

Report

Driving Event Value in 2026

2026 Benchmark: How your peers are navigating the tension between efficiency, attendee experience, and the business impact of events.



The Engagement Paradox

As we move through 2026, the events industry stands at a critical juncture. Corporate event teams are facing a unique paradox: while the pressure to demonstrate business value has never been higher, the primary focus for most professionals remains firmly rooted in "soft" metrics like attendee satisfaction rather than hard revenue attribution.

The 2026 State of Events Value Survey reveals a landscape where event professionals are striving to balance the art of experience with the science of data. The results paint a picture of an industry that values human connection above all else but struggles to translate that connection into the bottom-line metrics that leadership demands.



Key Findings

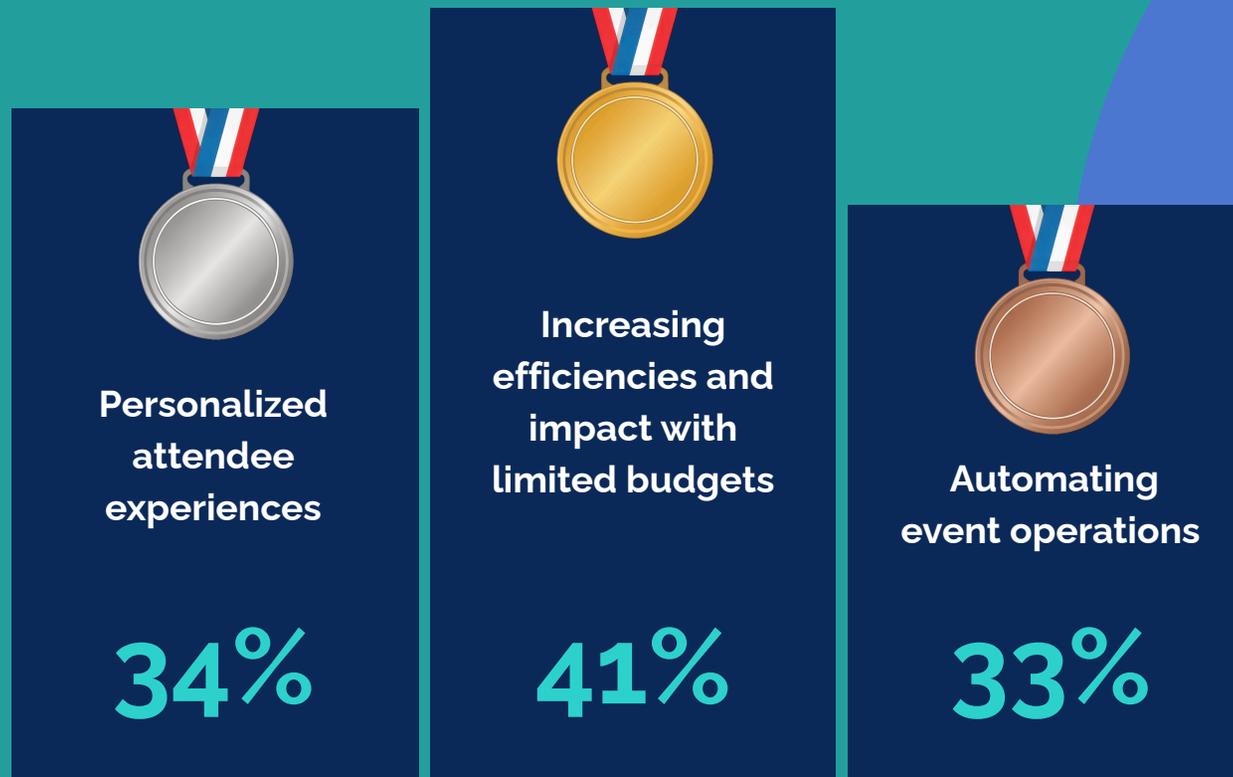
- ✓ **Engagement is the North Star:** A resounding 41.7% of teams rank attendee engagement and satisfaction as their top success metric—more than double those who prioritize ROI (18.5%) or New Leads (17.6%).
- ✓ **The ROI "Black Box":** Despite the need for efficiency, nearly half of all teams (43.1%) admit they struggle to connect event engagement to revenue pipeline. A further 33.9% lack the basic tools or data required to show ROI at all.
- ✓ **The Integration Divide:** The industry is split on technology maturity. While 29.6% of organizations enjoy fully automated integration with their sales stacks, a nearly equal portion (25.9%) operate in data silos with no connection to CRM systems.
- ✓ **The Efficiency Mandate:** Looking ahead, the top priority for 2026 is not growth at all costs, but "doing more with less." 41.1% of professionals cite increasing efficiency with limited budgets as their primary goal, overshadowing AI adoption, which remains mixed.

