

# The Viral Impact of Events

## Extending & Amplifying Event Reach via Social Media

Exclusive Survey of Leading Corporations & Event  
Marketers and Strategic Insights Report Developed by

Freeman  P  
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# Table of Contents

Introduction..... 3

Executive Summary ..... 4

I.) Value & Effectiveness of Social Marketing Strategies ..... 7

II.) How Social Media is Used .....11

III.) Most Effective Social Media Platforms  
Before, During & After Events .....14

IV.) How Social Marketing Efforts are Managed .....16

Maximizing the Viral Impact of Events — A FreemanXP Guide .....18

Conclusion.....20

About the Respondents .....22

About FreemanXP .....23

About the Event Marketing Institute .....24

# Introduction

Event and experiential marketers are increasingly focused on making an impact beyond the live event. To assess this trend, FreemanXP and the Event Marketing Institute have developed a unique, groundbreaking study that analyzes how top brands are using social media to extend the reach and visibility of their event and experiential programs.

To access this unique market information, a survey of leading event marketing executives with a focus on large companies in both business and consumer markets was conducted. The response is from large, leading corporations in key sectors including IT, medical and pharmaceutical, financial, automotive, entertainment and media, and consumer products.

This report also provides the following:

- Viral impact estimates and measurement benchmarks
- How social media is used pre-event, during events and post-event
- Most effective social media channels

The findings are provided for all the respondents and in places where there are meaningful differences breakout for companies with over \$500 million in revenue are included.

The definition of viral marketing provided to the survey respondents was: “Viral marketing and communications use social media, online networking and other technology services to produce an increase in brand awareness, promote content sharing, generate word of mouth or other objectives. This study covers how event marketers and exhibitors are developing content and information for social networks and other channels to encourage online sharing by attendees, participants and other applicable industry members, prospects and influencers.”

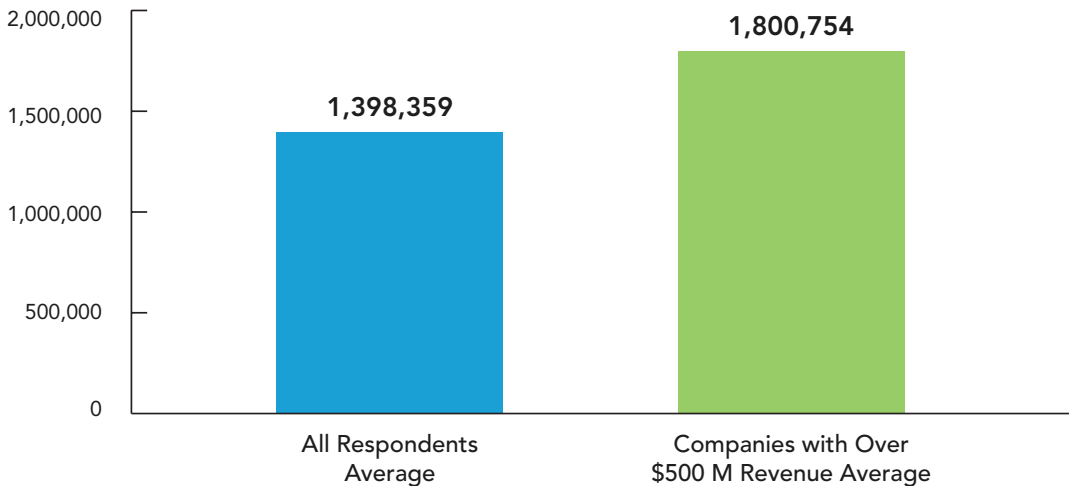
FreemanXP and the Event Marketing Institute thank all of the respondents for their invaluable contribution to the study.



# Executive Summary

One of the most important findings from the study is the sheer number of reported event-related touches, communications, connections and impressions. The average for all respondents is nearly 1.4 million touches and impressions, and for companies with over \$500 million in revenue the average is a significant 1.8 million per event. Clearly, the viral impact especially seen by large companies is significant.

## Estimated Viral Touches, Communications, Connections, Shares & Impressions per Event



The survey asked brands in a follow-up question to rate the level of confidence they have in their viral impact estimate. The companies with 100% confidence report an even larger, very significant average figure of 7.8 million touches, communications, connections and impressions per event. Nearly all of the companies reporting 100% confidence have over \$500 million in revenue, and most are in technology sectors with their own events.

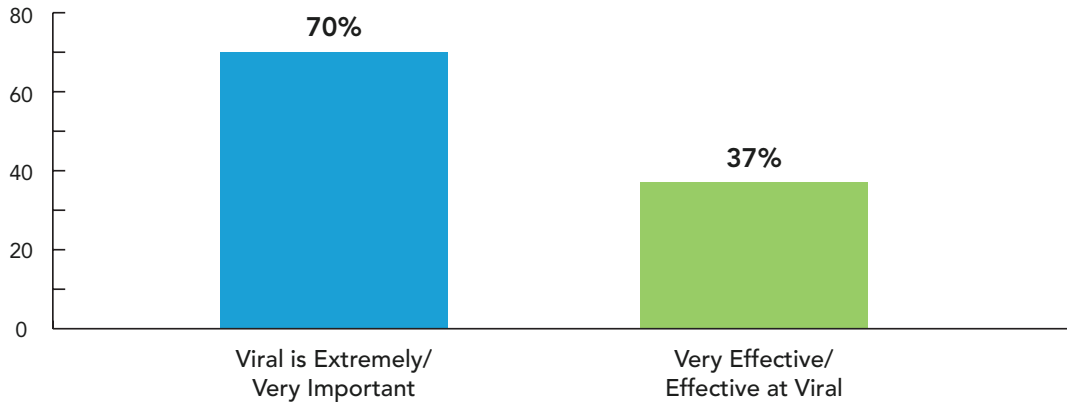
Extending and amplifying event reach via social media is becoming very important to top marketers and exhibitors, and many are still experimenting. While most leading event marketers have a social media strategy that includes efforts to extend and amplify the event investment, many companies feel they can be much more effective with these efforts.

### Key Insights

- Viral efforts related to events are very important to top companies and event marketers. But most feel they can be much more effective and are essentially experimenting today.
- 50% of leading event marketers specifically budget for viral efforts, and 97% expect to increase or hold their spend level in the next budget cycle.

A total of 70% of top companies and brands ranked social marketing related to event programs as “extremely” or “very important”. Yet only 16% of the survey respondents say they are “very effective” at generating viral impact from their event and exhibit programs — and only 21% say they are “effective”.

