



360° View: Attendee Acquisition Research Roundup

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PRESENTED BY
EVOLIO
marketing

Exhibit and event measurement

2015

EVOLIO founded

25+ years

Joe measuring exhibits and events globally

1,950+

Events and exhibits measured

998,500+

Attendee and exhibitor surveys completed

50+

Attendee, exhibitor and sponsor benchmarks

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Exhibit and event strategy and measurement

- Corporate events
- Global largest industry events
- Niche industry events
- Small industry events
- Global sports and esports
- Event industry events
- Major brands, exhibitors, sponsors
- Major industries and geographies



Feelings Aren't Facts®



Research Study:

Attendee acquisition strategy and challenges

Wave 1

129 participants

March to June 2025

Wave 2

98 participants

October to November 2025

Wave 3

106 participants

March to April 2026

Research conducted by



Trade Show Executive

80% are director level or above, 38% are execs

AAR SURVEY · MARCH 2026 · N=106

83%

**director level or
higher**

of which 52% are execs

65%

**associations and
non-profits**

35% independents/others

54%

**20+ years of
experience**

8% have 5 years or fewer

58%

**run shows of 125K+
sq ft**

42% under 125K sq ft

Top industries: Education 19%, technology/IT 16%, science/energy/agriculture 16%, plus many others.

Registration fees are increasing. Slightly.

AAR SURVEY · MARCH 2026 · N=106

53%

increased registration fees

40% kept it the same

7% decreased

10%

average amount of increase

88%

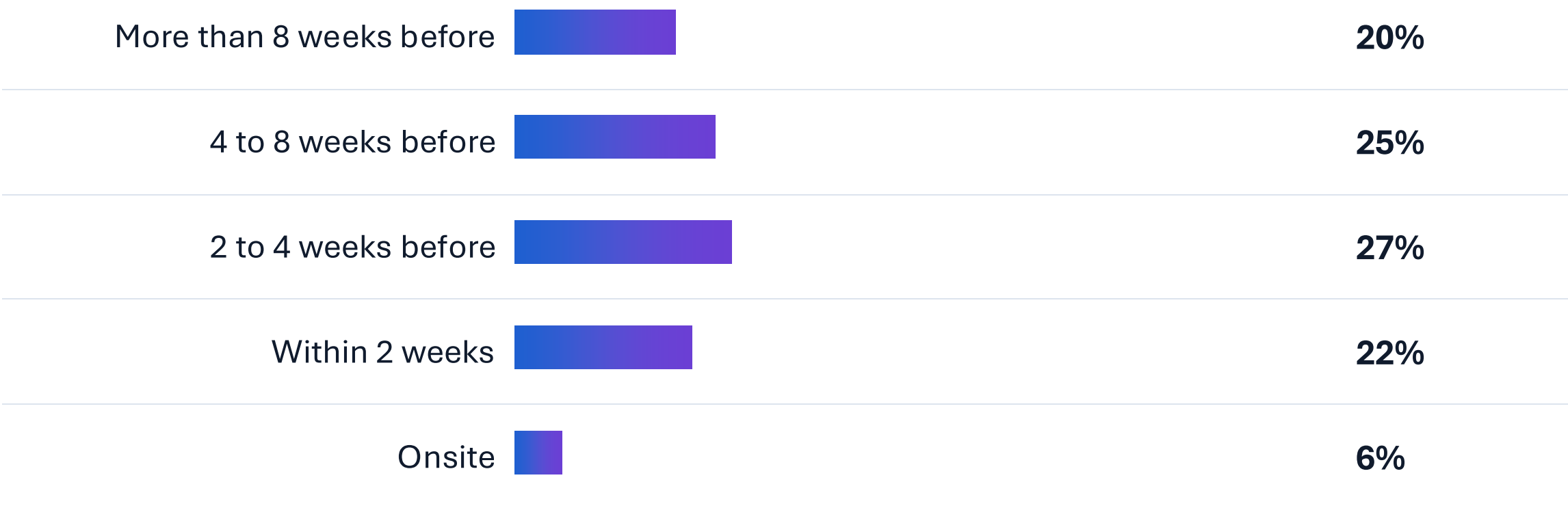
**offer a registration fee
discount to those who
register before a specific
date**

40% take discount

Q: By approximately what percentage have the attendee registration fees increased?

