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EVENTTRACK 2026: EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING FORECAST & BENCHMARK STUDY

EXCLUSIVE
DATA

Introduction

For more than 23 years, Event Marketer has been tracking the meteoric rise of experiential marketing and measuring the impact events have on brands, audiences and bottom lines.

We are proud to introduce the latest installment in the industry's most-comprehensive, multi-audience annual report on experiential marketing: EventTrack 2026, a collection of data points and insights that have long been used by Fortune 1000 marketers to craft their strategies, sell in experiential programs to CMOs (and procurement departments), level-set budgets and standardize their measurement stack.

This year's data reveals that investments in experiential marketing continue to rise as more brands and marketing professionals discover the power live experiences have to drive business. And among the world's biggest brands, events are becoming the linchpin in the marketing mix, serving as the central strategy that ultimately drives all of the other marketing initiatives across the portfolio. Today, events are a lead discipline—a platform leveraged by advertising, content, social, broadcast, online, direct and PR to generate eyeballs, engagement, awareness and revenue.

Event creators are on the precipice of another phenomenon that will no doubt continue to drive the increasing interest in events: the rise of AI. Indeed, as many consumers and business audiences realize that the only reality they can trust is the one they experience themselves, more and more people will flock to events to engage with the cultures and communities they crave, but also to see and experience brands in real life to judge for themselves what's real and what's true.

EventTrack digs into consumer behaviors and sentiment to shed light on how they interact with brands at events. The study also surveys marketers to better understand how they leverage live events. EventTrack surveyed more than 1,000 U.S.-based corporate marketers (every business category was represented) and attendees in the summer of 2025. The study is comprised of:

- **Six separate surveys targeting consumer event marketers**, b-to-b event marketers, corporate trade show exhibitors—plus attendees at consumer events, b-to-b events and trade shows.
- **Topline and deep insights from Fortune 1000 brands** covering spending forecasts, investments by type of event, measurement practices, sustainability investments and more.
- **In-depth sentiment data from event and trade show attendees** on dwell time, purchase intent and what gets them to an event—and engaging with brands.

To elevate statistical reliability, questions were randomized for respondents, and the survey funneled Fortune 1000 marketers into their respective consumer or b-to-b question pools. Agencies and suppliers were automatically exited from the survey.

EventTrack is underwritten by leading global experiential agency Sparks (wearesparks.com). Event Marketer and Sparks want to thank all the respondents who gave their time to create the industry's leading research on experiential marketing. Additional copies of the full report, a "stat pack" of top charts, and private Zoom overviews of the research with your team can be requested at eventmarketer.com/eventtrack26.

sparks®

Turning Insight Into Action. Action Into Growth.

EventTrack fuels the industry's top experiential minds — and Sparks turns that insight into bold, measurable outcomes. From data to design to delivery, we help brands inspire audiences and move markets.



From Research to Reality:

Let's Create What Others Will Follow.

Email hello@wearesparks.com
to schedule a chat today.

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The background is a light blue gradient with various abstract elements: blue and purple rounded rectangles, thin lines, small yellow dots, and black and white plus and cross symbols scattered throughout. The central text is contained within a white circular glow.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CAN'T STOP, WON'T STOP

It's impossible to get a full sense of the power and promise of experiential marketing without talking to all sides of the industry and, perhaps most importantly, event attendees.

This is exactly what EventTrack does. It's the only industry report that digs deep to extrapolate the latest data from the widest audiences, and then report back on the full health of the industry, backed by real sentiment and reporting from the people who produce the most events, and the people who attend them.

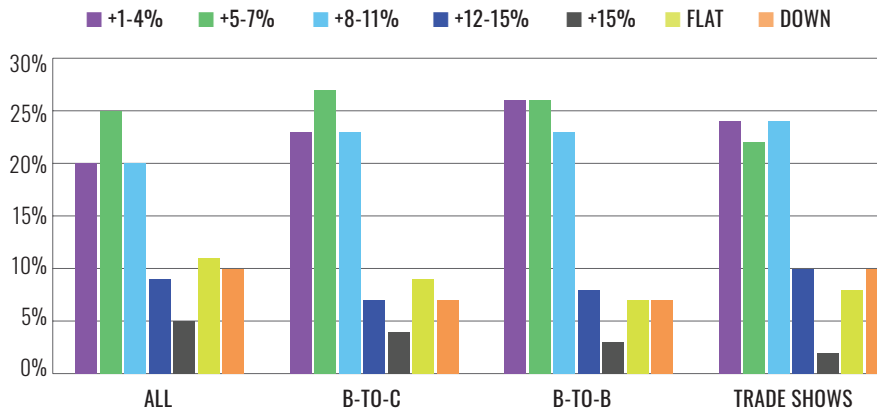
Fortune 1000 marketers turn to EventTrack to fortify their event strategies, prove the value of experiential programs to executive teams, build budgets based on real data and forecasts, and solidify measurement methodologies based on real ROI strategies and data.

