

splash

Getting Back to Business

2022

An Outlook on Events in 2022

Ready for a Rebound

In our 2021 Outlook report, we found an events industry adapting to a once-in-a-lifetime disruption with resiliency and remaining optimistic for a return to normalcy.

The latter didn't quite happen, but things moved in the right direction. Event professionals discovered that virtual and hybrid events weren't just necessary stopgaps — they could be a productive part of their permanent event mix. In a year that featured greater event volume overall than in 2020, more event marketing budgets increased than not in preparation for a more substantial rebound in 2022.

And speaking of 2022, people are anxious to attend events. 63% are already registered for two or more virtual events in 2022, and 64% are registered to attend two or more in-person events.

In short, events are poised for a rebound in 2022, so event professionals need to prepare themselves for the in-person, virtual, and hybrid events of the future.



A Budget Bounce

Companies ramped up their event marketing budgets in 2021, with 38% increasing their budgets compared to only 28% in 2020.



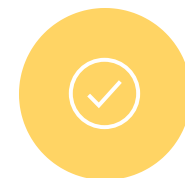
Event Tech Opportunities

Like in 2020, companies didn't invest in new virtual event tech in 2021. 67% reported using the same event marketing tools as they did pre-pandemic.



Virtually Permanent

Virtual events are now a permanent part of companies' event mix. 92% continued hosting virtual events even once in-person events were safe to resume.



Sticking with What Works

Virtual events were more effective than anticipated for 55% of the companies we surveyed, so those events aren't going anywhere.

3 Key Trends

59%

plan to increase their investment in event technology compared to 2021

Businesses Make Do with Existing Event Tech

More than two-thirds of companies are still using the same event marketing tools they had in place before the pandemic, despite rising event budgets and an ongoing embrace of virtual and hybrid events.

Is your company's current event tech stack getting the most out of your events?

46%

anticipate hosting more virtual events in 2022 than they did in 2021

Virtual is a Permanent Part of the Event Mix

Even when restrictions on in-person gatherings eased, the vast majority of companies continued hosting virtual events. Additionally, almost half of companies anticipate running more virtual events in 2022 than they did in 2021.

Are your virtual events meeting your attendees' expectations?

43%

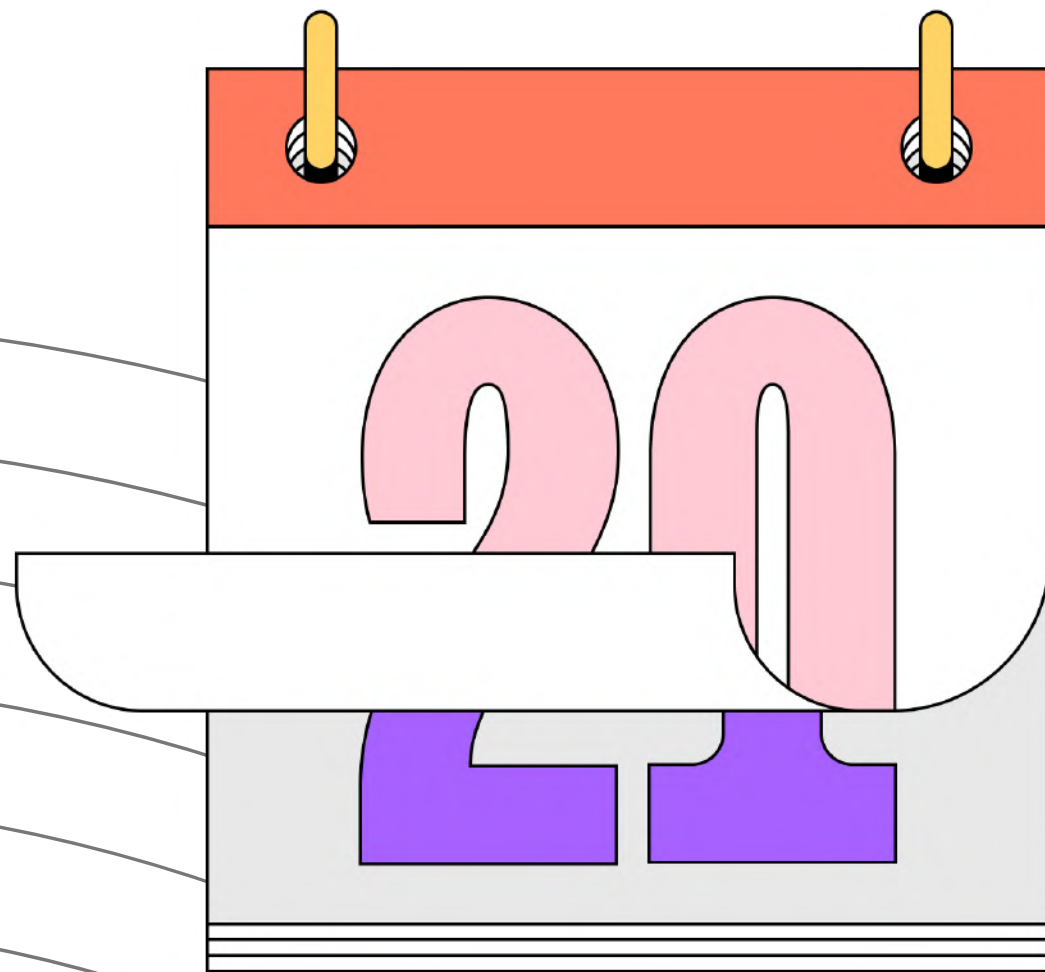
measure event success by their impact on revenue