### **Viral Efforts Related to Events is Important to Top Event Marketers, But Only a Small Percentage Feel They are Being Effective**



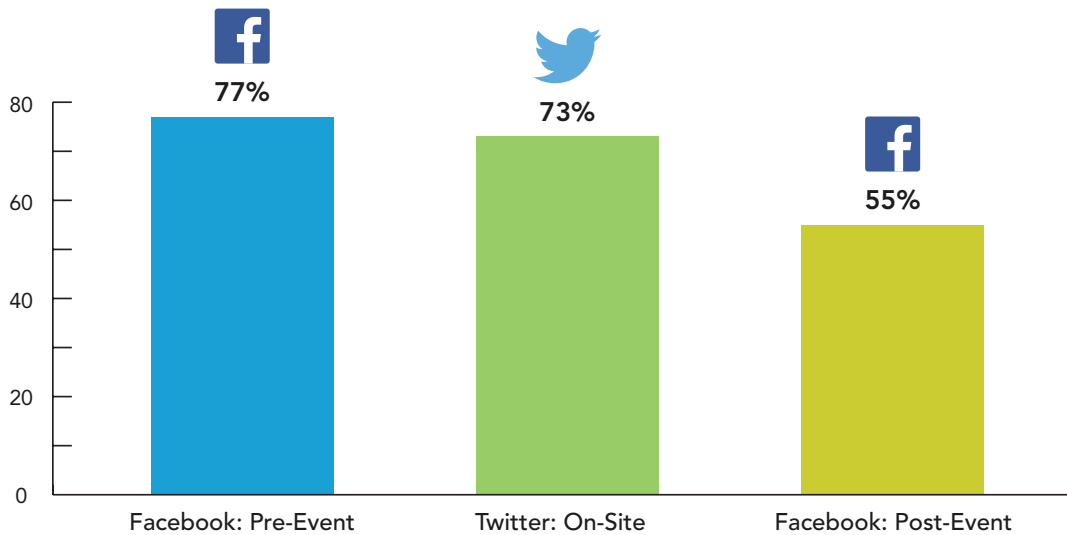
For event marketers and exhibitors, there is significant awareness about the importance of creating memorable moments and content worth capturing and sharing across digital channels. Clearly, over the next few years more consumer and B2B marketers will focus efforts on developing engaging event content strategies to earn increased social engagement from targeted fans.

The findings show the primary social engagement goals are to drive attendance and then reach attendees on-site during events. A secondary, emerging trend which many leading companies are already focused on is to reach applicable industry members, prospects and influencers that may not attend the events.

The importance of marketing social content is also suggested in the finding that 50% of leading event marketers and exhibitors have a specific budget for viral efforts. In addition, 53% of brands and exhibitors are increasing their spending on social efforts, and 44% expect their spend to remain at the current level in the next budget cycle with almost no brands decreasing the spend. Also, 53% of the survey respondents say they measure their event-related viral impact.

Another goal of the study has been to quantify the most effective social channels. Overall, Facebook is considered the most effective channel pre- and post-event, while Twitter is the most effective platform during events, according to the survey respondents.

### Most Effective Social Channel for Viral Impact Pre-Event, On-Site & Post-Event \*



\* Percentage of brands selecting "most effective".

### About the Respondents

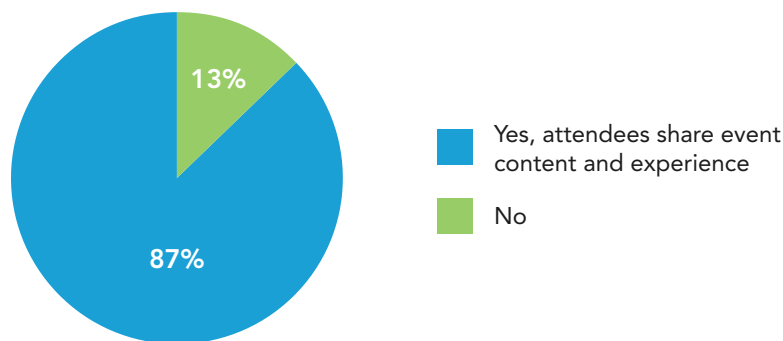
The survey respondents are mainly large companies in IT, medical and pharmaceutical, financial services, automotive, entertainment and media, and consumer products. Seventy percent have total revenue over \$500 million. Thirty-seven percent have over \$10 billion in annual sales. Thirty-six percent of the companies serve both business and consumer markets and 38% are primarily B2B and the remainder are consumer focused brands.

# I.) Value & Effectiveness of Social Marketing Strategies

The complete survey findings are provided beginning in this section. The data is provided for all of the respondents, and in places findings are compared to companies with over \$500 million in revenue where there are differences or insights.

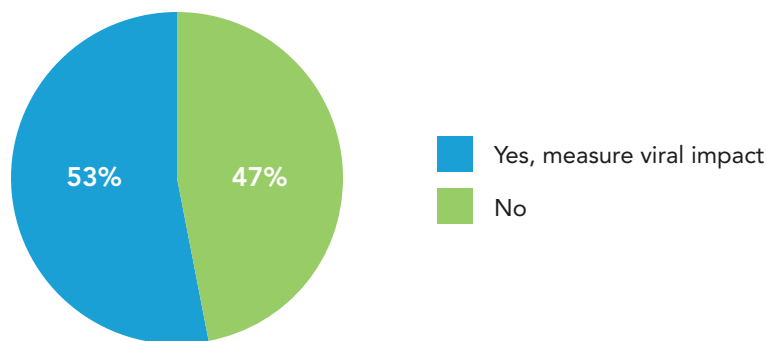
## Do Attendees Share Their Event Experiences or Content with Others?

A very high percentage (87%) of the respondents believe attendees share their event experiences or content. An even larger percentage of companies with over \$500 million in revenue (90%) say attendees share information post-event. This is a key indication of the opportunity to increase the viral impact of event marketing programs.



## Percentage of Event Marketers Measuring Viral Impact

Just over half of the survey respondents measure their event marketing viral impact. Similar to overall event ROI, top companies track and measure their social marketing impact and effectiveness. Most all companies believe attendees share event content and experiences, yet nearly half lack a formal measurement plan for this area.



