

# Redefining Value for Today's **Exhibitors & Sponsors**

Volume 2, Virtual Event Satisfaction  
September 2020

**T**his survey, the second in a series focused on exhibitor and sponsor perspectives, identifies the exhibitor and sponsor community's level of satisfaction with virtual conferences and tradeshows. It specifically measures the effectiveness of virtual events in the marketplace and how well these events support exhibitor and sponsor business objectives.

Over a 1-week period in August 2020, Tradeshow Logic surveyed 12,806 individuals at companies who exhibit at and sponsor events across diverse industries. The survey was completed by 343 respondents from 21 shows including heavy participation from the manufacturing and medical sectors.

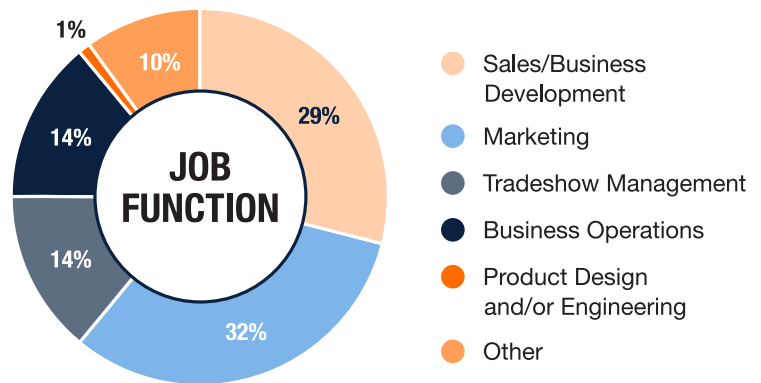


The current scale and scope of virtual events is new to exhibitors and sponsors; it's new to show organizers and to the platform developers. All parties involved are facing a steep learning curve under tight deadlines.

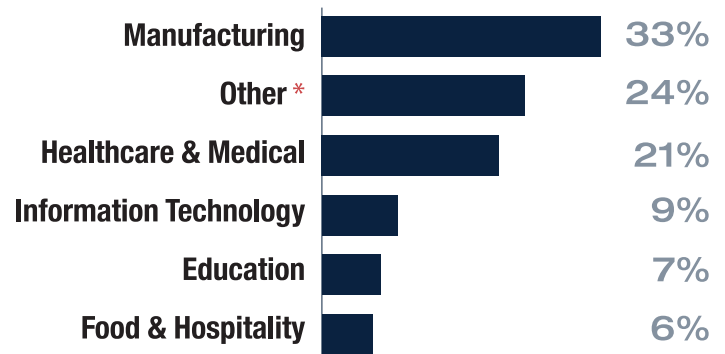
Considering these circumstances, it's not surprising that the majority of opinions recorded about the current logistics and value of virtual conferences and tradeshows indicate less than favorable results. Overall, exhibitors and sponsors are struggling to find satisfactory engagement with customers and prospects.

Conferences and tradeshows exist to provide a forum for networking, education and new product and service introduction. The virtual experience must evolve to meet these demands; it must offer stronger buyer-seller connections and 1:1 engagement opportunities in order to satisfy constituents and generate expected ROI.

## AUDIENCE ANALYSIS



## INDUSTRY



\* Includes agriculture/landscape, business, financial & legal, law enforcement, natural resources/environmental, pharmaceutical, safety and transportation.

## Top 4 Challenges Identified by Exhibitors & Sponsors

- #1** Not enough time to prepare content.
- #2** Burden of learning multiple virtual event platform technologies falls squarely on exhibitors.
- #3** Lack of participation inside the virtual exhibit hall + minimal engagement with customers/prospects.
- #4** Must find new ways to convey the value of products or services to connect with prospects.

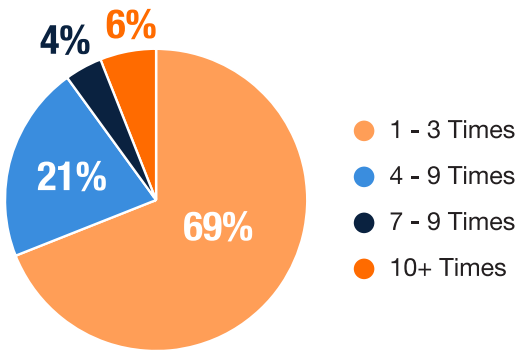
LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION

Since March 2020, has your organization participated as an exhibitor or sponsor in a virtual conference or tradeshow?

