TOP 10 MEETING & EVENT INDUSTRY TRENDS FOR 2024

cvent

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
2024 PROMISES TO BE A GOLDEN PERIOD FOR THE MEETINGS AND EVENTS INDUSTRY

Planners, marketers, and hospitality professionals have become a collaborative force. Together, their combined expertise is helping to deliver more engaging, year-round experiences that are both carbon-conscious and accessible to all.

Technology is playing its part, too. Generative AI had its breakthrough year in 2023, with tools such as ChatGPT being used more widely for ideation and crafting content for emails, websites, and RFPs. We've also seen a greater focus on automation and tech consolidation to improve efficiencies and make work lives easier.

Of course, there are always challenges. Costs continue to rise faster than budgets, and contingency planning has become the new norm in an increasingly uncertain world.

But with more ways to reach and engage audiences, a greater focus on inclusive and sustainable event design, and the continued evolution of AI-powered solutions, there are exciting opportunities on the horizon.

Drawing on extensive industry research, Cvent data, and interviews, this report reveals the key trends shaping the meetings and events industry in 2024. Whether you're an event or hospitality professional, read on to discover how you can shape your event programs, attract more business to your venue or hotel, and future-proof your strategies.

IN-PERSON DOMINATES; VIRTUAL REMAINS

Undoubtedly, in-person events will continue to anchor the event and hospitality industry in 2024, but virtual experiences are here to stay.

Embracing a Multi-Format Event Mix

A survey conducted among our 21,000+ customers towards the end of 2023 revealed that 74% were planning in-person-only events this year, while 26% will include either virtual events or a mix of in-person and virtual events as part of their 2024 event program.[1]

The significance of this data is clear – organizations will continue to connect with their customers and prospects through a combination of event formats. As a result, planners and venues must have the necessary technology and expertise to facilitate this.

Face-to-face experiences offer unique opportunities for deeper engagement, building brand trust, peer-to-peer networking, and developing relationships. On the other hand, virtual events can help to connect more disparate workforces and expand the reach of an event far beyond the walls of a meeting room or conference hall.

74% are planning in-person events in 2024

26% are planning virtual or a mix of in-person and virtual events
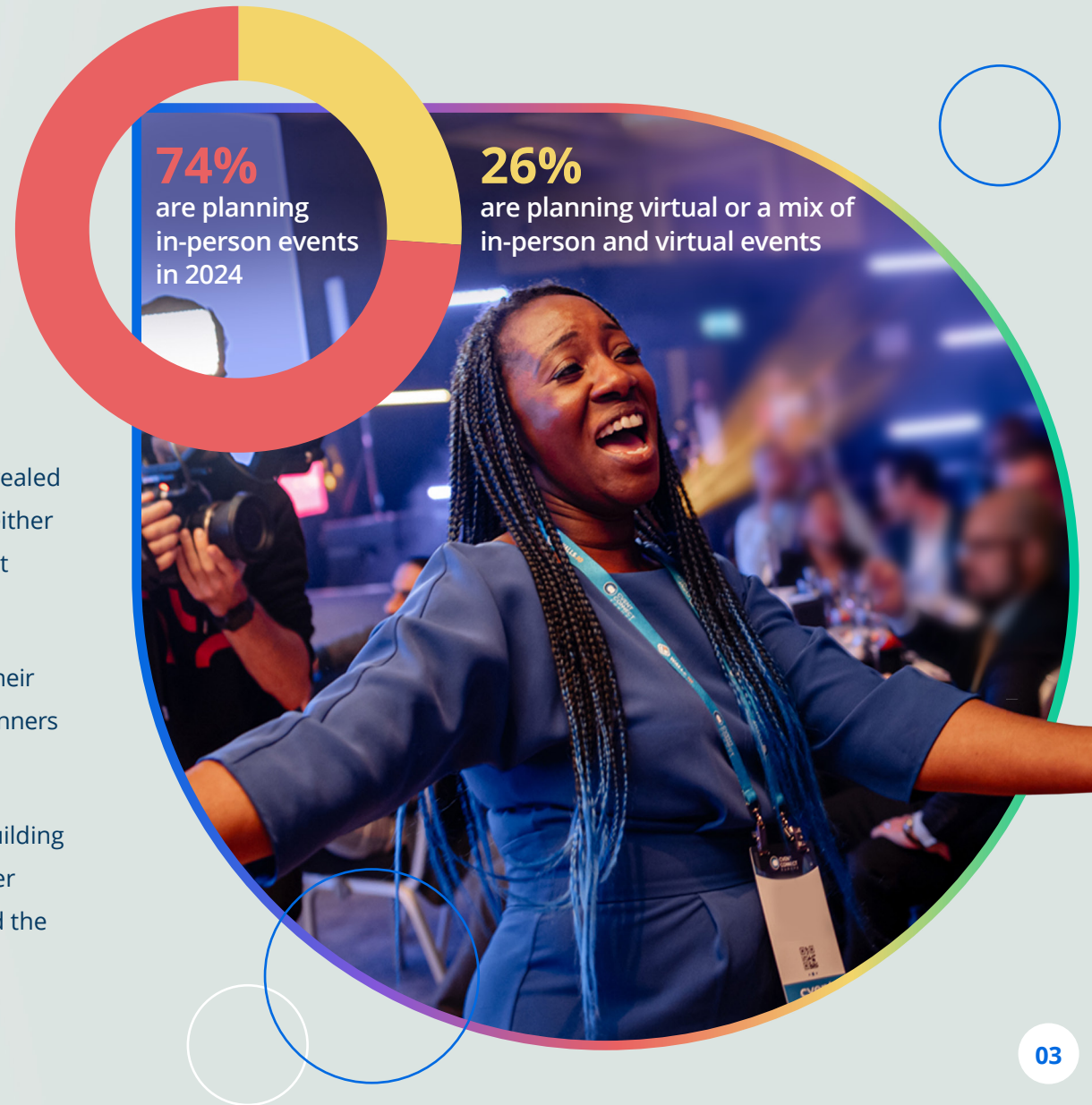
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Hybrid Events Are Here to Stay

