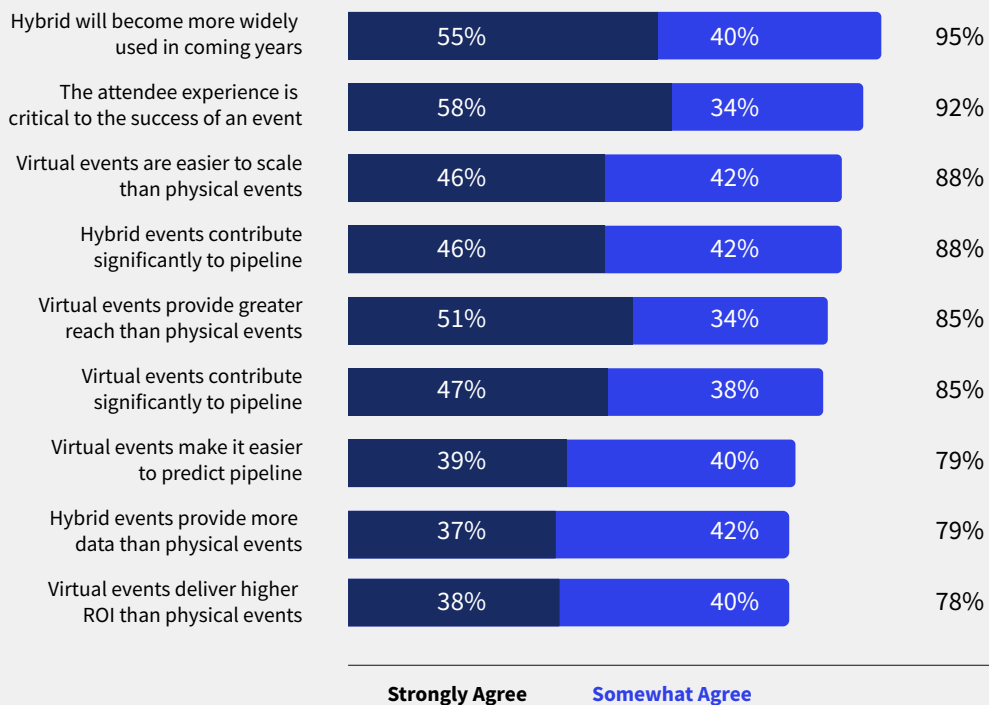
- Avoid the temptation to simply replicate your physical event strategy to a virtual environment.
- Don't rely on a recovery in physical events. It is far from guaranteed.
- Act to address the complaints sponsors have had with their events.
- Use technology to create events that deliver more than sponsors can do alone.
- Move from a "point-in-time" events approach to one that is always-on and delivers continual leads and engagement.

# THE CURRENT PICTURE FOR EVENTS

2020 was not a good year for B2B in-person events. The event season started with business as usual. Then, it ended early and abruptly as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe. In fact, data from the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) shows that [97% of B2B in-person events were canceled in Q4 2020](#) alone.

Virtual events, like webinars and virtual conferences, were already experiencing a steady increase in usage before the pandemic. But the necessity of a digital-first environment saw them filling the in-person events void. [ON24's Webinar Benchmarks Report](#) found that in 2020, the number of webinars grew by 162% year-over-year, the number of attendees rose by 251%, and the total hours spent watching webinar content climbed even higher (290%).

## WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING APPROACHES DO YOU USE WHEN PRODUCING YOUR EVENTS?



Figures on the right represent total agreeing.

The shift to virtual events was unexpected for some, but marketers are seeing many surprising benefits. Two such benefits are reach and scalability. Virtual events have the potential to reach a wider audience, with 85% agreeing that “virtual events have a greater reach than physical events,” while even more (88%) agree that “virtual events are easier to scale than physical events.”

B2B marketers have also discovered the positive impact virtual events have on the bottom line. Some 85% of survey respondents agree that “virtual events contribute significantly to pipeline.” Moreover, 78% agree that “virtual events deliver higher ROI than physical events.”

But what do these promising results mean for the near future? According to our survey, eight in 10 respondents (81%) will make virtual events a central part of their event portfolio over the next 12 months. That’s more than those who are planning physical events (70%) during the same timeframe.

But choosing physical or virtual events is not an either/or proposition. About three-quarters (74%) of the marketers say they are looking to blend virtual and physical elements to create hybrid events.

The perceived benefits of a hybrid approach shows us why this approach is gaining traction. Of our respondents, 88% say that “hybrid events contribute significantly to pipeline.” A survey from Merkle elucidates another point: that [more than half \(52%\) of marketers are making the collection of more first-party data a priority](#) to cope with increasing data restrictions. Hybrid events provide a viable solution for some marketers. Indeed, four-fifths (79%) agree that “hybrid events provide more data than physical events.”

While there is a general desire for life to get back to normal, it’s clear that when marketers look towards the future, they are expecting to blend all that is desirable about physical events with the benefits of virtual events. This is likely why nearly all (95%) of survey respondents agree that “hybrid will become more widely used in coming years.”

One other thing that is clear from the survey — regardless of the event type, 92% of respondents agree that “the attendee experience is critical to the success of an event.” In theory, this means that marketers should be focused on creating events that get their audience to engage.



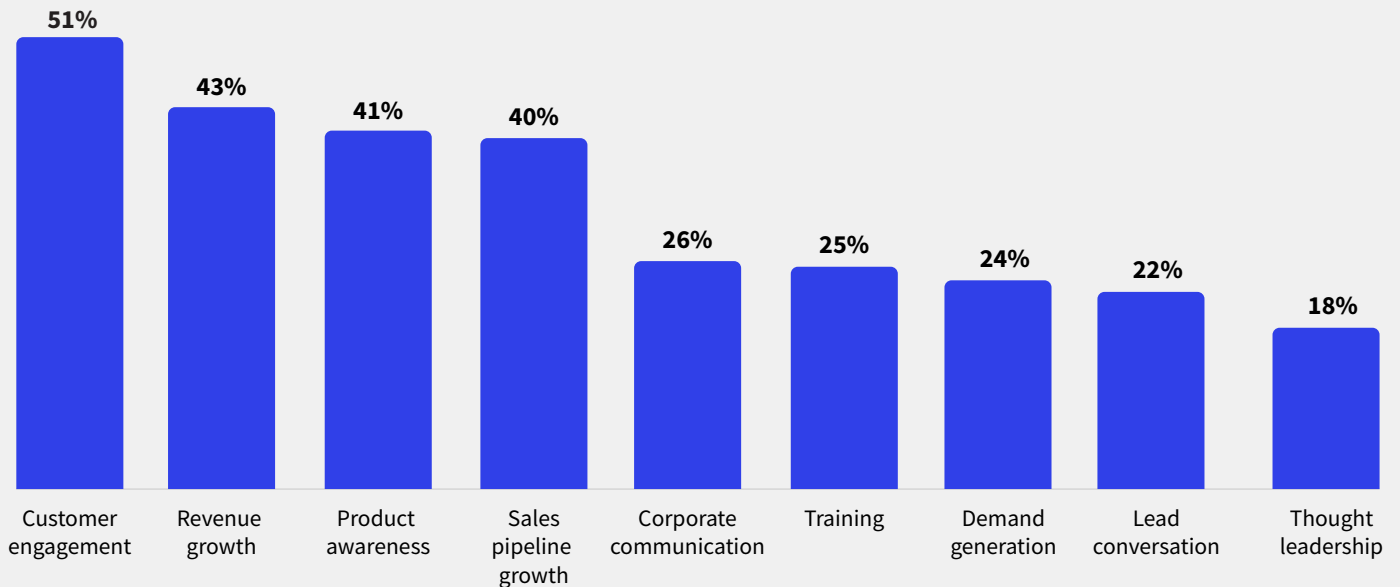
### **ON24 TIP: CONNECT YOUR VIRTUAL AND HYBRID EVENTS TO YOUR MARKETING AUTOMATION AND CRM SYSTEMS**

Digital event technology provides both the data to identify buyer behavior and the ability to use this data to personalize and improve the event experience. However, the best results are only possible when you connect your event tech to your existing systems. [Check out ON24 Connect](#) to see how you can do this seamlessly and make your events even more effective.

