

Freeman 2024 Exhibitor Trends Report

Event Excellence by Design

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Where we left off

Following the release of [Freeman's 2024 Attendee Trends Report](#), we are once again building on our insights by exploring exhibitor needs.

In our 2024 Attendee Report, we proposed a new way to think about event excellence.

Now it's time to move beyond rethinking event excellence and focus on designing event excellence.

+ Event Excellence by Design

Excellent events aren't accidental. You can't just put attendees and exhibitors in a room together and manifest success. This is especially true as rising costs make it **more important to prove value and generational shifts make it more challenging to provide value** for exhibitors and attendees alike.

Excellent events are a product of design. Magical moments are architected. There's someone behind the curtain pulling all the right strings so that attendees and exhibitors can attain the value they seek. But even the people behind the curtain – that's you, event leaders, marketers, and organizers – need guidance in a time when value means something different to everyone every year.

Freeman has taken an inside look at exhibitor needs relative to attendee needs to ensure **event organizers can design events that prove excellent for everyone.**

Key Findings

We are proud to have accurately predicted a few of this year's key findings, but there were also some surprises.

From understanding exhibitor concerns to uncovering where exhibitors and attendees align (or don't), the data pave a path for event organizers to provide more value to everyone, despite differences in age, event type, and objective.

Exhibitor demographics and event types are shifting

Respondents are younger, more are female, and they are exhibiting at a variety of B2B and B2C events.

Event costs are a concern but can be overcome by quality leads

Exhibitors ranked "unpredictable costs" as the *fourth* most important factor influencing their decision to attend an event. The quality and quantity of leads ranked as the top two influential factors.

Exhibitors want more out of lead acquisition

Despite the importance placed on lead acquisition, exhibitors are increasingly unsatisfied with the leads they receive. Event organizers can bridge the gap.

Exhibitors want all-inclusive packages

Event organizers can be of the greatest assistance to exhibitors by offering turnkey, all-inclusive booth packages – although “all-inclusive” looks different for small and large exhibitors.

Exhibitor and attendee objectives are somewhat aligned

Overall, exhibitors and attendees prioritize similar **XLNC elements**. However, there is more attendee alignment with large exhibitors than small.

Opportunities to connect exhibitors and attendees remain

Our attendee and exhibitor research shows that both groups want opportunities to communicate with each other before and after an event.



Exhibitor Profile

The Evolving Exhibit Marketer

In last year's [Exhibitor Trends Report](#), we predicted that the average exhibit marketer/manager age would decrease and that more female exhibit marketers and managers would enter the mix. Not everyone agreed, but this year's numbers are revealing.

Compared to our last exhibitor report, we saw **3% more Gen Z** respondents, **12% more Millennials**, **6% fewer Gen X respondents**, and **9% fewer Boomers**, leading to an overall decrease in average age from 51 down to 47 – in less than a year! We also saw **5% more female** respondents.

You may remember that in [last year's report](#), we emphasized that every B2B is now a B2C...or should be.

And guess what? This year, 72% of respondents reported exhibiting at various types of events beyond just trade shows.

They are exhibiting at user conferences, internal meetings, and even B2C and consumer events, reinforcing the data's strength across multiple categories.

These steep shifts over just 10 months indicate that exhibitor preferences and needs will continue evolving rapidly.

So, what does that mean for the events ecosystem? Here's your chance to find out.

46%
female

47 years old
on average

Exhibiting at branded
conferences, internal
events, and online
events




Within this report...


Sample characteristics

- + 1,911 respondents
- + +/- 2.2% margin of error
- + More are female (46%) compared with 2023 (41%)
- + More are Gen Z/Millennial (38%) compared with 2023 (23%)
- + Average age down 4+ years
- + Most respondents (72%) exhibit at event types other than B2B, including user conferences, SKOs, and B2C events

Interpretation guidelines

 Freeman 2023

 Freeman 2024

 Small exhibitors
(100 sq ft booths)

 Large exhibitors
(600+ sq ft booths)

 Pink
callout
boxes

Highlights differences among exhibitor groups or comparisons to attendee ratings from comparable questions in the Freeman 2024 Attendee Trends Report.



Value

BY DESIGN

There is no question that events are valuable, but with increased economic pressure, event organizers must consistently ask themselves whether or not they are delivering that value. Understanding exhibitor plans and budgets is the first step in designing excellent events.



QUESTION

Over the next 12 months, how do you expect your exhibiting budget to change relative to 2023?

FREEMAN 2023

Exhibitors (N=1,551)

FREEMAN 2024

Exhibitors (N=1,911)

+ Most exhibitor budgets will increase or stay the same over the next year

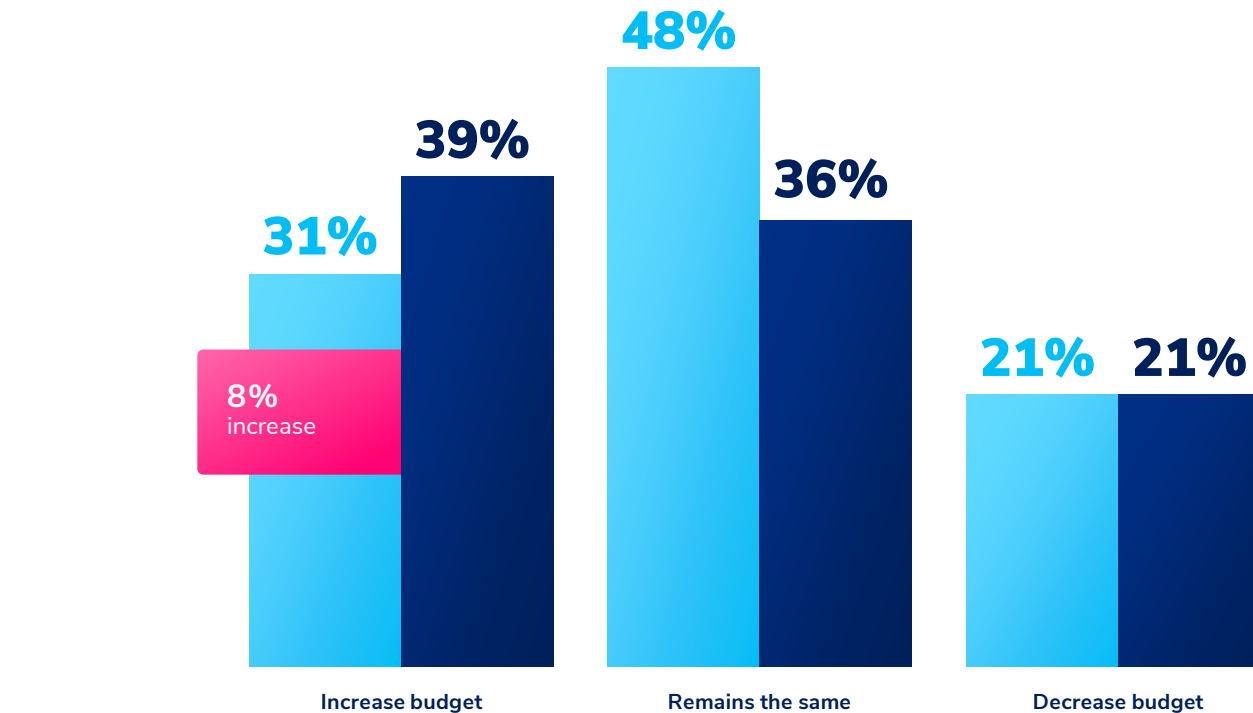
Event organizers rejoice: **75% of exhibitors do not plan on cutting back their exhibiting budgets.**

Relative to last year, 8% more exhibitors plan to increase their budgets. No wonder “75% of event professionals are optimistic about 2024” (Julius Solaris, Boldpush).

However, budget increases are likely due to increased costs over the past few years.

So, how are exhibitors allocating these increased budgets? We believe they are looking for the most impactful ways to spend.

Exhibiting budget expectations for next 12 months



Freeman 2023 Freeman 2024

QUESTION

Looking ahead to the next 12 months, how do you expect your in-person exhibit plans to change?

FREEMAN 2024

Exhibitors (N=1,911)

+79% of exhibitors plan to attend the same number of events or more in the next year

Projected attendance is holding steady alongside budgets. 29% of exhibitors plan to attend more events and 50% plan to attend the same number of events in 2024.

13% of exhibitors plan to attend fewer events, and 6% don't know what their in-person exhibit plans entail.

These trends are worth continued reflection considering that 23% of those who plan to attend fewer events believe the reduction is permanent and 43% are unsure whether it is permanent or temporary. Not to mention that, like last year, we see increased competition as some exhibitors plan their own independent events.

Changes to in-person exhibit plans

More events



29%

Same number of events



50%

Fewer events



13%

Not sure/
don't know



6%

QUESTION

Is your organization planning and executing its own private event (not a sales get together but an event with a show floor, education sessions, etc.) within the next 1-2 years?

+ More exhibitors are considering independent events to realize more value

Although most exhibitors' event plans and budgets look promising, more exhibitors are considering or already planning or executing their own independent events.

Large and medium exhibitors are more likely to be planning or executing independent events than small exhibitors (32% and 26%, respectively).

This response indicates that like last year, gaps in exhibitor expectation and satisfaction remain. Not all exhibitors are receiving the value they need from third-party events, and those who can afford to are taking things into their own hands.

FREEMAN 2023

Exhibitors (N=1,551)

FREEMAN 2024

Exhibitors (N=1,911)

Exhibitors considering independent events

No, third-party events work for us

48%

38%

No change yet, but might consider in the future

35%

43%

Yes, already planning or executing

17%

19%

Freeman 2023

Freeman 2024

QUESTION 1

How important is the event organizer’s assistance in helping you meet your objectives on which events to exhibit at?