55% register in the final four weeks

AAR SURVEY · MARCH 2026 · N=106



Growth is coming from first-timers, not repeats

AAR SURVEY · MARCH 2026 · N=106

48%

report more first-time attendees

25% remained the same
8% decreased

22%

saw growth in repeat attendees

58% remained the same
22% decreased

38%

report fewer attendees sent per organization

29% remained the same
11% increased
21% unsure

Q: Compared with 2 years ago, how has each of the following changed for your most recent largest event(s)?

Quality of attendees now outranks quantity

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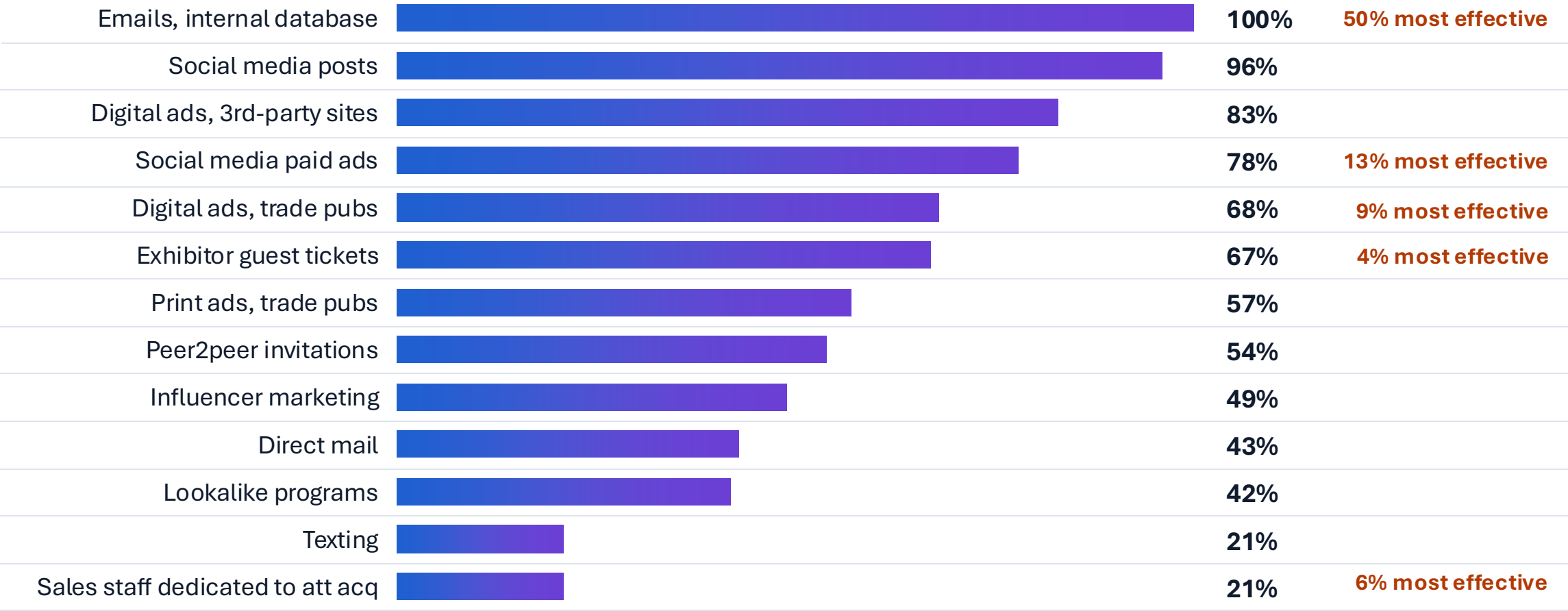
Ranks #1 and #2 flip-flopped compared against waves 1 and 2

#3 and #4 flip-flopped compared against waves 1 and 2

Q: Rank order your top attendee acquisition challenges.

