

OUTCOMES RESEARCH REPORT

The 2026 State of B2B Event Marketing: From Attendance to Commercial Motion

A global survey of 841 marketing, sales, and business development professionals on how B2B teams run conferences, what they measure, and where event ROI breaks down.

Fieldwork September 2026, via Prolific

Sample 841 professionals

68.9%

have reported an event ROI figure they didn't fully trust

39.2%

tag every conference lead to the event it came from

74.2%

of booth conversations at the last major event weren't planned

51.8%

expect conferences to matter more in the next 2 to 3 years

Most B2B teams are reporting conference ROI they don't trust. They spend heavily on events, see the value in being there, and come away with plenty of conversations and leads. Many are convinced those events drive revenue. What they often don't have is a system that connects all of that activity back to revenue they can prove.

That's becoming harder to ignore. Budgets are shifting toward fewer, bigger shows, and leadership expects each event to justify the investment. Teams are increasingly being asked to put a number behind their event ROI, and 68.9% have already handed leadership a figure they weren't confident in.

We surveyed 841 marketing, sales, and business development professionals in September 2026 to understand what's really happening behind the scenes. The events themselves aren't necessarily the problem. It's everything around them. In many organizations, no single person owns the event from start to finish, which means there is no clear meeting target. Without a target, the booth becomes reactive: conversations happen when people walk up, the best ones aren't always followed up, and leads often make it into the CRM without a clear source. By the time someone needs to calculate ROI, the pieces have already been lost.

WHAT WE FOUND

- 1 Event ROI breaks down at the booth.** Teams struggle to prove ROI because the source of a lead often isn't captured when the lead is created. No report can recover information that was never recorded.
- 2 No one owns what happens after the show.** Events, sales, and marketing each handle part of the process, but nobody is clearly accountable for the pipeline that comes out of it.
- 3 Teams have target lists but don't book the meetings.** The list is there. The calendar isn't. So the booth ends up relying on foot traffic.
- 4 The best content is the conversations.** Teams often record interviews with buyers because the opportunity happens to be there, while spending much more time planning social posts.
- 5 PR rarely helps sales.** Most teams announce the same kinds of things everyone else is announcing, and the coverage they do get rarely makes its way to the sales team.

FINDING 1**Most teams don't trust their own event ROI**

68.9% of teams have given leadership an event ROI number they didn't fully trust. Only 31.1% say they've never done it. So a shaky ROI number isn't unusual anymore. It's how event ROI gets reported at a lot of companies.

The problem starts long before anyone opens the report. Only 39.2% of teams tag every conference lead to the event it came from. Everyone else has to piece things together later using badge scans, rep notes, and memory. By the time finance asks where the number came from, some of those details are already gone, and the team has to fill in the blanks.

The underlying instinct may not be wrong. 36.0% believe conferences influenced at least a quarter of their closed deals, and in complex sales, meeting someone in person can absolutely move a deal forward. But when budgets get tighter, "we think it helped" isn't enough. And budgets are getting tighter: 37.9% say they're under more pressure to prove event ROI.

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That means a better dashboard alone won't fix the problem. If the lead source wasn't captured in the first place, there is nothing for the dashboard to report. The fix has to happen when the lead enters the CRM. Otherwise, teams may eventually cut events that are actually working simply because they can't prove the impact.

Teams believe their events drive revenue. They can't prove it, and leadership is starting to ask.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMERCIAL TEAMS

- Tag every lead to its event in the CRM the same day.
- Agree with finance on how you'll measure event ROI before the show, not after.

FINDING 2

When everyone owns the event, no one owns the follow-up

Ask who owns conference marketing and you'll often get a few different answers. 24.2% say it's shared across teams, which is not far from the 26.4% that have a dedicated events lead. The events team books the booth, sales works the floor, and marketing handles the recap. But once the show is over, there often isn't one person responsible for what happens to the pipeline.