Emphasis on Driving Revenue

Companies rely on virtual events to stay connected with their audiences. But more companies cited revenue growth and sales as the key success metric for virtual events, indicating a shift toward measuring real business outcomes.

Do your virtual and hybrid events actively drive business results?

What Changed from 2020?



2020

52%



2021

68%

of companies measure event success by **attendance**

2020

28%



2021

38%

of companies reported their event marketing budget **increased** in the past year

2020

38%



2021

55%

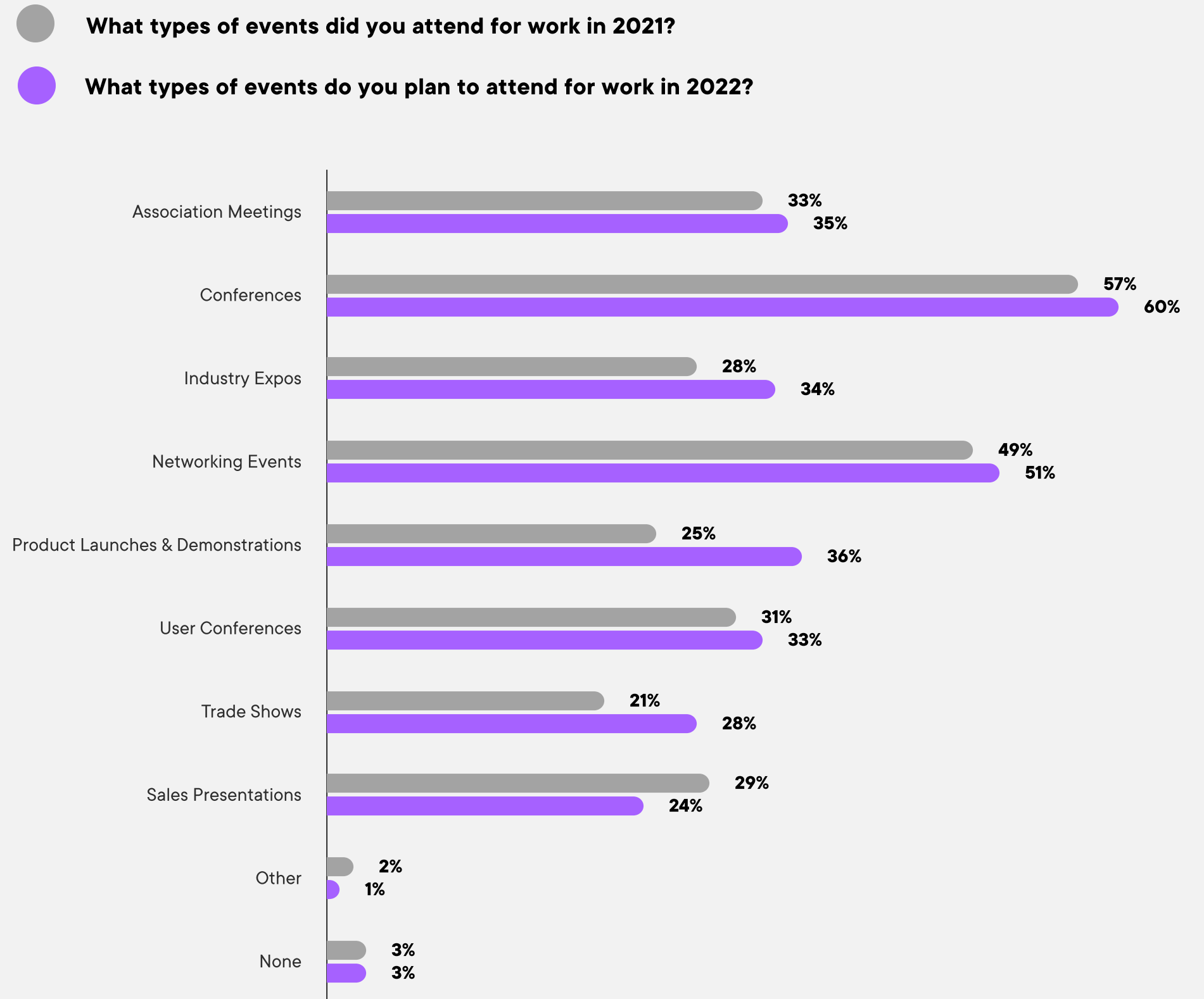
of attendees said the ideal event length is either **45 minutes or one hour**

