

Are You Ready to Go Back to Live Events?

White Paper



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Introduction: A Look at the Events Industry, One Year Into COVID-19

Roughly a year after the economy began to recover from the initial wave of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the events industry landscape has been dramatically reshaped. While live events were beginning to mount a comeback by Q2 2021, post-pandemic events — live as well as the virtual events the industry relied on during months of lockdowns, cancellations and travel prohibitions — are going to look very different than they did in the past.

Aventri has been canvassing industry professionals to find out what changes they're seeing and implementing. This research offers visibility into event organizers' top concerns about post-pandemic meeting- and event-planning, and provides insights into the top solutions they are using. Aventri's long history of research, surveys and analysis give it the positioning and insight to know how to interpret these major changes, and how to give organizations a competitive advantage to improve their outcomes — even with an economy still recovering from a worldwide public health disaster.

The survey captured responses of nearly 400 event industry professionals, an approximate two-thirds of whom characterized themselves as “Event Planner/Producer/Organizer/Manager/Designer.” (Figures in this report might not total 100% as a result of rounding.)

While the vast majority of survey participants were from the United States among the 331 who provided a location, respondents also hailed from five Canadian provinces and other countries including Australia, Brazil, Colombia, France, Greece, India, Lebanon, Mexico, Panama, Spain and the United Kingdom.



Respondents in the U.S. who provided their locations were widely dispersed throughout the country, with the top-represented states as follows:

California: 63

New York: 38

Florida: 19

Georgia: 13

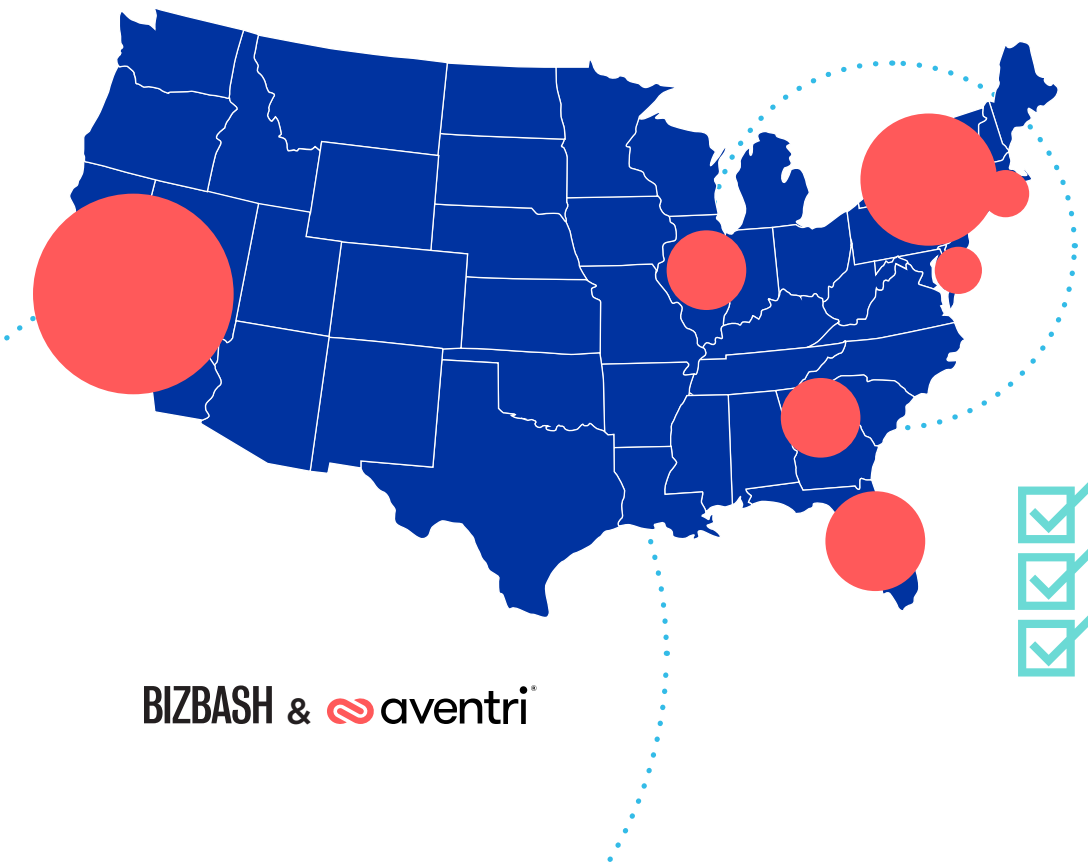
Illinois: 13

Massachusetts: 10

Washington, D.C.: 10

The number of events planned by respondents included a broad range, with most concentrated between six and 50 events annually. Nearly one-third (31%) said they plan, work on or influence between six and 20, and an additional 22% said they are involved in between 21 and 50.

This survey also reveals exclusive insights into the regionality that has emerged as the United States emerges from the pandemic. Over the past approximately year and a half, variations in everything from climate to government regulations have contributed to differences in what the recovery looks like in different cities, and how both venues and organizations are adapting. Aventri offers the most in-depth insight in the industry of these highly granular operational distinctions.



Although Caution Is a Key Watchword, Optimism For Recovery Abounds

Research indicating the comfort level of organizations and their audiences, key concerns and predictions for the future offer a wide-ranging road map of what the events industry can expect to unfold over the next several months. This hesitancy makes it highly likely that virtual and hybrid meeting models will be integral parts of the mix for some time to come — suggesting a pressing need for both technology and skills that can bridge the in-person and digital divide

Broadly speaking, most events pros surveyed perceive a light at the end of the long, dark pandemic tunnel. That optimism draws on advances in public health metrics, but also on the adoption of sophisticated tools that can make navigating this new normal as seamless as possible for all stakeholders of an event.

Survey respondents' positive expectations, though, were tempered by some very real concerns and challenges, primarily triggered by the uncertainty that still lies in the months ahead. Aventri's robust technological tools and consultative expertise offer event organizers cutting-edge solutions for mitigating these pain points.



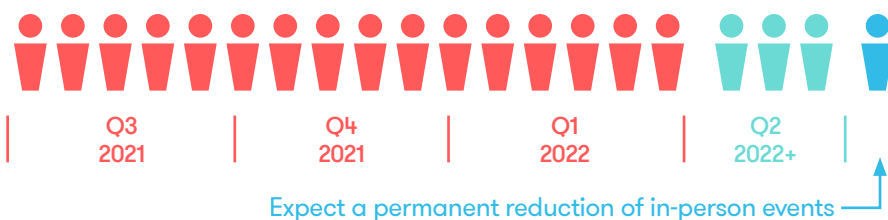
Road Back Could Be Long, But We'll Get There (Eventually)

An analysis of the topline survey results finds that nearly four in five (78%) of survey respondents anticipate a full rebound of their pre-pandemic roster of in-person events by Q1 2022. Those respondents were roughly evenly divided on which quarter will see that rebound, with 27% answering Q3 2021, 24% saying Q4 2021 and the remaining 27% choosing Q1 2022.

An additional 16% of respondents said they don't anticipate returning to a pre-pandemic event schedule until Q2 2022 or later, and 5% said they expect a permanent reduction of in-person events.

Within these results were indications of a geographical-ly-oriented divide. Respondents expecting a permanent

78% anticipate a full return of pre-pandemic roster of in-person events by Q1 2022



Southern Spotlight

Aventri's in-depth analysis of responses provided by event pros in Florida, Georgia and Texas (42 in total) found that not a single person said they expected a permanent drop in event numbers. Four Florida respondents picked the time frame of Q2 2022 or later, while none of the respondents from Georgia or Texas chose a target date that late.

reduction of in-person events were concentrated along Eastern Seaboard, West Coast and Canada. None of those respondents came from states in the Southern and Midwestern regions of the U.S.