Throughout the report you will hear directly from corporate event departments (consumer event teams, b-to-b conference/meeting teams and trade show departments) and all three types of event attendees (consumers, b-to-b professionals and trade show attendees). In addition to the more than 50 pages of data in the full report, EventTrack analysts have also provided essential context to help explain the "why" behind the research. They have also coalesced diverse data points to provide context around some of the upticks, downward trajectories and even surprising changes in the data this year.

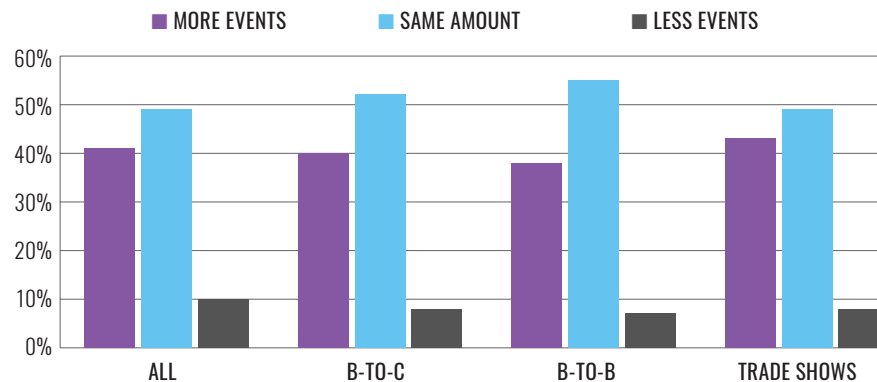
Despite the differences in how audiences experience events, and how marketers execute them, there are a few common themes you will see throughout the report that—collectively—point to a healthy, growing and optimistic year ahead for the event industry.

- Most event marketers say they will produce (or exhibit at) more events in 2026 than they did in 2025.
- Attendees (both b-to-b and b-to-c) plan to participate in more events this year than in 2025.
- The ROI marketers are getting from event and trade show investments is increasing.
- The majority of event marketers expect spending on events and trade shows to rise in 2026.

2026 SPENDING:
BUDGETS ARE EXPECTED TO BE...



PORTFOLIO VOLUME:
IN 2026, YOUR BRAND WILL PRODUCE...



Source: EventTrack 2026/Event Marketer

Attendees will participate in more events in 2026



Brands across all sectors will spend 8-11% more on events in 2026

The majority of brands will produce the same number of events for this investment

Less than 10% of brands will produce fewer events in 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REFINED GOALS. BIGGER INVESTMENTS

Events that might have been pure plays for foot traffic and awareness five years ago have evolved to become highly strategic engagement machines designed to achieve a clear set of outcomes. Event marketers are reporting sophisticated and layered thinking when it comes to the specific goals their events are designed to achieve. Media coverage and PR, for instance, is the top objective among consumer marketers, while b-to-b event marketers are focused mostly on relationship development. Interestingly, trade show marketers are not in lockstep with their peers in b-to-b and are also focused on media coverage and PR as their top goal.

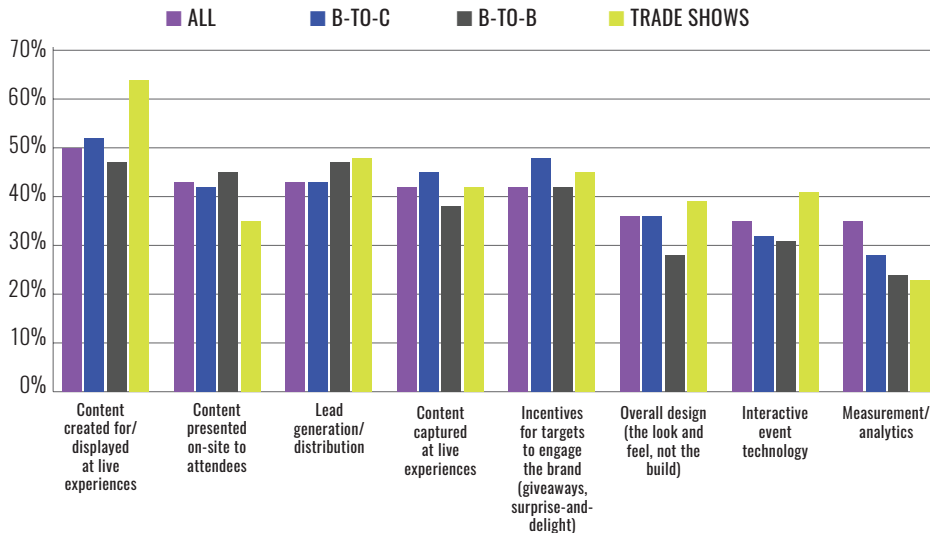
Content is the #1 investment area among all brand marketers, with 48-65% citing they will invest more in content created for live experiences in 2026