As planners worldwide strive to reduce the carbon footprint of their events and provide additional opportunities for sponsors and exhibitors to showcase their products online, the demand for events that offer a blended program of virtual and in-person content will strengthen.

According to the *2023 Annual Cvent Planner Sourcing Report,* 41% of planners surveyed are planning hybrid or blended formats for the year ahead, marking an increase of 8% from 2022.

The members of ICE, a global community of over 1,345 corporate event planners, also confirm the rise of hybrid event formats in the latest annual *Benchmarking Research Report for Corporate Events*, with 35% of respondents incorporating hybrid events into their future event programs.

Venues can capitalize on this trend by effectively communicating their ability to support hybrid events. Planners are seeking venues with fast and secure connectivity, live-streaming capabilities, and reliable in-house technical support.

Hybrid elements in demand include the ability for virtual attendees to connect with each other and/or with physical event attendees, interact with on-stage speakers, and engage with both the content offered to the in-person audience and content exclusively created for the virtual experience.

Bringing it Together with Technology

If you haven't already, having the technology to support all event formats and seamlessly integrate with MarTech and other systems will be a vital strategic investment for 2024.

Additionally, developing blended experiences and engaging audiences year-round through on-demand sessions, webinars, and other engaging content will help foster loyal and engaged communities and keep diverse audiences connected.

VENUES SUPPORT EXPERIENCE-FIRST EVENTS

Planners are striving to find venues that can deliver extraordinary experiences and captivate attendees. The race is on to create that all-important "wow" factor and provide one-of-a-kind experiences that cater to attendees' changing expectations.

Unique Venues See a Surge in Popularity

To meet these demands, planners are prioritizing experience-first event design, valuing uniqueness over traditional notions of extravagance.

In their quest for bespoke experiences, planners are turning towards unconventional venues in locations that provide a unique aesthetic. These venues offer more flexible pricing and freedom to transform their event space and bring their vision to life. They also serve as a blank canvas for creativity and allow for the creation of more personalized events.

For example, according to the North American edition of our Planning Sourcing Report, 35% of respondents say they're looking for a unique aesthetic when it comes to venue selection. Of those that included non-hotel venues in their sourcing activity, the most popular venues were convention centers (53%) and restaurants (50%).
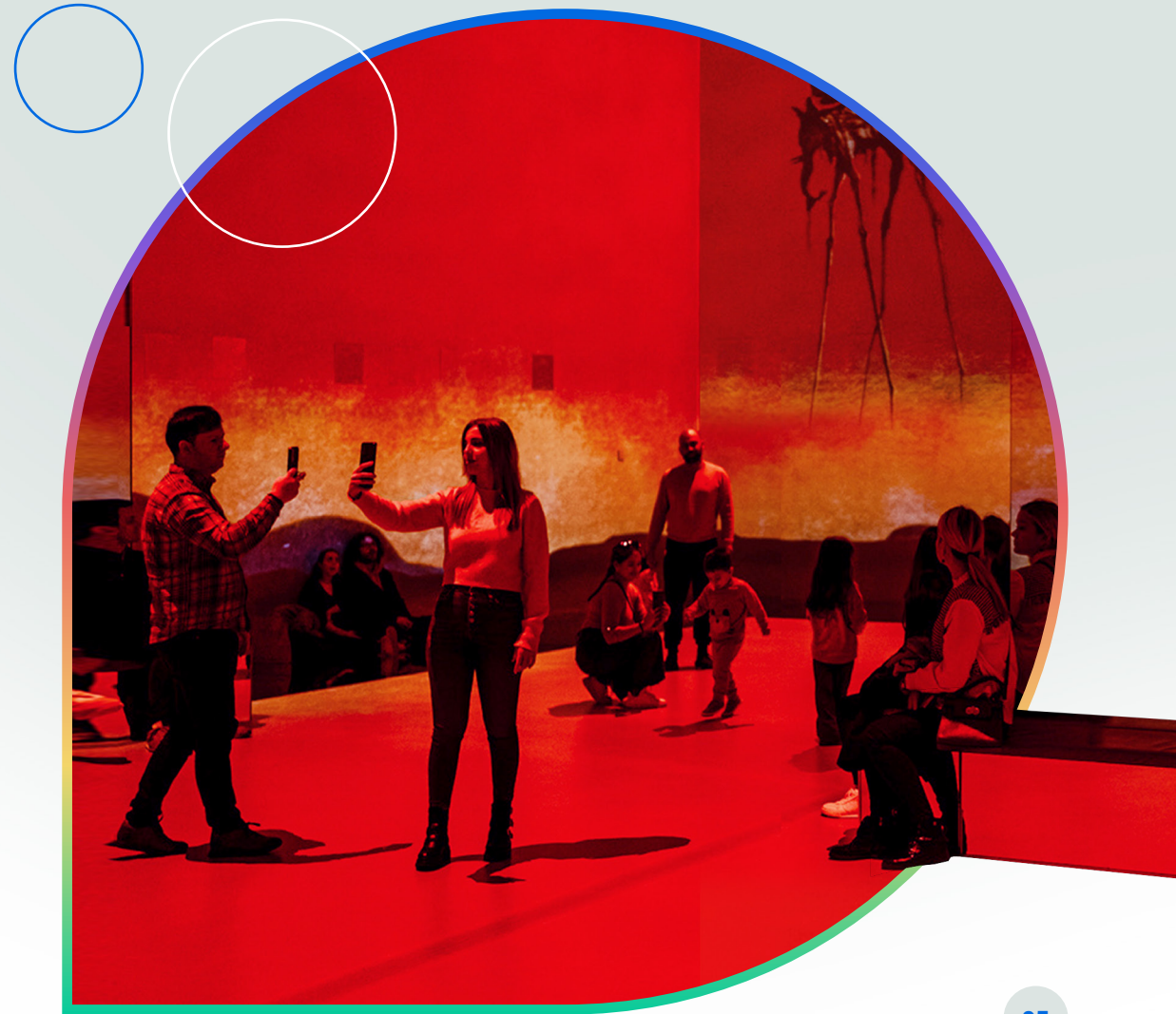
When searching for special event venues, cost considerations drive 53% of North American planners, while 45% seek more flexible spaces.

