

Freeman¹



Show, don't tell

Boosting in-person engagement
for today's audiences



Understatement of the decade: There's been a lot of change recently.

The good news is that planners can attract expanded audiences and meet their expectations while also gaining loyalty.

How?

It's all about the experience.

Sounds obvious, right? But there's something you may be missing:

How does each attendee define "a great experience"?

Turns out, asking that question is the key to your event's success.

In this guide, we'll cover how to meet audience needs with new on-site experiences that benefit everyone: attendees, exhibitors, sponsors, and your show.



What will attract attendees?

The promise of something special and engaging that they can't get at home.

Take it to the floor

By creating different experiences throughout your show floor, you can empower attendees to engage with what is most meaningful to them. In the past, planners spent more time designing the learning portion of the show, ensuring that top-notch speakers and the flow of sessions had variety and value.

But many attendees are looking for something more.

People want to spend time doing a variety of things, including:

- Meeting face to face with suppliers and stakeholders.
- Curating networks of new and meaningful connections.
- Interactive education that elevates learning and networking through shared experiences.
- Tending to their wellness with amenities like yoga, chair massages, and even quiet, comfy spots designed for relaxing and recharging.
- Negotiating business deals with clients and even a few stretch prospects.

The power to choose

Giving attendees experiences they crave — and places where they can unplug as needed — goes a long way toward a richer on-site experience that generates repeat attendance.

And that's where your show floor, a blank slate of possibilities, comes into play.

Attendees choose their own adventure — and get exactly what they hoped for.

Refreshing education

If your event has focused heavily on the learning experience in the past, it's worth revisiting your approach to make sure it's still relevant. With so many resources available online, in-person attendees will appreciate richer, more targeted content:

Practical and
hands-on
workshops

Q&As with
industry
experts

Advanced-level
sessions

Then, consider building out stellar e-learning opportunities for year-round engagement.



E-zones: curated experiences on the show floor

Key attendee goals include:

- Making new connections and deepening existing ones.
- Engaging with co-workers they see only on Zoom.
- Learning from industry experts.
- Trying out new tech or products.

Of course, most value the joy of sharing in-person inspiration, fun, and wonder with other humans.

Show managers can creatively combine these goals (education, networking, business development, and entertainment) into highly curated “experience zones.”

Zones defined:

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

There are 3 components to a successful approach:

Curated spaces

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

Feature areas

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

Partner opportunities

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



Show, don't tell

E-zones create multiple points of alignment with your brand

From seeking high-level inspiration to trying out the finer details of a new tool, attendees have a variety of goals.

So does your organization.

What if you could create alignment, so each zone not only satisfies an attendee need, but also an organization need?

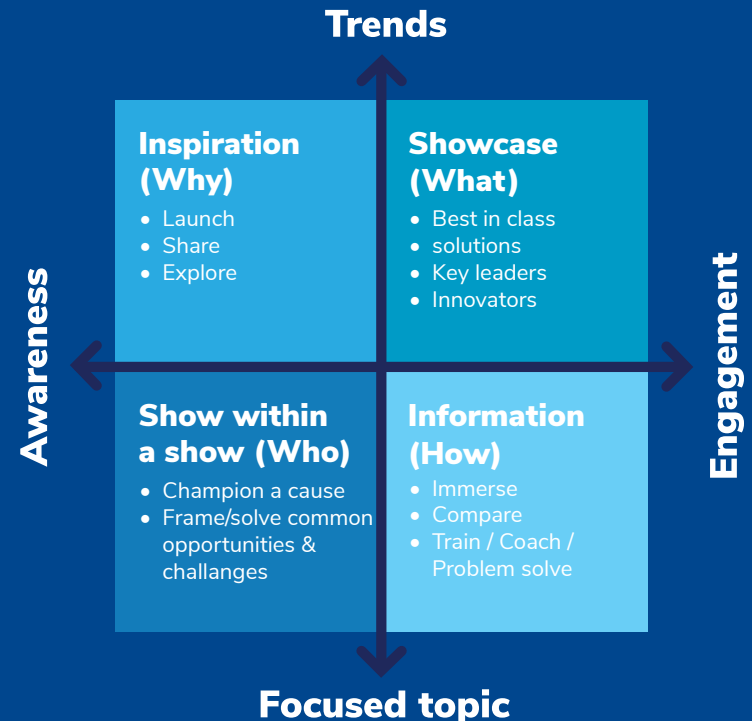
In addition to helping each attendee choose what works best for them, experience zones can help promote corporate goals by satisfying the multidimensional aspects of successful shows.