This report explores these friction points and offers a roadmap for closing the gap between engagement and verifiable business value.

Top Event Priorities for 2026

Budgets are tight and events need to show ROI. However, marketers and event planners are investing in personalized attendee experiences.

What will be your top event priorities in 2026?

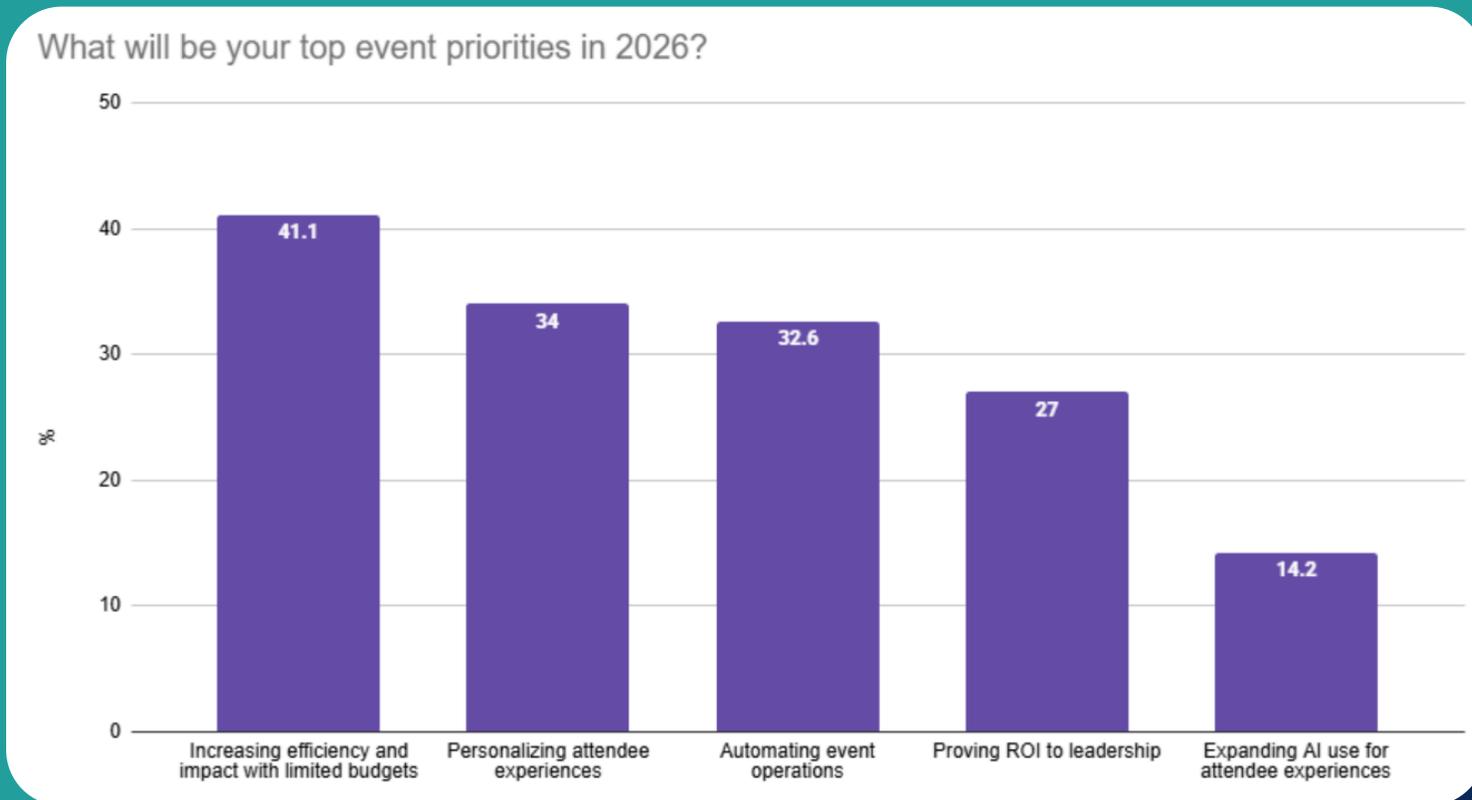


2026 is the year to be the hero who can show Event ROI AND deliver exceptional attendee experiences!

Top Event Priorities in 2026

When asked to identify their most critical strategic focus for 2026, the market spoke with a singular voice: efficiency is paramount. A leading **41.1% of event professionals ranked "Increasing efficiency and impact with limited budgets" as their top priority**, signaling that the era of growth at any cost has been replaced by a discipline of "doing more with less."