Similarly, 48% of respondents to the European edition of our Planner Sourcing Report express a desire for unique event venues and non-traditional locations, such as golf courses, bars, and movie theaters. Across Europe, unique venues are most popular among planners in the Netherlands (57%) and the UK (55%).

What This Means for Traditional Venues

Nevertheless, traditional venues still play a critical role. Four-star chain hotels are the most popular among the more traditional venues, according to those Europeans surveyed (35%), followed by five-star chain hotels (34%) and four-star independent/ boutique hotels.

However, the increasing popularity of unconventional venues presents an opportunity for traditional venues and hotel groups to showcase their unique value propositions and communicate why they are a perfect fit for experience-first event design.

Offering incentives such as automated block bookings, room upgrades, or exclusive dining experiences can set more traditional venues apart from the competition and appeal to planners seeking to maximize the event experience.

The Opportunity of "Bleisure Travel"

In 2024 and beyond, all venues will look to capitalize on the concept of "bleisure travel", where business travelers incorporate leisure experiences with their work trips, and leisure travelers combine working remotely with wanderlust. For venues,

this presents a new revenue opportunity while continuing to provide planners with the facilities, technology, and exclusive offers to create memorable events.

Hoteliers can capitalize on this by offering extended stays, additional travel experiences and upgrades, as well as advertising their venue as an ideal working location.

By embracing the shift towards unique, experience-first events, venues can position themselves as highly sought-after partners.

TREND 3

AI EXPERIMENTATION GROWS

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT took the world by storm in 2023, and the meetings and events industry was no exception. AI's ability to automate manual processes, analyze large amounts of data, and streamline operations offers new possibilities for planners, marketers, and hospitality professionals.

At a time when teams are being required to do more with less, AI can empower professionals to achieve more with fewer resources and free up time for more creative and strategic endeavors.

For example, AI-driven chatbots can provide quick responses to frequently asked questions. Generative AI tools expedite the creation of copy for campaign emails, event websites, session descriptions, and RFPs for sourcing venues, with the ability to adapt the writing style to suit specific needs.

Meanwhile, AI-powered matchmaking and content recommendation tools are enhancing the attendee experience. These tools analyze profiles and interests, providing personalized suggestions for networking connections and session recommendations.

"Hotels will be able to create personalized journeys where the same website experience for one guest will be completely different from another."
Social Capital

> **"[AI] is a tool that can help us … take things to the next level so that we can focus on what we do best and not waste time on the administrative or tedious tasks that AI can do for us instead."**
>
> Joey Rodriguez,
> Manager of Event Planning Services,
> Meeting Tomorrow

Experimentation with AI tools will continue in 2024, as organizations find new ways to integrate AI into existing processes. Tools like ChatGPT and other generative AI technologies will become more sophisticated, assisting with brainstorming ideas, reaching broader audiences with consistent messaging, and creating engaging content in multiple languages.

The potential of AI to mine and analyze the vast amount of data generated by event marketing campaigns, registration, surveys and event apps is invaluable. For planners and marketers, AI can help to evaluate engagement, improve content, and personalize the attendee experience with informed recommendations and targeted suggestions. For hospitality professionals, AI tools can be used to predict future demand and revenue based on historical data, thereby optimizing pricing and availability.

AI Considerations

But while AI offers numerous benefits, it's important to be aware of the associated risks and concerns. Remember, for example, AI can only draw from information which is already available and can't identify biases or distinguish between correct or fake source material.

It's also worth remembering that AI is a tool and not a replacement for the expertise and skills of event, marketing, and hospitality professionals.

Nevertheless, AI has quickly become a powerful workplace enablement tool, and its potential to help organizations increase efficiency is promising.