An Appetite for Events

Whether in person or virtual, more people plan to attend events of all types in 2022.

Conferences remain the top category, followed closely by networking events.

As event restrictions ease, interest in large-scale, traditionally in-person events like trade shows and industry expos is rising. Companies participating in these events will benefit from hosting smaller, more targeted ancillary events that are revenue-generating machines.



Virtual, In Person, or Both?

Event participation is expected to rise in 2022, but will those events be in person or virtual? Most likely, they'll be both.

63% of respondents are currently registered to attend two or more virtual events in 2022, and 64% are already registered to attend two or more in-person events.

The expectation among event organizers and attendees is that virtual and hybrid events will be a significant part of the events landscape in 2022. Companies that build on their virtual event successes from the past two years are best positioned to attract attendees and generate positive outcomes from their events.

51%

of respondents attended 3 – 5 **virtual** or **hybrid** events in 2021

50%

of companies anticipate hosting **more in-person events** in 2022 than they did in 2021

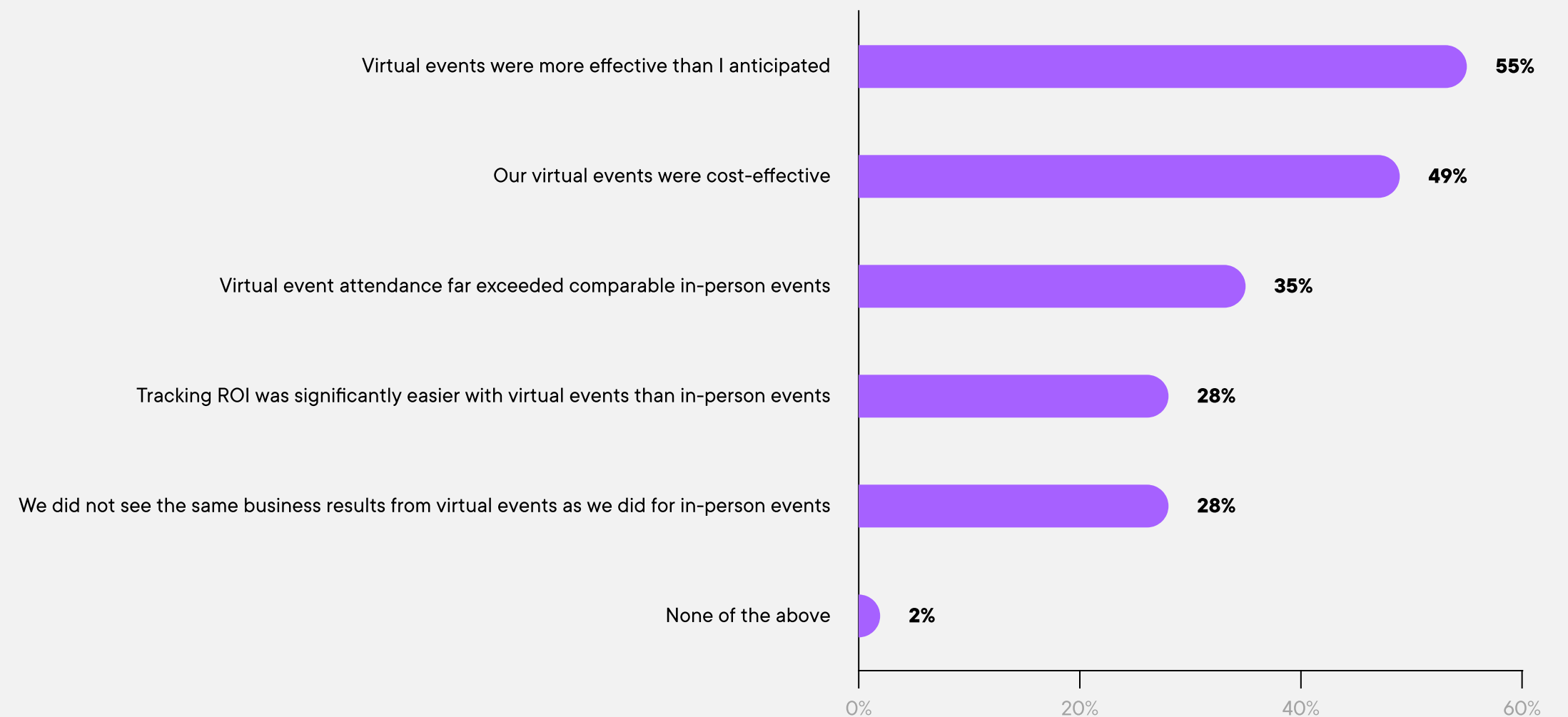
46%

