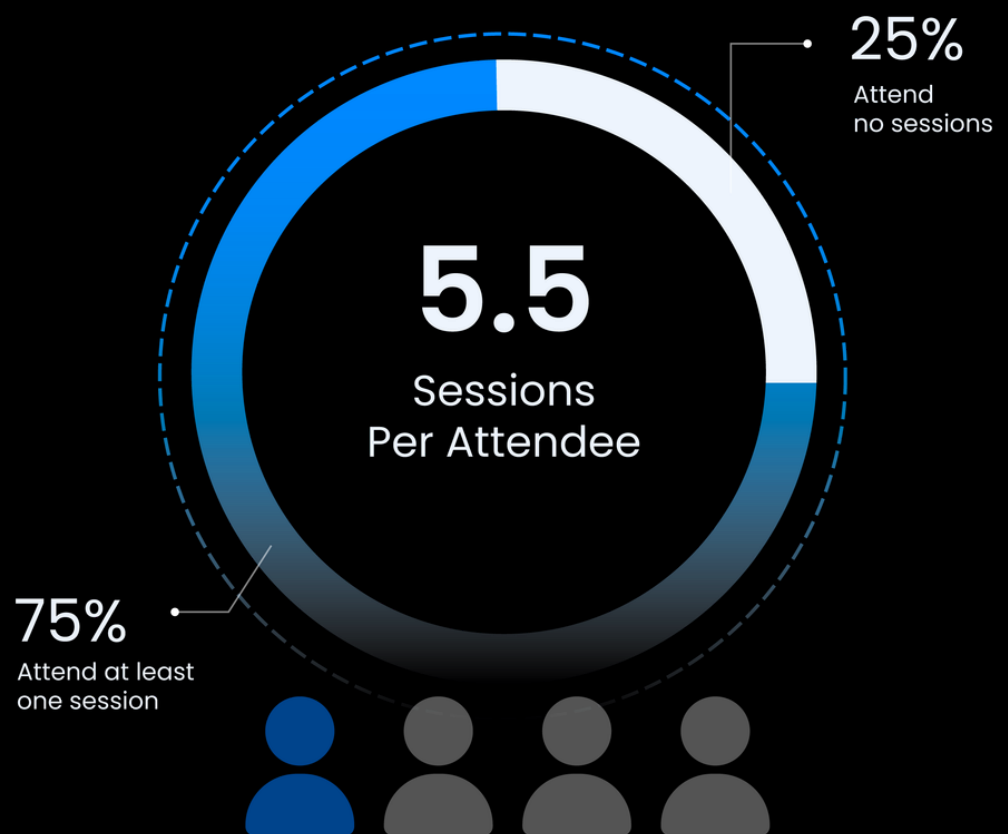


Attendees Attend 5.5 Sessions, and One in Four Attend None

Data-backed benchmarks from real-world events



Executive Summary



This report examines what attendees actually do with an event programme: how many sessions they attend, what share of them attend any session at all, and which scheduling decisions affect attendance. It is based on session-level check-in data across 411 live events.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- **At the median event, an attendee who attends any session attends 5.5 of them.** The interquartile range runs from 3.3 to 8.0 sessions per person. The figure is stable across every cohort variant tested.
- **Roughly one in four people who check into an event never check into a session.** Median session reach is 75% of event attendees, falling to 53% at the 25th percentile.
- **Session consumption rises far more slowly than session supply.** Events offering 61 or more sessions see 8.2 sessions attended per person against 3.3 at events offering 5 to 15. An eightfold increase in programme size produces roughly 2.5 times the consumption.
- **Agenda bookmarks predict total appetite but not individual session attendance.** Only 28% of sessions draw within 20% of their bookmark count. 40% draw more, 18% draw fewer than half.
- **Time of day, session length, parallel track count, and day of event show little measurable effect.** All four move within-event attendance by under 10% at the median.