FIG. 1 WHO OWNS CONFERENCE MARKETING



That ownership matters. It's what turns a series of individual events into an actual program. Without it, every show gets planned from scratch and judged on its own. Lessons from one event don't necessarily make it into the next.

That's reflected in the numbers. Only 29.8% run a fully connected, year-round conference program. Everyone else is still largely planning one show at a time.

The problem becomes more noticeable as event calendars get smaller. A team attending ten shows can absorb one that doesn't perform. But 37.6% are moving toward fewer, higher-value events. When there are fewer shows, each one carries more budget and gets more attention from leadership. Someone needs to own that investment from the first outreach email through the eventual deal.

Unclear ownership is behind almost every other gap in this report. Fix it first.

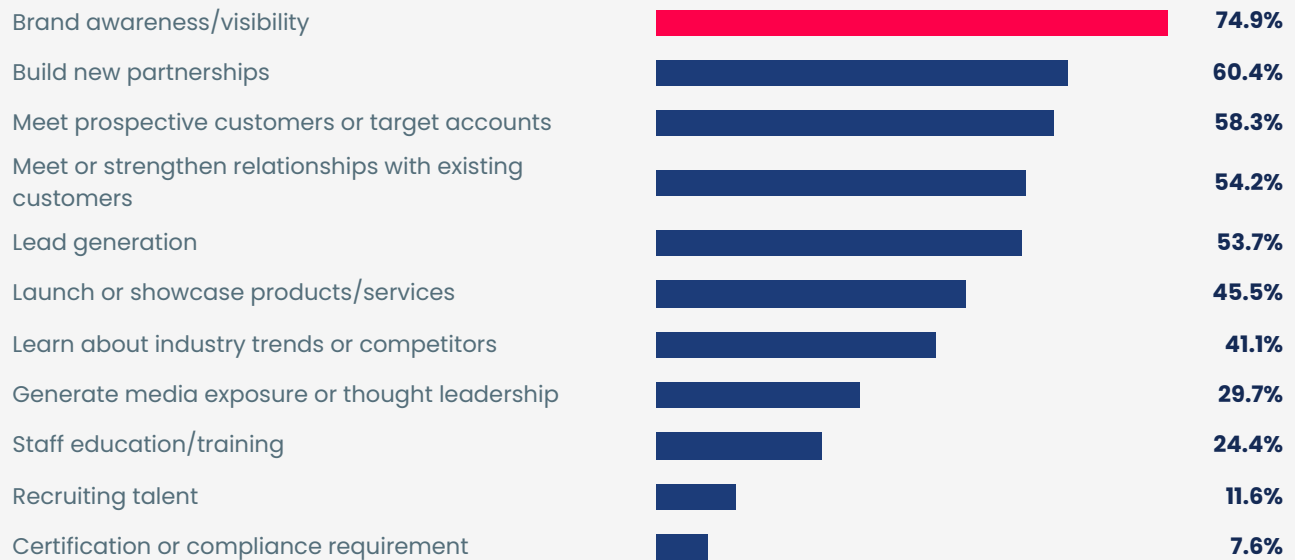
IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMERCIAL TEAMS

- Pick one person who owns event pipeline before, during, and after each show.
- Build every major show into the annual sales and marketing plan, so the follow-up has a budget and an owner.

