

**ON24**

# **B2B TRENDS: ACTIVATING YOUR HYBRID ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

**HOW TO DRIVE ENGAGEMENT AND MAKE YOUR HYBRID STRATEGY A SUCCESS**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** **2**

Hybrid offers buyers choices on where to engage 2

Reaching the audience is a challenge 2

Practical steps to hybrid success 3

**WHY ADOPT A HYBRID STRATEGY?** **4**

Hybrid is the best of both worlds 5

Provide what the audience wants 5

Deal with short attention spans 6

**OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES** **7**

Lack of event budgets 7

Reaching the audience where they are 8

Providing buyer enablement 9

**PRACTICAL STEPS TO GOING HYBRID** **10**

Ask questions, understand intent 11

Try integrating virtual and physical in new ways 11

Get timing and messaging right 11

**FINAL TAKEAWAYS** **13**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After spending a year in a digital space, many professionals are probably looking forward to the chance to connect in person once again. But while we're looking forward to shaking hands and bumping elbows again, one fundamental truth of 2020 will remain: that digital buying and remote work will continue to be a norm marketers must contend with.

So, here is the big question for B2B marketers going forward: do they stay primarily in the digital realm, or do they try to go back to how things were in 2019?

It's not a binary decision. There is a third option: a hybrid approach. Hybrid is not a new concept, but it is a trend with a renewed sense of popularity as marketers try to figure out how to emerge from a digital-only world and start incorporating the corporeal elements of marketing again.

So, what is hybrid engagement? And, how can B2B marketers benefit from it? To answer these questions, ON24 and NetLine sat down with marketing expert Eva Jackson, Director of Demand Gen at PFL. This report summarizes their thoughts and the input shared by the audience.

**Here are a few highlights from the discussion:**

## HYBRID OFFERS BUYERS CHOICES ON WHERE TO ENGAGE

2020's pivot to digital was a necessity, not a choice. But a hybrid approach empowers prospects and customers to engage with businesses where they are most comfortable — either online or face-to-face.

However, there is a wrinkle: businesses aren't reaching audiences on the channels where they reside. A poll of webinar attendees found that **only 3% of B2B marketers are "very successful" in using all the digital and physical channels needed to reach their buyers.**

And, buyers don't just stay on one channel anyways. Eva reminds us that the human attention span is currently at eight seconds, making hybrid a good way to adapt to how buyers now consume and digest content.

## REACHING THE AUDIENCE IS A CHALLENGE

As with any strategy, implementing a hybrid approach is not without its hurdles. **One such challenge: 39% of poll respondents said the data they gathered was either low quality or insufficient.**

Insufficient data also extends to another challenge: reaching the audience. Eva says PFL — which helps organizations with direct physical mail — obtaining the best physical address to send direct mail is especially difficult since many prospects now work from home.

But a hybrid approach helps. With its hybrid plan in place, the company can capture the key data (in this case, a preferred address) and deliver a better experience.

## PRACTICAL STEPS TO HYBRID SUCCESS

Although challenges exist, there are still some steps B2B marketers can take to implement a successful hybrid marketing strategy. Asking your buyers questions to get some first-party intent data is one suggestion given by the panel of experts.

Taking an account-based approach to hybrid is something that also works well. Indeed, **seven in 10 ON24 poll respondents have found hybrid success by focusing on smaller, more targeted audiences.**

Don't just focus on the channels used in your hybrid approach. Give some thought on the timing and messaging used when leveraging those channels as well.

## HOW TO LEARN MORE

The webinar generating these insights is always-on and ready to view. [Register now to hear more.](#)

To sign up to future sessions, visit [www.on24.com/resources/upcoming-webinars](http://www.on24.com/resources/upcoming-webinars).

Cheri Keith, Head of Strategy at ON24 and David Fortino, SVP Audience and Product at NetLine, would like to thank Eva Jackson, Director of Demand Gen at PFL, for joining the discussion and providing valuable recommendations for today's B2B professionals.

