

Freeman Trends Report

Unpacking XLNC: the future of adult learning at conferences and trade shows

Part Two

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Learning is happening whether you schedule it or not

Learning doesn't wait for the session to start. It happens in the moment an attendee picks up a product they've never seen before. In the conversation that starts in line for coffee and ends with a new productivity hack. Or the expo theater session they discovered while exploring the floor.

Attendees navigate your event the way they navigate the world: curious, open, and ready to learn from whatever crosses their path.

The latest data shows that unstructured learning is already one of the most valued parts of an event. **Attendees rate learning from exhibitors, peers, and sessions as comparably valuable**, and they come expecting to learn across all formats. However, **event leaders aren't fully capitalizing on this opportunity.**

Unstructured learning isn't a threat to keynotes or conference room sessions — it's complementary — and it happens whether you plan for it or not.

The opportunity is to bring all parties together around a shared goal: building an environment where learning can happen more often, more meaningfully, and for more people.

This report looks at where learning happens, what attendees expect from it, and what it takes for organizers, learning directors, and exhibitors to design for it together. It also gives advice for drawing in new attendees — namely, by offering clear value in an environment that can't be replicated online.

Learning is already happening everywhere at your event. This report is about making the most of it.

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Within this report

Total number of
respondents 3,319

Total number of attendee respondents: 2,508

- Attendee margin of error: +/- 2.1%
- Trade show 50%, Conference 50%

Total number of exhibitor respondents: 811

- Exhibitor margin of error: +/- 3.4%

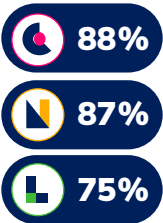
Callouts you'll see



NowGen Event Goers (NGEG), aged 23-46, are shaping trends, driving innovation, and redefining what value means. This callout represents NowGen data segmentation.



Throughout this report, we've modified a few charts to highlight the top responses. When you see this callout, it means that the full dataset can be found in the appendix.



These callouts show where learning-focused, networking-focused, and commerce-focused attendees respond differently from the overall average.



These callouts represent differences between conference and trade show attendees.



PART TWO



Learning is a big topic. So, we've chosen to explore it in two parts.

Part One of our Learning Report focused on learning inside conference room sessions and general sessions.

In case you didn't read it, here's what you need to know:

- Attendees prioritize learning that **delivers new ideas and take-home value** over credentials/certifications they can collect.
- Attendees want speakers to lead **with clear objectives, real-world examples, and practical takeaways**.
- To consider conference-room-style learning effective, attendees require a **mix of learning formats**.

This report is Part Two.

This report covers where happens everywhere else: on the expo floor, in peer discussions, in product demonstrations, and in the spontaneous exchanges that occur across the entire event environment. We refer to it as “unstructured learning” for short.

XLNC Framework

If you're familiar with Freeman's previous trends reports, you're familiar with Freeman's XLNC Framework.

If you're not, allow us to catch you up. XLNC (pronounced 'excellence') stands for **eXperience, Learning, Networking, and Commerce**. It's an objective-based framework that examines the four main reasons folks attend (or exhibit at) events.

This year, we're taking a different approach to our research and double-clicking on each XLNC element.

This chapter is all about learning that happens across the full event environment, and exploring what organizers, learning directors, and exhibitors can do to deliver more effective, more attendee-centric learning experiences.



EXPERIENCE

Have fun, achieve my objectives, enjoy the environment



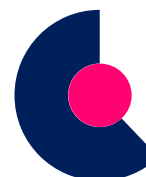
LEARNING, PART ONE

Be inspired, learn something new, receive training



NETWORKING

Make connections, socialize with new and existing contacts



COMMERCE

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



The Origins of XLNC, Explained

Grounded in data from millions of attendees, exhibit marketers, event leaders, and meeting organizers, the XLNC framework gave the industry a common language for understanding what attendees and exhibitors want from events — and a way to measure organizer assumptions against both.

By structuring our research around attendee and exhibitor objectives rather than how events are traditionally programmed, the findings reflect what participants actually experience and need. That same structure gives organizers a practical lens for evaluating and designing their own events.

Across this series of trends reports, that approach has consistently surfaced findings that challenged what event professionals expected to hear.

And that's the whole point.



Unstructured Learning Expectations



Different attendees, different expectations

As in [previous reports](#), we segmented attendees using the XLNC framework based on their self-identified primary objective at events: Learning, Networking, or Commerce.

Unstructured learning expectations shift significantly based on what attendees are there to achieve, **and a single approach won't serve them all.**



Learning-focused

- Prefer structured learning
- Value expo theater sessions that are differentiated from conference-room learning
- Value industry trends sessions delivered by the event organizer's staff/expert



Networking-focused

- Prefer unstructured learning
- Learn more from connecting with other attendees/experts
- Attend an industry trends session if delivered by an industry influencer



Commerce-focused

- Prefer unstructured learning
- Expect unstructured learning to deliver product/service discovery
- Attend an industry trends session if delivered by an exhibitor SME

ATTENDEE QUESTION

To what extent do you expect learning that occurs outside of a general session/keynote or conference room setting to provide each of the following? (% to high/very extent)

What attendees want from unstructured learning reflects why they came

Unstructured learning looks different depending on why someone showed up.

