



Exhibition & Convention Executives Forum

# What Attendees Actually Want From Your Show (It 's Not the Swag)

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ECEF 2026

# What attendees actually want from your show.

It's not the swag.

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Zoom

May 27, 2026 Grand Hyatt,

Washington DC

# I've been on **your** **side** of the table.

Zoom sponsors, exhibits at, and attends dozens of trade shows and conventions every year.

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We've staffed booths. We've walked floors. We've done the ROI math after every show.

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**This session is what we've noticed.**

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**The attendee has changed.  
The show floor hasn't.**

What attendees walk in **already knowing** has changed completely.

2015  
ATTENDEE



2025  
ATTENDEE



That attendee is gone.

Today they've watched the demo video, read the reviews, and maybe attended one of your webinars before they set foot on your floor.

They arrive knowing what you do. What they don't know is whether you fit their specific situation.

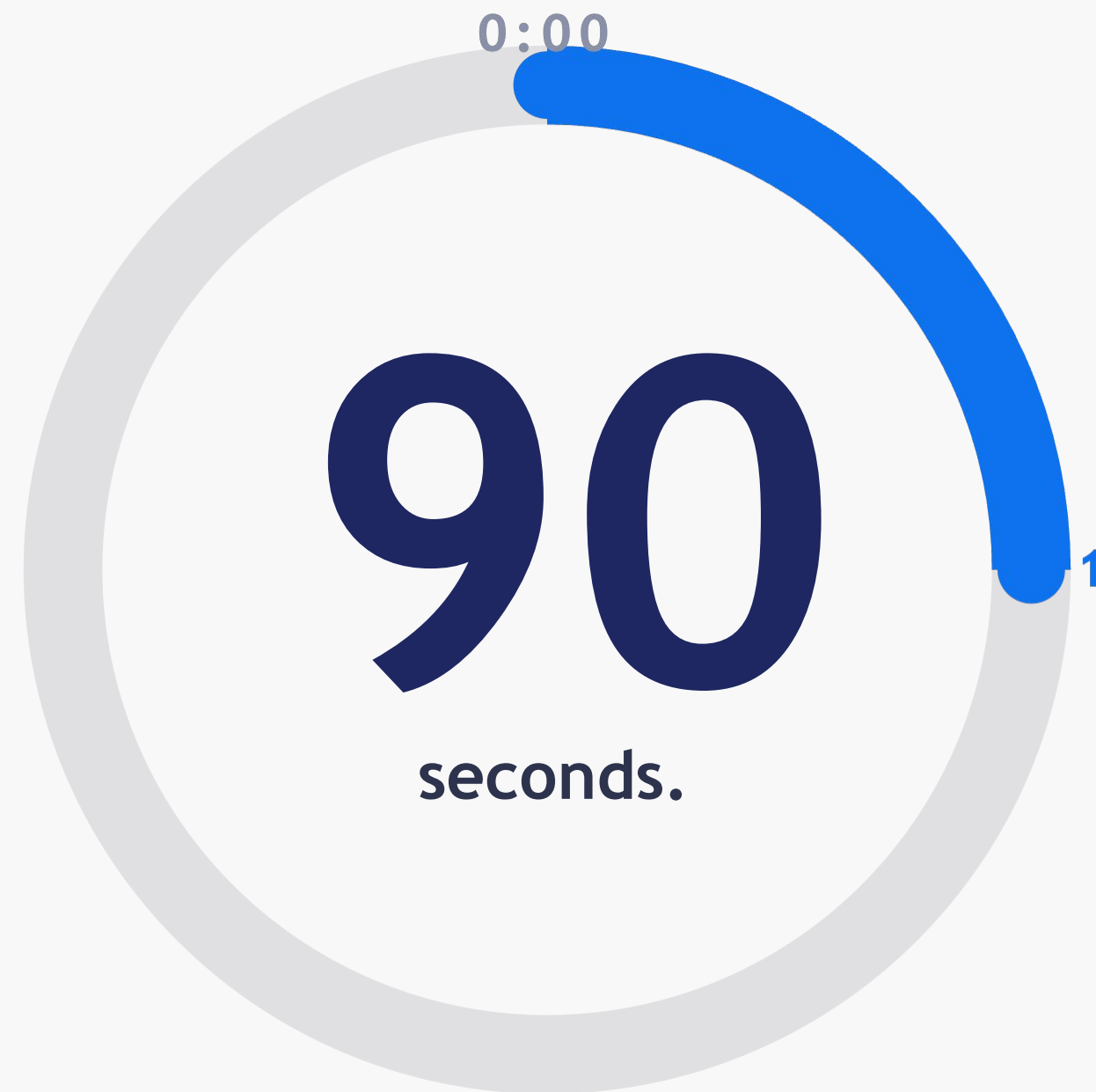
The question they're actually asking: *“How does this work with what I already have?”*

