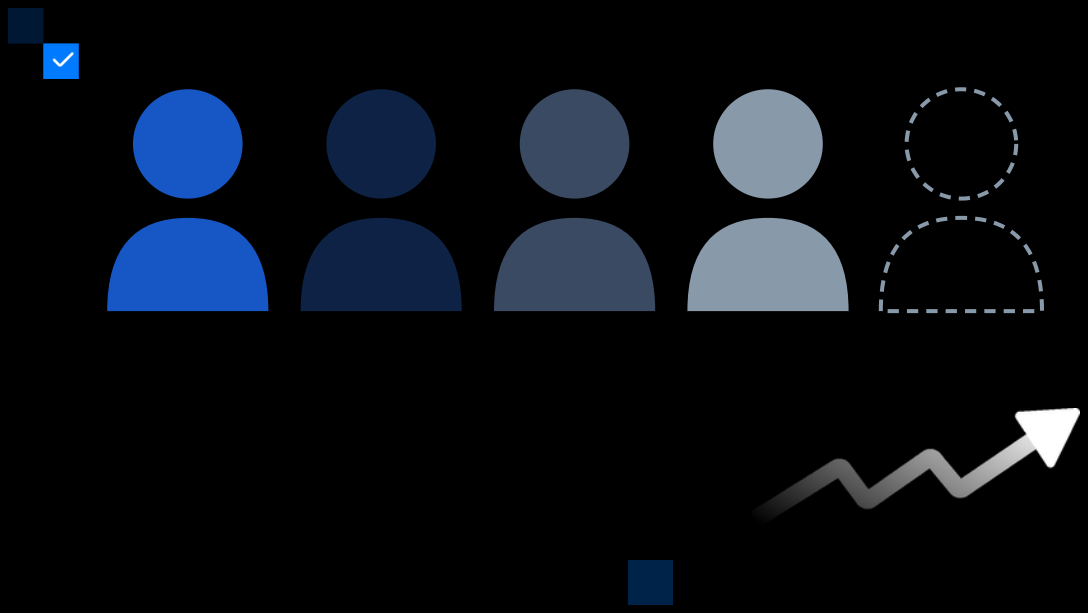
Event Data Lab Report #05

One in Five Registered Attendees Won't Show Up

Data-backed benchmarks from real-world events



pheedloop

Executive Summary

This report establishes baseline no-show rate benchmarks using check-in data from 1,000+ live events. No-show rate measures the gap between expected attendance and actual onsite presence.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- The median no-show rate across all events is ~21%. Roughly one in five expected attendees does not check in. The mean is higher at 29%, indicating a subset of events with severe no-show problems.

- Free events experience a median no-show rate of ~28%, compared to ~17% for paid events. The 10 percentage point gap is consistent across event sizes but most pronounced at smaller events.