+ 63% of exhibitors feel that event organizer support is extremely/very important, but there’s room to improve outcomes

Most exhibitors report that event organizer assistance is extremely or very important in meeting their objectives. However, only 39% of exhibitors report that organizer support was extremely or very effective – indicating that there is room for improvement.

And it’s not just small exhibitors that desire assistance: 45% of large exhibitors claimed that event organizer assistance was very important.

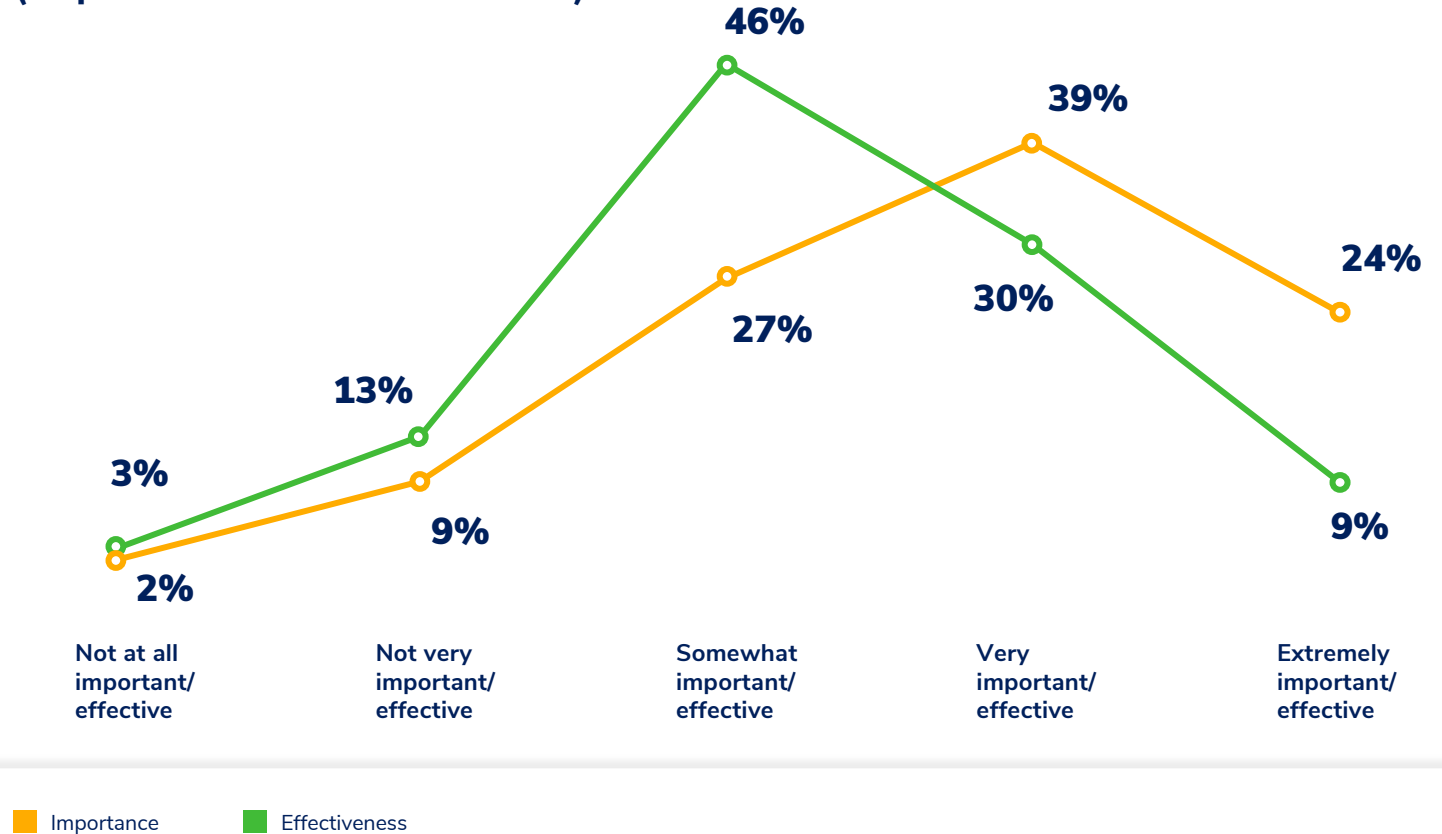
What type of assistance do exhibitors need, you ask? We’re way ahead of you.

QUESTION 2

For the most important event where you exhibit, how effective is the event organizer at helping you achieve your objectives?

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)

Event organizer assistance in helping exhibitors meet objectives (importance and satisfaction)



QUESTION

For the most important event where you exhibit/sponsor, select the top 3 options where event organizer assistance would be most helpful.

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)

+ Exhibitors want predictable, all-inclusive packages

We asked exhibitors to tell us the most helpful types of organizer assistance, and the answer across all respondents is clear: all-inclusive exhibit packages. This suggests that exhibitors want more control over their investment tied to their targeted outcomes.

All-inclusive packages are not one-size-fits-all; they need to be tiered. Your large and small exhibitors will not have the same objectives or buying behaviors. The smaller exhibitors will likely be looking at a basic, do-it-yourself package. A larger exhibitor with a broader set of objectives will be looking for a

comprehensive package that may include everything from bringing their custom-built booth to hosting receptions, providing thought leaders to speak and other elements in a full sponsorship package.

Exhibitors want predictability and ongoing studies show they will invest more if they can understand costs tied to objectives up front. They just don't want to incur hidden costs or invest in uncertain outcomes. They want a clear and measured return on their specific objectives.

Most important type of event organizer assistance





Return on Objective

BY DESIGN

Return on investment (ROI) is an essential measure for exhibitors. But it's been a challenging task for event organizers to prove exhibitors' ROI without a final sales pipeline and full picture of expenditures. That said, event organizers can (and should) demonstrate a return on objectives (ROO). Freeman is exploring what those objectives are so that event organizers can design and assess events accordingly.



+ Quality Matters

If you read last year's **Exhibitor Trends Report**, this may sound familiar, but it bears repeating. Quality is just as important as (if not more important than) quantity.

Exhibitors have long used leads as the sole indicators of a successful event. However, leads are not the value proposition they used to be. According to exhibitor (and attendee) objectives, the future is about measuring and monetizing the **quality of connections**, not the quantity of them.

Event organizers must plan and measure our events with exhibitor and attendee goals as our guide (that's where the **XLNC Framework** comes in). This approach will allow event organizers to design events that yield a clear **return on objective**.

QUESTION

Please allocate 100 points across the following areas based on how much each one contributes to your reason for exhibiting at your most important event.

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)

+ Lead generation reigns supreme – and it's up to event organizers to get the right leads to the right booths

Whether exhibitors have big or small booths, lead generation is the most important event component.

Here's our hot take: Exhibitors shouldn't be left to generate leads on their own. Event organizers would be wise to help ensure this exhibitor objective is met. After all, event organizers are so much more than real estate agents primarily concerned with selling square footage. **The best event organizers are relationship managers**, serving as a bridge between exhibitors and attendees.

For exhibitors and attendees to come back year after year, event organizers must help them connect in meaningful ways.

Importance of event components to overall experience

35%

LEAD GENERATION

includes marketing campaigns, consumer research, events, advertising, trade shows, webinars, direct mail, social media, search, media mentions, and more

25%

BRAND IMPACT/AWARENESS

includes new product launch, new line of business launch, or competitive awareness, to demonstrate our interest/investment in industry

24%

SALES

includes product demos & shopping carts, marketing & sales working together to prove their product is best, completing sales transactions

17%

LEAD NURTURE

includes engagement & introduction to positioning, emails, targeted content, classes, newsletters, product information & specials, email campaigns, case studies, free trials and more



QUESTION

Please allocate 100 points across the following areas based on how much each one contributes to your reason for exhibiting at your most important event.

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)

+ Despite lead generation prominence, exhibitor needs vary

Although a slight majority of exhibitors selected lead generation as the most influential outcome, brand impact and sales are not far behind. This goes to show that exhibitors are not a monolith – they have different needs and reasons for exhibiting.

For example, large exhibitors were less likely than the average respondent to rank lead generation as more important (30%) and more likely to rank brand impact (29%) and sales (27%) as more important.

Event organizers must focus on *all* types of exhibitors and their needs. It comes down to understanding who they are and what objectives they have.

Importance of event components to overall experience

35%

LEAD GENERATION

includes marketing campaigns, consumer research, events, advertising, trade shows, webinars, direct mail, social media, search, media mentions, and more

25%

BRAND IMPACT/AWARENESS

includes new product launch, new line of business launch, or competitive awareness, to demonstrate our interest/investment in industry

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includes product demos & shopping carts, marketing & sales working together to prove their product is best, completing sales transactions

17%

LEAD NURTURE

includes engagement & introduction to positioning, emails, targeted content, classes, newsletters, product information & specials, email campaigns, case studies, free trials, and more



QUESTION

Rate the impact of each of the following on exhibiting at in-person events.

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)

+ The quality and quantity of leads outweigh cost concerns

Generating quality leads is the top priority for exhibitors. Costs become an investment when organizers design opportunities for connection with the right attendees.

We asked exhibitors to rate how event elements impact their exhibiting experience. 61% of exhibitors claimed that unpredictable costs have a major influence (which makes sense given exhibitors' desire for predictable, all-inclusive packages).

