

EXHIBIT SALES ROUNDTABLE CHICAGO
20-MINUTE CONVERSATION

From Transactions to Growth Engines

Modernizing space selection and sponsorship sales -- without breaking what already works.

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Four observations from the field

Drawn from 60–70 strategic accounts a year — and conversations with organizers, sponsors, exhibitors, and sales teams. Some are reinforced by reinforced by industry research.

1 Sponsors want more

Relevance and outcomes — not just visibility and logos.

2 Keep what works

Priority points and onsite selection stay. We make them smarter.

3 AI is a game changer

Structure, scale, and sponsor intelligence for lean teams.

4 Experience design is revenue

Attendee moments become sponsor platforms when designed on purpose.

Relevance and proof — not just visibility

Sponsor expectations are advancing faster than organizer infrastructure.

WHAT SPONSORS ASK FOR

62.6%

Personalization

The top emerging expectation — targeted, tailored opportunities. Not tiered sponsor packages.

59.4%

Audience quality

Who is in the room now outweighs raw headcount. Ideal customer profile

56.3%

Proof of ROI

Defensible, goal-tied results — measured consistently.

THE ORGANIZER REALITY

Lean teams

Sponsorship handled by just 2–3 people.

Revenue pressure

53% expect sponsorship revenue to grow in 2026 if space allows.

Proof gap

ROI is still measured inconsistently — the proof sponsors want is missing.

Acquisition gap

Acquiring new sponsors is named the single biggest challenge.

The model works — and it should stay

For most organizers, the exhibit sales model is non-negotiable. It moves the floor in days.

01

Priority points

Earned status that drives loyalty and a predictable renewal cadence.

02

Onsite selection

Live visibility turns choice into action and creates urgency.

03

Interactive floor plan

Structured slots compress a long buying cycle into a few days.

04

Appointment cadence

Concentrated decision moments create FOMO and momentum.

70–80%

of next-year exhibit space typically sells onsite — often within three days.

FROM THE ROOM

"How many of you run a priority-point process and select space onsite? How often does that conversation expand into sponsorship strategy?"

But success can hide an opportunity cost

Five things the legacy model can leave on the table — every cycle.

Lost strategic timing

The window to shape next year closes before the strategic conversation starts.

Lost buyer access

The space-selection contact rarely has authority to commit to sponsorship. Once they sign and pay deposit they move on until you are a couple of months out

Lost insight

Decisions get made without ROI, goals, or audience signals on the table. We don't know what success looks like.

Lost design integration

Creative, activation, and production arrive too late to execute or budget.

Lost renewal leverage

First-right renewals run on autopilot — then the account goes quiet.

FROM THE ROOM

"Which of these feels most familiar in your organization?"

MAIN MESSAGE

The booth conversation often ends before the growth conversation begins.

Four ways to personalize the process

1 Focus where it matters

Segment and prioritize high-potential accounts. Not every account needs a custom strategy.

2 Arrive prepared

Use AI-assisted briefs to understand goals before the meeting — and show you are aligned and focused on their business.

3 Extend the conversation

Make space selection the start of a growth discussion, not the end of it.

4 Align to the journey

Connect sponsors to attendee needs so activations create value for both sides.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Keep the transaction. Improve the conversation. The value created around the booth is what changes.

AI can help lean sales teams close the sponsor gap

Creates structure + scale

Prioritize accounts, segment growth potential, and recommend next-next-best actions consistently.

Monitors growth signals

Track external signals like launches, funding, hiring, partnerships, and leadership changes in real time.

Builds sponsor briefs

Consolidate history, spend, audience fit, goals, and market signals into one view.

Personalizes + proves value

Generate tailored activation ideas and tie them to engagement and ROI.

MAIN MESSAGE

AI does not replace relationships — it strengthens them. The goal is better conversations, not more data.

AI scales personalized creative

Sales teams can tailor approved creative concepts to each sponsor — faster, and with more relevance.

1

Start from approved concepts

Begin with brand-safe, pre-approved activation templates and design systems.

2

Personalize to the sponsor

Adapt visuals and messaging to the sponsor's brand, goals, and audience fit.

3

Deliver faster, more relevant

Customization that used to take weeks now takes hours — without losing quality.

MAIN MESSAGE

AI helps scale personalization — keeping brand control while making every concept feel built for that sponsor.

Post-event brief: explain why it mattered

Don't just report activity — connect engagement quality to outcomes and the next renewal.

64

Scheduled meetings

37

Qualified follow-ups

1,420

Activation visits

84%

Positive sentiment

Meetings

Volume and quality of scheduled buyer conversations.

