

The 2025 Experiential Trends Report

Produced by BizBash x Czarnowski Collective

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Introduction + Methodology

To help BizBash get a pulse on the industry, in May, we released a monthlong survey, in collaboration with Czarnowski Collective, asking event professionals to share their thoughts on what’s top of mind, what challenges they’re facing, and what they’re predicting in terms of experiential marketing trends and concepts.

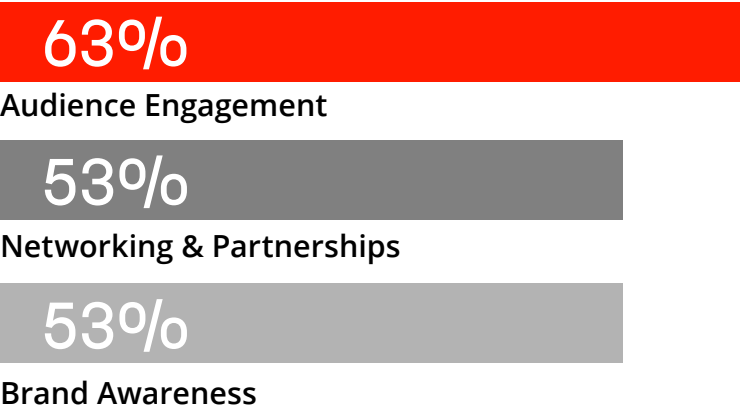
More than 200 industry pros completed the questionnaire. Among the participants, jobs ranged from planning and producing B2B conferences and trade shows to consumer activations and pop-up events to sports sponsorships and entertainment partnerships, with some boasting budgets of up to \$20 million.

When it comes to event goals, audience engagement (63 percent), networking and partnerships (53 percent), and brand awareness (53 percent) topped their list. As for challenges, the event professionals surveyed said that budget constraints were number one at a whopping 89 percent, while audience engagement (48 percent) and standing out in a crowded landscape (46 percent) were at a distant second and third.

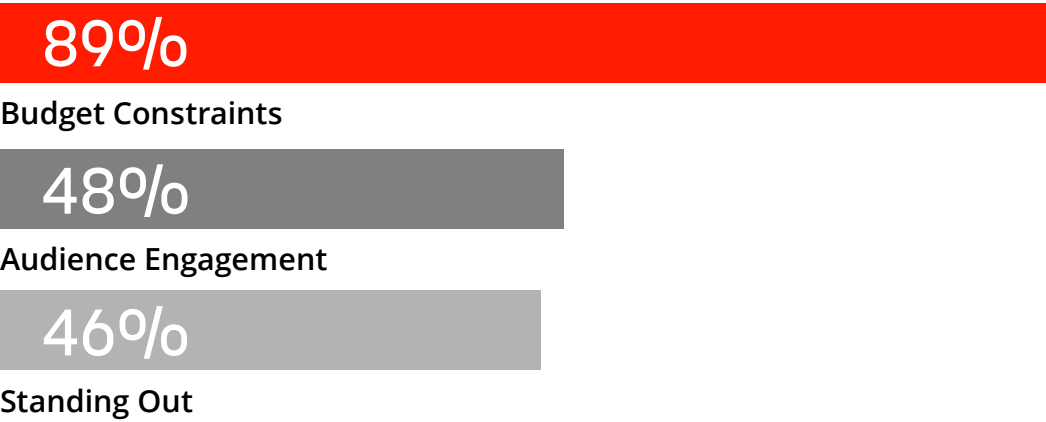
From an extensive list of current experiential trends, personalization and highly customized experiences (54 percent), multisensory activations (40 percent), sustainability and social impact (33 percent), and AI-powered experiences (32 percent) sparked the most interest, with networking appearing as common throughline through the survey results.

Here, we dive deeper into those topics, explore the risk/reward equation, and learn which trends event pros are over.

