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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The event industry is going through one of the most radical changes ever. The Covid pandemic has had and continues to have a considerable impact on the entire industry. No one can be sure of what the future holds. However, we can use the best data available to help us understand where we are and plan ahead.

This report includes the latest data generated directly from our own surveys of event professionals. We've carefully analyzed the data and compared it with previous survey results to explore shifts and trends. We offer possible explanations for the data and, where possible, discuss potential impacts on the industry. In addition, five industry leaders share their insights on overcoming some of the challenges faced by event professionals, as revealed by the data.

The progress in event technology during the Covid pandemic has been nothing short of astounding, something that EventMB has followed closely throughout this time. Event professionals have also responded to this by developing their skills like never before. Although we all want to be able to meet in person safely, we realize that technology now enables us to meet virtually. Virtual events have radically developed since the start of the Covid pandemic, and there is much more innovation just around the corner.

With 2021 coming to an end, this report captures the pulse of the industry with brand-new primary research. We hope you find it interesting and valuable for your 2022 planning and beyond.

MIGUEL NEVES, Editor in chief

METHODOLOGY

EventMB's State of the Event Industry research surveyed hundreds of event professionals from across the world throughout 2021. The aim of this research is to highlight trends in the event industry and build on findings from last year's State of the Event Industry survey results.
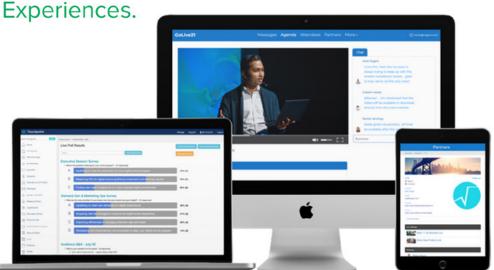
The analysis covers a variety of approaches, including:

❯ A high-level view of how attitudes have changed since 2020

❯ A quarter-by-quarter comparison of shifting trends across 2021

❯ A summary of the most recent findings from Q4 data, gathered between October and November 2021

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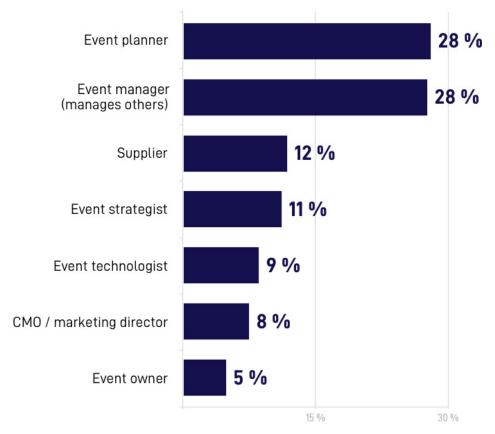✓ Have Peace of Mind with Data Security, Privacy & Highest Levels of Compliance

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DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN

ROLES

The majority of respondents (56 percent) were either event planners or event managers themselves. Almost 20 percent hold supportive roles as event strategists or technologists, and 12 percent are suppliers. The remaining responses came from senior marketers or event owners.

ROLES

Event planner	28 %
Event manager (manages others)	28 %
Supplier	12 %
Event strategist	11 %
Event technologist	9 %
CMO / marketing director	8 %
Event owner	5 %

15 %   30 %

REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

In the Q4 survey, EventMB asked respondents where they were based. The majority of respondents (60 percent) are based in North America, with the next biggest group (23 percent) residing in Europe. The remaining portion of respondents are based in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, or South America.

LOCATIONS

North America	60 %
Europe	23 %
Asia	7 %
Africa & Middle East	6 %
South America	3 %

18 %   35 %   53 %   70 %

NOTE: All percentages in this report have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

BUDGETS AND NUMBER OF EVENTS PLANNED

The most commonly selected budget was less than $500,000 USD, with 44 percent of respondents selecting this option; however, those with budgets ranging from $500,000 to $5 million make up an almost equal proportion at 41 percent. The three top brackets, ranging from $5 million to $15 million and above, together make up only 16 percent of the total.
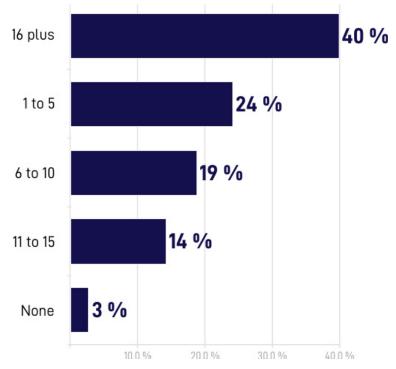
When asked how many events they plan in a typical year, 40 percent of survey respondents cited 16 or more. While it might be tempting to assume that those who fall into this category overlap with those who have budgets of $1 million or more (roughly 36 percent of respondents), the data paints a more complicated picture.

After cross-checking each respondent's total budget against their total number of events, the data shows surprising results. While respondents organizing 1 to 5 events per year are much more likely to report having budgets of $500,000 or less, respondents organizing 6 to 10 annual events are just as likely to have a budget ranging between $500,000 and $5 million as those organizing 16 or more. It follows that respondents organizing 6 to 10 events per year have the highest spend on a per-event basis.

BUDGET OF EVENTS

Budget	Percent
Less than $500K	44 %
$500K - $1M	20 %
$1M - $5M	21 %
$5M - $10M	7 %
$10M - $15M	4 %
$15M or more	5 %

NUMBER OF EVENTS

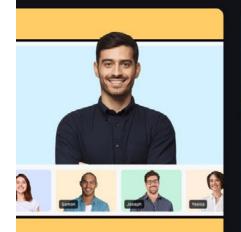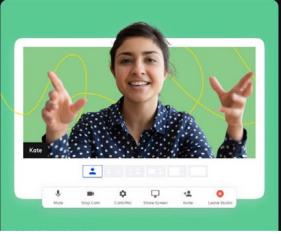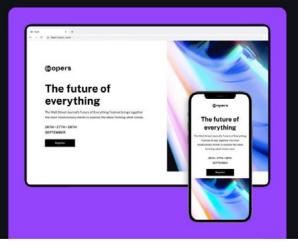| Number	Percent
16 plus	40 %
1 to 5	24 %
6 to 10	19 %
11 to 15	14 %
None	3 %

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FROM 2020 TO 2021: OBSTACLES AND SIGNS OF HOPE

Given the nature of the pandemic, how quickly it has evolved, and its profound effect on the event industry, it is useful to consider the global context during the period covered by the scope of this report.

When last year's survey results were collected, the strategy of many world governments was to limit social gatherings in an effort to slow the spread of the virus; however, in 2021 tactics shifted. Attention was turned to the fast and efficient rollout of vaccines to protect individuals from catching and spreading the virus.
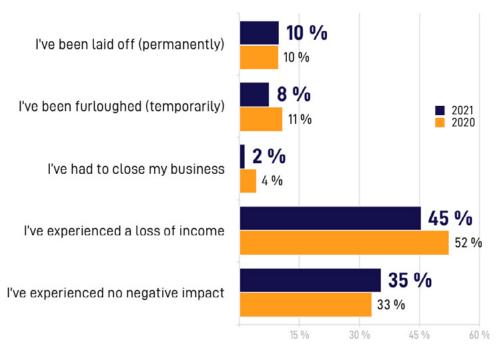
This is an important contextual difference to bear in mind when comparing this year's findings against those of the prior year. The presence of a widely accessible vaccine has had an inordinate impact on the ability of events to return safely to in-person formats, which in turn explains many of the shifts found through our data.

THE PERSONAL IMPACT OF COVID

Last year's EventMB State of the Event Industry research revealed that Covid had the industry stuck in somewhat of a holding pattern. There were no major statistical differences between data gathered in June and November 2020, but there were glimmers of hope.

This trend has continued into 2021 where signs of progress are emerging, not in dramatic swings but rather at a slow and steady pace. Similar to 2020's survey responses, the most recent survey results show that a loss of income continues to be the most commonly cited personal impact of the pandemic. However, this year's results show this figure has decreased on a year-over-year comparison.

PERSONAL IMPACT OF COVID 2021 VS 2020

I've been laid off (permanently): 10 % (2021), 10 % (2020)
I've been furloughed (temporarily): 8 % (2021), 11 % (2020)
I've had to close my business: 2 % (2021), 4 % (2020)
I've experienced a loss of income: 45 % (2021), 52 % (2020)
I've experienced no negative impact: 35 % (2021), 33 % (2020)

Other results similarly suggest that the negative effects of Covid-19 may be subsiding. While the percentage of those who have been laid off has held fairly steady at roughly 10 percent, the number of respondents who have had to close their business has dropped from 4 percent to just under 2 percent. The number who report being furloughed has also decreased from almost 11 percent to less than 8 percent.

Similarly, **while 52 percent of respondents reported a loss of income in 2020, that figure has now dropped to 45 percent**. This trend is further reinforced when looking at the proportion of those who have experienced no negative impact from the pandemic. In 2020, 33 percent said they had not been negatively impacted; however this year that figure has increased modestly to just over 35 percent.