of companies anticipate hosting **more virtual events** in 2022 than they did in 2021

Virtual Events Work

Virtual events have become a fixture in most companies' event strategies because they work. Not only did respondents find virtual events to be **cost-effective** (49%), they also drew **more attendees** (35%) and facilitated **better ROI tracking** (28%).

Which of the following describes the virtual events your company hosted in 2020 and 2021?



It's Time to Upgrade

While both event organizers and attendees alike have adapted to (and embraced) virtual and hybrid events, most companies have not taken the next step: investing in technology to improve the experience.

After a year of all-virtual-everything, companies are still using the same traditional live-streaming and webinar tools they had in place pre-pandemic. What's more, 70% are either "extremely" or "very confident" their existing event technology can support effective hybrid events.

But "effective" only works for so long. The companies that'll win at virtual and hybrid events are those that can deliver immersive, on-brand guest experiences and connect important event data for fast follow-ups.



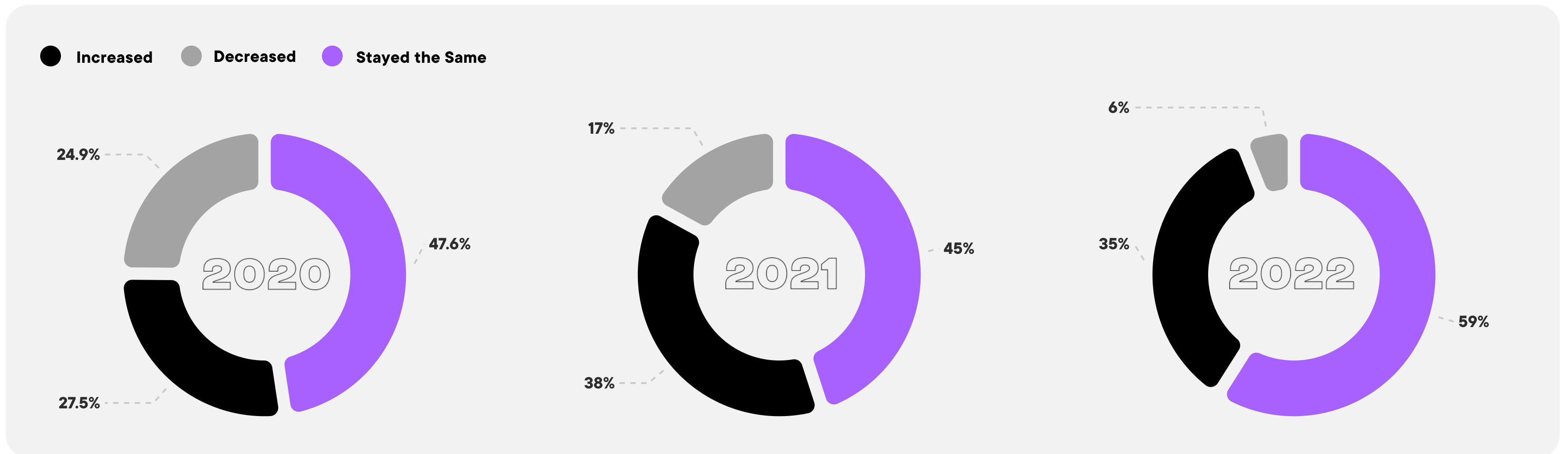
In 2020, 66% of companies reported using the same event marketing tools as before COVID-19 to create virtual events. In 2021, that percentage was virtually unchanged at 67%.