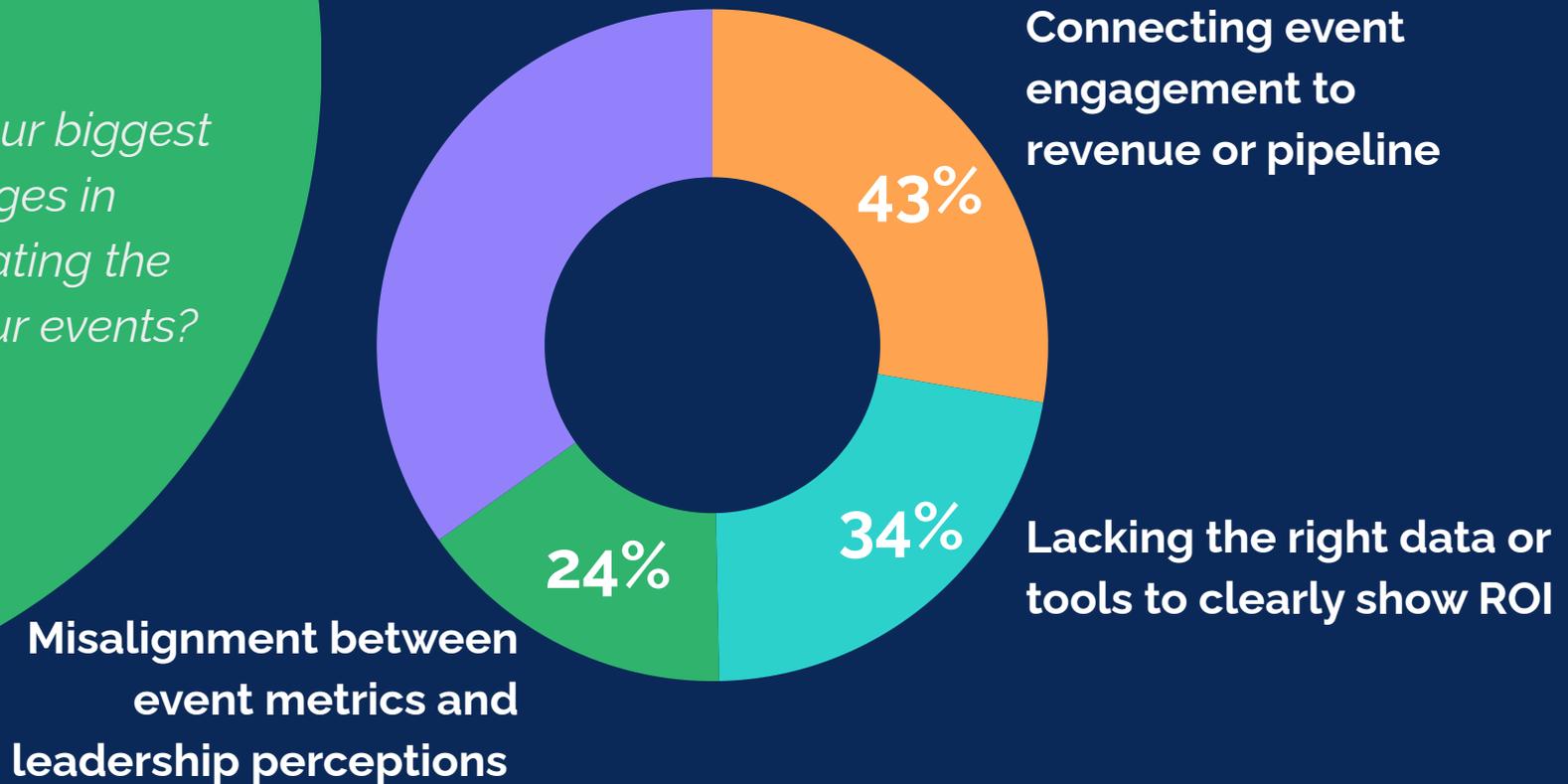
This financial pragmatism, however, stands in direct tension with the **second-highest priority: Personalizing attendee experiences (34%)**. This creates a unique pressure cooker for event teams, who are now tasked with delivering hyper-tailored, high-touch experiences without the luxury of expanding resources—a challenge that will likely drive the next wave of technology adoption and process automation.



Demonstrating Event Value

Demonstrating Value is hard. Connecting the dots, getting the right data and executive alignment are the biggest challenges:

What are your biggest challenges in demonstrating the value of your events?

