

Freeman¹



The new event basics

Your toolkit for conference planning success

It's a whole new event world.

Show managers are used to juggling, but amid massive change you've got even more balls in the air: scarce resources, challenging participation, and rising costs.

News flash: You've got your hands full!

With so much to grapple with, planners must dig deep for revenue-generating ideas while also creating a meaningful in-person experience that gives attendees a good reason to book that flight.

[Read on — we've got you.](#)





The future is about growth, not recovery.

It's easy to focus on how to overcome, how to recover, how to get back to normal (whatever normal means these days).

But resist the temptation.

The big takeaway? It's time to shift your mindset forward.

Ready, set...grow!

The current landscape is ripe for smart planners to refresh their events and meet the new needs of attendees, exhibitors, and sponsors.

The trick is rebooting your approach, starting with some key essentials: the new event basics that will help you prioritize growth. And real growth takes strategy.

This new basics guide will outline three strategic reset opportunities — **audience acquisition, show floor engagement, and measurement** — with insights and ideas to help you deliver the can't-miss event that audiences want.

Start with the big picture... and here's why.

Today's audiences expect more, so how can your event meet their needs and encourage repeat attendance?

Align your organization's goals with attendee expectations — knowing that they will differ by persona — and you'll find the sweet spot of deep engagement. (More on that below.)

To get there, plan discovery meetings with stakeholders to understand your:

Goals

- What are your organization's mission, purpose, and key objectives, and how have they changed over the past three years?
- How can your event deliver on these goals in ways that are unique and personal?
- What pre-show promos will entice audiences to not only register, but attend with bells on?

Audiences

- How are you approaching the current state of your database?
- Each attendee, exhibitor, and sponsor has individual wants. Do you know what those are?
- How can you deliver varied yet tailored experiences that educate and entertain?

Approaches

- How can you create an omnichannel marketing ecosystem that goes beyond the event?
- What will connect your organization and audiences before, during, and after the show? (More on this later, too!)

Measurement

Traditional measurement strategies and KPIs are easily discoverable via social media, reviews, and surveys. But the real ticket is actual audience behavior.

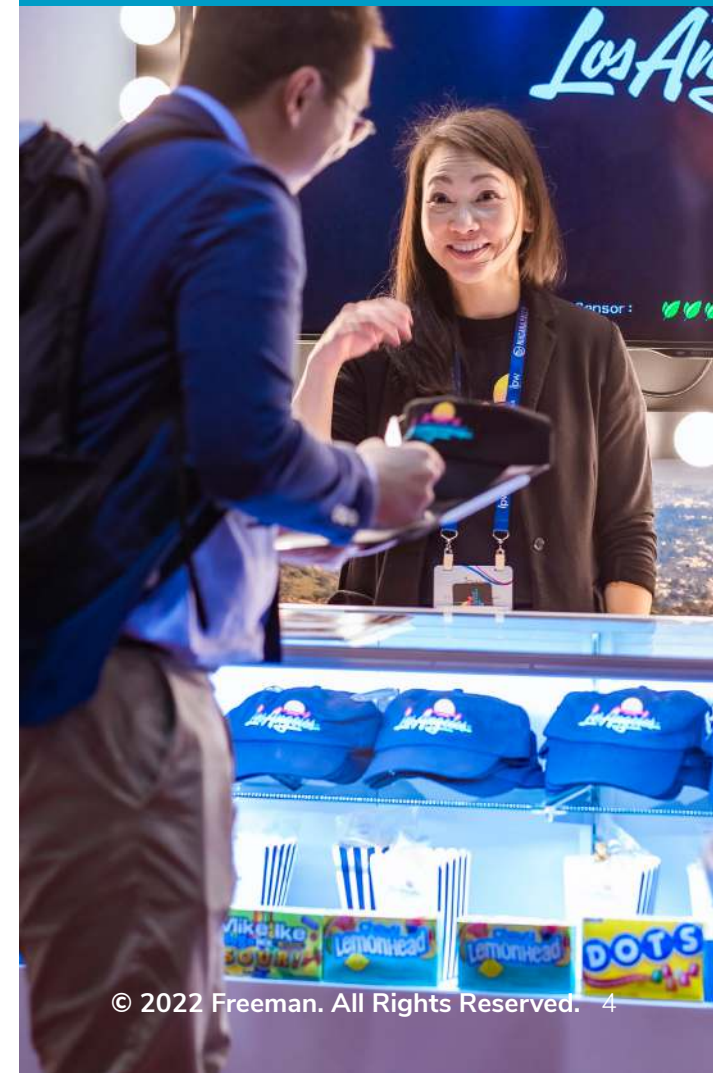
- How are you tracking those behaviors across the journey?
- How can you use this behavior data to fine-tune and add value to the in-person event experience?