INDUSTRY OBJECTIVES: TOP FIVE MOST IMPORTANT GOALS OF YOUR LIVE MARKETING PROGRAMS ARE:

B-TO-C	B-TO-B	TRADE SHOWS
1. Generate/increase media coverage/PR for brand/product/service	1. Engage target audience to generate relationship/connection with the brand	1. Generate/increase media coverage/PR for brand/product/service
2. Engage target audience to generate relationship/connection with the brand	2. Generate/increase media coverage/PR for brand/product/service	2. Engage target audience to generate relationship/connection with the brand
3. Generate/increase awareness for brand/product/service	3. Generate/increase awareness for brand/product/service	3. Connect with existing customers to maintain relationship/connection with the brand
4. Connect with existing customers to maintain relationship/connection with the brand	4. Connect with existing customers to maintain relationship/connection with the brand	4. Generate/increase awareness for brand/product/service
5. Drive/build social media engagement	5. Drive/build social media engagement	5. Drive/build social media engagement

Content remains king at events and continues to demand bigger investments as a means to create the kinds of live engagements that are memorable, impactful and—perhaps most importantly—shareable. Consumer, b-to-b and trade show event marketers are all in agreement that content created for, and presented to, attendees at events is the biggest investment they’re making this year. Forty-five percent of consumer marketers and 42% of trade show marketers plan to leverage more content captured at live experiences. And all types of event marketers plan to invest more in giveaways and surprise-and-delight experiences, which serve as powerful content generation opportunities.

EXPERIENCE INVESTMENTS: ARE YOU INVESTING MORE OR LESS IN...



Source: EventTrack 2026/Event Marketer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

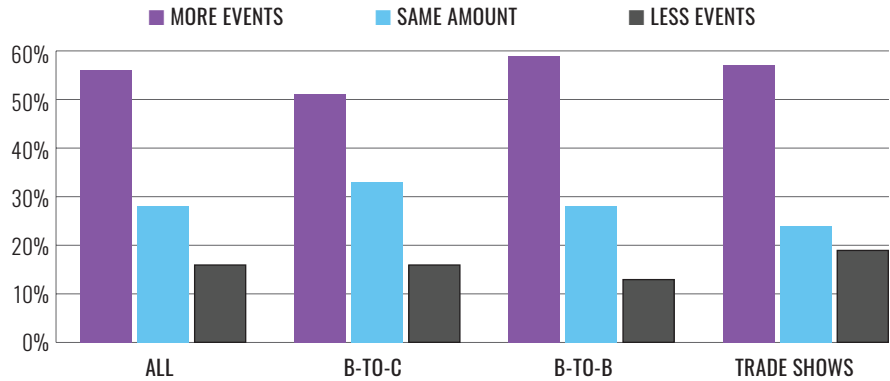
ATTENDANCE RISING

THE MAJORITY OF EVENTGOERS PLAN TO ATTEND MORE EVENTS

An industry that is often the first to feel the trickle-down impact of economic uncertainty has reason to be optimistic as 56% of event attendees surveyed report that they will attend more events than they did in 2025. B-to-b and trade show attendees are particularly bullish with 59% and 57%, respectively, reporting they will attend more events next year.

Events will experience a 50-60% increase in attendance across all segments

EVENT ATTENDANCE:
DO YOU EXPECT TO ATTEND MORE OR LESS EVENTS THAN YOU DID IN 2025?