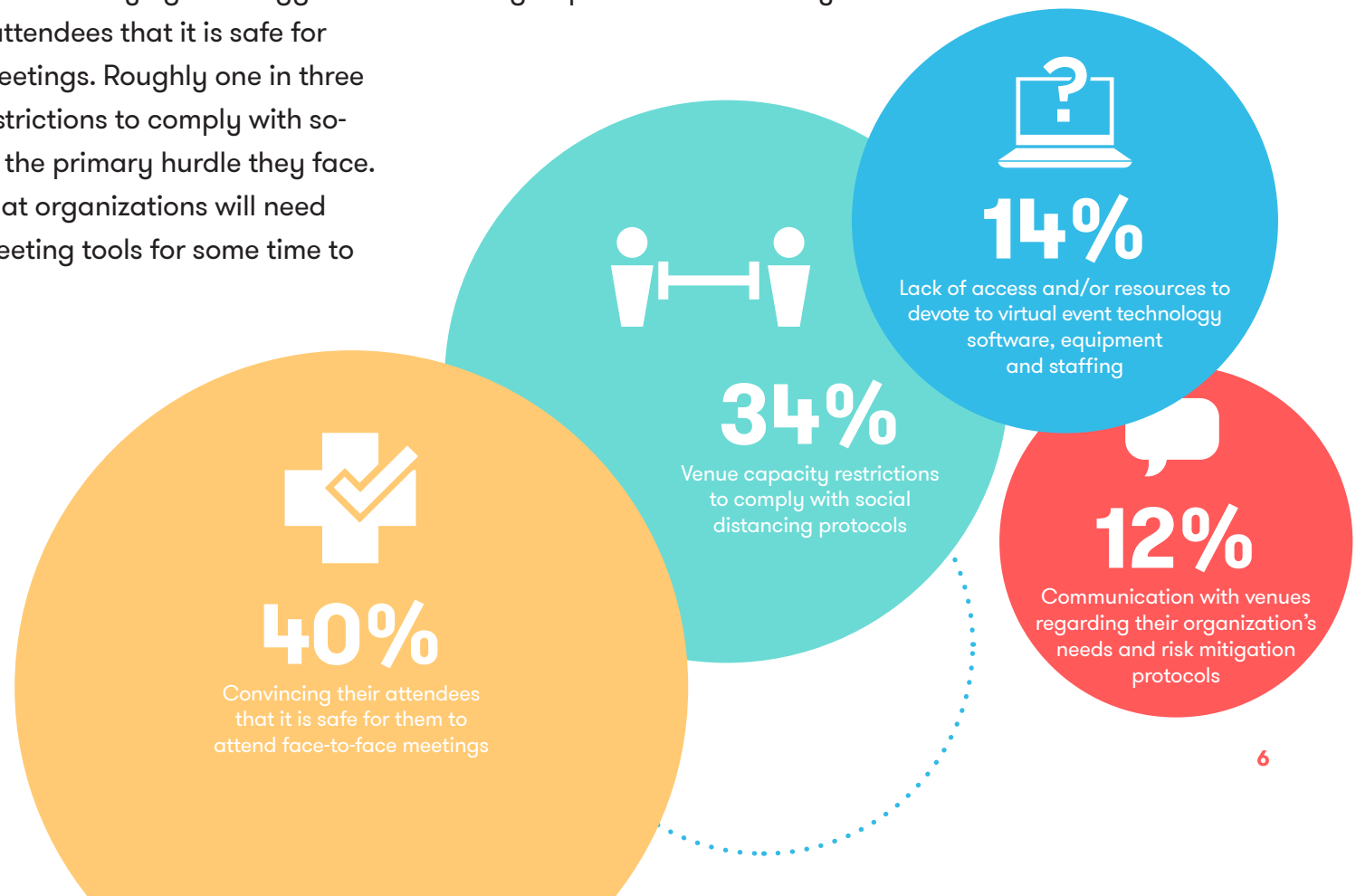
Successful resumption of live events depends on the right partnerships. For example, Aventri worked with Informa Markets to produce a live event at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando this spring. Informa chose Aventri on the strength of its digital and in-person interface that gave attendees a safe, seamless and stress-free experience, with tools like contactless check-in, QR-enabled badges and touch-free lead retrieval.