The exhibitors still answering “what does this do” are fighting a battle their attendees already moved past.

\*Based on observed trends

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The generational shift  
isn't coming. It's already  
on your floor.



The window before a younger attendee decides to stay or walk.

Younger attendees don't browse. They scan, decide, and move — and if you didn't earn their attention in the first exchange, you won't get a second one.

**But here's what most exhibitors miss:**

**They're also the highest-leverage person in the room.**

They brief the VP. They share on LinkedIn. They bring colleagues back the next day.

The booths designed for the 50-year-old decision-maker are invisible to the 28-year-old who influences that decision.

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**The three days on the floor  
are more underused than  
anyone wants to admit.**

# The best conversations happen before the floor opens.

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## 01

### Before sessions start

The morning before the keynote and the breaks between sessions are when attendees are most honest. They're not in show mode yet. Most exhibitors aren't either — which is exactly why it's the best time to talk.

Attendees aren't in show mode yet. Neither are your competitors.

## 02

### Targeted pre-show outreach

Not "come see us at booth 423." Specific messages that say: **we know you're working on X, we have someone here who's solved that, here's when to come by.** The shows where we do this have a completely different quality of conversation.

Specificity beats “come by our booth.” Every time.

# The margins are where the real conversations happen.

Between the keynote and the coffee break. Before the expo floor opens. After the last session ends. Most exhibitors aren't designing for those moments — which is exactly why they're available to you.



Guide your exhibitors around the transitions, not just the expo hours.