Engagement

Demo participation, dwell time, and micro-learning attendance.

Audience quality

Confirm the sponsor reached the segments they care about most.

Sentiment

What attendees valued — practical value and technical credibility.

SUGGESTED CLOSE

"Your activation did more than generate traffic — it created qualified engagement with the audience you care about most."

People remember experiences, not logos

1 Start with attendee intelligence

Who attends, what they want, what they consume, where they spend time.

2 Sponsors become the experience

Move beyond banners and logos to lounges, theaters, and demo labs.

3 Create value for both sides

The best activations serve attendees and deliver sponsor outcomes.

4 Differentiate through experiences

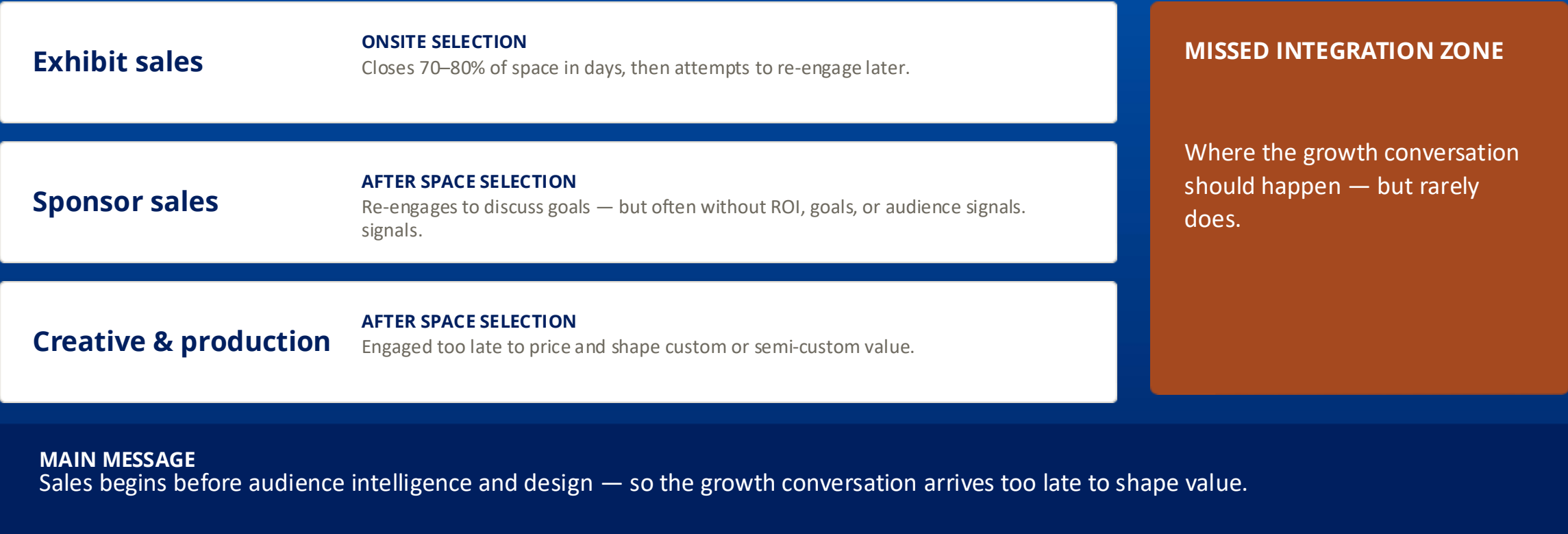
Experiences are far harder to commoditize than inventory.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The best sponsorship strategy doesn't start with inventory. It starts with the attendee — then sponsors join the journey.

The growth conversation happens too late

Three teams, three timelines — each doing its job. The problem is the seams between them.



FUTURE STATE

Lead with intelligence and intentional design, not inventory.

Reorder the sequence so audience insight and experience design shape the conversation before space is locked in.



The legacy sequence starts at space selection. The future state starts with the audience intelligence and experience design.

Modernize without breaking the model

- 1** Protect the core model
- 2** Score your priority accounts
- 3** Build AI-assisted sponsor briefs
- 4** Align design and sponsorship
- 5** Measure outcomes — before the sale

THE BIG IDEA

Don't replace the transaction. Surround it with intelligence.

Thank you for your time today.

A note on the rest of the deck

The remaining slides are examples and inspiration — activation concepts, experience design examples, and audience journey examples.

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Sponsorship Activation Inspiration & Examples

Designing The Experience

Activation concepts · experience design examples · audience journey examples. Discussion starters.