An e-zone can be set up for:

- Attendees to learn about products or services
- Q&As and hands-on interaction/trials
- Relevant industry information or news
- Media event or product announcement
- Networking activities

And by leveraging both the performer and voyeur elements of social channels like TikTok and YouTube, e-zones can eliminate the barriers between in-person and virtual attendees.

The intersection between audience and corporate goals



E-zones offer an ideal opportunity to seize on the latest trends and ideas, from a 10,000-foot perspective (environmental sustainability) down to a 500-foot view (electric cars). They can also help transport your audience on the journey from brand awareness to product / service engagement.

Planning your show's e-zones

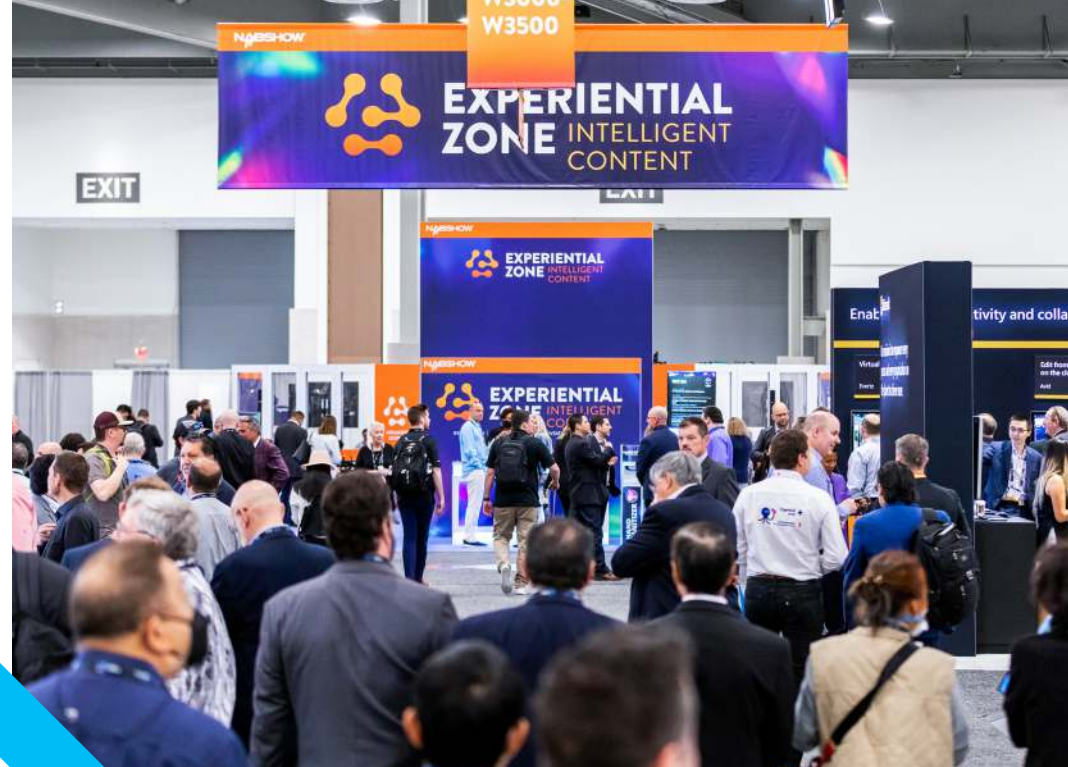
A successful experience zone strategy requires going well beyond one-size-fits-all. It requires a level of personalization not only for your various attendee profiles, but for your specific industry, show location, and more.

Keep these factors in mind when planning your zones:

Location, location, location

Think about your event city. Is it conducive to an outdoor experience? What about a multi-site experience? Don't be afraid to think beyond the walls of the conference center.

- Even if all your e-zones are within the same building, how can they be best worked into the space?
- Is there architecture you can leverage to make an e-zone more impactful?
- What kind of floor plan makes sense for your event, the industry, and attendee priorities?



With an evolving media landscape and a growing audience of content creators, NAB saw an opportunity to reimagine its signature event.