But Can We Upgrade on Our Budget?

From what we're reading, yes.

In 2021, more companies (38%) reported increasing their event marketing budgets than in 2020 (28%), and 59% plan to grow their investment in event technology in 2022.

With virtual and hybrid events set to play a major role for the foreseeable future, event organizers should consider allocating budget increases to event technology that can create operational efficiencies and better attendee experiences.



The B2B/B2C Difference

B2B companies took a different approach to virtual events in 2021 than their B2C counterparts.

For instance, B2B companies were significantly more likely to hold virtual town halls (31% vs. 20%), panel discussions (42% vs. 34%) and trainings (70% vs. 50%) than B2C companies.

More surprisingly, B2B and B2C companies diverged on measuring event success. Attendance (69%) and registrations (59%) were the top metrics for B2B companies, followed by new leads (53%).

B2C organizations also measured success by attendance (68%) but put less emphasis on registrations (47%) and impact on revenue (46%).

B2B

organizations are slightly less confident that their current event tech can support effective hybrid events at 71% vs. 73% of B2C companies

B2C

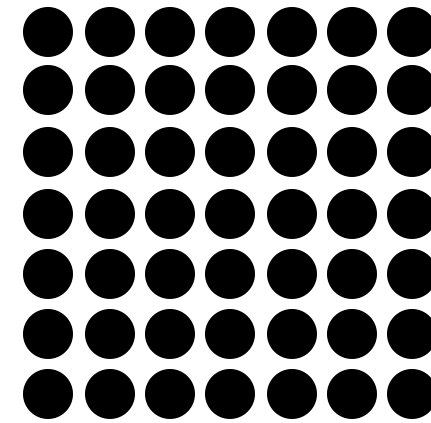
companies were less likely to host virtual happy hours (24%) or strategic planning sessions (32%)

Size Still Matters

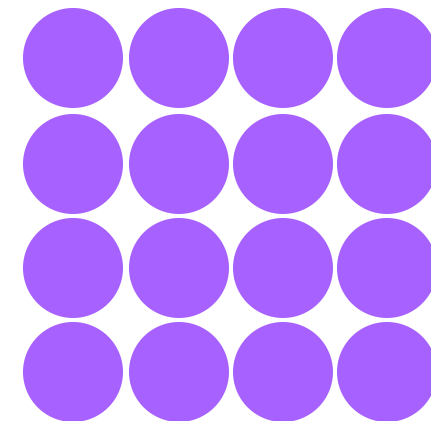
Just as in 2020, large companies (1,000 – 10,000 employees) are more likely to leverage virtual events for large-scale gatherings than their smaller counterparts. 40% of large companies hosted virtual town halls last year, compared to only 16% of companies with fewer than 100 employees and 20% of companies with between 100 and 999 employees.

Large companies also tend to have more robust virtual human resources operations in place. 74% of large companies held virtual trainings last year, compared to only 58% and 55% of small and mid-sized companies, respectively.