However, more exhibitors (93%) believe that the quality of expected attendees is the most impactful outcome, even when compared to external constraints.

Despite cost concerns, it seems that most exhibitors will invest if the event predictably delivers quality leads for their organization.

“Extremely/very impactful” element of exhibiting at in-person events

93%



Quality of expected attendees

81%



Number of expected attendees

80%



Raise our company's industry profile

61%



Unpredictable total cost

53%



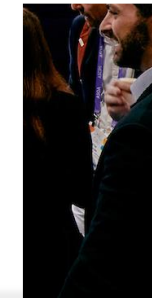
Location of event (city)

47%



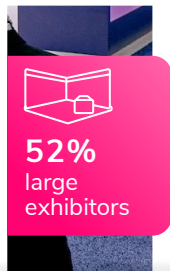
Smaller marketing/sponsorship budget

45%



Smaller travel budgets

41%



Competitor organizations exhibiting

QUESTION

How do you measure the value your organization receives from exhibiting? (Select top 3)

+ Lead quality is still the #1 measure of success, even more so than last year

Fortunately, exhibitors look to lead quality as their primary measure of success – not just lead quantity. However, it serves everyone to ask: How accurately and consistently are exhibitors able to measure that quality? The methods exhibitors use to measure are inconsistent at best. Some exhibitors aren't aware of event organizer tool systems, and others just don't maintain regular records throughout the day.

This measurement messiness likely impacts exhibitors' satisfaction with lead quality received. Event organizers may be able to help.

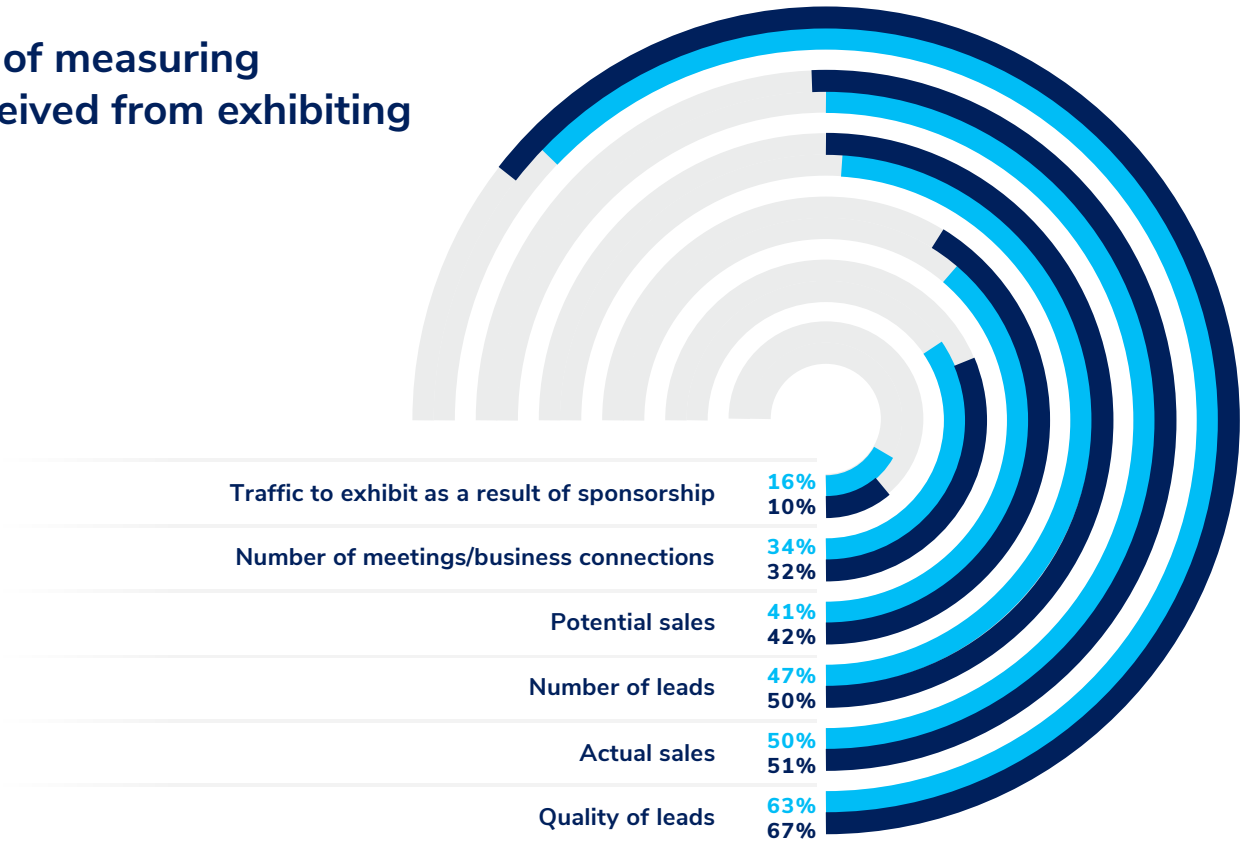
FREEMAN 2023

Exhibitors (N=1,551)

FREEMAN 2024

Exhibitors (N=1,911)

Methods of measuring value received from exhibiting



Freeman 2023

Freeman 2024



+ Bridging the Gap

Last year, we identified gaps between exhibitor expectations and satisfaction. Between exhibitor behaviors and attendee needs. Between large exhibitors and small exhibitors. We cautioned event organizers everywhere to mind those gaps.

Well, we hate to be a downer, but the gaps are still there, and some are growing into canyons. **Exhibitors and attendees are divided**, trying to connect and receive value from each other to no avail. This growing gap in expectation presents an opportunity for planners to deliver value across the events ecosystem.

Event organizers can be the bridge between exhibitors and attendees.

QUESTION 1

Thinking about the most important event you exhibit at, please rate the importance of each of the following objectives.

+ Exhibitors want more out of lead generation and networking

It comes as no surprise that exhibitors' top objectives are to meet with customers/prospects and acquire leads.

That being said, exhibitor satisfaction rates remain low – particularly for lead acquisition.

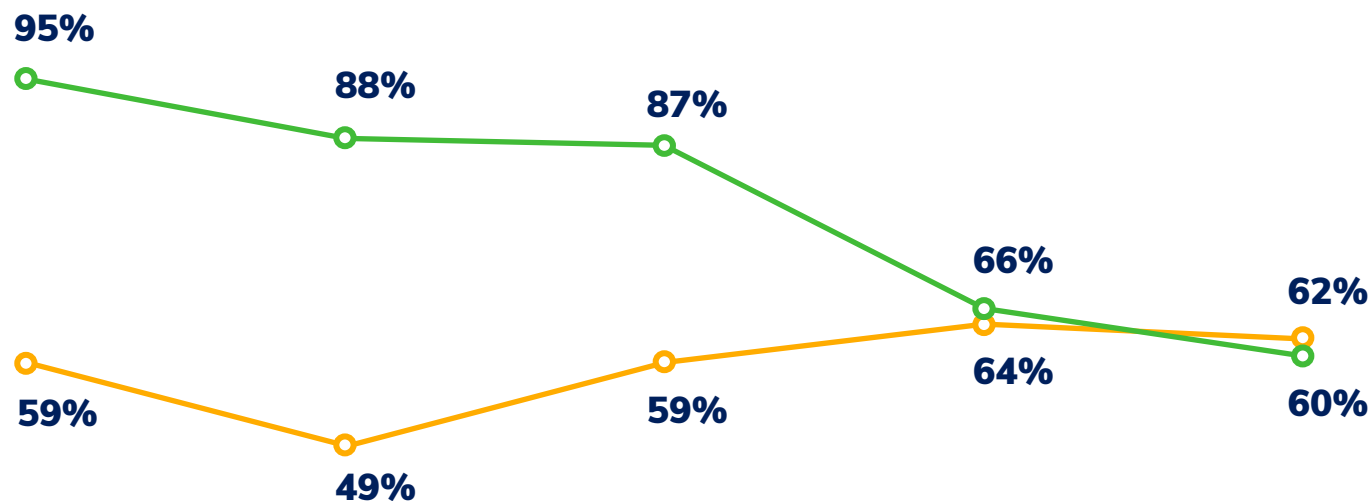
Although some gaps have improved compared to last year, the most important objectives are still missing the mark.

QUESTION 2

Now rate your satisfaction with this event in meeting those objectives that were highly important to you (those rated extremely/very important).

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)

Reasons for exhibiting (importance and satisfaction)



	Meeting/Networking with Customers/Prospects	Lead Acquisition	Brand/Product Awareness	Meeting/Networking with Industry Partners	New Product Introduction
2024 gap	-36	-39	-28	-2	+2
2023 gap	-33	-37	-30	-5	+2

■ Extremely/Very important ■ Extremely/Very Satisfied

QUESTION 1

Thinking about the most important event you exhibit at, please rate the importance of each of the following objectives.

+ These gaps remain larger than during pre-pandemic times

While a difference is understandable, the significance of the gap indicates that there is work to be done.