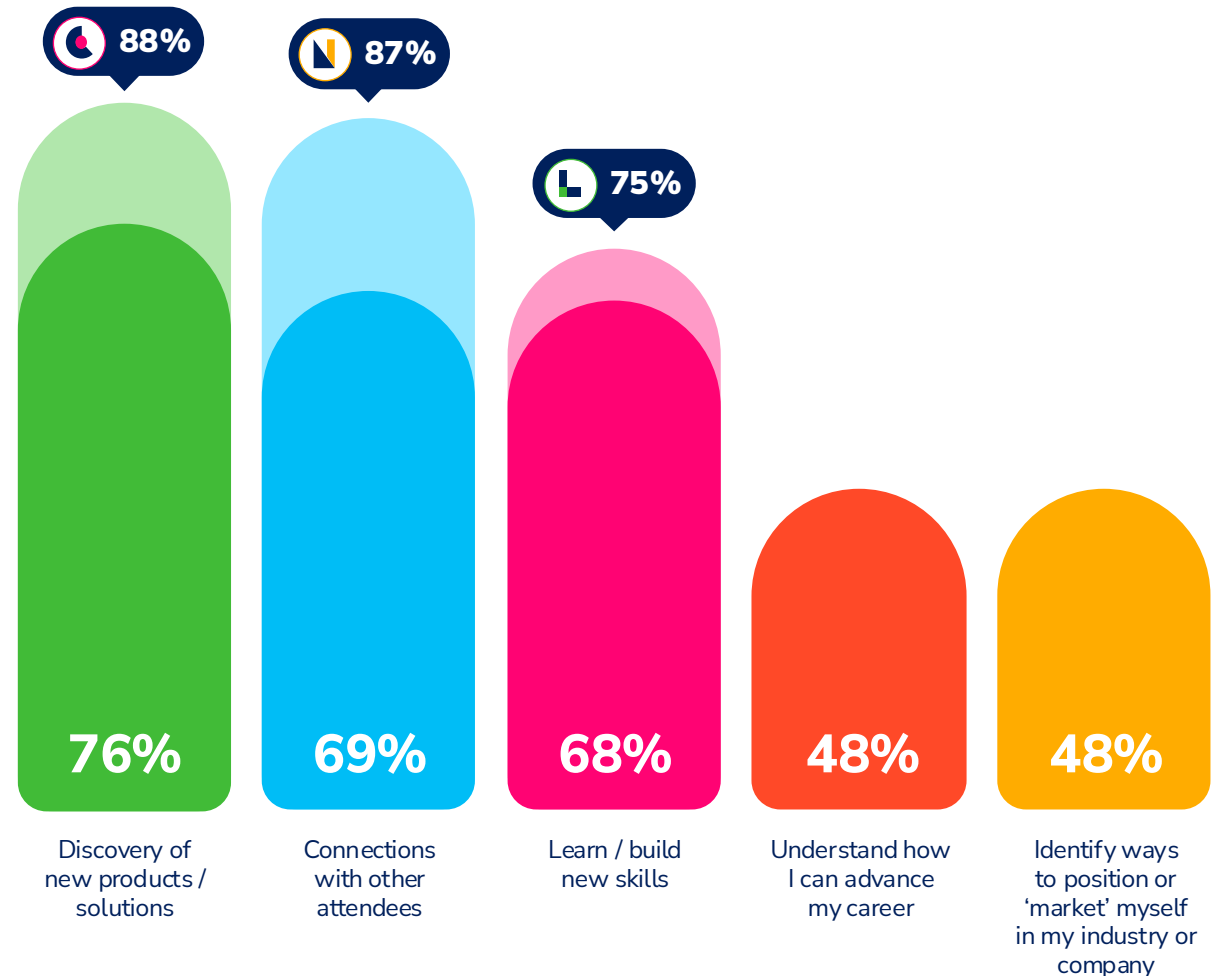
Commerce-focused attendees come expecting product discovery above all else: 88% say it's what they want unstructured learning to deliver.

Networking-focused attendees most value peer connection, at 87%.

Learning-focused attendees lean toward skill building, at 75%.

Each profile has a clear priority, and those priorities point to different parts of the event. Designing unstructured learning that works requires knowing which of these attendees you're building for.

Expectations for unstructured learning



Action Item



Assess attendees' needs using the XLNC framework

Including a simple survey question in the attendee registration process can go a long way to giving event organizers actionable insights for event design.

Ask attendees what they're most hoping to learn or gain from the event. Do they want to:

- Have fun, achieve objectives, and enjoy the experience
- Learn something new or build a skill
- Meet people and make connections
- Discover new products or find solutions to a specific challenge

Their answer maps directly to the XLNC framework and reveals what each attendee values most, giving organizers a data-driven foundation for deciding which unstructured learning environments need the most intentional design.

Check out our resource, [The Best Events Are Intentional](#), for insights on how to weave intention into every event using our Intelligent Innovation approach.

