

Unpacking XLNC:

The future of trade shows and conferences

Within this report



Total number of respondents: 1,991

Conference respondents: 55%

Trade show respondents: 45%



Margin of error: +/- 3.1%

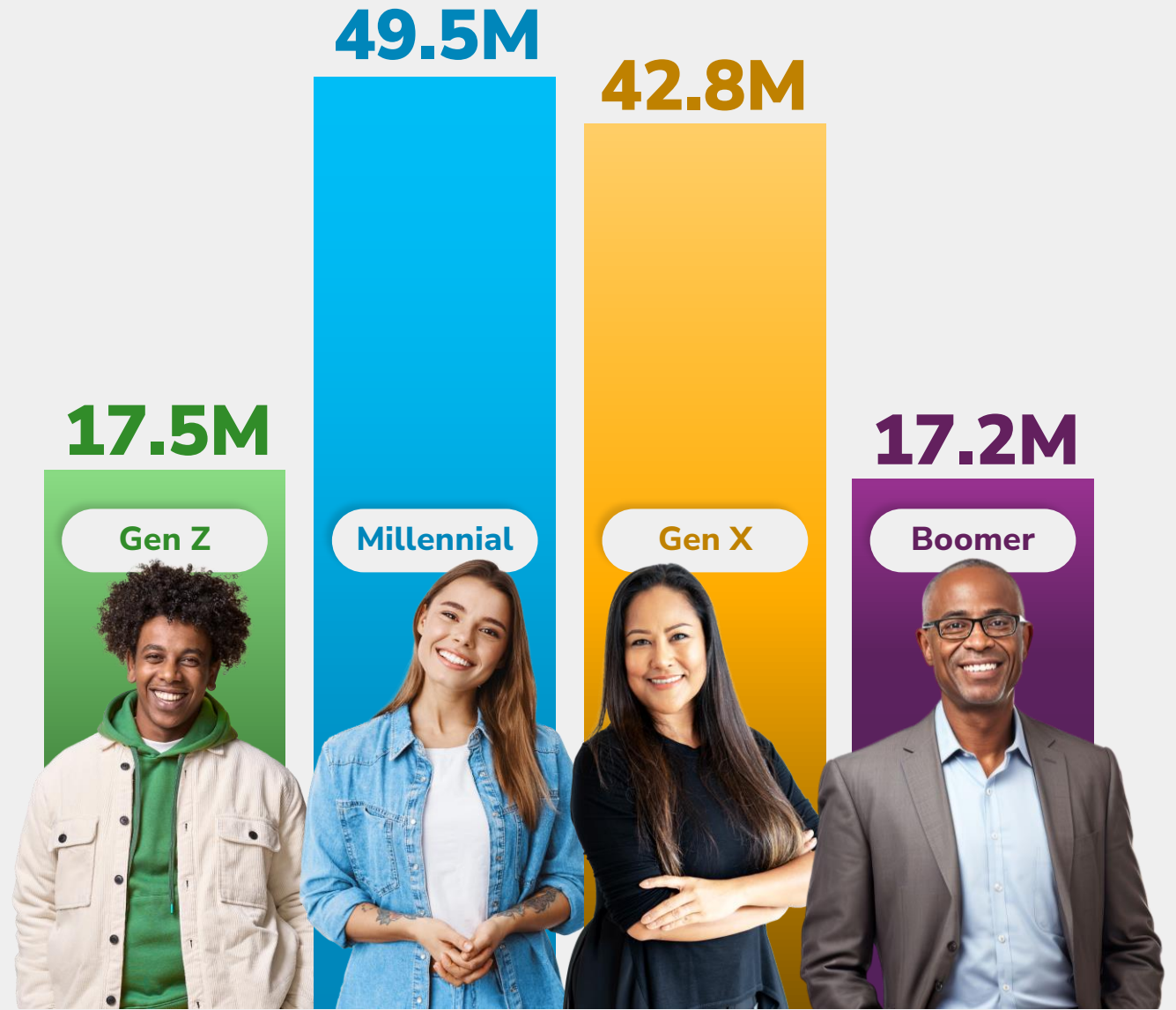


Attendee purchase decision making status:

32% final decision-makers

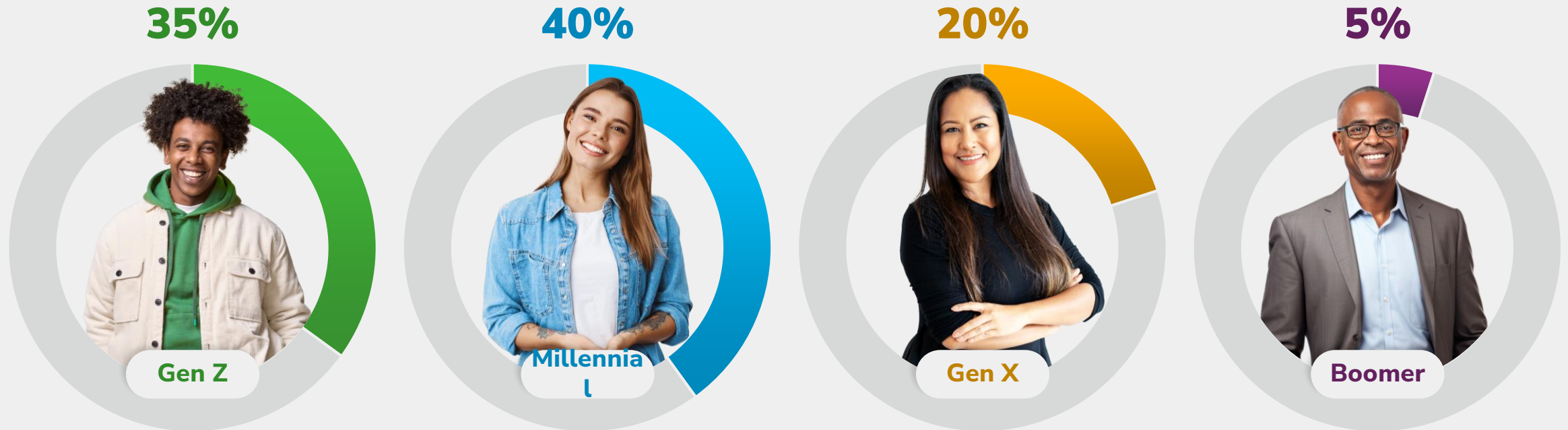
68% significant/some influence

Gen Z has Overtaken Boomers in the Workforce



