THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO EVENT DATA STRATEGY:

Maximize ROI with Informed Decision Making

Skift MEETINGS

Webex Events
(formerly Socio)

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ABOUT SKIFT MEETINGS

Skift Meetings, formerly EventMB, is defining the future of events.

As a Skift brand, we relentlessly deliver insights into the innovative business events that define organizations. Our global audience of meeting and event professionals trusts us to deliver up-to-date guidance and inspiration. Our thought-provoking, impartial content sets us apart. We take a business-focused approach that is accessible to everyone from senior leaders to aspiring students.

We are now entering a new era of business. An era where meetings, events, technology and travel all play leading roles in defining and instilling organizational – and indeed industry – culture. Skift Meetings is at the forefront of this new era, defining the way forward and helping you find new ways to thrive, regardless of the challenges that lie ahead.

ABOUT WEBEX EVENTS (FORMERLY SOCIO)

Webex Events (formerly Socio) is an end-to-end event management platform that powers immersive virtual, hybrid, and in-person events. Webex Events supports multi-track events with custom virtual venues, mobile apps, live and on-demand streaming, registration and ticketing, interactive attendee networking and in-person solutions like onsite check-in & badge printing, lead retrieval & live display. Webex Events joins award-winning support with #1 ranked user satisfaction. Learn more.

INTRODUCTION

The wave of virtual events that swept the industry has left many lasting effects on the landscape of meetings and events, but the most impactful might come down to one key factor: data.

Over the past two and half years, marketing departments have come to increasingly value virtual events as a critical element of their digital marketing strategies. It's no longer just about reaching new audiences, but about understanding what motivates them.

Many event professionals adapted with the times and learned to interpret a whole new set of analytics. Collecting data and leveraging key insights to improve event programs is now a core part of being an event professional. But with added pressure to deliver outstanding in-person event experiences, can planners afford to maintain these expectations? Arguably, that's precisely why they can't afford to let them slip. An effective data strategy can be just what's needed to achieve event success with limited resources. We won't be going backwards.

Business events connect key decision-makers and engage them in shared experiences — making them an ideal platform for gathering real-time customer data and other high-value metrics. This guide will provide in-depth guidance on how to capture and leverage that data across the entire event life cycle.

Get ready for a deep-dive into the following key questions:

Pre-Event

- How can you strike a balance between collecting data and respecting privacy — learning enough about your audience to provide a personalized experience without overstepping boundaries?
- How can market segmentation actually help to create targeted event marketing campaigns and refine the event design itself?

Mid-Event

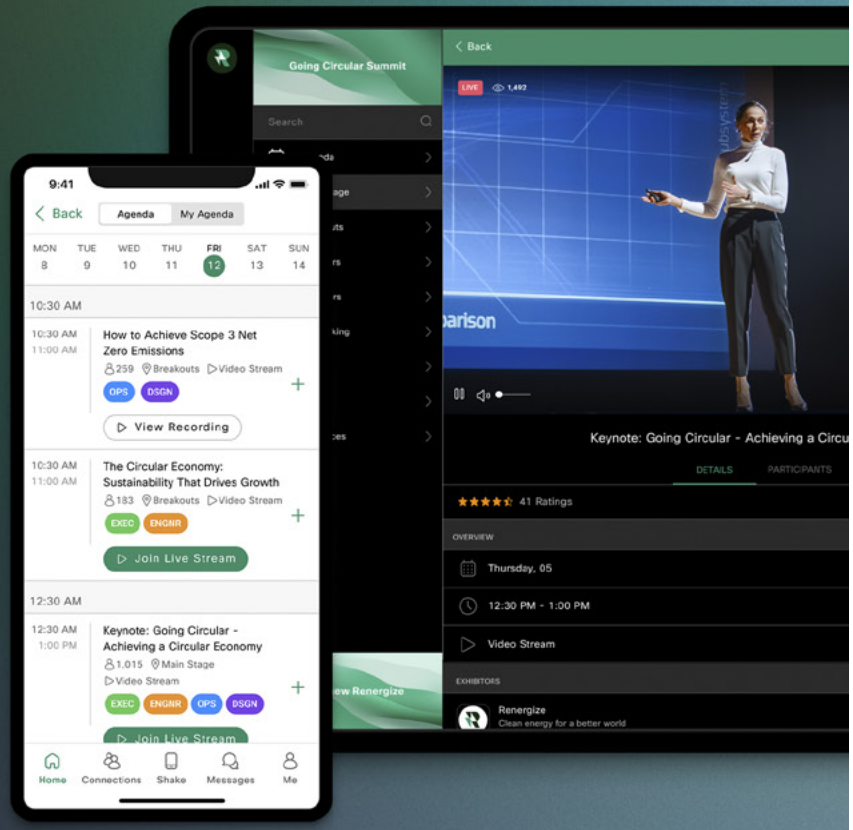
- How can you ensure that everything runs according to plan while also remaining flexible enough to adapt to new data as it comes in?
- What are the most effective ways to collect feedback from attendees in real time?
- What's the secret to content automation?

Post-Event

- How can you translate all your event data into meaningful takeaways that will help to improve future events and expand your audience?
- How can data help you show sponsors and exhibitors the true value of participating in your event — and upsell them next time?
- How can you design a post-event survey with the highest possible completion rates and the most meaningful insights?

Webex Events (formerly Socio)

Host engaging virtual, in-person, and hybrid events.



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Part 1

USING DATA TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE BEFORE ANYONE ARRIVES ON-SITE OR ON-SCREEN

The pre-event phase offers a tremendous amount of potential for event organizers. It's the period of time that allows you to demonstrate that you understand the audience's needs. It's also an opportunity to learn even more about what they're looking to accomplish at the event.

Key steps to capitalize on all that potential:

- Be upfront about your plans for data to make everyone feel comfortable sharing it.
- Work with your marketing department to develop a sophisticated segmentation strategy.
- Think ahead to what you actually want to do with the data so you know what to collect — and what you don't need.
- Let the marketing data help drive your event design decisions.