This data aligns with a larger, multi-year trend toward consumer spending on experiences versus hard goods, most recently documented in the Mastercard Experience Economy 2025 study. It is also well documented that Gen Z and millennials lean toward purposeful, meaningful experiences that create connection over “things” or status-building.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Source: EventTrack 2026/Event Marketer

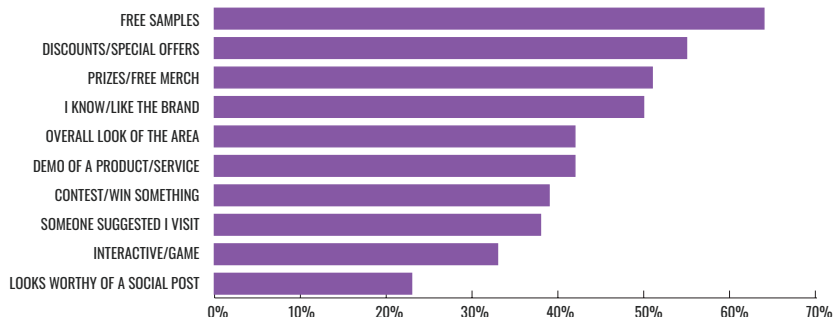
DRIVING CONNECTIONS

THE IMPACT OF INTERACTING WITH BRANDS

What the survey calls “free samples” really reflects event attendees’ desire to try it before they buy it, and that drive still reigns supreme when it comes to getting consumers to engage with your brand. Samples, discounts and free merch remain at the top of the list of key motivators for engagement. Product demos, which were at the bottom of the list in 2024, snuck up three notches this year, which may reflect experiential’s unique ability to turn a traditional (ahem... *boring*) show and tell into something more exciting, immersive and meaningful.

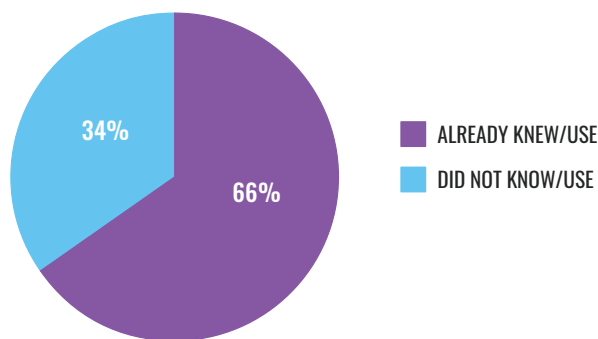
TOP B-TO-C EXPERIENCE DRIVERS:

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO ENGAGE WITH A BRAND AT AN EVENT?



Live events are instrumental to further developing existing relationships among those who are already familiar with a brand, but they are also key to penetrating new audiences. Thirty-four percent of consumers surveyed said their most recent interaction at an event was with a brand they *didn't* know or use. This data point should give consumer marketers seeking inroads into new markets and target audiences confidence in their event investments.

EVENTS DRIVE CONSUMER AWARENESS: YOUR MOST RECENT INTERACTION WITH A BRAND, PRODUCT OR SERVICE AT AN EVENT WAS A BRAND YOU...



Free samples, aka opportunities to try a product before you buy a product, remains the top motivator among attendees engaging at an event

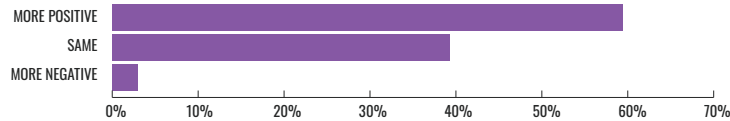
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MORE THAN JUST GOOD VIBES, EVENTS DRIVE TRIAL AND PURCHASE

In addition to their ability to create awareness among new audiences, live experiences have the power to boost sentiment among nearly two-thirds of event attendees. Fifty-nine percent of consumers surveyed say they feel more positive about a brand after a live event. For comparison, most studies on sentiment and advertising estimate that only around 4% of ads are remembered positively.

EVENTS BOOST SENTIMENT:

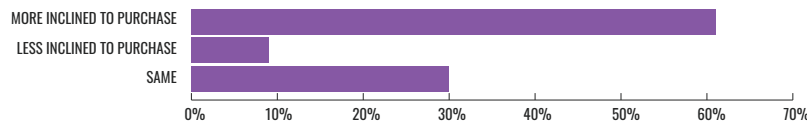
HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THE BRAND, PRODUCT OR SERVICE AT AN EVENT AFTER THE EXPERIENCE?