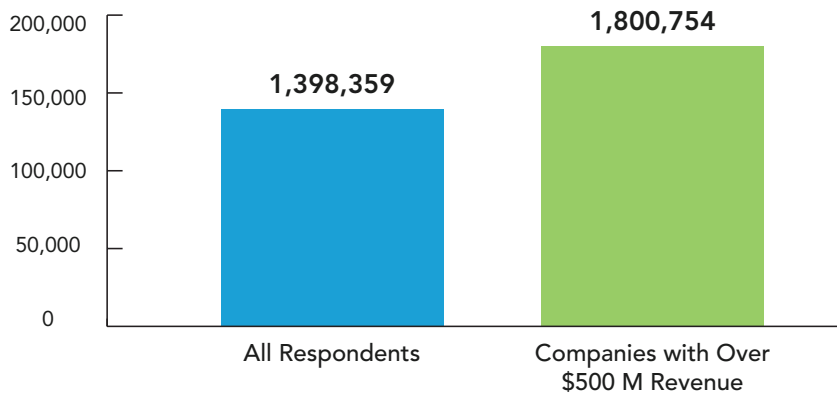
### Key Insight

- Nearly nine out of ten event marketers feel their attendees share their event experiences or content, suggesting the significant opportunity for more effective viral efforts around events by brands.

## Estimated Impact Generated by Online & Social Media Efforts

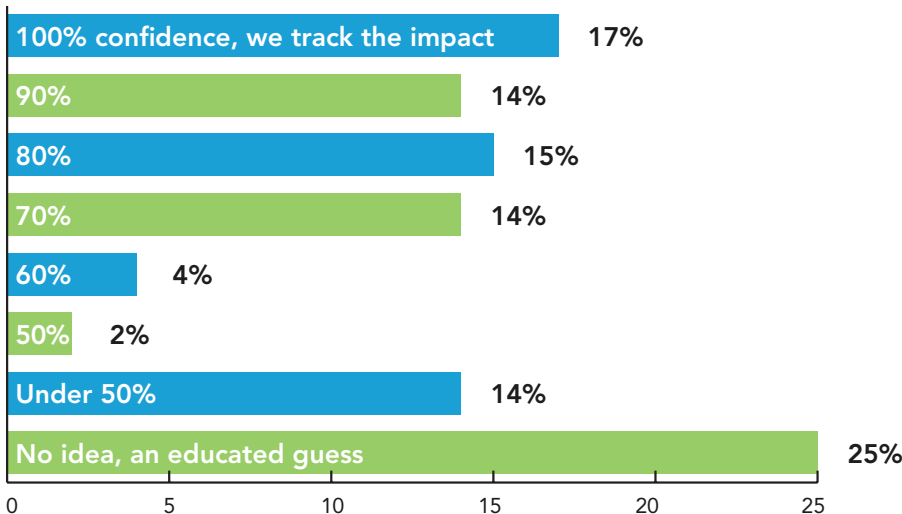
The chart below provides the estimated total touches, communications, connections and impressions about the brand, event or exhibit activity. Clearly, the viral impact especially seen by large companies is very significant. The survey question was: *Considering your largest, most important event or exhibit, please estimate the total viral impact and word of mouth generated by your online and social media efforts. That is, please estimate the total number of viral touches, communications or connections about your brand, exhibit or event presence.*

### Average Estimated Viral Touches, Communications, Connections, Shares & Impressions per Event



### Viral Impact Estimate Confidence Level

The survey asked the respondents to rate the level of confidence they have in their estimate. A total of 46% of the respondents have an 80% to 100% confidence level for their estimates. Still, 14% say their confidence level is under 50%, and 25% indicate they have no idea and are simply guessing the impact.



### Key Insight

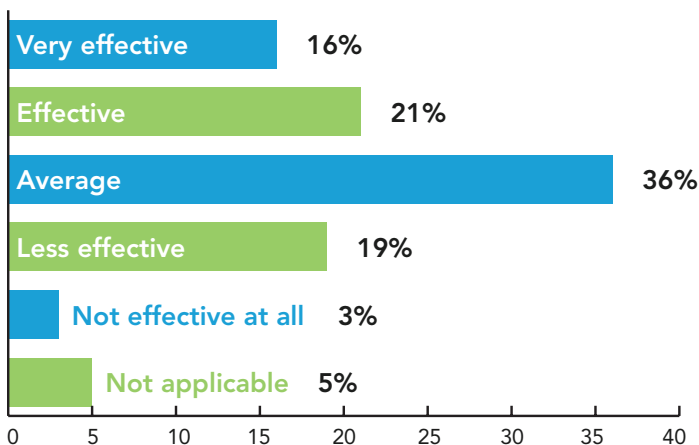
- One of the key findings is the sheer number of reported event-related touches, communications, connections and impressions. The average for all respondents is nearly 1.4 million viral touches and impressions, and for companies with over \$500 million in revenue the average is a significant 1.8 million per event.



An analysis of the companies that indicated they have 100% confidence in their viral impact finds a very significant average figure of 7.8 million touches, communications, connections and/or impressions. Nearly all of the companies reporting 100% confidence have over \$500 million in revenue. Most of these companies are in technology sectors with their own events, with social engagement strategies specifically targeted to non-attendees, often around the world. These leading companies are truly focused on extending and amplifying the live event.

## Effectiveness at Generating Viral Impact & Content Sharing from Event Programs

The survey findings suggest event marketers and exhibitors feel they could be more effective with their viral efforts. Consider that only 16% say they are “very effective” at generating viral impact. Analyzing the data further finds companies serving both business and consumer markets, which are often large companies in IT, medical and financial sectors, feel they are the most effective at generating viral impact.



## Importance of Extending & Amplifying Event Marketing Programs via Social Media

Extending and amplifying event programs via social media is “extremely” or “very important” to a total of 70% of top companies and brands. Event-related social marketing is most important to companies with over \$500 million in revenue. The table below shows this comparison.

	All	Over \$500 M
Extremely important, critical	32%	47%
Very important	38%	30%
Somewhat important	21%	17%
Not very important	8%	7%
Not at all important	1%	0%
Other	0%	0%