The data appears to suggest that things are slowly edging back towards a sense of normalcy. This progress is likely a consequence of vaccine rollouts and the easing of restrictions worldwide, two trends that have allowed many businesses to operate with a little more certainty and clarity.
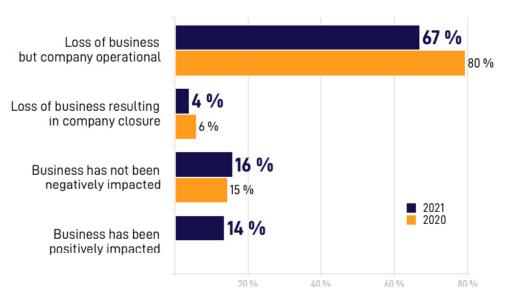
IMPACT OF COVID ON COMPANIES

The personal impact of the pandemic gives us a glimpse into what is happening at an individual level for event professionals; however, it's also important to look at the impact that the pandemic is having at a company level.

The majority of respondents (67 percent) said that they experienced a decline in business this year, but that their company is still operational. This is down from last year when almost 80 percent of companies reported experiencing reduced business activity. When it comes to loss of business significant enough to cause company closures, the same downward trend is visible. This category has fallen from 6 percent in 2020 to 3.5 percent now. At the same time there has been a sharp increase in the percentage of respondents whose companies have not been negatively impacted (from just under 15 percent in 2020 to almost 30 percent in 2021).

These findings reflect and build on the picture painted by the pandemic's personal impact: The industry appears to be recovering at a gradual pace. If the vaccine remains effective against new variants of the virus, we should expect to see these positive trends continue into 2022.
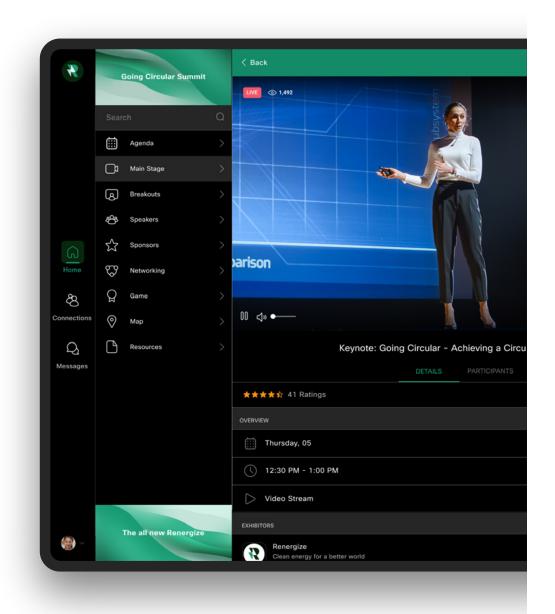
IMPACT OF COVID ON COMPANIES 2021 VS 2020

PREDICTIONS FOR THE FUTURE: THE RETURN OF IN-PERSON EVENTS

PREDICTING THE FUTURE

EventMB has been asking survey respondents to predict the return of in-person events since 2020, and there has been a continued trend of expecting them to come back in full swing within roughly six months' time. While projections have continued to slip forward throughout much of the pandemic, the gap is finally starting to close.

2021's Q4 survey was in fact the first time that we explicitly included "Already started" as a possible response to the question, "When are you expecting to host in-person events again?" And just over 42 percent of respondents chose this answer.

When EventMB asked respondents to predict the return of in-person events in November of 2020, 42 percent expected they would be hosting events by Q3 and Q4 of 2021. At first glance, this might suggest that the two survey results (the expectation and the real-world results) line up. A further 37 percent of respondents, however, thought that in-person events would return earlier than that (in either Q1 or Q2 of 2021). In total, roughly 80 percent of 2020's respondents thought in-person events would be back either by or before this point.

While these figures reflect the total number of respondents who predicted events to happen by a set time — and not the percentage of events that would be allowed to happen in that same time frame — they still paint a picture. At least some of the people who thought they would be able to host events by

PREDICTIONS ON RETURN TO IN-PERSON 2020 VS 2021

now have been disappointed (relative to their 2020 hopes, anyway). And the industry has had a tendency to be overly optimistic from the outset of the pandemic.

The shift from Q3 to Q4 of 2021 was in fact the first time when optimism increased quarter over quarter. When event planners were surveyed in Q3, 30 percent predicted that they would be able to host in-person events within the quarter (Q3). Q4's survey results show that roughly 42 percent have already hosted in-person events.

Although the recent emergence of the Omicron variant has created an added layer of uncertainty, the outlook for 2022 also seems positive with close to a third of planners expecting to host in-person events again in the first half of next year. In fact, the percentage of respondents who chose this answer was exactly the same in both Q3 and Q4: 31.7 percent.

TIMELINE FOR HOSTING IN IN-PERSON EVENTS AGAIN (Q3 2021)

Q3 2021	30 %
Q4 2021	23 %
First half of 2022	32 %
Second half of 2022	16 %

TIMELINE FOR HOSTING IN IN-PERSON EVENTS AGAIN (Q4 2021)

Already started	42 %
This quarter (Q4 2021)	11 %
First half of 2022	32 %
Second half of 2022	15 %

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OBSTACLES TO RESUMING EVENTS

In order to understand when events will return, it's important to identify some of the biggest hindrances currently standing in their way.

BIGGEST OBSTACLES 2021 VS 2020

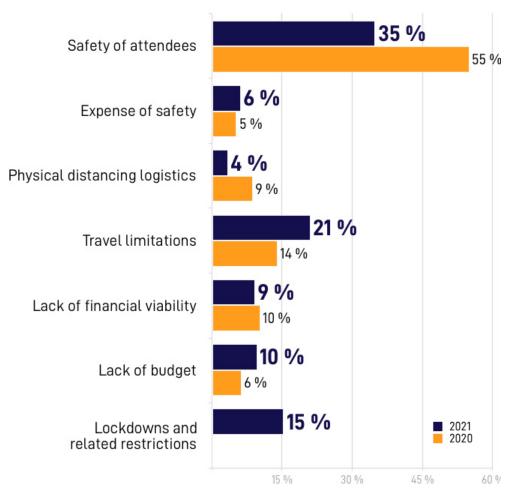| Obstacle	2021	2020
Safety of attendees	35 %	55 %
Expense of safety	6 %	5 %
Physical distancing logistics	4 %	9 %
Travel limitations	21 %	14 %
Lack of financial viability	9 %	10 %
Lack of budget	10 %	6 %
Lockdowns and related restrictions	15 %	

According to our latest survey results, **the biggest obstacle for resuming in-person events continues to be concern for attendee and stakeholder safety**. Over two thirds of respondents, or 35 percent, now cite this concern as their biggest challenge. Last year, however, over half of respondents (55 percent) said that safety was their biggest concern. This downward trend has undoubtedly been aided by the vaccine rollout, which is enabling groups to gather more safely without as much fear of contributing to super-spreader events.

While safety concerns continue to be the most commonly cited obstacle, travel limitations are not far behind with just over one in five respondents choosing this answer (21 percent). A further 15 percent of respondents cited lockdowns and related restrictions on group sizes as their biggest obstacle.

Only a small minority of respondents see the added costs of safety measures as the biggest obstacle, and this number has increased only marginally from 5 percent last year to 6 percent in 2021.

At the same time, **there has been a marked decrease in the number who view physical distancing logistics as a barrier to in-person events**, from just under 9 percent in 2020 to 3.5 percent now. This isn't surprising given the shift away from mandated and enforced social distancing guidance from local governments. Indeed, the introduction of a new survey response option — "lockdowns and related restrictions on group sizes" — was designed to reflect increasing emphasis on the total number of attendees as opposed to the distance between them. (As an aside, our anecdotal research suggests that social distancing rules are often difficult if not impossible to enforce at events.)

When it comes to lack of financial viability as a direct consequence of lower venue capacity, the figures are hovering at roughly the same level: 10 percent in 2020 compared to 9 percent now. At the same time, however, the number citing a lack of budget has jumped from 6 percent last year up to 10 percent now.

The data seems to suggest that **while safety is becoming less of an obstacle, other issues may be cropping up in its place.**

Nevertheless, there are signs of hope in the gradual return to in-person formats; budgets may not appear overnight, but they will likely rebound eventually if other obstacles continue to recede. Further, the experience gained with virtual events over the past two years may provide yet another avenue for boosting event revenues while planners continue to navigate roadblocks to hosting full-scale in-person events.

VACCINE PASSPORTS AND REDUCED TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS ARE BECOMING PIVOTAL

While it's important to think about the obstacles to planning in-person events, it's equally key to consider the opposite end of this equation: What factors might increase confidence in planning face-to-face events?

A comparison of data from Q1 and Q4 2021 shows a significant shift in terms of the factors most likely to boost confidence in planning onsite events.

MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS Q1 VS Q4 2021

A widely accessible Covid-19 vaccine: 9 % (Q4), 45 % (Q1)
A Covid passport program: 13 % (Q4), 4 % (Q1)
No travel/quarantine restrictions: 20 % (Q4), 10 % (Q1)
I am already confident in planning live events: 18 % (Q4), 4 % (Q1)

MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS 2021

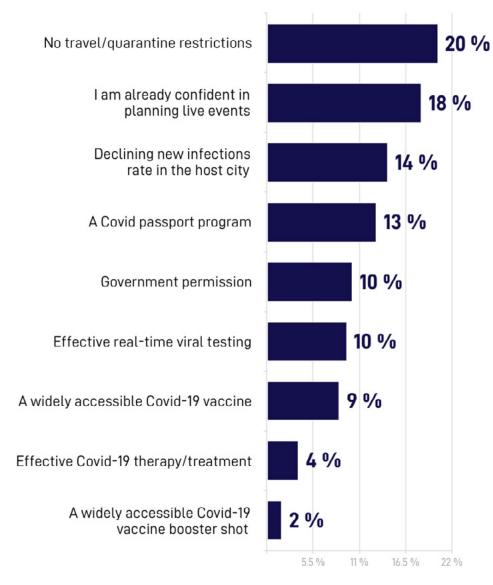| Factor	%
No travel/quarantine restrictions	20 %
I am already confident in planning live events	18 %
Declining new infections rate in the host city	14 %
A Covid passport program	13 %
Government permission	10 %
Effective real-time viral testing	10 %
A widely accessible Covid-19 vaccine	9 %
Effective Covid-19 therapy/treatment	4 %
A widely accessible Covid-19 vaccine booster shot	2 %

At the beginning of the year, having a widely accessible Covid-19 vaccine was considered one of the most important factors for planning live, in-person events. As the vaccine became more accessible, its ranking fell to sixth place with less than 9 percent of respondents citing it as the most important factor — down from 45 percent in Q1. This shift can largely be accounted for by the fact that Covid vaccines are now widely accessible in the regions most heavily represented by this survey. It's less that vaccine accessibility is no longer important, and more that it can now be treated as a given. Furthermore, It's worth noting that a widely accessible Covid-19 vaccine booster shot, an option only added to the Q4 2021 survey, was selected by less than 2 percent of respondents. This lack of focus on a vaccine booster shot reinforces the idea that the availability of vaccines is now taken for granted and not a core concern for planners.

Since the beginning of 2021, there has been a marked increase in the importance of a Covid passport program, from just under 4 percent in Q1 to 13 percent in Q4. This demonstrates that while the vaccine being widely distributed is crucial, it's also important for event organizers to be able to officially confirm the vaccine status of their attendees.

The removal of travel or quarantine restrictions has also become an increasingly key factor. At the beginning of the year, only 10 percent of respondents felt this was the most important factor, compared with 20 percent now. In other words, roughly double the number of respondents now rank it as their top dealbreaker. This perspective is understandable given the many different quarantine and travel restrictions in place in destinations across the world. Attendees need to be able to travel to the event first and foremost, but they are also much less likely to come if they have to quarantine for a number of days upon arrival. **While the vaccine has opened the door for physical events to take place, it's not a silver bullet for a full-blown recovery**. Travel restrictions and quarantine requirements are the next hurdle to overcome.
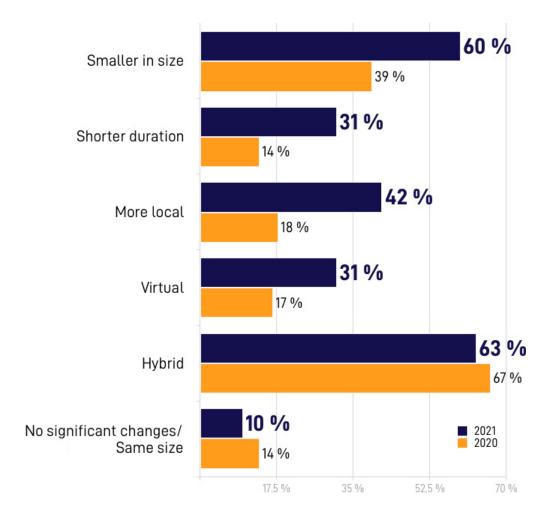
Reassuringly, the proportion of respondents who are already confident in planning live events has increased dramatically since the beginning of the year. Starting at a mere 4 percent in Q1, the figure is now just over 18 percent.

Notably, however, this number is much lower than the percentage who stated that they are already hosting in-person events (42 percent) — a contrast that suggests many **organizers are hosting in-person events without feeling fully confident in the decision**. Travel restrictions and other setbacks may make it difficult for organizers to feel secure investing in large-scale onsite events, so smaller, local events will likely be the norm for the near future.

IS THE FUTURE OF EVENTS REALLY HYBRID?

As compared with results from 2020's survey, the latest research shows a noticeable increase in the proportion of respondents who believe their future events will be smaller in size. At the end of last year, 39 percent of respondents predicted that their events would be smaller than they had been in the past; currently, the proportion who hold this opinion has shot up to just under 60 percent. It could be that in 2020 there was a real resistance to change and a desire to simply go back to how things have always been done. Data from 2021 seems to suggest that the tides have turned. **Respondents are now acknowledging that events will be smaller, at least in the short-term**.

PREDICTED CHANGE IN FORMATS 2021 VS 2020

A similar shift towards more modest expectations can be seen across the board: **A larger share of respondents are now projecting that events will be shorter and more local**.
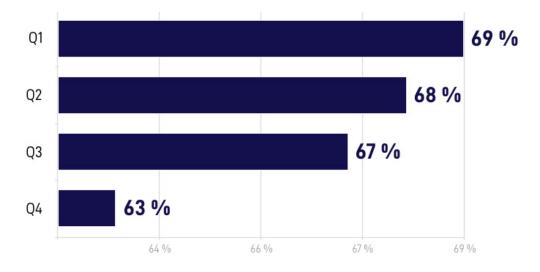
What has remained consistent over the last year, however, is the perception that hybrid is the format of the future. **The vast majority of respondents (63 percent) say they see their events becoming hybrid in the future**. Notably, however, a review of results across all four quarters of 2021 shows that the numbers have been steadily declining, albeit only slightly.

Compared to your past events, how are you seeing formats change for future events?

Those who answered "Hybrid"

While this shift may not be statistically significant, it may signal a slight decline in enthusiasm for hybrid events. If enthusiasm for hybrid is in fact waning, it might be tempting to conclude that more event planners are ready to leave online audiences behind. A closer inspection of the numbers, however, suggests otherwise. Over the same period, the proportion of respondents who've chosen "virtual" as an option has risen from 17 percent

to 31 percent. Given this information, it's possible that **some event planners are choosing hybrid strategies over hybrid events — that is, they are planning to host both in-person and virtual events, but not necessarily in a combined format.**

Nevertheless, despite what may be a slight decline in popularity, hybrid formats are still the clear favorite. The transition to hybrid may have been fraught with challenges for many who attempted it for the first time this past year, but these first iterations lay the groundwork for better and better hybrid events. We expect clearer frameworks will emerge — along with the budgets required for the extra AV equipment and professional live streaming tech. **Now that attendees have had the opportunity to experience the convenience and accessibility of online events, the demand is unlikely to disappear. And where there's demand, there's a business incentive and plenty of opportunity.**

NAVIGATING EVENT ORGANIZATION IN A PANDEMIC

HEALTH AND SAFETY STILL GUIDING DESTINATION CHOICES

Looking at data from the Q4 2021 survey, the three most important factors for confidence in destination choice are:

1. "Clean and Safe" or similar designation representing a commitment to follow local health guidelines

2. No quarantines or other travel restrictions that would apply to your attendees

3. Low local rate of new cases

TOP CRITERION FOR CHOOSING A DESTINATION

Criterion	%
'Clean and Safe' or similar designation representing a commitment to follow local health guidelines	32 %
No quarantines or other travel restrictions that would apply to your attendees	31 %
Low local rate of new cases	24 %
The capacity to host large meetings	10 %
The destination's attractions	2 %
The quality of the destination's medical infrastructure	1 %

These findings are in line with the top three obstacles to running physical events identified earlier in this report. What this shows is that destinations have a big role to play in the return of in-person events. Since ensuring the safety of attendees and s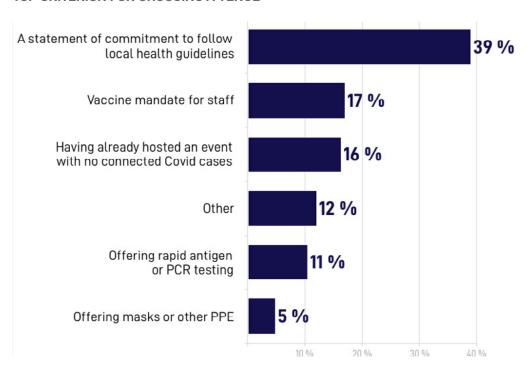takeholders is a key concern for planners, **destinations play a significant role in easing concerns by demonstrating their commitment to adhere to local guidelines**. Similarly, because travel restrictions and quarantines can act as significant obstacles to attracting attendees, it stands to reason that event organizers would choose destinations that have lenient travel policies.