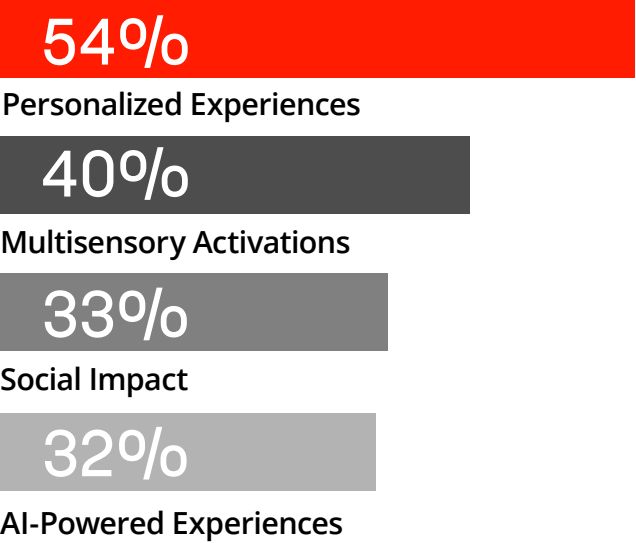
Event Goals



Challenges



Noteworthy Trends



Risk vs. Reward

At the start of the survey, we asked respondents to share how comfortable they were with experimenting with new event formats or trends. Fifty-five percent said they were very comfortable, while 37 percent said they were somewhat comfortable.

With the pressure to constantly meet ROI goals and satisfy C-suite execs, some pros might feel the need to play it safe and stick with a tried-and-true formula, while others might have the freedom to try new things. Figuring out if the risk will pay off requires research, analysis, and a little bit of hope.

In recent years, Mercedes-Benz has shifted its marketing strategy away from traditional auto shows, opting instead to host exclusive experiences in unique locations. One notable example is their proprietary event franchise, Mercedes-AMG Race Day. These events are held in unconventional venues, such as Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, Jo's Coffee in Austin, and most recently at Smorgasburg in Miami during the Miami Grand Prix.

Mercedes-AMG Race Day offers a variety of fan experiences, including race viewings, F1 simulators, AMG vehicle displays, exclusive AMG and Adidas merchandise, and local specialty foods. The primary goal of Race Day is to cultivate brand loyalty and affinity for AMG, particularly amidst the growing popularity of F1 in the U.S. market. This strategic approach has proven highly successful, generating 108 million earned media impressions and over seven million social media impressions.



Whether you're ready to jump into the rough AI waters headfirst or are looking to cautiously incorporate more customization, keep reading to learn about the experiential marketing trends that are gaining stream right now.

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Artificial Intelligence: The Future Is Now

Some event planners have fully embraced the technology, while others have shied away, uncertain how to utilize it as a force for good. Here’s what we’re seeing.

Depending on who you talk to, when it comes to artificial intelligence, we’re either facing a looming apocalypse or a tech renaissance that will create new jobs and spawn economic riches. Regardless, one thing is for sure, you can’t ignore it. According to our survey results, 32 percent of participants are interested in AI-powered experiences, with AI popping up as the most popular response when we asked which trend would dominate the events space in the next 12-24 months.

It’s clear that event planners will need to prepare for these society-shifting AI advancements and learn how they can use the tech as a force multiplier. How, though, is the real question. While using ChatGPT to generate keynote copy, for example, might be frowned upon, AI has the ability to streamline day-to-day tasks and back-end operations and boost efficiency like generating thousands of trade show floor plans in minutes.