Event Organizers Identify Key Pain Points and Areas of Need

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a number of new challenges and concerns, with safety and technological equipment and protocols topping event organizers' list of frustrations.

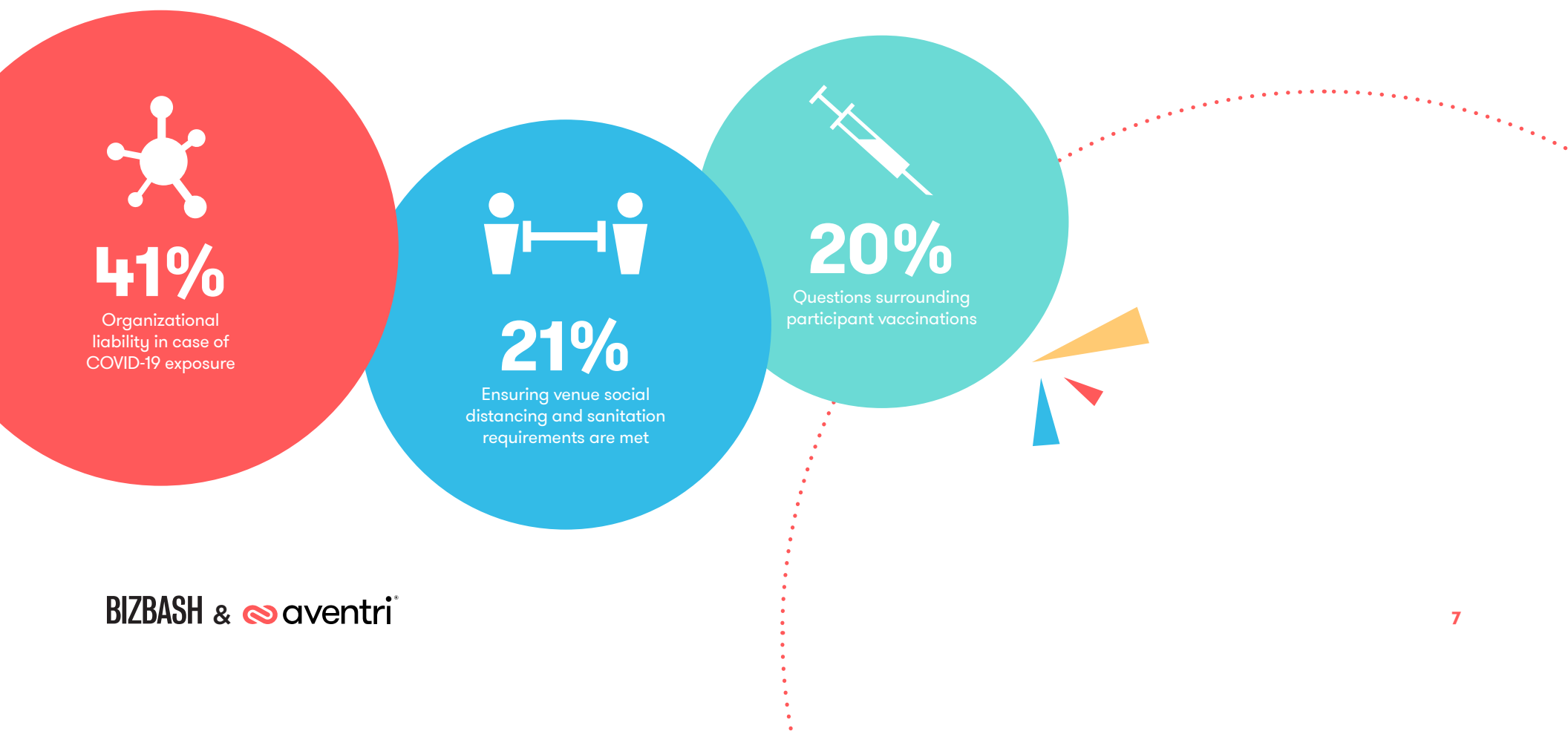
Personal safety concerns were the top site selection barrier event organizers identified, with 40% saying their biggest challenge is convincing their attendees that it is safe for them to attend face-to-face meetings. Roughly one in three (34%) said venue capacity restrictions to comply with social distancing protocols were the primary hurdle they face. These responses both imply that organizations will need to invest in hybrid or digital meeting tools for some time to come in the future.