While destinations' capacity for large meetings, attractions, and medical infrastructure may influence the decision-making process, very few event organizers cite them as the most important factor — and their rankings have remained relatively steady across all four quarters of 2021.

The consistent primacy of "clean and safe" commitments demonstrates just how pivotal health and safety still remains. These findings may influence how destinations want to position themselves in order to attract more planners. Those hoping to attract more events need to ensure they are able to provide a safe and secure environment with low case numbers.

HOW VENUES CAN POSITION THEMSELVES AS LEADERS ON HEALTH AND SAFETY

TOP CRITERION FOR CHOOSING A VENUE

Criterion	Percentage
A statement of commitment to follow local health guidelines	39 %
Vaccine mandate for staff	17 %
Having already hosted an event with no connected Covid cases	16 %
Other	12 %
Offering rapid antigen or PCR testing	11 %
Offering masks or other PPE	5 %

Across all four quarters of 2021, respondents have consistently cited the same top priority when choosing a venue: a statement of commitment to follow local health guidelines. Echoing the views expressed around destination choices, 39 percent of respondents said that adherence to a health and safety pledge was their number one criterion when selecting a venue. This suggests that **it isn't enough to simply pick a destination with good local**

health guidelines; the venues must also work to uphold health and safety standards to protect attendees and other event stakeholders.
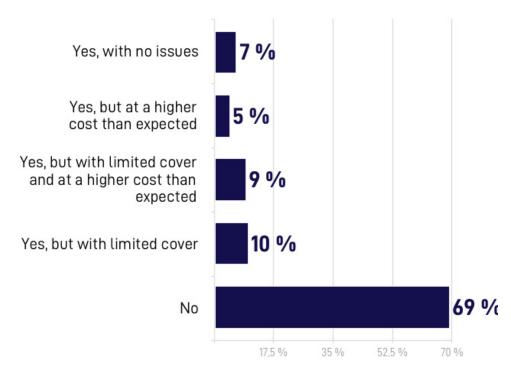
The second most popular criterion was a vaccine mandate for staff. 17 percent of respondents said that this is their top concern when picking venues. Additionally, many who selected 'Other (please specify)' mentioned the need to have mandatory vaccinations for both staff and attendees. This suggests that **those who require all attendees to be vaccinated will be looking for the same practice from the venues they choose**.

The third most popular criterion for venue selection is a proven record for safety. 16 percent of planners look for venues that have already hosted events with no connected Covid cases. Therefore it's important for venues to consider how they are promoting their health practices, adherence to local guidelines, and track record for Covid-safe events.

Another commonly cited criterion by those who selected 'Other (please specify)' was flexibility. As mentioned earlier, 42 percent of planners say that they are already hosting in-person events, but only 18 percent say that they already feel confident hosting in-person events. Both this discrepancy and the need for flexible venue contracts speak to continued uncertainty in the event industry, an issue that will be explored in more detail in the event insurance section.

COVID MEASURES FOR LIVE EVENTS

HAVE PLANNERS SECURED EVENT INSURANCE FOR COVID-RELATED ISSUES?

Response	Percentage
Yes, with no issues	7 %
Yes, but at a higher cost than expected	5 %
Yes, but with limited cover and at a higher cost than expected	9 %
Yes, but with limited cover	10 %
No	69 %

Even before the pandemic hit, insurance plans rarely included coverage for cancellations caused by communicable diseases. Even force majeure clauses, which protect against unforeseeable "acts of God", were applicable only when the contract's clauses made specific reference to the threat of communicable diseases — and this kind of explicit inclusion was rare. Anecdotal reports suggest that it is now even harder to secure this kind of coverage. From the insurer's perspective, the risks are just too high.
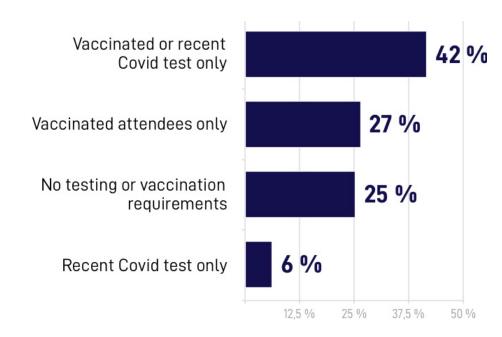
The latest round of research from EventMB's Q4 survey confirms these whisperings within the industry. The overwhelming majority of respondents (69 percent) have not been able to secure event insurance to cover pandemic-related issues. This could be why some planners are looking for venues with flexible cancellation and attrition policies. **Without the added security of insurance coverage, many are looking to their suppliers and partners to help mitigate some of the risks.**

Be that as it may, a portion of respondents have been able to secure this type of insurance, albeit either at a higher price or with limited cover — or both. 5 percent of respondents cited higher costs, and another 10 percent said they were only able to secure limited coverage. Just over 9 percent are paying higher insurance premiums for limited coverage. **Only a small minority of respondents (less than 7 percent) report having no issues securing pandemic-related coverage.**

Venues and other suppliers should consider what kind of flexibility they can offer event planners considering the majority are unable to secure protection through insurance plans.

ATTENDEE RESTRICTIONS: ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS THAT EVENT PLANNERS ARE ENFORCING

As part of the Q4 survey, respondents were asked what pandemic-related attendance restrictions they enforce based on the rules in place at their most recent event. The most commonly cited entrance requirement was an either-or approach: proof of vaccination status or a recent Covid test. 42 percent of planners selected this option. The next most common approach is to require that all in-person attendees be vaccinated, with 27 percent of respondents adopting this policy. "No testing or vaccination requirements" follows close behind with 25 percent of planners choosing this option.

To gain a better understanding of why these discrepancies exist, it's important to assess the influence of geographic differences and how local policies could be influencing the results. The three most represented countries in the survey were the United States (51 percent), the United Kingdom (10 percent), and Canada (7 percent).

To provide more perspective on how different countries may be approaching entry requirements at events, survey responses were broken down by region.

71 percent of respondents from Canada said they are only accepting vaccinated attendees at in-person events, compared to only 11 percent of respondents in the UK. UK respondents were much more likely to take an either-or approach, accepting either proof of vaccination or a Covid test. Additionally, 30 percent reported having no testing or vaccination requirements.
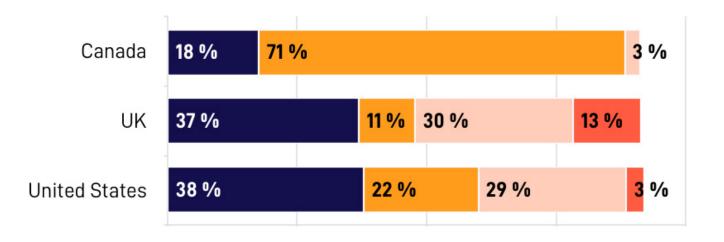
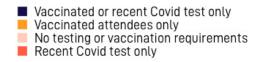A mixed view emerged from US respondents, possibly reflecting the different practices in varying states. More than a third (38 percent) require proof of vaccination or a Covid test, and over one in five respondents from the US said they only accept vaccinated attendees at their events. At the same time, 29 percent of US respondents have no testing or vaccination requirements.

This demonstrates that attendee restrictions are not a monolith. **As each country has their own local guidelines, practices and cultural norms, the restrictions that will be placed on attendees will vary by location.**

This could also be further influenced by the type of events being organized. For example, if a planner is organizing small internal events for colleagues who have to test on a regular basis or conform to the employer's vaccine policy, further attendee restrictions become much less relevant. The point here is that even though a quarter of respondents don't require vaccination or testing, this may not be a matter of defying local restrictions. Instead, it is more likely a matter of circumstance, with norms defined by the surrounding culture and context of the event.

ATTENDEE RESTRICTIONS BY COUNTRY

Legend:
- Vaccinated or recent Covid test only
- Vaccinated attendees only
- No testing or vaccination requirements
- Recent Covid test only

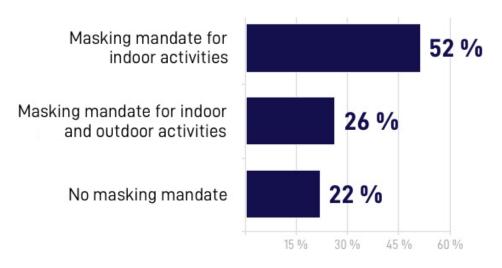| Country	Vaccinated or recent Covid test only	Vaccinated attendees only	No testing or vaccination requirements	Recent Covid test only
Canada	18 %	71 %	3 %	
UK	37 %	11 %	30 %	13 %
United States	38 %	22 %	29 %	3 %

ATTENDEE RESTRICTIONS: MASKING POLICIES
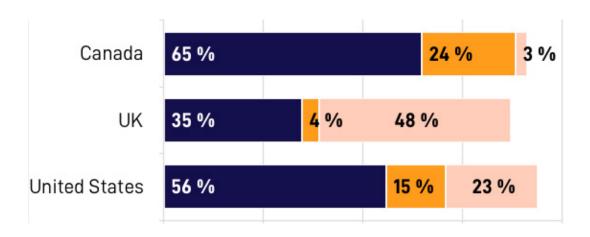
MASKING MANDATES

The Q4 2021 survey results show that over half (52 percent) of planners say they enforce mandatory masking for all indoor activities. However, once again, a notable portion of planners (22 percent) do not mandate the wearing of masks at their events. Similarly, this data would benefit from a more nuanced analysis to understand the context of these responses. The following chart breaks down these Q4 results by country.