Marketing Tactics Used for Attendee Acquisition

AAR SURVEY · MARCH 2026 · N=106

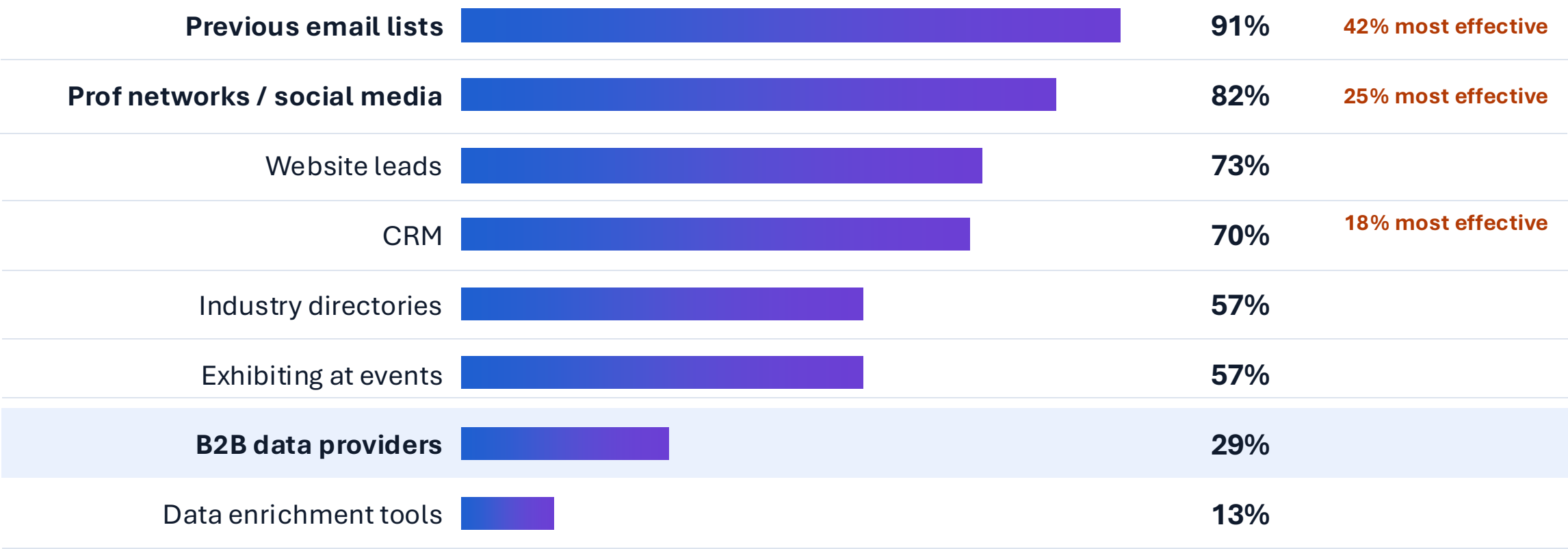


Q: What tactics are used for your attendee acquisition campaigns? Select all that apply. Which ONE is most effective?

92% reuse previous lists; only 13% enrich data

AAR SURVEY · MARCH 2026 · N=106

Sources Used to Build Prospect Lists



Q: Which sources or tools do you use to build attendee prospect lists? Select all that apply. Which ONE is most effective?

70% of emails hit firewalls. Over half do not use targeted marketing

AAR SURVEY · MARCH 2026 · N=106

70%

not getting through corporate firewalls

48%

not a good method to reach younger generations

45%

reporting is not accurate

open and click rates, deliverability

MAJORITY ARE NOT USING TARGETED MARKETING

57%

do NOT vary attendee acquisition efforts based on attendees' age

55%

do NOT ask how attendees prefer to receive communications, or are unsure

Q: Which of the following challenges have you experienced recently with email marketing campaigns? Select all that apply.