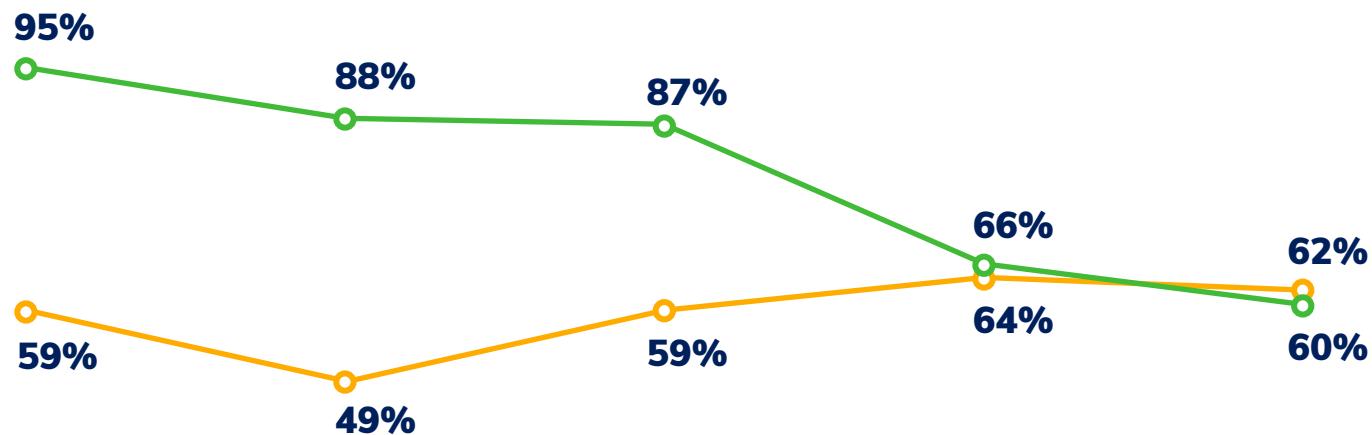
Event organizers can't bridge this gap on their own – exhibitors are a part of the equation too. But with more new exhibitors than ever before, event organizers can offer first-time exhibitor training or implement exhibitor advisory boards so that exhibitors know what to do and what not to do when staffing their booths.

QUESTION 2

Now rate your satisfaction with this event in meeting those objectives that were highly important to you. (those rated extremely/very important)

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)

Reasons for exhibiting (importance and satisfaction)



	Meeting/Networking with Customers/Prospects	Lead Acquisition	Brand/Product Awareness	Meeting/Networking with Industry Partners	New Product Introduction
2024 gap	-36	-39	-28	-2	+2
2023 gap	-33	-37	-30	-5	+2
Pre-pandemic gap	-30	-31	-22	+23	0

■ Extremely/Very important ■ Extremely/Very Satisfied

QUESTION

In the next 12 months, are you planning any changes to your standard booth square footage?

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)

+ Some exhibitors are willing to spend more on booths, but objectives come first

16% of exhibitors indicated that they intend to purchase more square footage over the next 12 months and 64% of exhibitors plan to use the same amount as last year.

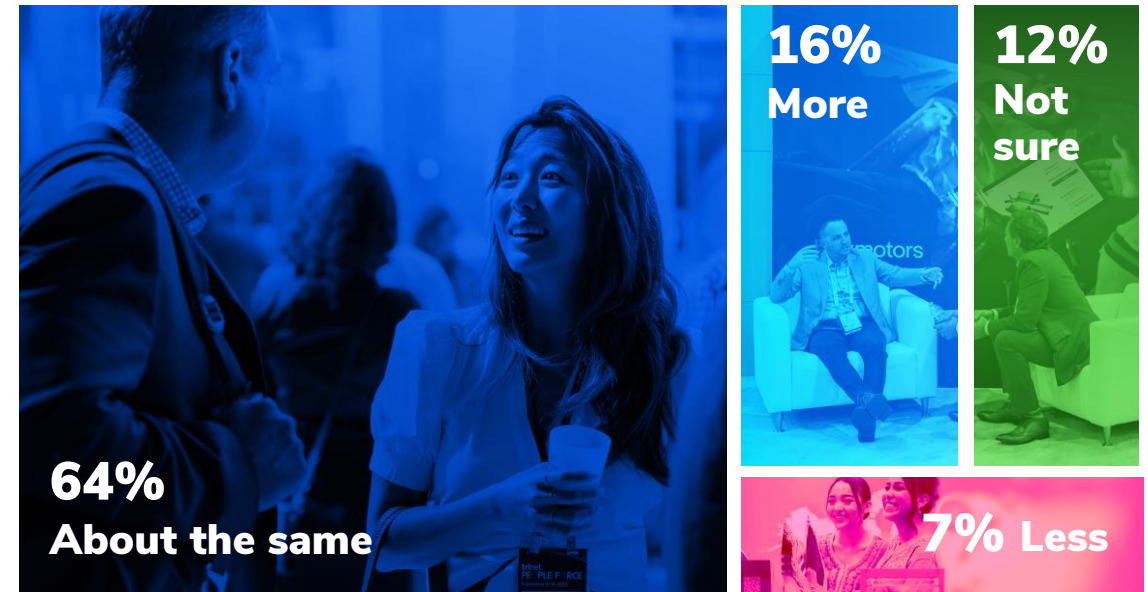
We have thoughts. Some attendees report that they care most about personalization and quality connections. They don't want to feel like just a number. Smaller booths may prove the most effective for this type of interaction.

Still, other attendees want immersive experiences and hands-on demonstrations in the booth. Big booths can create more opportunities for these experiences.

Our takeaway: Objectives come first. Exhibitors shouldn't be upping their booth size just because their competitors are. Nor should they be decreasing their booth size to save on budget if it will jeopardize target attendee satisfaction.

It all comes down to who exhibitors want to connect with and what those attendees want.

Change in booth square footage in the next 12 months



QUESTION

What services would enhance the ROI you receive at the events where you exhibit? Select up to 2 options.

FREEMAN 2024

Exhibitors (N=1,911)

+ Attendee lists can enhance exhibitor ROI and benefit some attendees too

69% of exhibitors believe that receiving an attendee list before or after an event would offer added value – and exhibitors aren't the only ones who would benefit. In our attendee report, attendees themselves reported that preplanned meetings were the second-most preferred way to interact with exhibitors.

With attendee lists in hand, exhibitors can maximize the time between registration and day one by scheduling pre-planned meetings that prove valuable to everyone.

If you're worried providing pre- or post-lists would damage your connection with attendees or infringe on their privacy, we get it. But there is a way to connect respectfully, with attendee objectives and data privacy in mind.

Enhancing the ROI from exhibiting at events



61%

Pre- or post-event attendee list



56%

Networking opportunities with attendees



31%

Industry-standard lead retrieval system



9%

Meeting space availability



8%

Education opportunities



7%

More options available to host private events



+ Optimizing Opt-In: Making Every Moment Matter

In-person events are the ultimate marketing opt-in. Not all leads are created equal. For example, a new lead from a blog post pales in comparison to a lead who purchases a plane ticket, commits days of their time, and immerses themselves in an in-person experience. The potential for lifetime value (LTV) is unparalleled.

But right now, this opt-in is not fully realized. It's up to event organizers to communicate the value of the in-person event and optimize the opt-in.

Event organizers are missing out on monumental moments to connect exhibitors with attendees. These moments aren't limited to the event itself. There's an opportunity to optimize every moment before, during, and after the event, from the time someone purchases a ticket to the time they get home. We hear your concerns about privacy and overcommunication, but your outreach approach can be intentional and value-driven.

Lean into the power of the opt-in. The opportunity to connect attendees with exhibitors, thought leaders, content, and each other are all desires revealed in our attendee survey.

This rarely optimized opportunity may be just the thing to unlock additional value in your event.



XLNC

BY DESIGN

Excellent events don't happen by accident – they are a product of event organizers' design. Optimizing what event organizers do best requires knowing exactly what exhibitors and attendees seek. Fortunately, we asked, and they answered.

+ The XLNC Framework

Over decades of extensive research, Freeman has sought to uncover why people attend events. We've boiled it down to four primary reasons. Attendees want to have fun (X), learn (L), network (N), and do business (C). These motivations apply to exhibitors, too. They want to have a frictionless experience, teach, network, and sell.

However, exhibitors' needs vary. Like attendees, different exhibitors prioritize different objectives. Some exhibitors focus on the frictionless experience, while others prioritize thought leadership. Some exhibitors are driven by networking opportunities while others care most about sales. The result is that interests, characteristics, and drivers are varied.

That's why it's so important to analyze exhibitor nuances and how they align with attendee needs.



EXPERIENCE

Have a frictionless experience (registration, move-in/setup, on-site/customer service, event technology, etc.)



LEARNING

Demonstrate thought leadership, teach customers, prospects, or the industry something new



NETWORKING

Make connections, network with attendees, socialize with new/existing contacts



COMMERCE

Conduct sales, build brand awareness, launch new products/services

QUESTION

Imagine you are exhibiting at an in-person business event. Allocate a total of 100 points across the below areas based on how important each component is to your overall experience. Enter "0" in a box if the component does not influence your experience exhibiting at an event.

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)

+ While exhibitors prioritize commerce and networking, learning opportunities and overall experience matter too

There's a common misconception that exhibitors attend events solely to sell, but it's clear that exhibitor motivations vary. We were (pleasantly) surprised to see that networking objectives were considered almost as important as commercial elements. Additionally, it seems that the ability to educate others and have a frictionless experience also impacts exhibitor satisfaction.

While exhibitors prioritize commerce and networking, components may be differently weighted depending on event type and business sector. It's in the best interest of event organizers to analyze and understand their exhibitor and attendee profiles to ensure an excellent overall experience.

Importance of event components to overall experience



21%

EXPERIENCE



14%

LEARNING

33%

COMMERCE

32%

NETWORKING





EXPERIENCE

-focused exhibitors

Concerned with

Ease of end-to-end exhibitor experience (or lack thereof)

Unpredictable costs

Complex on-site logistics

Industry-standard lead retrieval

Less interested in

Speaking opportunities

Attendee lists

Pre-set meetings with attendees



QUESTION

When thinking about your overall experience exhibiting at any in-person event, what are the top 3 factors that most positively influence your experience?