Understanding your audiences and how your organization's goals relate to their goals is essential. These care-about's should drive your event strategy and ultimately, the live experience.

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KPI FYI

Using your key business objectives, determine your KPIs and develop a consistent strategy. Then make sure that strategy can clearly demonstrate to stakeholders the evolutions and trends, both across events and year over year.





The key to audience acquisition:

Step back in time



As part of the great resignation and workforce shift, 50.3% of people over the age of 55 left the workforce, leaving millennials as the majority.*

Translation: The baby boomers you were targeting three years ago have been replaced with younger event audiences who are motivated by completely different factors.

With all these changes and hurdles, planners need to revisit their databases to identify current customers, new untapped audiences, and the multi-gen audience breakdowns.

Audience audit

Follow these steps to gain more engaged audiences and increase show attendance:

Step 1. Mind the generation gap

Create audience personas and get to know your new, younger attendees.

Collect information such as:

- Job role
- Age
- Professional challenges
- What success looks like to them
- How and where they access new information
- What might prevent them from showing up
- Who they'd love to hear speak, meet, or see
- What they wish you could do differently

Step 2. Get into a groove with your audience — take them on a journey

Collect information such as:

- **Awareness** (solving a problem) – Help audiences overcome a challenge with valuable content.
- **Info gathering** (value prop) – Give audiences industry updates and tease experts who will be speaking at the event.
- **Conversion** (register) – Continue reinforcing the value of attending even after attendees register.
- **Engagement** (attend) – Use the tips in this guide to elevate your on-site experience tailored to audience needs.
- **Reactivation** (continuous content feed) – Engage current and cold audiences with valuable content before, during, and after the show.

Step 3. Give CPR to your CRM

Breathe life back into your contact database (the shift in the workforce also left tens of millions of contact records out of date) by implementing a CRM system with automated data capture that can help save time and keep info current.

Want to go deeper with your audience acquisition strategy?

Our free guide, [Conference crowdsourcing](#), offers comprehensive instructions and best practices to grow attendance.

Grab your copy

Persona prep: Don't bury the backstory

Be sure to tell audiences WHY you're asking for this information. Unlike older generations, younger groups want to know the purpose behind the questions. They'll appreciate the transparency as well as the intent and will be more likely to answer.

Use this information to help build your marketing strategy and create messaging that engages your current (and younger) database as well as cold audiences.