DATA BEGINS WITH TRUST

We may be living in a data-driven age, but people are becoming increasingly skeptical about who's in the driver's seat — and where they are heading with all the information they're collecting. In a recent survey of 2,000 U.S. adults conducted by KPMG, 86 percent of respondents indicated that data privacy is a growing concern for them, and 68 percent are concerned about the level of data being collected by businesses. As event organizers work to offer incentives to attendees for turning over their personal data, it's important to recognize that those rewards may not be able to win over everyone: 30 percent of adults aren't willing to share their personal data for any reason.

"There is a growing premise of 'my data is my data,'" Dahlia El Gazzar, event tech expert and founder of Dahlia+ Agency, says. Increasingly, people expect a user experience that combines both control and convenience. "Younger generations want their data to be able to travel with them from one platform to another. They're also trying not to be tracked. It's going to create a huge shift in how event organizers and event marketers are going to operate."

The key to navigating privacy concerns is simple: Be transparent. "Tell everyone what you're planning to do with the data," El Gazzar says. "If an attendee will be walking around the conference with a bracelet lighting up different colors, what does it mean? What are you collecting — the number of conversations she has, the number of sessions she attends, the number of options she says yes or no to?"

Ultimately, the data should be serving them as much as it serves you. When asked to share advice on how to leverage event data for better ROI, one Skift Meetings survey respondent advised, "Find a way to make it useful to the attendees to provide you with data." Perhaps the audience that falls within a three-hour driving distance will be entered into a draw for a discounted day pass versus a sweepstakes to win a free flight for those who would be traveling across the country. Similarly, information about their job role could be used to help match them with networking contacts at the event.

THE RIGHT DATA DRIVES THE RIGHT MESSAGING

Despite concerns about data collection, the reality is that most people want the businesses they interact with — including meetings and trade shows — to demonstrate a real understanding of what they want, with communications approaching a one-to-one conversation. Research from McKinsey shows that 71 percent of consumers expect personalization from brands, and 76 percent are frustrated when they don't find it. For event organizers, these statistics underscore an important reality: Pre-event marketing materials cannot be designed with a one-size-fits-all model.

While your marketing team can't send individual text messages to thousands of prospective attendees, they can leverage data to embrace the power of the next best thing to personalization: segmentation.

For example, you might send a tailored note of appreciation to loyal attendees who have consistently registered for the past three years. To welcome back individuals who let their membership lapse, you might instead share a rundown of all the new additions you've added to the event in the past year. And if you're working to acquire new attendees who have never interacted with your organization, think about what could really resonate with them — a testimonial from another professional instead of any kind of brand speak.

"If I'm a new prospect, maybe I want to hear from your other customers," Lisa Vogel, leader, field and event marketing, Webex Events (formerly Socio), says. "I don't want to just hear traditional marketing language. I want to hear about somebody's experience."

No matter how you segment your audience, you can expect the recipients on the other end to pay more attention to your messaging. Mailchimp's research has shown that segmented campaigns lead to more opens, more clicks, and fewer unsubscribes.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO KNOW

In addition to putting the power of the existing data you have to work, the pre-event phase is also the time to think about what kind of intelligence you want to collect to avoid amassing a stockpile of data points that won't translate to any kind of action.

When Skift Meetings asked our readers to share their top piece of advice on how to use data to maximize event ROI, the most common thread boiled down to advance preparation.

"The first thing to do is get with your marketing operations team to determine which categories and fields are mandatory to sync data with your CRM," Vogel says. "Whether it's getting a zip code, asking about the size of their company or their role in purchasing — make sure you outline your priorities of what you want to know so that you have clean data."

Ideally, every data point you collect should line up with the categories that your business development and marketing departments have already set up inside your CRM. This may seem like tedious housekeeping, but it can be vital to ensuring that your sales reps are equipped to target leads further down the road. It's also helpful to stick with one CRM and one event platform if possible. The more tools you use, the more data silos you create and the harder it is to make the data actionable. As one survey respondent shared, "Some clients choose to use multiple platforms for virtual events, and we can't track off platform meetings or third party integrations." Using the same event tech for your virtual and in-person events is yet one more way to ensure your data collection is as streamlined and synchronized as possible.

In addition to what kinds of data your organization wants, it's crucial to know what your other stakeholders — sponsors and exhibitors — are looking to learn. Ask them how they define ROI at your event. Are they more focused on brand awareness or retrieving leads? Will they be launching a new product? By inviting those partners into the process early, you'll be able to move forward with a game plan for the post-event conversation to help them recognize the value of supporting your event. And if you're working to convince a new partner to invest, you can lean on past data to get the deal done.

The information that you gather from attendees pre-event can even be helpful for more targeted sponsor and exhibitor messaging. For example, banner ads can be targeted to specific attendee groups.

One sponsor might be keen to target ads at registrants interested in medical equipment, while another might want to reach those who speak Spanish or German.

“Showcase that your audience has a need for that service or product,” Vogel says. “Maybe it was because it was in a past survey or poll. That historical data can reassure them that it’s the right fit and that they will add extra value to the attendee experience.”

USE DATA TO DESIGN THE ACTUAL EXPERIENCE

Which emails are being opened, which links are being shared across social media, what articles are doing well in the weekly event newsletter — these are all data points that can do more than drive registration numbers; they can also play a role in refining the program. For example, if the marketing department sees that one speaker has been tagged in a high number of social posts, perhaps the programming team can inquire about the speaker's availability for an on-site Q&A session. If a large number of registered attendees are on the waiting list for one highly interactive breakout session, perhaps it's worth considering hosting it twice to allow as many participants as possible to be involved.

The pre-event period is also the ideal time to crowdsource ideas for your event. The Webex Events (formerly Socio) team has even seen some event organizers successfully use a Miro board — a type of digital bulletin board for colored sticky notes — to generate ideas.