Learning Happens Everywhere



ATTENDEE QUESTION

What percentage of the time you spend learning at the event would you ideally spend in conference rooms vs. any other area of the event?

Preferred setting for learning –
conference rooms vs other areas

Attendees want to spend more than half their time in unstructured learning

The conference room and general session are two learning environments among many.

Attendees say they would ideally spend 54% of their learning time in unstructured formats. At trade shows, that number rises to 64%.

Designing for learning inside the conference room is necessary. Designing for it everywhere else is just as important, and most events haven't caught up to that yet.

46%

Conference room
or general
session /
keynote

64% Trade
43% Conf

54%

Any other area of the
event outside of
conference or general
session rooms

Source: Learning
Syndicated
Survey, May 2026

ATTENDEE QUESTION

Please select your level of agreement with each of the following statements at the most important in-person professional event you attended (% agree/strongly agree)

3 in 5 seek more unstructured learning opportunities

Sixty percent of attendees say they want even more unstructured learning opportunities.

Among NowGen attendees, that rises to 66%. Since NowGen is becoming a larger share of every event audience, it's time for organizers to recognize that learning programs can no longer stop at the session room door.



More data
in appendix

Freeman¹

Balancing learning across event environments



60%

Would appreciate more unstructured learning opportunities

66% NGEN

ATTENDEE QUESTION

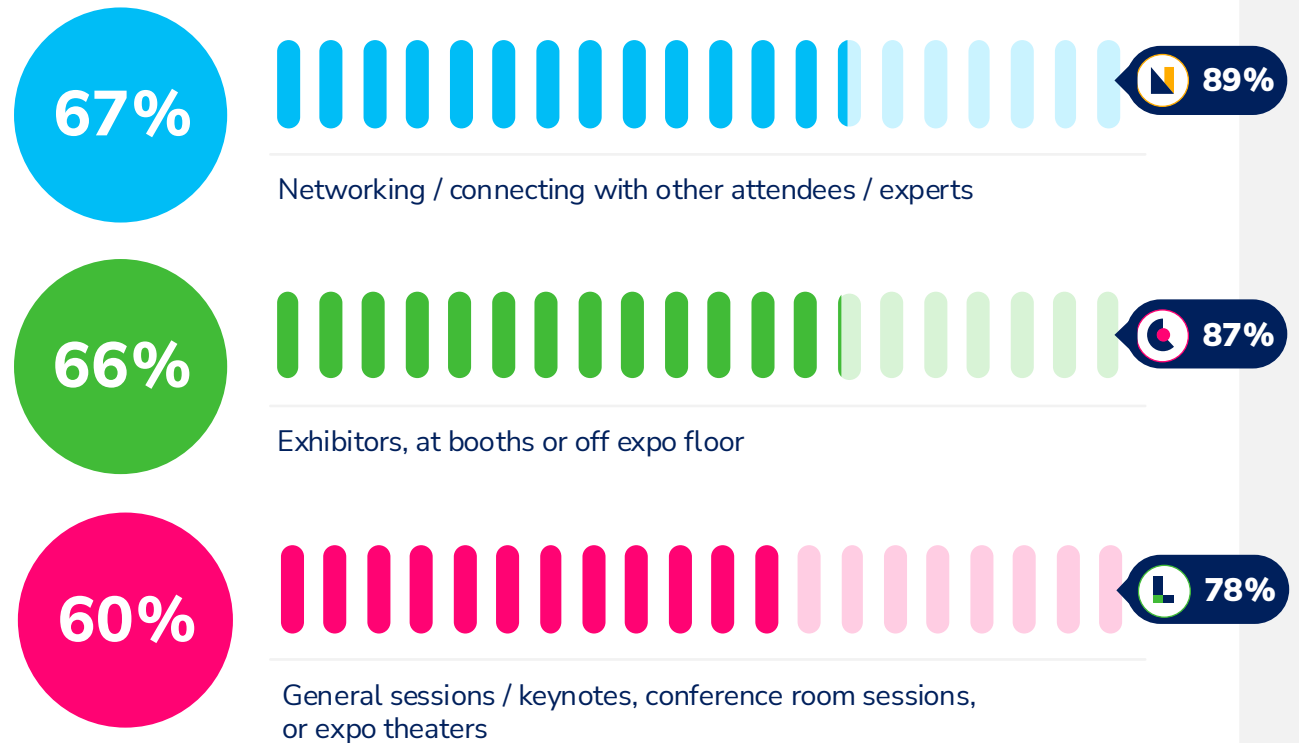
How valuable are each of the following sources to how you achieve your learning objectives at the most important in-person professional event you attend?