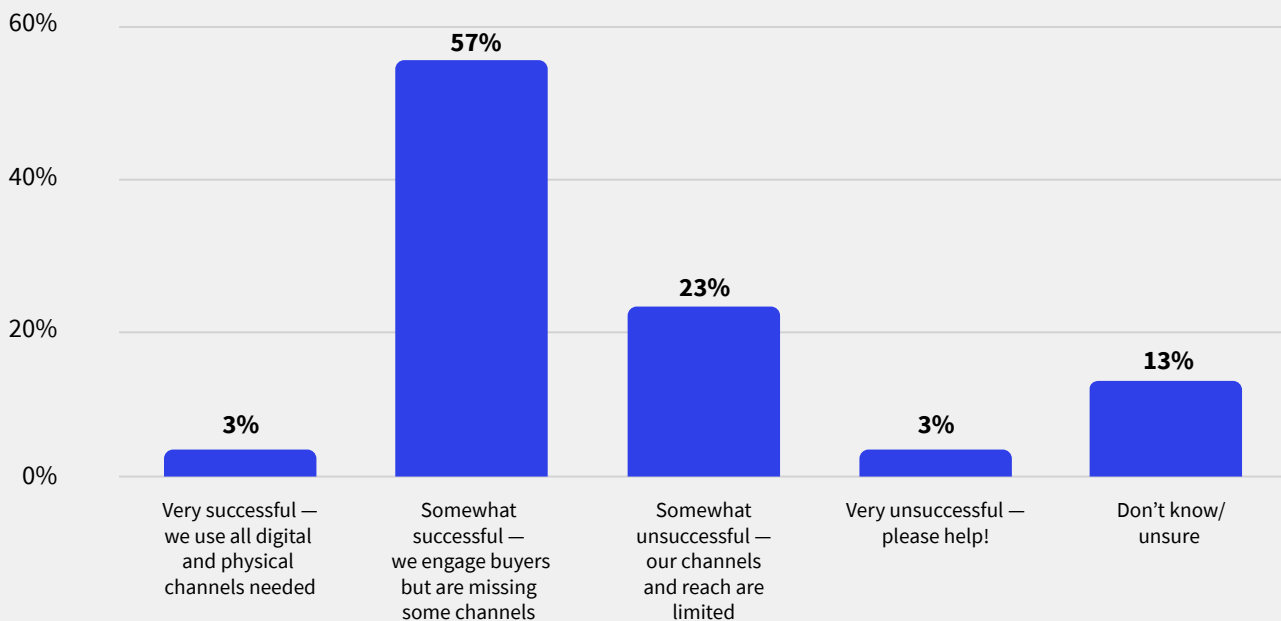
# WHY ADOPT A HYBRID STRATEGY?

In a lot of cases, 2020 was the year of digital. This is especially true of marketing. The pandemic drove a lot of activity online, whether it be working remotely, meeting with clients over video chat, or researching possible solutions to a technology problem. Marketers had to rethink where to focus their efforts, especially when — as CEIR reports — [97% of B2B in-person events were canceled in Q4 2020 alone](#).

However, as the hope for resuming in-person events grows, the concept of hybrid engagement has come to the forefront.

But what are the benefits of having a hybrid strategy? To understand, it might help to see how successful B2B marketers are at reaching buyers on the channels buyers use.

## IN YOUR OPINION, HOW SUCCESSFUL IS YOUR ORGANIZATION IN ENGAGING WITH BUYERS ON ALL THE CHANNELS THEY USE?



Unfortunately, only a scant 3% of respondents to an ON24 poll say they use all the digital and physical channels needed to reach buyers. The largest share (57%) of respondents say that while they engage with buyers, they are still missing some channels to connect. Worse still, about a quarter (23%) say that both their channels and reach are limited. Three percent of respondents say their coverage was “very unsuccessful.” A full 13% simply don’t know or are unsure of the success of their channel outreach.

All of this is to say that, currently, only 3% of polled marketers are fully confident in their hybrid marketing strategy. So, how can our experts help B2B marketers push their strategies forward? Let’s dive in.

### Hybrid is the best of both worlds

Hybrid engagement lets buyers choose how they want to interact with your brand. Remember: this was a decision that simply wasn’t available for many in 2020. As David points out, the pivot to digital was fueled by circumstances the world faced.

While digital kept most things ticking along during the COVID-19 crisis, it can’t always fulfill the need to interact face-to-face with people or quench the very human need to be tactile.