Key Pre-event Considerations

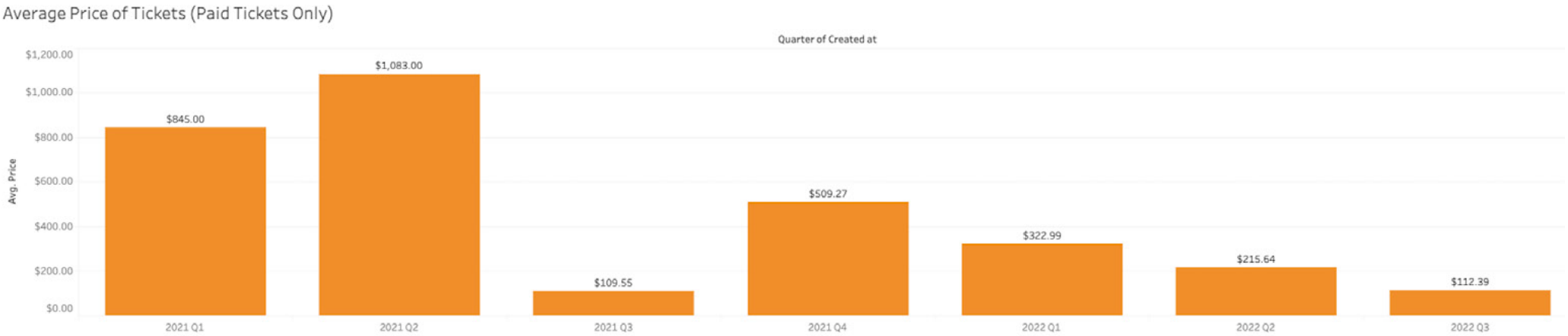
- How are you informing your audience of your intentions with their data? Is it transparent, or does the fine print feel confusing?
- What can you learn from the poll questions you asked at your last event? Did your audience offer any surprising opinions that can inform your content curation efforts?
- Which advertising placements have delivered the highest ROI in the past? What social media channels have you not explored that are worth testing this year?
- What did the registration window look like at your last event? What was the balance of attendees who opted for the early bird discount versus those who registered less than one month before it kicked off?
- How much room is your content or programming team leaving for last-minute session topics? Will attendees be able to find the kind of late-breaking conversations that will elevate your event's relevancy?

LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE

It's not just about your own event data. As the industry looks ahead to a hybrid future, you're probably trying to answer a tough question: What should you charge for different types of experiences? Finding the right balance between a price tag for a face-to-face event and its digital sibling isn't always easy. To get a sense of the broader industry's pricing strategy, take a look at the data from the entire Webex Events (formerly Socio) client portfolio.

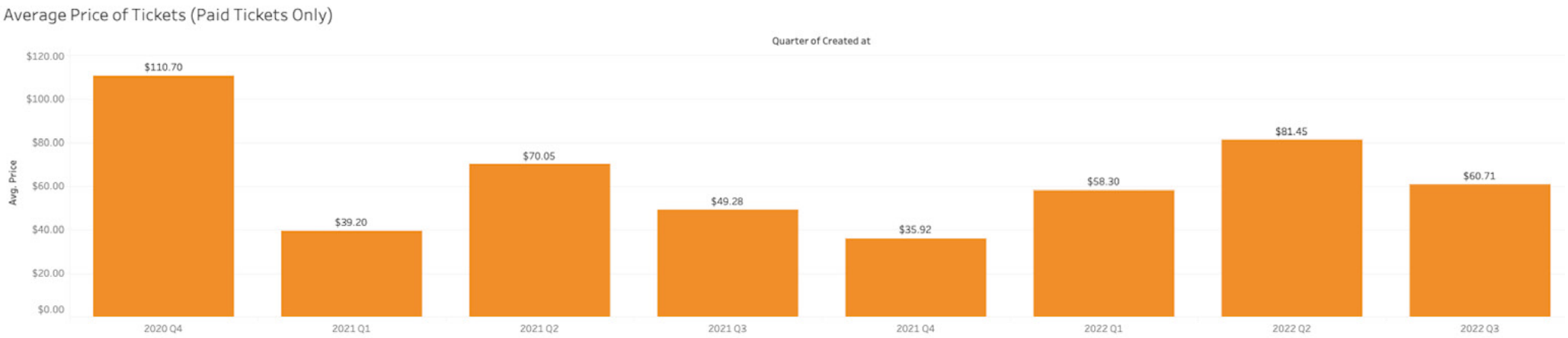
There is no one-size-fits-all rule for setting ticket prices for events, but it helps to have a ballpark idea of how much more expensive in-person tickets are as compared to virtual ones. Setting prices for virtual participation is a challenge in part because the format is still relatively new as a mass phenomenon, and now especially with in-person attendance being put front and center again, some might worry that online access could cannibalize potential in-person attendance. With this in mind, it makes sense to charge a fee for virtual participation — but one that's significantly lower. How much lower? Judging from this data, it looks like 20 percent of full admission costs may be a good rule of thumb.

In-Person Events



Although prices varied from quarter to quarter, the data suggests that in-person tickets are typically about five times higher than virtual event tickets, with the former averaging $298 per ticket and the latter $57 per ticket.

Virtual Events



For event organizers running multiple events throughout the year, it may also be possible to try out modified pricing models to gauge their effect on attendees. Keep in mind that many other factors can affect an audience's inclination to participate. As always, number crunching needs to be balanced with a wider understanding of the context. Where possible, consult with other event organizers to see if they're noticing similar trends. The wider the pool of data you have to draw from, the more likely it is to show a real trend rather than a coincidental blip. Another option is to include questions about pricing in surveys or to discuss the topic with focus groups.