Attendees find learning value across all environments, with networking and exhibitor conversations edging out formal sessions

Attendees rate learning from networking and the expo floor as slightly more valuable than formal sessions. For an industry that invests most of its planning energy in conference rooms and keynote stages, **that's a significant finding.**

That doesn't mean formal learning sessions aren't important. Each environment has a distinct role, and attendees are drawing on all of them. **The opportunity is in designing each for the type of learning it's best suited to deliver.**

Value of learning by source



ATTENDEE QUESTION

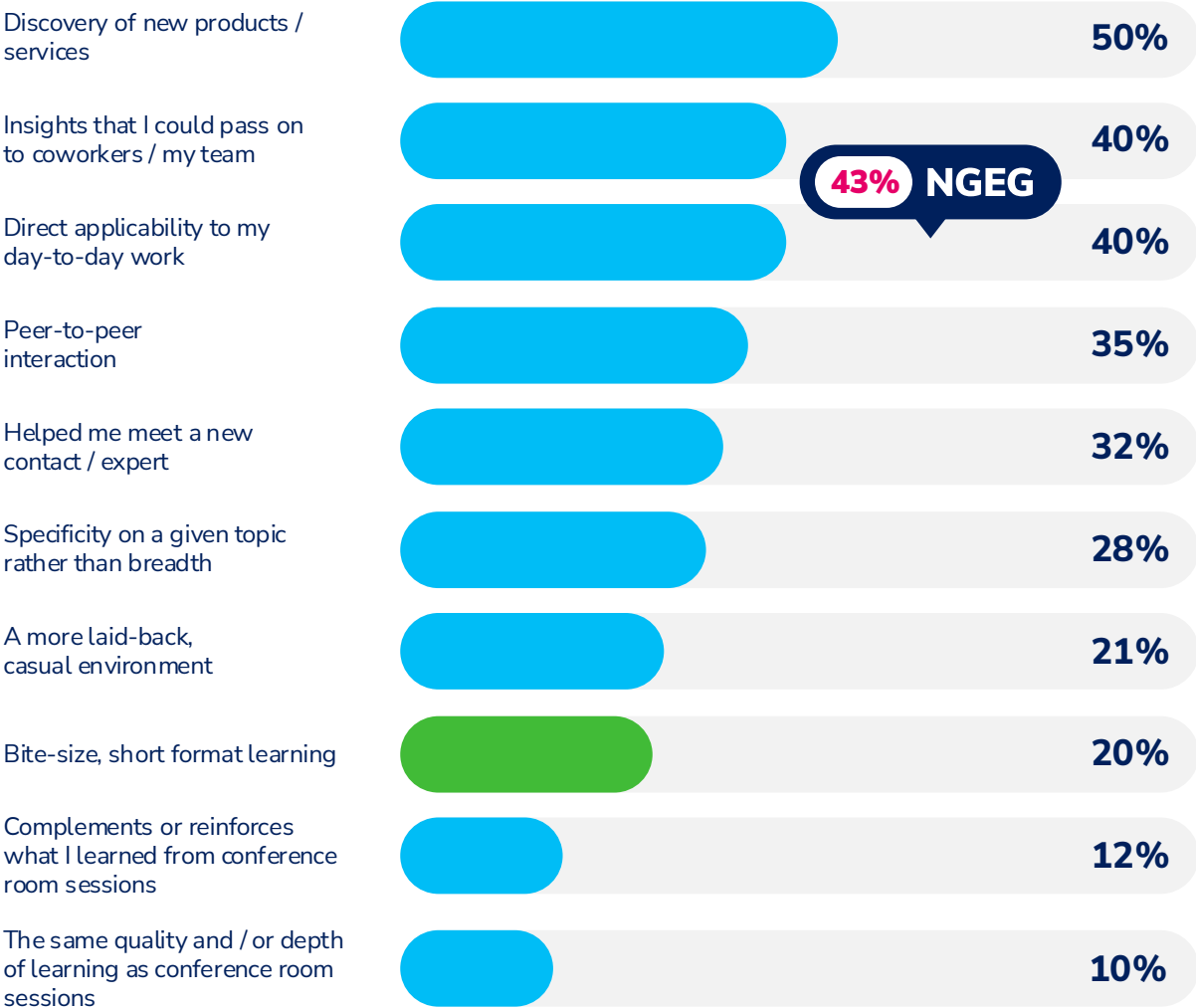
What do you expect learning outside of a general session or conference room setting to deliver for you to consider it valuable? Select up to 3 options.

Unstructured learning should be substantive

Attendees say product discovery, sharable insights, direct applicability, and peer interaction are the most important unstructured learning elements. This aligns with what we saw in our [Commercial Trends Report](#).

One counterintuitive finding: bite-sized, short-format learning ranked as one of the least valuable elements. Organizers often assume that unstructured learning should be brief and informal. But attendees are asking for something more substantive than that.

Indicators of value for unstructured learning



ATTENDEE QUESTION

In a setting outside of a general session or conference room at professional events, what has been most impactful for how you have learned about new ideas/approaches or has sparked inspiration?

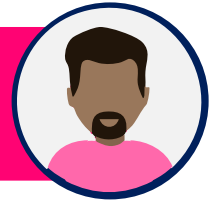
What attendees are saying about the most impactful unstructured learning

When we ask attendees to describe the most impactful unstructured learning moments, **we see a common thread: conversation, exploration, and relevance to real problems.**

A great way for organizers and exhibitors to deliver all of these outcomes? Having the right subject matter experts on hand.