REIMAGINING ENGAGEMENT

In a 2023 Forrester Consulting study commissioned by Cvent, 71% of respondents agreed that in-person events are the most important format for increasing engagement.[2]

However, attendees today expect more from their event experience. In return for the time and effort of attending a meeting or event, they want to be fully immersed in the content and overall experience, making every moment count.

According to the *Freeman Trends Report Q1 2024,* 64% of attendees cited immersive experiences as the most important experience element, followed by customized agenda plans (45%) and technology that makes consuming the event easier (44%).

To meet these expectations, event planners and marketers are embracing technology, tools, and creative event elements that enhance participation and engagement.

Evoking Emotion Through Events

But what is also evolving is the thought process behind incorporating these elements. Planners and venues must prioritize the audience and their desired outcomes and find creative new ways to engage their senses, evoke positive emotions, and facilitate meaningful connections.

[2] Level Up Your Event Platform Capabilities, A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Cvent, February 2023

**Effective ways to engage audiences include:**

- **Content that encourages interaction, participation and skills-based learning, rather than passive listening**

- **More immersive and sensory-based experiences such as the use of music, video, live performances, visual displays, creative lighting, and touchscreens**

- **More opportunities for onsite networking, small group discussions, trade show tours, and fireside chats**

- **Shorter, more tailored sessions, and a diverse range of session formats**

- **Clear, actionable takeaways for every session**

- **Enhanced pre-event networking opportunities**

- **Using live data from polls and Q&A to develop more personalized session content**

- **AI-powered matchmaking to connect attendees with similar interests and content preferences**

- **Focus on using events to cultivate engaged communities that champion the brand**

Measuring Engagement

In parallel, planners and marketers will need to become more adept at tracking, reporting, and activating engagement data across their events to understand attendee preferences and optimize the event experience.

With increased engagement touchpoints from events, having the right technology is vital to analyze this data and build engagement scores for individual attendees. Leads can then be prioritized based on their engagement. Sales teams can follow up with hot leads more quickly and efficiently, while marketing can nurture qualified warm leads and push them along the pipeline.

By embracing innovative approaches to engagement and leveraging technology, event and marketing professionals can create transformative experiences that leave a lasting impact on attendees. The future of engagement is about connecting with your audience, immersing them in meaningful experiences, and building communities that thrive long after the event concludes.
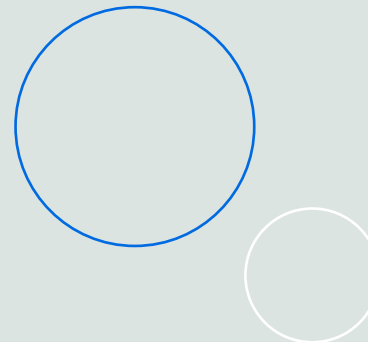
TECHNOLOGY UNITES PLANNERS AND VENUES

Technology is the ideal antidote to continued hospitality staffing shortages and the increasing demands placed on event teams with limited resources and budgets.

Add to that the high demand for event space and the disrupted relationships between venues and planning teams post-pandemic, and it becomes clear that technology can offer a way to collaborate and communicate more efficiently, bridging the gap between event teams and venues.

> **"Not all hotels are difficult to work with. But some show zero interest in creating a long-term relationship or in helping us find a middle ground. I attribute this to either hotel sales being too overworked/overloaded to take the time to address each client's needs, or them just being too new to the industry and not knowing how important relationships are to our industry."**
>
> Anonymous, Northstar/Cvent Meetings Industry Pulse Survey, December 2023

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Simplifying Venue Sourcing

One of the key areas where technology has united venues and event teams is venue sourcing.

Venues can use venue sourcing technology to attract, engage, and communicate with planners. Likewise, planners can use the same technology to simplify the process of sourcing their next event space. Gone are the days of sending out individual RFPs to multiple venues and struggling to compare elements like capacities, credentials, and locations.

With just a few clicks, planners can access critical information about venues, including average hotel room rates, average daily meal costs, the total number of sleeping rooms, activities, entertainment options, star ratings, promotions, and venue pictures. Armed with this wealth of data, planners can make informed decisions and choose the most suitable venues for their events.

Rebuilding Planner and Supplier Relationships

Rebuilding relationships between planners, venues, and suppliers has been a challenge in recent years due to staffing turnovers and other factors. However, technology can play a pivotal role in strengthening these relationships.

For example, 3D diagramming tools like Cvent Event Diagramming enable real-time sharing of room layouts and seating designs with selected venues. This seamless communication not only reduces the need for multiple site visits, saving time and resources, but also allows planners and venues to collaborate more easily.

> ❝❞
>
> **"3D diagramming helps planners to understand what's happening at the hotel or venue, what the available space looks like, and what the opportunities are for that space. Taking advantage of the technology that's available to venues to help the planner and form closer working relationships is the best thing they can do."**
>
> Melinda Burdette, Senior Director of Events,
> Meeting Professionals International (MPI)

By the Numbers

According to the North American edition of our *Planner Sourcing Report*, 63% of respondents use technology to source as much or more than they did in 2022, with 38% saying that time spent using technology to source has increased.

Of the planners who said they spent more time using technology to source, almost 60% said they spent that time reviewing event diagrams, 51% spent more time building unique RFPs, and 47% said they viewed more photos of venues.

In the year ahead, more planners will use single-platform and cloud-based technology as a place to store all previous bids and contracted rates, making it easier to negotiate with remote-working hotel and venue representatives to get the best deals.