Part 2

PUTTING DATA TO WORK WHEN THE EVENT IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING

The event industry has traditionally operated on a lengthy timeline that involves collecting information from the current year, analyzing it after everyone goes home, and developing a strategy for next year's program. However, that extended window creates a big problem: If you can't respond to attendee feedback fast enough, they might not be willing to show up again.

Key steps to make real-time data adjustments a reality:

- Identify the areas where you can be flexible enough to make changes while the event is in progress.
- Designate specific team members to monitor the sentiment in chat among remote participants.
- Work with your venue to understand their capabilities for identifying potential areas of frustration.
- Explore new technologies designed to make better, faster decisions with your data.

CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE PLANS IN ADVANCE

Throughout that pre-event phase, you've scrutinized every minute of the program and every inch of the environment to design a complete journey for your audience. So making changes to your plan isn't exactly easy.

To avoid feeling like you're making impulsive decisions in the spur of the moment, plan in advance for elements that you might want to adjust in real time. Then, decide what types of signals you will be monitoring to trigger Plan B, C, or D.

1. Determine What Should Trigger a Change in Plans

Gathering real-time data on attendee sentiment is tricky enough. Analyzing it for meaningful takeaways is a fine art, but it helps to have a clear idea of what to look out for.

Online Chats and Polls

With virtual and hybrid events, a key strategy can be to monitor the chat for insights into what attendees are thinking — and what they want to hear next. With the right strategy, this kind of digital communication can also be valuable at in-person events. If your speakers are open to discussing more than one topic, consider prompting the audience to vote on which subject they want to hear more on through a real-time poll. "[We] selected topics based on audience responses," reported one of our survey participants.

Session Popularity and Heat Mapping

At a multi-track event or in a large exhibition hall, it's also key to consider how attendees are voting with their feet. Which sessions are drawing the biggest groups? Are some standing-room only? Is there a long line up outside the restrooms?

Monitor social posts in your app's news feed and on social channels to estimate which sessions are likely to draw the biggest crowds. Additionally, heat mapping can provide real-time insights into where there might be opportunities to reshuffle your event agenda or even the floor layout itself.

This kind of data can also be critical for identifying potential bottlenecks in the flow of attendee traffic — as well as the best real estate to maximize the visibility of key assets.

2. Come Up With Back-Up Ideas Before Opening Day

If you think about these adjustments in advance, you'll have a plan in place for sending updates to attendees through an easy-to-

access system of notifications and an editable, live floor plan on your mobile app.

The Program

Ultimately, a successful event program is one that has been carefully designed down to the smallest details, but to take it to the next level, you need to craft it with all the dynamism of a choose-your-own-adventure novel. Being flexible doesn't mean winging it. It means planning for multiple eventualities.

"Some adjustments are made to accommodate very popular or unpopular sessions, relocate bad room assignments, adjust for overlaps, etc," reported one of our survey respondents.

For example, if heat mapping shows that attendees are spilling into the halls, consider running the session a second time later in the agenda if possible.

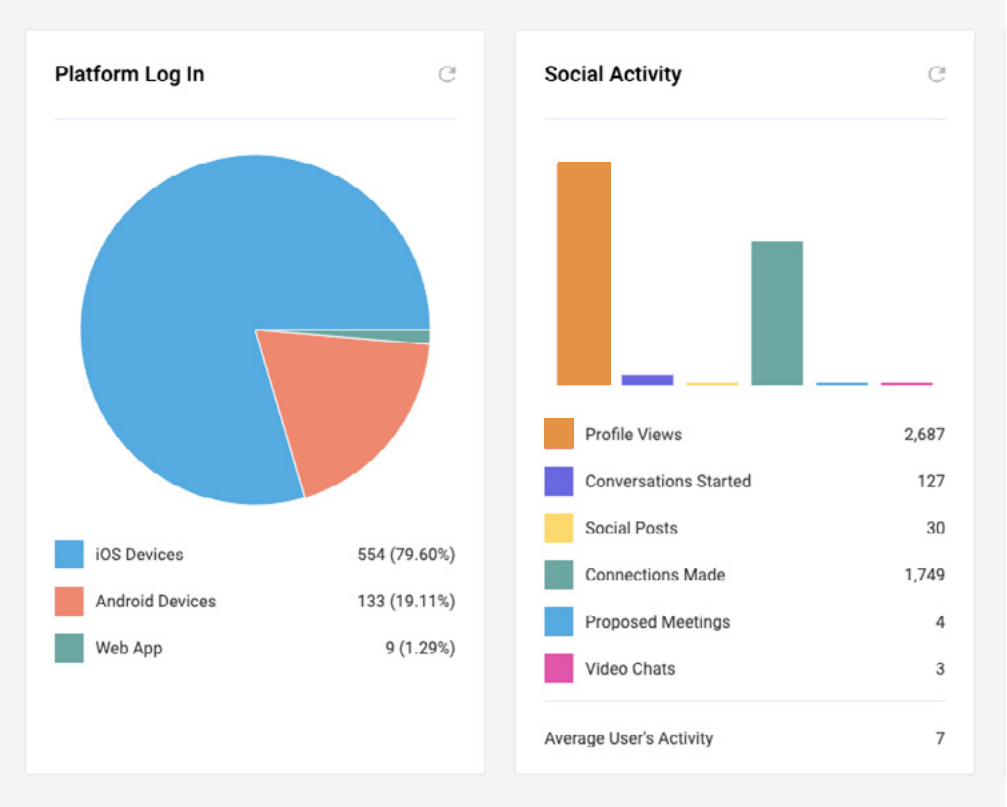
Another idea is to add a Q&A with the speaker from the most well-received session. Leaving a little wiggle room in your agenda can give you the power to add elements at the last minute.

The Floor Design and Session Timing

This kind of monitoring can also help with removing points of friction for a smoother attendee journey. Are bathroom lines causing traffic jams and wasting valuable time for your attendees? Consider shuffling the schedule so a longer intermission is broken down into shorter breaks between individual sessions. Another idea is to create two different versions of a key speaker session: one that's 15 minutes, and another that's 30. This kind of flexibility requires that you leave some cushioning in your agenda, so forethought is essential. To minimize the extra work needed from your speakers, consider asking them to create presentations with a workshop component or a series of audience polls that can be dropped if a break is needed.