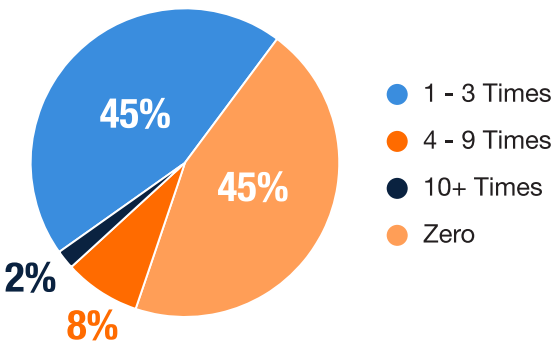
46% YES

54% NO

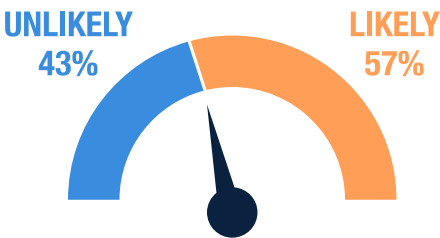
How many times since March 2020 has your organization participated in a virtual conference or tradeshow?



How many times does your organization expect to participate in a virtual conference or tradeshow in the next 12 months?



Based on recent experience, how likely is your organization to participate in more virtual conferences or tradeshows?



43%

of respondents who have participated in a virtual conference or tradeshow are unlikely to participate in more

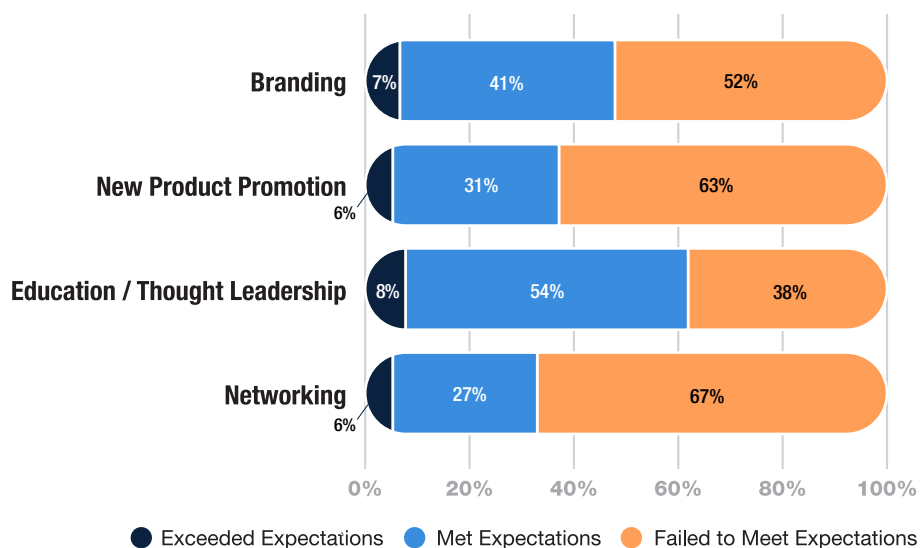
45%

of respondents who haven't yet participated in a virtual conference or tradeshow don't expect to during the next 12 months



## SATISFACTION WITH ACTIVATIONS/ENGAGEMENTS & OUTCOMES

How well have virtual conference(s) or tradeshow(s) in which your organization participated met your company's expectations for these activations/engagements?



### Respondents said...

"Virtual booths do not lend themselves to successful customer interactions in the same way in-person booths do. We've had more success with speaking slots for prospect engagement. Some platforms do not have easy lead capture for people that do visit or interact, which all but renders participation useless."

"We have to be at tradeshows. It's the only way to connect and get leads. I would be more excited about virtual tradeshows if I could actually get in front of the people I was looking for and was offered solutions to drive people to my booth – whether that be emails, texts, smoke signals... anything!"

TL  
TAKE  
AWAY

All exhibitors and sponsors have existing digital strategies (websites, e-blasts, webinars, social media), so your virtual event must offer a deeper and richer digital engagement experience than they can already propagate for themselves. The event must ensure that exhibitors and sponsors explicitly benefit from your aggregated audience in order for your brand/experience to remain relevant and valuable.

TL  
TAKE  
AWAY

Think hybrid all the time. Even when in-person events return in full force, you'll be expected to integrate some level of virtual engagement into the experience. Developing long-term strategies for utilizing virtual platforms throughout the year to drive multiple engagements and frequent buyer-seller interactions will only strengthen the value of your offering to your exhibitors and sponsors.