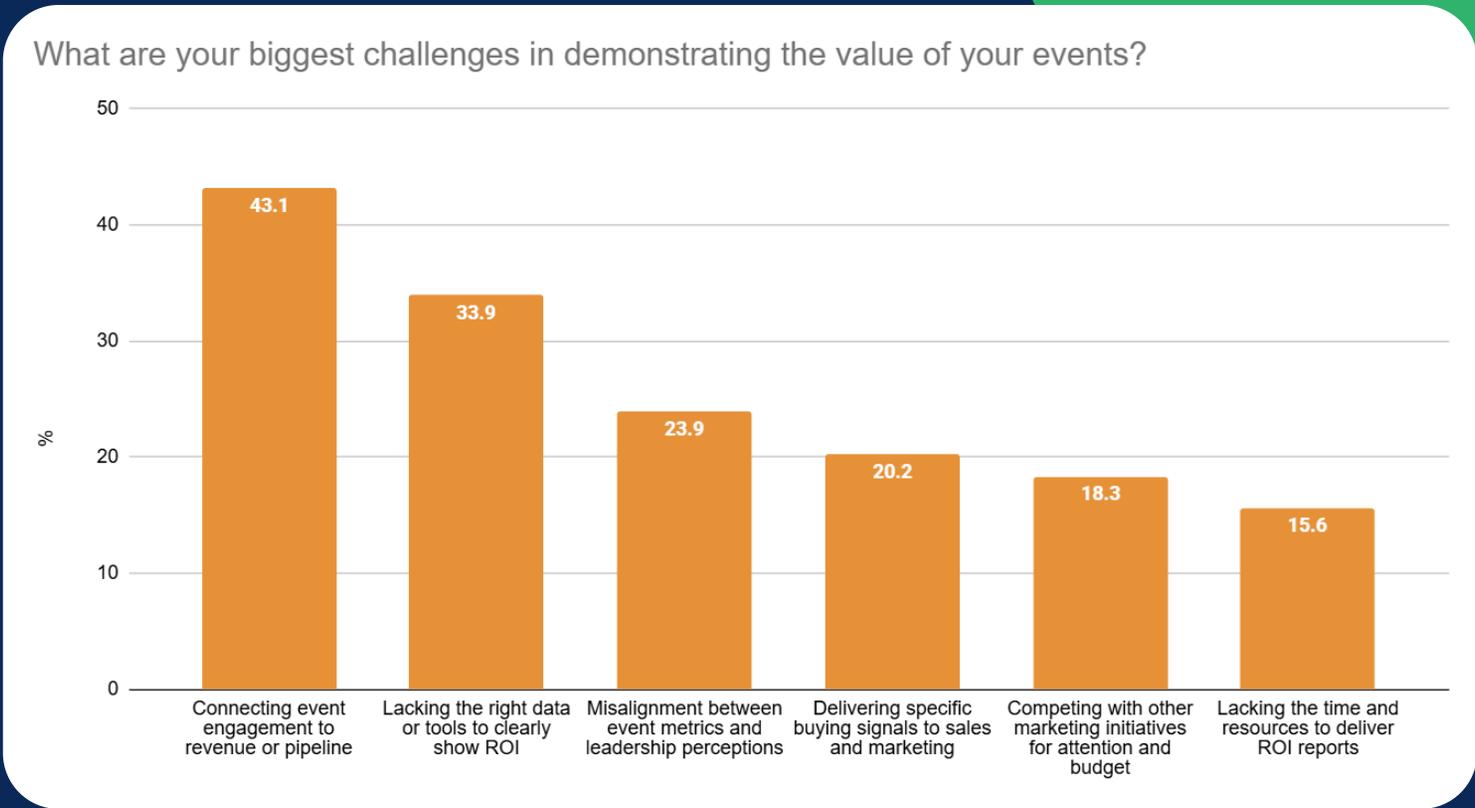


It should not be that hard - look for Event Tech that does the heavy lifting and connects engagement to outcomes!

Demonstrating Value of Events

Engagement is often the preferred metric simply because proving financial ROI remains frustratingly difficult. Our survey highlights a **pervasive "ROI Disconnect"**: the top hurdle for teams is connecting engagement to revenue (43.1%), followed closely by a lack of necessary data or tools (33.9%) and misalignment with leadership (23.9%).

This **"Engagement Trap"** is a consequence of technical limitations, not choice. Professionals aren't avoiding ROI; they simply can't measure it. With one-third of the industry lacking basic tracking tools, events remain a "black box" expense, viewed by executives as a cost center rather than a brand builder. Until this data gap closes, justifying budgets and defending against cuts will remain a critical challenge.