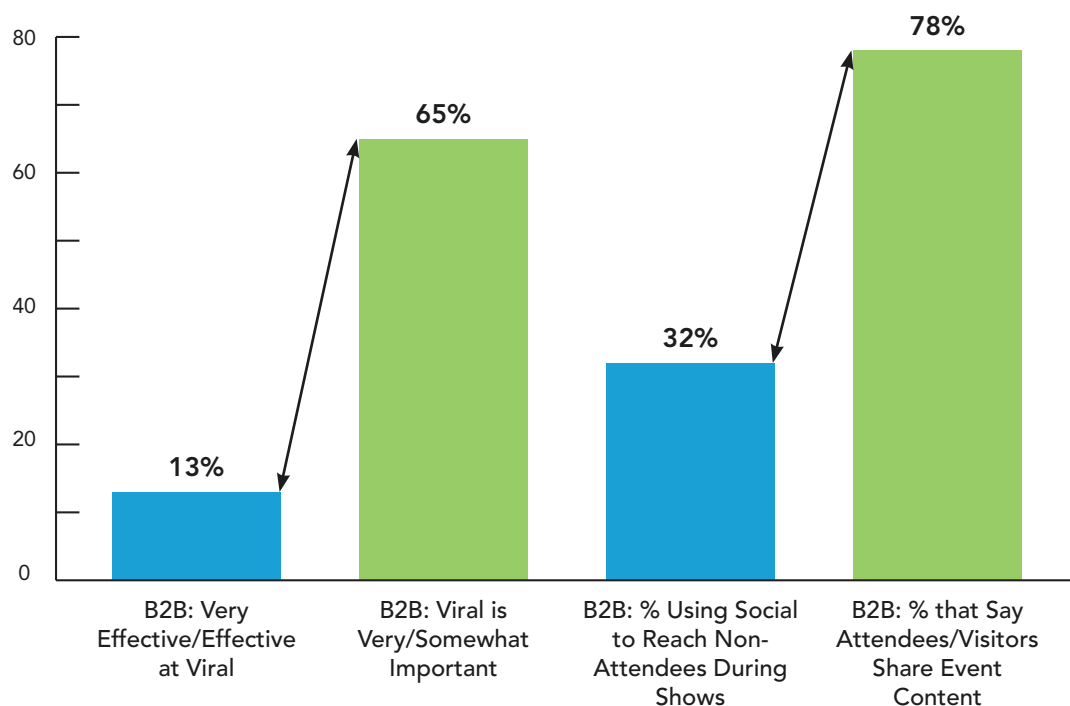
### Key Insights

- The companies with 100% confidence in their viral impact tracking report a very significant average figure of 7.8 million viral touches, communications, connections and impressions per event. Nearly all of these companies reporting 100% confidence have over \$500 million in revenue and most are technology firms with their own events.
- Only 16% of event marketers surveyed feel they are “very effective” at generating viral impact related to their event programs.

## Opportunity for B2B Brands & Exhibitors

Analyzing the B2B focused company specific findings suggests there is an even larger disconnect and opportunity related to viral efforts in this market segment. Only 9% of B2B respondents say they are “very effective” at generating viral impact from their event and exhibit programs and even less (4%) say they are “effective” at this. Yet a total of 65% say social marketing efforts related to events are “very” or “somewhat important”. This disconnect is also suggested when considering 78% of B2B respondents say attendees share information and content gathered at shows with others. There is also the opportunity for B2B exhibitors to reach non-attendees via social platforms during shows, as in many industries only a subset of potential industry members and buyers are able to attend the typical convention and trade show. These findings are summarized in the chart below.

### B2B Marketers & Exhibitors on Viral Importance & Impact



#### Key Insight

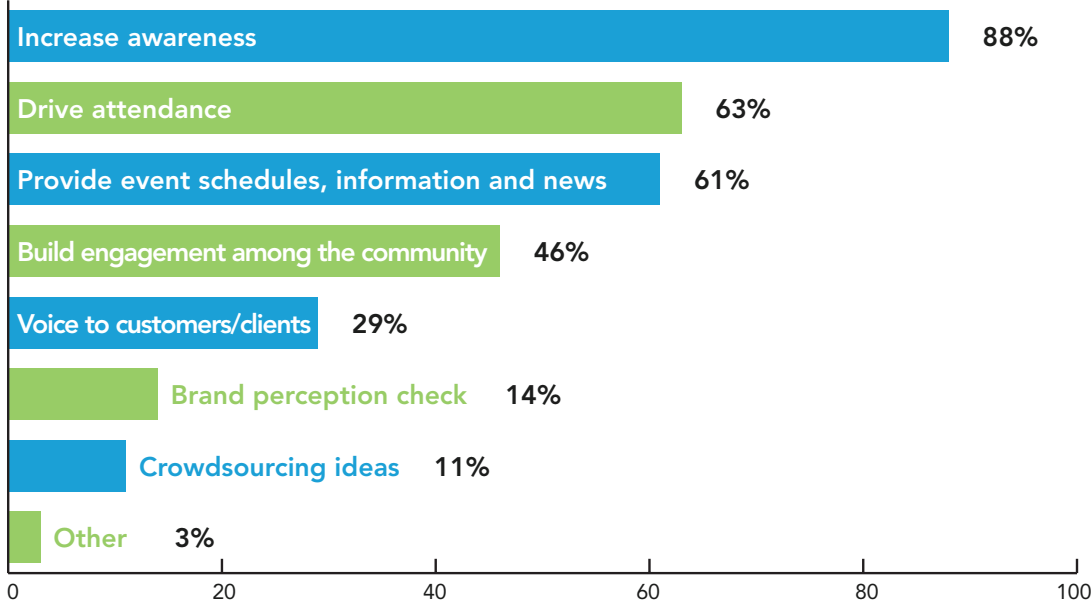
- Only 9% of B2B respondents say they are “very effective” at generating viral impact from their event and exhibit programs and even less (4%) say they are “effective” at this. Yet a total of 65% say event-related social and viral marketing efforts are “very” or “somewhat important”.

## II.) How Social Media is Used

This section provides the findings for the different ways brands generate viral impact through social engagement before, during and after events as well as their rankings of the most effective platforms.