TREND 6

ACCESSIBLE, SUSTAINABLE EVENTS REFLECT BRAND VALUES

Consumers and buyers now expect organizations to demonstrate a clear commitment to accessibility and sustainability. Events are a clear way for brands to showcase their values in these areas and show they are practicing what they preach.

Event and marketing teams, as well as venues and hotels, will place more emphasis on accessibility and sustainability, not simply as a compliance measure, but as an opportunity to build trust and meet the expectations of attendees and stakeholders.

Accessibility

Globally, around one in six people have some form of disability.[3] In the US, it's around 27% of adults;[4] in the UK it's around 24% of the population,[5] and across the EU it's approximately one in four adults.[6]

Accessibility is a fundamental aspect of event planning and prioritizing it from the outset means that meetings and events are inclusive for everyone.

Here are some ways to ensure an accessible event experience:

• Straightforward registration processes that allow people with disabilities to communicate their requirements

[3] World Health Organization, March 2023.   [4] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Disability and Health Data System.
[5] UK Department for Work and Pensions' Family Resources Survey. [6] Disability in the EU: facts and figures, European Council of the European Union

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- Sign language interpreters and captioning
- Wider aisles and wheelchair zones in conference halls or breakout rooms to accommodate attendees in wheelchairs
- Venues should offer accessible infrastructure as standard, such as screens for captioning and ramps for stages
- Low sensory rooms or wellness spaces
- Facilities for service animals
- Accessible UX design for digital elements such as websites and event apps

CHECK OUT MORE TOP TIPS TO MAKE YOUR EVENTS ACCESSIBLE >

Sustainability

According to the American Express GBT Meetings & Events' *2024 Global Meetings and Events Forecast*, 78% of respondents say their organization will have net zero goals in place by the end of this year. As organizations strive to meet Net Zero targets by 2030 and face increasing pressure to reduce their carbon footprint, events play a crucial role in promoting sustainability.

Shawna Mckinley, Principal at Clear Current Consulting, says, "In 2019 the thinking within event teams was: do we need a sustainability plan for our event, what will it be and can we make the business case? The concern was internal, trendy, and discretionary. There was a relative lack of policy or regulatory pressure. In 2024, it's no longer event teams who are asking the question. Hosts, sponsors, and participants are thinking: do events align with our sustainability commitments? If not, why are we doing them?"

To embrace sustainability in events, consider the following strategies:
- Greener event design and the use of more sustainable materials to build booths, set and staging
- Prioritizing sustainable venues and hotels
- Carbon-conscious menu choices, including vegan alternatives to meat and locally sourced food
- Eliminating single-use plastics from all meetings and events
- Going digital to reduce the use of printed material
- Greener transport options
- Improvements in measuring, tracking, and offsetting carbon emissions by venues and planners

How Venues Can Support Sustainability Efforts

According to ICE's *Benchmarking Research Report for Corporate Events*, the primary hurdle preventing global in-house event teams from fully embracing sustainability initiatives is cost, a concern almost 40% of respondents raised. Following closely were constraints in resources and knowledge.

With sustainability a priority for event teams, venues and hotels can play their part by educating, showcasing their green credentials, demonstrating how they are minimizing their environmental impact, and offering flexible pricing.

GRAB OUR GUIDE TO SUSTAINABLE MEETINGS FOR HOSPITALITY PROFS >

EVENTS SHIFT TO MARKETING

There has been a significant shift in the corporate landscape, with in-house event teams increasingly reporting to marketing. In fact, a majority (71%) of corporate in-house events teams are now housed within a company's marketing function, marking a substantial rise from the 55% reported in 2022.[7]

This growing alignment signifies the recognition of the value and importance of events in marketing strategies, which will continue to gain momentum. Events help marketers capture leads, push prospects along the sales funnel, drive revenue, build brand awareness and increase brand engagement.

Event Marketing Budgets Remain Strong

The importance of events to marketing strategies is reflected in marketing budgets. On average, 14% of a marketing budget goes toward events, making event marketing the second largest expenditure after online advertising (19%).[8]

Regionally, event marketing budgets are growing. For example, in the UK, event marketing budget increases are set to carry through into the 2024/25 financial year, with nearly 27% of panelists to the 2024 IPA Bellwether Report signaling an upward revision to event budgets.[9]

More Collaboration Means Greater Impact

Closer collaboration between event and marketing teams will mean more cohesive and impactful brand experiences and efforts to align marketing goals and event objectives.

In the same way that technology is uniting planners and venues, it can also facilitate the collaboration between marketing and event teams. Event management software, CRM systems and marketing automation are just some tools that enable better communication, data sharing, and campaign management.

As a result, planners will grow more proficient at using MarTech technology and integrating event data into CRM systems. This will see better use of data to optimize event strategies, personalize the experience, measure ROI and make more informed decisions for future events.

Plus, as marketing and event planning align ever closer, we'll see marketing teams have their input when it comes to sourcing venues that match overall campaign objectives. Venues will need to consider this new client customer when promoting their services and offers.

This greater synergy between planners and marketers ultimately puts the spotlight on events as a critical channel for 2024 and beyond. Together, event teams and marketers are a more formidable force to drive impact and objectives across the organization.

"The one positive for the events industry from Covid is that it forced innovation into B2B events and brought the discipline closer to marketing, both in terms of the tools used to measure and track and the use of different formats."