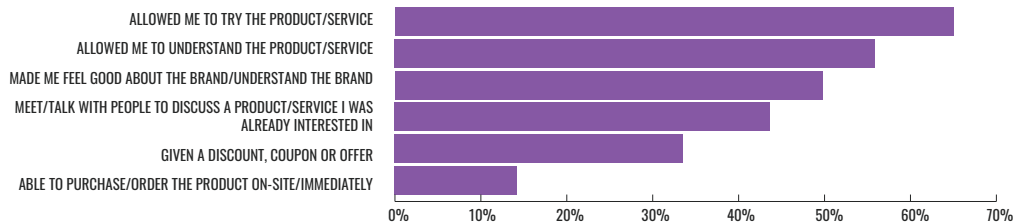
What do attendees do with all of those positive feelings they experienced after the live event? They hit the “purchase” button, of course. Two-thirds (61%) of consumers report that they are more inclined to purchase a product or service after a live experience. Unlike the engagement metric that showed attendees crave freebies, samples and discounts, this strong purchase inclination effect is driven by hands-on trial experiences, conversations and getting a good understanding of the product or service itself. Indeed, today’s event-to-sales funnel is refined and specific in the way each level and type of experience can generate a different outcome.

EVENTS IMPACT PURCHASE INTENT:

INTERACTING WITH THE BRAND, PRODUCT OR SERVICE AT AN EVENT MADE ME...



POWERFUL TRIAL PLATFORMS: WHY WERE YOU MORE INCLINED TO PURCHASE?



59% of attendees feel more positive about a product/service after an event or experience

61% of attendees are more inclined to purchase after an event or experience

Top three purchase drivers among attendees:
 ① Trying products/services; ② Understanding of product/service; ③ Connection with the brand

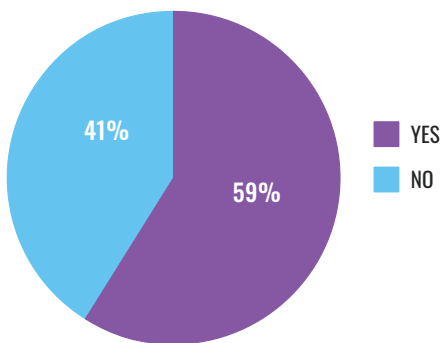
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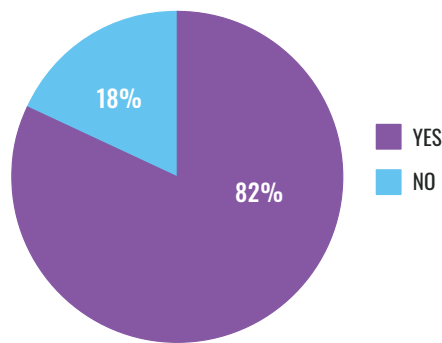
CONTENT AND SHAREABILITY

Event teams are investing more than ever in the quality of their show content in an effort to entice attendees to snap, record and share their experiences with the world. And attendees are responding with nearly two-thirds (59%), stating that they do capture content at live experiences. A memorable event can also drive enormous word of mouth, according to 82% of attendees who say that they told their friends and family about their engagement with the brand. These data points should inspire event creators to consider the ways in which their engagement strategy acts as a catalyst for content capture, sharing and then word of mouth—and how those sharing actions are different and can be uniquely supported.

ATTENDEES CAPTURE CONTENT: DO YOU CAPTURE CONTENT DURING INTERACTIONS WITH BRANDS?



ATTENDEES AND SOCIAL SHARING: DID YOU TELL FRIENDS OR FAMILY WHO WERE NOT AT THE EVENT ABOUT YOUR INTERACTION WITH THE BRAND, PRODUCT OR SERVICE?



59% of attendees capture content at live experiences

82% of attendees tell their friends and family about their engagement with a brand

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

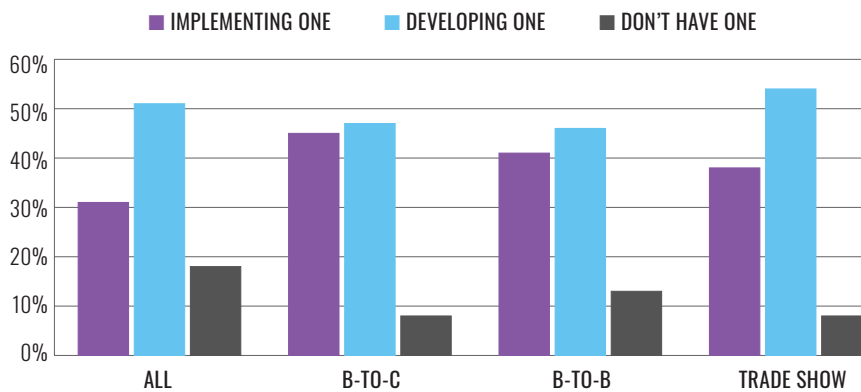
Source: EventTrack 2026/Event Marketer

SUSTAINABILITY: PROMISES AND PACING

Nearly three quarters of all attendees surveyed (73%) say they care about the sustainability of the events they attend, yet delivering sustainable events remains one of the biggest challenges impacting the industry. For Fortune 1000 companies and their event departments, the good intentions are reflected in the data, with 82% reporting they have a sustainability policy or are working on one. This is a massive increase over 2024 when the bulk of experiential marketers (76%) didn't have a sustainability policy in place. But most event agencies and departments still report that when it's time to make difficult budget cuts, the sustainable options (which are frequently the more expensive options) are the first to get cut from the budget.