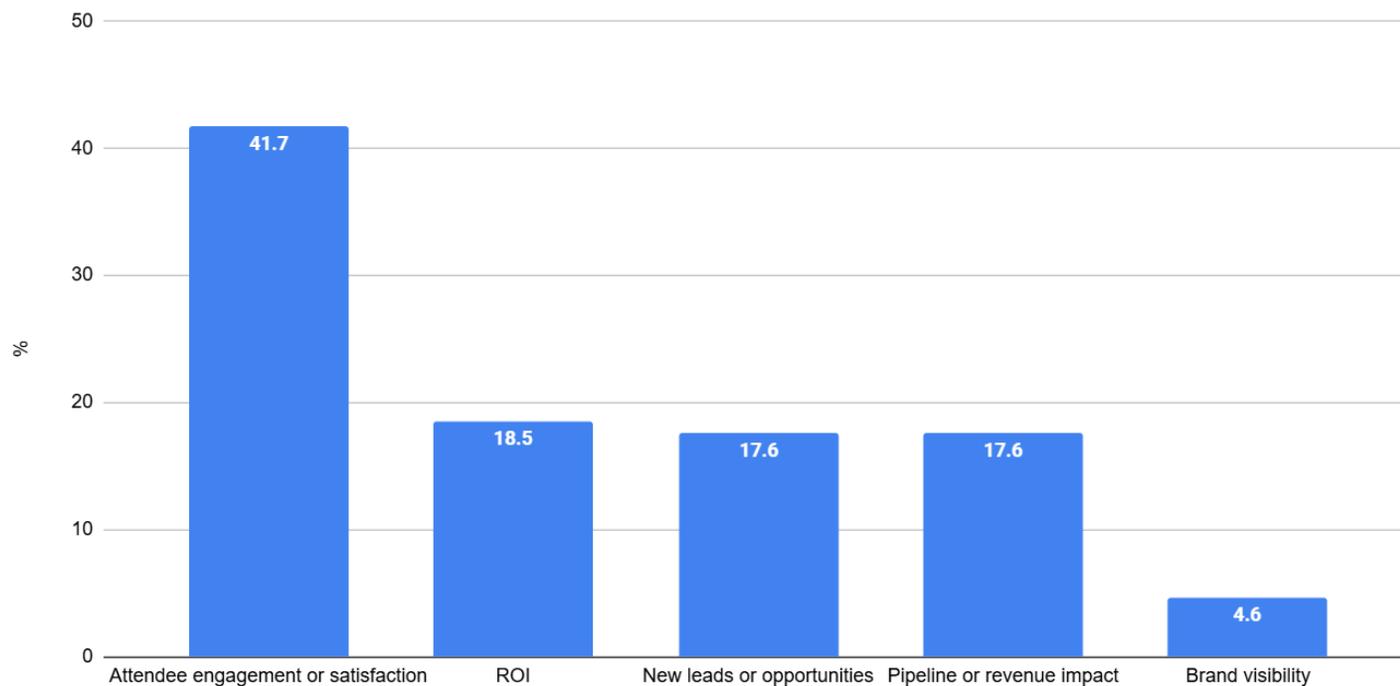


Prioritizing Engagement Over Revenue

In a data-driven era, one might expect ROI to rule. Yet, our 2026 data reveals that **Attendee Engagement and Satisfaction (41.7%)** is the primary success indicator, dwarfing **ROI (18.5%)** and **New Leads (17.6%)**.

This focus on immediate experience over delayed revenue attribution creates a **strategic risk**. When nearly 42% of teams prioritize "feelings" while executives look for "figures," a **misalignment gap widens**. Engagement is a vital precursor to value, but treating it as the final metric rather than a leading indicator leaves budgets vulnerable. **Leaders must reframe satisfaction not as the destination, but as the fuel driving downstream ROI and pipeline growth.**

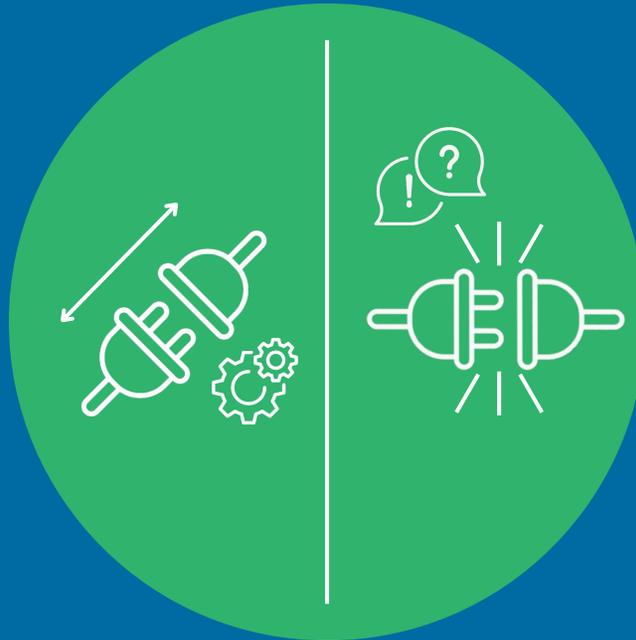
When evaluating event success, which metric matters most to your team?



Connecting Event Data to the Martech Stack

Many organizations are still working on integrating event data with the rest of Martech.