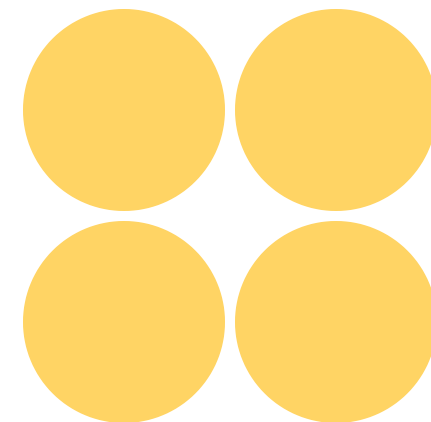
This trend reinforces the idea that the biggest companies have the resources to host virtual events that accommodate the most attendees. It also indicates they directed virtual event investment to their human resources, perhaps as a way to accommodate their increasingly remote workforces.



Larger companies are more likely to target employees (79%) with **virtual events** than small and mid-sized companies.



Mid-sized companies struggle the most with **driving attendance** to events (54%).



Smaller companies have adopted **new event marketing tools** in greater numbers (only 58% are using the same tools as they were pre-pandemic, compared to 73% of mid-size and 66% of large companies).

Ongoing Challenges



Many of those challenges are addressable with the right approach and the right event technology.



Regardless of size, the biggest event challenge companies found in 2021 was driving attendance (48%).



Smaller, more targeted events can drive higher attendance rates.



Close behind was a new challenge uncovered in 2021 — combatting virtual event fatigue (47%).



More engaging and purpose-built virtual event technology can help eliminate that virtual fatigue common with traditional webinar platforms.



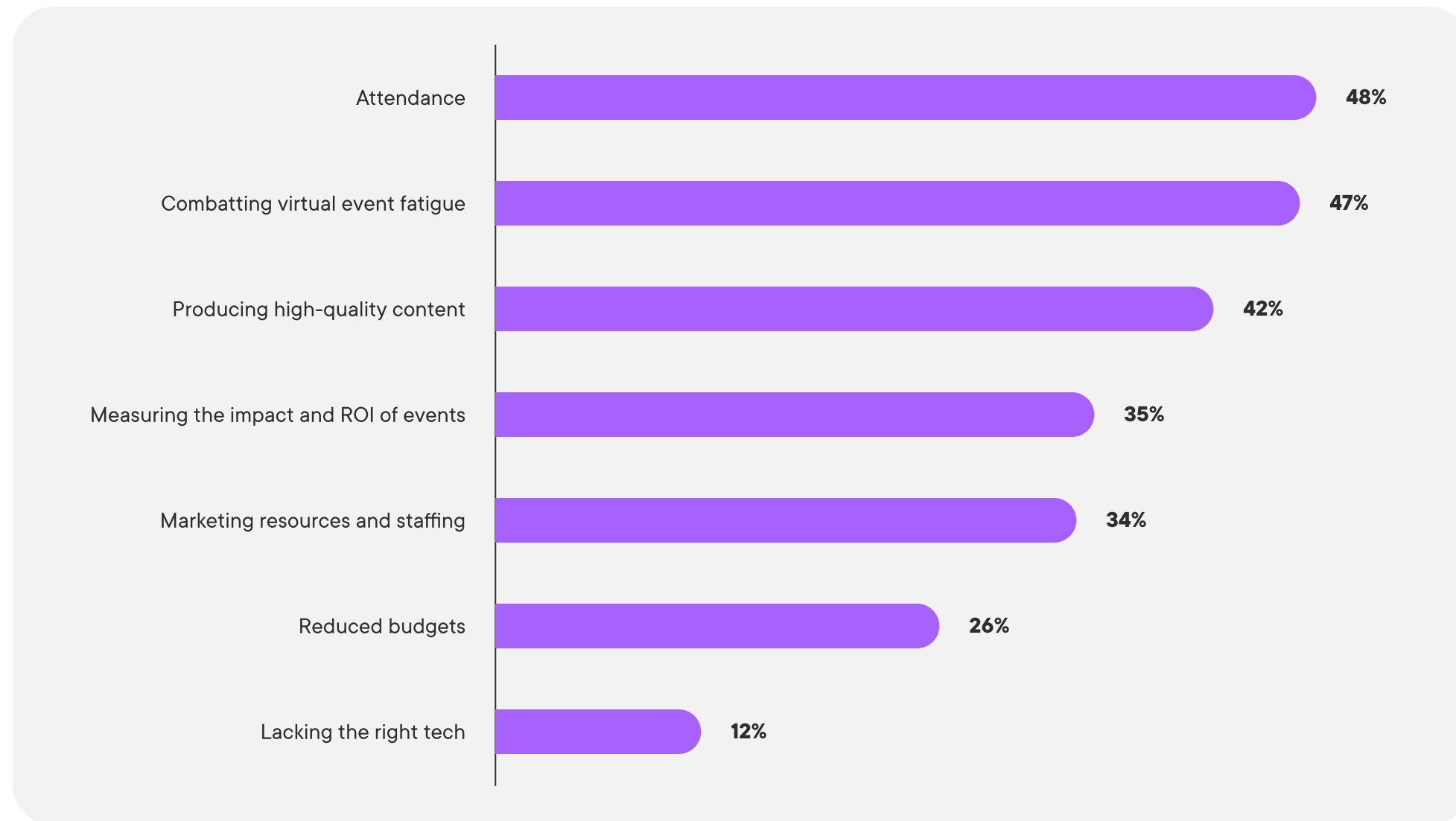
Companies also struggled with producing high-quality event content, measuring event ROI effectively, and dealing with limited budgets and staffing.