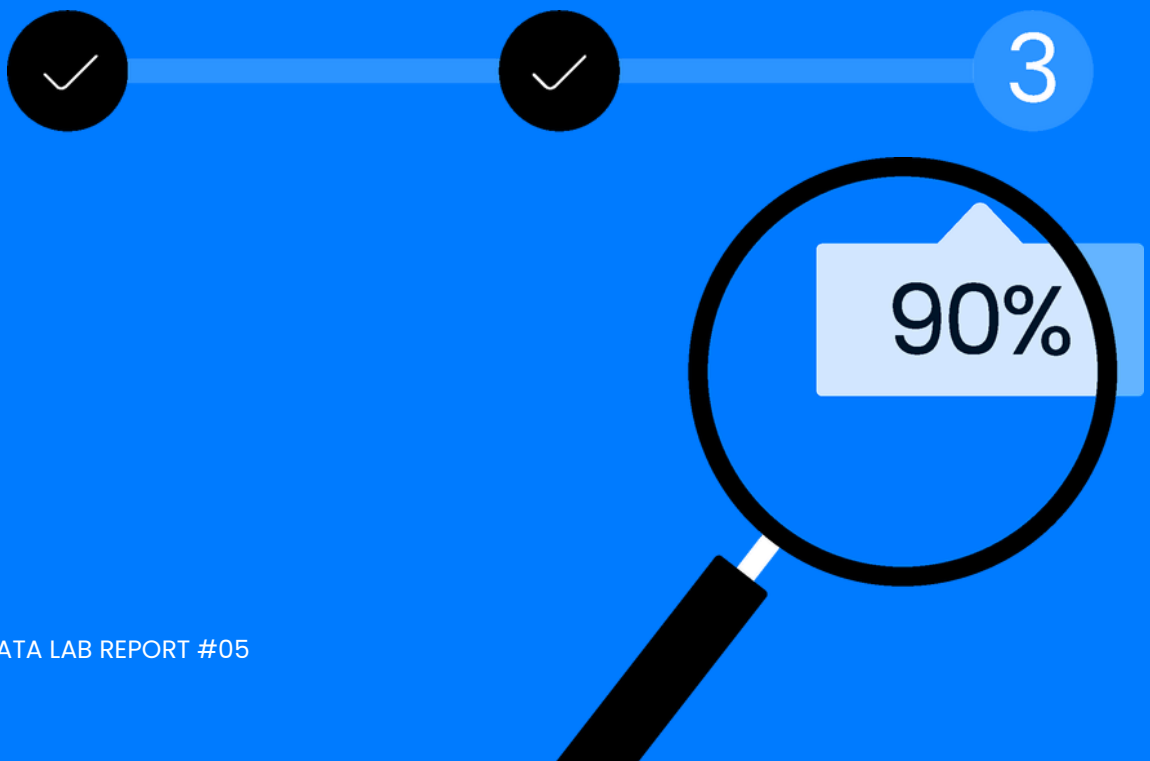
- No-show rates are highest at small events (10-49 attendees, ~32% median no-show) and stabilize around 19% for events with 150+ attendees. Paid events show stable no-show rates (~15-18%) regardless of size

---

These benchmarks are intended to help event teams evaluate the effectiveness of their registration experience and identify when performance deviates meaningfully from typical patterns.

About the Event Data Lab

The **Event Data Lab** is an ongoing research initiative focused on analyzing real-world event performance using aggregated and anonymized data. Reports published under the Event Data Lab aim to surface empirical benchmarks and operational insights across registration, onsite operations, engagement, and ROI.



Dataset Overview

Scope

- **1000+ live events** with check-in data
- Events span both free and paid formats across multiple event types
- Data aggregated and anonymized across live events

Exclusions

To ensure statistical stability and reduce noise:

- Test, sandbox, and internal events were excluded
- Events with very low registration volume were excluded
- Events with check-in rates exceeding 100% were capped at 100% (8 events, likely reflecting minor data timing artifacts). One internal sample event was excluded

---

Anonymization

All data was aggregated and anonymized prior to analysis. No individual event, organization, or attendee can be identified from this report.

Metric Definitions

No-show rate is defined as the proportion of expected attendees who did not check in at the event.

No-Show Rate	=	1 - (Check-Ins / Total Expected Attendees)

Total expected attendees includes all individuals associated with the event (registrants, speakers, and other participants). This denominator is broader than completed registrations alone and provides a more complete picture of attendance gaps.

Benchmark Results

Overall No-Show Rate

Median No-Show	Mean No-Show	P25 (better)	P75 (worse)
20.3%	28.3%	11.4%	39.0%

The median-mean gap (21% vs 29%) indicates a left-skewed distribution: most events achieve reasonable attendance, but a subset experience severe no-show rates that disproportionately affect the average.