Masking mandates by country echo the same sentiment as they did for attendee entry restrictions. Canada leads the pack as the most Covid-conscious cohort of respondents. 65 percent of Canadian respondents said they mandate masks for indoor activities, and a further 24 percent mandate masking for both indoor and outdoor activities. A very small minority of Canada-based respondents (under 3 percent) said they have no masking mandates in place.

On the other hand, the respondents from the UK were most likely to report not having a masking mandate (48 percent). Still, 35 percent of UK-based respondents mandate masking for indoor activities, and a very small minority (4 percent) mandate masking for both indoor and outdoor activities.
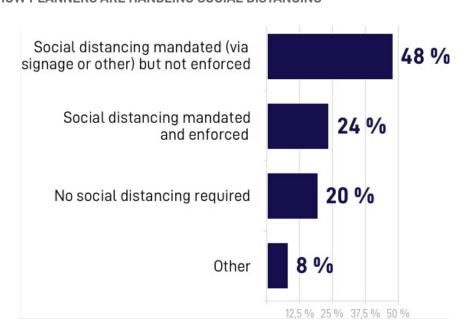
MASKING MANDATES BY COUNTRY

Respondents based in the US had a similar policy towards indoor activities as those based in Canada, with 56 percent mandating masking for indoor spaces. However, whereas a third of Canada-based respondents mandate masks for both indoor and outdoor activities, a third of US-based respondents have no masking mandate.

This further stresses the important cultural context at play when talking about Covid restrictions.

ATTENDEE RESTRICTIONS: SOCIAL DISTANCING

HOW PLANNERS ARE HANDLING SOCIAL DISTANCING

Social distancing mandated (via signage or other) but not enforced	48 %
Social distancing mandated and enforced	24 %
No social distancing required	20 %
Other	8 %

12,5 % 25 % 37,5 % 50 %

The Q4 survey data also reveals how respondents have been handling social distancing at their events. Almost half (48 percent) of planners say they mandate social distancing through the use of signage; however only a quarter (24 percent) say they actively enforce social distancing at their events. Therefore **less than half of those with social distancing policies are actually enforcing them**. Almost one in five respondents do not require social distancing at their events.

Among those who selected "Other", comments centered around following the guidelines of the venue, and using the design of their events to reinforce distancing policies.

"We haven't yet decided for 2022 programming. FL has restrictions on enforcement of any type of mandates with fines so will create policy as we get closer."

TECH SOLUTIONS: SHIFTING ATTITUDES TO HYBRID EVENTS

ARE VIRTUAL EVENTS DELIVERING ON THEIR PROMISE?

Virtual events have been dominating the event landscape for nearly two years, but how successful have they been? This section compares responses from late 2020 against a quarterly breakdown from 2021 to observe how responses have changed over the past year.

In 2020 and Q1 of 2021, over 70 percent of planners were able to successfully pivot their events to virtual.

EVENTS THAT HAVE PIVOTED TO VIRTUAL

Some
- 0 %
- 55 %
- 60 %
- 53 %

Yes/All
- 78 %
- 28 %
- 28 %
- 34 %

No/None
- 22 %
- 23 %
- 13 %
- 14 %

Legend:
- 2020
- Q1
- Q2
- Q3
- Q4

At first glance, there appears to be a sharp decline in the numbers who successfully pivoted their virtual events starting in Q2 of 2021. However, this drop is likely owing to a change in the question format. In 2020 and Q1 of 2021, the question was designed for a simple "yes" or "no" answer. Then from Q2 onwards, the survey began asking respondents to specify whether they had successfully pivoted all, some, or none of their events.

If we look closely at the no/none camp, we can see that it continued to decline fairly steadily indicating that planners are increasingly successful at turning to virtual events.

Taken in their entirety, these findings suggest that planners have become better at adapting to virtual formats over time — but other survey questions help to shed light on just how successful these virtual events were.
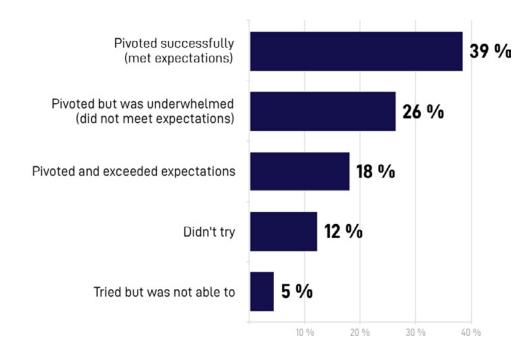
THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF VIRTUAL EVENTS

Over half of Q4's respondents (57 percent) had success in pivoting to virtual formats, either meeting or exceeding their expectations. However, there is still a notable proportion of planners (26 percent) whose virtual events failed to meet their expectations . Meanwhile, 4.5 percent of respondents tried but were unable to pivot. A further 12 percent — over one in ten — never attempted

to try. So while the majority have had a positive experience delivering virtual events, there is still a significant portion of the industry that has not.

This presents an interesting conundrum. **There is a section of the industry who are leveraging the value of digital. They are reaching wider audiences by hosting virtual events, and some are even exceeding expectations.** Yet there is also a subsection who are unable to tap into this value. For some, it could be a question of preference, but a significant number of survey responses paint a picture of frustrated efforts. By sharing insights about how some planners are succeeding with virtual formats, the industry can help to support planners looking to unlock the benefits of online engagement.

SUCCESS IN PIVOTING TO VIRTUAL
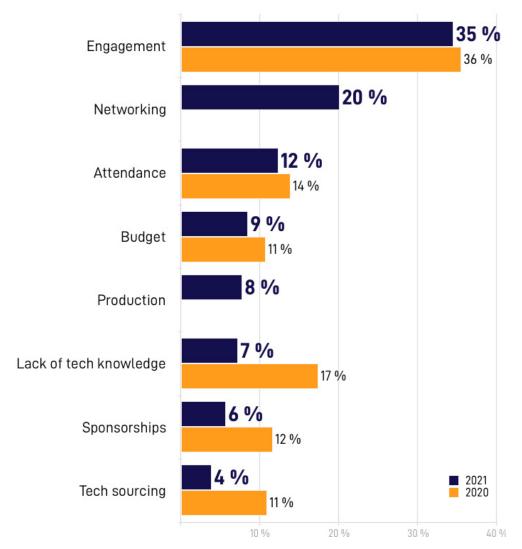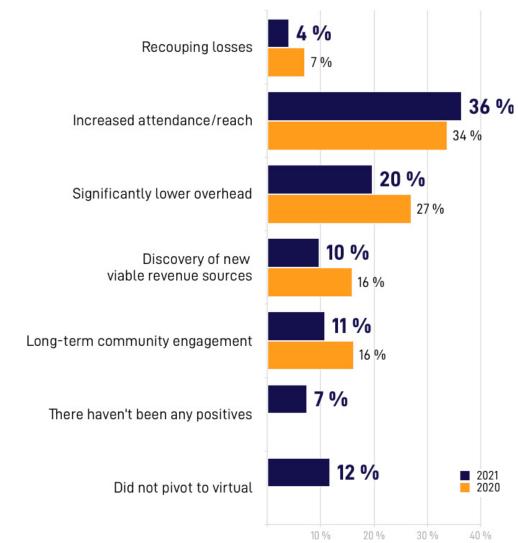

Pivoted successfully (met expectations)	39 %
Pivoted but was underwhelmed (did not meet expectations)	26 %
Pivoted and exceeded expectations	18 %
Didn't try	12 %
Tried but was not able to	5 %

BIGGEST CHALLENGE 2021 VS 2020

Category	2021	2020
Engagement	35 %	36 %
Networking	20 %	
Attendance	12 %	14 %
Budget	9 %	11 %
Production	8 %	
Lack of tech knowledge	7 %	17 %
Sponsorships	6 %	12 %
Tech sourcing	4 %	11 %

■ 2021
■ 2020

MOST POSITIVE RESULT 2021 VS 2020

Category	2021	2020
Recouping losses	4 %	7 %
Increased attendance/reach	36 %	34 %
Significantly lower overhead	20 %	27 %
Discovery of new viable revenue sources	10 %	16 %
Long-term community engagement	11 %	16 %
There haven't been any positives	7 %	
Did not pivot to virtual	12 %	

■ 2021
■ 2020

In 2020, the top three challenges organizers faced with virtual events were engagement (36 percent), lack of tech knowledge (17 percent), and attendance (14 percent). While some of these challenges remain consistent, **there has been a marked decrease in the proportion of planners who consider lack of technical knowledge a major setback**. While 17 percent of respondents cited this as their biggest challenge with virtual events in 2020, only 7 percent do now.

