

Plan Networking That Works

How to help attendees
connect with each other
and your event.



Recognize the value

of face-to-face connections

Remote work environments have made in-person events one of the most valuable opportunities to connect.

According to the Freeman Trends Report: 2024 Attendee Intent and Behavior, attendees view networking as the most valuable when they can:

- Exchange ideas with peers.
- Meet new people.
- Speak with industry experts (who may not always be available).

Here, you'll learn how to create the optimal networking experiences that audiences value most — and bring the most value to your event.





Work in space for networking

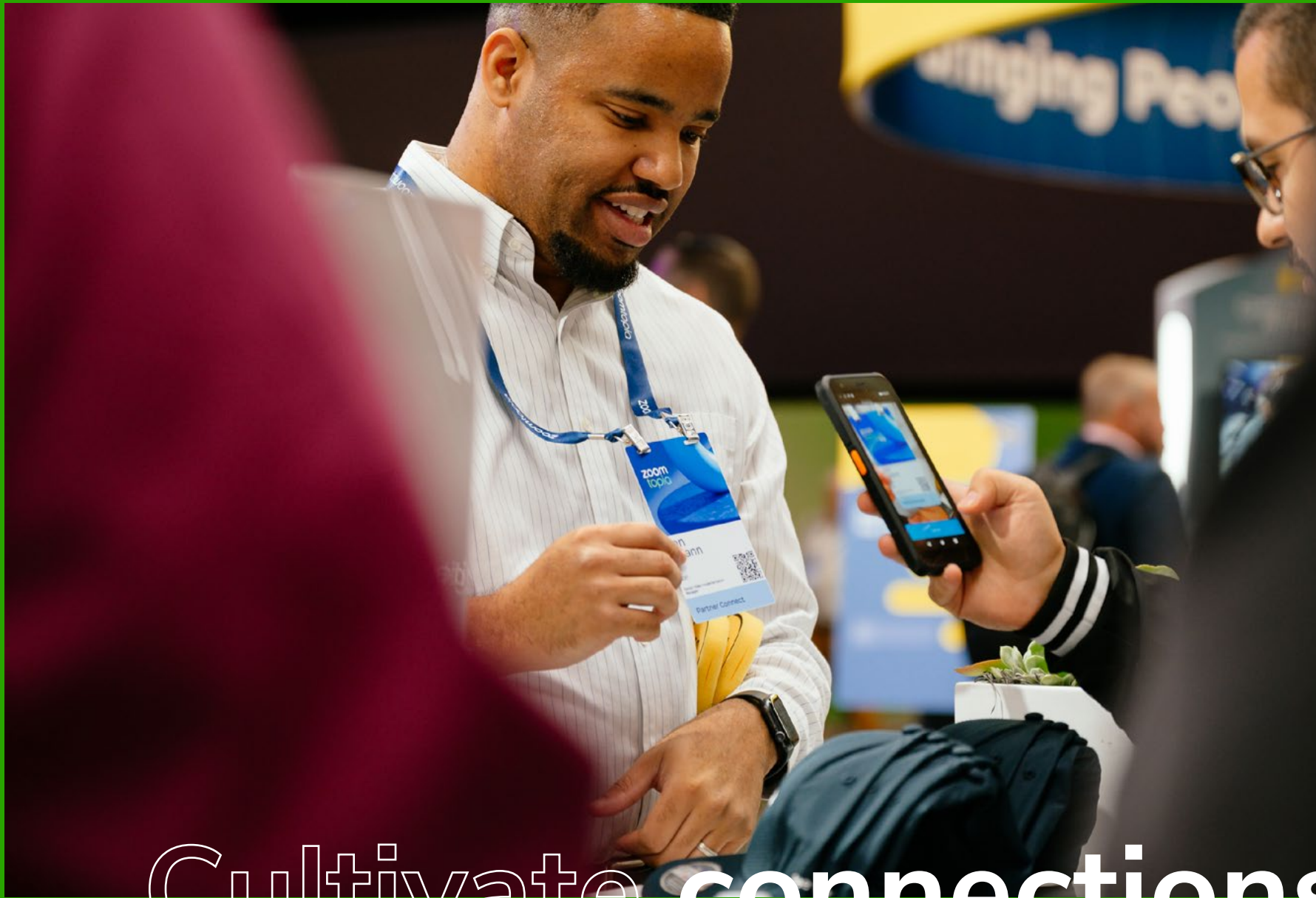
During the event strategy and design stage, consider where there are optimal spaces to build in networking locations.