The new event basics



The new trade show engagement: Take it to the floor

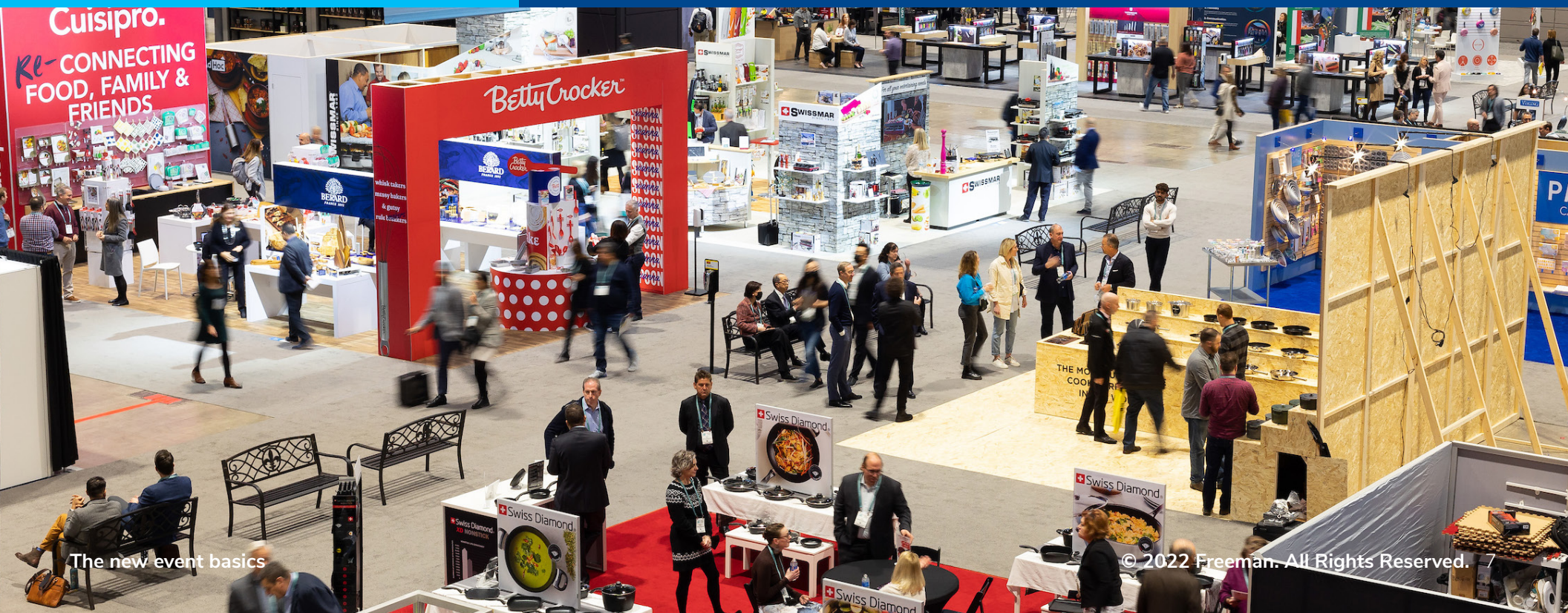


To truly maximize the impact of a live, in-person experience, take advantage of your prime real estate — the show floor.

Think of this space as a place to create curated “experience zones” for personalized audience engagement — for learning, hands-on experiences, networking, and entertainment.

By creating different experiences throughout your event, you can empower attendees to engage with what is most meaningful to them.

By choosing their own adventure, attendees get what they hoped to experience (and more) at your event.



What are experience zones?

Experience zones (or “e-zones”) are designed with specific show dynamics, audiences, locations, and subject matter in mind.



There are three components to a successful e-zone approach:

1 Curated spaces

- Destinations on the floor
- Learning and discovery — primes interest in exhibits
- Deliver varied content and unique experiences to drive return visits

2 Feature areas

- Showcase for innovation or spirited discussion
- Space for networking and hands-on learning
- Curated content and sponsorships

3 Partner opportunities

- Extended exhibitor presence
- Can be sold as a standalone
- Unlimited ways to monetize
- Participation can be incentivized

For example, an e-zone can be set up where attendees learn about a product, service, industry, or even themselves by interacting with an exhibit and its wares. It may involve media and/or mechanics. Or it could be a spot where attendees network and make connections. The possibilities are endless!

Sponsor-owned zones

Sponsorships are more important than ever, offering a win-win with recognition, affinity, and content — all of which help with marketing and sales.