Buyer Density Index (BDI)

BDI is: 0-100 score estimating how buyer-rich an attendee audience is by blending purchase authority and spend capacity.

What BDI answers

If an exhibitor meets 100 attendees, how many can decide or strongly influence purchases and bring real budget?

Shows whether the show attracts real buyers, not just more people.

Why it matters

Blends purchase authority and spend capacity, with authority weighted higher.

Attendance can rise while exhibitor ROI falls if buyer density drops.

How to integrate it

Track average BDI and the share of high-BDI attendees (for example % ≥ 60) across cities and cycles.

BDI shows buyer presence, not whether meetings happened.

Recommended companion metrics

Buyer Access Index: appointments, qualified meetings, scan-to-qualified rate.

High-buyer %: approve or specify, and budget $\geq$ \$___ (your event's data)

Exhibitor positive ROI % and lead-quality metrics.

Board-level use

Use BDI to balance attendee growth segments, e.g., grow under-35 years old segment while protecting and growing the buyer core.

This is the ONE metric stakeholders can track and trend for **both audience quality and exhibitor ROI**.



Let's discuss

**How are you utilizing AI for your
attendee acquisition efforts?**

AI use jumped from 18% to 71% in one year

AAR SURVEY · MARCH 2026 · N=106 and 75 AI USERS

75%

currently use AI for their events

Yes was 18% in the 2025 study
25% do not use AI

FOR HOW LONG?

17% Less than 6 months

29% 6 to 12 months

13% 1 to 2 years

13% More than 2 years

26%

average time saved per week by using AI

Was 19% in the 2025 study

Q: How long have you been using AI to aid in your event(s)? Adoption is based on n=106. Duration and time saved are on AI users only.

AI writes content; 12% use it to measure ROI

AAR SURVEY · MARCH 2026 · BASE: 75 AI USERS

SEEING IMPROVEMENTS FROM USING AI

47%	Improved marketing effectiveness
33%	Too soon to tell
12%	Increased revenue
12%	Increased attendance / less attrition
12%	Increased attendee satisfaction
12%	Increased attendee quality

How AI is used (grouped by tiers)

HIGHER	Writing and content creation	85%
	Marketing, including digital, social media, PR	67%
	Feedback collection and analysis	46%
MEDIUM	Support and customer service (agent, chatbot)	41%
	Design and graphics	41%
	Networking and matchmaking	29%
	Personalized attendee experiences	24%
	Language translation and accessibility	20%
LOWER	Predictive analytics	18%
	Budget and forecasting automation	12%
	Reporting and ROI measurement	12%
	Registration	6%
	Predictive analytics: attendee behavior	6%

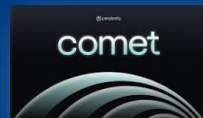
EVOLIO's AI & tech stack

HIGH QUALITY CONTACT LISTS & LIST ENRICHMENT



RE2B

RELEVANT BRAND SCOOPS, INTENT, AND NEWS



MARKETING & SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT, DISTRIBUTION, TRACKING



WIX STUDIO

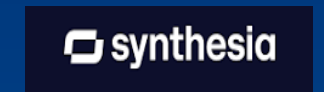
CRM, SALES CONTENT, DISTRIBUTION, TRACKING



pipedrive



RESEARCH, TRAINING, OPERATIONS



AI usage case study

Use AI to assist in your attendee acquisition strategy

AEO, GEO and SEO are three different jobs

AEO

Answer Engine Optimization

Answer the questions buyers ask

Fees, dates, tracks and exhibitors/
sponsors in plain text

Add structured event data

GEO

Generative Engine Optimization

Publish research worth citing

Named experts and exhibitor voices

One consistent brand / event name
everywhere

SEO

Search Engine Optimization

Crawlable site

Clean architecture

Intent keywords and terms

AEO gets you in the answer. GEO gets you cited. SEO keeps you found.