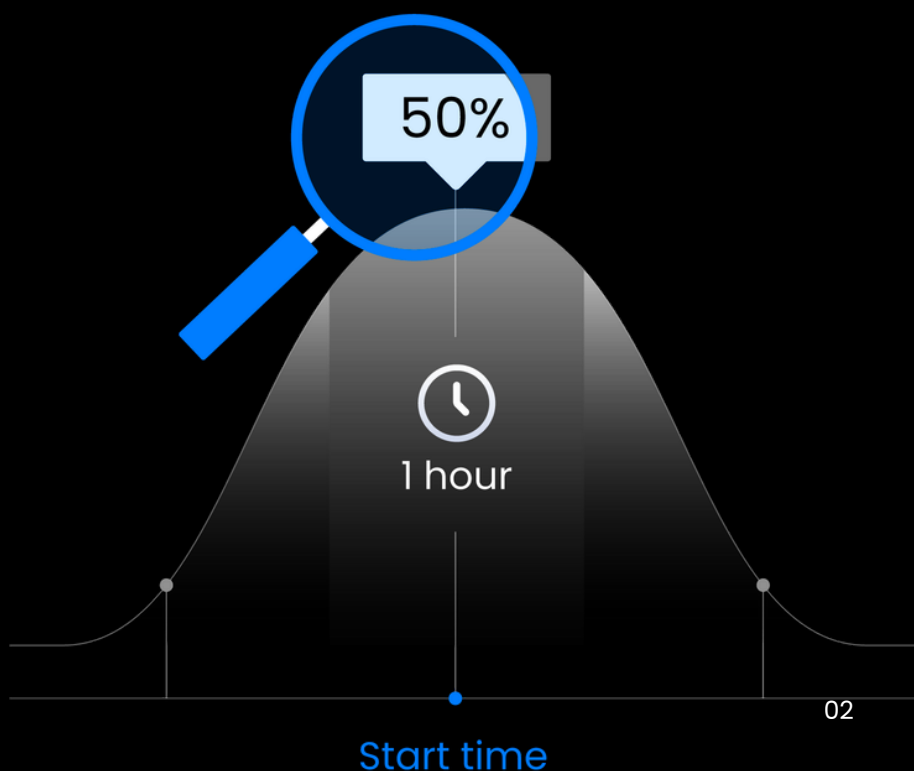
These benchmarks are intended to help event teams size rooms, set programme scope, and calibrate expectations about session engagement.



About the Event Data Lab

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

This report follows Report #07, which examined onsite arrival patterns. Where #07 addressed how attendees enter an event, #08 addresses what they do once inside.



Dataset Overview



Scope

- 411 live events with session-level check-in data
- 14,161 sessions with recorded attendance, drawn from 47,689 scheduled sessions across 805 events delivered
- 967,701 session check-ins
- Event durations of 1 to 14 days
- Data aggregated and anonymised across live events

Inclusion criteria

An event qualifies if it has five or more sessions with at least 10 recorded check-ins. This threshold ensures the event operated session check-in with enough consistency to describe its programme.

Exclusions

- Test, sandbox, and internal events were excluded
- Events with a recorded duration exceeding 14 days were excluded as evergreen or training containers rather than events
- Sessions dated outside their event window were excluded (0.8% of sessions dated before the event start, 0.4% beyond day 30)
- Sessions with fewer than 10 recorded check-ins were excluded from attendance measures

Methodological note on unscanned sessions:

Session check-in coverage is patchy within events, not only between them. Across events using the feature, the per-event share of sessions with agenda adds but no recorded check-in runs 14% at the 25th percentile, 28% at the median, and 48% at the 75th percentile. Only 3 of 361 events show zero scans across all such sessions. These are rooms nobody scanned, not empty rooms. Treating them as zero-attendance sessions would understate attendance by a wide margin, so they are excluded rather than counted.

Anonymisation

All data was aggregated and anonymised prior to analysis. No individual event, organisation, or attendee can be identified from this report. Session-level figures are derived from event-level counts, not from tracing individual attendees.



Metric Definitions

Sessions Attended Per Person

$$\text{Sessions Per Person} = \frac{\text{Total Session Check-Ins}}{\text{Distinct Attendees With At Least One Session Check-In}}$$

This measures average session consumption among attendees who engaged with the programme at all. It excludes event attendees who attended no sessions, who are measured separately as session reach.

Session Reach

$$\text{Arrival offset} = \frac{\text{Attendees With At Least One Session Check-In}}{\text{Total Event Check-Ins}}$$

Within-Event Attendance Index

For findings comparing session characteristics, each session's attendance is divided by the median session attendance at its own event. An index of 1.00 means the session performed like a typical session at that event. This removes event size as a confound and is the basis for all figures in the Scheduling Variables section.

Finding 1: Attendees Attend 5.5 Sessions



At the median event, an attendee who attends any session attends 5.5 of them.