But selling sponsorships is just the first part of the equation. Just as the bar has risen for content, it's also risen for sponsorships: A straight transaction isn't enough anymore. Instead of setting up the traditional "sponsors' row," work in partnership with sponsors to plan how they can be thoughtfully integrated into the sphere of your e-zones.



Hone your zones:

Be strategic: Make sure sponsor activations are aligned with the right zone.

Get creative: Partner to create unique experiences that meet show objectives and attendee care-about.

Offer real value: A truly effective activation must be a triple win that benefits the sponsor, the show manager, and the attendee.

Package...in partnership: Align to create packages, whether simple or custom, that work for individual sponsor needs and objectives.

Make it easy: Ensure the process is as seamless and simple (and repeatable!) as possible.

Want to explore creating your own experience zones? Find out more in our free e-book.

Get zoned



Strengthen your bond with exhibitors and sponsors

Exhibitors will only want to attend your event if it has the right number of qualified attendees and ample interaction opportunities. They want targeted, engaged audiences who influence purchases or are ready to buy.

Sponsors are also looking for lasting, personal connections and are eager to become part of your digital and storytelling network. But be selective about the sponsors you choose — they should integrate seamlessly with your marketing goals and organization culture.

Gauge sponsor fit with key questions:

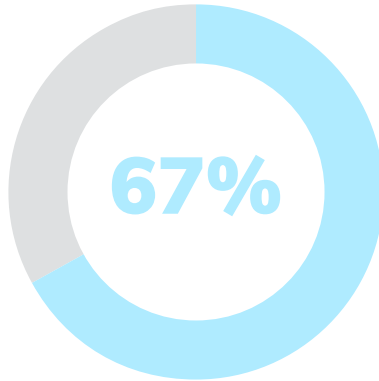
- What makes this event a good fit for your brand, product, or service?
- What is your audience goal: to maintain exposure and awareness with your existing audience or reach new audiences? What are your program's goals?
- What type of engagement do you envision?
- Are you looking for a passive or participatory experience?
- How can we work together to create a tailored sponsorship? What is your budget?

Attracting and retaining high-value sponsors and exhibitors can add new dimensions to your events. Most notably, they can increase audience engagement, resulting in meaningful impact for attendees and sponsors, which elevates the event's overall success.



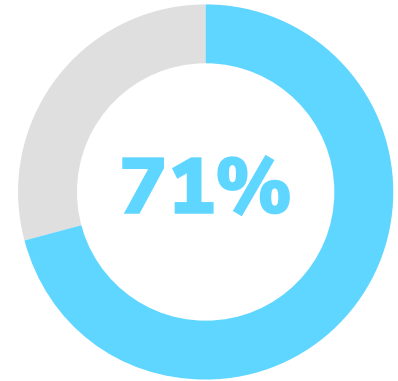
Embrace the “bleisure”

Business + leisure — work this equation into your experience



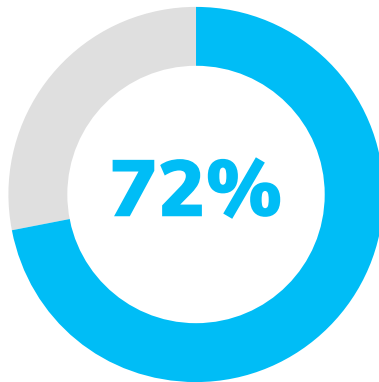
Mental health

is more important now compared to before the pandemic.



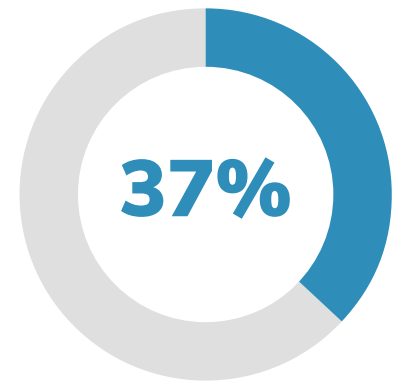
Physical health

is more important now compared to before the pandemic.