For example, the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery (ASCRS) built a bar with plenty of seating in a centralized location during its annual event — helping to drive traffic and encourage attendees to sit, have a drink, and connect.

One networking station may not be enough. Take a

look at your event design, and map out various places where attendees are most likely to gather.

The Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) designed networking centers throughout its exhibit hall. Some networking centers had pods, some had coffee and snack kiosks, and one included a stage for education sessions.



Cultivate connections

among audiences with similar interests

Providing interactive opportunities for like-minded individuals allows them to make deeper and more valuable connections that last. And that adds more value to your show.

Ask your event partner about utilizing AI-based apps to automate attendee connection suggestions, including one that can read badges and make suggestions based on similar interests.

AI can also help you boost the value of your event.

Tech it out →

Make networking an experience

Combining networking with experiences leads to more memorable and meaningful connections. For attendees today, a simple mix and mingle isn't going to bring a lot of value.

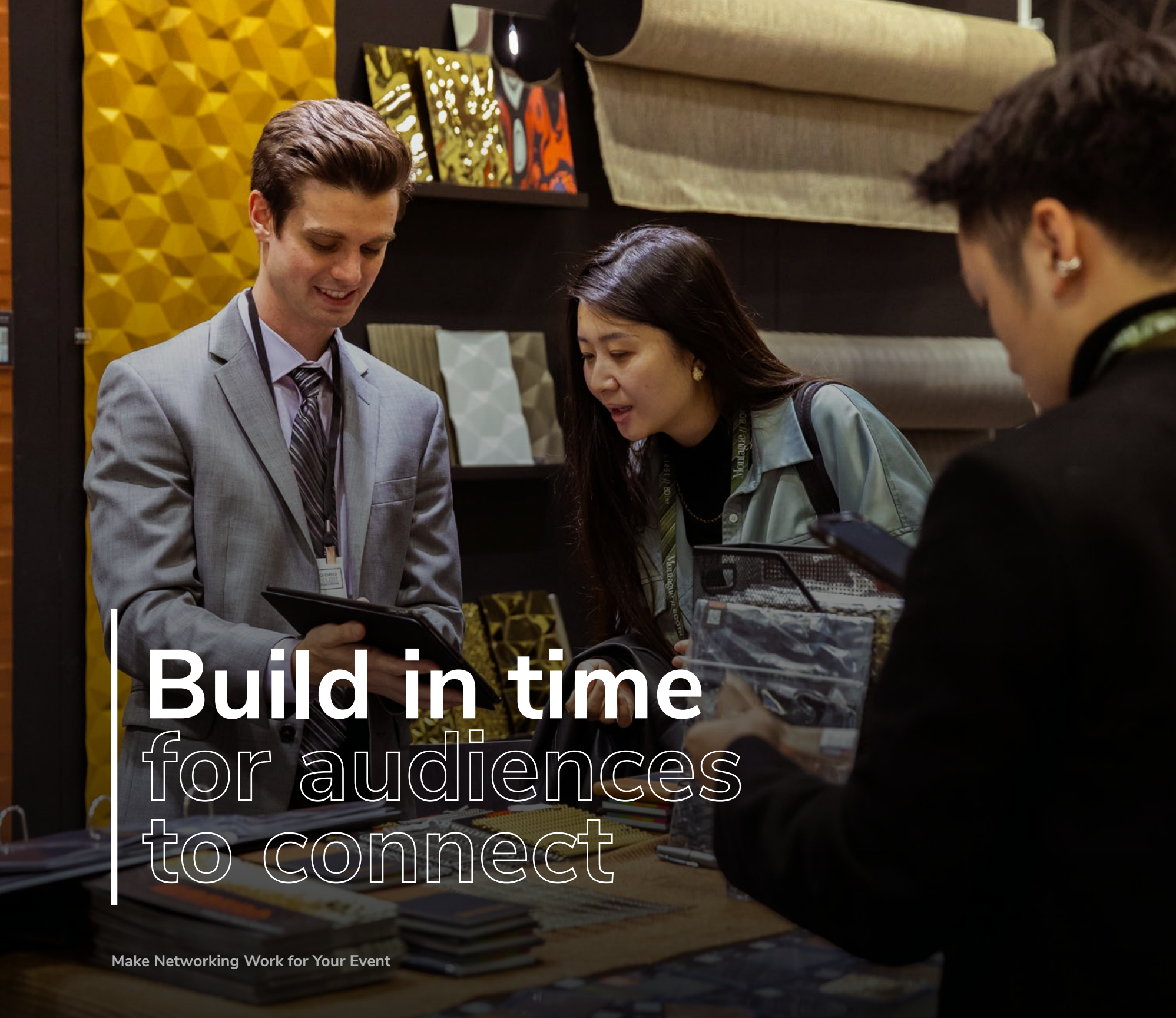
So, try turning a regular cocktail reception into a Bingo Night, where the bingo boards are filled with industry-related terms.