Knowledge and communication were challenges for some: 14% identified a lack of access and/or resources to devote to virtual event technology software, equipment and staffing as their biggest stumbling block, and 12% said communication with venues regarding their organization's needs and the mitigation protocols required to ensure their group's health and safety.



Among operational and on-site concerns, more than four in 10 (41% of) respondents said organizational liability was their greatest threat should there be any exposure to COVID-19 at one of their events. Approximately one in five (21%) said their greatest need was ensuring that venue social distancing and sanitation requirements were appropriate, while roughly the same number (20%) said their most pressing concern was questions surrounding participant vaccinations.

The high degree of concern around liability indicates that, moving forward, event organizers will need to take steps and invest in systems that can both mitigate transmission and trace it if an infectious person does slip through the cracks. Aventri's contactless badging lets organizers monitor capacities, regulate attendance and even facilitate contact tracing with granular location-based data capabilities.



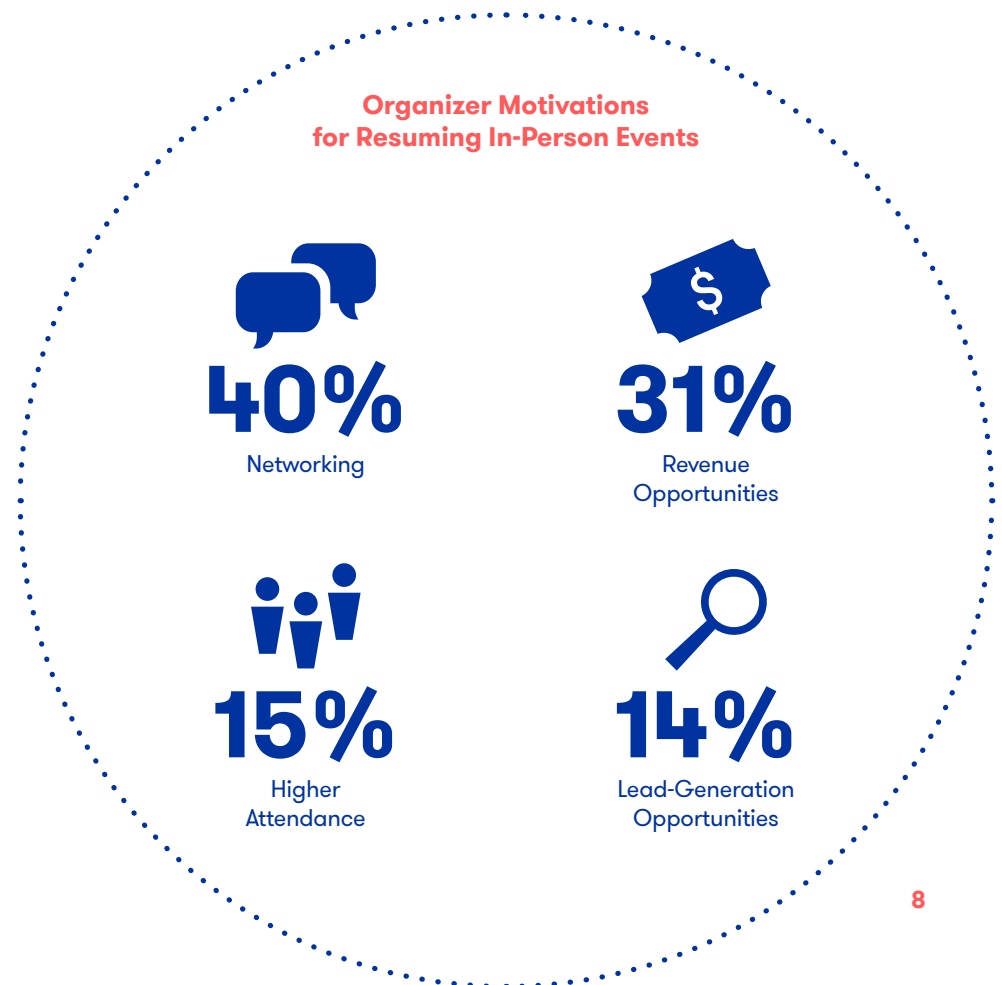
Organizations and Attendees Are Motivated to Resume In-Person Events