Family

is more important now compared to before the pandemic.



Travel

is more important now compared to before the pandemic.

According to a Harris Poll, 67% of Americans say their mental health is more important now compared to before the pandemic. Our culture has fundamentally shifted, and the way we choose to live our lives (and spend our time) has changed. So, planners need to address those changes in what’s offered at events.



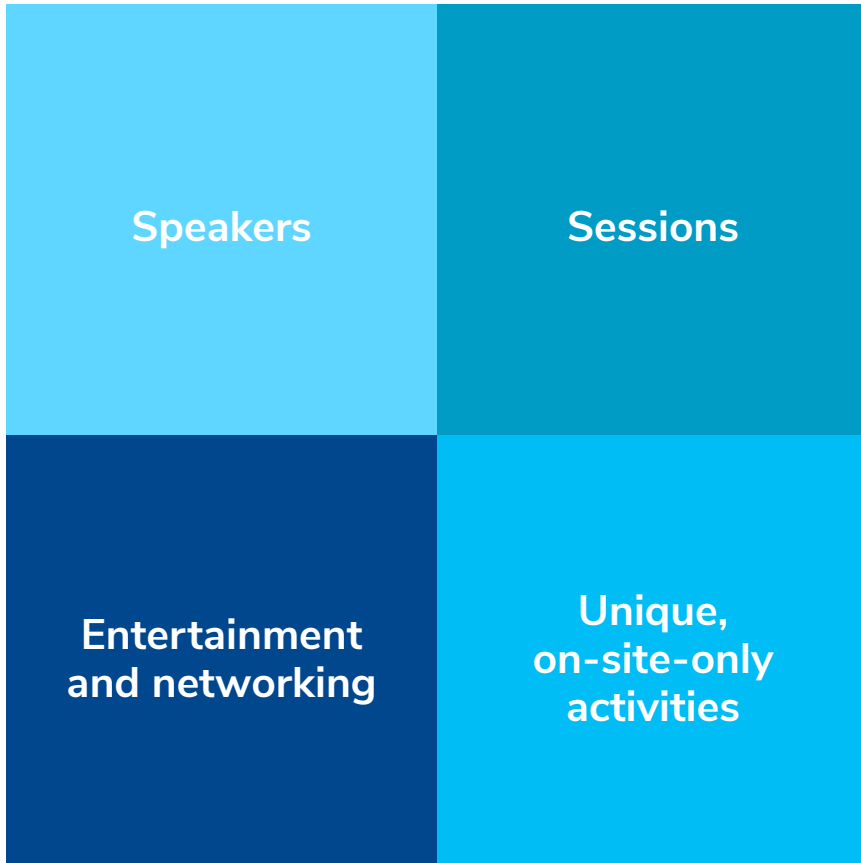
When designing your in-person experience, consider these concepts:

- **Wide-open spaces:** More physical space to move and chill.
- **Agenda white space:** Offer more time and (mental) space to break between conference programming segments — packing in something every second of every day won't fly.
- **Short and sweet:** Audiences still want knowledge, but to keep attention, think tight and brief, with breaks: shorter sessions mixed with networking activities and hands-on experiences.
- **All the trimmings:** Consider trimming the length of the show to fewer days and also trimming the duration of your content — that includes the agenda, general session, keynote, speakers, etc.
- **Mindful moments:** Wellness breaks, yoga classes, meditation, and relaxation lounges.
- **Sense-sational:** Never neglect the power of sensory experiences. Incorporate sound, visuals, food (and make sure you've got healthy and varied food options), and smells to give activations additional impact.