First, we identified attendee profiles using historical data. Then our designers and AV team created engaging e-zones that directly correlated not only to these profiles, but to attendees' areas of interest.

The result? A dynamic and versatile show that surpassed its goals while feeling custom-designed for each attendee.

[See the transformation](#)



Seize the tease

Unless e-zones are meant to be a surprise (which is a valid approach), you'll want to get attendees excited about the experience. So make sure your event marketing team makes a point of promoting the e-zones via channels like digital ads, the show guide, and the event website.

How can you get people excited?
And how will you leverage each communication channel to that end?

Highlight innovation

E-zones lend themselves wonderfully to emerging innovation and new start-ups, giving planners — and exhibitors — the chance to show, not just tell.

How will your e-zone be relatable and make the connection with attendees, especially if the technology or innovation is truly groundbreaking?

Jazz up your zones: Learn about other event tech and audio visual extras to innovate your e-zone space.

Show within a show

There's nothing like going to a stellar conference that also delivers an incredible concert, amazing reveal, or other standout event.

While not every e-zone you're creating will be big and splashy, how can you make it feel like you're delivering a "show within a show"?



ABC: Always be connecting

Networking is an essential engagement element that should be integrated into every e-zone. How can your experience help audiences interact in a more structured way to network? Where in the e-zone are there opportunities for attendees to create connections?

At HubSpot's INBOUND 2022 conference, attendees could have fun headshots taken (complete with colorful props) and then post them on a wall with a note indicating what expertise or services they offered, creating a fun (and introvert-friendly) way to network and build connections.

Show, don't tell

Get the LED out

To ensure that attendees can take the best possible advantage of experience zones, make them easy to find. LED walls can be hugely effective here, whether for providing information, wayfinding, or just grabbing attention.

Bonus: because they can also feature ads, LED walls provide a wealth of sponsorship opportunities.

Do your homework

Approach each e-zone with a curator's perspective. Find out what audiences want to see and then proactively approach partners or sponsors to help you create those experiences.

What will offer the best combination of engagement and interest?

Take your e-zones to the bank

Sponsorships are more important than ever, offering a win-win with recognition, affinity, and content. But selling them is just part of the equation.

Just like content, the bar is way up for sponsorships: A straight transaction isn't enough.

Instead of setting up the traditional "sponsors' row," work in partnership with companies to plan how they can be thoughtfully integrated into the spaces.

Sponsorship success factors (in and outside zones)

Be strategic

In the same way e-zones are curated for your specific industry, audience, and location, your sponsorships should follow a similar approach. The last thing you want to do is shoehorn a sponsor into an e-zone that doesn't connect, making attendees wonder if they've wandered into the wrong convention hall.

Get creative

Work with your sponsors to create unique, interactive ways for their displays and presence to work seamlessly into the event objectives while still providing a memorable and impactful experience for the attendee.

Make it easy

E-zones may be a new idea to sponsors, so make the process as easy and repeatable as possible. Offer a wealth of support and get answers to their questions, while building in a fully self-serve element for sponsors who are ready right away.

Offer true value

When thinking through a potential activation, make sure it is worthwhile to the sponsor, the attendee, and the planner — if it's not a clear yes to all three, it's not an effective idea.

Package it up

A sponsor may come to the table seeking a customized opportunity. But other sponsors might want to just keep things simple. If you do offer packages for your e-zones, make sure each one includes brand awareness, thought leadership, and demand generation.

Exhibitor needs are changing, too — they know attendees aren't keen on the hard sell. So put on your consultant hat and help them engage in new ways:

Space:

Think beyond the booth environment (ahem, zones!) or even a different type of space — smaller, different location, etc.

Content:

Explore content and thought leadership opportunities.

Activation:

Brainstorm ways to create interactive and hands-on activities.

Bottom line:

Be flexible — open your mind about what's possible and what benefits the brand, the attendees, and the show.



A can't-miss live event — for everybody

Driving engagement on the show floor requires planners to focus on what matters to attendees, sponsors, and partners: What do they want out of the event?

Experience zones make it easier to give your people what they want. By letting attendees select the experience that is most rewarding to them, you find that sweet spot — and create a successful, can't-miss show experience.



Ready to get in the (experience) zone?

Let's show and tell

Design an event tailored
for today's audiences.

Get your new basics toolkit

Freeman[™]