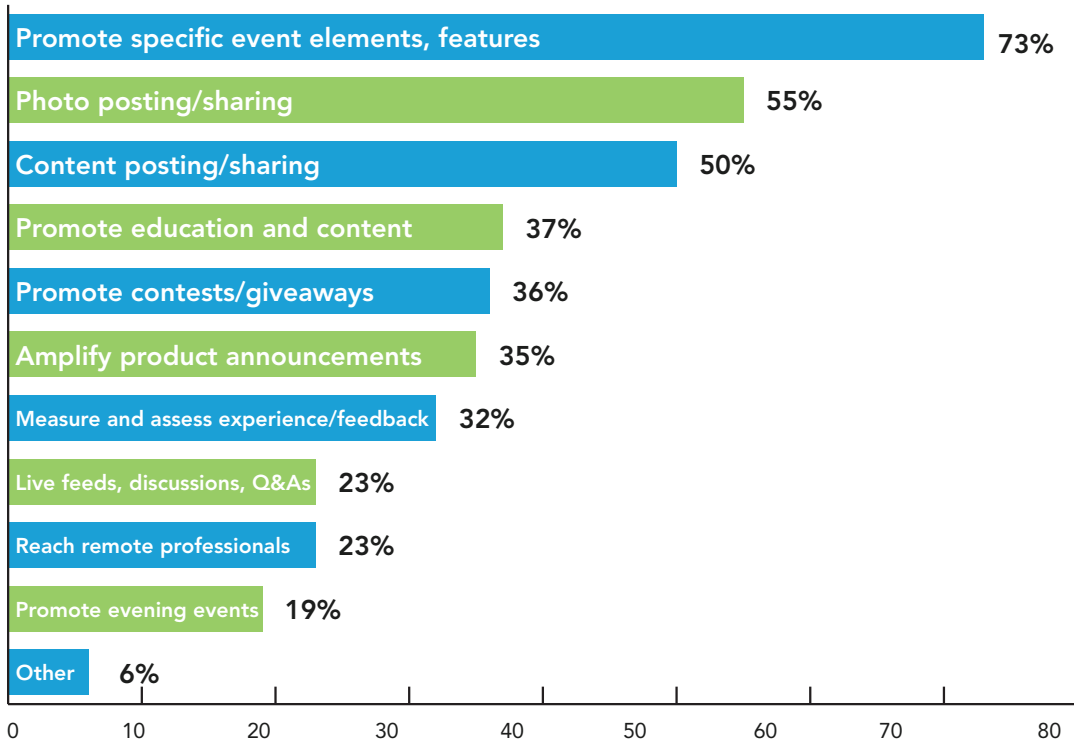
### How Social Media is Used Pre-Event

Social media is mainly used before events and experiences to increase awareness, drive attendance and provide general information. Analyzing the survey data by market segment finds 65% of companies that serve both B2B and consumer markets which are often large companies also focus their pre-event social efforts on building engagement among their market community.



## How Social Media is Used During Events

During events social media is mainly used to promote event elements or features as well as share photos and content. About one-third of companies do one or more of the following while on-site at events and exhibitions: promote education and content; promote contests/giveaways; amplify product announcements; and measure the experience and access feedback.

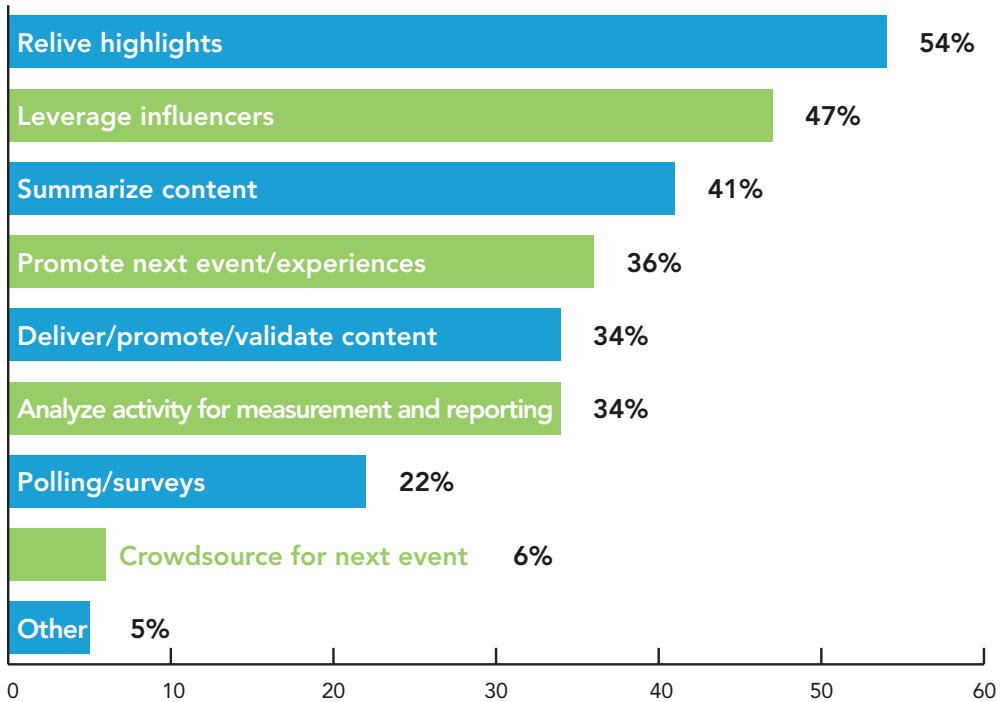


### Key Insight

- Only a small percentage (23%) are currently using social media during events to reach remote or non-attendees and industry members.

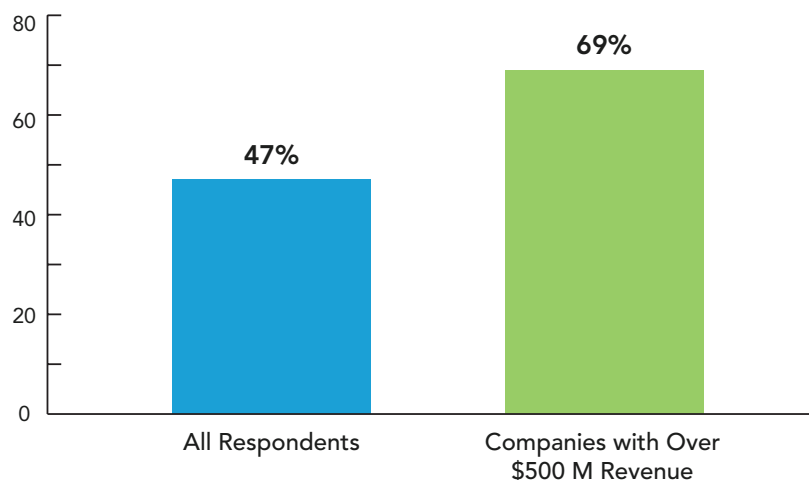
## How Social Media is Used Post-Event

Following events, about half of event marketers use social channels to relive or summarize highlights and leverage influencers.



The largest companies with over \$500 million in revenue place a much greater emphasis on leveraging influencers, often those with large or important followings, with their post-event communications. The chart below provides this comparison. In fact, leveraging influencers is the most common post-event social engagement activity by the largest companies in the survey.