# STRATEGY AND OBJECTIVES

Attendee experience is critical to the success of any event. So, it stands to reason that “customer engagement” is one of the top event goals for more than half (51%) of those surveyed. Other important event goals and objectives include “revenue growth” (43%) and “product awareness” (41%).

## WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR YOUR EVENTS? SELECT UP TO THREE OPTIONS.

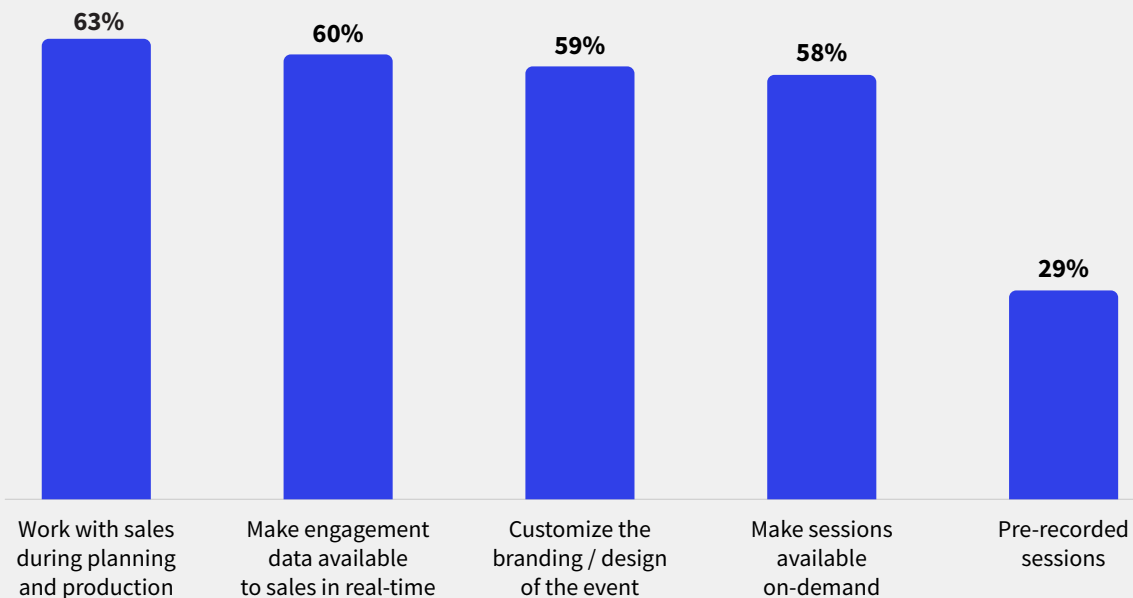


So what approaches are respondents using to deliver against these and other top objectives for events? For the majority, it means working in partnership with sales. Almost two-thirds (63%) say that when producing events, they “work with sales during planning and production,” while six in 10 (60%) “make engagement data available to sales in real-time.”

Beyond working with sales, respondents also engage in other best practices for events, including “customizing the branding and design of the event” (59%) and “making sessions available on-demand” (58%).

However, few are adopting all of these tactics. Out of the five approaches offered to respondents, just 19% use four or more in total.

### WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING APPROACHES DO YOU USE WHEN PRODUCING YOUR EVENTS?

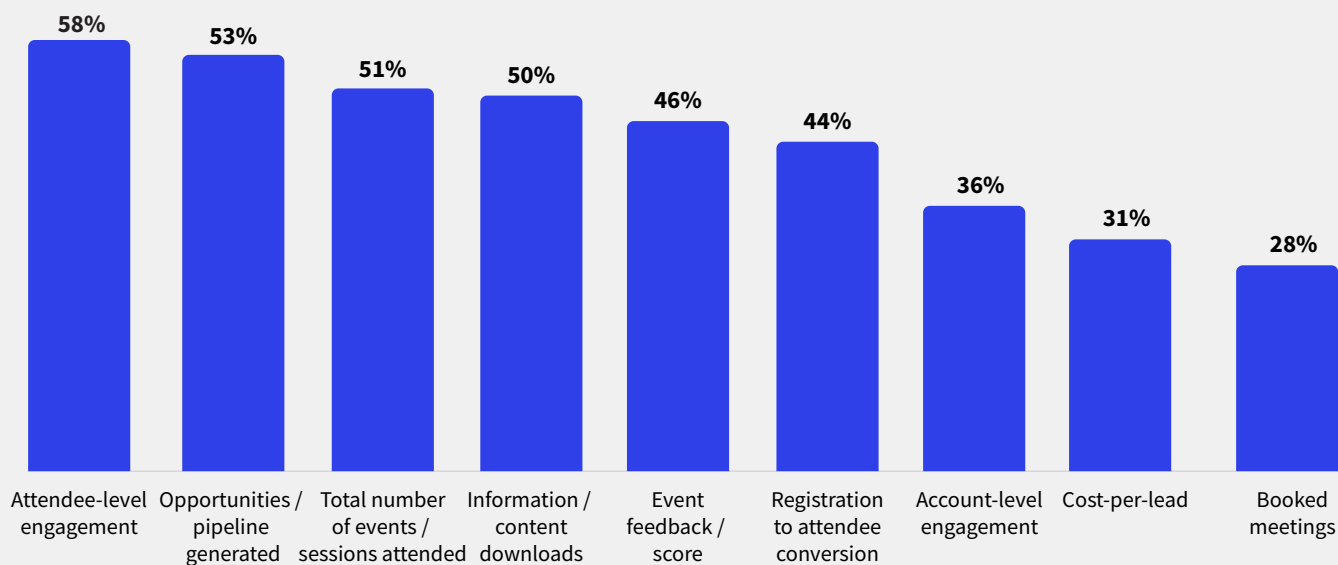


Respondents were those that produced their own events (n=182)

When it comes to measuring results, there is one metric that stands out above others. Respondents cite various ways of assessing performance, with the top three being “attendee-level engagement” (58%), “opportunities/pipeline generated” (53%) and “total number of events or sessions attended” (51%).

As a trend, engagement tends to stand out. For example, “customer engagement” is one of the top objectives for marketers. Close to six in 10 (58%) measure success using “attendee-level engagement.” Only a little more than one-third (36%) look at “account-level engagement” to assess performance.

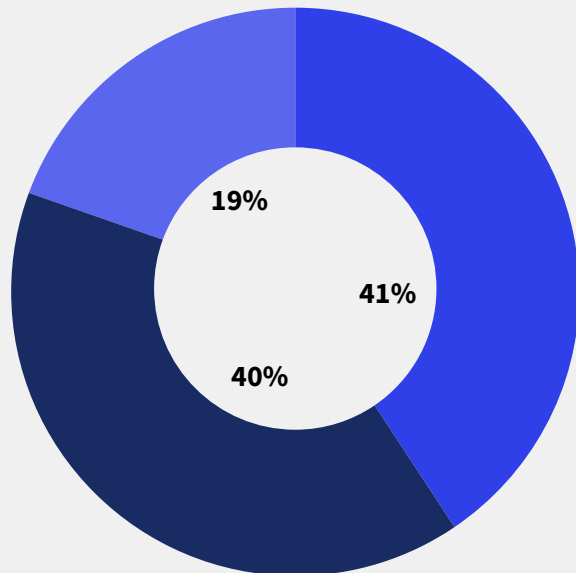
## WHEN ASSESSING PERFORMANCE OF YOUR EVENTS, WHICH METRICS DO YOU LOOK AT?



Companies shifting to virtual events are more likely to adapt their “existing” physical events to work in a digital environment, either by adapting their physical event strategies to prioritize virtual audiences (41%) or mirroring the existing physical event strategy (19%). Despite the differences in attendee behavior for virtual events, only two-fifths (40%) are going as far as creating a new strategy for hosting virtual events to maximize digital engagement.

This finding is concerning. Because new strategies aren’t being created, B2B marketers could miss out on their most important objectives and performance metrics.