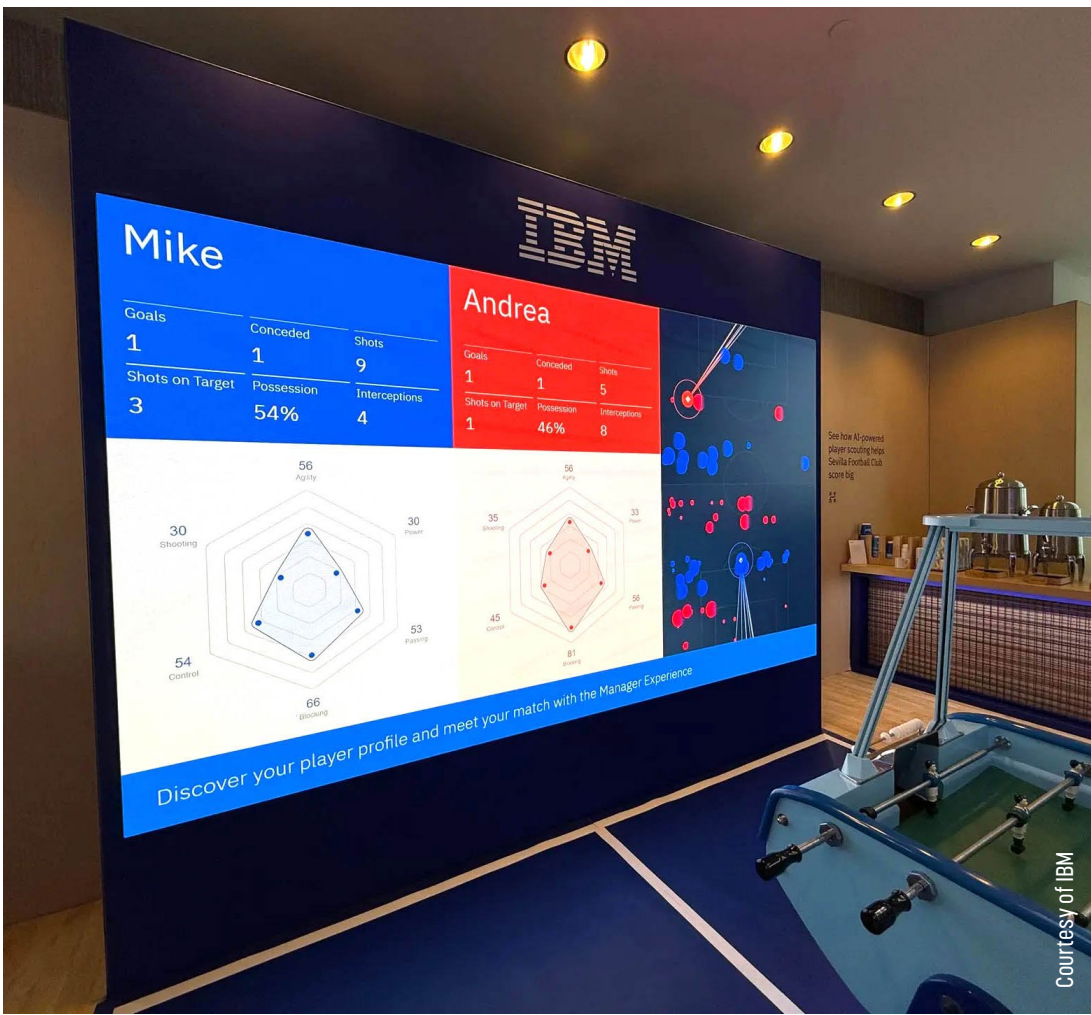
According to our survey, almost 53 percent said AI will have the biggest impact on data analytics and insights in the next one to two years, followed by pre/post-event communications at 40 percent.

Music Magic

Beyond chatbots, AI also has been used successfully in creative ways across various events and activations to enhance the attendee experience. For example, at Google I/O in 2019, headlining band The Flaming Lips incorporated the tech into their performance, resulting in the “Fruit Genie,” an AI-powered musical instrument that combined Google Magenta’s Piano Genie model with a physical interface. To get the audience involved, giant inflatables were filled with sensors that signaled the software when touched, adding notes to the song.

Game Play

At this year’s SXSW, IBM hosted an interactive space that included foosball and ping-pong tables with cameras that tracked attendees’ interactions. At the foosball table, an AI system tracked how often participants shot, intercepted the ball, defended, and more. Based on this information, the system assigned them personality traits. Using a watsonx and a Granite LLM, the game also explained the player’s strengths and weaknesses. This same tech is already being used by Spain’s Sevilla FC, who are using it to better keep tabs on their players.