“Humans still have a tangible sense at the core; we love to be around people, and we still would love for that to happen. But, that’s still a challenge. We still like to touch and feel things and experience things beyond just a website. So, having a hybrid strategy that mixes both online tactics and strategies and touchpoints as well as some creative offline implementations is a way to create a lasting moment between you and your prospect or customer.”

Furthermore, David sees this as an opportunity to be creative, as marketers don’t have to follow what competitors are doing.

### Provide what the audience wants

Another benefit of a hybrid engagement strategy is the ability to reach your buyers across the channels they

are comfortable using. This is important considering not everyone will be ready to jump back into the physical world and head out to crowded convention spaces.

From Cheri’s point of view, this is an advantage of hybrid engagement. It gives the audience options on where they want to engage as well as keeps marketers from missing out on opportunities:

“I think what we need to think about moving forward for hybrid is this idea of what the audience wants, their comfort level. Also, what types of engagement techniques we need to be using to help them in their journey... We are still having human touchpoints, even through the majority of digital experiences. This is human; we are not bots right now speaking to you.”

According to Cheri, what it comes down to is the need to understand good marketing and think about the appropriate touchpoints and techniques.

### Deal with short attention spans

Buyers have a lot of information coming at them. Eva quotes a stat from [Microsoft’s Work Index 2021](#) report revealing that professionals received more than 40 billion more emails in February 2021 than they did in the same month the year before. Another important data point she quotes is that the average digital attention span is eight seconds — a goldfish averages about nine seconds.

With this in mind, Eva points out that having a hybrid approach is crucial:

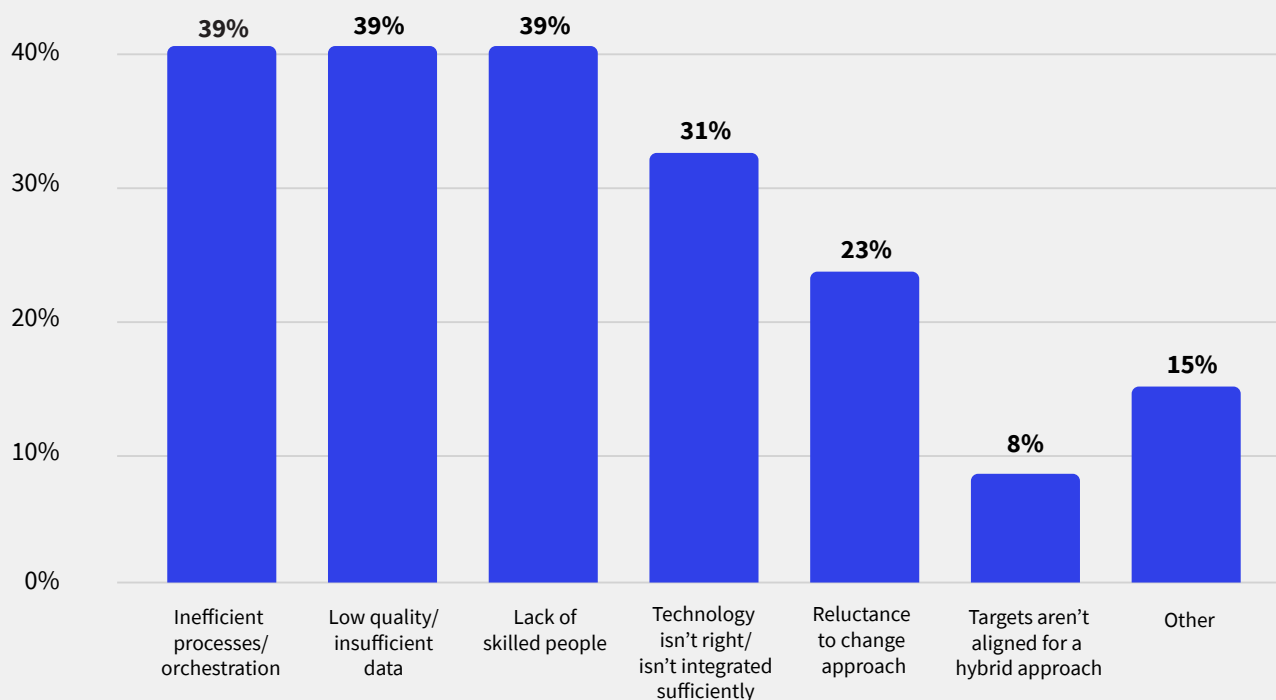
“Marketing really needs to be multi-channel, and it needs to be extraordinary to really break through to our target audiences. So, hybrid strategies really combine that digital and human engagement is just essential so that we can engage our audiences in the best way.”