Tracking the impact of events on revenue and other business outcomes becomes possible when using an event platform that integrates with existing CRM systems.

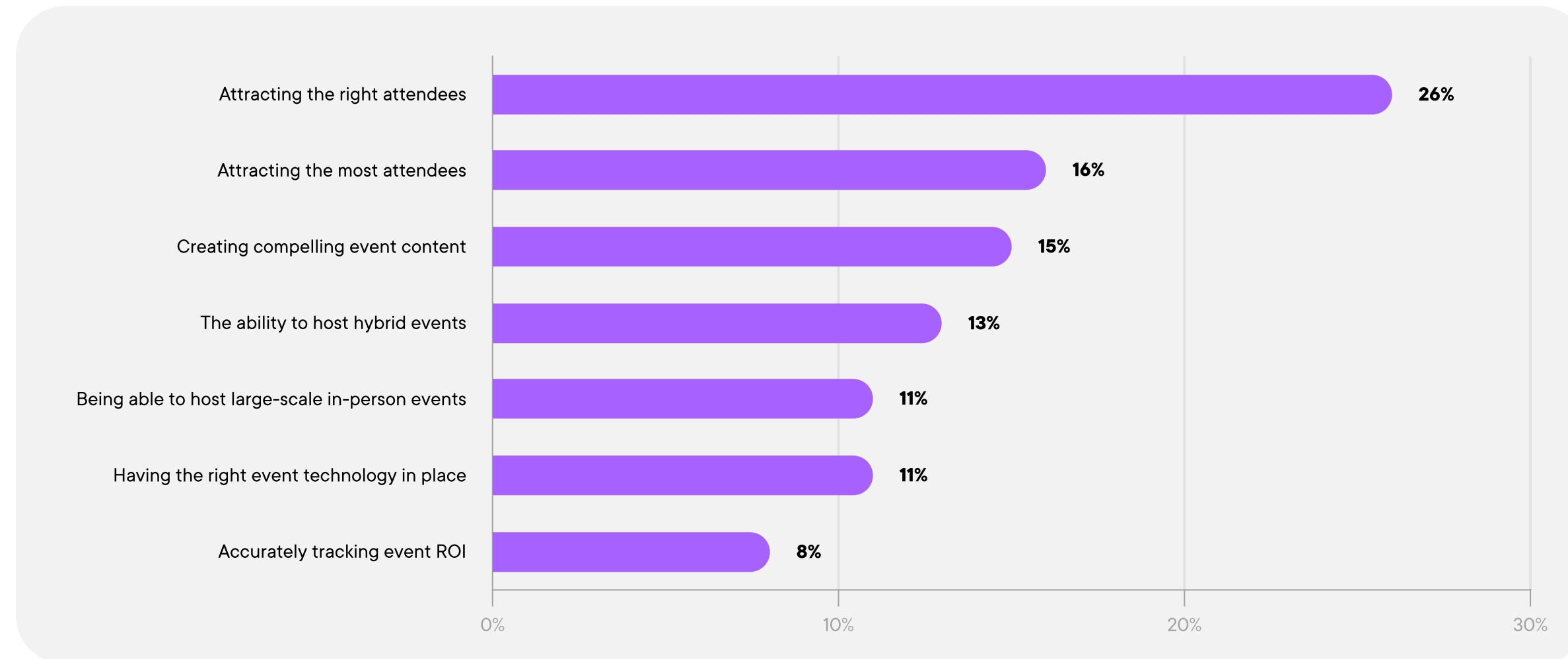
Ongoing Challenges

What are your main challenges related to events?