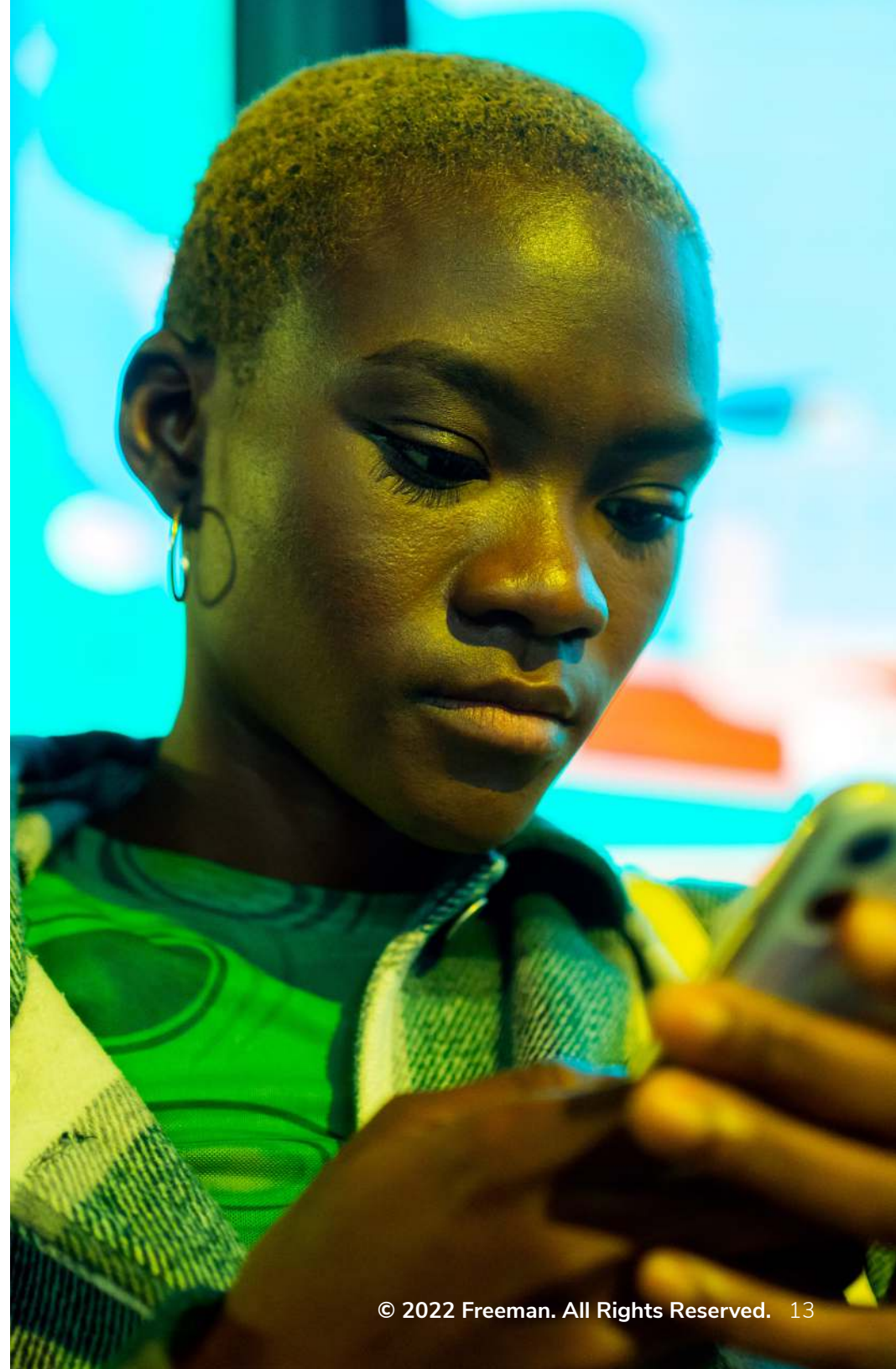
Bottom line: Treat attendees like humans rather than statistics by putting more emphasis on their overall event experience.