## Levering Influencers Post-Event: All Respondents & Companies with Over \$500 Million in Revenue



### Key Insight

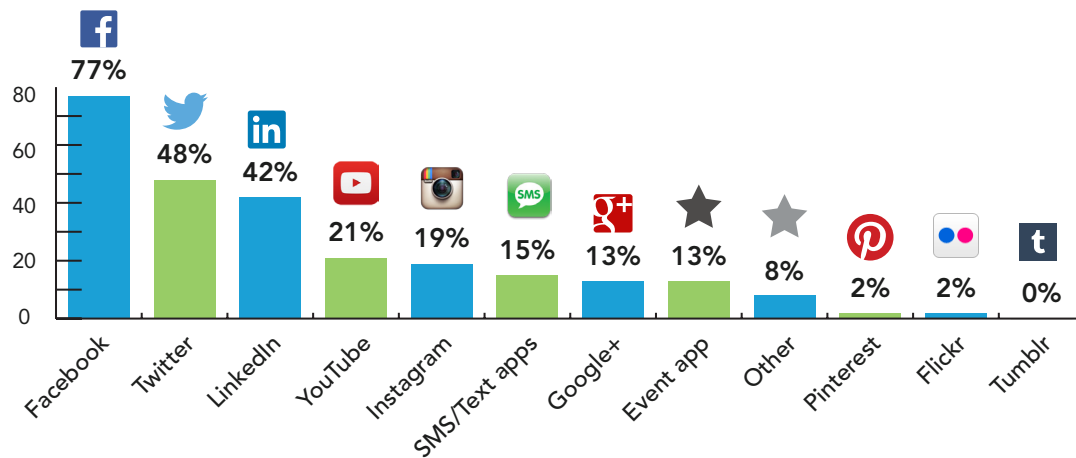
- Leveraging influencers is the #1 post-event social engagement activity done by the largest companies in the survey. And 69% of companies with over \$500 million in revenue say they do this post-event.

# III.) Most Effective Social Media Platforms Before, During & After Events

This section provides brands' ratings of the most effective social engagement channels at different phases of the event and experience cycle.

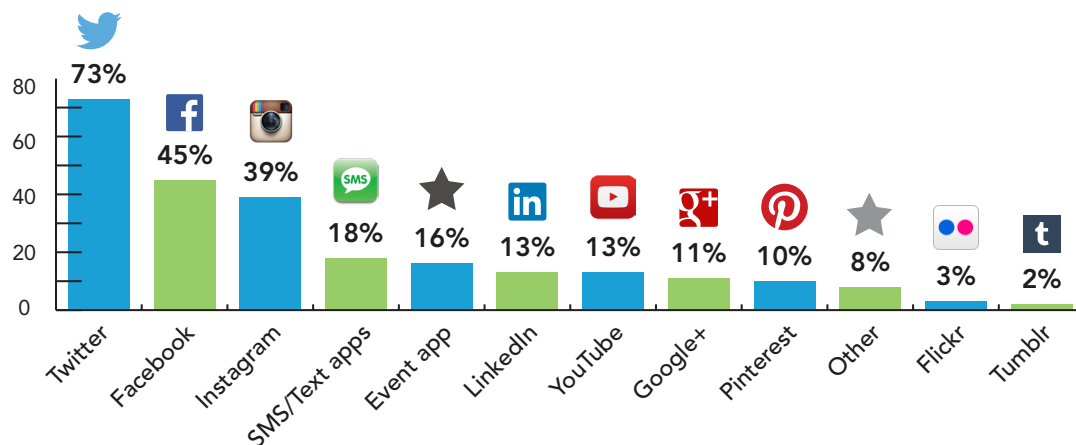
## Most Effective Social Media Platforms Pre-Event

Facebook is considered the most effective social media platform leading up to events. The second and third highest rated platforms by the survey respondents are Twitter and LinkedIn.



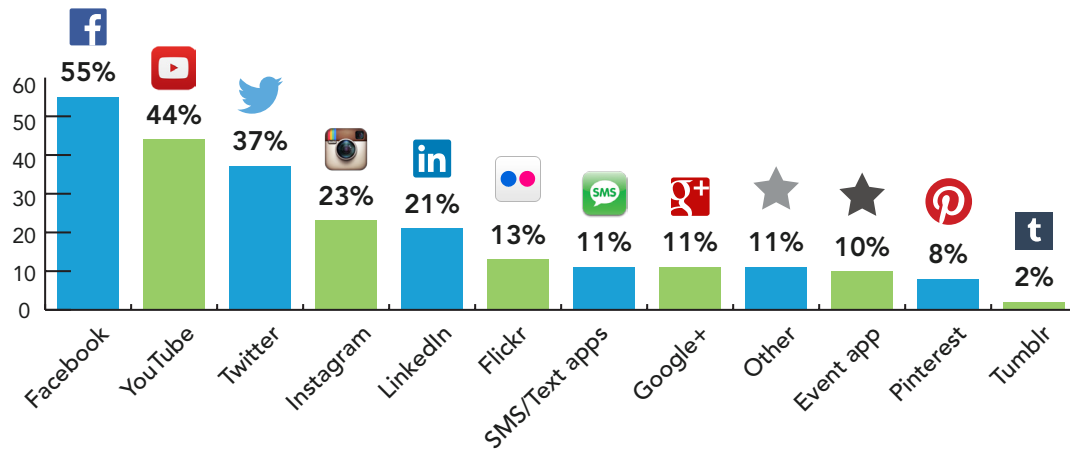
## Most Effective Social Media Platforms During Events

During events, Twitter is rated the most effective social platform, followed by Facebook and Instagram.



## Most Effective Social Media Platforms Post-Event

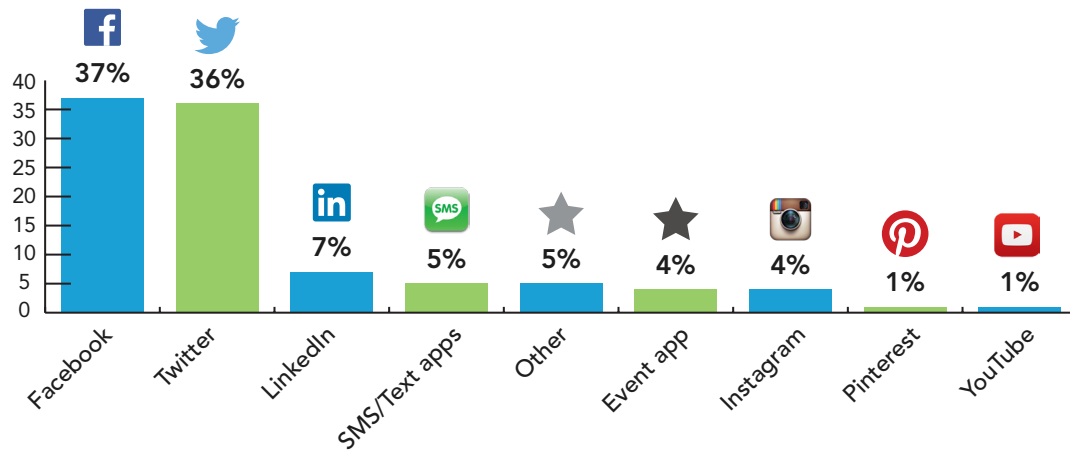
The top three channels post-event are Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.