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)



+ Exhibitors favor face-to-face interactions and delivering hands-on experiences

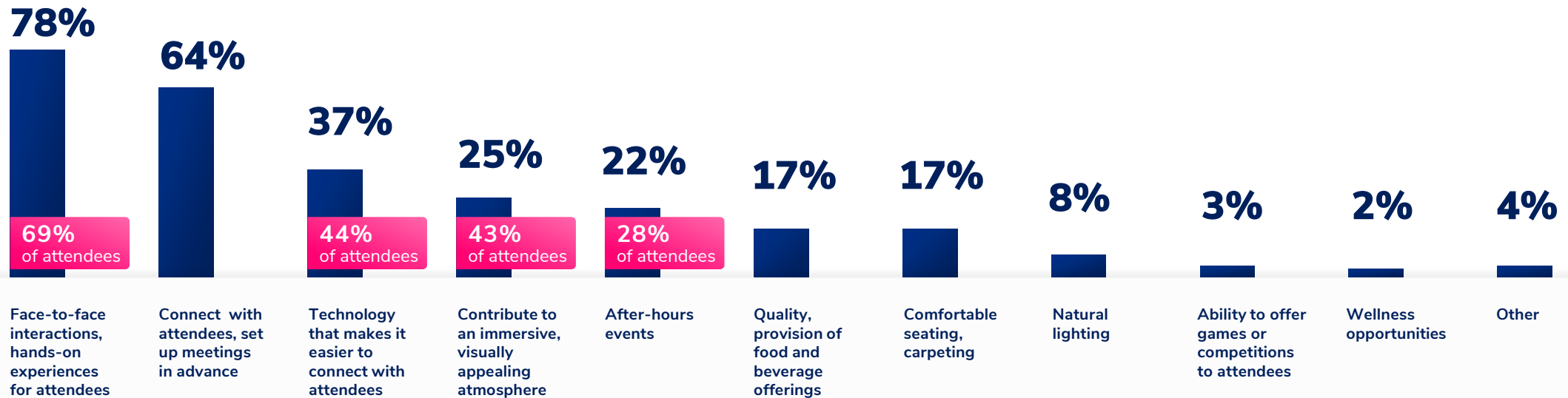
Whether big or small, networking- or commerce-focused, all types of exhibitors find value in delivering face-to-face interactions and hands-on experiences – which aligns with attendees’ overall format preferences.

Large exhibitors are more likely to attract attention through the immersive experiences attendees seek (33%),

whereas small exhibitors are more likely to rely on after-hours events to meet attendees (25%).

Another point of alignment is that neither exhibitors nor attendees find elements like lighting, games, or wellness to be of substantial influence.

Most important experience elements





LEARNING

-focused exhibitors

Driven by

Speaking opportunities and sharing thought leadership

Connecting with attendees via topic-specific discussions

Leading roundtables

Offering hands-on demos

Generating leads rather than completing sales on-site



Most satisfied with

Ability to acquire leads at events

Watch out for

More likely to be executing or planning their own events already

Key exhibitor characteristic

Represent larger companies (2,000+ employees)

QUESTION

When thinking about how your organization demonstrates expertise to customers, prospects, and others in your industry at any in-person event, what are the top 3 factors that most positively influence how you can share your organization's expertise?

+ Large exhibitors are more likely to share expertise in a way that attendees value

44% of exhibitors believe that small group discussions are the most influential teaching/learning opportunity, which ranked as the sixth most important learning element for attendees.

Large exhibitors are more likely to align with attendees' preferred learning elements: participatory learning and demonstrations (which were in the top three most important learning elements for attendees, along with informal meetings with SMEs).

Event organizers have an opportunity to help the smaller exhibitors offer the most effective learning experiences so that exhibitors and attendees meet their learning-related objectives.

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)



LEARNING

Most important learning elements



44% 30%

Scheduling short, 1:1, or small group discussions with attendees



37% 56%

Offering hands-on interaction or participatory learning activations



32% 43%

Providing demos in a classroom, activation, or at booth



41%
large exhibitors



29% 48%

Conducting meetings with SME attendees



27% 23%

Leading or participating in roundtable discussions with attendees



21% 23%

Presenting at general session (i.e., to audience seated in hall)



19% 31%

Presenting at topic-specific classroom education sessions

■ Exhibitor ■ Attendee

QUESTION

How important are speaking opportunities and/or the ability to demonstrate thought leadership to your decision to exhibit at an event?

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)



LEARNING

+ Most exhibitors want to demonstrate thought leadership

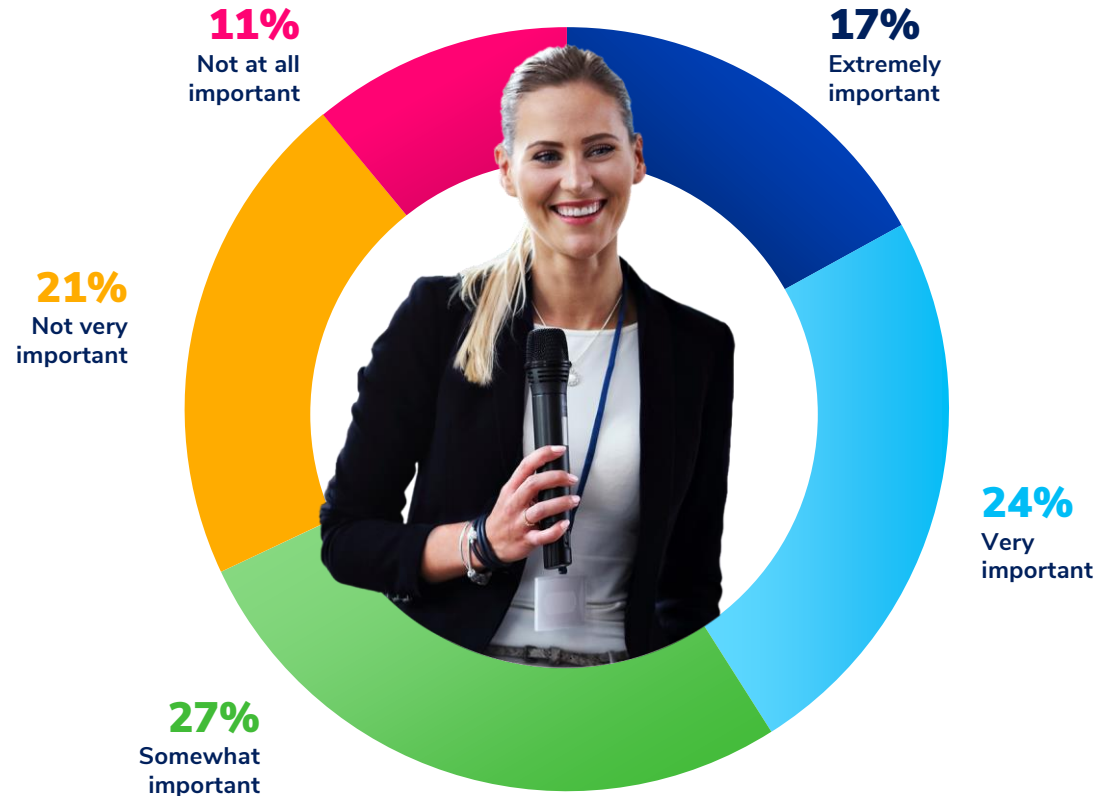
68% of exhibitors believe that it's at least somewhat important to demonstrate thought leadership at events.

By thought leadership, we mean relevant, inspirational, and educational content – not a sales pitch.

Thought leadership is a good opportunity for exhibitors to reach quality prospects, considering attendees want to feel both informed and inspired when leaving a keynote/general session.

An interesting discrepancy, though, is that 35% of exhibitors consider these speaking opportunities extremely/very important compared to 59% of those who exhibit and sponsor. This indicates that sponsors are usually paying to speak, which means exhibitors who aren't sponsors miss critical chances to connect due to additional cost requirements.

Importance of speaking opportunities





NETWORKING

-focused exhibitors

Driven by

Connecting with attendees in advance

Pre-scheduling meetings with attendees or industry partners

Connecting with attendees one on one or in small groups

Generating leads rather than completing on-site sales



Less interested in

Introducing new products at events

Watch out for

Less satisfied with introducing new products, acquire leads, and promote brand/product awareness

Key exhibitor characteristic

More likely to represent exhibitors with small to midsized booths (<600 square feet)

QUESTION

When thinking about networking at any in-person event, what are the top 3 factors that most positively influence your networking experience?

+ Networking preferences are mixed among exhibitors and attendees

Topic-specific meetups ranked as the most valuable networking opportunity among exhibitors (43%), which aligns with attendees' networking priorities.

However, only 16% of exhibitors found scheduled common-interest meetups important, whereas attendees found them to be among the top three most important networking opportunities.

Another disconnect we discovered involves speed meetups. 27% of exhibitors rated speed meetups as important, but attendees ranked them as the least important networking element (8%).