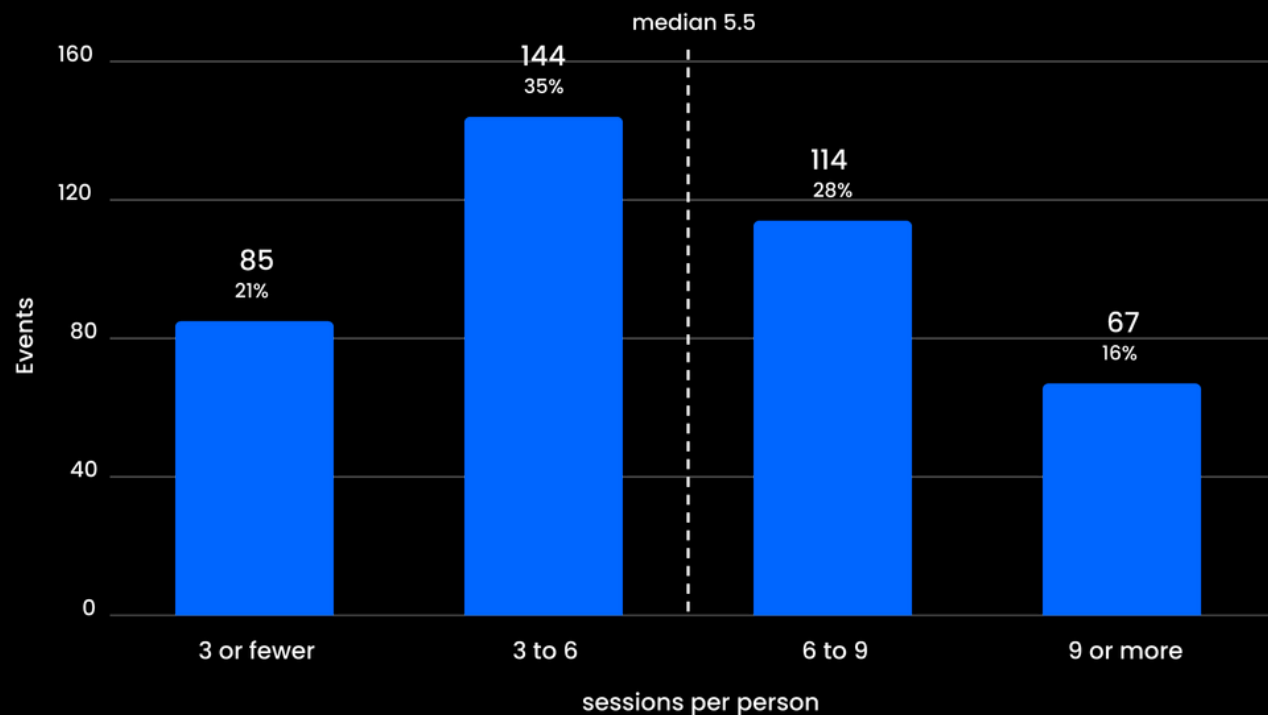
Percentile	Sessions attended per person
10th	2.2
25th	3.3
Median	5.5
75th	8.0
90th	10.3
Mean	6.1

Distribution across the 410 events with sufficient volume:

Sessions per person	Events	Share of events
3 or fewer	85	21%
3 to 6	144	35%
6 to 9	114	28%
9 or more	67	16%

Sessions Attended Per Person, Distribution Across Events

410 events with session-level check-in data



Distribution of median sessions attended per attending person across 410 events. Test events excluded.

Robustness

The median holds between 5.4 and 7.0 across every cohort variant tested.

Cohort variant	Events	Median	P25	P75
Base (5+ session with 10+ check-ins)	410	5.5	3.3	8.0
Require 8+ qualifying sessions	365	5.9	3.7	8.2
Require 20+ check-ins per session	381	5.7	3.6	8.1
Event duration 7 days or fewer	401	5.4	3.4	8.1
Require 15+ qualifying sessions	274	7.0	4.4	8.5

The upward drift on the most restrictive variant is expected: events running larger programmes both qualify more easily and generate more consumption per attendee, which is the subject of Finding 3.