It's also important to consider attendee plans. If you are cutting an hour-long break to 45 minutes, might you be interrupting pre-scheduled networking meetings that your attendees have set up with fellow participants? Keep track of activity on your mobile app's meeting booking system to stay cognizant of potential conflicts.

Consider the following data from an in-person event using the Webex Events (formerly Socio) event app:



If in-person attendees are scheduling video chats, perhaps it makes sense to free up a small room on the show floor as a hybrid meeting space? Even if the numbers are small, they could be key drivers of business deals for your attendees — particularly if some VIP attendees are unable to attend in-person at the last minute because of travel setbacks or a positive COVID-19 test.

A similar principle of informed flexibility applies to the larger floor plan too. Could the help desk be moved to a more convenient location? Or perhaps a member of staff can be positioned in a high-traffic spot to help provide directions? Could you move a gamified sponsor installation to a location where it's more likely to grab attention? Think carefully in advance about what can be moved — either overnight or during low-traffic periods — and be sure to update any relevant maps on your mobile app.

SET UP DEDICATED CHANNELS FOR REAL-TIME FEEDBACK

Today's event industry demands a new level of flexibility to respond to attendee behaviors while they're happening, and it's essential to create dedicated lines of communication that will alert you when there's a problem.

Think about the expectations attendees have in today's business environment: If they complain about the boarding process on the flight to your conference via public platforms, chances are the airline's social media team will respond within a few minutes with an invitation to send a direct message for assistance. When they arrive at your conference, they want that same level of immediate service.

Consider creating an online "help desk" on your app where attendees can submit questions or concerns. On the Webex Events (formerly Socio) app and event platform, for example, it's possible to use either the Q&A feature or a live video chat to fill this purpose. Another option is to share an email address or phone number in advance of the event, which can help attendees with troubleshooting any problems they may have signing onto the app or platform itself. The app can be an effective channel of communication between attendees and the organizer, but they have to be able to sign on first!

To collect feedback related to specific physical touchpoints, consider setting up posters with QR codes in key areas: "Scan this QR code to provide feedback on your experience in the restroom line," for example. The code could be linked to a dedicated survey or open-ended question through which attendees could provide instant feedback. By working to collect real-time input on performance in these high-trafficked areas, you can ensure that you're addressing any small issues before they turn into big problems.

FUTURE-FORWARD AUDIENCE SENTIMENT TRACKING

Although still essential components to a successful event strategy, emails, QR codes, and audience polls are not exactly new technologies. Where is the industry headed next with real-time tracking of the attendee experience?

Strategically Placed Survey Terminals

There are also more futuristic ways to tie surveys to specific points in the attendee journey. For example, at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California — home to the NFL's San Francisco 49ers — a network of more than 100 HappyOrNot terminals is designed to help spot areas of fan frustration, such as long lines at gate entrances and understaffed concession stands. Using a simple interface, these terminals prompt bypassers to rate and provide feedback on their experience in real time.

It's easy to see how a similar approach can apply to business events. The Greater Columbus Convention Center in Columbus, Ohio is already using HappyOrNot terminals in the building's restrooms — a good step toward ensuring that attendees are satisfied with one piece of the experience. The same principle can apply to multiple touchpoints at an event: the registration desk, the shuttle line, and the bar at the networking reception, for example.

AI-Powered Facial Analysis

If you don't have live chat going, and you don't want to poll your audience for feedback on what to do next, are there any other signals you can use in an in-person setting?

Facial analysis, enabled through strategically-placed cameras, can help to gauge attendee engagement through AI interpretation of facial expressions — a process that involves anonymized measurement of how the audience is responding in real time. This is mostly a matter of assessing positive emotions by tracking facial movements like smiling and nodding, but it can also involve noting appropriately concerned expressions during more serious moments.

TAKE AN AUTOMATED APPROACH TO CONTENT CURATION

What happens when you finish watching a show on Netflix? You find more reasons to embark on a new binge. And what about when your favorite album ends on Spotify? Your listening experience continues with artists in the same genre.

Organizers can embrace a similar approach with their curated offerings. While 100 concurrent sessions might not be quite as deep as the seemingly endless list of programming on Netflix or the mountain-sized catalog of streamable music, it's still a lot of material for the average attendee to sift through.

Remember — they might have been so busy in the leadup to your event that they didn't even have time to download the app or browse the complete list of sessions until the day before it officially kicked off. Work with your mobile app provider to determine how you can leverage the technology to offer recommendations to add to an attendee's agenda.

If an attendee at a conference gives a thumbs up to a session about sustainability, perhaps they'll want to know about similar sessions happening later in the agenda. Why not send them a notification about an evening speaker who will focus on small steps your industry can take to prepare for more erratic weather in the face of climate change?

A key step here is to think about how each piece of content relates to others. Once you've established these larger categories of interest, it will be easier to provide thoughtful recommendations to your audience.

As mentioned in the pre-event section, you can even organize attendees into groups based on their interests. While most of this market segmentation is done pre-event, it's possible to continually refine it after the doors open. An effective way to systematize this information gathering is to prompt attendees to fill out a short survey immediately after a session. Keep it simple and make the value-add for them clear. For example, let's say the session they just attended covered three main categories of interest that will each be explored in further detail later in the agenda. Why not ask them to rate their interest in each? If they rate a given topic with four out of five stars or higher, they can be put into a group that will receive push notifications about the next opportunity to indulge their interests further.

It's not just about sessions and speakers, either. For exhibition organizers, the mobile app represents a chance to point attendees toward specific products and companies that are aligned with their interests and professional needs. For example, a sponsor might use a targeted banner ad to promote a charity auction or a sneak-peak demo of a new product prototype.