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)



NETWORKING

Most important networking elements



43% 25%

Topic-specific meetup opportunities



38% 34%

After-hours events



34% 35%

Areas where informal networking can occur



34% 13%

Digital tools to enhance connecting with attendees



29% 35%

Personal-interest meet-up opportunities



27% 8%

Speed meetups to identify attendees that may be a good partner



25% 25%

Dedicated zone/hub for networking



16% 44%

Scheduled common interest meetups



2% 1%

Other

■ Exhibitor ■ Attendee



COMMERCE

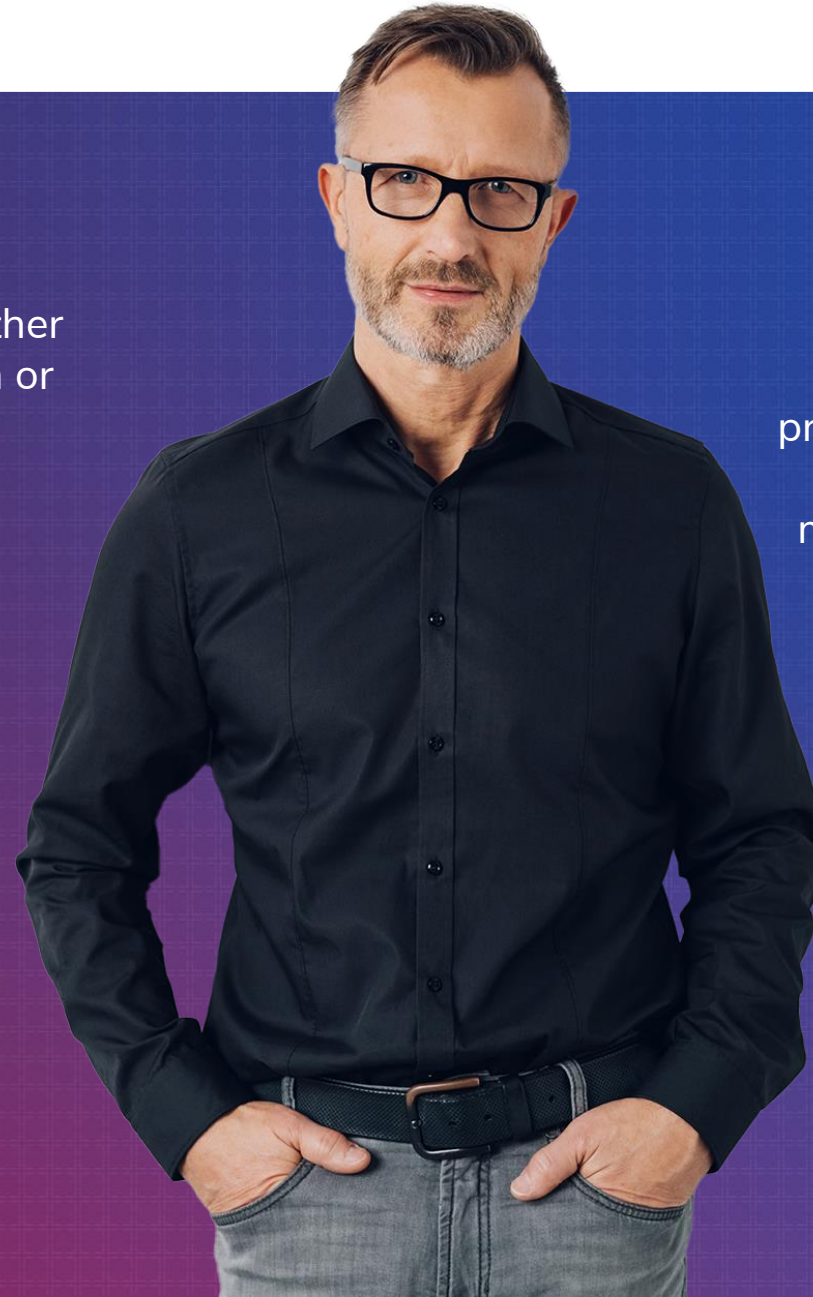
-focused exhibitors

Driven by

Completing sales rather than lead generation or lead nurture

Introducing new products

Providing product samples or service demos



Watch out for

Less satisfied with meeting customers/prospects, lead acquisition, brand awareness, and meeting industry partners

More likely to change the number of events where they are an exhibitor

Key exhibitor characteristic

Represent smaller companies (<100 employees)

QUESTION

In your meeting planning, are you securing additional meeting room space for your organization?

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)



COMMERCE

+ Exhibitors continue to secure additional meeting space

Like last year, 13% of exhibitors plan to secure additional meeting space for networking opportunities with attendees, which can pose a risk for the show floor.

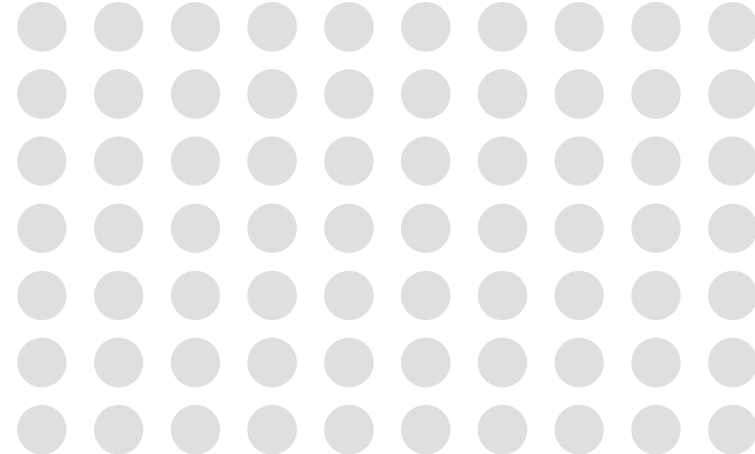
Where exactly is this additional meeting space being secured? Keep reading to find out.

Exhibitors securing additional meeting room space for their organization

13%
YES



87%
NO



How are you securing that space?

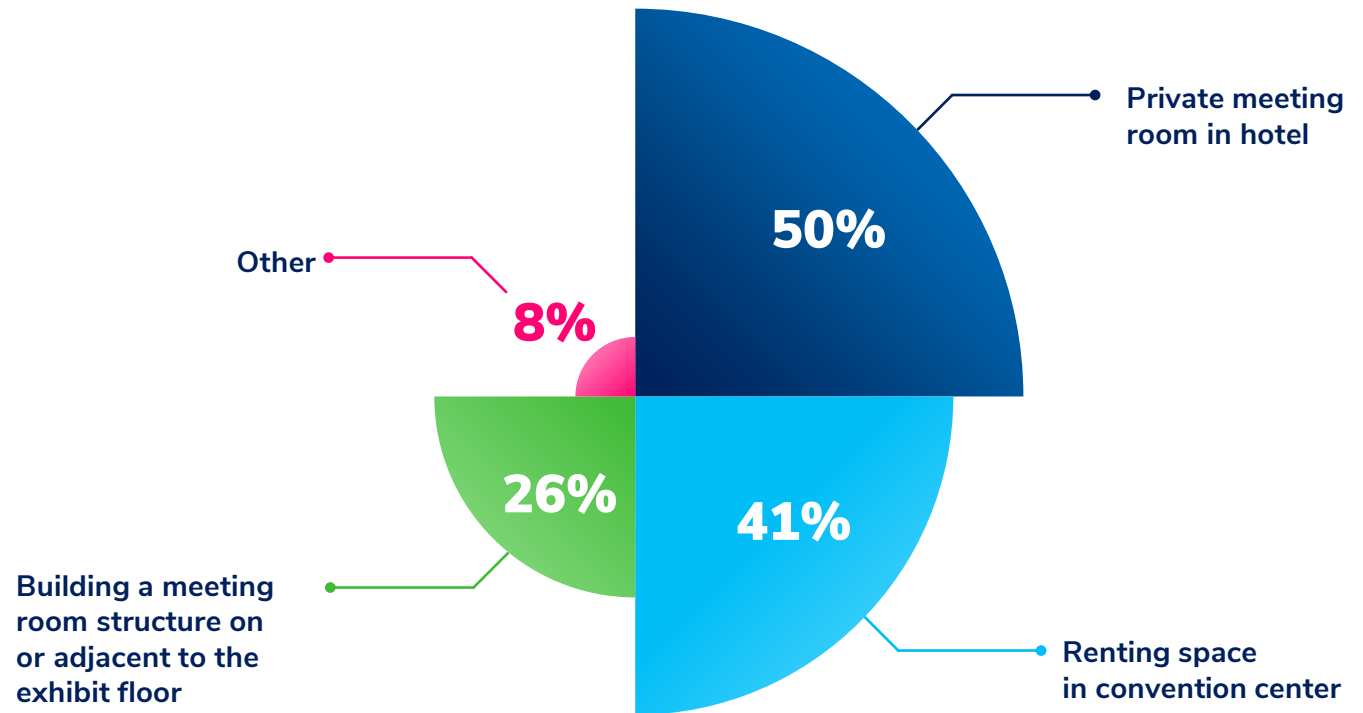


+ Event organizers must put stipulations in place to keep exhibitors from securing off-site space

Of the 13% securing additional meeting space, 50% plan to utilize meeting rooms in hotels, 48% plan to rent space in the convention center, and 26% plan to build a meeting room adjacent to the exhibit floor.

Exhibit floor-adjacent meetings don't pose as much of a threat, but it's in event organizers' best interest to put stipulations in place so exhibitors can't lure attendees away from the show floor.

Methods for securing additional meeting room space



QUESTION

When thinking about how you interact with customers/prospects at any in-person event, what are the top 3 factors that most positively influence commercial aspects of in-person events?

+ Exhibitors and attendees value product samples and demonstrations most

Overall, exhibitors and attendees prioritize the same commercial elements: samples/service demos and hands-on demonstrations.

However, exhibitors place more value on preset meetings than attendees do, where attendees would prefer vendor swag and giveaways.