Finding 2: One in Four Attendees Never Enters a Session

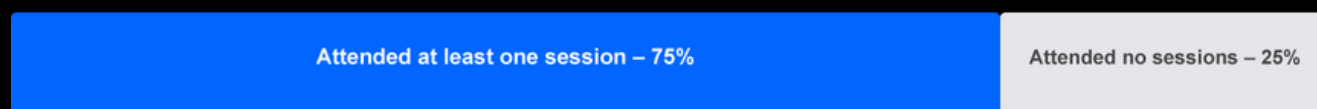
Median session reach is 75%. At the median event, a quarter of the attendees who checked in at the door never checked into a session

Percentile	Sessions attended per person
10th	31%
25th	53%
Median	75%
75th	92%

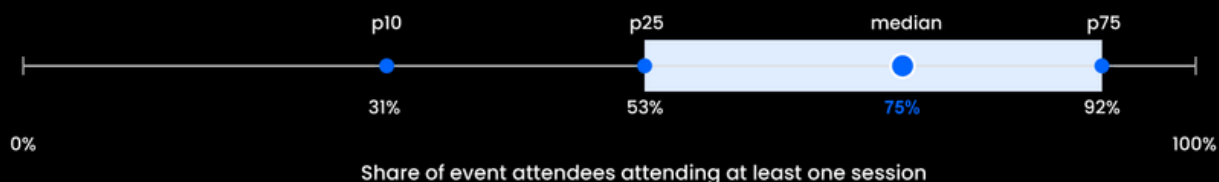
At 32% of events, fewer than 60% of event attendees attended any session. Reach varies more widely than any other measure in this report.

One in Four Event Attendees Never Enters a Session

Share of event check-ins that also produce a session check-in, 252 events



SPREAD ACROSS EVENTS



At 32% of events, fewer than 60% of attendees attended any session.

Median session reach across 252 events with 50 or more event check-ins. At 13% of events, session attendees exceeded event check-ins; those events are capped at 100%. Figure should be read as approximate.

Caveat required alongside this figure:

At 13% of events (33 of 252), more attendees checked into sessions than checked into the event. This occurs when door check-in is operated less thoroughly than session check-in, and it means the denominator is unreliable at those events. Those events are capped at 100% in the figures above. The true reach rate may be lower than 75%. This number should be cited as approximate.

Finding 3: Consumption Rises More Slowly Than Supply



Median session reach is 75%. At the median event, a quarter of the attendees who checked in at the door never checked into a session

Sessions offered	Events	Sessions attended per person
5 to 10	138	3.3
16 to 30	109	5.8
31 to 60	100	7.2
61 or more	58	8.2

Moving from roughly 10 sessions to roughly 80 is an eightfold increase in programme size. It produces approximately 2.5 times the consumption per attendee.

Event duration shows the same sub-linear pattern:

Event duration	Events	Sessions attended per person
1 day	36	3.7
2 days	77	5.6
3 days	132	5.9
4 days	104	5.4
5 days	44	8.4

More days and more content both increase consumption, and both do so at a declining rate. Attendees appear to carry a session appetite that is relatively stable and not easily expanded by supply.

Key Finding:

Each session added to an already-large programme competes for attention that has already been allocated. Programme expansion is subject to diminishing returns, and the sessions at the margin compete with the existing programme rather than with empty time

Finding 4: Bookmarks Predict Appetite, Not Attendance



Attendees can add sessions to a personal agenda ahead of the event. That data is commonly used to forecast room requirements.

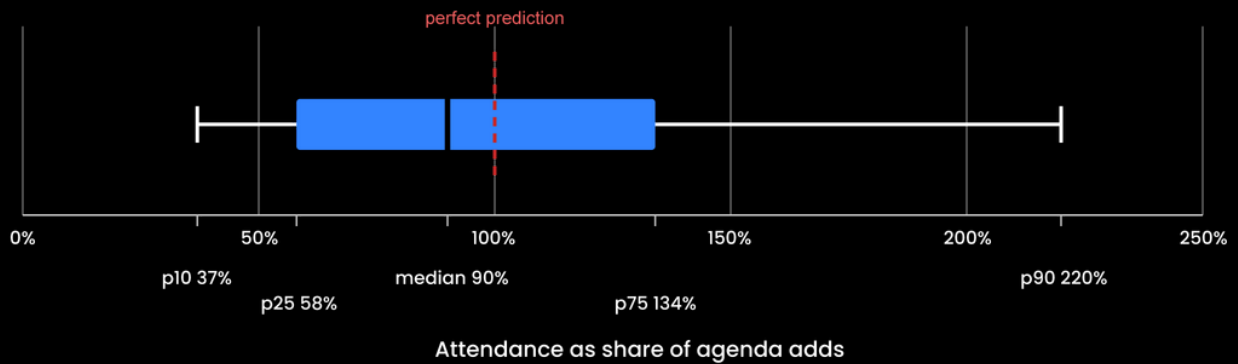
Across 12,496 sessions with at least 10 agenda adds and recorded check-in activity:

Percentile	Attendance as share of agenda adds
10th	37%
25th	58%
Median	90%
75th	134%
90th	220%

Outcome	Share of sessions
Draws more than bookmarked	40%
Draws within 20% of bookmark count	28%
Draws fewer than half of bookmarks	18%

Bookmarks Predict Appetite, Not Attendance

Session attendance as a share of agenda adds, 12,496 sessions



40%

of sessions draw MORE people than bookmarked them

28%

land within 20% of the bookmark count

18%

draw fewer than half of their bookmarks

Sessions with 10 or more agenda adds and 10 or more recorded check-ins. Agenda adds are a soft bookmark and do not reserve capacity. 411 events

At event level (median of within-event medians, 326 events), the ratio runs 72% at the 25th percentile, 97% at the median, and 174% at the 75th.

Agenda data is close to unbiased in aggregate and close to useless for an individual session. A planner sizing a room from bookmark counts is roughly as likely to be oversubscribed as undersubscribed, and the error is frequently large in both directions.

Definitional note: agenda adds in this dataset are a soft bookmark, not a registration against session capacity. Attendees are not restricted to sessions they bookmarked, and bookmarking does not reserve a seat. This is why attendance above 100% of bookmarks is common rather than anomalous.

Finding 5: Attendance Is Flatter Than Expected



Within events, session attendance is less concentrated than programme debates typically assume. Across 328 events with 10 or more sessions carrying recorded attendance:

Slice of programme	Median share of session attendance	IQR
Top 10% of sessions	20%	15% to 27%
Top 20% of sessions	38%	31% to 44%
Bottom 50% of sessions	29%	24% to 34%

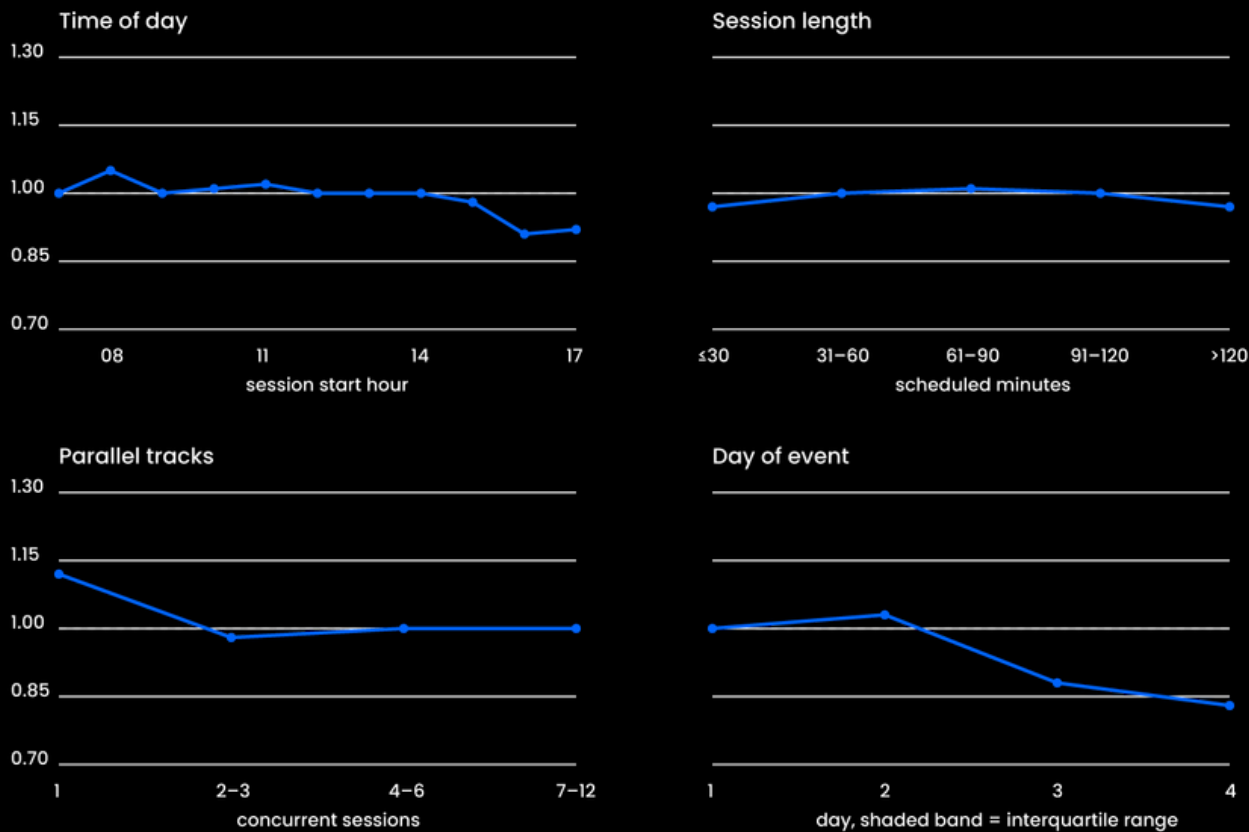
A perfectly even programme would place 20% of attendance in the top 20% of sessions and 50% in the bottom half. Actual figures are 38% and 29%. Concentration is real and modest. It bears no resemblance to an 80/20 distribution.