67%

of respondents who have participated in a virtual event said **networking** failed to meet their expectations

46%

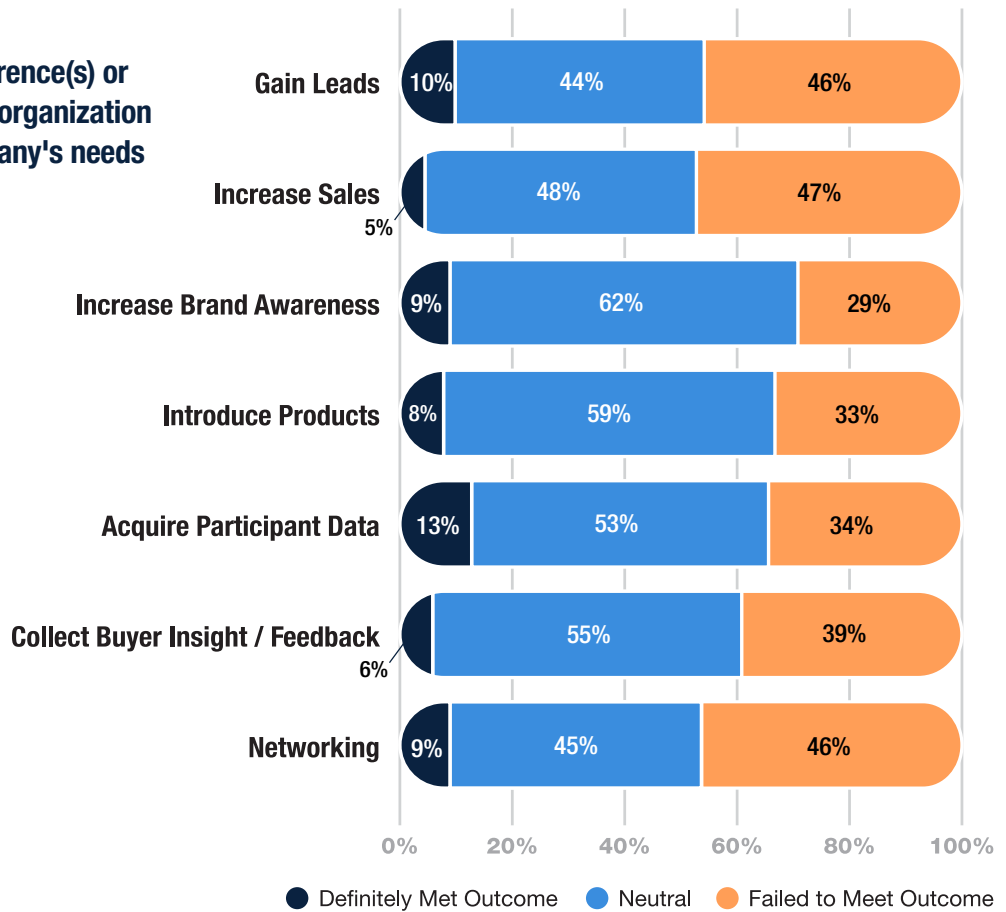
of respondents said they failed to **gain leads** at virtual events in which they participated

33%

of respondents said virtual events in which they participated did not meet their **new product introduction** outcomes

## SATISFACTION WITH ACTIVATIONS/ENGAGEMENTS & OUTCOMES

How well have virtual conference(s) or tradeshow(s) in which your organization participated met your company's needs for these outcomes?



**Respondents who *had* participated in a virtual conference or tradeshow identified these as some of their *biggest challenges*:**

“Lack of experience from the conference organizers; different platforms used at different times; lack of knowledge from our organization on how to execute; lack of time.”

“Not knowing all of the details far enough in advance – how many assets we can upload, document and image sizes, etc.”

“Lack of knowledge on the account manager side as they deal with new vendors and learn the new platform.”

“Training and logistical support for virtual booth creation is being done by tech people who know their own system but have no empathy for exhibitors...who don't have dedicated marketing people who can spend all day learning this stuff.”

**Respondents *preparing to participate* for the first time in a virtual conference or tradeshow anticipated these as their *biggest challenges*:**

“Time and resources to make compelling virtual experiences.”

“Getting the leadership team onboard to understand the importance of maintaining our presence.”