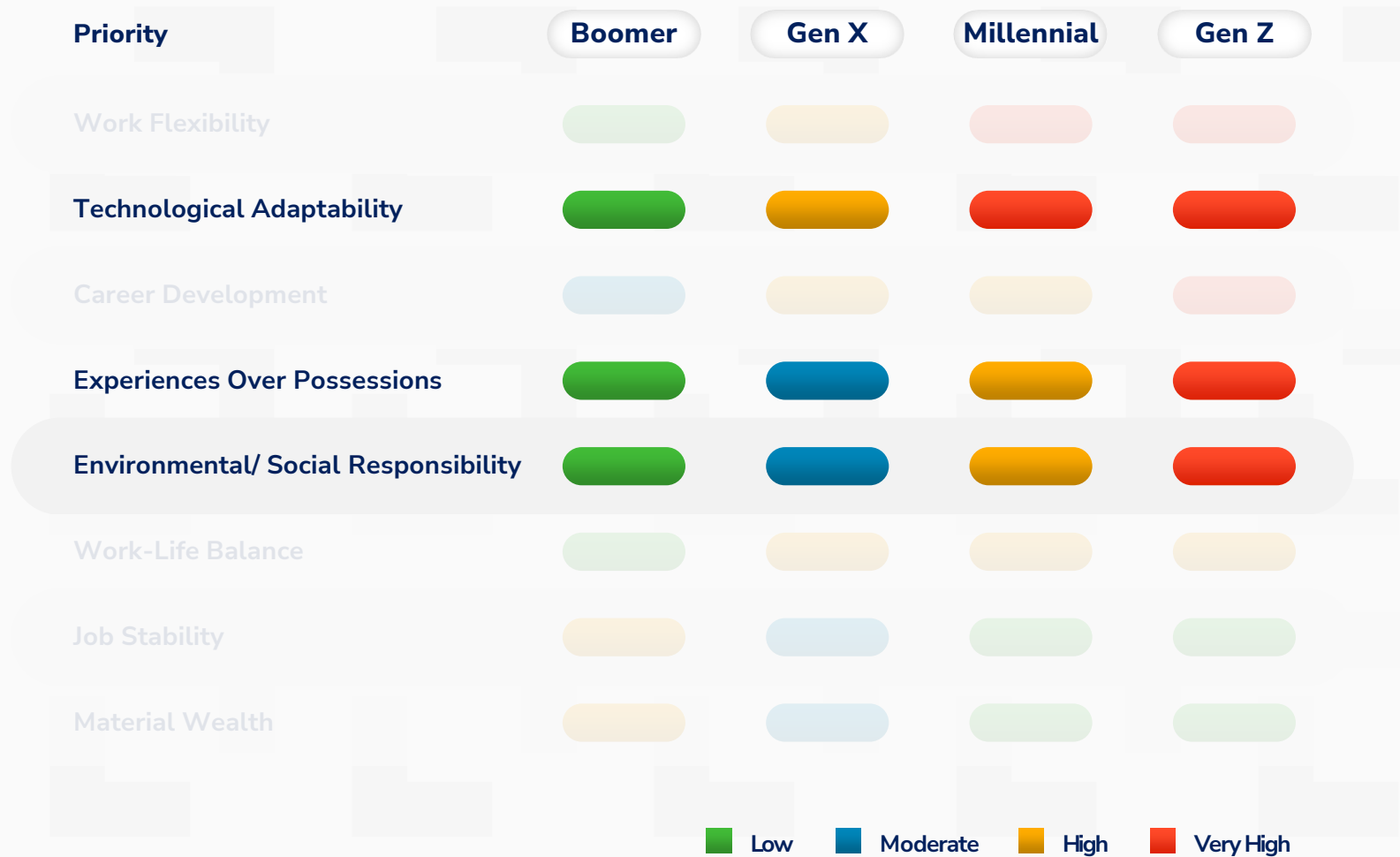
Source: Glassdoor analysis of Census Bureau data

By 2030, Workforce Composition Will Be:



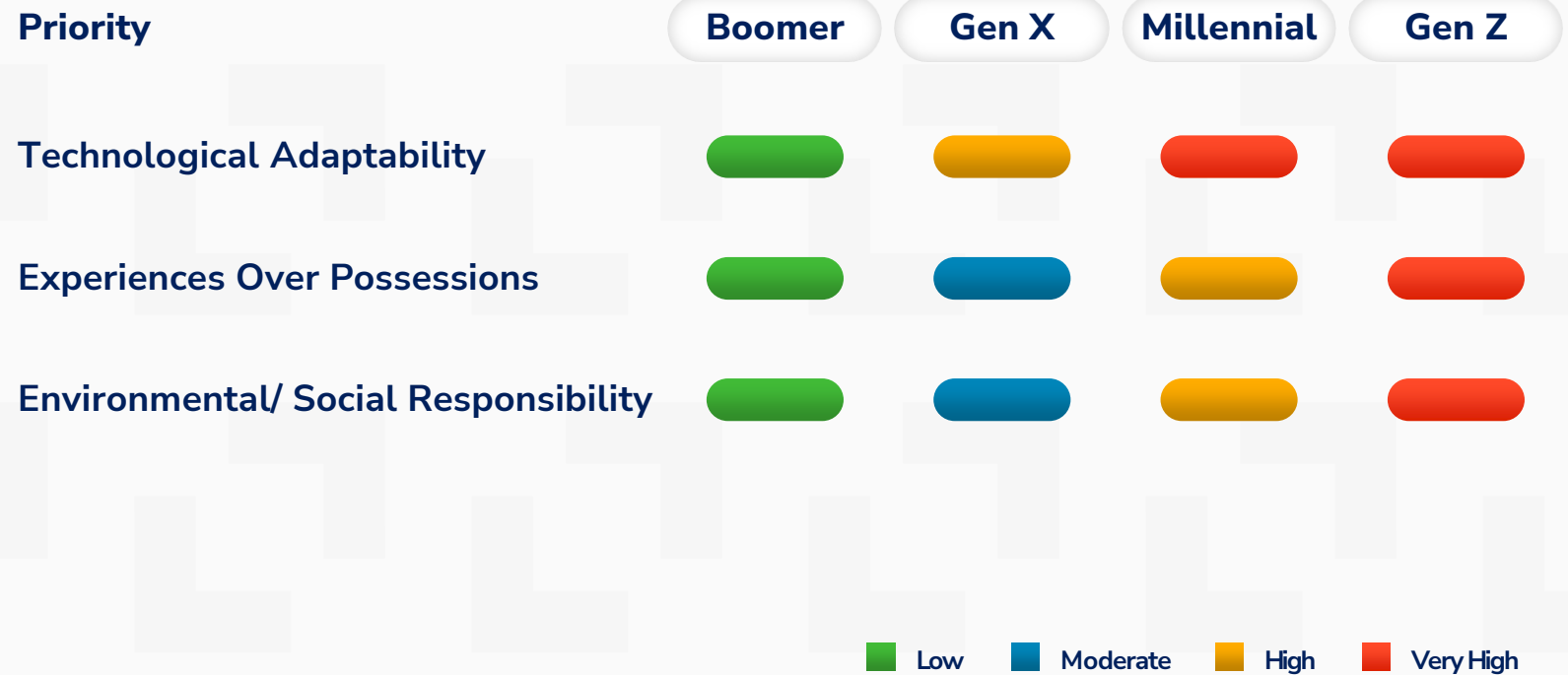
Business Events can and will need to innovate to reach and engage emerging generations