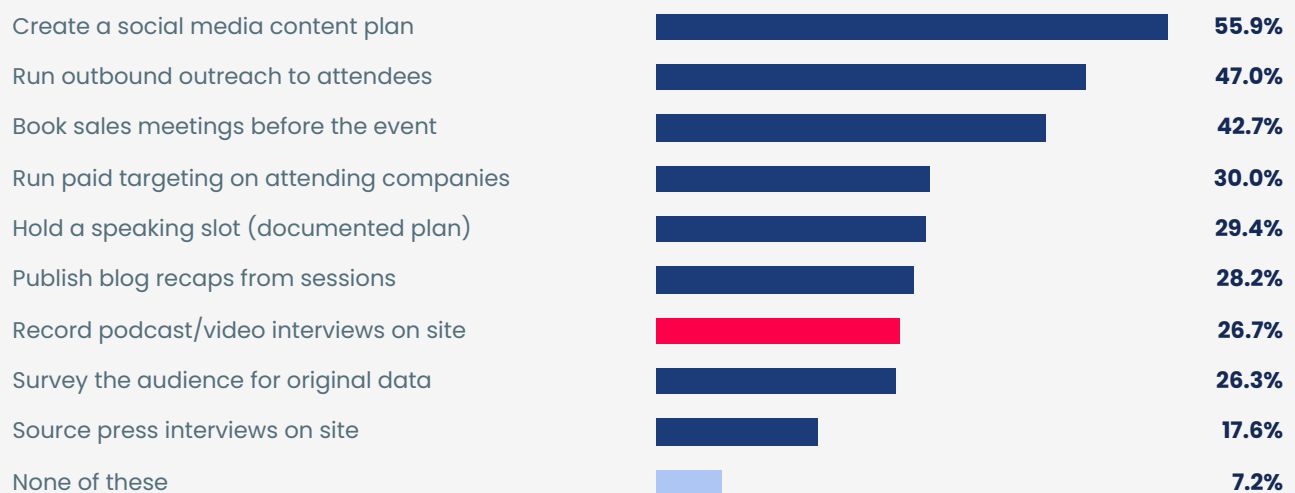
FINDING 3

Most booth conversations happen by chance

74.2% of booth conversations at the last major event weren't planned. That's not because teams aren't doing any preparation. In fact, 76.8% build a target account list for at least some events. The missing step is turning that list into actual meetings. Only 32.0% set a goal for how many meetings they want to book ahead of time. The target list becomes a reference document, and the booth ends up running on whoever happens to walk by.

FIG. 2 WHY B2B TEAMS ATTEND CONFERENCES


A lot of event planning is still focused on visibility. The most common tactics are a social media plan (55.9%) and outreach to attendees (47.0%), both of which help put the brand in front of people at the show. Tactics that create more focused conversations, like on-site interviews, original research, and press, are much less common. Only 7.9% use most of the tactics we asked about.

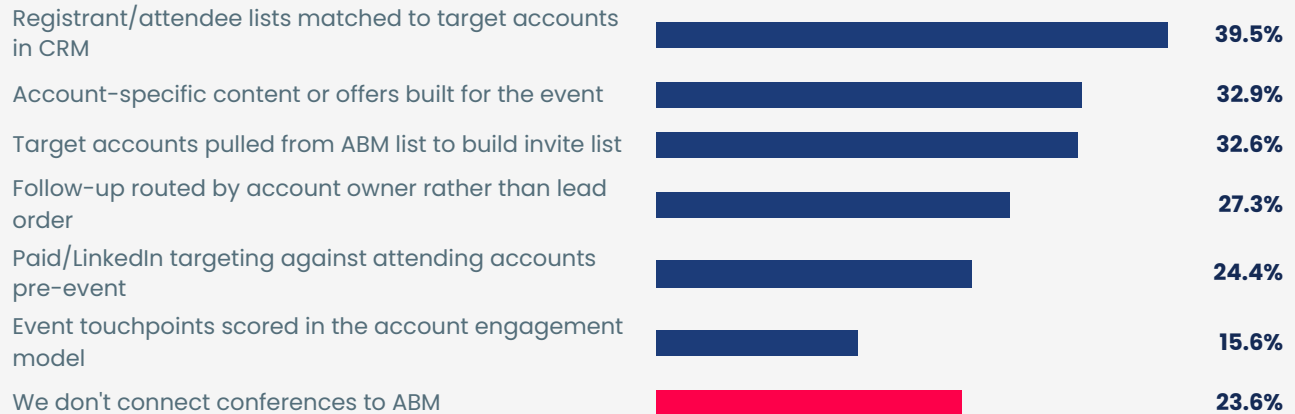
FIG. 3 WHAT B2B TEAMS DO AROUND A MAJOR CONFERENCE


A walk-up conversation can create awareness. It's much harder for it to move a complex deal forward when several people need to be involved in the decision. Those people have their own

schedules, and getting them together usually takes planning well before the event.