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)



COMMERCE

Most important commerce elements



41% 68%

Providing product samples or service demos



41% 20%

Preset meetings with qualified attendees



40% 61%

Offering hands-on demos, sessions at booths/activations



29% 33%

Printed product/service description materials



26% 17%

QR codes providing attendees additional information



25% 20%

After-hours events



23% 35%

Providing attendees swag, giveaways



23% 19%

Event site where information can be featured



22% 18%

Featuring insights on booth/activations

■ Exhibitor ■ Attendee

QUESTION

What is your company's preferred way to make a new product announcement?

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1911)



COMMERCE

+ Attendees and exhibitors have different preferences for new product announcements

Small exhibitors are more likely to see social media as a viable way to make product announcements, which appeals to [Next-Gen Event Goers](#) in a cost-effective way.

However, most attendees have made it clear that they want to discover new products in person.

In-person events are the most-visited source for new product discovery. For attendees, social media didn't even make the top five.

Preferred ways to make new product announcements



So, What Now?

Where do we go from here? It's clear that there are growing gaps between attendees and exhibitors. We know there's an opportunity for event organizers to bridge those gaps. Here's where to start.



Next Steps

Our findings are only as valuable as you make them. So, consider this your action plan.

Start with one thing at a time. Start small. Start now.



Design for return on objective (ROO)

Expect and embrace differences

Help exhibitors measure quality

Optimize the opt-in

Offer predictable exhibitor packages

Manage relationships, not real estate



Design for return on objective (ROO)

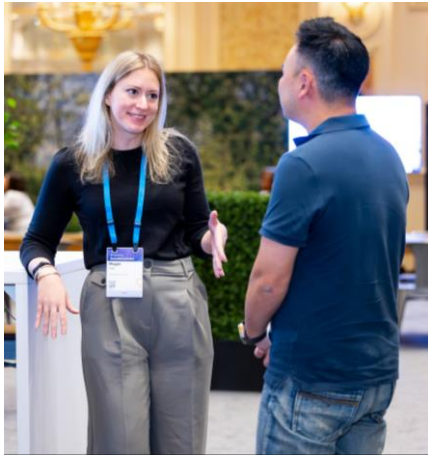
ROI is essential for exhibitors but impossible for event organizers to deliver. Consider strengthening your partnership with exhibitors beyond traditional sponsorship options. Instead, create opportunities to demonstrate a return on objective. Make it easier for both exhibitors and attendees to set up meetings ahead of the event. Imagine new sponsorship opportunities that appeal to and attract attendees, or redesign networking to increase the chances of exhibitors meeting their next high-quality lead.

Expect and embrace differences

It's a common misconception that all exhibitors share the same goals. However, each exhibitor, whether big or small, has their own unique objectives. Exhibitors who meet their objectives express higher event satisfaction. Therefore, it's crucial to take the time to assist exhibitors ahead of the event and create opportunities to match them with attendees whose objectives and needs are aligned.

Help exhibitors measure quality

Measuring quality is more challenging than measuring quantity, but it's more beneficial to everyone. Less experienced exhibitors may have additional challenges in understanding how to report critical metrics back to their marketing departments. Organizers can offer measurement tools including traditional lead scanners, but also more innovative technologies such as behavior and sentiment mapping that collect data on who is attracted to each exhibit and how they react to their experience. Helping exhibitors better understand attendee interests and needs ahead of the event can help them bring assets that are most likely to appeal to event attendees.



Optimize the opt-in

Event attendance is the ultimate opt-in. Make every moment before and after the event count. Optimize the opportunity by offering exhibitors attendee lists in advance and/or creating more networking opportunities between attendees and exhibitors. Help exhibitors find high-quality leads by serving as the bridge between them and attendees. Use technology to help match exhibitors and attendees ahead of the event without sharing personal information too early. Once everyone agrees to connect, make sharing information between exhibitors and attendees seamless.

Offer predictable exhibitor packages

Help exhibitors feel confident about their event spend and their return by offering tiered, all-inclusive pricing. Organizers have an opportunity to revamp their pricing strategies to minimize exhibitor uncertainty and create space for exhibitors to invest in other event elements. These changes would help exhibitors achieve more of their overall objectives. Consider offering packages that include more than just exhibit space and align with other event goals, like networking and sharing thought leadership.

Manage relationships, not real estate

Event organizers are in a unique position to connect exhibitors and attendees in the ways they both value. Historically, exhibitors are sold space and sponsorships and then left to figure out the rest of it on their own while planners focus more on education and activities. Don't be realtors – exhibitors are looking for the most impactful ways to spend. Instead of brokering space, sell connections, engagement, and opportunity.



Whether you need more data-driven insights into strategic event management or boots-on-the-ground consulting, Freeman Strategy is here to help. **Please reach out if you require assistance with:**

Event Performance Benchmarking and Analysis

Analyze your event's performance across a myriad of markers and see where it aligns with industry benchmarks. Identifying industry misalignment is the first step in closing gaps between exhibitors and attendees at your event.

On-site Event Assessment

Evaluate your attendees' unique motivators and uncover where your event meets (or misses) the mark using our on-site assessment tools.

Pricing Analysis and Strategy

Assess the competitive alignment of your exhibitor and sponsor pricing relative to the industry and develop models that simplify and create predictability for exhibitors.

Community Gap Analysis

Identify addressable market and attendance drivers for both current and prospective attendees, which can help exhibitors better understand and engage with your attendees.

Sponsorship Analysis and Strategy

Help organizers define event objectives and create sponsorship opportunities that can optimize engagement between sponsors and attendees.

Get in touch

Connect with

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Methodology

+ Methodology

The survey sample comprises B2B convention and exhibition exhibitors as well as sponsors who also exhibit. The survey was conducted online.

All respondents were given the option to opt in to a drawing for one of five \$100 Amazon gift cards.

	Freeman 2023	Freeman 2024
Fielding dates	April 18-27	February 15-29
Responses	1,551	1,911
Margin of error	±2.5%	±2.2%
Exhibitors (who may also sponsor)	100%	100%

100% allocation methodology – In some instances, the value of all components on a chart may not sum to exactly 100%. This may occur due to three possible reasons: (1) When rounding to the nearest whole number across a series of components, the sum may not equal exactly 100%. (2) In some instances, a small percentage of respondents selected “not sure” as their answer option. Those individuals may have been excluded from some charts. (3) The question may have allowed respondents to select multiple answer options.

+ Profile of respondents

Top business types

	Freeman 2023 Exhibitors	Freeman 2024 Exhibitors
Consumer Goods/Retail	25%	19%
Industrial/Heavy Machinery	12%	15%
Communications/IT	8%	11%
Medical/Healthcare	7%	7%
Food/Beverage	4%	7%
Building/Construction/Home and Repair	5%	6%
Business Services	11%	5%
Transportation	7%	4%

Company size (# of employees)

	Freeman 2023 Exhibitors	Freeman 2024 Exhibitors
Small (up to 100)	64%	61%
Medium (101-2,000)	25%	30%
Large (>2,000)	11%	9%

Job titles/functions

	Freeman 2023 Exhibitors	Freeman 2024 Exhibitors
Corporate	38%	30%
President, Partner, Owner	27%	20%
Sales and Marketing	35%	43%
Director	13%	14%
Manager	14%	20%
Exhibits/Events	24%	24%
Director	11%	7%
Manager	9%	10%
Other	3%	3%

+ Profile of respondents (continued)

Role in exhibiting or sponsorship decisions	Geographical distribution		Age					
	Freeman 2023 Exhibitors	Freeman 2024 Exhibitors	Freeman 2023 Exhibitors	Freeman 2024 Exhibitors				
I am the key decision maker	55%	45%	Northeast	23%	23%	Gen Z (11-26)	1%	4%
I have significant influence	45%	55%	Southeast	17%	17%	Millennials (27-42)	22%	34%
			Midwest	16%	22%	Gen X (43-58)	45%	39%
			Southwest	8%	7%	Boomers (59-77)	29%	20%
			West	24%	20%	Greatest Generation (78+)	1%	<1%
Gender	Freeman 2023 Exhibitors	Freeman 2024 Exhibitors	Canada	4%	5%	Prefer not to say	2%	2%
Male	53%	49%	All other countries	8%	7%	Average Age	51	47
Female	41%	46%						
Prefer not to say	6%	5%						

+ Profile of respondents (continued)

Event types

	Freeman 2023 Exhibitors	Freeman 2024 Exhibitors
B2B Trade Show Exhibits/Sponsorships	100%	100%
Branded Conferences (user conference, partner event, training)	36%	36%
Internal Events (sales meeting, product meetings, etc.)	35%	39%
Digital/Online Events	30%	29%
B2C Trade Show Exhibits/Sponsorships	26%	26%
Executive Events (analyst days, board meetings, exec briefings, etc.)	17%	16%
Consumer Events (major sponsor events, music festivals, etc.)	9%	9%
Other	2%	2%

Exhibit square footage

	Freeman 2023 Exhibitors	Freeman 2024 Exhibitors
Small (100 square feet)	38%	35%
Medium (101-600 square feet)	52%	52%
Large (601+ square feet)	8%	10%
Don't know	2%	3%

Appendix

QUESTION 1

Looking ahead to the next 12 months, how do you expect your in-person exhibit plans to change?