Adam Azor, EVP of Global Marketing at Sportradar

TECHNOLOGY BECOMES A CORE SKILL

Technology is not just a passing trend; it has become an essential pillar for the success of any event or hospitality program. The rise of virtual and hybrid events in the last few years underscored the increasing role of technology and the need for professionals to acquire new skills.

As we look to 2024, it's clear that technology will continue to evolve and play a significant role in marketing, event design, and audience engagement. To ensure career progression, professionals in the industry must continue to develop their skills in areas such as AI, data analysis, and automation.

But what specific skills should industry professionals prioritize? Here are some key areas to focus on:

- **Data and Insights:** Technology allows event professionals to capture valuable data from events, but it's not enough to collect it. Understanding how to analyze and integrate this data with MarTech and other systems is crucial. Using data insights helps you make more informed decisions, optimize event planning, and enhance overall performance. Similarly, hospitality professionals must also track and act on the right data. Understanding response rates and times, booking windows, and most popular times for events, are examples of key data points that can enable you to optimize your strategies.

- **AI Applications:** As AI continues to advance, experimenting with AI tools can give you a competitive advantage. By embracing AI-powered tools, you can automate repetitive tasks, personalize communications, and enhance attendee satisfaction and engagement. If your organization is new to adopting AI, sharing your experiences with stakeholders can help foster an internal culture of innovation.

- **Event Management Software:** Mastering event management software is essential for seamless planning and organization. Familiarize yourself with event registration platforms, onsite event tech, and reporting tools to help streamline processes, improve attendee management, and demonstrate ROI.

- **Sales & Marketing Automation:** Hotels and venues that integrate automation technology into their sales and marketing processes are more likely to see efficiencies across their operations, accelerate sales conversions, and build better client relationships. For example, automating RPF responses can ensure you're prioritizing and submitting proposals quickly to the most valuable leads.

For more tips on integrating automation technology, check out our guide:

8 RULES OF AUTOMATION FOR HOSPITALITY SALES AND MARKETING >
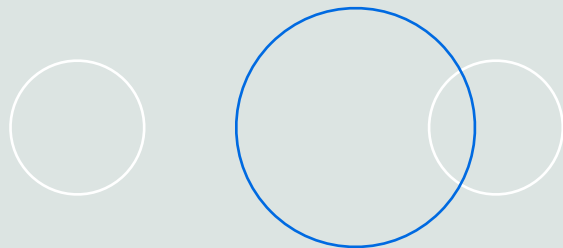
Spotlight: The Event Technologist

One key technology-based role growing demand is that of the event technologist. While still an emerging role – currently, 24% of organizations have a dedicated event technologist – the vast majority (82%) of organizations believe that this role will become increasingly important in the next five years.

So, what exactly is an event technologist? Event technologists combine an understanding of event planning and management with a deep knowledge of technology.

Their responsibilities include:
- **Managing an organization's event tech stack**
- **Implementing new and innovative technology solutions for events**
- **Conducting data analysis and reporting**

In 2024, more companies will formalize the event technologist role, standardizing the responsibilities and providing a clear path for career growth. This will drive innovation and increase understanding of the opportunities that data and AI bring to processes and workflows, including future developments in live streaming, personalization, and more.

Since emerging technologies will continue to have a significant impact on our workplace, staying informed and up to date with technological advancements will be vital for success.

For more insights on this new, emerging role, check out our eBook:

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE EVENT TECHNOLOGIST >

COST PRESSURES PLACE A PREMIUM ON ROI

Event budgets are on the rise, but this isn't necessarily enough to match inflationary rises in costs. As a result, planners are still left with the task of doing more with less, requiring them to negotiate diligently with venues and suppliers to secure the best deals.

Planners share a common concern: the increasing expenses associated with venues, catering, transportation, and services.

In a recent Northstar/Cvent Meetings Industry Pulse Survey, one anonymous planner stated: "Most of our clients cannot triple their meeting budgets from one year to the next, so we're between a 'rock and a hard place' with future meeting sourcing, negotiations, and contracting."

Similarly, for 38% of the planners who took part in Cvent's *Planner Sourcing Report 2023 (Europe edition)*, cost inflation is also deemed the biggest challenge on the horizon. Additionally, a large majority (77%) believe the price of holding a meeting or event of the same size and complexity in 2024 will increase by up to a fifth compared with 2023.

Venues can counter this by staying up-to-date with crucial market insights, which will give them a greater understanding of the challenges that planners face and allow them to remain competitive by providing value add-ons and insight-led offers.

One example of such insight is that 83% of North American planners told the *Planner Sourcing Report* in 2023 that they'd switch venues for 6% or greater savings, with half agreeing to switch for up to 10% savings. Knowing this, venues can create special offers that may tempt planners away from their chosen venue or adjust their pricing accordingly.

Tips to Manage Rising Costs

With increased scrutiny on event spend, meetings and events teams will need to prove the value of their events on key objectives, as well as the organization's bottom line. Here are some tips to help you:

1. Build Collaborative Partnerships: Building strong partnerships with venues and suppliers will allow you to negotiate better rates, access special offers, and receive value-add services that can help stretch your budget further.

2. Embrace Technology: Embrace technology to streamline processes, reduce costs, and increase efficiency. Consider using event management software for registration and attendee management, incorporate virtual or hybrid event solutions to reach a wider audience, and use data analytics tools for better budget tracking and reporting.