Despite the concerns detailed above, it's clear that there is a strong imperative for in-person events to resume, with planners listing both quantitative and qualitative benefits face-to-face events confer.

Primary reasons organizers are seeking to resume in-person events varied, but all had a common thread: All seek to resume interactions that have been disrupted or stymied by the pandemic. Organizational imperatives revolved around two factors: Connections and finances — reasons cited by 71% of meeting and event planners.

Two in five (40% of) survey respondents said networking was the primary motivation for the resumption of in-person meetings. The next largest category was the 31% who said the biggest reason was “greater revenue opportunity from registration fees, exhibit booth sales, sponsorships, etc.” While goals pertaining to engagement and revenue can be accomplished and exceeded in virtual or hybrid formats, it takes a dedicated investment of financial and human capital. Meeting and event planners need the right tools and the right team.

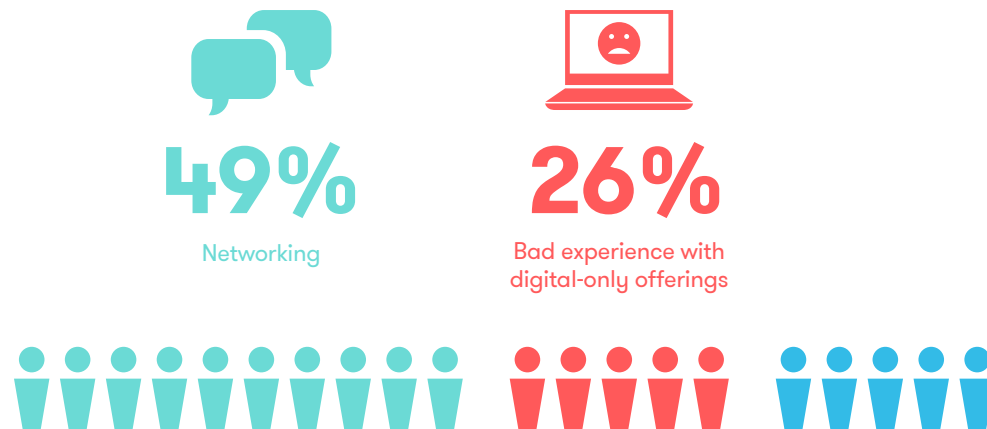
The remaining 29% of respondents citing their top motivation were split almost evenly between the 15% who said they could draw higher attendance at in-person events and the 14% who said live events yielded better lead-generation opportunities.



Survey respondents said networking also was a powerful incentive for their attendees to want to return to face-to-face events, with nearly half (49%) listing this as the top motivation. Just over one in four (26%), however, said that the main reason their constituents want a return to in-person meetings is because they had undergone a poor experience with a virtual event in the past, citing “Poor engagement with[and/or] hard to use digital-only offerings.”