30% fully integrated with Martech stack



26% not connected at all

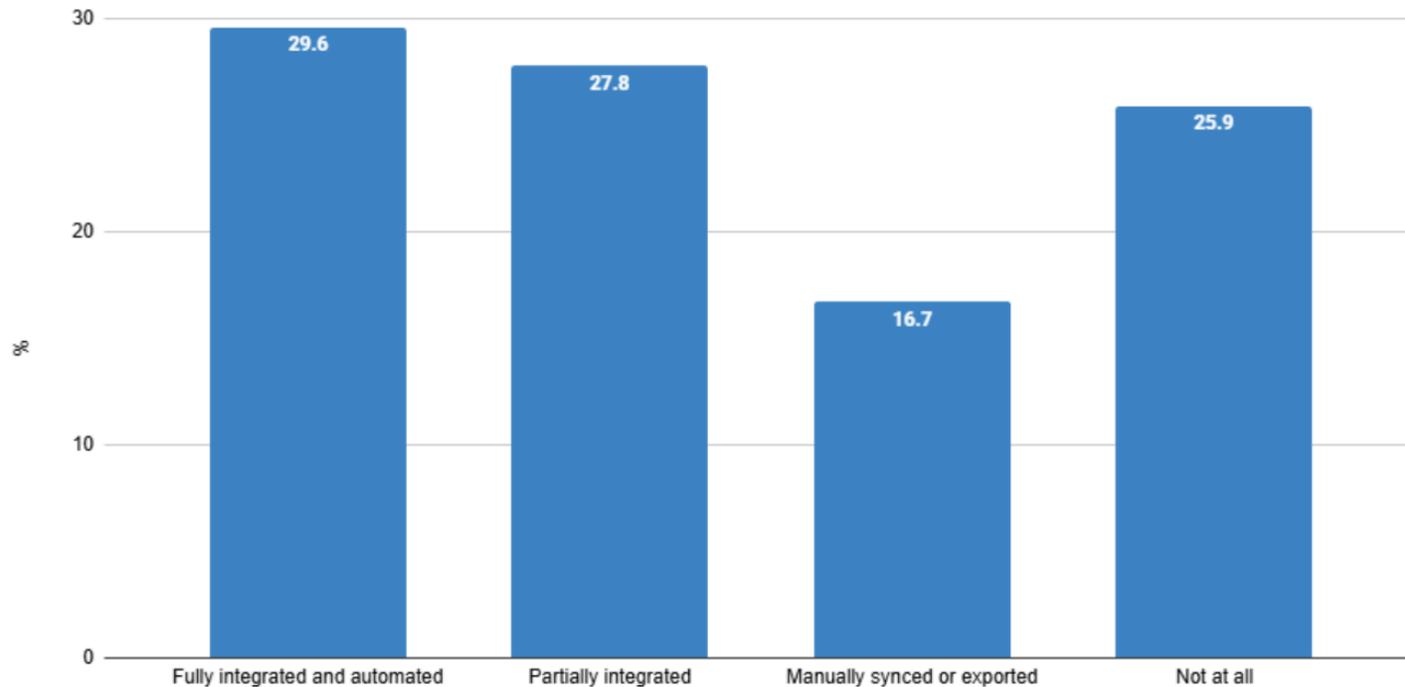
*If you haven't already, just get it done this year.
The right Event Tech can help!*

The Integration Divide

The root of the ROI struggle often lies in the tech stack. Our survey reveals a **sharp divide between fully integrated ecosystems and isolated data islands**: 29.6% of teams are automated with sales systems, while 25.9% remain completely disconnected.

This "Integration Gap" creates a two-tier industry. Integrated leaders gain a competitive edge, triggering immediate follow-ups and leveraging critical intent data across the stack. In contrast, disconnected teams rely on slow, manual spreadsheets, which explains the heavy reliance on "Attendee Satisfaction." Without the ability to track the financial value of an attendee, teams are forced to simply track their happiness.

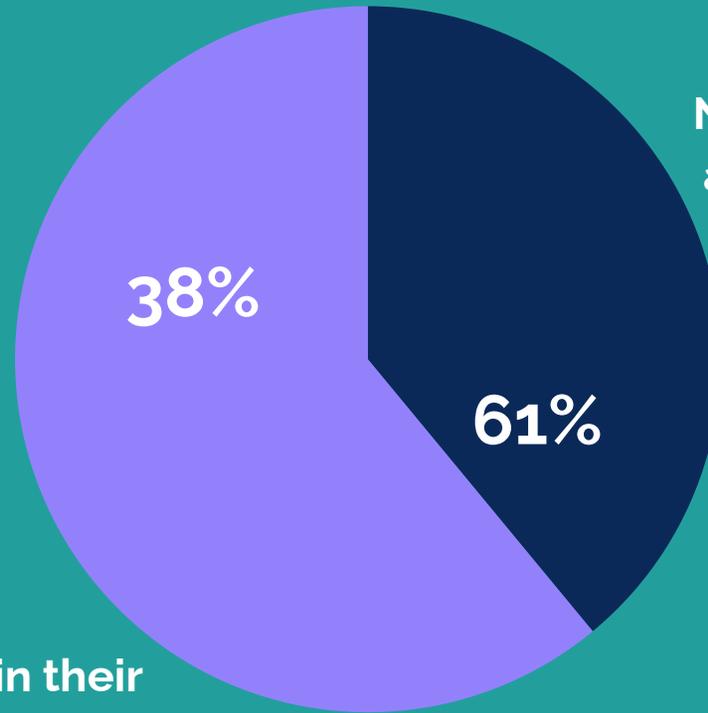
How connected is your event data with your marketing and sales tech stack (CRM, MAP, etc.)?