82% of Fortune 1000 companies report they have a sustainability policy or are working on one, a substantial increase over 2024 when the bulk of experiential marketers (76%) still didn't have a sustainability policy in place

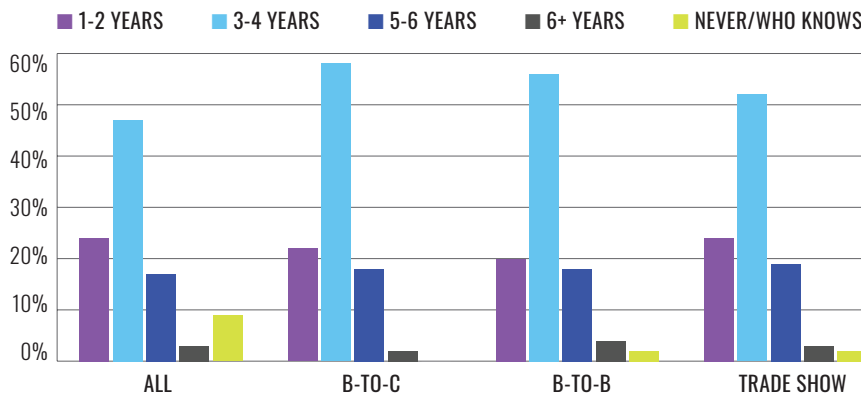
BRANDS: SUSTAINABILITY PACING YOUR CURRENT EVENT SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY IS...



Most event marketers (88%) forecast they will have a more sustainable portfolio in the next 2-6 years, and all three event audiences surveyed reported very similar pacing in terms of when they will expect to have a more sustainable portfolio.

The majority of brand marketers expect to have a more sustainable portfolio by 2030 (3-4 years)

BRANDS: SUSTAINABILITY HORIZON YOU EXPECT TO HAVE A MORE SUSTAINABLE PORTFOLIO IN...



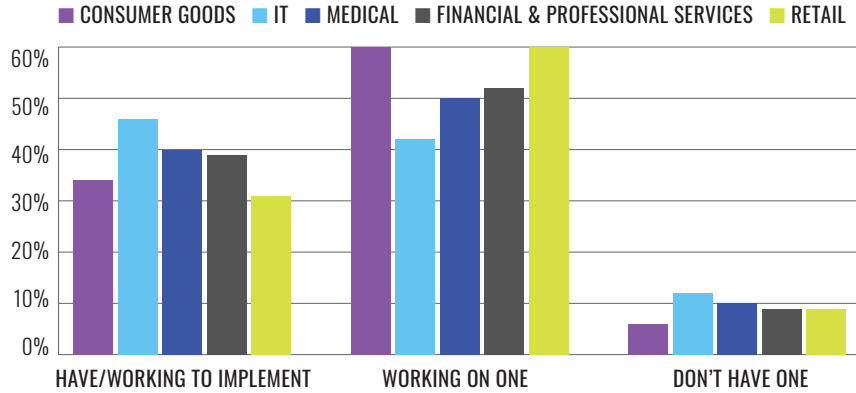
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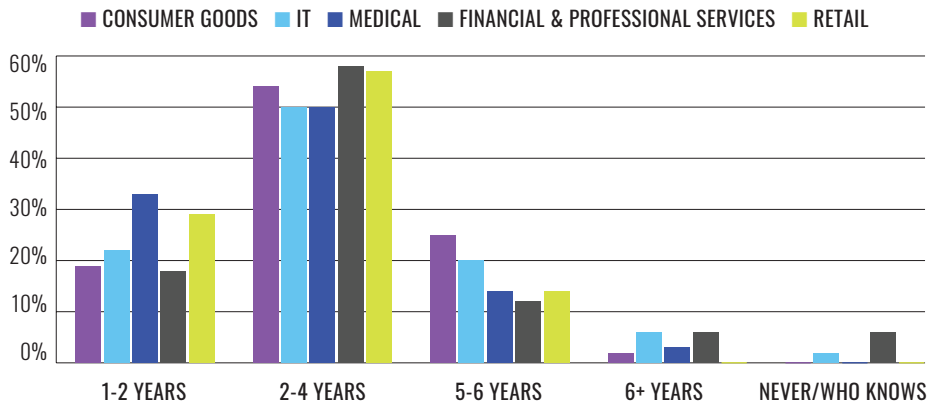
SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS VARY BY VERTICAL