Shepard Inspiration Playbook

Inspiration Playbook - Shepard Ev... X

https://shepardes.com/event-education/inspiration-playbook-lp/

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Exhibitor Orders

INSPIRATION PLAYBOOK

Our best experiential design ideas—all in one place.

The Inspiration Playbook is a continuously updated, curated collection of our best-performing attendee engagement ideas. These creative activation ideas and strategies have been tested by our award-winning clients at some of the [largest trade shows in North America](#). We're sharing them here so they can continue to spark imagination and help transform your next event into a world-class experience!

✓

Curated and continuously updated

✓

Concepts rooted in experiential design

ACTIVATE & AMPLIFY

Content Studio



A full-scale branded studio for capturing video testimonials, interviews, and social content.

BENEFIT

Creates sponsorable real estate and



The Shepard logo, featuring a stylized diamond icon followed by the word "Shepard" in a serif font.

Engagement & Gamification

**Please note some inspiration images are not Shepard projects*



Attendee Collaboration



PHOTO MOSAICS



PAINT BY NUMBERS & COMMENT WALLS



Animal Therapy Spaces



Attendee Engagement



Podcast Studios



Not a Shepard Project



Not a Shepard Project



Charging / Branding Zones

Not a Shepard Project



Not a Shepard Project



Not a Shepard Project



Not a Shepard Project



Inspiration & Concepts



The Tool Shed Lounge: Builder Resource Hub

A compact yet information-rich zone designed as a meeting point for practical learning and collaboration. Pegboard walls, hardware displays, and quick learning modules make it a destination for discovering new materials and methods.

- “5-Minute Fix” micro-sessions with sponsor experts
- Wall-mounted sponsor product showcases with QR-linked tutorials
- Seating designed for idea exchange and peer collaboration
- **Best Fit Sponsorships:** Hardware companies, trade education partners, and association sponsors



Demo Stations



Worktable Sessions Seating



QR Code Resource Wall



The Porch Lounge: Southern Hospitality Experience

A comfortable, casual lounge that celebrates Texas charm and the social heart of the Sunbelt Builders Show. Featuring rocking chairs, string lights, and signature refreshments, this is where business meets community.

- Sponsored “Porch Talks” — quick idea exchanges and storytelling sessions
 - Fireside Chats, Peer to Peer Conversations, Structured Networking
- Branded beverage activations (sweet tea, bourbon tastings, or mocktails)
- Lounge seating with rustic charm & ferns
- **Best Fit Sponsorships:** Regional builders, home design brands, lifestyle sponsors



Lounges & Activations

- 1 Sponsored Sports Lounge & Snack Bar: Sponsored Signage, Live Sports on TV, Snacks & Beverages
- 2 Gaming & Activity Options: Yard Games / Cornhole / Putt Putt / Golf Simulator
- 3 Recharge Lounge: Massage Chairs, Wellness Products, Coupons & Special Product Deals



Not a Shepard Project



Shepard

SHM Activation Inspiration

Education/Scheduled Meetings

1. Hands On Focus

a. Flight Tracker & Map

- i. How far did you travel to attend SHM Converge?

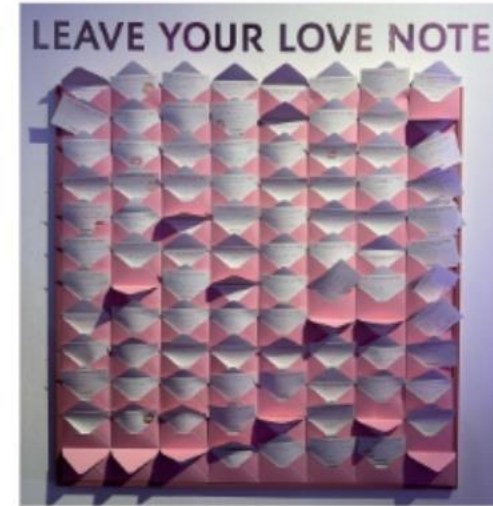
b. Voting & Prompted Discussion/Networking

- i. Detailed Belonging Walls & Charting the Future of Hospitalists
- ii. Can be tied to specialty discussions and used for peer to peer prompts

c. Legacy Journal / Reflections Journal Installation

- i. Content can be reused for future activations

d. "Love Notes" Patient Care focused activation



SHM Activation Inspiration

Voting & Live Polling Wall

- Change out questions each day to gather new insights
 - Can be updated by monitor or static signage
- Tie polls back to audience specific engagement questions
- Can prompt daily networking topics & peer to peer discussions



Benefits of Digital Display

- Ease of Content Updating
- Update Daily Feedback and Findings