## WHICH BEST DESCRIBES YOUR STRATEGIC APPROACH TO PLANNING VIRTUAL EVENTS?



- We adapt our physical event strategies to prioritize virtual audiences
- We create a new strategy for hosting virtual events to maximize digital engagement
- We mirror our existing physical event strategy

Respondents were those that had virtual events planned (n=161)



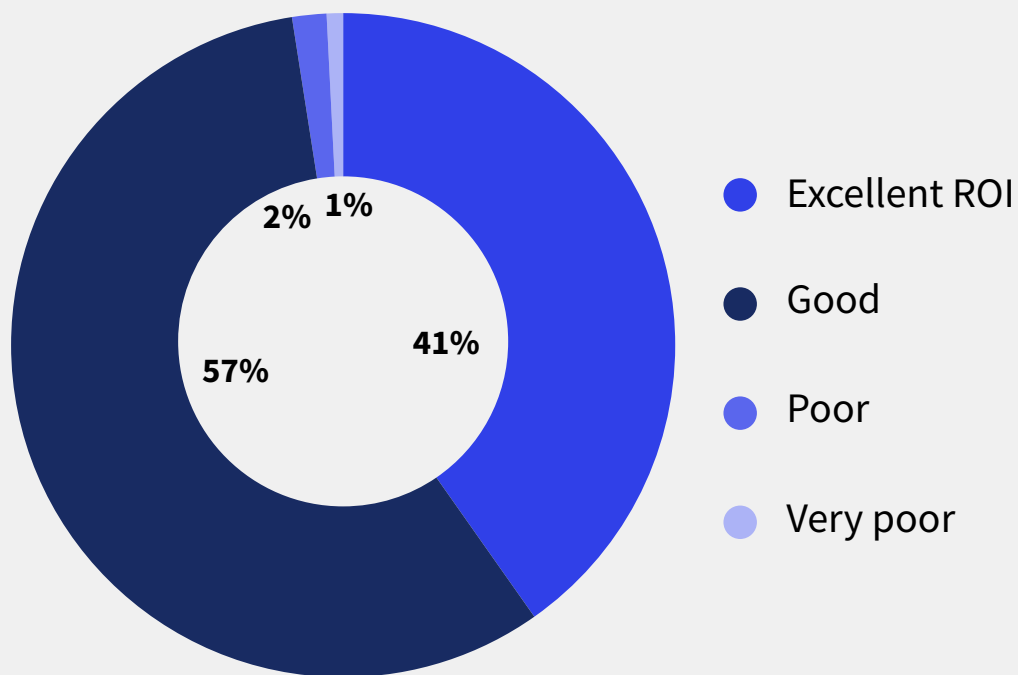
### ON24 TIP: PLAN YOUR EVENTS WITH ENGAGEMENT IN MIND

Event attendees can only interact when they are given the opportunity — and will often only do so when encouraged! For this reason, see that your virtual and hybrid events have a choice of engagement options within the experience, such as the ability to ask questions, chat in real-time, respond to polls, and download resources. Also, make sure your presenter or event host encourages interaction proactively, rather than waiting for it to happen. For more tips, [download the ON24 Marketing Playbook on what to do before, during and after your virtual event.](#)

# PERFORMANCE

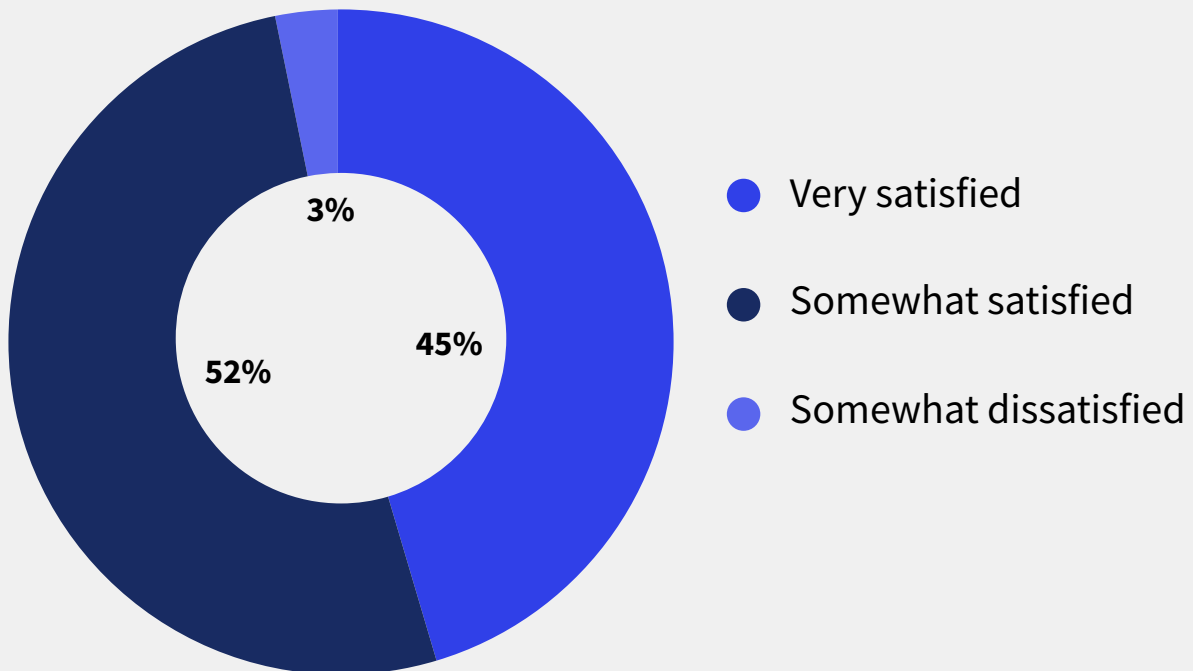
When looking at performance, there does appear to be somewhat of a gap between the importance being placed on attendee experience and the reality of most events. While nine in 10 (92%) marketers agree that the attendee experience is “critical” to the success of an event, only four in 10 (41%) describe attendee experience for their organization’s events as “excellent.” Instead, the majority share (57%) rate attendee experience as simply “good.”

## IN YOUR OPINION, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE ATTENDEE EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION'S EVENTS?



Nearly all respondents expressed some level of satisfaction with their virtual events, even with the gap between the importance of attendee experience and how marketers feel their events are performing. Indeed, when asked how satisfied they were with the performance of their virtual events against their goals and objectives, 45% reported being “very satisfied,” with another half (52%) saying they were “somewhat satisfied.”

### THINKING ABOUT YOUR VIRTUAL EVENTS HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THEIR PERFORMANCE AGAINST YOUR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES?

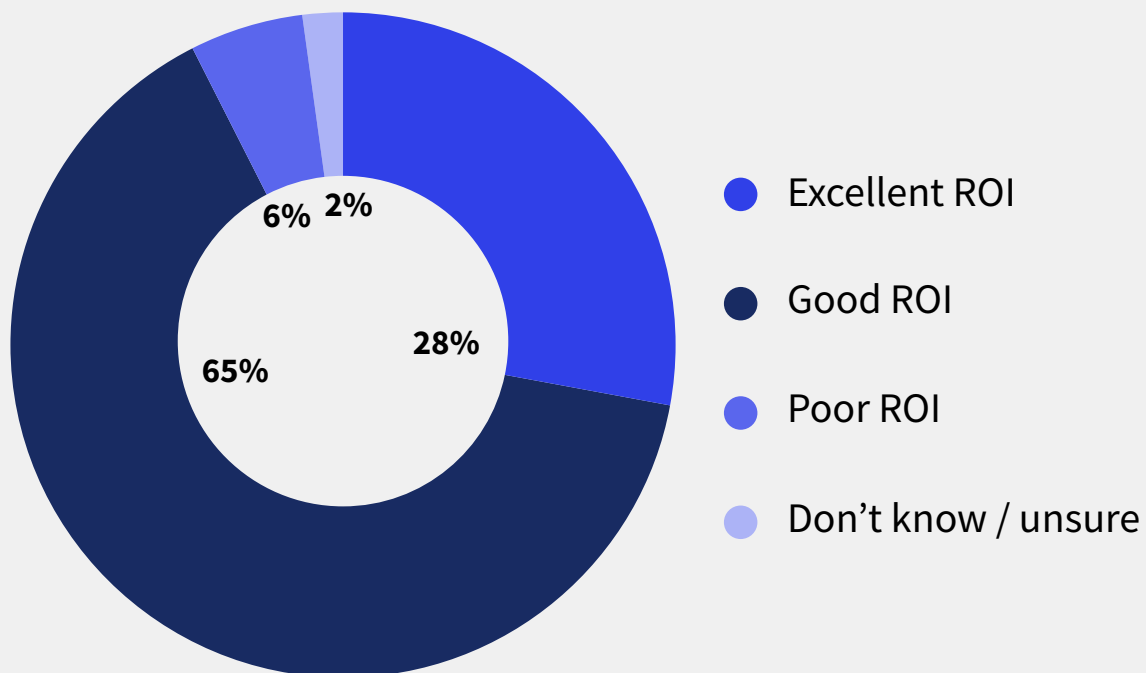


Respondents were those that had virtual events planned (n=161)

Adding to this general level of satisfaction, respondents are also seeing that virtual events make good business sense. In reference to return on investment (ROI), of those who have been running virtual events, some 93% say they have experienced “good” or “excellent” ROI.