Personalization: One Size Does Not Fit All

Producing highly customized experiences for attendees is top of mind for event pros.

According to our survey results, 54 percent said that they are very interested in personalization and highly customized experiences, with many pointing out the need to leverage AI and data to more effectively tailor events to the individual.

“While personalization has been a buzzword for years, we’re now entering an era where AI can analyze attendee behavior, preferences, and engagement in real time to dynamically shape the event experience—from curated content journeys and networking recommendations to personalized notifications and even room lighting or music based on emotional feedback. This doesn’t mean replacing the human element but enhancing it,” commented one of our survey participants.

The Right Track

Of course, you don’t need high-level tech to make an attendee feel like a VIP. At this year’s Canva Create, the software company designed its experience around what its wide range of attendees—from solo creators and small business owners to enterprise leaders—wanted most from the event. Guests could chart their own course through a whimsical, theme park-inspired layout, choosing the experiences that best fit their goals: exploration in the Apps Marketplace, content creation in the LinkedIn content studio, hands-on learning in the Design School Labs, experimenting with Canva’s newest

product launches in the Uncharted Studio, and community-building in the Create Commons. Every touchpoint invited guests to experience Canva Create in a way that felt personal and purposeful.

Q&A

At this year’s National Restaurant Association Show, attendees completed a quiz before the show to help them build agendas that aligned with their business goals and interests. “With so much to see and do, especially for first-time attendees, the quiz provided a curated agenda focused on individual goals and priorities,” explained Tom Cindric, president of exhibitions for Informa Connect Foodservice Group, which owns and operates the show in partnership with the National Restaurant Association.

Special Sauce

On the less serious side, McDonald’s recently hosted a pop-up called the “Sauce Drawer” in New York City. The event allowed attendees to sample McDonald’s sauces, including the new Creamy Chili Sauce, as well as mix and match sauces to create a custom blend. They could then name their creation using an AI-powered sauce name generator.



Networking: Designing a Sense of Community

Building professional relationships through events is becoming increasingly important as remote work schedules upend the traditional office setting.

With the pandemic came the proliferation of remote work, disrupting the office environment and its many relationship-cultivating moments like watercooler convos and happy hours. This shift in workplace culture has brought with it the need for more networking events filled with name tags and handshakes.

According to the event pros surveyed, 40 percent said that they expect to plan more networking events in the next 12-24 months. Networking and partnerships also ranked as one of the top goals of hosting an event at 53 percent. Moreover, a recent cultural intelligence study by Eventbrite found that a staggering 84 percent of attendees between the ages of 18-35 have developed close friendships at interest-based events, signaling a need for events that facilitate relationship-building.

Of course, events have always been about making a connection. But now more than ever, planners are prioritizing creating welcoming spaces that remove the awkwardness and intimidation and allow attendees to mix and mingle with ease.



Group Chat

For example, FQ Lounge @ SXSW, hosted by the Female Quotient, a global community of women in business, served as a place where women could connect and collaborate with other industry leaders during the festival. Curated programming such as exclusive panels transformed into intimate conversations with founders and C-suite leaders.

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Multisensory Experiences: All the Feels

By stimulating attendees’ senses, planners are creating more emotional, impactful, and memorable events.

Engaging an attendee’s five senses—sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste—is all the rage right now. Perhaps as a response to our increasingly digital world, planners are pushing for more immersive, memorable experiences that engage attendees in an analog way, with 40 percent of survey participants saying that they are very interested in multisensory activations.

To stimulate these very human responses, event producers are utilizing high-tech wizardry. Think scent machines, audio haptics, and projection mapping.

Outdoors In

At this year’s CES, Japanese machinery company Kubota harnessed the power of sight, sound, smell, and touch through interactive displays that transported visitors to vineyards, construction sites, and orchards—right in the middle of the Las Vegas Convention Center’s West Hall. Dynamic lighting, ambient audio, and the smell of freshly cut grass enhanced the experience.