When you dig into the five industry verticals surveyed for this year's EventTrack (Consumer Goods, IT, Medical, Financial and Professional Services and Retail) the commitments vary. More than 90% of Consumer Goods and Retail brands, for instance, report they have a policy or are working on a policy already, no doubt due to the consumer-facing nature of their businesses. The IT sector is a tale of two extremes, with 12% (more than any other vertical) responding that they don't have a sustainability strategy, but the highest percentage of all the sectors (47%) saying they have one or are implementing one. The Medical vertical reports the lowest starting point but the most ambitious forecast, with 60% saying they don't have a strategy or are working on one, but 33% saying they will have one in 1-2 years, which is higher and faster than all of the other sectors.

TOP FIVE VERTICALS: YOUR CURRENT EVENT SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY IS...



TOP FIVE VERTICALS: YOU EXPECT TO HAVE A MORE SUSTAINABLE PORTFOLIO IN...

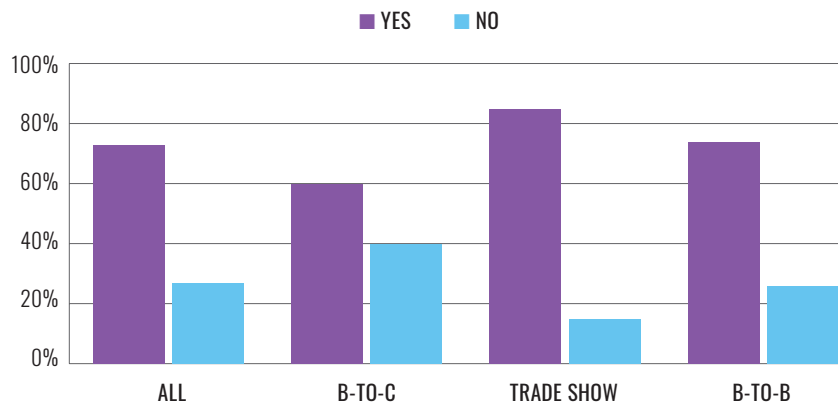


SUSTAINABILITY: ATTENDEE PERCEPTIONS

Most (73%) event attendees care about event sustainability. This data maps to outside research tracking consumer sentiment and brand loyalty. What may be surprising is that a greater number (85%) of trade show attendees care about sustainability than consumer attendees (60%). It may point to a common misperception that consumer events attract younger and therefore more environmentally conscious crowds. But the data shows that, in fact, trade shows, which have often been maligned for the inherent waste that comes with producing them, are actually attended by people who care *more* than their consumer counterparts. Perhaps also counterintuitive: Millennial and Gen X audiences outpace Gen Z audiences (77% and 78%, respectively, versus 66%) when it comes to caring about how sustainable events are.

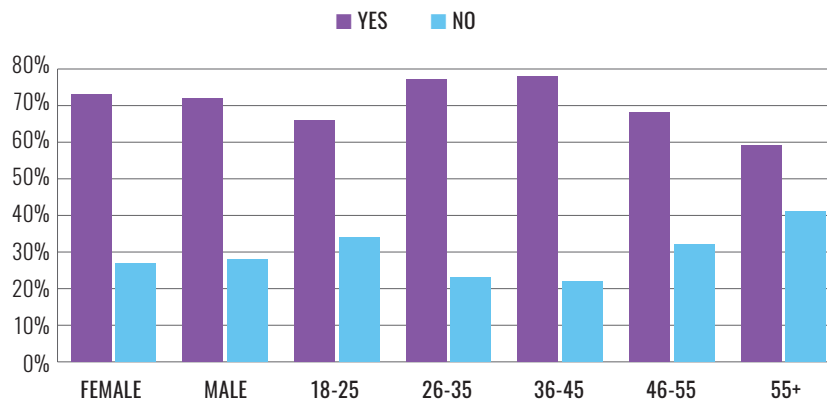
73% of event attendees care about sustainability

ATTENDEES: SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS
DO YOU NOTICE/CARE ABOUT HOW SUSTAINABLE THE EVENTS YOU ATTEND ARE?