“The true personal connection and networking that occur at in-person shows seems hard to recreate virtually.”

“Our organization is worried we'll spend a lot of money and get no traffic in our virtual booth; that registrants will attend only their educational sessions and then log off without browsing the exhibits.”


## ENGAGEMENT AND FORMAT SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES



Associations and show organizers cannot simply replicate a live event on a virtual platform and expect equivalent success. Exhibitor and sponsor feedback is clear – these are two separate experiences, the same way shopping in a brick-and-mortar store is different from shopping online. The retailer and the products may be the same, but the experience of how you learn about what's for sale is not.


### CHALLENGE: CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT





 "The biggest challenge is getting our target audience engaged and interested in spending time in a virtual exhibit booth...The last thing [attendees] want to do is spend another hour staring at the screen to see information they can find on our website at any time."


### CHALLENGE: PRODUCT DEMOS



 "We have very technical equipment that is hard to demonstrate in a virtual setting, especially if the show platform is set where we have to supply exact materials such as logos, videos, etc. that fit the platform more than they fit our needs."

 "Our products are not easy to visualize. We have customized services and we need to speak with each individual customer to determine what they need."

 "In-person events allow for 'touch and feel' of products and they facilitate organic conversation about products, uses and benefits."

 "Our products are very tactile. We don't believe we'd see benefit from participating in a virtual conference."

### TL TAKE AWAY

Break the traditional model and start to integrate exhibitor solutions and introductions throughout the educational sessions. Take advantage of your captive audience to help drive engagement and awareness of your solution provider partners.

Delivering a balanced experience for education, networking and new product/service discovery is still the goal of every event – regardless of format. How these three components complement and support each other is where the new opportunity lies.

### TL TAKE AWAY

Successful virtual platforms and events will utilize artificial intelligence (AI) to help guide, prompt and direct guests to the right types of exhibitors and solutions. The same way Amazon suggests products or Netflix identifies your next binge-worthy series, the virtual conferences and

tradeshows that rely on data to identify and anticipate their audiences' needs and behaviors will become indispensable partners for driving new sales and growing businesses.

### TL TAKE AWAY

Can you blend the attributes of virtual and live events? Many respondents felt that their products needed to be seen to be sold. Can you help coordinate the delivery of product giveaways prior to or after your event?

## ENGAGEMENT AND FORMAT SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES



### CHALLENGE: UTILIZING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

*"We are still determining how to use conferences to our business development advantage. When we host an event, it is well attended and successful. When we are sponsoring or attending, it falls below expectations. Being allowed to contribute as thought leaders through panel discussions and presentations will be the most advantageous for us."*



As much as possible, offer your exhibitors and sponsors the opportunity to provide thought leadership or product demonstrations throughout the event.

Remember, your exhibitors and sponsors are often your industry's research, innovation and new product development specialists and their information is important to your audience. Embed that thought leadership into your scheduled programming. There are simple ways to denote CEM vs. non-CEM if that is an issue.

Confinement to the exhibit hall is often the biggest challenge for exhibitors and sponsors during an in-person event... so being free of those four walls in a virtual experience should be viewed as a unique opportunity to build stronger relationships with your industry partners. Think of your industry innovators!



Trying to recreate your tradeshow floor inside a virtual event platform won't satisfy your exhibitors or your attendees. Change your perspective – don't think of your show as an event. Instead, think of it as a strategic tool that intelligently connects buyers and sellers. Exhibitors continue to rely on associations and show organizers to deliver audience and to facilitate intelligent experiences that drive results so introduce unique experiences and drill down to find the right solutions.

### ***Respondents had this to say about the expense and reward of their virtual event experiences...***

“Virtual events share information and knowledge which is good, but you can get similar insights via other digital channels, whenever it suits you...I believe newsletters, Google and other digital channels are more efficient insight channels than virtual events.”

“[Virtual event platforms] are glorified webinars where attendees are going in for the education and leaving. This vertical needs to...develop meaningful sponsorships or they will lose all their sponsorship dollars along with lower registration fees.”

“As a small-sized company, it doesn't make sense for us to spend thousands of dollars to just get our materials posted on the tradeshow's website.”