KEY REAL-TIME CONSIDERATIONS

- Who's in charge of monitoring the data? If you do not have the resources to hire a data scientist, can certain staff members have the sole responsibility to track potential warning signs about attendee frustration?
- Can your event technology partner help make sense of the data points and turn information into valuable insights?
- What are the data points you plan to use? And what are the pre-selected actions and strategies you'll employ based on real-time measurement?
- Do you have a flexible approach to staffing that will allow you to reassign resources to other areas in need of assistance?
- If you're hosting a multi-day conference, are you sharing data at your staff meeting to help the entire team recognize areas that need improvement? On the flipside, are you showcasing areas where they deserve a round of applause?
- Have you done the pre-event work to categorize your content into buckets that can help recommend sessions and speakers based on how an attendee is moving through an event?

Part 3

PUTTING YOUR DATA TO WORK AFTER THE EVENT CLOSES

The post-event time frame still represents the most valuable window for digging deeper into the data. This is when your team can take a breath and dedicate the necessary hours to connect the dots that will turn data into actionable insights. Plus, it's a chance to reflect on anecdotal data — what everyone heard from on-site attendees and what chatter emerged from the virtual audience.

Key steps for powering a more valuable post-event data strategy:

- Communication should never end — keep a consistent rhythm of segmented messaging with your audience, beginning immediately after the event.
- Look for signals and patterns from your technology — what features attendees utilized most in the mobile app, how engaged they were in gamification efforts, when they dropped off virtual sessions and more.
- Present a narrative of the ROI for each sponsor and exhibitor — don't leave it up to them to make sense of numbers in a spreadsheet.
- Conduct focus groups for more informal data gathering and listening opportunities.
- Keep a close eye on how the audience consumes content throughout the rest of the year for an ongoing feedback system that will shape next year's program.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING WITH YOUR ATTENDEES — AND THE AUDIENCE THAT DIDN'T SHOW UP

The most important piece of the post-event phase relies on the most basic piece of data you have: email addresses. Your first message to your attendees should be more than a simple invitation to complete a post-event survey (although, you'll definitely be asking them to complete that, too); it should include your authentic appreciation. Consider a personal note from the CEO that thanks them for registering, participating, and taking time away from their other work and life responsibilities to be at your event.

How does data collection fit into the picture? Remember to use the same segmented strategy that you developed in your pre-event emails, too: A thank-you note is better when it feels personal. For example, you could share links to presentation files or on-demand recordings from sessions that correspond with their top interests.

In addition to communicating with those who were there, this is the prime opportunity to show everyone who didn't register what they missed. What were the most well-received sessions? Perhaps you should make one or two available for free to help them appreciate the compelling education available at your event. And nothing stirs up a sense of FOMO like some pictures of the action, so share a few images that will inspire them to save the date for next year.

MAKE SENSE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENTS

While session evaluations and post-event feedback forms will yield helpful information, event organizers now have access to signals that don't have to be shared via a survey.

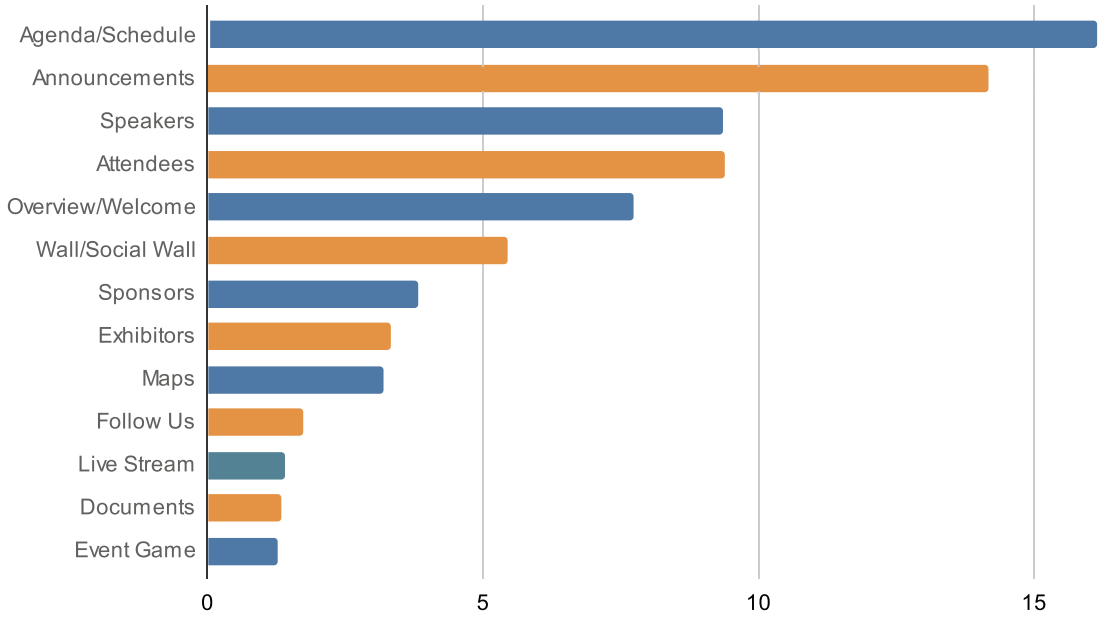
"It's easy to look at a session with a positive outlook when most people stayed for the duration," Vogel says. "But data analysis involves thinking about the areas that can be improved. Where did more attendees drop off? Was it not that interesting? Did we get off topic? What happened? You can dig in a little bit deeper to inform where the energy fell flat."

In addition to looking at data of when digital attendees log off, it's getting easier to look at minute-by-minute data from the physical venue, too. Heat mapping can identify where attendees are going (and where they're not), and if you want to take it a step further, facial analysis can even determine when the audience's attention is drifting away.