## Overall Single Most Effective Social Media Platforms

The survey asked the leading companies to consider the single most effective social platform for their event communications and viral efforts. The survey question was: *Overall, which social media channel is the most effective in driving community engagement and content sharing considering your entire event and experiential marketing portfolio?* Facebook and Twitter are by far considered the most effective social media channels.

## Single Most Effective Social Media Channel



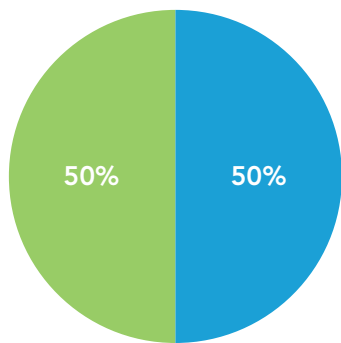
# IV.) How Social Marketing Efforts are Managed

This section covers budgets for viral efforts and how event-related social media is managed.

## Is Viral Budgeted in Event Budget?

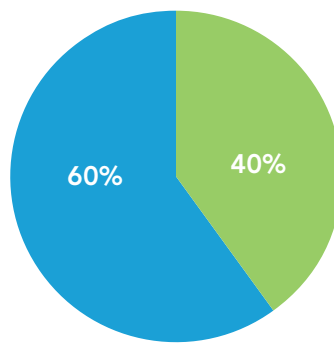
Exactly half of companies with event and exhibit programs have a specific budget for their viral marketing tied to events. Analyzing companies with over \$500 million in revenue finds 60% currently have a specific budget for viral efforts tied to events.

All Respondents



■ Yes, have budget for viral  
■ No

Companies with Over \$500 Million in Revenue

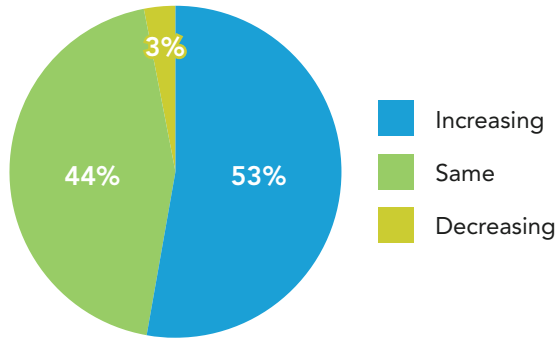


■ Yes, have budget for viral  
■ No



## Is Viral Spend on Events Expected to Increase, Decrease or Stay the Same in Next Budget Cycle?

The importance of the trend to increase viral activity is suggested in the finding that 53% of brands and exhibitors are increasing their spending on viral efforts, and 44% expect their spend to remain at the same level in the next budget cycle.



## How Event-Related Social Media is Managed

Event-related social media is most often managed by a dedicated team within marketing or by the events team directly. The largest companies are even more likely to have their event social media run by a dedicated team within marketing as the table indicates.

	All Respondents	Over \$500 M
By a dedicated social media team within marketing group	47%	59%
By internal events team	40%	31%
By corporate marketing group	25%	28%
By our agency	20%	28%
Other	5%	3%

### Key Insight

- 53% of brands expect to increase their budget for viral efforts related to events.

# Maximizing the Viral Impact of Events — A FreemanXP Guide

## Best Practices to Amplify Event Content

Live events provide an authentic platform with which to engage and expand audiences and fully galvanize brand communities. Savvy marketers extend the reach and frequency of their messaging by amplifying face-to-face programs through strategic digital marketing plans that harness the immediacy of brand experiences, and expand their range of influence and scale. Through effective preplanning and real-time monitoring, brand managers and event organizers can cultivate and curate content that extends moments into movements by inspiring audiences to participate and share.

## Tips for Maximizing the Viral Impact of Events

**Deliver Value:** Segment your audience archetypes, understand and clarify what they most care about, and develop social content that speaks to their core needs. Think about why your target audiences are motivated to seek out and share content. Perhaps they want to be seen as influencers, cool hunters, thought leaders, industry connectors, or decision makers. Or maybe they just want to be entertained. Whatever “it” is, deliver on this value proposition. No amount of preplanning will encourage viral activity unless there is the right message — whether educational, funny, provocative, or newsworthy. Thinking through your audience’s motivations will help you focus content to encourage sharing.

**Visualize Your Message:** Pictures tell stories, graphics articulate concepts, and videos engage in powerful ways. In addition to creating content that people WANT, use the full palette of visual media to get noticed. Words and content are still king, but the visual has become more sharable and accessible than ever before. Keep production quality in mind — you aren’t just competing against similar companies in your space, you’re competing against entertainment and media companies within your audiences’ feeds. Also, keep in mind that social content at events is consumed on mobile devices. Bring your message to life accordingly.

**Preplan Content:** Have your content almost fully baked. Work with your presenters, exhibitors, and other partners to contribute content around key topics. Slice and dice that content into different formats for different channels. If you are announcing a new product, think of all the angles and visuals you’ll need to get it ready to go. That way, you can spend time customizing messages and jumping into the conversation versus starting from scratch. Immediacy is key when it comes to the intersection of live events and digital content.

**Make It Easy:** Plan how these messages will play out over your various social channels, and make it easy to share them with a single click. Keep the headlines short and provocative. Program your social sharing tools so any forwards automatically include hashtags as well as the brand or organizer handle.

**Measure Everything:** Viral activity provides a level of data previously unavailable to event marketers without an event survey. The FreemanXP analysis of companies that track viral impact found they had an average of 7.8 million viral touches, communications, connections, and/or impressions. Plan campaigns to drive data, then measure, analyze, and refine programs accordingly.

**Right Channel, Right Time:** As seen in our research, all social channels are not created equal. Use appropriate channels for communications pre, during, and post event. And don't forget email!

**Utilize Technology:** Live and mobile are the perfect combination, so make sure to keep them both at the forefront. In addition, look for effective new second-screen technologies like **FXP | touch** to help amplify event content in real time.