Eva provides partner events as an example. By teaming up with peers like ON24 and NetLine, Eva — and PFL by extension — has seen attendance rates as high as 70%. Creating and increasing these touchpoints is something she feels is unprecedented when it comes to capturing attention digitally and a reason why hybrid marketing is a great way to adapt to how buyers are consuming and digesting content.

# OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

While there are plenty of advantages to taking a hybrid approach to engagement, marketers still struggle with finding the right mix of channels to reach and connect with buyers.

## WHAT CHALLENGES ARE YOU FACING WHEN IMPLEMENTING HYBRID ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES?



About a quarter (23%) of ON24 poll respondents say there is a reluctance to change their approach. But the most common challenges faced when implementing hybrid engagement strategies involve:

- Inefficient processes or orchestration (39%)
- Low quality or insufficient data (39%)
- A lack of skilled people (39%)

Three in 10 (31%) also say that their technology isn't right or isn't integrated sufficiently.

Here's what our panel had to say about challenges marketers face in a hybrid approach and some ideas on how to overcome those challenges.

### Lack of event budget

Budget, or a lack of it, can hold back just about any strategy. But while budget can stand in the way of marketers seeing a strategy come to fruition, it can also inspire more creative, hybrid thinking.

The panel also unanimously agrees on one point: that hybrid thinking will be necessary going forward because marketing will never go back to how it used to be. The definition of what is "normal" will need to change. And although some may want to dive headlong into the way they used to think — including attending or hosting big face-to-face events — the audience may not be ready. Alongside that, finance may have other ideas entirely.

David and Cheri agree that event budgets will not be the same as they once were going forward. However, David predicts an approach that is smaller and more targeted:

"I do think, from the budget perspective, there will be more bespoke efforts where you're going back to events in a much more high-quality, low-volume deployment. Whether that's an executive-to-executive session, who knows? But, I think that idea makes a ton of sense because it controls costs. It's a controlled environment, and you're not there just throwing darts and hoping for the best."

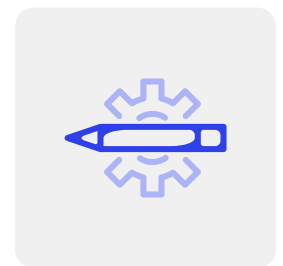
Cheri points out that marketers need to learn from what happened in 2020 and have a backup plan and other ways to collect the data they need.

### Reaching the audience where they are

It wasn't too long ago that working from home was something only a minority of employees did. But since the start of the pandemic, many companies are rethinking whether they need to spend thousands of dollars each month on having people at their desks in an office.

While remote work has its advantages for employers and employees, it does pose a problem for marketers trying to reach audiences on a physical channel, such as direct mail.

This is a challenge Eva's company, PFL, is well versed in. As such, they use a hybrid approach to preferred address capture because they can no longer rely on just one address to reach someone.





“The biggest piece of advice that we give at PFL is to think of just creative, hybrid ways to capture preferred address. We do a lot of different things to capture that preferred address. We use BDR, outreach, and one-to-one webinars and events. They are a really awesome way to capture a preferred address because you can integrate that touch into the experience... So we really do leverage a lot of different channels to curate our own preferred address database.”

One thing Eva does stress when using a hybrid engagement approach for collecting preferred addresses that can also be extended to data, in general, is to be really clear about what you are using that address or data for. This helps provide the necessary level of trust needed, which is vital when buyers are potentially sharing their home address.

### Providing buyer enablement

When it comes down to it, hybrid provides buyer enablement. Expanding on Eva’s discussion about using hybrid engagement to obtain preferred address data, Cheri touches on the idea of letting the buyer decide on what kind of experience they want.

“A trend we know is that people are self-educating, and we should help them self-select the right experience. Maybe they don’t want to receive something in the mail. But if they do, why shouldn’t we give them the option to do that?”