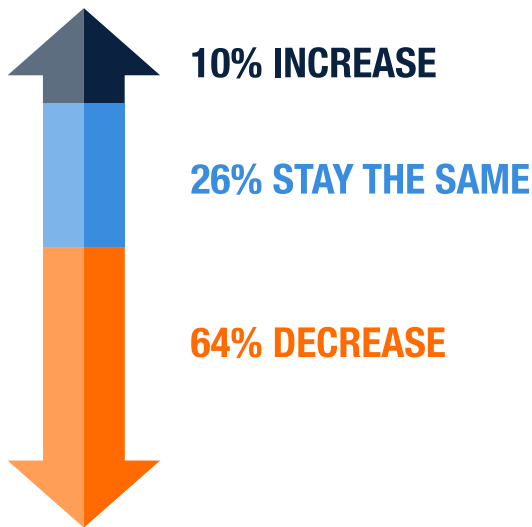
“As an exhibitor, I don't see any benefit in paying thousands of dollars – in a year where my marketing budget is already cash-strapped – to post what amounts to a new website in an online forum where I am not guaranteed any leads or interest. It's an untested market that, in my experience, offers nothing that my own website doesn't already do for me.”

## MARKETING EXPECTATIONS



Based on survey responses, it appears most marketing budgets will be decreasing at a time when exhibitors and sponsors realize the importance of creating new kinds of digital engagement tactics and strategies. What worked in the aisles of in-person events does not translate to device screens. This discrepancy may significantly influence the perceived value of virtual events moving forward.

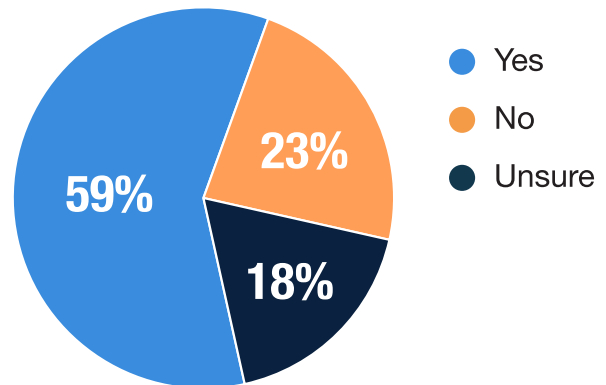
Respondents indicated these changes in marketing budgets over the next 12 months.



**59%**

of the respondents indicated plans to develop new marketing tactics and strategies for driving awareness and improving ROI at virtual events

Is your organization developing new marketing tactics and strategies for driving awareness and improving ROI in a virtual conference or tradeshow environment?



**TL  
TAKE  
AWAY**

Marketing matters, now more than ever. Exhibitors and sponsors agree it's difficult to get noticed inside a virtual environment, and it's incredibly easy for buyers to skip

over an online exhibit hall.

Focusing dollars on creative ways to “surprise and delight” customers and prospects is the key to increasing sales and generating leads. That means it's time to think outside the box – find ways to connect the physical with the digital environment; develop 1:1 engagement strategies; showcase your expertise and thought leadership; drive awareness before, during and after the event. Cutting budgets now may be detrimental to the long-term value of virtual and in-person event dividends.

**TL  
TAKE  
AWAY**

Show organizers who invest now in infrastructure to better support exhibitors' and sponsors' efforts inside their virtual platform will reap immediate rewards in

higher revenues and greater customer satisfaction.

Providing a deeper level of client support and customer care to help exhibitors and sponsors maximize their experience is critical for the future of your ongoing virtual and hybrid strategies and the long-term value of your event brand.





Tradeshow Logic is a full-service show management company dedicated to giving our clients the courage to make bold decisions and drive strategic, sustainable change. We create and implement smart event solutions that drive revenue, reduce cost, and elevate the customer experience.

## We're versed in virtual and hybrid event strategies and executions

We're helping our clients transition and evolve their events with a variety of services and solutions:

- **American Academy of Pediatrics** – Virtual Event Strategy, Virtual Customer Care Concierge, Exhibitor & Sponsor Chat Support
- **American Organization for Nursing Leadership** – Virtual Exhibit & Sponsorship Sales, Onsite Support & Exhibitor Care
- **American Society of Anesthesiologists** – Virtual Exhibit & Sponsorship Sales
- **National Automatic Merchandising Association** – Virtual Platform Review & RFP Assistance, Virtual Exhibit & Sponsorship Sales & Fulfillment, Audience Engagement Strategy
- **National Sheriffs Association** – Digital Platform Development, Audience Engagement Strategy, Virtual Exhibit Sales
- **Spring Manufacturers Institute** – Digital Engagement Strategy, Audience Engagement Strategy



## How can we help? Let's get started!

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