3. Implement Creative Cost-saving Ideas: Make the most of your budget by getting creative. Explore alternative venues or locations, optimize transportation logistics, implement sustainable practices to reduce waste and costs, and consider innovative sponsorship opportunities to offset expenses.

4. Stay Flexible: Continuously evaluate and adapt your budget strategies throughout the event planning process. Regularly review and analyze budget performance, identify areas of improvement, adjust spending priorities, and make necessary adaptations to stay within budget constraints.

GRAB OUR TOP TIPS ON HOW TO REDUCE YOUR EVENT SPEND IN 2024 >

CENTRALIZING FOR SCALE

As event requirements grow more complex and there is greater scrutiny on budgets, event planners and venues are increasingly relying on technology to improve efficiency, accelerate response times, and deliver exceptional experiences. Centralizing technology and operations is one way to meet these challenges.

Centralizing Technology

Just as organizations have centralized their CRM and marketing technologies, many also recognize the value of centralizing their event technology. Centralization enables organizations to scale their event programs effectively, gain a unified source of truth for data, and demonstrate the impact of their events.

In a 2023 study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Cvent, 42% of respondents ranked a more comprehensive, end-to-end suite of capabilities among the top five aspects of choosing an event technology partner.[10] Additionally, 81% said they expected to invest in a platform that enables a holistic view of performance.

This underscores the growing recognition of technology consolidation as a means for event and marketing teams to gain comprehensive insights into event performance.

[10] _Level Up Your Event Platform Capabilities_, A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Cvent, February 2023

For venues and hotels, it's crucial to consider technology that seamlessly integrates with existing systems. This integration saves valuable time, eliminates manual processes, and reduces the risk of human error. By centralizing technology, hospitality professionals can streamline their operations, automate tasks, and improve efficiency in managing event bookings.

Spotlight: Centralizing Venue Sourcing

A centralized tech stack also helps teams better connect with suppliers. The Cvent Supplier Network, for example, connects event planners directly with thousands of global hotels and venues. This allows teams to build a shortlist of properties based on requirements, send one RFP to multiple venues, and easily compare bids.

Once a venue has been selected, other tools within the platform mean that you can block-book hotel rooms, design meeting room layouts, share plans and requests with the venue team, and make alterations in real time.

Planners told the European edition of the *Planner Sourcing Report* that a centralized technology platform is vital to help them book venues during the sourcing process and visualize how an event or series of events will look.

North American planners meanwhile said that, compared with 2022, they're spending more time researching (42%), more time reviewing RFP responses (35%), and more time negotiating with hotels and venues (38%). So they're relying on technology more than ever.

Centralizing Teams

Centralization extends beyond technology to encompass organizational structures. Many organizations are centralizing their event planning, execution, and technology selection processes to achieve greater efficiency and cost savings. This is particularly true for larger events, where the goal is to standardize processes, optimize resource allocation, share best practices, and bring teams together.

Centralizing technology and operations is driven by the need for efficiency, cost savings, and the ability to deliver exceptional experiences. By embracing centralization, organizations can streamline processes, avoid data silos, enhance planner/supplier relationships, and achieve scalability for driving growth. This trend empowers teams to work more effectively, make data-driven decisions, and demonstrate impact.

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INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS SHARE THEIR 2024 PREDICTIONS

Maxine Jensen, Director of Groups for Alpine Adventures

"Hot destinations for 2024 are Iceland, Portugal, Croatia and Switzerland amongst my US clients. But they're also looking for places off the well-trodden path that can provide unique experiences. Places like Montenegro have a unique opportunity to impress destination-savvy travelers who have 'been there and done that' with other countries."

Julius Solaris, Founder of Boldpush

"The number one priority for 2024 for event planners is data. The most successful event companies leverage data to customize experiences, understand demand, create new opportunities and generate better content. Not tracking, not analyzing and not deploying data is a mistake that events can't afford to make going forward."

Rebecca Bleasdale, Venue Find Consultant for PwC Meeting Services

"PwC is always looking for sustainable event solutions and carbon-conscious venues. That won't change in 2024. We will, however, see a reduction in meetings and event spend, tied to sustainability. So, for example, if we're staging an event in Manchester, PwC employees who live in the region won't be given hotel accommodation. We're constantly having to tighten our processes, think more creatively and negotiate on costs.

"PwC's in-house meetings technology is of an exceptionally high standard so we expect venues and hotels to offer the same level of equipment in their meetings and conference rooms. We're therefore always on the lookout for technology innovation from venues. Flipcharts for example are no longer considered sustainable so we look for venues offering smart boards and other paper-less solutions such as innovation in event apps."

Georgina McGee, Project Executive for Be Sure Events

"For the year ahead, we're looking at more European incentives and less long-haul. There are so many exceptional experiences to discover across Europe that groups don't need to travel too far. The trends in incentive travel are around adding wellness elements and adding partners to programs to maximize the reward element. Be Sure is a young agency so we're constantly pushed to discover innovations and more innovative ways of working. The MICE group industry is a blank canvas for innovation to flourish."

Alistair Turner, Author of the 2024 IBTM World Trends Report

"Artificial Intelligence will break down into the three As for 2024: Accessibility, Automation and Augmentation. Automation is essentially about making planners' lives easier by taking the increased complexities and pain points of the role and removing them. Augmentation is about taking a physical event and layering on AI-powered digital elements that improve and enhance the experience. Finally, Accessibility means using technology to improve the inclusivity of your events through features such as multiple-language translation, sensory aids and digital sign-language interpretation."