By contrast, engagement has stubbornly held on as the top challenge throughout 2021, with 34.5 percent of planners still identifying it as their biggest issue. Networking has also emerged as one of the biggest challenges for virtual

events, with one in five respondents choosing this answer in the Q4 2021 sruvey. (Unfortunately, this option was not included in the 2020 survey, so it is difficult to draw conclusions about how much the issue has changed over time).

Attendance is still the top challenge for 12 percent of respondents, a similar proportion to last year. This result is somewhat surprising given that increased reach is often considered one of the benefits of going virtual, but we'll examine this issue more closely in the next section.

Overall, it is clear that engagement and networking are the two areas that event technology providers need to work on improving — if not directly by adding new features, then by offering insights into the most successful strategies used by their clients.

By far the most positive result of hosting virtual events is the increased reach, with 36 percent of event planners citing this advantage. This is up from 34 percent last year, and it echoes a wider sentiment in the industry about the value virtual provides by reducing barriers to entry and attracting a truly global pool of attendees.
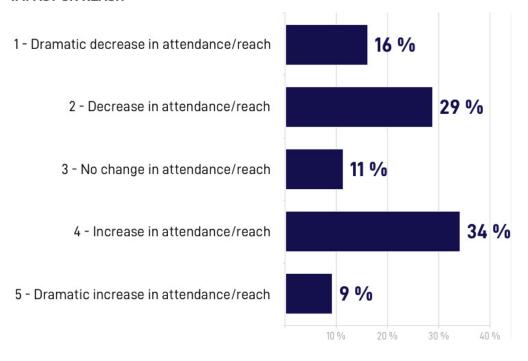
It's also worth noting some shifts in the financial impact of virtual events.

Many struggled with monetizing virtual events throughout 2020, with only 16 percent seeing revenue opportunities as the most positive result to come out of online events. In the latest survey results, that figure has fallen to 10 percent. This suggests that even fewer respondents have been able to efficiently monetize their virtual events in 2021 — or those who have been able to earn revenues now see other benefits as more important.

Whereas lower overhead was perceived as the top benefit by 27 percent of respondents in 2020, now only 17 percent cite this as the biggest advantage of going virtual. This change, however, could be indicative of a shift in the market. Competition is high and planners are under increasing pressure to deliver TV-broadcast-worthy experiences that capture and captivate audiences. This comes at a considerable cost. As respondents have had to deliver more engaging virtual events that go beyond a Zoom meeting style, it's possible they have become more costly to run. This inevitably means planners are having to spend more money to remain competitive in an increasingly saturated market.

THE REACH CONUNDRUM

IMPACT ON REACH

1 - Dramatic decrease in attendance/reach	16 %
2 - Decrease in attendance/reach	29 %
3 - No change in attendance/reach	11 %
4 - Increase in attendance/reach	34 %
5 - Dramatic increase in attendance/reach	9 %

Despite reach being clearly the most positive result of hosting virtual events, other responses in the survey seem to contradict this consensus. When asked to specify how the switch to virtual formats has affected their reach, only 43 percent of respondents experienced either an increase or a dramatic increase in reach. In fact, 45 percent reported experiencing either a decrease or dramatic decrease in reach.
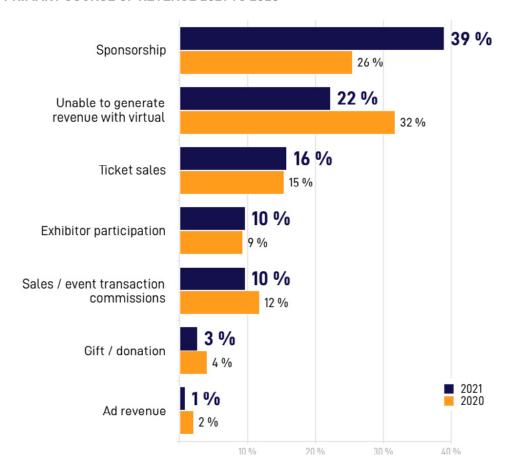
While this may seem like a contradiction, it's worth noting that the percentage who cited an increased reach (43 percent) is actually higher than the percentage who said that the biggest advantage of virtual events is their increased reach (36 percent). This also demonstrates that some of those who experienced an increased reach actually thought that other elements of the virtual experience were a bigger benefit. All of these results underscore the conclusion that there is a significant gap in the experience of those who are benefiting from virtual events, and those who fail to see the advantages.

PRIMARY REVENUE SOURCE FROM VIRTUAL

With the monetization of virtual events identified as an area of concern for survey respondents, we decided to delve deeper into the topic.

Sponsorship appears to be the best avenue for virtual event monetization, with 39 percent of respondents citing it as their primary revenue source for virtual events in 2021. This figure is up noticeably from 2020, when only a quarter (26

PRIMARY SOURCE OF REVENUE 2021 VS 2020

percent) of respondents selected it. Exhibitor revenue has also increased, although at a much more modest rate than sponsorship, from 9 percent in 2020 to 10 percent in 2021.

Increased investment from sponsors and exhibitors may be a good sign, potentially indicating that sponsors are starting to see more value in virtual events. On the flip side, this trend indicates a heavy reliance on

sponsors for virtual event revenue. While in-person trade shows also rely heavily on the same revenue sources, this may be a worrying sign for conferences where in-person equivalents have ticket sales as a significant source or revenue. **The limited revenue diversification suggests that attendees may not be willing to support the costs of producing virtual events, at least not in a way that would be comparable to in-person events.**.
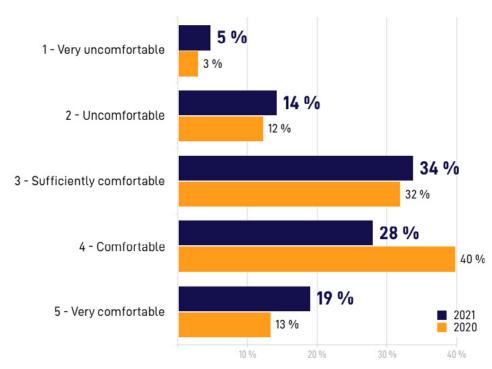
Despite the challenges, earnings from ticket sales are the primary source of revenue for 16 percent of respondents, and this figure has remained fairly constant, starting from 15 percent in 2020.

On a positive note, the number of respondents unable to generate revenue from virtual events has declined, dropping from 32 percent in 2020 to 22 percent now. Still, it's somewhat worrying that a quarter of respondents are still unable to adequately monetize virtual events. **Will virtual events be seen primarily as an extension of digital marketing efforts — perhaps even for the purpose of marketing in-person events themselves — or will the most successful virtual event organizers help pave the way for more effective monetization strategies across the board?**

COMFORT WITH VIRTUAL EVENT TECH

As more and more planners gain exposure to virtual events — both as organizers and as attendees — it is reasonable to expect a proportional rise in their sense of comfort with the technology involved. However, this is not what EventMB's research found.

COMFORT LEVEL FROM 1 TO 5 2021 VS 2020

In 2020, 12 percent of respondents reported feeling uncomfortable with virtual event technology; this figure has since risen slightly to 14 percent. The percentage of respondents who reported being very uncomfortable has also increased slightly from 3 percent in 2020 to 5 percent. Although the number

who report feeling "very comfortable" has risen from 13 percent in 2020 to 19 percent now, the most notable change is a drop in those who report feeling "comfortable" from 40 percent in 2020 to 28 percent in 2021.

Despite the earlier finding that fewer planners consider insufficient tech knowledge to be their biggest challenge in going virtual, these figures suggest that **while some event professionals have mastered virtual event tech, there is an increase in those struggling to deal with the technology**. The significant developments in virtual event tech over the last 12 months may explain this shift. While event tech platforms have dramatically increased their capabilities, this comes hand in hand with an increase in the complexity of platforms. Higher expectations regarding production value and the attendee user experience may also be a factor to consider. **These findings may question how ready event professionals are to master new hybrid formats, which are projected to dominate in the coming year.**
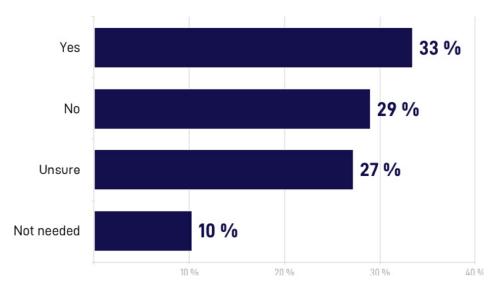
THE PATH TOWARDS HYBRID EVENTS

All roads appear to point to a hybrid future for events. **A rising number of respondents expect events to be smaller and more localized, and almost two-thirds predict that hybrid formats will be the go-to format of the future**. But is the industry ready, and what does it take to deliver a successful hybrid event? A key aspect of delivering any great event is a great strategy.