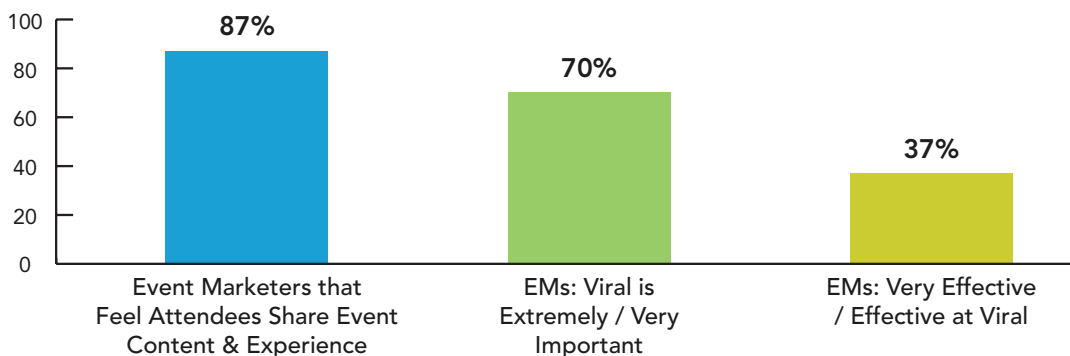
**Broaden Your Community:** Leverage influencers and event participants fully by bringing them into the fold early. Encourage VIP backstage experiences and guest posts to gain access to these thought leader networks. Crowdsharing is another way to get people to invest and share — get your audience invested with their ideas and promote standouts.

For more ideas on how to increase viral impact of events, visit [www.freemanxp.com](http://www.freemanxp.com) or [@freemanxp](https://twitter.com/freemanxp).

# Conclusion

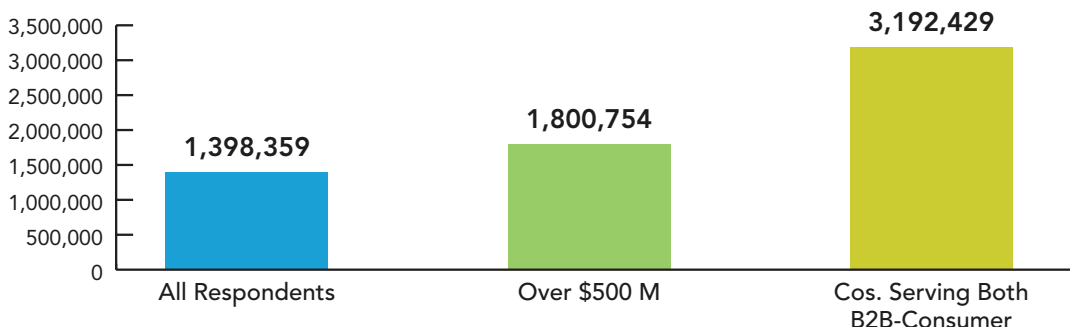
Extending the reach and value of events via social media with the goal of promoting content and information sharing is a very significant opportunity. Currently, event marketers are experimenting in this area and overall they feel they could be more effective. The chart below shows the opportunity and importance of event social media and viral activities, but also the perceived effectiveness gap.

## Attendees Share Their Event Content & Experiences, and Top Event Marketers Feel Viral is Important *But Only a Small Percentage Feel They are Being Effective*



Other key findings are the sheer numbers of reported event-related touches, communications, connections and impressions tracked by the survey respondents. The companies surveyed were mainly large corporations in sectors such as IT, medical, financial, automotive and consumer products. Many of these companies are considered "best in class" with corporate, agency or event staff dedicated to social media. The viral impact numbers are impressive, as shown below for the average responses from all the survey respondents as well as companies with over \$500 million in revenue and organizations that serve both business and consumer markets, which are often large groups in sectors such as IT, medical and financial.

## Average Viral Impact from Social Media Efforts: Estimated Touches, Connections & Impressions



The findings show that leading companies are indeed extending and amplifying their event, experiential and exhibition participation. While most all companies using social media related to their events and exhibits communicate general information, many of the largest, best in class companies also focus on the following:

- **Before Events:** building engagement among the industry or consumer-based community, and communicating with and giving voice to specific customers and clients.
- **During Events:** amplifying product announcements; accessing real-time feedback to make adjustments; and reaching remote or non-attendees and industry members.
- **After Events:** leveraging influencers; delivering content and information; using as part of the measurement process and for polling; and to promote the next event or experience.

Attendees share their event content and experiences. The opportunity is to leverage this with a focus on the most influential and connected customers, prospects and industry leaders online. The study findings suggest companies will continue to experiment in this area, and are open to learning what is working, industry best practices and further research on the topic.

# About the Respondents

Between August and September 2014, the Event Marketing Institute conducted a survey of leading event marketing executives with a focus on large companies in both business and consumer markets. The data in this report is based on responses from companies and brands with event, exhibit and/or experiential marketing programs. The response is from an elite group of large, leading corporations.

## Industry Sector

	All Respondents	Over \$500 M
Information Technology	13%	17%
Financial Services	12%	15%
Consumer Electronics & Mobile Technology/Telecommunications	11%	15%
Medical, Healthcare and Pharmaceutical	9%	7%
Entertainment and Media	8%	7%
Automotive and Trucking	7%	9%
Food and Beverage	7%	9%
Manufacturing and Industrial	6%	5%
Sports and Recreation	6%	5%
Consumer Products	5%	3%
Professional Services	4%	2%
Education	2%	2%
Retail	2%	2%
Restaurants and Hospitality	1%	0%
Other	6%	3%

## Company Size: Gross Revenue

	All Respondents	Over \$500 M
Less than \$100 million	22%	0%
\$100 to \$500 million	8%	0%
\$500 million to \$1 billion	5%	7%
\$1 billion to \$10 billion	28%	39%
Over \$10 billion	37%	54%

## Do You Manage B2B or Consumer Event Programs?

	All Respondents	Over \$500 M
B2B	38%	34%
Consumer	27%	21%
Both B2B and Consumer	36%	45%

# About FreemanXP

Our team is insights-driven and recognized for exceptional creative thinking and flawless program execution, no matter the scale. We work alongside the teams of the world's most successful brands to develop and deliver successful strategies and programs. As a brand experience agency within the Freeman organization, we are backed by 88 years of face-to-face marketing innovation. We leverage Freeman's experience, relationships and unmatched global resources to bring a whole new level of flexibility and scale to our clients' programs.

[www.freemanxp.com](http://www.freemanxp.com)

@freemanxp



# About the Event Marketing Institute

The mission of the Event Marketing Institute is to help our members enhance their professional performance by providing comprehensive education, research and analysis related to emerging trends and insights into event marketing strategy, as well as creating a growing list of productivity tools and professional networking opportunities to foster information exchange.



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