Different generations, different priorities



Source: GfK a Nielsen Company

Different generations, different priorities



Source: GfK a Nielsen Company

NowGen is
reshaping in-
person events and
commercial
expectations

**Authentic
connection**

**Socially
conscious**

**Transparent
value**

**Digitally
native**

**22-44
years old**



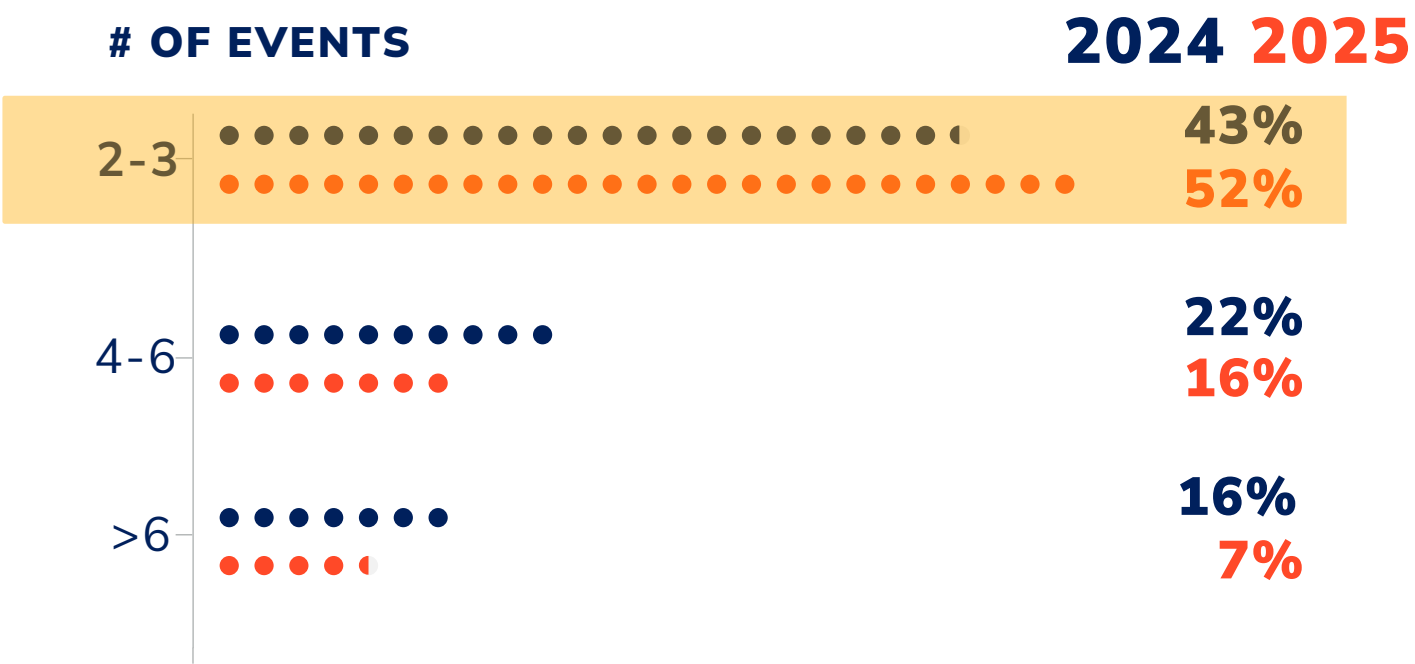
QUESTION

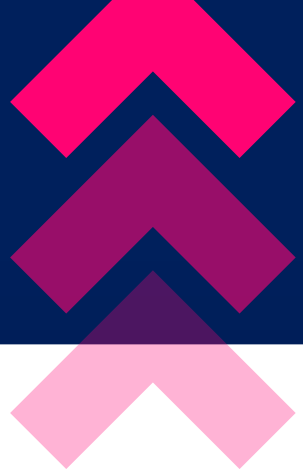
Looking ahead to the next 12 months, how many in-person events do you expect to attend?

 More data in appendix

Attendees are getting **more selective** with event attendance

Projected event attendance in next 12 months





Commerce is Key







EXPERIENCE

To have fun, feel emotionally fulfilled, explore, hands-on



LEARNING

To be inspired, informed, discover something new



NETWORKING

Connect with peers, build relationships with attendees and event partners



COMMERCE

Discover products/ services, buy, build vendor relationships

QUESTION

Imagine you are attending an in-person business event, allocate a total of 100 points across the below areas based on how important each component is to your overall experience.

Commerce is a
critical part of the
event experience

35% of key
decision
makers



Experience

16%

Have fun, feel emotionally fulfilled,
enjoy the environment



Learning

26%

Be inspired, learn something new,
receive training



Networking

28%

Make connections, socialize with new and
existing contacts



Commerce

30%

Evaluate vendor offerings, build awareness,
discover new products/services

QUESTION

What are your top priorities in your work/career?



Discovering new products / solutions



Training / technical competency



Building my network



Professional advancement



Expanding my business / clientele



Building / staffing team or organization



Mentoring / being mentored



Building my personal brand reputation

Freeman Commercial Trends Report © 2025 Freeman.

Discovering new products and solutions is a top career priority

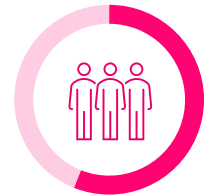


**In-person
events are the
best place for
new product
discovery**

QUESTION

Where do you go to discover new products and services?

Top sources for product/service discovery



74%
In-person
events



56%
Company
websites



55%
Professional
and trade orgs



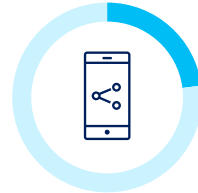
42%
Search Engine
or GenAI
(Google, ChatGPT)



41%
Journals/trade
publications



40%
Online events
(Livestreams,
webinars)



23%
Social & Websites
(TikTok, Instagram, X,
Facebook, Reddit, etc.)

32% NGEN





Today's Buying Dilemma

Digital and In Person channels are **aligned** - Not Competitive!