Write the prompt your ideal attendee would write. Run it in Gemini, ChatGPT, Claude and Perplexity.

If your event is not in the results, that is not a technology problem.

It is your attendee acquisition problem.

ATTENDEE POV: BASIC AI PROMPT

I am a _____ looking for trade shows and
job title & job description

conferences to attend _____ to address issues and
dates and locations

challenges, such as _____. I want
detailed description of issues and challenges faced regularly

to learn about _____, and
topics you find interesting

_____. What events do you recommend?
other activities you want to do

TRADE SHOW MADLIBS

AGES
12+



A FILL-IN-THE-BLANKS GAME
ABOUT EXHIBITS AND EVENTS

The prompt loop: each step adds specificity

PROMPT 1: DISCOVER

What are the best conferences and trade shows in the U.S. for software developers between August 2026 and March 2027?

PROMPT 2: ADD INTERESTS

Which of those focus on cutting-edge development techniques, AI, new programming languages, software architecture and cybersecurity?

PROMPT 3: ADD INDUSTRY RELEVANCE

Which ones are especially relevant to developers working in healthcare or manufacturing?

PROMPT 4: EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS

I want hands-on training, certifications, hackathons, workshops and chances to meet other developers. Which events offer the best mix?

PROMPT 5: ADD PRACTICAL CONSTRAINTS

Only include U.S. events where full registration costs less than \$1,500. Conference education matters more than the trade-show floor.

PROMPT 6: COMPARE

Compare the five strongest options on education, certifications, hackathons, networking, speakers, industry relevance and price.

PROMPT 7: THE DECISION

If you could recommend only three events for me and my software-development team, which would you choose and why? Put your answers in a table.

What your site must publish to be recommended

ATTENDEE ASKS ABOUT	YOUR EVENT WEBSITE SHOULD INCLUDE
“Best developer events”	Audience, positioning and technical focus
“Newest techniques”	Detailed tracks, topics and session descriptions
“Healthcare or manufacturing”	Industry-specific sessions, speakers, exhibitors and examples
“Certifications”	Certification name, requirements, cost and credential earned
“Hackathons”	Format, eligibility, schedule, prizes and participation details
“Networking”	Who attends and how peer interaction happens
“Good speakers”	Speakers, credentials, expertise, session level and topics/tracks
“Under \$1,500”	Current, visible and unambiguous pricing
“Which is best?”	Specific differentiators and credible evidence

IBEX is *very* visible. Some important benefits are buried.

THE PROMPT

Acting as a team of a world-leading AI expert focusing on AEO, SEO and GEO, and a strategic event marketing exec, use deep research to understand my industry and my event: www.ibexshow.com (IBEX, North America's leading technical trade event for the marine industry, October 6-8, 2026, Tampa Convention Center, Tampa, Florida), and evaluate this event's SEO, GEO and AEO.

SEO, AEO, GEO AUDIT SCORE: 78/100 OVERALL

Strong event facts, education content and industry authority make IBEX easy to find and understand. The gap: sessions, speakers, certifications, exhibitors and products are fragmented across third-party platforms, limiting deeper AI comparisons and recommendations.

SEO

74/100

Strong foundation.

Add Event schema; fix speed and year hygiene.

AEO

84/100

Answer-rich.

Clarify certifications, credentials and attendee outcomes.

GEO

77/100

Strong authority.

Publish first-party session, speaker and exhibitor pages.

Let's discuss

Two important questions to answer.

01

**What data do you have,
or need, to identify
attendee growth
opportunities?**

02

**What tools will you use,
or need, to reach
different segments?**

What your event website must get right

01 Attendees' perspectives: benefits? UVP? Why should they attend?

02 AEO, GEO, and SEO + Social media links and handles

03 UX and UI in the app and web

04 Exhibit hall floorplan in the app and web

05 User-friendly to register with actionable data collected

Feelings Aren't Facts[®]

Measure what matters. Then defend the investments and the decisions.

Questions

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