Even so, there is no guarantee that such strong performance will continue. B2B marketers organizing events should use this time to raise the bar on the experience that their events offer. By doing so, they stand a better chance of keeping attendees engaged and coming back for more.

### THINKING ABOUT YOUR VIRTUAL EVENTS, HOW STRONG HAS YOUR RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI) BEEN IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS?



Respondents were those that had virtual events planned (n=161)



#### ON24 TIP: USE DATA TO MEASURE EVERY ASPECT OF VIRTUAL AND HYBRID EVENT PERFORMANCE

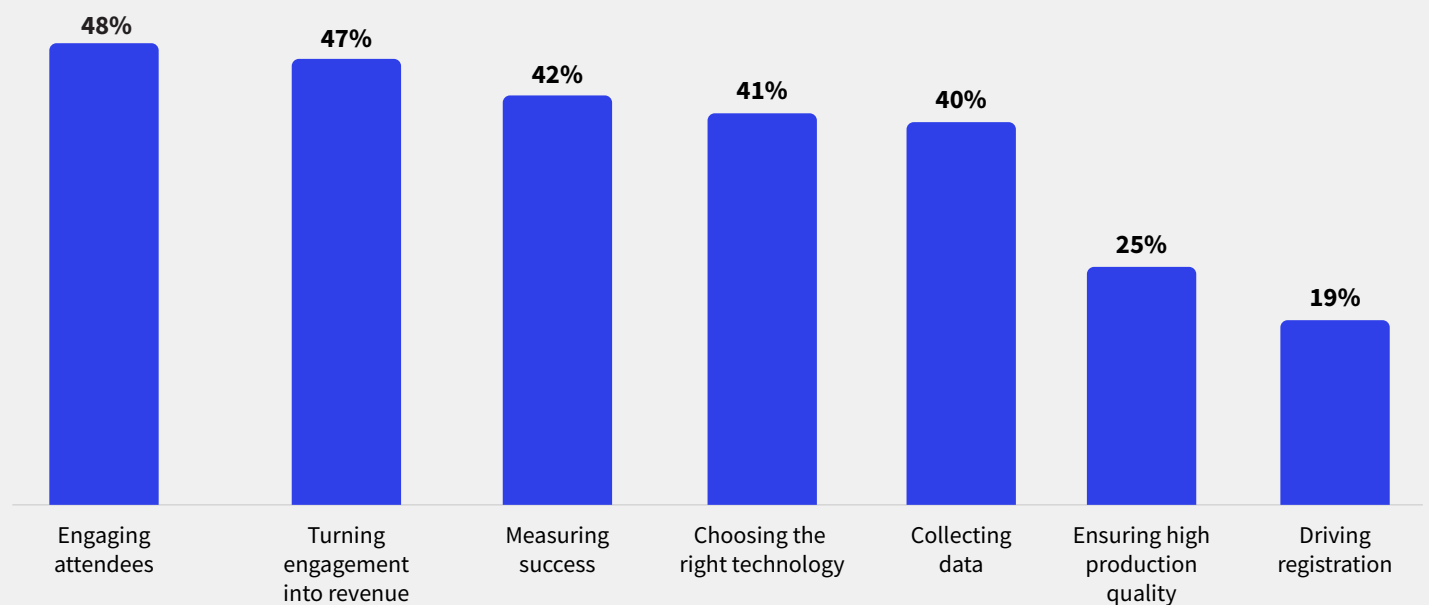
With virtual and hybrid events, almost every digital interaction and engagement can be measured. Take advantage of these data opportunities to measure your own performance and look for ways to make your next event even better. To find out more, check out [ON24 Intelligence](#).

# ADDRESSING THE EVENTS CHALLENGE

Running events — whether virtual, hybrid or physical — requires many steps to achieve success. However, our respondents noted several challenges they experienced while putting them together.

To find out which challenges were most pressing when hosting events, respondents were asked to select their top three options. The two primary issues both involved engagement, both in the form of “engaging attendees” (48%) and in “turning engagement into revenue” (47%). Following this was the challenge of “measuring success” (42%).

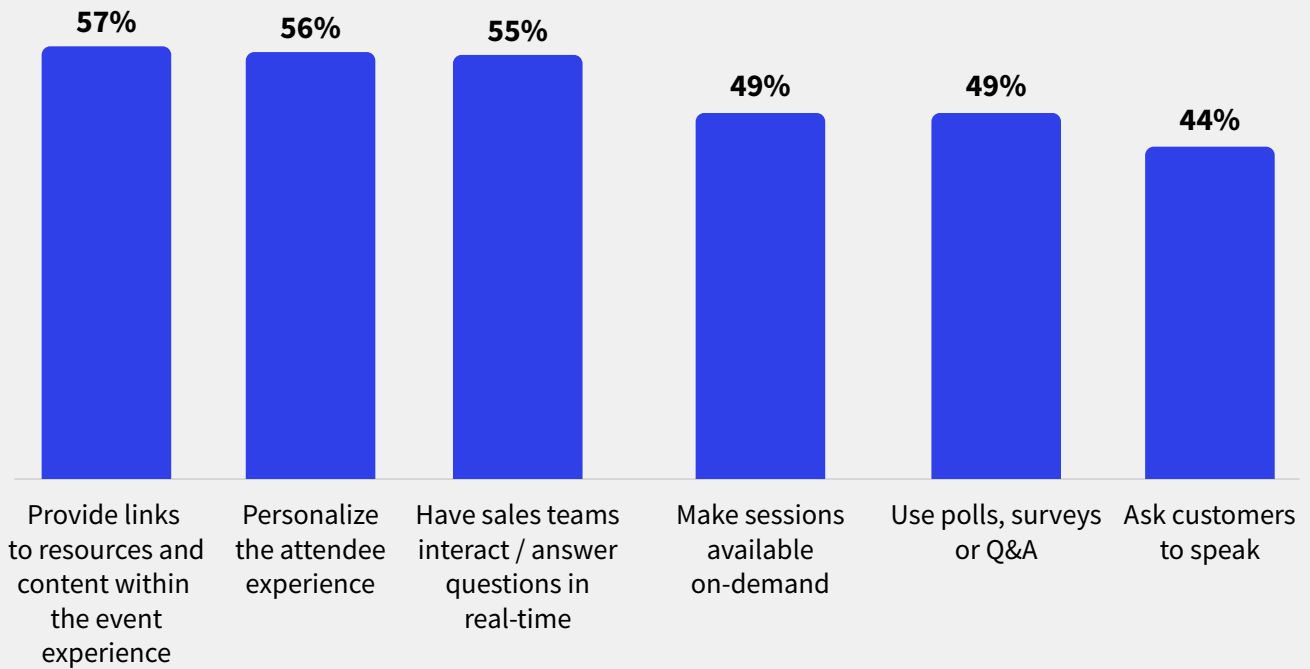
## WHAT ARE YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES WHEN IT COMES TO HOSTING EVENTS? PLEASE SELECT UP TO THREE OPTIONS.



By contrast, only a quarter (25%) cited “ensuring high production quality.” One-fifth (19%) selected “driving registration,” suggesting that marketers believe they have less of a problem in attracting sign-ups or bringing the surface-level experience up to par.