Going back to David’s insights about audiences needing a tactile experience, in the case of direct mail, blending the physical with the digital could mean offering to send pre-printed slides or a workbook through the mail for an upcoming webinar. This gives the audience a physical, tactile experience that compliments any event. Such a tactic was used for ON24’s [Predictable Pipeline Workshop](#) and has since extended to other experiences.

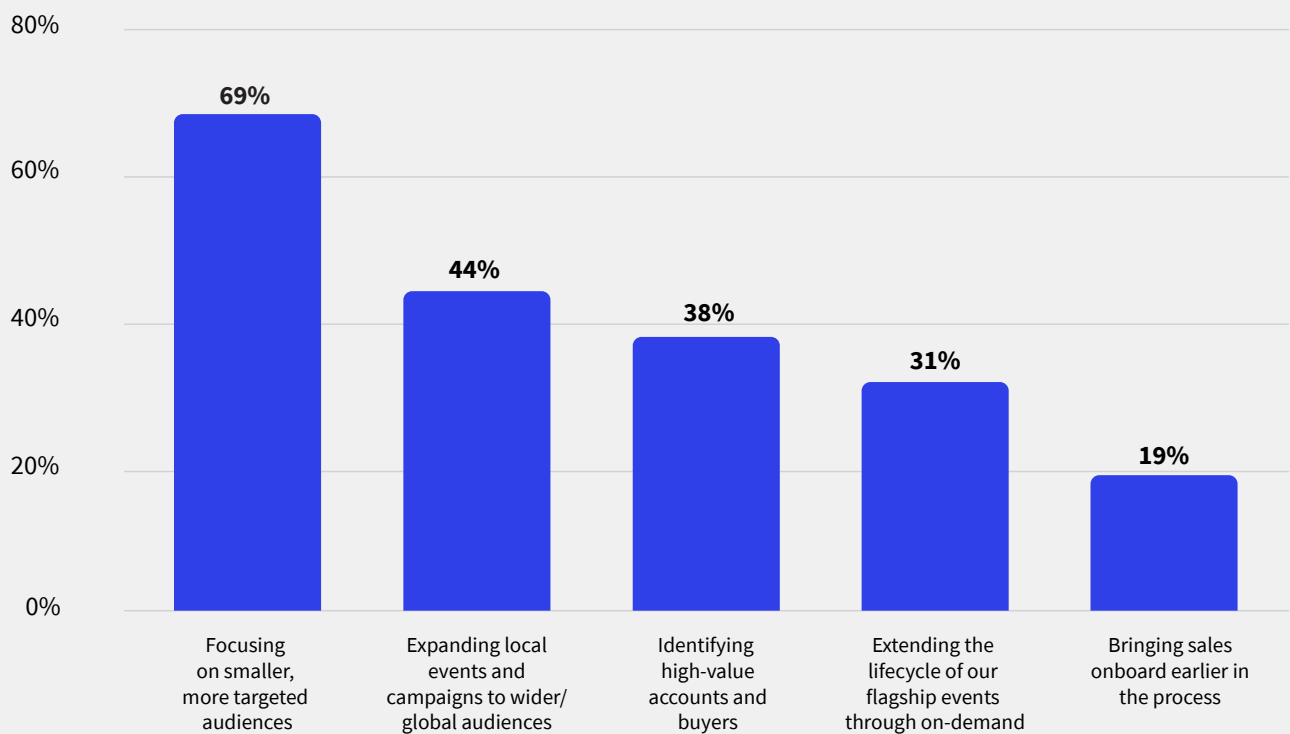


# PRACTICAL STEPS TO GOING HYBRID

Despite challenges, hybrid engagement strategies can lead to success. But when you start creating a hybrid marketing strategy, it's helpful to look at what works well for others.

An ON24 poll shows that while several tactics have worked well, most take an account-based approach. Nearly seven in 10 (69%) say that focusing on smaller, targeted audiences works well for their organization when implementing hybrid marketing strategies.