The same issue shows up with ABM. 23.6% don't connect conferences to their ABM program at all. That means some of their most important accounts aren't getting any additional attention at the one place where those buyers may already be gathered.

FIG. 4 HOW CONFERENCE ACTIVITY CONNECTS TO ABM



A target list with no meeting goal is not a plan. It is a wish list.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMERCIAL TEAMS

- Build a target account list for every major show and set a number of meetings to book against it.
- Start reaching out weeks ahead. A buying committee won't come together at your booth by chance.

FINDING 4

The best content from a show is the conversations, and most teams let them go to waste

Almost everyone creates content around conferences. 95.0% do. But most of that content is created for the week of the show itself. Only 36.1% plan it before the event, while 45.2% create it whenever they find the time. That makes it easy for the content to disappear almost as quickly as the event does.

FIG. 5 CONTENT PRODUCED FROM CONFERENCES


The numbers show the problem. 36.9% say their conference content stops working in under two weeks, and 10.7% stop using it once the show ends. The formats that tend to have a longer shelf life, like original data and recorded conversations, are also the ones teams are least likely to produce.

FIG. 6 HOW LONG CONFERENCE CONTENT KEEPS WORKING AFTER THE EVENT


The content opportunity is already sitting there. 58.4% of teams have recorded interviews with customers and prospects at a conference, but only 24.2% planned those interviews in advance. So the interviews happen when the right person happens to be available, rather than because the team deliberately chose who it wanted to talk to.

58.4%

have recorded interviews with customers and prospects at a conference.

24.2%

planned those interviews in advance.

A planned interview is different. If the person you're interviewing is a decision-maker at an account you're trying to reach, the conversation gives sales a natural reason to follow up. It can remain useful throughout a long sales cycle. And because the guest has a reason to share it, the content can travel beyond the event itself.

This may be one of the simplest gaps to close. The conversations are already happening, and the cameras are already there. What's missing is a plan for who to interview and what happens with each conversation after the show.

The conversations are already being recorded. They are not being planned or reused.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMERCIAL TEAMS

- Plan your content before the show, and focus on formats that last: interviews, original data, and written recaps.
- Book on-site interviews with target accounts, and tie each one to an account and a sales follow-up.

FINDING 5

Conference PR rarely makes it to sales

53.9% of teams go after press coverage for at least some events, but only 14.7% do it for every major show, while 24.5% don't do any PR around conferences. For the teams that do PR, the most common approaches are timing announcements to the show and briefing analysts and industry media (36.6% each).

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do it for every major show.

The challenge is that everyone else is doing much of the same thing that week. Only 24.2% release original research timed to the show, and that's the kind of news other companies can't simply replicate.

FIG. 7 PR ACTIVITY RUN AROUND CONFERENCES


Original research can do two jobs at once. It gives reporters something new to cover, and it gives sales a reason to follow up with people they met. The event itself can also be a good place to get that research. Organizers already have access to the audience and often want new content for it. Yet only 45.5% have ever partnered with an organizer on audience research. Another 40.7% haven't done it, but would consider it.

Speaking is mixed as well. 39.4% have a documented speaking strategy, while 34.8% either take speaking opportunities when they come up or don't actively pursue them. And even when coverage does happen, it doesn't always make its way to the people who can use it. Our 2026 Benchmark on AI, Visibility and Revenue found only 13.1% of organizations share earned media with their sales team.