More into a trivia experience? Host your own Jeopardy! or other trivia + cocktails event, where the answers are industry (or even sponsor) related.



Pro Tip: Keep different personality types in mind. A networking experience that involves big crowds and lots of small talk isn't for everyone. Consider a movie night featuring a flick that's followed by a small reception and group discussion.





Build in time for audiences to connect

Make Networking Work for Your Event

Attendees place high value on having time to meet new people, reconnect with clients or partners, and get in more face time with coworkers.

47% of Gen Z attendees said that overprogrammed days were the number one factor in an unsatisfactory event.

Source: Freeman Trust Report

The solution? Avoid an over-scheduled agenda. Plan break times between keynotes and breakout sessions for attendees to interact with each other.

Pro Tip: To help tighten your schedule, limit keynotes to 30-45 minutes. Our research shows that attendees lose interest when sessions run longer.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark top, is smiling and looking down at a drink she is holding. She is in a dimly lit room with purple and blue ambient lighting. Other people are visible in the background, some out of focus.

Sponsor your way through networking

You know that incorporating social opportunities into your event is important. But what about the budget? Networking events provide great sponsorship opportunities that can help offset costs.

Here are some quick ideas to offset costs through sponsorships ▶

Meetup featuring Q&A with industry experts

Questions with cocktails: Add a bar or a specialty cocktail to sponsor.

Hydration station: Offer sponsor-branded waters infused with fruits.

Meet-up lounge: Provide lounge-style furniture to create a fun oasis, and have it sponsored.

Cocktail reception with engagement activities

Craft cocktails: Offer 2-3 custom-branded craft cocktails and name them for your sponsor.

Tapped brews: Have local breweries and distilleries sample their products (and sell as a pop-up sponsorship).

Art showcase: Bring in local artists as a surprise and delight (offer as a sponsorship).



More networking event ideas

Game event mixed with activities

(Bingo, Jeopardy!, pickleball)

Game pieces: Add your sponsor's logo to dice, cards, poker chips, etc., and give them away as door prizes at the end of the event.

Monopoly board: Design a custom-made board using your sponsor's products/services.

Activity gear: Offer branded pickleball paddles, cornhole boards, or dart boards as a sponsorship and activity starter.

Outdoor lunching and fresh-air fun

Food truck: Invite multiple food trucks and offer a sponsorship opportunity for each one.

Picnic spot: Set up picnic tables with special tablecloths sold as sponsorships.

Adult recess: Rent outdoor games such as cornhole, Jenga Giant, Giant Connect Four, etc., and sell sponsorship opps in the gaming area.

Case Study

Joe knows sponsorships

The Automotive Aftermarket Products Expo (AAPEX) built a full-size, indoor repair shop — Joe's Garage.

Here, sponsors were invited to schedule hands-on, live demonstrations, driving plenty of attendee traffic and brand recognition.

[Learn more →](#)

Networking gets attendees in touch

With the right planning, you can connect with today's audiences and show them just how valuable and experiential your event is, and why it's the place to meet up face-to-face.



Ready to work up a networking plan?

Let's talk!

Freeman¹