QUESTION 2

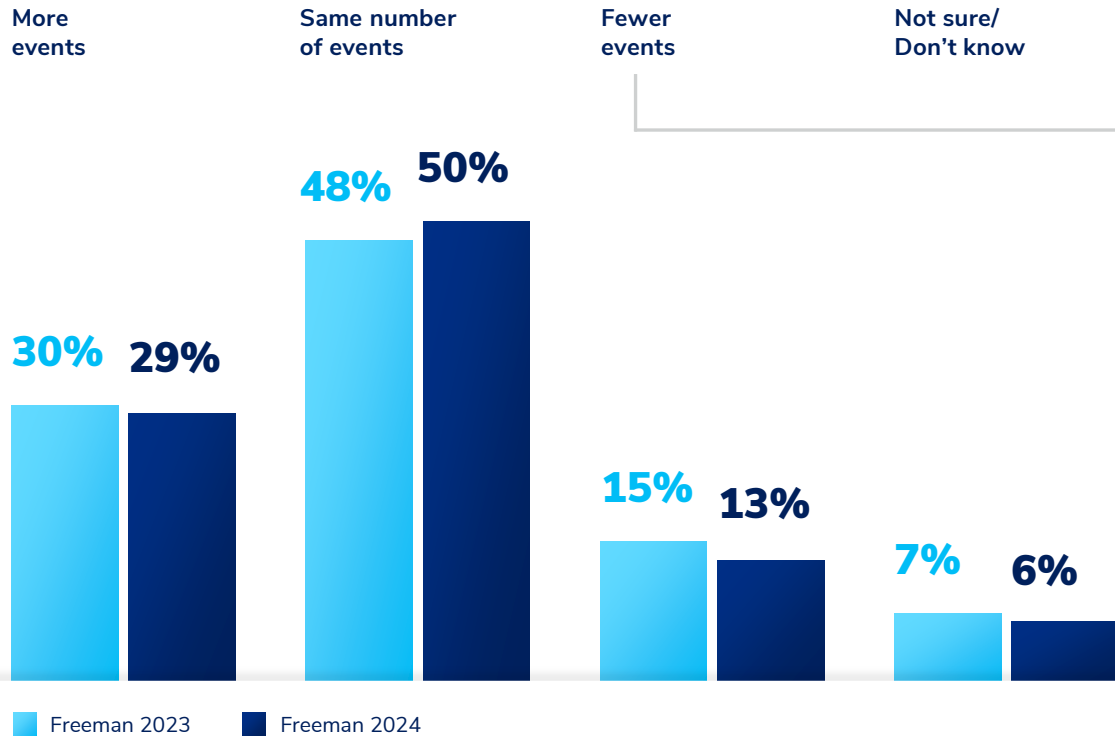
Do you anticipate your reduction in planned exhibits at in-person events is permanent or temporary?

FREEMAN 2023
Exhibitors (N=1,551)

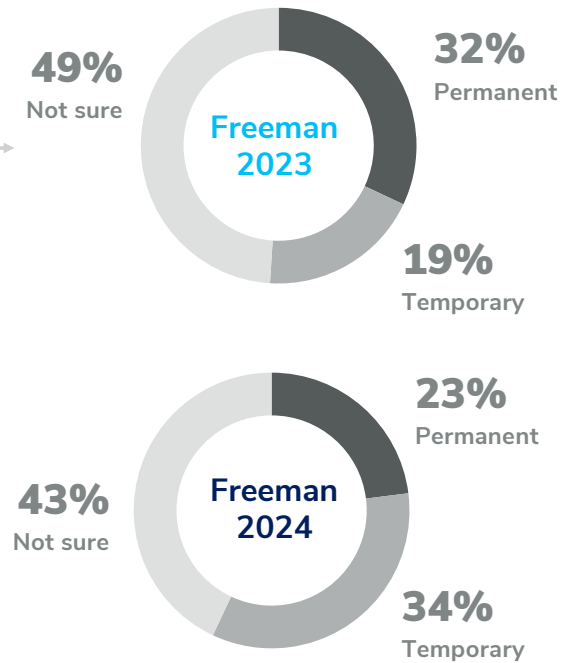
FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)

+ 79% of exhibitors plan to attend the same number of events or more in the next year

Changes to in-person exhibit plans



Anticipated reduction in planned exhibits



QUESTION 1

In the next 12 months, are you planning any changes to your standard booth square footage?

QUESTION 2

What is the primary reason you are reducing square footage?

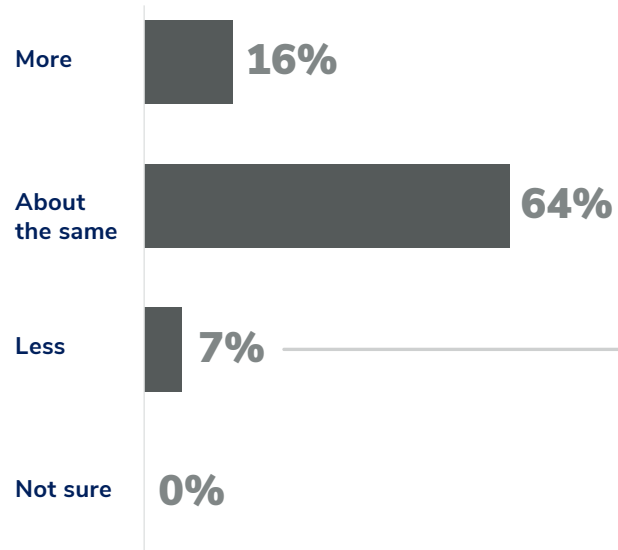
FREEMAN 2023

Exhibitors (N=1,551)

FREEMAN 2024

Exhibitors (N=1,911)

Change in booth square footage in the next 12 months



Reasons for reducing square footage



Freeman 2023 Freeman 2024

QUESTION

When thinking about your overall experience exhibiting at any in-person event, what are the top 3 factors that most positively influence your experience?

FREEMAN 2024
Exhibitors (N=1,911)

Most important experience elements

Face-to-face interactions, hands-on experiences for attendees

Connect with attendees, set up meetings in advance

Technology that makes it easier to connect with attendees

Contribute to an immersive, visually appealing atmosphere

After-hours events

Quality, provision of food and beverage offerings

Comfortable seating, carpeting

Natural lighting

Ability to offer games or competitions to attendees

Wellness opportunities

Other

78%

64%

37%

25%

22%

17%

17%

8%

3%

2%

4%

QUESTION 1

In your meeting planning, are you securing additional meeting room space for your organization?

QUESTION 2

How are you securing that space?

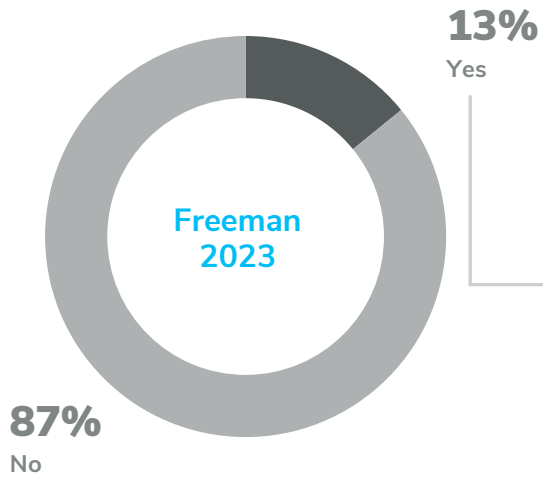
FREEMAN 2023

Exhibitors (N=1,551)

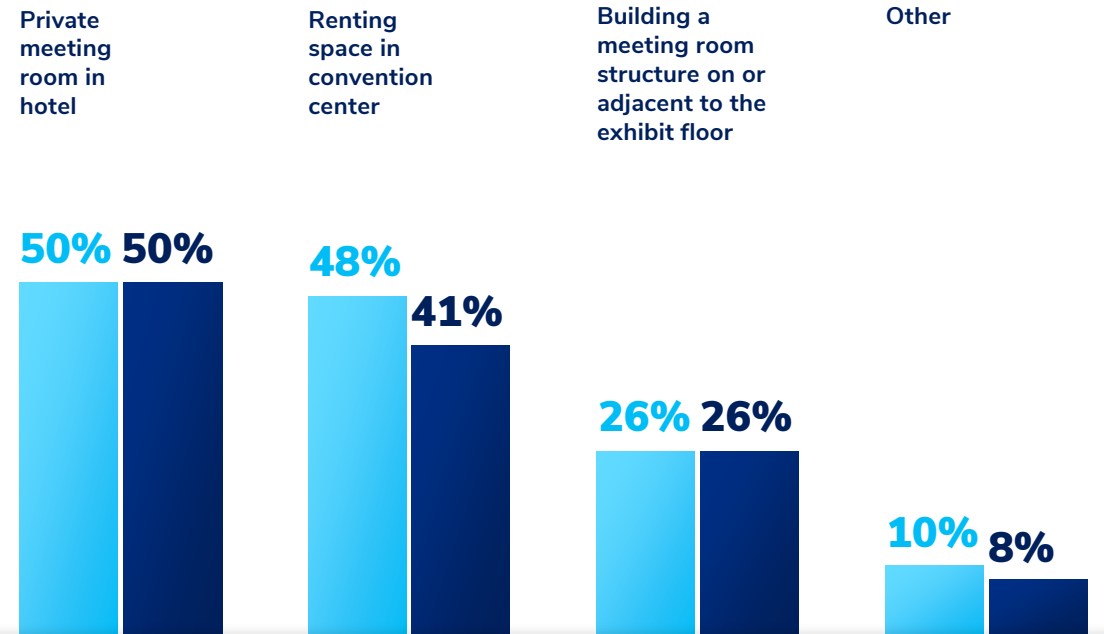
FREEMAN 2024

Exhibitors (N=1,911)

Are You Securing Additional Meeting Room Space for Your Organization?



Methods for securing additional meeting room space



Freeman 2023 Freeman 2024