In addition to specific moments, your mobile app usage statistics will offer a big-picture view of engagement. Did a large number of attendees participate in the gamification challenge? How many utilized the on-site matchmaking connections tool to meet new contacts? What kind of insights can you decipher from the in-app polling questions?

Let's take a look at platform-wide data from Webex Events (formerly Socio) to parse out potential takeaways. The graph on the following page breaks down individual features in terms of the percentage of unique clicks they each received.

It will likely come as no surprise that the "Agenda/Schedule" feature comes out in the top spot. What may be a bit more unexpected is just how close behind the "Announcement" feature comes. You might have realized that your announcement page is one of the most effective channels for communicating with attendees, but these numbers drive home the message even further. And while the sponsor page may only represent only 4 percent of total clicks, this feature comes out ahead of exhibitors, maps, and the social wall! The fact that attendee profiles come out in position four — just behind the speakers — also underscores the importance of event technology for connecting attendees. Gone are the days when physical business cards were the only tools attendees needed to connect.



It's also crucial to take a retrospective look at the entire attendee journey from start to finish. For example, have registrations started to pick up closer to the event date than in years past? These kinds of trends are essential to share with sponsors who may be feeling anxious about registration numbers in the lead-up to opening day.

DESIGN THE OPTIMAL POST-EVENT SURVEY

Pre- and mid-event surveys can be crucial to your event strategy, but the post-event survey may be the most pivotal of all.

The importance of conducting a post-event survey is one of the most foundational lessons of event planning 101, but it's easy to go off track. Key factors to consider include:

- **Response Rate:** How many responses will you need to consider the feedback valid and representative? There is no right or wrong answer here, but it's important to remember that if only a small percentage of your attendees responded, they may be the outliers who were either especially satisfied or somehow disappointed. The closer you get to 30 percent or above, the more likely your sample is to be representative of the majority view.
- **Content:** What questions will derive the most useful insights into how you can build on your successes and improve shortcomings? Be sure to ask about what worked best, what could have been better, and what could be added. It's also a good idea to ask if your audience intends to attend the event again. Not only does this give you insight into how much they truly enjoyed the experience, but it can also predispose respondents to attend again thanks to a phenomenon known as the "**mere-measurement effect.**" In other words, the mere attempt to measure something can have an influence on the outcome — including follow-through on predictions to participate. This term is also used to describe people's inclination to **make up responses** when asked for their opinion, even when they did not initially have strong views in one direction or another. Once again, it's important to put negative perspectives in context if you are asking a question that specifically prompts a critical answer.
- **Method:** Don't just think about what you're asking — it's equally important to **be strategic about how you pose the questions.** Use a mix of multiple choice, yes/no, and open-ended questions, as well as rating scales where appropriate. The easier and more intuitive the survey is, the more likely your audience will respond well to it. Rating scales, for example, can be effective for gauging the popularity of different session formats and networking activities. Open-ended questions may take more time, but they can be vital for crowdsourcing new ideas.
- **Length:** It's important to gather as many insights as possible, but it's equally crucial to avoid over-burdening your audience. Research suggests that the average person will dedicate approximately **five minutes** to completing a survey.

- **Incentives:** How can you convince attendees that it's worth it for them to answer your survey? You are asking them to take time out of their busy schedule to share their perspective with you. Make sure you show that you not only appreciate their input, but that they have something to gain from it.

Ultimately, all of these factors are interwoven. If the questions are kept short and relevant, your audience is more likely to answer them.

There are three key strategies for incentivizing attendees to click on the survey in the first place. The first is to get your timing right — try sending it out as soon after the event closes as possible. Second, explain how you will use the information. Make it clear that questions about what they liked best will be used to shape next year's content, while feedback on problem areas will be key to troubleshooting top attendee pain points. If you include an open-ended question about their most important learning from the event, consider creating follow-up content based on the findings — and let the audience know that's what you plan to do.

The third strategy to keep in mind is a straightforward reward. This could take the form of a random-draw prize, or even access to an enticing event asset like photos from your closing ceremony party.

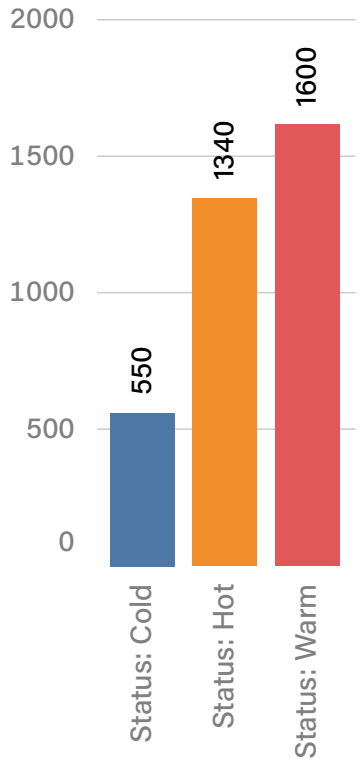
SHARE A STORY WITH YOUR SPONSORS AND EXHIBITORS

It's easy to share click-through rates, floor traffic numbers, and badge scan figures, but the most successful organizers will go the extra mile to turn numbers into a meaningful narrative about the real ROI for sponsors and exhibitors.

"Walk through the types of companies and titles of attendees — how involved they were at the event, how long they stayed, and how much they interacted with all of the different engagement tools," Vogel says. "In addition to helping them understand how their investment performed this year, that kind of context can play a helpful role in shaping their activation at your next event."

It's key to provide sponsors and exhibitors with trackable attendee engagement metrics. Heat mapping is great for demonstrating overall traffic, but how many of the attendees who passed by a sponsor booth actually engaged with it? One of our survey respondents noted that "Connecting demographic and lead capture data with anonymous heat map data" is a top challenge. While old-fashioned information gathering from sales teams is vital, it's also key for event organizers to make it as easy as possible for buyers and sellers to connect and share information. Your event app can help you cover all your bases: Not only can it make these exchanges more streamlined, but it also makes them trackable.