'Peer to peer conversations. A lot of us go through the same or similar problems/challenges and everyone has a different approach to things.'



'Being able to get a hands-on feel was more effective than just seeing it on the exhibit floor.'



'Smaller, more informal settings tend to be more hands-on and transparent, which makes it easier to understand the real-world challenges, tradeoffs, and opportunities behind it.'



'Interactive, small-group experiences — peer roundtables, live problem-solving workshops, innovation labs, or behind-the-scenes demonstrations.'



'The expo floor has been the most impactful place for discovering new ideas and inspiration because I can see products, innovations, and business approaches firsthand.'

Whose job is it anyway?

Formal learning sessions have a clear owner. When it comes to unstructured learning, however, responsibility gets murkier.

Ask most event teams who owns unstructured learning, and you'll get a complicated answer. The education team owns the sessions. Operations owns the floor. Nobody owns what happens in between.

Freeman's Networking Trends Report found that 96% of organizers have no dedicated staff member responsible for networking. Most see their role as providing the time and space — not the purpose. As one organizer put it: 'Networking is unstructured. We expect them to connect on their own.'

Our Commercial Trends Report found that fewer than half of organizers say they actively guide attendees to relevant exhibitors.

Both are learning opportunities without a clear owner. Until someone claims that responsibility, the full learning potential of the event goes untapped.



96%

of organizers have no
dedicated staff member
responsible for
networking



The Singular Learning Lens

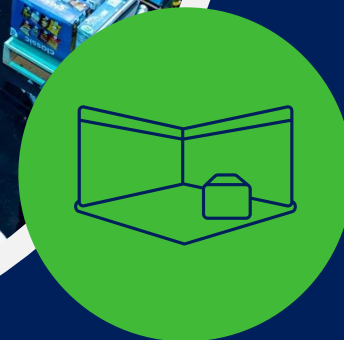
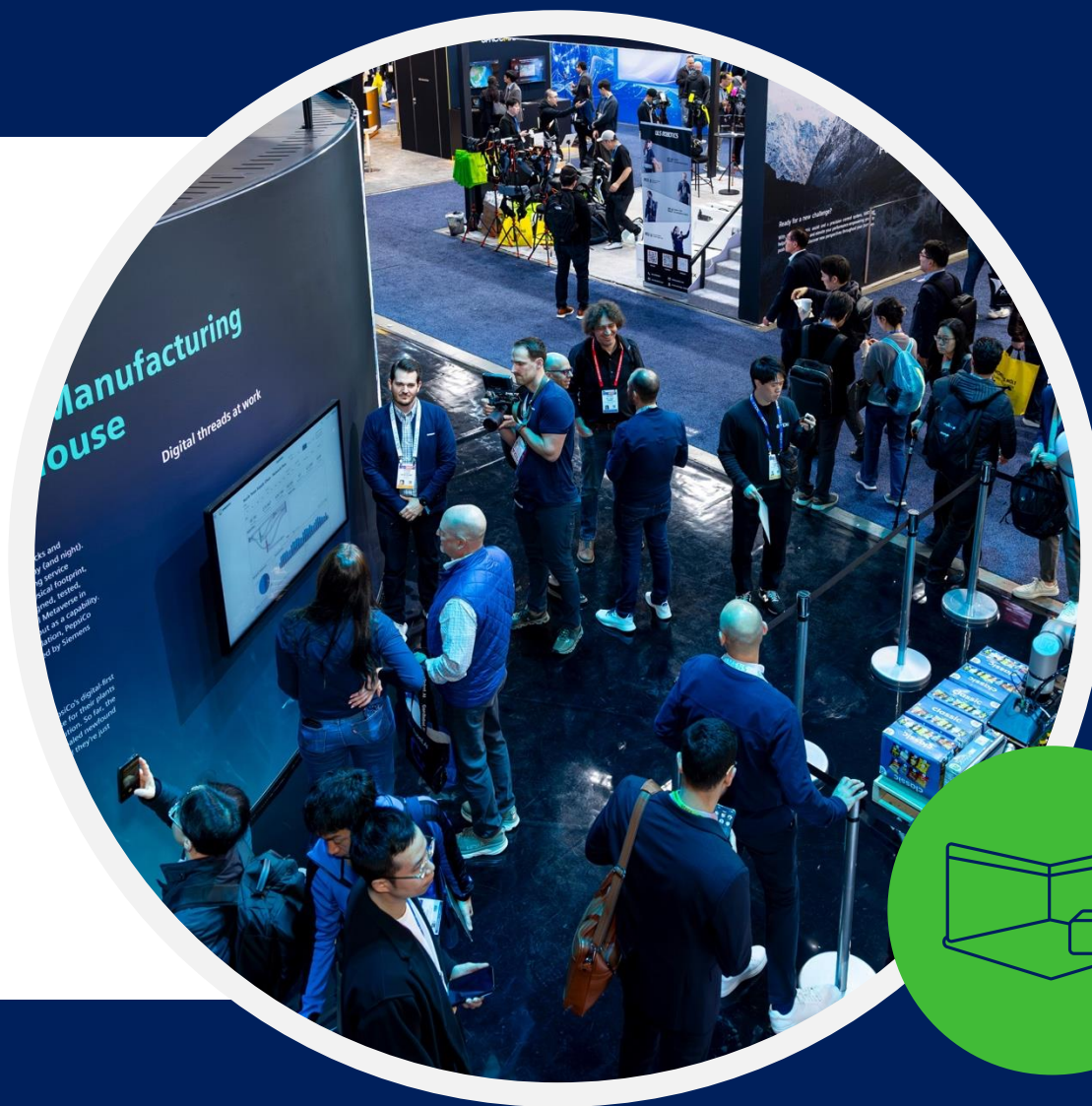
Most event learning budgets, planning hours, and organizational attention flow to two places: the conference room and the keynote stage. These are the environments organizers and education directors know how to build for learning.