As part of the Q4 2021 survey, respondents were asked whether they've been able to develop a solid hybrid strategy. Only a third (33 percent) said yes. A further 27 percent were unsure, and 29 percent answered with a firm "no." As yet more evidence that hybrid events will soon become essential, only 10 percent felt that a hybrid strategy was "not needed."

These answers demonstrate that there is still a long way to go for hybrid events. **While a sizable share of respondents feels confident about their hybrid event strategies, almost two-thirds appear to be struggling**. Given that hybrid events are still in an experimental stage, these misgivings are perhaps unsurprising. After learning to adapt to virtual formats, planners are now faced with the additional challenge of balancing the needs of two different audiences.

HYBRID EVENT STRATEGY

A well-designed strategy could be essential for keeping remote audiences from feeling like second class citizens, while also ensuring that in-person attendees get the most out of being onsite. There are simply no tried-and-tested event design formulas for event planners to rely on, at least not yet.
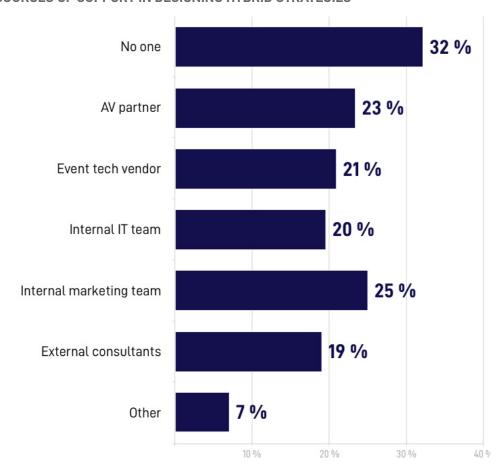
The answer to this conundrum may lie in a collective effort to share best practices within the event planning community. **Throughout the transition to virtual events, planners have relied heavily on each other to learn new tactics and find support. With hybrid events as the next frontier, collaborative experimentation is likely to again be the best way forward**.

With such a high proportion of survey respondents feeling less than confident about their hybrid strategies, there is a clear need for support of some kind.

To understand the situation better, EventMB attempted to find out if event planners had received any support when developing their hybrid strategies. Just shy of one third (32 percent) said they had not received help from anyone. The rest of the respondents sought help from a myriad of professionals — including AV partners, event tech vendors, internal IT teams, marketing teams, and external consultants — with no single contributor distancing itself from the others as the primary source of support.

This demonstrates that respondents are leaning on the wisdom of multiple industry professionals in order to deliver their hybrid events. There is, however, a considerable minority who are figuring it out on their own, either by choice or by financial necessity. Those who selected "Other (please specify)" mentioned using free resources, such as industry research and/or the collective wisdom of their network, to develop their hybrid strategy.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT IN DESIGNING HYBRID STRATEGIES

Source	Percent
No one	32 %
AV partner	23 %
Event tech vendor	21 %
Internal IT team	20 %
Internal marketing team	25 %
External consultants	19 %
Other	7 %

SUMMARY

So what is the current state of the event industry?

This research shows that the most harmful effects of the pandemic appear to be subsiding. Finances appear to be improving for both individual planners and event companies, and a large part of that recovery is thanks to the accessibility of vaccines. However, the industry has not rebounded with an instant boomerang effect. Progress is coming slow and steady.

The once pervasive sentiment that things will just "go back to normal" seems to have also diminished. In its place, there is a recognition and cohesive agreement that the industry is moving towards a new normal characterised by smaller, localized, and hybrid events.

Virtual formats still face very clear challenges when it comes to engagement and networking. Monetizing virtual events is also a challenge for many and hybrid events are far from being standardized, even if they are largely seen as the future of the industry.

Moving into 2022, planners must consider how they can overcome these obstacles in order to unlock the full potential of their event strategy.

FLOOR TO THE EXPERTS

REIMAGINING CONTENT FOR VIRTUAL AND HYBRID EVENTS

Rachel Andrews

Director, Meetings & Events, **Cvent**

With 15 years of experience as a meetings and events professional, Rachel is a seasoned industry expert bringing deep expertise managing events of all size and caliber. Rachel leads Cvent's 40-person global planning team, helping them organize more than 1,200 events worldwide every year. Rachel's team is also in charge of Cvent's comprehensive corporate internal events program for its 4,300+ employees around the world.

Rachel has been instrumental in overseeing & growing Cvent's annual customer conference, Cvent CONNECT, from a 200-person once-a-year event, into a renowned global event technology conference approaching 5000 attendees.

Prior to joining Cvent, Rachel was a lead meeting and event planner at Morgan Stanley, managing some of the financial industry's most high-profile equity and fixed income conferences..

The advancements in virtual event technology over the last year have been a game-changer.

At Cvent, we realized our virtual events were pretty static, so we have focused on reimagining content. We wanted to produce more dynamic, broadcast-quality content that felt like an interactive TV show rather than a passive experience — there has been an explosion of tools aimed at helping planners achieve this.

We have also seen that engagement needs to extend beyond traditional start and end dates for events. Increasingly, technology is enabling attendees to explore content weeks ahead of when an event begins. Post-event, content can be made available On Demand to extend engagement further.

We are also seeing a lot of excitement in video topic-based discussions, speed networking, and easier ways for virtual attendees to interact with sponsors and exhibitors.

By using innovative event technology, online events have become valuable tools for sponsors to drive brand awareness. The goal is for attendees to transform their questions into meaningful conversations with sponsors — event tech can facilitate, capture, and track those interactions to drive sponsorship value throughout the online event.

But planners must have the right technology to aid those interaction points and create sponsorship packages that offer genuine attendee interaction and ROI.

The role of meeting and event planners has, in many ways, been re-invented in the past two years, and event tech providers can do three things to help.

First, the technology must be easy to use and consistent across event formats. Second, tech providers need to stop asking planners to go in and out of multiple systems to get their jobs done.

Rachel Andrews

Director, Meetings & Events, **Cvent**

With many different event formats and audiences, planners must have the end-to-end tools they need to execute any event. Finally, planners need adequate support, training, tools, and competent tech partners to make their events successful and lighten the load.

Hybrid events require a lot of resources. However, done well, the payoff can be significant due to the combination of an extended virtual audience and deep engagement for your in-person attendees.

As health concerns remain and travel budgets and policies remain in flux, we see the hybrid format remaining for the foreseeable future. The most popular hybrid model consists of an in-person audience at a single location and content available through live-stream and on-demand for a virtual audience.

Our user conference, Cvent CONNECT, was held in this format in 2021. Based on the event's success,

we plan to repeat and iterate on this with our April 2022 conference.

Our top recommendations based on what we have learned so far:

1. Think deeply about your goals for the event. Not all events need to — or should — be hybrid events.
2. If you decide to host a hybrid event, ensure you deliver a program and networking experiences that cater to each audience type — "one event, two experiences."
3. For your virtual audience, the technology is the venue — content is the primary lens through which they will experience your event.
4. Speaking of content, don't underpower content production, delivery, or interactivity.
5. Most importantly, your hybrid events likely have an event program consisting of virtual and in-person formats. Your event technology must handle all three event formats.

SUCCESSFUL HYBRID EVENTS MEET PARTICIPANTS WHERE THEY ARE

Peter Micciche

CEO, **Certain, Inc.**

Peter is CEO of Certain and has led the Company's drive to deliver measurable results to enterprise marketers from events. Peter provides motivation, inspiration, and leadership to the employees at Certain. He ensures strong, productive and long lasting relationships with industry leading companies. Prior to Certain, Peter was CEO of Native Minds; CEO of Kinecta; President, Cognos Corp; Sales Executive at GE Software.

Peter is on a never ending journey to play jazz piano and create music through improvisation. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in accounting and finance from Boston College and an MBA degree from Suffolk University in Boston, MA.

Technology can play an integral role in bringing people together by providing engaging moments in comfortable environments.

These online experiences can happen through highly configurable templates, which reflect host and event branding and can be maintained across a series of events, providing a consistent look and feel and forming the basis for participant communications. Landing pages and other online assets, give rich opportunities for easily identifiable sponsor messaging and branding.

Additionally, we can personalize all aspects of these events to meet participants' interests, passions, skill sets, and roles — like matched sessions, dialogues, interactive activities, and more, through various platforms (phones, apps, and laptops).

A simple, well-integrated system adds to participant, presenter, and sponsor comfort while making engagement easier — leading to memorable events and highly productive, long-term customer relationships.

Using tech, the event, the event interactions, participant interests, and engagement become data points. Sponsors and hosts can gain insights and understanding into participant needs and interests that can shape future experiences, longer-lasting connections and provide greater levels of return to each sponsor through accumulated participant knowledge.

Further, the rise in self-service products and the changing state of travel have created new opportunities and challenges for event planners. Therefore, event technology must be familiar and easy to use, comprehensive (encompassing all aspects of an event), seamlessly integrated, resilient and flexible, and rewarding for everyone.