Women in every age category far outpace (by more than double) men when it comes to caring about how sustainable an event is

GENERATIONAL AND GENDER DIFFERENCES:
DO YOU NOTICE/CARE ABOUT HOW SUSTAINABLE THE EVENTS YOU ATTEND ARE?



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Source: EventTrack 2026/Event Marketer

RESPONDENTS

The EventTrack brand surveys were conducted in June and July 2025 and received 517 responses. The attendee surveys were conducted in June 2025 and received 811 responses.

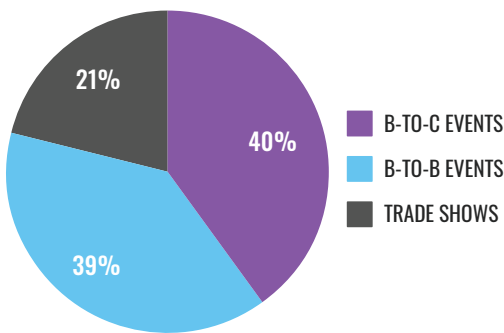
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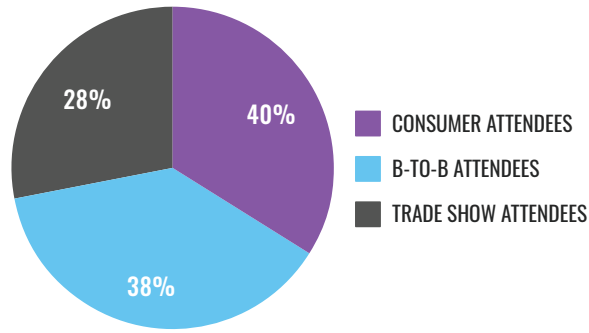
BRAND RESPONDENTS

517 MARKETERS, BY PRIMARY FUNCTION



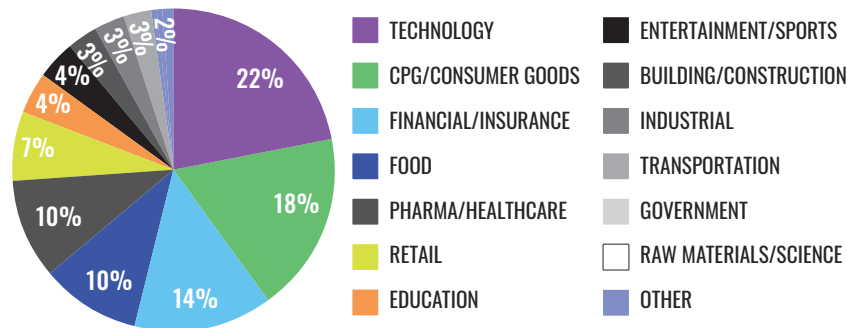
ATTENDEE RESPONDENTS

811 EVENT ATTENDEES, BY TYPE



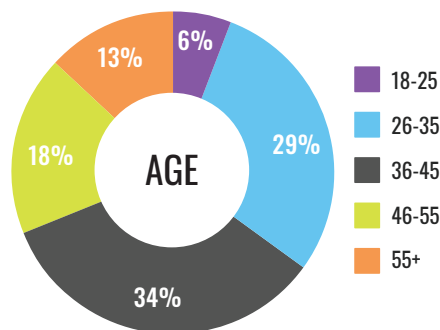
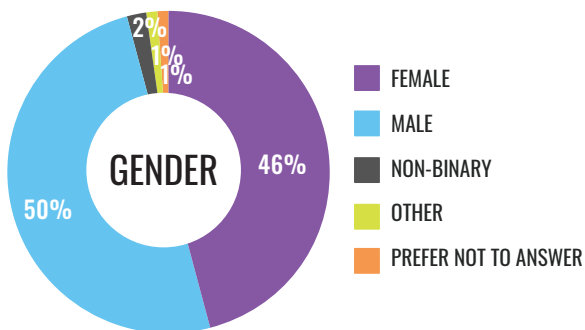
CROSS-INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES

FORTUNE 1000 RESPONSES, BY SECTOR



ATTENDEE DEMOGRAPHICS

SURVEY RESPONDENTS, BY AGE/GENDER



ABOUT THE SURVEY

Source: EventTrack 2026/Event Marketer

The logo for 'event marketer' is centered in a white circle. 'event' is in a smaller, bold, lowercase font above 'marketer', which is in a larger, bold, lowercase font. The background of the page is light blue with various abstract shapes in darker blue and purple, along with small yellow dots and plus/cross symbols.

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