Having a system in place to qualify leads as cool, warm, or hot can also go a long way to demonstrating that it's essential to think beyond sheer volume.



Another effective strategy can be to integrate sponsors into a top piece of content. Could they sponsor research that you'll be presenting at the event? Can someone from their company interview one of your star speakers? When that content performs well, you can point to that success as a measure of their audience reach. "Paint that picture of how you made their brand really shine while adding value for your attendees," Vogel recommends. "Don't let them think that they are simply sponsoring something without knowing if anyone's interested. It's crucial to reassure them that their product or service played a role in the event."

Use the conversation as an opportunity to help identify upselling opportunities for next year, too. By showing the most high-trafficked areas in the environment, you may be able to help sponsors recognize the most valuable pieces of real estate at the event — and motivate them to budget for a bigger spend to land in those areas.

It's also key to consider how higher-tier sponsorships can deliver more value. Do platinum sponsors get 100 points assigned to their event game challenges as opposed to only 15 for bronze sponsors? Dig into the data from past events to demonstrate that this translates to higher ROI. For example, a past Webex Events (formerly Socio) client found that the number of challenges completed was 32 percent higher for the 50-point range as compared to those 25 points and below, and 54 percent higher for the 75-to-100-point range.

Explaining that she always goes over the analytics dashboard with Webex Events (formerly Socio) customers to explain how they can browse data and report back on sponsor ROI, senior customer success manager Janet Smith added, "I always encourage them to download the full metrics report and dive into it."

For maximum impact, consider hiring a data analyst to pull out key takeaways from your event, and don't be shy about asking your event tech provider for assistance with pulling specific data points.

FOCUS ON YOUR EMERGING AUDIENCE — NOT JUST YOUR LOYAL, YEAR-AFTER-YEAR ATTENDEES

Every opinion matters, but the future of your event relies on the newest members of the audience. As meetings and conferences look to engage student members, recent graduates, and those pivoting careers, it's crucial to pay extra attention to the levels of engagement and satisfaction of the up-and-coming cast of participants. When slicing and dicing your data, think about how different age brackets and career levels respond to session formats and networking opportunities. As your organization develops an ongoing succession plan for registration numbers, this kind of insight can help your content team get a better understanding of the next generation of the event audience.

And just because the event is finished, it doesn't mean your data collection efforts are done. This is an ideal time to assemble a focus group of certain subsets of your audience to hear deeper perspectives on how your event made them feel. In many cases, large meetings and conferences have been operating with the same format for decades, so ask them tough questions. If they could redesign it, how would the experience look?

It can also be helpful to host these focus groups six months out from the event. Did the connections that they made at your event lead to long-term business relationships? Did their learnings lead to a career upgrade? These conversations can give you great insight into how you can refine the long-term gains generated by your event — and provide useful testimonials to encourage new registrants.

LOOK FOR CUES FROM YOUR ONGOING CONTENT STRATEGY

The post-event phase quickly becomes the pre-event phase. In fact, there isn't much of a separation. When your attendees aren't together online or on-site, your job as a data analyst is never finished.

Any information that your attendees share during your event can potentially provide insight into where you should take your event next. "Keep audience questions. They open new content doors," recommends one of our survey participants.

"Pay close attention to what the data is telling you in the in-between time," Vogel adds. "Which downloadable resources are the most popular? What webinars drew the biggest crowds? Did certain blogs or articles receive more shares on social media? By working to understand what topics are performing and what's not resonating with smaller pieces of content, you can continually refine your educational approach."

In addition to measuring the topics and speakers that drive high engagement rates, track how your audience actually consumes the content. Are they willing to pay for some on-demand sessions? Perhaps it's worth gating more sessions to fuel a more effective monetization strategy. Does your audience spend more time watching video or listening to audio recordings? You may be able to save some money by focusing on an audio-focused approach at your next event. Are they watching an entire 45-minute panel in one viewing session? If the data shows viewers and listeners aren't getting to the end, maybe it's better to divide more sessions into bite-sized, 15-minute episodes.

Key post-event considerations:

- What are the tough questions you should be asking in your post-event survey? Instead of looking for validation of whether attendees were satisfied, can you solicit ideas on what should be changed/how the next event can exceed expectations?

- Are there metrics that can be used to show the quality of leads your sponsors are generating? Is there a way to integrate them into larger event themes and popular topics?
- Are you asking the right questions in your post-event survey, and are you clearly explaining the value to your audience?
- What can you learn from the chat dialogue that occurred throughout the virtual component? Were there certain topics that stirred up conversation?
- Which pieces of content resonated most with on-site attendees? Were there different sessions that seemed to gain more traction with the virtual audience?

Conclusion: Putting Data in the Driver's seat

Planning, producing, and executing an event requires making a mile-long list of decisions — and no one can be expected to get every one right the first time. The key is to realize that a careful data strategy can help confirm when you've made the right choice, and alert you when you've started to drift off course. With that in mind, data should be in the driver's seat for every organizer, helping to navigate the twists and turns of engaging an audience. After all, making the right decision translates to the most important piece of every organization's continued success: the bottom line.

Consider this data point — about data, oddly enough — from McKinsey Global Institute: Data-driven organizations are 23 times more likely to acquire customers, 6 times as likely to retain those customers, and 19 times as likely to be profitable. Data isn't simply nice to have; it's the heartbeat of any business that wants to grow.

If your organization has been struggling to do more with its data, you're not alone. In fact, the most recent survey of data and AI leadership from NewVantage Partners, which includes responses from more than 90 blue-chip companies, revealed that only 26 percent of these massive firms identify as data-driven organizations, and more than 90 percent of respondents indicated that there are cultural impediments blocking the way to complete digital transformation.

If you've been taking baby steps toward a more sophisticated data mentality, now is the time to turn them into giant leaps. The events that work to harness the true power of data will become the must-attend experiences that define the next generation of hybrid engagement.

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