

# Smarter Sales Through Insights: What Attendees and Exhibitors Really Want

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## **INSIGHT 1:**

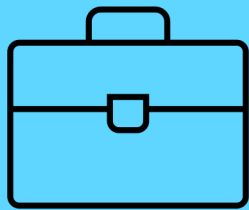
**From Sales to  
Marketing: Events  
Are Now Held to a  
Higher Standard**



## Who Owns The Exhibit Decision?

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### Pre-Pandemic (pre-2020)



#### Sales-led decisions

The salesperson who often justified their decision based on peer presence ('our competitors are there')

### Pandemic Era (2020–21)



#### Marketing takes the lead

Events moved online—became part of the digital marketing mix

### Post-Pandemic (Now)



#### Co-ownership, but ...

Marketing still leads. 43% of decision-makers hold roles in both Sales and Marketing.



# Why This Matters

- Different decision-maker, different expectations
- Presence isn't enough anymore
- Success depends on making the marketing case





# What To Do About It

Lead with ROI-ready sales  
messaging

Equip exhibitors with tools that  
prove value

Sell integrated marketing  
outcomes, not just floor space

## INSIGHT 2:

**Tariff Anxiety Is Real—And Exhibitors Need Reassurance to Commit**



# Why This Matters

- Uncertainty delays decision-making
- Confidence sells in a cautious environment
- The risk isn't just losing an exhibitor—it's losing momentum





# What To Do About It

**Lead with flexibility and  
transparency**

**Reframe your sales pitch for  
international prospects**

**Offer resources that simplify  
cross-border participation**

**Strengthen international  
exhibitor retention with  
reassurance**

## INSIGHT 3:

### Next-Gen Event Goers Prefer Interactivity



# Limited hands-on exposure is most likely to prevent attendees from achieving their commercial objectives

## QUESTION

Which of the following options are most likely to negatively impact your experience evaluating products/services at a business event or prevent you from achieving your commercial objectives?



Limited opportunities for hands-on exposure to products/services

44%

Limited or no provider subject-matter experts

40%

Lack of relevant products/services to my organization

40%

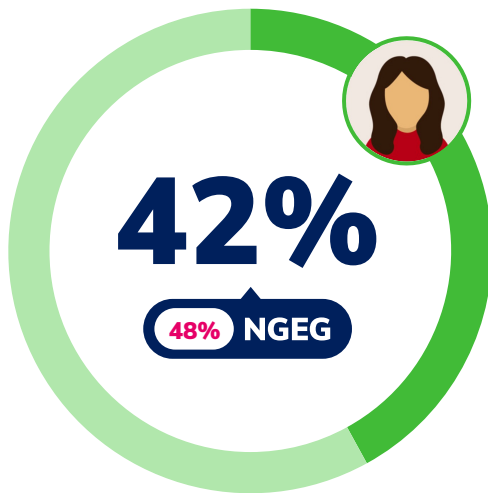
Challenge finding desired providers in the expo hall

33%



#### QUESTION

To what extent did the lack of hands-on experience with a product/service impact your perception of a brand/company?



**Attendees who don't receive hands-on experiences are likely to prioritize other vendors instead!**

## Hands-on exposure turns attendees into product advocates



### QUESTION

Please select your level of agreement with the following statements regarding the hands-on experience

96%

Easier for me  
to advocate for  
the purchase of a  
product/service

95%

Easier to  
determine if the  
product/service  
would be a good  
fit for my  
organization

93%

Helped improve  
my awareness  
of or evaluate  
an offering

## QUESTION

Please provide a brief description of the hands-on experience.

# What attendees are saying about hands-on experiences



"I was able to look at and climb around—in order to customize it more to our needs prior to purchase."



"I was able to touch, hold and try on the equipment, instead of watching videos and looking at photos."



"I got to experience the platform using my own contextual information rather than generic data."



"It allowed me to try the product (with a rep there to answer questions) at my own pace."



# Why This Matters

- Elevates attendee engagement expectations
- Influences exhibitor activation strategy
- Shapes how you position the value of your event



# What To Do About It

Encourage immersive activations

Incorporate interactivity into your pitch strategy

**Encourage exhibitors to partner with GSCs, agencies or others to implement simple interactive elements.**

## INSIGHT 4:

**Trust Is the New  
Premium: Events  
Deliver What AI  
Can't**





## QUESTION

How trustworthy are the following sources of information?

**+ In-person Events  
are Seen as the  
Most Trustworthy  
Sources of  
Information**

	2023		2024	
IN-PERSON EVENTS	75%		80%	▲
PROFESSIONAL TRADE ORGS	68%		68%	
ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS	65%		61%	▼
WEBINARS	48%		44%	▼
COMPANY LEADERS	45%		42%	▼
THOUGHT LEADERS	36%		31%	▼
MEDIA OUTLETS	12%		12%	
BLOG POSTS	9%		9%	
GOVERNMENT LEADERS	8%		8%	



Statistically significant difference between waves

“Within the next 3 years, there will be so much AI, people won't know if what they see or hear is real. Which will lead to an explosion of face-to-face engagement, events and jobs. Call it the Milli Vanilli effect.”

*Mark Cuban*



# Why This Matters

- Reinforces the unique value of live events
- Influences how exhibitors evaluate event participation
- Shapes how you position face-to-face engagement



# **What To Do About It**

**Incorporate this insight into your  
exhibitor sales messaging**

**Offer programming or activations  
that reinforce authenticity**

## INSIGHT 5:

**Attendees Want  
Subject Matter  
Experts—Not Just  
Sales Pitches**





# Prioritize SMEs!

## QUESTION

At the most important in-person business event you attended last year, how important was it that you achieved each of the following



**84%**

of attendees report that connecting with subject matter experts is extremely/very important

## QUESTION

Select the top 3 options that would be most effective in helping you interact and/or engage with exhibitors/attendees at in-person events.

Freeman<sup>®</sup>

**Exhibitors undervalue the impact that subject matter experts have on attendees, and over-value badge scans and emails**

### Top expectations for improved interactions: attendees vs exhibitors



**Speaking with subject matter experts**  
from exhibiting companies

Attendees **58%**

Exhibitors **26%**



**Being scanned and emailed afterwards**  
about products and services

Attendees **23%**

Exhibitors **49%**

# Why This Matters

- Attendees crave substance
- Booth staffing impacts ROI
- Booth design should reflect the buyer journey



# What To Do About It

**Make this stat a central part of  
your sales pitch**

**Encourage exhibitors to mix  
personalities and expertise**

**Promote SME-friendly formats**

## **In Summary ...**

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**1**

**From Sales to Marketing:  
Events Are Now Held to a Higher Standard**

**2**

**Tariff Anxiety Is Real—And Exhibitors Need Reassurance to Commit**

**3**

**Next-Gen Event Goers Prefer Interactivity**

**4**

**Trust Is the New Premium:  
Events Deliver What AI Can't**

**5**

**Attendees Want Subject Matter Experts—Not Just Sales Pitches**



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