Visibility is not authority. Authority comes from having something new to say and getting it in front of the right accounts.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMERCIAL TEAMS

- Bring your own data to every major show, so reporters and sales both have a reason to reach out.
- Send every piece of coverage to sales, along with the accounts it's relevant to.

OUTLOOK

Confidence in conferences is running ahead of the systems behind them

Teams are increasingly optimistic about conferences, but their processes haven't necessarily caught up. 51.8% expect conferences to matter more over the next two to three years, while only 15.0% expect them to matter less. At the same time, 37.6% are moving toward fewer, higher-value events, and 37.9% are under more pressure to prove ROI.

Put those numbers together and the gaps in this report become more important. If you're attending fewer shows and putting more money and attention into each one, you can't afford to rely on foot traffic or an ROI number you can't defend. Fixing ownership, meeting planning, and lead tracking becomes much more important when every event carries more weight.

The same basic issue applies to AI. 65.5% expect AI-driven targeting and personalization to have the biggest impact on conference marketing, nearly 27 points ahead of the next most-cited factor, the rise of hybrid or virtual formats (38.5%). AI can help identify the right accounts and make outreach faster. What it can't do is connect revenue to a lead that was never tagged, or book meetings against a goal that was never set.

FIG. 8 BIGGEST EXPECTED IMPACT ON CONFERENCE MARKETING IN THE NEXT 2 TO 3 YEARS



The optimism is warranted. The systems to prove it aren't there yet.

ACROSS OUR RESEARCH

We see the same gap in every channel we study

Across our recent research, the same pattern keeps showing up in different channels. Teams invest, believe the work is having an impact, and then struggle to prove exactly what that impact was.

STUDY	CHANNEL	THE MEASUREMENT GAP
2026 State of B2B Event Marketing 841 surveyed	Conferences	68.9% have reported an event ROI figure they did not fully believe
2026 State of B2B Go-to-Market Strategy 511 surveyed	GTM overall	About 24% of GTM budget goes to initiatives without traceable commercial outcomes
Branded podcasting benchmark with Health Podcast Library 861 surveyed	Podcasts	16.8% of hosts track formal ROI

Ownership follows a similar pattern. In our GTM study, about 21% had no formal GTM strategy or no clear owner. Here, 28.9% have no clear owner for events.

The takeaway is less about any one channel and more about how the work is organized. Give someone ownership, set a revenue goal, and make sure every lead can be traced back to its source, and you improve the way events, content, and PR work together.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Where conference marketing is headed

The findings show how teams are running conferences today. They also point to where the expectations are heading: less emphasis on simply being present, and more on being deliberate about what happens before, during, and after the event.

Conferences are moving beyond the traditional marketing budget and becoming part of the broader revenue plan. As more teams face pressure to prove ROI and more companies reduce the number of shows they attend, each event is likely to be looked at more like any other

revenue investment. Events that can't be supported with real numbers will be harder to defend, even when they may be contributing value.

The advantage is also shifting from simply showing up to showing up prepared. Teams can arrive with meetings already booked, specific accounts in mind, and a plan for which conversations they want to capture. As event content loses its impact more quickly, those planned conversations can keep working long after the booth comes down.

AI will make good underlying data even more important. It can help teams target and personalize their outreach, but only when the event data is complete. Teams with clean lead tracking will have more to work with. Teams without it risk simply automating the gaps they already have.

MEDTECH AND HEALTHTECH

What this means for medtech and healthtech

This survey wasn't limited to healthcare. Here's how we read the findings for medtech and health tech sales and marketing teams.

Pre-booked meetings matter more with buying committees. Only 25.8% of booth conversations were pre-booked. When a purchase requires sign-off from clinical, finance, and IT, a walk-up conversation rarely reaches everyone involved.

Fewer events raise the stakes on each one. 37.6% are shifting to fewer, higher-value events. Each remaining show has to be treated as more than a booth. It needs a target list, a meeting goal, and a plan around it.