The expo floor and the networking program get planned too, but through different lenses. The focus here is on booth placement, traffic flow, receptions, and structured mixers. Learning isn't the organizing principle, and that's a major missed opportunity.

Whether it's theater sessions that share new ideas, product demonstrations that offer hands-on learning, or peer conversations happening over lunch — **these are all learning opportunities that aren't being framed or supported as such. The result is a one-size-fits-one learning program.**



The Expo Floor as a Complementary Learning Channel





76%

of attendees say discovering new products is what they expect unstructured learning to deliver



Product discovery is a big part of attendee learning

Product discovery has ranked as a top attendee priority across every report in the XLNC series. It showed up in the [Commercial Trends Report](#), the [Networking Trends Report](#), and it shows up here. 76% of attendees say discovering new products is what they expect unstructured learning to deliver.

Discovering a new product or solution that changes how you work is learning. The expo floor is where that happens, and it deserves to be designed accordingly.

ATTENDEE QUESTION

Select your level of agreement with each of the following statements at the most important in-person professional event you attend. Expo hall theaters or any other learning in the expo hall ... (% agree/strongly agree)

Expo theaters offer a distinct learning experience

The expo theater’s unique format lends itself to so much of what attendees crave in an event overall.

As natural discovery and innovation hubs, expo theaters give attendees a prime opportunity for product and solution discovery, hands-on demonstrations, and connection with peers and subject matter experts (SMEs).

NowGen attendees in particular place a high value on expo theater sessions, which isn’t surprising since we already know that they place a premium on authenticity, relevance, and experiences that align with their priorities.

Perception of expo theater sessions



68%

Provide a different atmosphere for learning that compliments conference room learning



67%

Is differentiated from learning that occurs in conference rooms



60%



Allows me to connect with other attendees/ experts more effectively than during conference room sessions



57%

Improves my learning experience due to being more convenient to attend, minimizes time walking between destinations



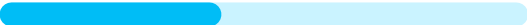
48%

Deliver comparable quality of learning to conference room sessions



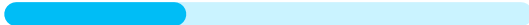
42%

Serves my learning needs, makes attending conference room sessions less necessary



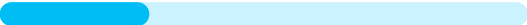
34%

Takes time away from conference room learning



28%

Must provide CE credits for me to attend



ATTENDEE QUESTION

Consider expo hall theater sessions or other thought leadership that are presented by an exhibitor. Select your level of agreement with each of the following statements. Provider/exhibitor-led sessions ... (% agree/strongly agree)