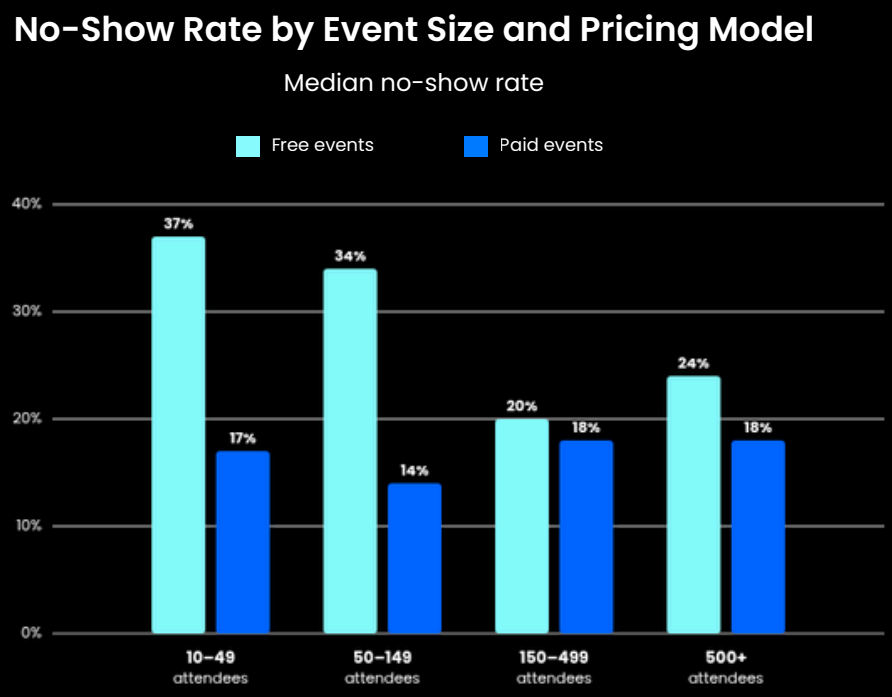
No-Show Rate by Pricing Model

Pricing	Events	Median No-Show	Mean No-Show	P25	P75	>50% No-Show
Free	389	27.5%	32.6%	13.3%	47.2%	22%
Paid	683	17.4%	25.8%	10.3%	30.3%	14%

The improvement is concentrated between small and mid-size events. Once events reach 150+ expected attendees, no-show rates stabilize around 19% and do not improve further at larger scales.

No-Show Rate by Size and Pricing

The free/paid gap is most dramatic at smaller event sizes.



Median no-show rate by event size and pricing model. Test events and events with fewer than 10 expected attendees excluded.

At small event sizes (under 150 attendees), the free/paid gap is 19-20 percentage points. At 150-499 attendees, the gap narrows to less than 2 points. Paid events maintain consistent ~15-18% no-shows regardless of size. Free events improve with scale but remain more variable.

Key finding: The median event loses roughly one in five expected attendees to no-shows. Free events and small events are disproportionately affected. Payment acts as the most consistent predictor of attendance, with paid events showing stable no-show rates around 17-18% regardless of size

Practical Implications for Event Teams

Plan for 80% attendance at paid events and 70% at free events. These are more operationally realistic planning numbers than total registration or expected headcount. Catering, seating, materials, and staffing should be scaled accordingly.

Small free events should plan for up to 40% no-shows. Overbooking, waitlist strategies, or confirmation mechanisms (RSVP reconfirmation, calendar holds) may be appropriate for events in this category.

Paid events deliver more predictable attendance regardless of size. The financial commitment acts as a consistent filter. Teams that need reliable headcounts should consider whether even nominal pricing would improve planning accuracy.

Distinguish between registration metrics and attendance metrics. A high registration count with a high no-show rate may indicate a marketing-to-commitment gap rather than event success. Both metrics should be tracked and reported separately.

How to Use These Benchmarks

These benchmarks are most useful as:

- Planning references for catering, seating, materials, and staffing decisions

---

- Diagnostic tools for identifying events with abnormally high or low no-show rates

---

- Context for evaluating whether free vs paid pricing affects operational predictability

They should not be interpreted as performance targets or guarantees.

Limitations

- Check-in data captures only events that actively used check-in features. Events without check-in data were excluded and may differ systematically from those that track check- ins.

- Total expected attendees includes speakers and non-registrant participants. This denominator is broader than completed registrations and may understate the no-show rate for the registrant population specifically.

- The dataset does not distinguish between attendees who cancelled in advance and those who simply did not appear. Both are counted as no-shows.

- Results may vary based on audience, industry, event format, and operational practices.

Closing

Event Data Lab Report #05 marks the transition from registration analysis to onsite performance. No-show rates represent the first point where registration intent meets operational reality.

The finding that payment is the strongest predictor of attendance connects directly to the registration series: Reports #02 through #04 optimized for registration completion, and Report #06 will examine whether that optimization comes at the cost of attendance.

This report is part of the Event Data Lab, an ongoing research initiative analyzing real-world event performance across registration, onsite operations, engagement, and ROI.