Scheduling Variables That Do Not Move Attendance

Four variables that event teams actively optimise show little or no measurable effect. All figures are within-event attendance indices, where 1.00 represents a typical session at the same event.

Four Things That Don't Move Session Attendance

Within-event attendance index. 1.00 = a typical session at the same event.



Within-event attendance index, where each session is divided by the median session attendance at its own event. 411 events, 14,161 sessions with recorded attendance. Day of event panel restricted to events of 3 to 5 days.

Time of Day

Session start hour	Sessions	Attendance index
07:00	134	1.00
08:00	1,393	1.05
09:00	1,524	1.00
10:00	2,101	1.01
11:00	1,632	1.02
12:00	520	1.00
13:00	2,047	1.00
14:00	1,800	1.00
15:00	1,408	0.98
16:00	929	0.91
17:00	164	0.92

A late-afternoon dip of under 10% is the only visible pattern. There is no post-lunch collapse, which contradicts a widely held scheduling assumption.

Session Length

Scheduled length	Sessions	Attendance index
30 minutes or less	2,220	0.97
31 to 60 minutes	6,661	1.00
61 to 90 minutes	3,150	1.01
91 to 120 minutes	1,087	1.00
Over 120 minutes	972	0.97

Parallel Tracks

Concurrent sessions in slot	Slots	Attendance index
1 (single track)	2,514	1.12
2 to 3	1,171	0.98
4 to 6	956	1.00
7 to 12	388	1.00

The single-track premium largely reflects that single-track slots are usually plenaries or keynotes rather than an effect of concurrency itself. Between 2 and 12 parallel sessions, the index is flat. Adding tracks does not measurably dilute per-session attendance.

Day of Event

Indexed within each event against its own opening day, restricted to events of 3 to 5 days:

Day	Events	Attendance index	IQR
1	143	1.00	reference
2	138	1.03	0.81 to 1.33
3	133	0.88	0.68 to 1.25
4	57	0.83	0.63 to 1.41

Day 2 is flat or marginally up. Days 3 and 4 fall 12% to 17% at the median. The interquartile range crosses 1.00 on every day, meaning event-to-event variation is larger than the day-over-day effect.

A note on why this matters methodologically. Comparing raw median attendance by day across all events produces an apparent decline from 48 attendees on day 1 to 23 on day 5. That is a composition artifact: different events contribute to different days, and longer events differ systematically from shorter ones. Indexing within each event removes the artifact and reduces the effect to the modest decline above.

Key Finding:

Session bookmarks tell you how much appetite exists, not where it will go. At the median session, attendance lands within 10% of the bookmark count. At the quartiles it lands anywhere between 58% and 134%.