FOMO your pre-show

To keep registration fresh in attendees' minds (and to get them across the finish line), plan marketing touchpoints like targeted digital ads leading up to the show promoting:



These targeted reminders also build excitement for attendees as the event gets closer. Round out ads with helpful content that makes planning and personalizing their trip super easy.



New measurement matters & XLNC

XLNC is a trusted (and statistically proven) event measurement model that outlines the top four reasons attendees come to conferences and trade shows: to learn, network, conduct business (commerce), and have fun.

But this framework takes on new meaning in this climate.

The main takeaway? It's a quick way to get to the why behind your trade show or conference and also to better understand the why for your audiences.



The new event basics

X
Experience

L
Learn

N
Network

C
Commerce

X

To experience (have fun)

These attendees are looking for a memorable event that will take them out of their day-to-day life and transport them into an exciting, immersive experience that they can look back on fondly for years.

L

To learn

Whether they're attending multiple product demonstrations or dashing from session to session, these attendees want to wring as much learning as possible out of the time and financial investment they've made in the event.

N

To network

Armed with phones full of new digital contacts (and maybe a few old-school business cards), these attendees want to make connections, meet key industry players, raise their profile, and/or close deals with the leads they've been nurturing.

C

To do business (commerce)

Everyone wants to bring success to their organization, but this type of attendee is coming with specific business goals (and sales numbers) in mind. They want to network and have fun along the way, but closing the deal comes first.



Using XLNC outcomes (what you want audiences to think, feel, and do) and priorities can help you define a measurement plan that will deliver against audience expectations.

So instead of asking how to measure the event, inform your strategy by measuring the success of the event touchpoints that are based on audience wants.



The new event basics

XLNC data tools

The key is capturing data consistently and completely across the attendee journey — getting the right picture goes beyond mere post-event measurement. Here are some examples of measurement tools by focus:

X

Attendee and/or click tracking, social monitoring

L

Second-screen data, abstracts, sessions, CEM courses

N

Networking tools such as matchmaking, social connections, behavior in networking areas

C

Registration and lead capture, floor plan/exhibit sales, mobile app

Bonus: Surveys work for all!

Want to go deeper into data? Download our new guide, **Measurement reset**, to learn about this new framework and how to make better data decisions.

Dig in

Drive 365

Keep the attendee interaction and conversations going even after the event ends.

Event planning should never be a seasonal process that ebbs and flows with the event calendar.

Today's most successful show managers invest time and energy into consistent activities to reach audiences throughout the year.

NAB: Amplifying community

Our audience acquisition team, **mdg**, worked with the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) to develop Amplify, an “always-on” resource designed to provide its broadcast community with year-round content, industry updates, and interactive opportunities. The platform has become an invaluable data generator that helps NAB improve in-person experiences and ultimately drives attendance.

[Learn more](#)



“Amplify curates this 365-day conversation to build deeper connections between live events. It also helps us elevate our events by better understanding our community’s interests and needs.”

– Chris Brown, Executive Vice President and Managing Director, NAB Global Connections and Events Group.

6 post-event strategies to maximize in-person connections:



- 1 Post highlight** reels across social media.
- 2 Use influencers** to recap lessons and leave a positive summary. Take advantage of their audiences and thought leadership.
- 3 Summarize event content.** And make it accessible! This creates easy sharing and memorable lessons.
- 4 Deliver the content over time.** You've already put in the work. Now drip it out for those who couldn't make it and as reminders for those who did.
- 5 Get feedback.** Use polls and surveys (before, during, and after) to learn what went well and what you can do better next time.
- 6 Promote what's next.** Great experiences create the desire for more. Let attendees know what to look forward to!



As an event juggler planner, you've got a lot to manage — but these new strategies to build audiences, refresh the in-person experience, and then measure attendee behavior will help you elevate and grow your event in a whole new way.

And even if a ball drops along the way, we've got the net.



Ready to apply these new basics for an extraordinary event?

Let's go!

Freeman¹