Keys to Success in 2022

Companies surveyed had slightly different opinions on the most important factor to event success in 2022.



The standout finding here is that companies' first priority isn't attracting the most attendees to their events (16%), but rather **the right attendees (26%)**. They also acknowledge the importance of hybrid events to overall event performance in 2022, and the need to have compelling content.

Attendee Attitudes

One survey finding challenged conventional wisdom: Attendees are more tolerant of longer virtual events. In 2020, the overwhelming majority of attendees thought that virtual events should be 30 minutes or less.



In 2021, the ideal length of a virtual meeting swelled to 45 minutes to an hour.

Are attendees willing to endure virtual fatigue for valuable event experiences? Or are they simply getting used to the state of events now? Either way, event professionals should take note of this trend.

60%

plan to attend conferences in 2022 for work

53%

“always,” “almost always,” or “often” experience virtual fatigue when attending virtual events

46%

attend events primarily for professional development

Not Just for Marketers

In 2020, 29% of companies surveyed reported that non-marketing staff were more involved in creating events than before the pandemic. In 2021, that percentage surged to 37%.

This trend means that companies should invest in solutions that enable self-sufficiency across their organization to create consistent, repeatable, and measurable events.

37%

of companies surveyed report that non-marketing staff are now more involved in creating events than pre-pandemic.



Hybrid is Happening

If virtual events were the hallmark of 2021 (and the entire pandemic period), then the proliferation of hybrid events will be 2022's calling card.

It's not hard to imagine most in-person events returning with some virtual component, whether to reach more attendees or hedge against potential disruptions. And indeed, that's what companies are preparing for.

Most companies expect to host hybrid events in 2022 (79%). **The worrisome news is that most companies seem content with their existing event tech stacks**, which may not meet evolving attendee expectations.

43%

of companies are “extremely” or “very” confident that their current event technology can support effective hybrid events

32%

say their existing platforms are sufficient for hybrid events, but barely

Event Horizons

Over the past two highly disruptive years, simply having an event — any type of event — has felt like a qualified win for many teams. But that won't be the case in 2022. Expectations for achieving measurable business results are high. And attendees' expectations of their event experience are too.

How can event professionals meet those expectations for positive event ROI, lead generation, and pipeline development? Our data shows many have already begun integrating what they've learned through the pandemic — **smaller attendee lists, virtual experiences, and hybrid events** — into their ongoing strategies, and that's a great start. But as the volume of events increases in the next year, and attendees clamor for new and better experiences, event professionals and marketers will need new approaches to get the most out of their events.

That's where the right technology comes in.

The Opportunity

Companies have been hesitant to replace their existing virtual event technology so far. This means there's plenty of opportunity for differentiation and optimization with strategic technology investments. With the right tools, teams can build, replicate, and scale events with maximum efficiency, leading to better business outcomes.

The Potential

2022 is set to be a year of realized potential for the events industry. But that can only happen if companies embrace the technology and solutions needed to adapt. After all, the events landscape will continue evolving and challenging companies to think in different and more effective ways.

Methodology

In November 2021, we surveyed **253 event professionals** in the United States across a variety of industries. To qualify, respondents had to work in marketing, HR, or other departments within the survey criteria.

The results were combined with a 2020 survey of 270 event professionals meeting the same criteria, resulting in a total response count of **523**.

The survey was not weighted.

About

Splash provides event marketers and field marketing teams with the tools they need to design, create, and execute virtual, in-person, and hybrid event programs that create memorable experiences, engage attendees, and drive business value.

The Splash platform empowers users to easily create their own branded, connected, and compliant event programs in minutes or hours, not days or weeks. By marrying data, design, and intelligent automation, Splash helps companies market, measure, and scale their event programs in ways that were previously impossible.

See why Fortune 500 companies choose Splash to power their events at www.splashthat.com.



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