Practical Implications for Event Teams



- **Plan for roughly 5.5 sessions attended per attending person, with 3.3 to 8.0 as the realistic band.** This is a more useful planning input than total programme capacity, and it scales with programme size in a predictable way.
- **Expect a quarter of event attendees to skip the programme entirely.** If session attendance is a stated objective, that gap is the largest available opportunity, and adding sessions does not address it. Reach and consumption are separate problems with separate levers.
- **Treat programme expansion as subject to diminishing returns.** Quadrupling session count historically yields about 2.5 times the consumption per attendee. The marginal session competes with the existing programme, not with empty time. Beyond roughly 60 sessions, additional content produces very little additional consumption.
- **Do not size individual rooms from agenda data alone.** Use bookmarks to gauge total appetite, then build capacity flexibility into room assignments. Only 28% of sessions land within 20% of their bookmark count, and errors run in both directions.
- **Reallocate optimisation effort away from time of day, session length, and track count.** None of the three moves attendance by more than 10% in this dataset. Programme scope and session reach are where the measurable effects sit.

The overall picture is of a fairly fixed attendee appetite, distributed across a programme more evenly than expected, and largely insensitive to the scheduling variables that receive the most attention.



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

- **Dwell time is not covered.** Session check-out is recorded for 6.4% of session check-ins platform-wide. Where it exists the values are unreliable: among sessions with a computed dwell and five or more check-outs, the ratio of recorded dwell to scheduled length reaches 8.9 at the 90th percentile. Session duration attended is not measurable from this dataset and has been excluded entirely rather than published with caveats.
- **Capacity-based fill rates are not covered. Session capacity is unset on 88% of sessions.** Among the 5,464 sessions carrying a capacity value, agenda adds already meet or exceed capacity on 737, indicating capacity is frequently nominal.
- **Session format segmentation is not covered.** The format field is unpopulated on 67% of sessions.
- **Findings are event-level, not attendee-level.** Sessions per person is derived from total check-ins divided by distinct attendees at each event. No attendee identifiers were included in this dataset, so individual session paths, repeat attendance, and per-attendee variation cannot be described.
- **Event type segmentation is not available.** Event type classification was not delivered with this dataset, so benchmarks cannot be segmented by conference, trade show, or association format as in Report #01.
- **This is observational.** No event ran an experimental variation in programme size, schedule structure, or session length. Causal claims are not supported.

Closing



Report #08 establishes that attendee session appetite is more fixed, more evenly distributed, and less responsive to scheduling decisions than programme planning practice tends to assume. The two figures worth carrying forward are 5.5 sessions per attending person and 75% session reach.

The finding with the largest practical consequence is the gap between supply and consumption. Programme committees make expansion decisions on the assumption that more content produces more engagement. It does, at a declining rate, and the decline is steep enough that beyond roughly 60 sessions additional content produces very little additional attendance.

Future reports will examine exhibitor engagement and the relationship between session attendance and other forms of onsite participation.

Appendix



Definitions

- **Session check-in:** a recorded scan or confirmation of an attendee entering a specific session.
- **Scanned session:** a session with 10 or more recorded check-ins, used as evidence that check-in was operated for that session.
- **Sessions attended per person:** total session check-ins divided by distinct attendees with at least one session check-in.
- **Session reach:** attendees with at least one session check-in divided by total event check-ins.
- **Agenda add (bookmark):** an attendee action adding a session to a personal schedule. A soft signal of intent. It does not reserve capacity and does not restrict which sessions the attendee may enter.
- **Within-event attendance index:** a session's attendance divided by the median session attendance at the same event.
- **Median:** the 50th percentile. Used as the primary measure throughout because session attendance distributions are skewed.

Data Exclusions

Events were excluded if they matched internal or test naming patterns, if recorded duration exceeded 14 days, or if fewer than five sessions carried 10 or more check-ins. Sessions were excluded if dated outside the event window or if they carried fewer than 10 recorded check-ins.

Data Exclusions

- Session day index values ranged from -1000 to 169. 379 sessions (0.8%) were dated before their event start and 213 (0.4%) beyond day 30. Both groups were excluded.

- Recorded event duration reached 460 days. 46 events exceeded 14 days and were excluded as evergreen or training containers.
- Session names were unpopulated on 78% of sessions, suggesting programmatic or imported session creation. This does not affect any figure in this report.
- Session check-in coverage varies within events as well as between them. A per-session indicator of whether check-in was operated would materially improve the precision of these benchmarks.

Notes on Causality

All findings describe associations. Events with larger programmes may differ from events with smaller programmes in audience type, duration, budget, and organisational maturity, and those differences may explain observed patterns independently of programme size. The sub-linear relationship between supply and consumption is consistent across event durations and cohort definitions, but it has not been tested experimentally.

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