So, why is driving engagement and turning engagement into revenue such a struggle? To explore this issue, we asked respondents to tell us what interaction tactics they used to drive engagement. Turns out, more than half failed to either “make sessions available on demand” (51% did not use) or chose to “use polls, surveys or Q&A” (51% not doing so).

### WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TACTICS DO YOU USE TO ENCOURAGE INTERACTION AT YOUR EVENTS?



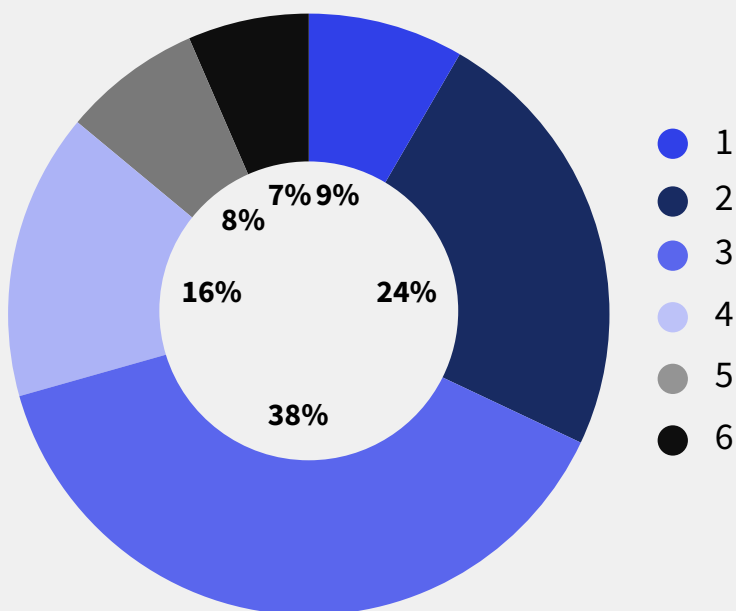
This is a cause for concern, as data from [ON24's Webinar Benchmarks Report](#) shows that:

- 43% of all virtual event attendees exclusively watched sessions on-demand, meaning that many marketers are letting down their buyers.
- 86% of webinars and virtual events hosted via ON24 used Q&A, meaning that many within the wider community of B2B marketers are failing to provide a function that is increasingly seen as a hygiene factor.

Finally, the least frequently used tactic was to “ask customers to speak,” with only 44% adopting this approach.

If B2B marketers are serious about driving engagement among buyers, they must close the best practice gap that is clearly present. There is plenty of room for improvement, given that only 30% of respondents used more than half of the tactics listed in the question.

### NUMBER OF TACTICS USED TO ENCOURAGE INTERACTION AT EVENTS (OUT OF SIX)



#### **ON24 TIP: AVOID THE “TALKING POWERPOINT” PROBLEM BY USING EVENT TECHNOLOGY THAT OFFERS PERSONALIZED, RICH EXPERIENCES**

We've all been to events — both virtual and in-person — that consist of little more than a monotonous reading of a presentation deck. Instead, look to create virtual and hybrid experiences that are personalized to the attendee and feature many opportunities to interact with the event. For more information on how ON24 makes this possible, check out the [ON24 Digital Experience Platform](#).



# HYBRID PLANS

Survey respondents overwhelmingly agree that hybrid approaches will become more widely used in the coming years. In fact, three-quarters of respondents (74%) are planning hybrid events of their own for the next 12 months.

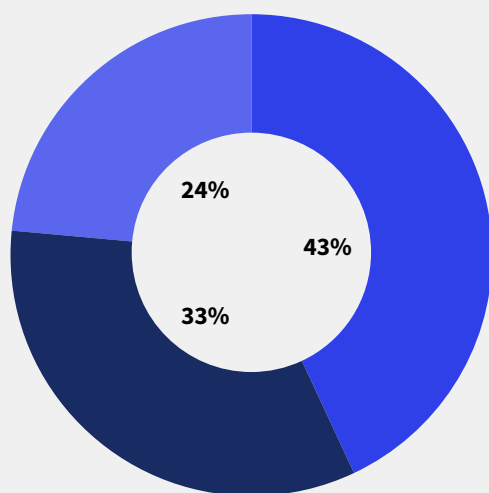
But what exactly is a hybrid event — and what is it not? Before this study was published, ON24's Mark Bornstein [described](#) the challenge of how hybrid events are often run:

“Hybrid physical/digital events mean a lot of different things to different people. Unfortunately, to many a hybrid event is really just a physical event where the presentations are also streamed to a digital audience.

“In these cases, the event is only really an event for the people at the event. For a virtual audience, however, it's just staring at a screen for endless hours with not much else to do.”

Sadly, there's a chance this description will fit many of the hybrid events that B2B marketers might produce in the coming years. One-third (33%) plan to simply mirror their physical event strategy — and while 43% will make some adaptations, only one-quarter (24%) say they will create a brand new strategy for hosting hybrid events.

## THINKING ABOUT THE HYBRID EVENTS YOU MIGHT PRODUCE, WHICH STATEMENT BEST DESCRIBES THE STRATEGY YOU WILL FOLLOW?



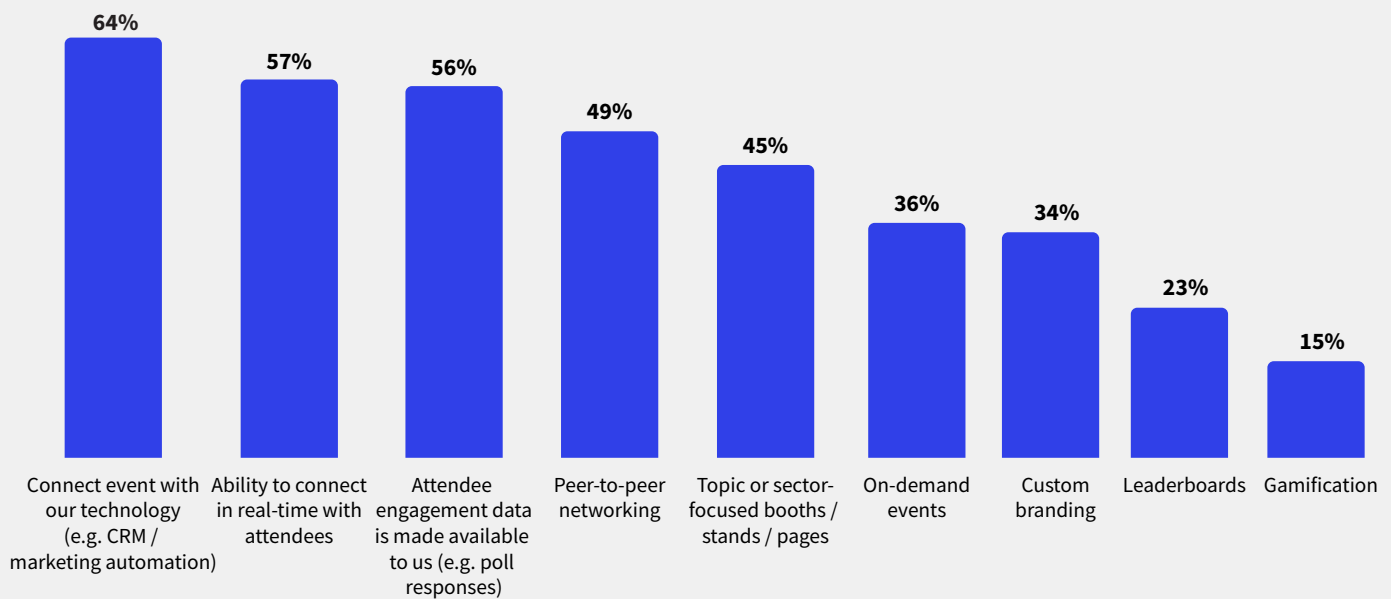
- We will adapt our virtual physical event strategies to prioritize both our in-person and virtual audiences
- We will mirror our existing physical event strategy making it accessible to a virtual audience while prioritizing our in-person audience
- We will create a brand new strategy for hosting hybrid events to prioritize in-person and virtual engagement

Respondents were those planning to produce hybrid events (n=148)

At a tactical level, there are many areas of best practice that are at risk of simply being overlooked. When provided with a list of nine elements that could be incorporated into a hybrid approach, only three were chosen by more than half of respondents, while just 25% listed five or more options out of the full list.