**High five
to hands on!**



Limited hands-on exposure is most likely to prevent attendees from achieving their commercial objectives

QUESTION

Which of the following options are most likely to negatively impact your experience evaluating products/services at a business event or prevent you from achieving your commercial objectives?



Limited opportunities for hands-on exposure to products/services



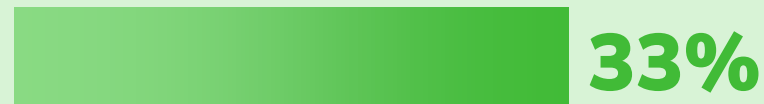
Limited or no provider subject-matter experts



Lack of relevant products/services to my organization

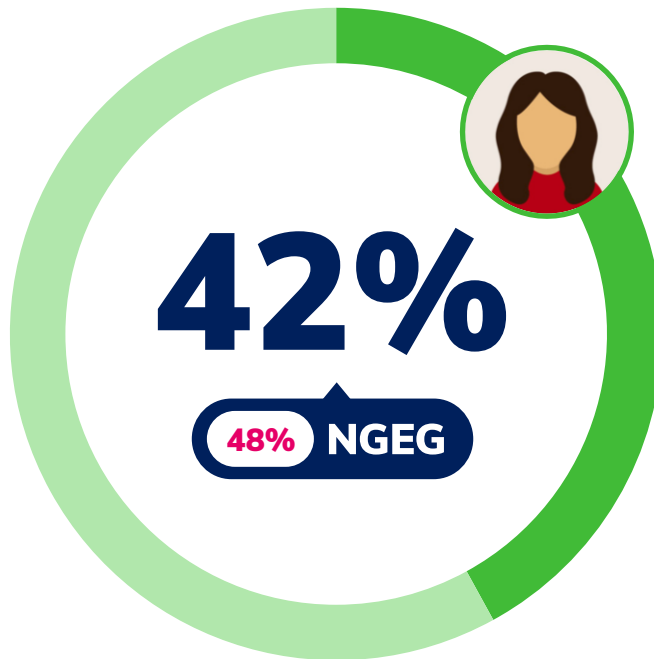


Challenge finding desired providers in the expo hall



QUESTION

To what extent did the lack of hands-on experience with a product/service impact your perception of a brand/company?



Attendees who don't receive hands-on experiences are likely to prioritize other vendors instead!

Hands-on exposure turns attendees into product advocates



QUESTION

Please select your level of agreement with the following statements regarding the hands-on experience

96%

Easier for me
to advocate for
the purchase of a
product/service

95%

Easier to determine
if the
product/service
would be a good fit
for my organization

93%

Helped improve
my awareness of
or evaluate an
offering



ACTION

- Remember – Design first for F2F
- Promote the data/opportunities in your prospectus
- Deeply understand attendees and their key business objectives
- Remind your Exhibitors – Their booth isn't a website!

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Empowering exhibitors

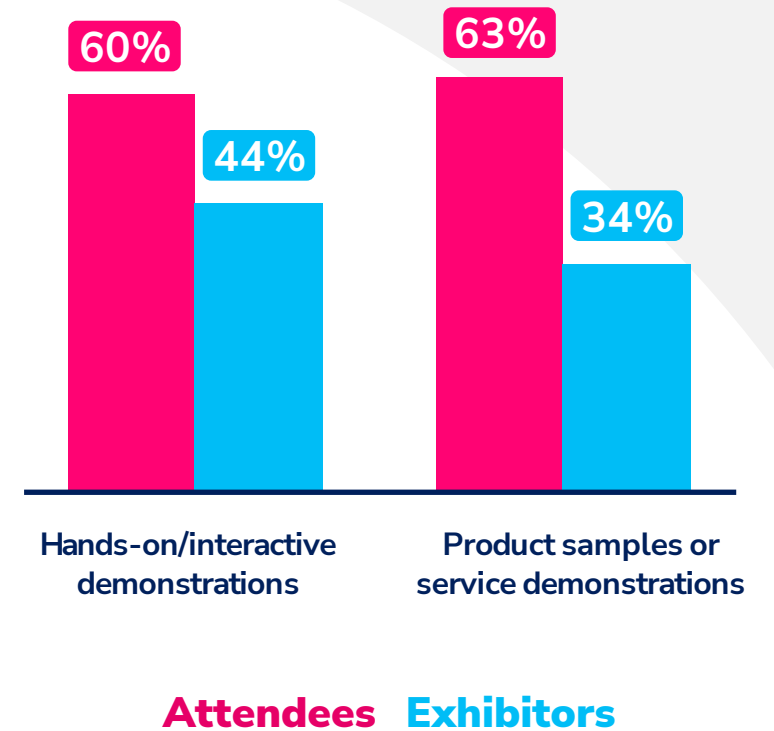
Exhibitors tend to undervalue the impact of hands-on experiences