Peter Micciche
CEO, **Certain, Inc.**

Event tech that translates into successful hybrid events of the future will meet participants wherever they are, using whatever media or channel they wish. Future approaches should operate in a scalable plug-and-play mode while seamlessly integrating with the most appropriate end-points.

Using this integrated approach, each participant and stakeholder will have a recognizable and smooth integrated front end delivered in a hub and spoke fashion to engage with others, and data collected can be used to provide an ever-improving event experience.

Event planners should pick their technology partners carefully by looking for firms that have the following characteristics:

- ❯ A long and successful track record as a tech partner during the entire event life cycle.

- ❯ A template-based approach that has multiple event uses and is available across many geographical regions.

- ❯ A platform that is comprehensive, flexible, personalized, and seamlessly integrated.

- ❯ Support for whatever media or approach event participants are responding to at present.

- ❯ The ability to "connect the dots" and engage with all event stakeholders.

- ❯ An experienced support and service team.

These ingredients set all stakeholders up for success by creating memorable, engaging, and well-executed participant experiences and delivering a high ROI.

HYBRID EVENT SUCCESS DEPENDS ON CREATING THREE DISTINCT EVENT EXPERIENCES

Lauren Sommers

Vice President of Corporate Marketing, **Hopin**

Lauren Sommers is the Vice President of Corporate Marketing at Hopin and is responsible for Experiential Events, Partner Marketing and Customer Marketing. She has spent the majority of her career in the B2B SaaS industry with her tenure at companies like JDA Software, Marketo, App Annie and Gainsight. Sommers' passion is building human first connections through scaling large events, customer engagement and curating unique experiences in the field. Her superpower is intuition. Her intuition coupled with deep market insight and obsession with audience experiences have influenced her approach to building incredible brand awareness and engagement through live experiences.

Even when we can't physically be together, we should still be able to partake in experiences that make us feel inspired, energized, and emotionally engaged. When used thoughtfully and with empathy, the internet and technology can be excellent enablers of innovation, inclusivity, social mobility, and human progress.

Event technology that opens the door for more meaningful attendee engagement will inherently create more sponsorship opportunities. From there, it's up to event organizers to unlock value.

And although technology has evolved rapidly over the last decade, it shows no signs of slowing down. In the wake of a global pandemic, we can expect event technologies that are unfathomable today to emerge over the next five to ten years.

But while reskilling is inevitable, companies driving innovation should be investing in the creation of resources. These resources should enable event professionals to do what they do best — create and facilitate shared experiences.

It is important to note there is no one-size-fits-all model for hybrid events. The most successful approaches we've seen with Hopin customers are community-led.

Community-led events are sometimes a hybrid experience that people can attend simultaneously in-person or online. Other times, community-led events could be a large virtual event augmented by a series of smaller in-person events.

What we have learned from event organizers that have hosted successful hybrid events is: We need to approach this type of event format as three distinct event experiences — in-person, virtual, and an area where the two audiences will overlap.

A hybrid event strategy that takes this approach will have two separate budgets and staff responsible for each (e.g., in-person attendee support and online attendee support).

HYBRID EVENTS SUPPORT GREATER INCLUSION AND ACCESS

Andrew Pearson

CMO, Socio

Andrew Pearson is a seasoned technology marketing leader, investor and entrepreneur with 20 years experience and passion for events!

Andrew is Socio's chief marketing officer and has served as CMO or head-of-marketing for six other software companies over his career. Andrew has an MBA from UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School with a focus on entrepreneurship and marketing. Andrew has been an event organizer, sponsor, host, exhibitor or speaker at over 1000 live and virtual events. Some of his favorites are SxSW (South by Southwest), Hubspot Inbound, and partner dancing events, where he practices his favorite hobby.

Creating a community before, during, and after an event, whether in-person or virtual, is key to increasing engagement and networking. The possibilities are almost endless when we use event tech correctly.

With event tech, planners create a variety of interactive activities for attendees to partake in, like content exploration, gamification, custom-built schedules, networking opportunities, and pre-event polls and roundtable discussions. Post-event, you can continue to host user group meetings and online dialogues and add additional on-demand content to drive continuous engagement in the event app and virtual venue.

Gone are the days of rigid sponsorship packages! With brand reach and lead generation typically the two biggest goals for sponsors and exhibitors, brands are looking to shine through by leveraging event tech to create more immersive online experiences.

At the same time, there is tremendous value in incorporating sponsors throughout the event without being intrusive. This type of involvement can take many formats, such as weaving sponsors into sessions, enabling chat functionality within booths, creating polls that help identify potential leads, and creating multiple ways for participants to connect with the sponsor team.

For planners to create these experiences, ease-of-use regarding event tech is vital — having a platform that makes sense when building an event goes a long way while incorporating a straightforward training plan. Often when a planner purchases an event platform, they need to start using it immediately.

The best way for planners to learn is by building an event from the back-end and having the experience of what it feels like to be an attendee. The on-demand experience Socio provides allows attendees to continue interacting with the event

Andrew Pearson

CMO, Socio

for months after it's over, inside the platform. Giving planners access to select on-demand experiences helps them see how other events came together.

Virtual and hybrid events add value for the above and many other reasons. By taking a step back and examining your objectives for each event, ask yourself if you can accomplish all your goals virtually? Or if you (and your audience) need the in-person experience? And if you can add more value by providing a combination of both — a mixture of in-person and online attendees?

In the future, in-person events will need to level up quality or programming, onsite experiences, and digital engagement elements to justify travel and time away from home — not a bad thing! As for virtual events, their use will be for continuing conversations and delivering messages when you can't be in-person and help reach a larger audience and enable greater inclusion and access.

While not all events should be hybrid, your hybrid events should be the events that will benefit from different audience types. For these events, your focus must be on the different attendee experiences.

Creating a successful hybrid event should consider the following:

1. Choose the right tech partners to power your hybrid event.
2. Develop an attendee strategy that connects with virtual and in-person audiences and provides experiences for both.
3. Create agendas that work for both audiences.
4. Strong event technology partner — this is worth stating twice!

DIGITAL EVENT PLATFORMS CAN HELP US FOSTER DEEP AND MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

Allie Magyar

Chief Product Officer, **Notified**

A successful risk-taker who has felt the sting of failure but refused to be defined by it, Allie Magyar is a compassionate leader who cares deeply about the people and technology reinventing the events industry.

After conceptualizing, building and scaling two companies, she founded Hubb in 2015 to deliver technology innovation and data-driven decision-making to the event industry. As CEO of Hubb, Allie brings vision, heart and soul to the company's strategic direction with an emphasis on integrating the mind of the meeting planner into Hubb's product, partnerships, integrations, and growth.

Engagement is all about participation and getting value from participation. Our job is to create environments where people can find both.

But it is (only) when using digital event platforms that we can measure value and translate that into tailoring event experiences. Now we can see if participants watched a video, asked questions in the Q&A, or posted in the chat, and we can take all of that data and compile it into our engagement metrics.

While we are still working on connecting digitally in a meaningful way, we are simultaneously looking for how we provide new and compelling opportunities for engagement.

At in-person events, we tend to gravitate to people we know. But for digital event connection, those social barriers do not exist. So, we become more open to connecting with new people. Because of this, the potential for event tech to foster deep

and meaningful connections is enhanced when compared to in-person events.

Regarding sponsors, at the start of the pandemic, digital sponsorships shoved sponsors in the virtual version of a 10x10 booth — an approach that generated no value. However, this initial mishap fueled the incredible growth of sponsorship opportunities and ideas.

We took a different approach by asking our sponsors to participate and shape the event experience. This approach works because sponsors are unrestricted in virtual platforms like they would be in a physical venue. Planners can then position sponsors as active thought leaders across the event value chain and promote themselves to their ideal target markets.

Planners do not usually feel comfortable with event tech until they have hands-on experience — we need to test it out, create a mock event, and

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explore every aspect of the tech before we feel comfortable. Essentially, digital event platforms are just another venue that planners need to get to know.

And while physical venues rarely change, event tech platforms are constantly evolving. To support planners in this space, we need to focus on training and reskilling so planners can learn about best practices for the virtual event world.

The industry is moving towards an "always-on" engagement model, an event portfolio with a variety of different events that consistently engage your audience throughout the year. This model will be the most successful hybrid format because it can be modified to fit each planner's audience. However, you also do not have to engage online and onsite audiences together all the time (a model which may be better suited to a singular event).

Each format has its strengths and should be leveraged within your portfolio and tailored to meet event needs.

The first step to creating successful virtual and hybrid events is to identify business goals and objectives. Doing this first ensures that a hybrid event strategy contributes to these goals and helps determine what experiences will land well for your audience. Next, define what hybrid means to you and your event. This step will help you plan your engagement.

And finally, you should always ask yourself the following questions: What am I trying to achieve, and how do I achieve it?

If you do that, then you've set yourself up for event success.

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