This result echoes one of organizers’ key pain points; namely, the struggle to obtain and use virtual and hybrid event technology. Aventri analysis found that, while digital events hold the powerful advantage of being able to enhance the footprint of an event and expand its reach, people are still more comfortable conducting sales activity and executive decision making in a face-to-face format.

Attendee Motivations for Resuming In-Person Events



Organizations Are Adapting to a New Set of Norms, Expectations

COVID-19 prompted meeting and event planners to make a number of changes to their site selection processes. At the top of the list: tech. Roughly half of the survey respondents (49%) said they are asking more questions and have added or enhanced requirements for on-site technology and internet connectivity in order to facilitate elements of remote or virtual meetings.

Organizers adapting in-person meetings to this new reality have new needs: For instance, they might want — or be required — to make distancing and hygiene information, equipment and supplies available at registration. Signage for wayfinding while observing social distancing protocols, up-to-date advisories and protocols around things like masking and other real-time information has to be easily conveyed to attendees. Making sure a venue has the capability to perform this is a critical piece of this “new normal.”

In addition, technology requirements may have changed: Event planners need to know that their chosen venue will be able to deliver robust Internet connectivity, fast and secure Wi-Fi and be able to facilitate streaming operations conducted by the organizer or a third-party technology firm if the event is to be streamed or recorded. Planners need to work with partners that can ensure venues can deliver.

Nearly as many (44%) said they are limiting bookings to conform to safety and health requirements, and 25% are booking smaller room blocks than prior to the pandemic. In spite of the difficulty traveling across international borders, only 16% of respondents said they had eliminated overseas events. Somewhat surprisingly, one in five respondents reported no changes to their site selection process. Among those who provided their location in the survey, respondents came from 22 states — reflecting a broad diversity of states and regions — as well as Canada.

How are planners adjusting their site selection process?



Enhanced tech requirements for virtual elements (49%)



Limiting bookings for safety and health reasons (44%)



Booking smaller room blocks (25%)



Eliminating overseas events (16%)



No changes (20%)

Once on-site, organizers are implementing a number of health and hygiene protocols in accordance with the current recommendations of public health officials and state and local regulations. Since these can change rapidly, especially on the regulatory side, planners need to be able to respond quickly with tools that enable them to easily update processes for registration and document verification, contact-tracing, capacity tracking and other functions.

Nearly all of the survey respondents indicate that they have implemented one or more health and safety protocols. More than four in five (83%) promote social distancing when possible, 80% have implemented mask-wearing and slightly less than half (47%) have added on-site temperature checks.

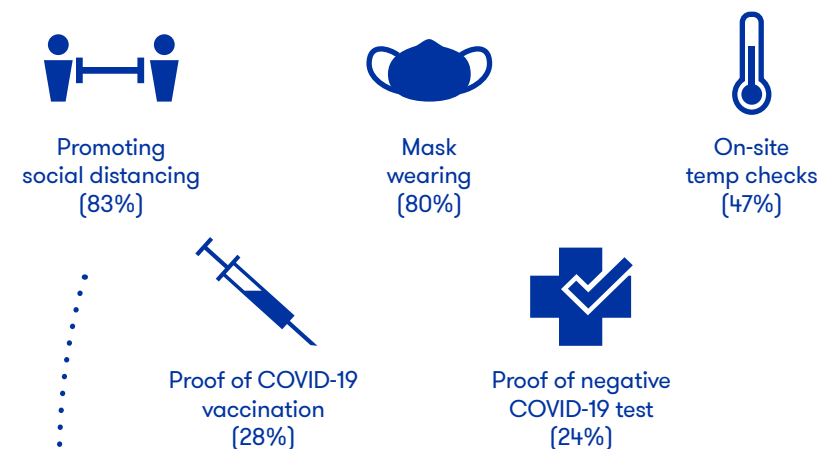
Just over one in four (28%) require proof of COVID-19 vaccination, and 24% require proof of a recent negative COVID-19 test. The onus for procuring this documentation is largely going to be the responsibility of attendees, with only 18% of respondents indicating that they plan to offer on-site rapid COVID-19 testing.