2026 will see innovators deliver AI-powered attendee experiences

Will your attendees see AI-powered experiences in 2026?

Will use AI in their attendee experience



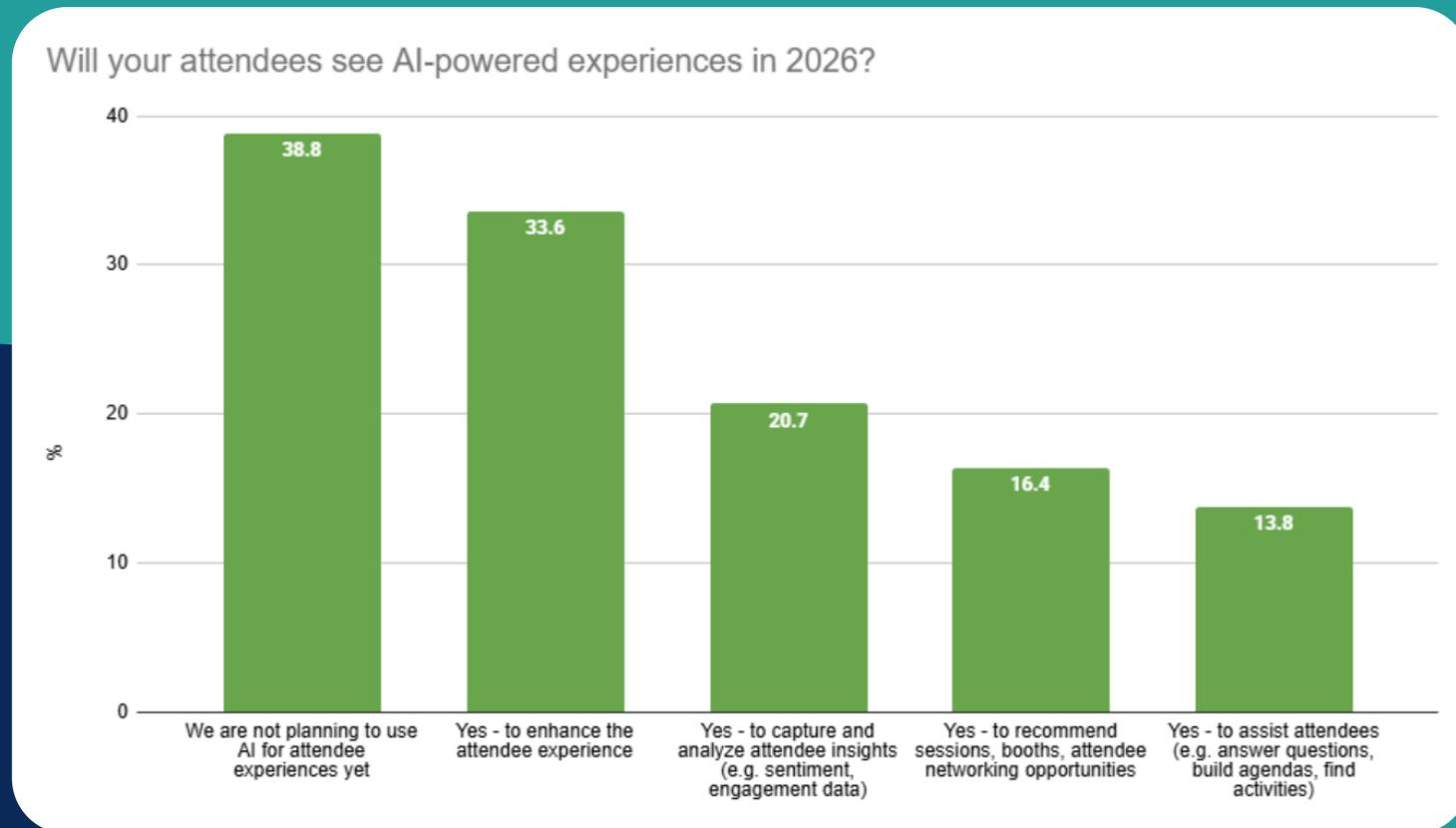
No plans to use AI in their attendee experience yet

Your attendee are using AI daily, they expect your events to use it too!