Of particular concern was that only 36% hoped to make their hybrid events available on demand. Given that [ON24's benchmark data](#) shows that 43% of all virtual attendees only watch sessions in this way, this figure suggests that most B2B marketers will be excluding a large share of their potential audience.

### FOR ANY HYBRID EVENTS YOU MAY RUN IN THE FUTURE, WHAT ELEMENTS ARE YOU HOPING TO INCORPORATE?

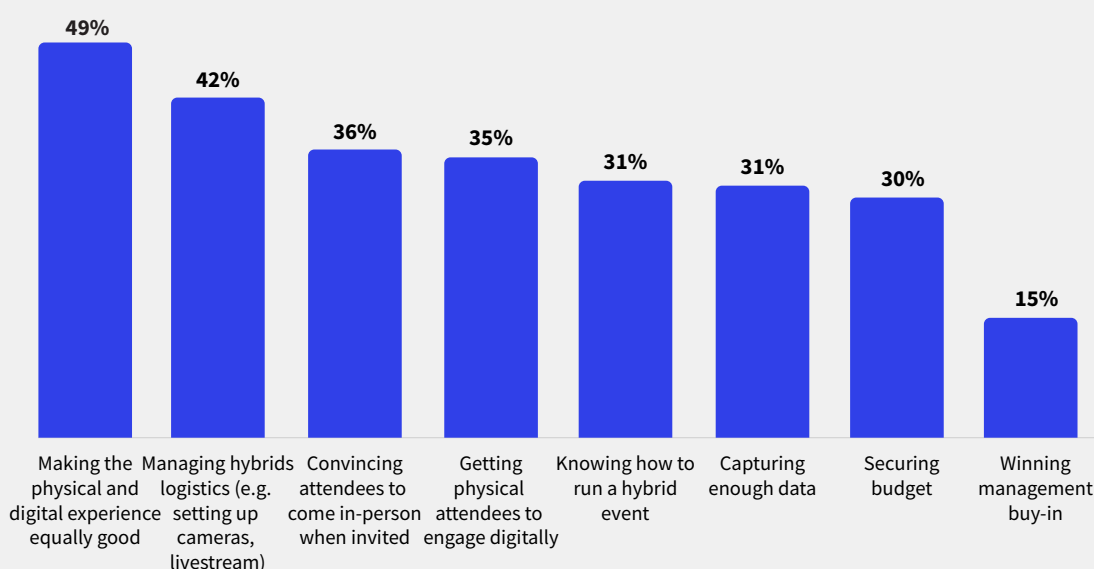


Respondents were those planning to produce hybrid events (n=148)

Ironically, B2B marketers do see the challenge in making the experience great for all of their attendees. When asked to select their top three anticipated barriers, half (49%) cited “making the physical and digital experience equally good.” By comparison, the common marketing complaints of “securing budget” or “winning management buy-in” were chosen by only 30% and 15% of respondents, respectively.

To address this top challenge, B2B marketers should resist the temptation of a cookie-cutter approach to hybrid events. Indeed, [as noted by ON24’s Michael Mayday](#), there are scenarios where a hybrid event *should not* be run — in particular, when an equal experience cannot be provided for all attendees.

## ASSUME YOUR ORGANIZATION DECIDED TO PRODUCE A HYBRID EVENT, WHAT DO YOU ANTICIPATE WOULD BE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO SUCCESS?



### ON24 TIP: SCALE THE IMPACT OF YOUR HYBRID EVENTS BY REPLICATING AND LOCALIZING THE VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE

While physical-only events are restricted to a certain place at time, hybrid events can take the experience to attendees wherever they are. Virtual elements can adapt an event to any market, improving the potential scale of your hybrid events. Pre-recorded sessions can be broadcast regardless of time zone, translation tools and closed captioning can communicate across language barriers, while localized breakouts, networking and chat can make the experience relevant and engaging. To help you scale your hybrid events, explore [ON24 Virtual Conference](#).



# WHAT EVENT ORGANIZERS CAN DO FOR THEIR SPONSORS

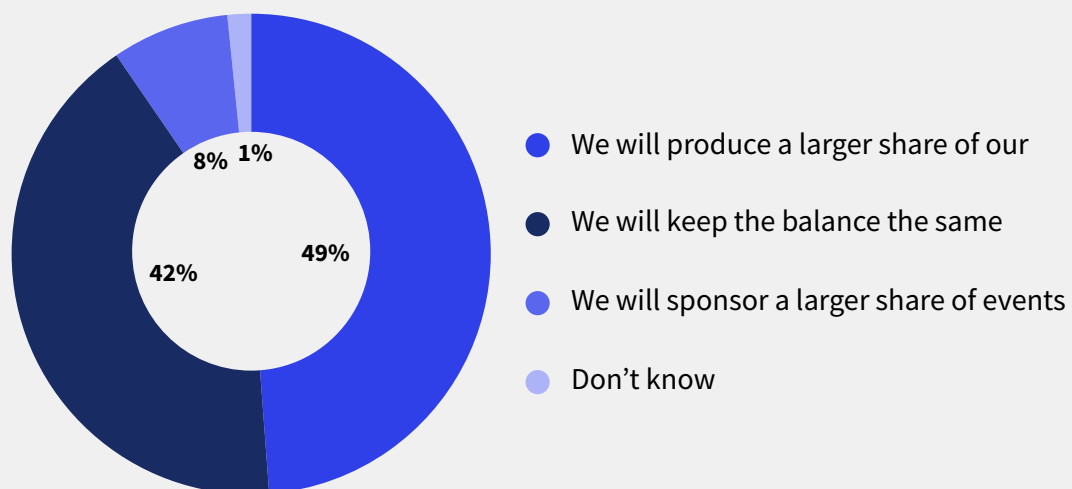
Sponsored events and conferences have always provided B2B marketers with a way to connect with audiences that aren't yet aware of their offerings. Of our respondents, half either sponsor other events (9%) or sponsor events in addition to producing their own (40%).

The B2B market for trade shows saw several years of growth in the run-up to 2019, with [PwC's Global Entertainment & Media Outlook for 2020-2024](#) estimating the size of the market at some \$15.58 billion in that year. Before the pandemic, this same study had predicted the B2B trade show market would grow at a compound annual growth rate of 4.3% from 2018 through 2023. But at the time of writing, this study forecasts that spend on trade shows isn't set to recover until after 2024.

Data from our respondents confirm that those looking to attract sponsors will have their work cut out. Half (49%) of respondents state they expect to produce a larger share of their own events in the future, compared to just 8% that expect to sponsor a larger share.

Given that the number of [virtual event attendees exploded by 251% in 2020](#) and [overall content consumption has risen by more than 22% year-over-year](#), B2B marketers can now reach a greater section of their target audience virtually. This means that the value of tapping into a sponsor's own audience has likely been reduced.