# What if the right person was always in the room?

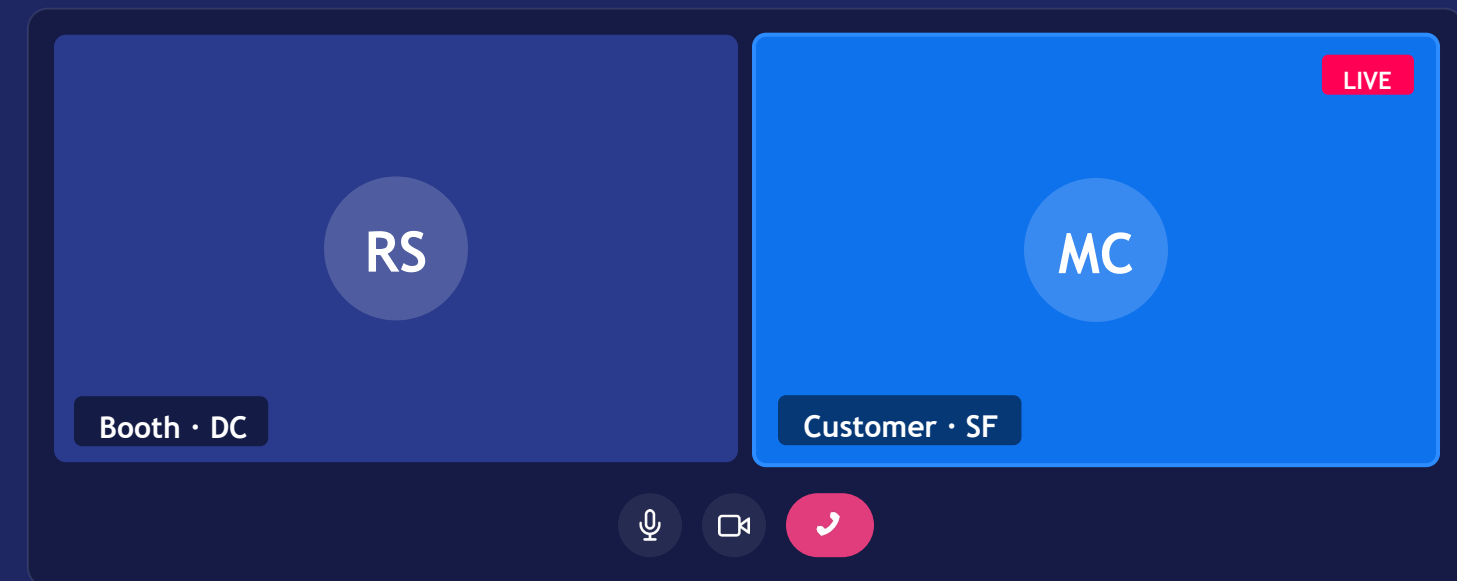
## WHAT USUALLY HAPPENS

A prospect walks up with a niche problem.

Your event organizer says: "Let me have someone follow up with you."

They take a brochure. You never hear from them again.

## WHAT'S POSSIBLE



A prospect walks up. You say: "My customer dealing with this is available right now."

Live conversation. Different city. Real answer. On the spot.

The technology to make that happen exists. The question is whether anyone is designing for it.

# Every booth has a screen. Almost nobody is using it right.

## A looping brand video is the **lowest-value** thing that screen can do.



### Bring the right expert in, live

Your best subject matter expert doesn't have to be in the building. A clean video feed on a large display changes the entire quality of the conversation. Not a laptop propped on a table — a presence.



### Make the remote person feel in the room

The technology to isolate a single broadcast-quality video feed and put it on any screen already exists. The exhibitors using it look like they have a production crew. Most don't need one.



### The moment that always lands

When a remote participant says something the room didn't expect, the audience comes alive. That's the thing no brochure, no demo, no giveaway can replicate. You can't manufacture it — but you can create the conditions for it.

The line between a live event and a broadcast is disappearing. The booths that figure that out first will look very different from everything around them.

# Three **patterns** worth stealing.

01

## SMEs over swag



They replaced branded merchandise with subject matter experts. The booth budget went to getting the right person on the floor, not the right giveaway in the bag.

02

## Remote expertise, live



When the right SME can't be there physically, they bring them in remotely — live, not recorded. The conversation still happens. It just doesn't require a flight.

03

## Repeat visitors over badge scans



They track who comes back. Someone who returns with a colleague is worth ten first-time badge swipes. That's the metric that actually tells you whether your booth conversation landed.

# Exhibitors used to ask the ROI question **after** the show. Now they're asking it **before** they sign.

## WHAT'S CHANGED

**Budgets are tighter. Attribution is harder.**

There are more ways to spend a marketing dollar than there were five years ago.

Exhibitors are not just evaluating your floor. They're evaluating whether you set them up to succeed before they arrived.

## WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

**The work that happens before opening day.**

The exhibitor briefings you run. The data you share about who's walking the floor. The connections you make before opening day.

Organizers who help exhibitors answer the ROI question in advance — with real data, not promises — win the renewal before the show happens.

When Zoom decides whether to return to a show, the conversation is about two things: the quality of conversations on the floor, and what the organizer did to set us up before we arrived.

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# You can't control travel budgets, keynote cancellations, or the economy.

You can control whether the person who walks into your show has a conversation they couldn't have had anywhere else.

That's the product. Not the square footage. Not the general session production value.

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*The exhibitors and attendees who keep coming back aren't loyal to your show. They're loyal to what happens when they're there. That's worth designing for.*

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# Thank you.

Questions?

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