The Future of Attendee Experience is with AI

Despite the rising use of AI in everyday life, actual AI adoption in events remains cautious. While a combined **61% of teams plan to leverage AI** to enhance attendee experiences in some way, shape, or form, **a surprising 38.8% have no plans to use it in 2026**.

This split suggests a significant barrier to entry, likely driven by budget constraints or unclear use cases. However, **early adopters are positioned to solve the "efficiency vs. personalization" paradox**. By automating logistics and tailoring content at scale, they can deliver high-touch experiences without increasing headcount, leaving **non-adopters at risk of falling behind rising attendee expectations**.



Closing the Value Gap

The 2026 landscape is defined by a clear tension: **event professionals value human connection, but the business demands hard data.** To bridge this divide and secure future budgets, teams must move beyond "feelings" to prove financial impact.

Action Plan for 2026

✅ **Automate Your Data Flow:** If you are among the 25.9% of "disconnected" teams, prioritize integration. Manually moving data to your CRM is a vulnerability; automated flows are the only way to attribute revenue at scale. 🏠 [Read more](#)

✅ **Reframe Your Metrics:** Do not abandon engagement, but treat it as a leading indicator. Map satisfaction scores directly to pipeline velocity to show leadership how happy attendees become loyal customers. 🏠 [Read more](#)

✅ **Pilot AI for Efficiency:** Address the "efficiency vs. personalization" paradox by starting small with AI. Use tools to automate agendas or content matching, delivering the high-touch experience attendees demand without expanding your team. 🏠 [Read more](#)



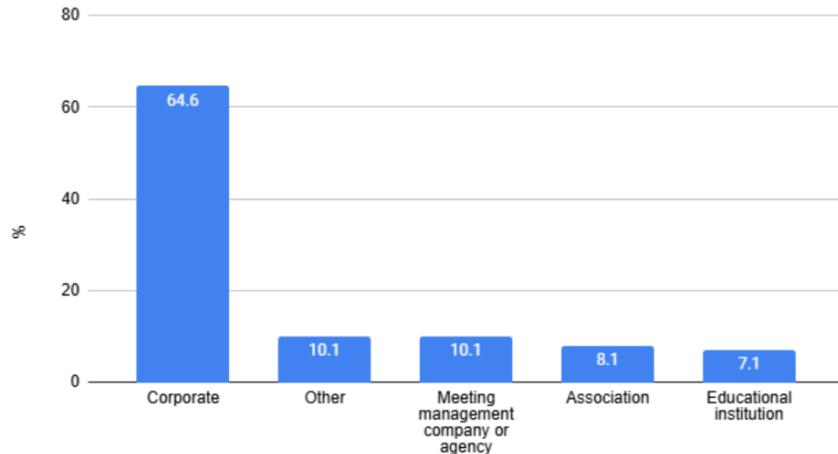
About Certain

Certain is the AI-powered event technology partner that turns exceptional attendee experiences into measurable revenue. Built for scale, Certain captures real-time engagement and transforms it into buying signals—empowering teams to identify intent, personalize outreach, and accelerate sales with enterprise-grade security.



Facts about the 2026 Survey

What type of organization do you represent ?



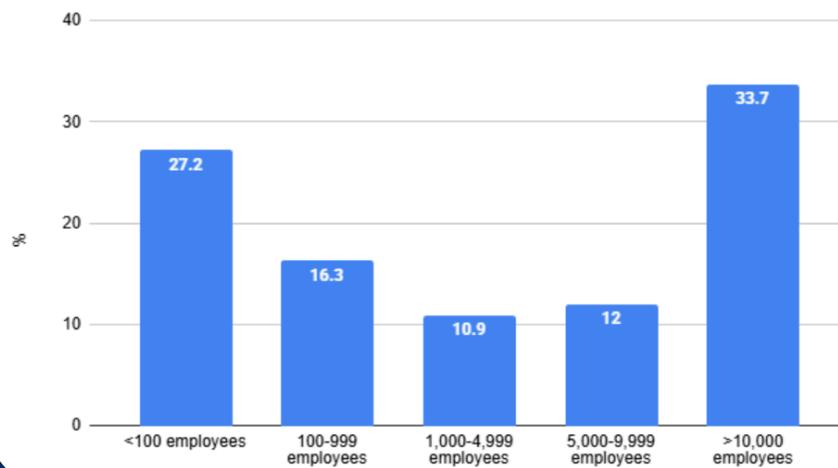
The Survey was conducted Nov-Dec 2025.

Audience (n=145): mostly large corporates and event professionals.

Read More:

certain.com/2026-Event-Value

How large is your organization ?



What best describes your role ?