QUESTION

When thinking about how you interact with customers/prospects at any in-person event, what are the top factors that most positively influence your company's commercial interactions at in-person events?



Factors Most Positively Influencing Commercial Interactions



Prioritize SMEs!



QUESTION

At the most important in-person business event you attended last year, how important was it that you achieved each of the following

84%

of attendees report that connecting with subject matter experts is extremely/very important

QUESTION

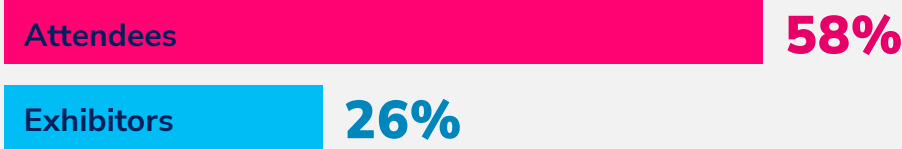
Select the top 3 options that would be most effective in helping you interact and/or engage with exhibitors/attendees at in-person events.

Exhibitors undervalue the impact that subject matter experts have on attendees, and over-value badge scans and emails

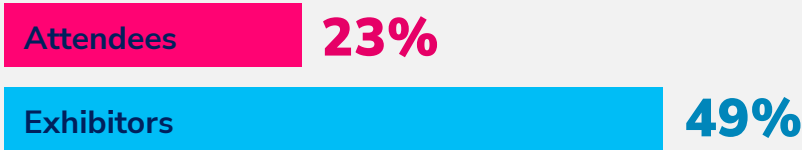
Top expectations for improved interactions:
attendees vs exhibitors



Speaking with subject matter experts
from exhibiting companies



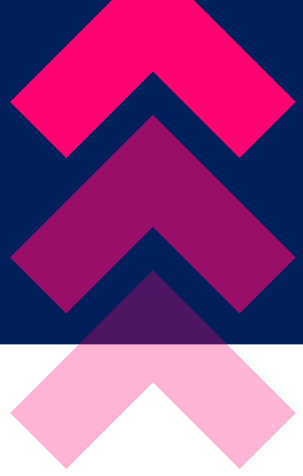
Being scanned and emailed afterwards
about products and services





ACTION

- **Exhibitor education is more important than ever**
- **You own the F2F channel – share your expertise**
- **Quantify the business objectives of your industry partners**
- **Reach out to the marketers making portfolio decisions**



So, What Now?





Build What Events Need Next

The Now Gen attendees are more selective, more intentional, and more pressed for time than ever



Our industry partners seek outcomes. - both rely on organizers to **make these outcomes possible**





Build What Events Need Next

Product discovery isn't a bonus—**it's a career priority. Hands-on experiences aren't a nice-to-have—they're table stakes**



Subject matter expertise, proactive planning tools, and intentional event design all play a role in helping attendees make better decisions and exhibitors generate better returns



Build What Events Need Next

Don't just host an event:

Develop a marketplace

Nurture the stakeholders

Build the channel with us!



Thank You!

Freeman⁷



Get the Report!

- Expo hall design and layout
- Wayfinding
- ROI measurement
- Case Studies
- New and innovative business models