Healthcare buyers expect proof, and so will your CFO. 37.9% face more pressure to prove event ROI. An ROI number the team itself doesn't believe is unlikely to hold up under scrutiny.

The interviews are already happening. 58.4% have recorded interviews with customers and prospects at conferences, but only 24.2% plan for them. Planning those conversations is one of the clearest opportunities to get more value from activity that's already happening.

THE PLAYBOOK

Five moves before your next show

- 1 Name one owner.**
One person answers for pipeline from the event, before, during, and after. Shared ownership is how 28.9% end up with no owner at all.
- 2 Set a meeting target, not a meeting hope.**
Build the target account list, then set a number of pre-booked meetings. Move the pre-booked share of booth conversations above 25.8%.
- 3 Tag every lead at the source.**
Every lead goes into the CRM with the event attached, the same day. If 39.2% can do it every time, you can too.
- 4 Record the conversations you are already having.**
Plan on-site interviews with customers and prospects before you arrive. Map each one to an account and a sales sequence.
- 5 Bring your own data.**
Partner with the organizer to survey the audience, or release research timed to the show. It gives press a reason to call and gives sales a reason to follow up.

Start with one step this week. Pull the lead list from your last major event and count how many have an event source attached.

“A conference is not a marketing expense. It is a revenue event, and it should be run like one. Only 29.8% of teams run a fully integrated conference program. Everyone else is still going show by show and hoping the pipeline shows up. Every program tied to an event, from ABM to content to PR, needs to feed the same number. If pipeline and revenue are not the metric, the conference is just a very expensive trip.”

Saul Marquez, CEO and Founder, Outcomes Rocket

CONCLUSION

Run every show like a revenue event

Teams believe in conferences, and the data suggests there is good reason for that confidence. What many haven't built yet is the system that connects everything happening at a show back to revenue they can actually prove. The biggest gaps are in ownership, planning, and lead tracking, not necessarily in the events themselves.

That gap matters more as the event landscape changes. Calendars are getting smaller, scrutiny is increasing, and every show has to justify its place on the calendar. Teams that continue planning one event at a time may find it increasingly difficult to explain what their best events are actually contributing.

The fix doesn't necessarily require a bigger budget. It starts with one owner, a clear meeting goal, a lead source on every record, and a plan for the conversations that are already happening. Put those pieces in place, and the work happening at a conference has a much better chance of continuing to create value after everyone goes home.

"Every year I watch healthcare companies spend a fortune to be seen at a conference and almost nothing to be remembered after it. The teams that win don't treat the show as the event. They treat it as the middle of a campaign that started months before the booth went up and keeps working long after it comes down."

Colin Hung, CMO and Editor of Health IT News; Editor-in-Chief, Swaay.Health Marketing Community

Respondent profile

The survey covers a wide mix of B2B marketing, events, and communications professionals across seniority levels, company sizes, and industries.

DIMENSION	BREAKDOWN
Job level	Managers 36.9%, individual contributors 23.9%, senior or lead professionals 17.4%
Company size	200 or fewer employees 57.1% (1 to 50: 34.2%, 51 to 200: 22.9%). 5,000 or more employees 10.9%
Industry	Retail and consumer 28.5%, technology and SaaS 18.4%, manufacturing and industrial 15.0%. Together about 62%, with the remainder spread across more than 130 distinct industry labels. No single industry is a majority.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a global survey of 841 marketing, sales, and business development professionals, conducted via Prolific in September 2026. Prolific is a research platform that provides pre-screened professional respondents. Participants were selected for experience in marketing, sales, or business development.

Of the 841 people surveyed, 160 (19%) hadn't attended a conference in the last 12 months and were screened out of the questions that followed. Findings are reported as a share of qualified respondents unless noted.

Percentages reflect multiple-response questions where noted and may total more than 100%. Source: Outcomes Rocket, The 2026 State of B2B Event Marketing: From Attendance to Commercial Motion.