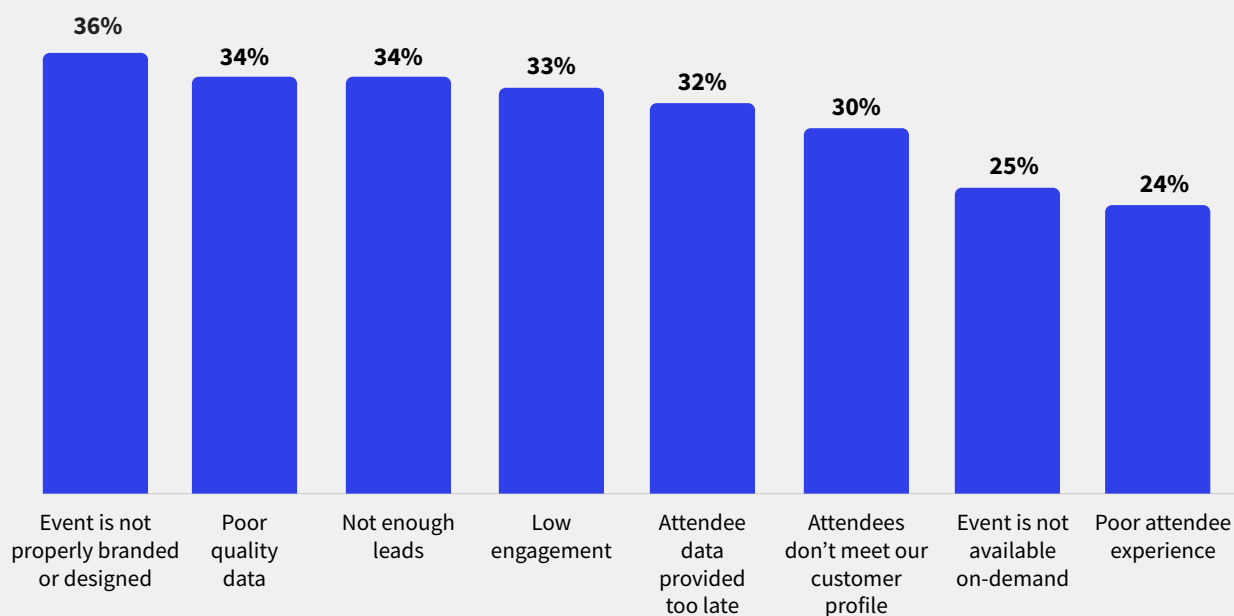
## IN THE FUTURE, HOW DO YOU EXPECT THE PROPORTION OF HOSTING YOUR OWN EVENTS AND SPONSORING EVENT TO CHANGE?



There are many complaints event organizers should address if they want to win back sponsors.

The most common complaint held by more than one-third (36%) of respondents is that the event “is not properly branded or designed” (36%). Other frequent issues include “poor quality data” (34%), “not enough leads” (34%) and “low engagement” (33%).

### WHEN SPONSORING AN EVENT, WHAT ISSUES OR BARRIERS DO YOU TYPICALLY FACE?



Respondents were those who have sponsored events (n=97)

[Research from the CEIR](#) shows event organizers are looking to hybrid strategies as an answer to sponsorship woes. In fact, nearly seven in 10 (68%) agree that virtual components will play a bigger role in physical events going forward. But this trade body also suggests that event organizers have a steep learning curve, [given that just 8% offered a hybrid model before the pandemic](#).

For sponsored hybrid events to be a success, event organizers need to make sure they provide the solutions that B2B marketers are now looking for — in addition to addressing existing issues and barriers.

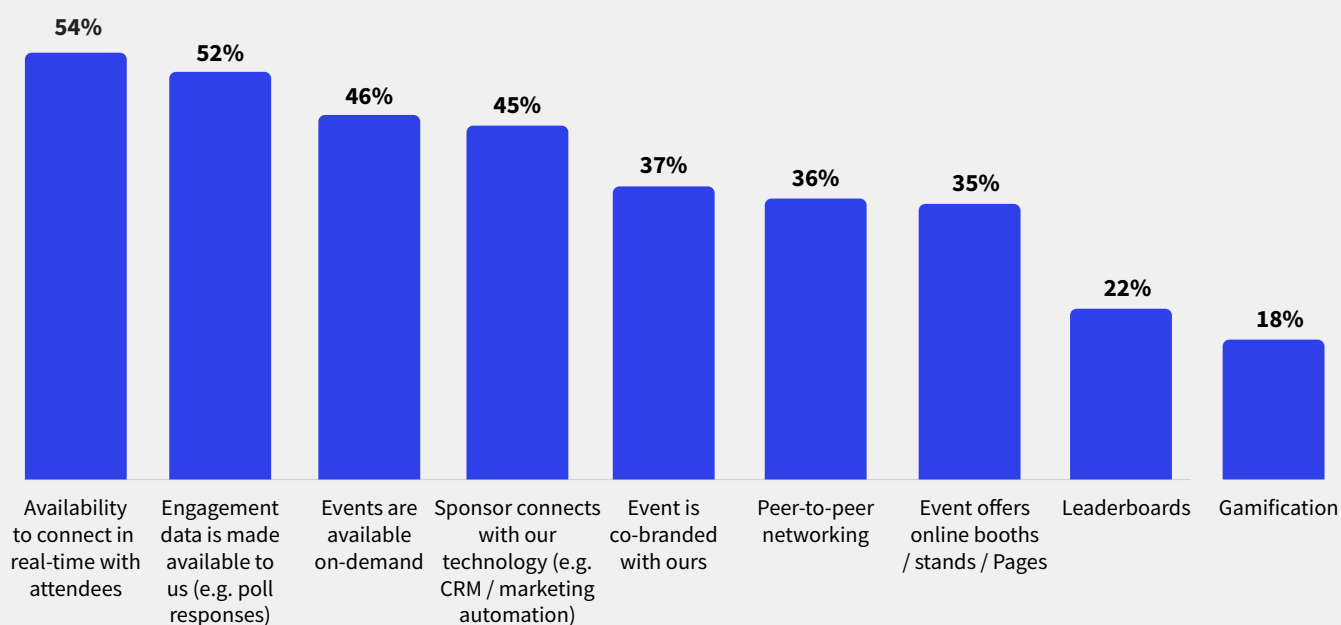
For our respondents, the top three most valuable elements are the “ability to connect in real-time with attendees” (54%), that “engagement data is made available to us” (52%) and that “events are available on-demand” (46%).

To do this, event organizers need to go beyond the simple practices often seen at physical events, such as badge scanning or emailing spreadsheets of registrants.

Furthermore, if event organizers adopt hybrid best practices faster than B2B marketers do themselves, they can gain an advantage over the hybrid events that marketers plan to produce on their own. This could help them recover more quickly and become a high-quality option for marketers looking to stand out from the competition.

In short, an approach of “if you build it, they will come” is unlikely to be sufficient for today’s B2B marketer, nor is a point-in-time approach where the results come only on the day of a given event, rather than a continuous flow of pipeline from on-demand sessions. Event organizers should rethink their existing approaches so they meet the changing demands of their past and future sponsors.

## ASSUME YOUR ORGANIZATION DECIDED TO SPONSOR A HYBRID EVENT, WHAT ELEMENTS WOULD YOU FIND MOST VALUABLE?



### ON24 TIP: CHOOSE EVENT TECHNOLOGY THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF TODAY’S B2B MARKETER

Respondents are clear on what they want, so event organizers need to give it to them. But not all event technology can provide real-time data, offer engagement options, and provide a fully customized, branded experience on demand. To see how you can better serve your sponsors with ON24, [read the case study from G3 Communications](#).

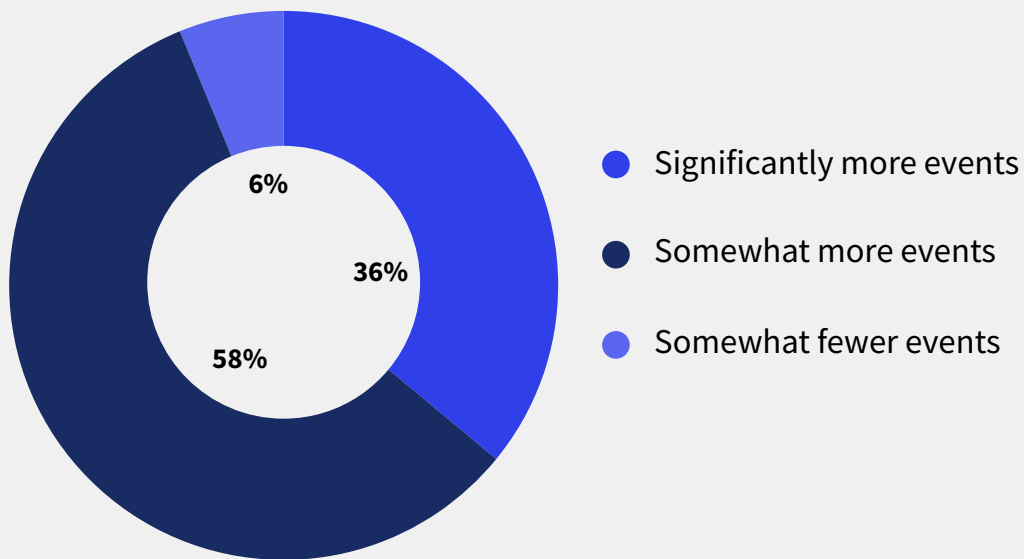


# THE FUTURE

It's clear from the survey that marketers not only filled the void left last year by canceled in-person events, but they reaped the benefits of virtual events as well. So what does the future hold for events?