Vaccine requirements emerge as a point of divergence: While the responses were largely homogenous regardless

of where the person was located, Aventri analysis detected some regional variation among respondents from different states on the topic of vaccine requirements. A comparison of five populous states revealed differences — although not necessarily along the lines that might be expected.

Respondents from both Florida and Georgia were less likely to require vaccinations. California and New York — as well as Texas — indicated that they require vaccines at a considerably higher rate than the national average, with more than one-third of respondents answering in the affirmative. GA and FL respondents were far less likely to choose this response.

What changes are organizers implementing on site?



Hybrid Events Emerging as the New Post-Pandemic Frontier

It is becoming clear now that even once in-person events have resumed, developing a digital strategy will be a significant component of planning each of those meetings. Face-to-face events will resume over the next year, but uncertainties around public health directives both at home and abroad as well as the epidemiological trajectory of the coronavirus as it mutates all point to the need for integrating remote-attendance solutions to in-person meetings for the foreseeable future.

Organizations pivoting to virtual meetings in the early months of the pandemic often did so in a piecemeal fashion — an understandable outcome given the suddenness and severity of the pandemic's descent. Using a patchwork of partial solutions from multiple providers is inefficient and delivers a user experience that is inelegant at best, unusable at worst. Poor hybrid execution will alienate stakeholders — whether that is attendees, buyers, sponsors or speakers — and make it more challenging for organizations to reach their revenue and engagement benchmarks in the future.



There is a profound need for tactics and tools to facilitate engagement between on-site and virtual attendees. This is often loosely described as “hybrid” event production, but that now-ubiquitous term can mean different things to different people.

Hybrid event management should be approached and executed as a strategy rather than merely viewing it as a medium by which to deliver a facsimile of the face-to-face event experience. Implementing a strategic hybrid events management solution means seeing the apps, programs and functions you use as more than the sum of their parts.

Data collection and recording is an important part of managing site selection, digital integration and on-site oversight. Aventri’s suite of intuitive tools can easily integrate with and augment other technological tools. It is possible to offer contactless registration and check-in, digital and NFC-enabled badging that deliver a seamless experience to attendees. For organizers, easy-to-use location tracking and beaconing allow on-site staff to perform real-time capacity monitoring and access control.

Addressing both organizations’ as well as attendees’ top frustrations with the digital experience and the constraints placed on face-to-face events by the pandemic demands world-class tactics and technology. And for organizers, addressing the skills and knowledge gap many report when it comes to working with hybrid event management technology is the key to solving both organizational challenges and attendee disengagement.



Conclusion: Planning For the Future of Live Events Means Preparing Now

It is clear that both organizational and attendee sentiment are evolving and remain very much in flux despite the progress being made to resume face-to-face meetings and events.

Event organizers are relying on technology more than ever before to manage a growing list of requirements: Seamlessly connecting remote attendees to breakout sessions, contact-tracing and verifying that attendees have followed the proper health protocols before attending face-to-face events, and making sure that sponsors, investors and other financial stakeholders are able to achieve the returns they expect.

Articulating the primary goal of the event in collaboration with a best-in-class hybrid events management platform provider improves the odds that events will be supported by the kind of technological infrastructure that can drive the desired outcome.

Achieving this dictates the need to partner with providers of best-in-class tools as well as consultative expertise to help face-to-face meetings survive and thrive as the live events industry recovers from the blow of the pandemic.

Organizers need a hybrid event management platform vendor with a robust suite of flexible, scalable offerings. To see how Aventri's best-in-class solution can deliver on that promise for your next virtual, hybrid or in-person event, [click here](#).