Value of exhibitor / provider expo theater sessions

Exhibitor-delivered expo theater sessions drive booth visits and engagement

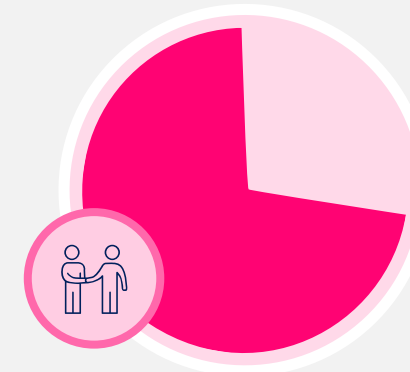
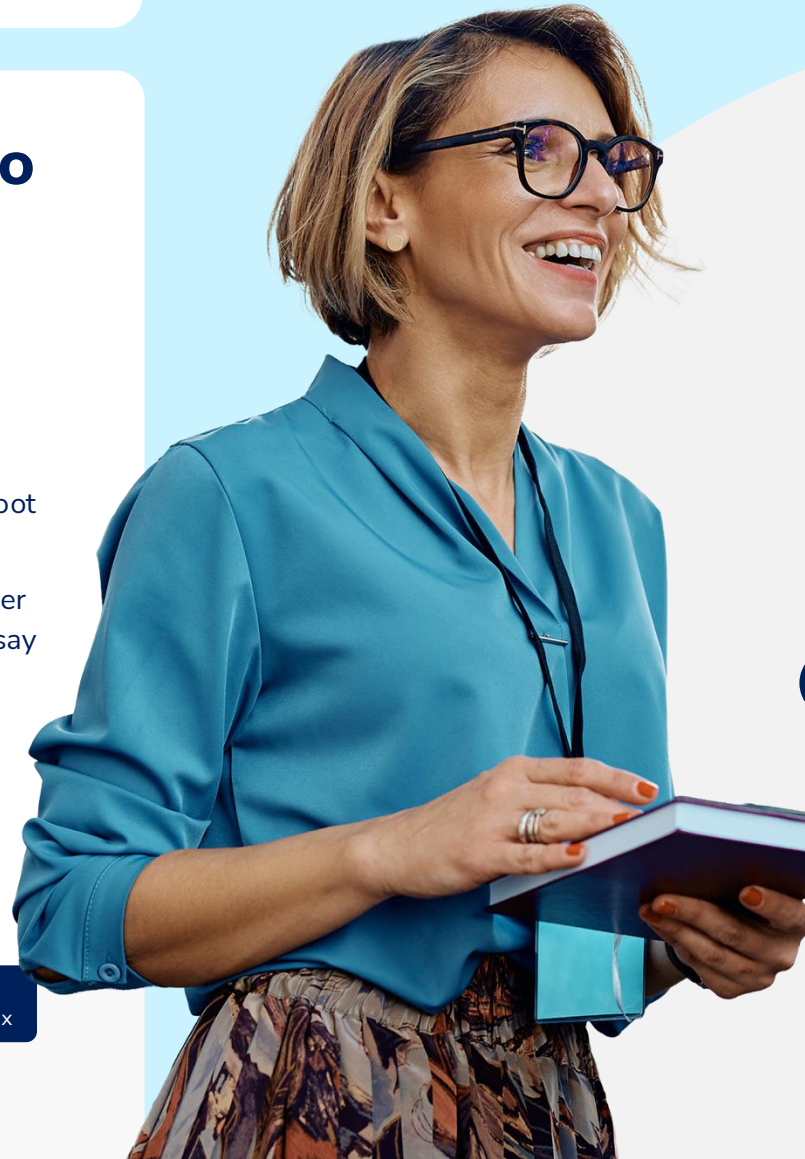
Another benefit to expo theater sessions? They drive foot traffic to booths and the overall exhibitor floor.

Nearly two-thirds of all attendees — and an even higher proportion (69%) of Commerce-focused attendees — say that these sessions prompt them to visit an exhibitor's booth after the expo theater session concludes.

Event organizers can play a role by regarding these sessions as essential to overall event engagement, while exhibitors should value these sessions as a way to increase booth traffic.

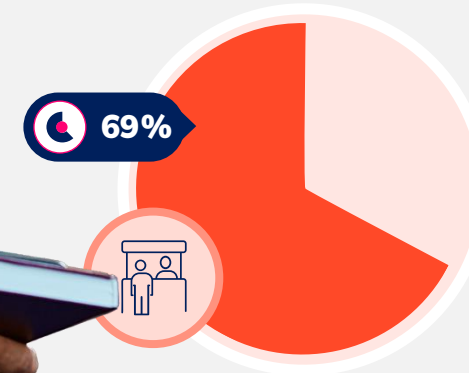


More data
in appendix



72%

Helped me connect with exhibitor / provider subject matter experts



64%

Frequently prompt me to visit an exhibitor's booth after the session

ATTENDEE QUESTION

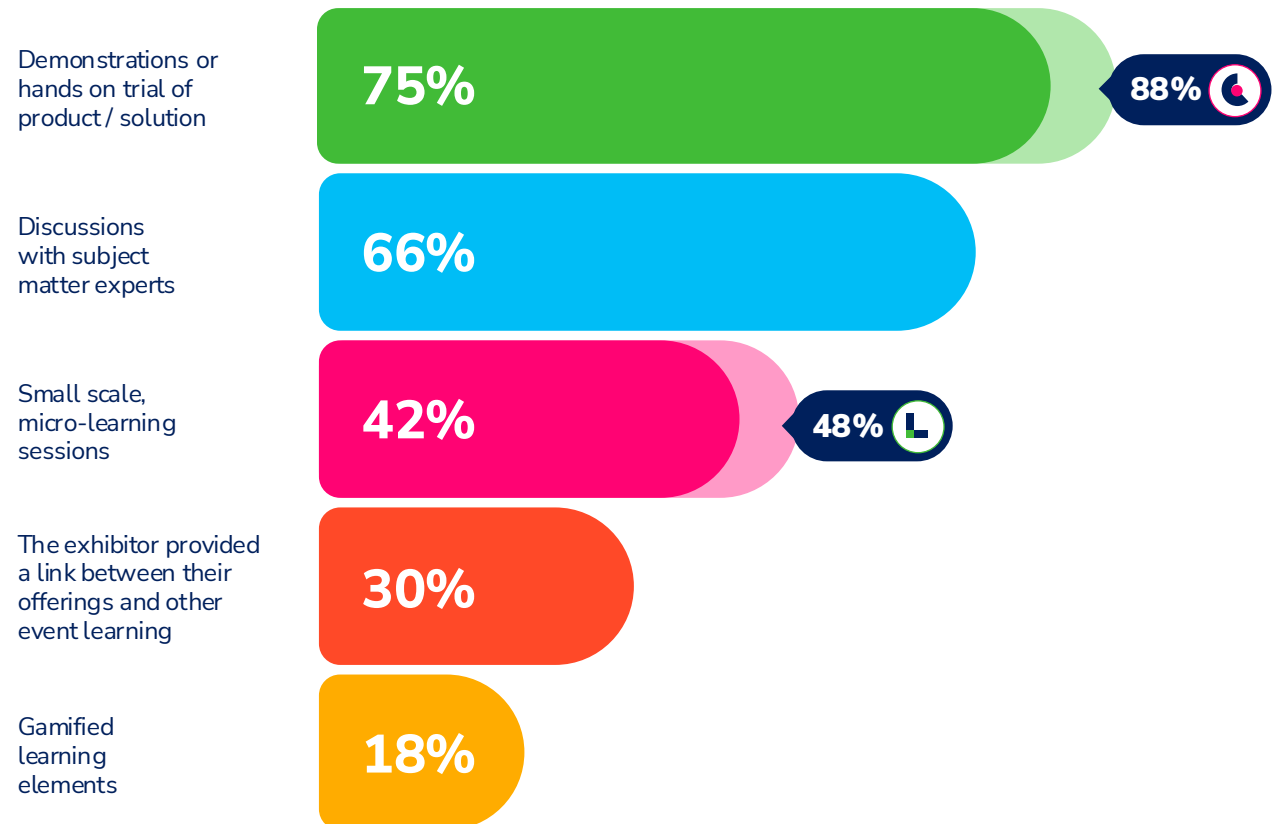
Consider how you learn at an exhibitor's booth on the expo floor. Which of the following factors helps you learn more about how to address your challenges/areas of interest most effectively? Select all that apply.