Sophie Dervan, Project Director, Cheerful Twentyfirst

"We're seeing a massive shift from return on investment to return on engagement. The event budget is no longer the opener for the conversation. It's more around legacy. Why is the event being held? What will attendees take away from the experience? And what can we give back to the destination we're using to stage the activity? Even clients who may have held the same event in the same destination for several years, now want to partner more closely with the local CVB and adopt a more holistic approach to ensure legacy.

"We're finally talking accessibility at the planning stage, which is long overdue. Whether that's accessibility in terms of venue infrastructure or it's making sure that event content is structured appropriately. We see it here on the Impact Stage at IBTM where there are short, 20-minute digestible sessions, which stop content from becoming too overwhelming. It's an educational piece that agencies like ourselves need to be sharing with clients.

"Adding elements such as sign-language interpreters and dedicated areas in the auditorium for wheelchair access or assistance animals is forming part of that conversation now, especially amongst our European clients."

Nyomi Rose, Founder and Director, WhatNyomiDoes

"The key trend for 2024 is to look at data in terms of how it can authentically translate into event success, improved engagement and better inclusivity. We need to look at what data we're collecting and how we're using AI to interpret trends and results."

Dan Elliott, National Sales Manager at Butlin's Conference and Events

"We're constantly hearing from corporate clients wanting to incorporate fun into their events for the year ahead. Whether that's creatively turning one of our venues into their ideal setting or benefitting from the numerous activities we have at each resort, attendees need entertaining experiences to support strong education and motivational teambuilding."

Brad Dean, CEO, Discover Puerto Rico

"We are excited and very optimistic about what lies ahead, not only for Puerto Rico but our entire industry. We're in our third straight year of record growth with more revenue, more visitors, more meetings, and more people working. We know there are some challenges ahead, particularly economically, but we feel very good about the industry."

Anna Peters, Creative Director, Evolve Events

"In 2024, the pulse of change beats to the rhythm of *tågskryt* – a term encapsulating the spirit of the moment: pride in taking the train. More and more, event attendees are asking if we can justify travel in a climate crisis. The simple answer? Yes, we can. The ascent of AI and the era of remote work exemplify why fostering real-life connections has never been more crucial. However, this hinges on a paradigm shift. To meet carbon targets, those frequent flyers among us must take to the skies a bit less. Opting for trains is an impactful move to slash the carbon footprint of your event and a travel choice that I expect to see firmly coming into fashion in 2024."

**Kevin Bartlett, Senior Sales Manager,
Ronald Reagan Building at International Trade Center**

"There has been a complete ramp up, so it's really exciting looking into the future and seeing the business that's coming in. Booking windows are shorter so the technology has to be there to maintain the business and get back to planners faster."

Garine Ferejian-Mayo, COO, Sonesta

"Our digital landscape continues to change. I want to spend more time on the digital front and the marketing front. There's a lot of opportunity and we want to make sure we're exploring other channels to stay ahead of the game."

Martin Fullard, Director, News & Content, The Business of Events

"According to the *Events Economy Tracker* quarterly report by The Business of Events, the UK has seen continued growth in the number of confirmed events taking place, with September 2023 seeing the most events taking place in a single month since 2019. However, forward bookings have moved slowly as the industry continues to experience short lead times, an average of 72 days. It is unlikely we will see this change any time soon.

"Inflationary pressures are continuing to bite, with the average Revenue Per Delegate up approximately 20% in the UK. However, venues are not profiting from this increase as their costs have skyrocketed, largely driven by energy bills, and event buyers are subsequently reducing the number of delegates attending their conferences and meetings."

A GOLDEN AGE FOR MEETINGS, EVENTS, AND HOSPITALITY

As we look ahead to the challenges that planners, marketers, and hospitality professionals will face in the coming months, it's clear that technology will be the key to overcoming these obstacles. Inflation is still a key factor, organisations continue to navigate staffing shortages, and there is an increasing demand to demonstrate sustainable and accessible event practices.

The thread that connects the trends covered in this guide is the effective use of technology. Venues and suppliers can maximize technology to improve collaboration with planners, offer a greater level of support, and faster responses.

Meanwhile event professionals can use technology to streamline, centralize and automate event planning processes. In doing so, organizations can save time on administrative tasks and redirect resources towards engagement strategies and creative, carbon-conscious initiatives.

This is a golden age for meetings and events, driven by substantial growth, closer collaboration across the board, and next-generation technology adoption. We're here to support you on this journey, providing insights, tools, and expertise to help you drive innovation forward.
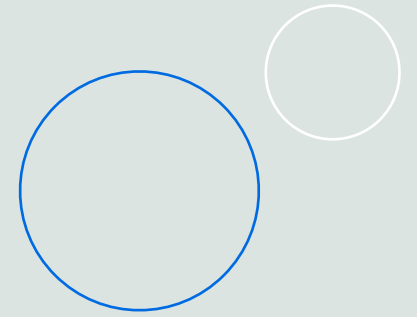
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Learn more about how venues and hotels can use technology to respond to planners faster, improve RFP response rates, and drive attendee upsells.

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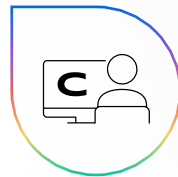
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