Sound Asleep

In 2024, IKEA hosted a dreamy “sleepeasy” in NYC that showcased the retailer’s products in a series of imaginative rooms and vignettes, highlighting what the brand had identified as the six essentials for quality

sleep: comfort, sound, air, light, organization, and temperature. IKEA played with the elements of scent, sound, and visuals to bring the concepts to life.

The “comfort” space, for example, featured feel-good textiles, mattresses, and comforters, along with lighting solutions. And because studies show that people sleep best at about 65 degrees, the Swedish brand created an icy room—complete with icebergs made from hanging comforters—where guests could immediately feel a chill when they walked in.

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Sustainability & Social Impact: The Broader Effects of Events

The need to instill eco-friendly practices into our planning processes and bring societal and cultural awareness to gatherings is more important than ever.

As we know, the event industry generates a significant amount of waste, including single-use plastics and discarded materials from decorations and signage. Which is why there’s been a shift toward more sustainable practices and zero-waste planning, with organizers focusing on reusing materials, recycling, sourcing local materials, and minimizing food waste.

Part of those efforts also include aligning with corporate social responsibility programs by incorporating charitable activities, volunteering opportunities, and cultural experiences into event programming. For example, at the Mauna Kea Resort, located on the Island of Hawaii’s Kohala Coast, aloha ambassador Healani Kimitete Ah-Mow passes along time-honored traditions from Hawaiian culture to guests, including the E Ala E sunrise ceremony.

According to our survey results, 33 percent of respondents said that they were very interested in sustainability and social impact as an experiential trend. But it’s more than just a flash-in-the-pan moment for events—it’s an ongoing mission to create a positive impact on the world around us.

Green Space

Over the last three years, Panasonic’s CES exhibit designs and fabrication have supported this goal by reducing single-use flooring, incorporating existing assets or rental properties that can be reconfigured for future events, and using sustainable materials such as PVC-free vinyl, Falcon Board, and Repreve fabrics. Panasonic also incorporates sustainability by utilizing their partner’s proprietary aluminum system, which is returned to the shop and reused across multiple events.

Outside the Box

Also at CES, Flint Batteries, a Singapore company specializing in cellulose-based paper batteries, wowed attendees with a trade show booth made entirely of cardboard, including custom-made display furniture and meeting areas using Falcon Board, a 100 percent recyclable material. The centerpiece of the booth was a structure designed to resemble a tree that was constructed from 24 carefully crafted ribs. The tree’s top featured a backlit frieze displaying the Flint Batteries logo.



What's Out

While some event trends stand the test of time, others eventually lose their luster. Here's what our survey participants told us they would like to see go away.

Junk-Filled Swag Bags

Even though giveaways, samples, and merch are one of the top ways planners engage attendees, at 64 percent according to our results, it seems that it's more about quality than quantity. I "don't want to see wasteful, over-the-top swag bags filled with cheap, throwaway items that add no real value," wrote one participant. "These bags include branded trinkets, single-use plastics, and unnecessary packaging that ends up in the trash shortly after the event. Instead, events should focus on meaningful, sustainable alternatives like digital gifts, charitable donations, or high-quality eco-friendly items that attendees will truly appreciate and use."

Lack of Sustainability

As we mentioned, sustainability is one of the top experiential trends that planners are interested in now and in the future, so grossly excessive events that don't incorporate environmental-friendly strategies or materials are not cool.

Virtual and Hybrid Events

We thought COVID would revolutionize the industry with remote video conferencing and livestreams, but it seems the changes didn't stick, according to our survey. In-person events remain a top priority, especially among companies that employ remote workers.



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Conclusion

This recent survey, in collaboration with Czarnowski Collective, proved that while the event industry continues to evolve and introduce new methods and strategies, the basic tenets of gatherings—building relationships and experiencing connection—remain the same. From artificial intelligence to sustainability, the current experiential trends reflect the issues and topics facing the world at large and illustrate the important role that event professionals play in bringing people together.

Thank you for reading! We greatly appreciate the survey participants who provided valuable input and insights into industry trends. Stay tuned on how you might be able to participate in the future.

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