Demand for events, according to the responses from the marketers surveyed, is only going to increase. More than nine in 10 (94%) say they plan to produce or sponsor more events than they did last year, with more than one-third (36%) planning to increase the number of events significantly. Only a mere 6% claim they will produce or sponsor somewhat fewer events in the next 12 months.

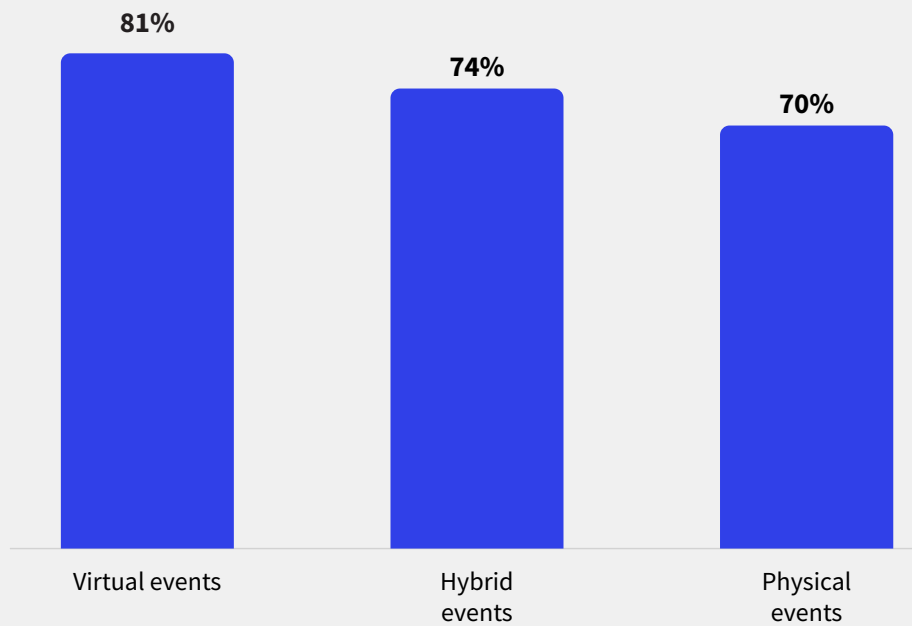
## FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS, WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE NUMBER OF EVENTS THAT YOU WILL PRODUCE OR SPONSOR COMPARED TO LAST YEAR?



The coming year will see marketers still relying a great deal on virtual events, with eight in 10 (81%) saying that they have planned virtual events for the next 12 months. But B2B marketers also want to connect with prospects and buyers in person while gaining the benefits of digital events.

As such, close to three-quarters (74%) of marketers are planning hybrid events in the next 12 months. But even with the desire to meet their audience face-to-face, B2B marketers do not seem as keen on getting back to purely physical events, in contrast to virtual and hybrid ones.

### FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS, WHICH TYPES OF EVENTS HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION PLANNED?



Separately, when asked about the future, seven in 10 (72%) said they believe they will run either the same number or more physical-only events in 2022 as they did back in 2019. At first glance, this optimism might be welcomed. However, given that the Global Business Travel Association forecasts that [spend on business travel will remain below 2019 levels by this time](#) — and that even by 2024, indexed spend in the United States will be below 2005 levels — marketers should plan with a degree of caution. Just because marketers may want a return to physical events doesn't mean their buyers feel the same way. Indeed, [a survey by McKinsey](#) has found that more than 70% of buyers prefer digital-only interactions. As such, those considering physical events should think carefully about the business case and the appetite of their buyers to attend.



### **ON24 TIP: DRIVE CONTINUAL ENGAGEMENT BEFORE AND AFTER THE EVENT WITH DIGITAL CONTENT HUBS**

Even though events are powerful, they are seldom the only touchpoint in the buyer's journey. To help your buyers learn more and accelerate your sales process, feature your most relevant content in personalized hubs that can be explored before and after the event. To find out more, check out the [ON24 Engagement Hub](#).

## CONCLUSION

The results of the survey make clear that both virtual and hybrid events offer significant potential to today's B2B marketers. Indeed, the fact that 84% of respondents plan to increase the number of events they will produce or sponsor over the next 12 months — even as uncertainty continues — represents a strong vote of confidence in the power of events to drive performance.

However, the data also shows that many B2B marketers are yet to adopt best practices within virtual and hybrid events, from their initial strategy to the tactics they plan to employ. In some way, this shows how effective events are, in that results may still be good even if the execution is not. This is a picture that has been seen in other digital channels such as email, [where most marketers report great ROI](#), even as few take full advantage of the tools available. It may also be the case that many B2B marketers are in the early stages of virtual and hybrid event maturity and are still learning.

But three points in this study show the risks that marketers face if they rest on their laurels. First, more than nine in 10 (92%) agree that the attendee experience is critical to event success. Second, the majority are yet to provide “excellent” experiences for their attendees. Third, marketers admit that their top two challenges both involve engagement — and given that engagement drives the quality of an experience, many are falling short.

As the number of events continues to rise and buyer expectations continue to increase, B2B marketers that don't act could see the performance of their events take a precipitous turn.

As today's B2B marketers enjoy the fruits of their events, they should take steps to prepare for future seasons. If they do, the rewards will be there as audiences keep coming back for the experiences they crave.

So whatever events you have planned, make sure that your strategy and approach provide an irresistible experience. We look forward to seeing the events you'll create.

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To make sure your events deliver the best possible results, look to adopt the following actions in your plans.



## FOR B2B MARKETERS

- **Develop a strategy that considers virtual and hybrid behaviors.** Make sure that both virtual and hybrid events provide worthwhile digital engagement opportunities. After all, digital attendees can easily leave a virtual event by closing a browser tab, and data from physical attendees will only come through digital interactions and booth scans.
- **Align people, processes, technology, and data to your event strategy.** By doing so, you can offer higher-quality events through personalization, capture and use engagement data, and make sure the post-event experience turns into revenue.
- **Consider making your event hybrid in these five scenarios, [as detailed by ON24's Michael Mayday](#):** when you want to increase the reach of an event; when you want to target multiple geographies; when you want to extend the life of an event; when you are running training or enablement sessions; and when you want to offer more value and reach to event partners.
- **Avoid making your event hybrid when it makes little sense.** This includes when you cannot offer an equal experience to all attendees, when you need an experience at short notice and when you don't want to add to the expense of a hybrid or in-person event.
- **Drive engagement by offering an excellent experience.** When your event experience is great, your audience will interact — allowing you to read their digital body language and turn that insight into increased revenue.
- **Define how you will measure engagement success.** This can include the time spent, the touches and interactions made, the buyer intent shown and the actionability of the engagement data you collect.
- **Aspire to make your virtual, hybrid, and physical experiences equally good.** Regardless of the channel, no attendee should receive a second-class experience



## FOR EVENT ORGANIZERS SEEKING SPONSORS

- **Avoid the temptation to simply replicate your physical event strategy to a virtual environment.** It's much easier for a virtual attendee to leave an event — and when they do so, the value to a sponsor is far lower.
- **Don't rely on a recovery in physical events.** It is far from guaranteed. With business travel and trade show spend set for a slow recovery, a strategy that invests heavily into physical-only events could quickly deplete cash and threaten your business.
- **Act to address the complaints sponsors have had with their events.** B2B marketers can now use digital channels to reach their target audiences, meaning that event organizers need to offer more than they used to.
- **Use technology to create events that deliver more than sponsors can do alone.** Consider investing the money that would have been spent on physical-only events into solutions that better measure intent and can have a more powerful impact on a sponsor's success.
- **Move from a “point-in-time” events approach to one that is always-on and delivers continual leads and engagement.** B2B marketers want pipeline throughout the year, not just when your event runs. By offering on-demand events and programs throughout the year, you can improve the value you offer.