## WHAT HAS WORKED WELL IN YOUR ORGANIZATION WHEN IMPLEMENTING HYBRID MARKETING STRATEGIES?



More than two-fifths (44%) of respondents have also found success with expanding local events and campaigns to wider or global audiences. This approach enables businesses to target people within traveling distance but also opens up access to a global audience for the same campaign. Others say that identifying high-value accounts and buyers (38%) and extending the lifecycle of their flagship events through on-demand (31%) has been helpful. One in five (19%) say that bringing sales onboard earlier in the process has helped drive their hybrid strategy.

With those suggestions in mind, let's look at what our panel of experts had to say about which practical steps to take in implementing a successful hybrid marketing strategy.

### Ask questions, Understand Intent

While many of the poll respondents are taking an account-based approach to hybrid strategies, another topic that has pushed its way to the forefront is intent data. And, as more and more marketers are moving away from third-party data, first-party intent data can tell marketers a lot about the user or "the who," as David refers to them.

For David, the best way to get that first-party intent data is to ask questions. It can be done through a platform such as an ON24 webinar, through NetLine's [Buyer-Level Intent Discovery](#) or other ways on or offline to solicit feedback.

"There are many different ways you can go about doing that. But, really leaning in towards the first-party side will always get you the true and honest responses from the 'who.'"

First-party intent data can also provide you with insights like which channels your audience prefers to use, whether they have the budget to travel to an event, how comfortable they are using digital channels and if they're actually interested in your solution.

### Try integrating virtual and physical in new ways

After last year, many people are keen to get back to face-to-face interactions. As such, marketers will be looking at how to successfully build a hybrid event strategy. But what does that entail?

Cheri advises that marketers should look at what worked in the past year in the digital space and start adding some physical back into the mix. However, things will likely not be the same as they were pre-pandemic:

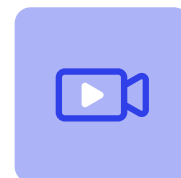
"I think those experiences are going to be different than they were in the past. They'll probably be more focused on the networking side of it and perhaps streaming some pre-recorded content. But I think it'll be people wanting to talk face-to-face as being a larger driver than other portions of it as well."

### Get timing and messaging right

Lastly, Eva reminds us that while using multiple channels is essential to a hybrid strategy, there are two other elements to consider: timing and messaging. She stresses that, while you may be leveraging multiple channels in your marketing, if there isn't a cohesive, timed approach, there is potential to create a confusing experience for prospects:

"When thinking about hybrid in terms of different plays for different stages of the buying journey, we (PFL) preach the idea of setting your channels in motion and defining the messaging and timing when the next play will activate."

For Eva, the most important thing when using a hybrid approach is that the message and time are the most consistent part of those tactics.



# FINAL TAKEAWAYS

Here are our experts' top tips to take away regarding hybrid engagement strategies.



## EMBRACE SPONTANEITY

If 2020 has taught us anything, it's that unexpected events happen that can disrupt all your well-thought-out plans. From David's perspective, these are times when we should embrace spontaneity and think of it as an opportunity for creativity. Being able to pivot and get out of your comfort zone can be a huge benefit.

“Just view it as an invitation to be creative, to test, to try new things. Especially with hybrid. It's beautiful because there are a lot of things that maybe you always wanted to do and you just didn't. So now is a great time to lean into those philosophies. Don't be afraid of really just testing as well. You don't have to go into some grandiose, massive, year-long plan. There's something between nothing and that, so go for it.”



## THE CHANGE WILL BE GRADUAL

Cheri's top takeaway is that the world will probably never go back to the way it was, and change is going to be gradual. That means now is the time to experiment.

“Trying things out, whether those be new digital tactics or new physical tactics. I think we're going to have more runway to explore those possibilities. Similar to David, definitely take the opportunity to test more, too. I think that not everyone has a culture of testing methodologies in place, but I think that this is a great place for you to start to adopt that in a good way.”



## HYBRID EXPERIENCES ARE HUMAN EXPERIENCES

For Eva, the most important thing to remember is not to forget the audience and their experience.

“As marketers, it's very easy for us, as we're moving so quickly, to feel like you're checking all the boxes, physical, digital, and multiple channels. But, if there's not messaging and kind of a brand experience that speaks to the pain of your audience or gets them excited in a creative way, it's not going to really meet the desired outcomes that you're looking to achieve. So the biggest thing is that while these are hybrid experiences, they also need to be human experiences.”