Across the expo hall, attendees learn best from hands-on experiences and subject matter experts

As attendees navigate the expo floor, the learning opportunities they find most effective go well beyond gamified learning (formats that use points, prizes, or incentives to encourage attendees to visit booths or complete activities). Done well, gamified experiences can be engaging. In practice, they often default to passport challenges and prize wheels, which is likely why they rank near the bottom.

What attendees want instead: hands-on demonstrations and direct access to subject matter experts. No surprise there. However, organizers can go a step further by offering challenge-based tracks that usher attendees through specific exhibitors and help them gain valuable take-home insights.

How attendees learn about addressing their challenges / areas of interest at exhibitor booths



EXHIBITOR QUESTION

How important do you believe it is that your organization provides each of the following as they relate to how attendees learn at events where you exhibit and/or sponsor? (% very/extremely important)

Exhibitors rightly value subject matter experts, but undervalue hands-on learning

The good news is that exhibitors, just like attendees, now place high importance on the learning that SMEs help foster.

This marks a meaningful shift from what we found in the [Freeman Commercial Trends Report](#), where only 26% of exhibitors believed that subject matter experts would improve their customer interactions. Exhibitor recognition of SME value has grown considerably since then.

Hands-on learning is where the gap remains. Only 6 in 10 exhibitors we surveyed indicate that hands-on participation or demonstrations are very or extremely important, even though attendees overwhelmingly value this type of learning.

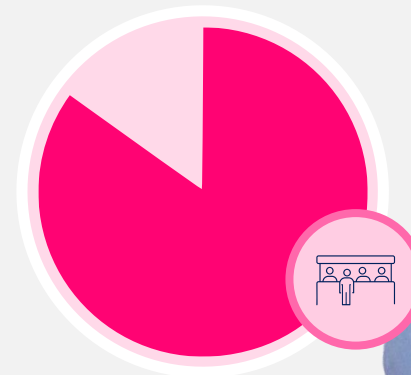


More data
in appendix

Exhibitor perception of the top ways they impact attendee learning

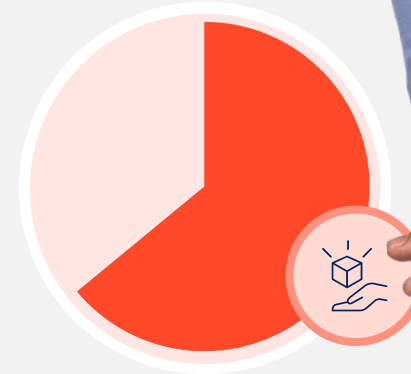
85%

Have subject matter experts at our booth for discussions with attendees



61%

Hands-on participation or some form of interaction



EXHIBITOR QUESTION

How much of a priority is it that your organization provides each of the following at the most important event where you exhibit and/or sponsor? (% high/very high priority)

Exhibitors say they prioritize delivering take-home value

81% of exhibitors say their top priority is delivering something attendees can take home to implement or apply in the future. Helping attendees learn something new and inspiring them also ranks highly.

Exhibitors are clearly focused on delivering genuine learning value. **The question is whether that intent is translating into attendee experience ...** (read on to find out the answer).

Exhibitor priorities for attendee learning



ATTENDEE QUESTIONS

How important is it that exhibitors provide each of the following as it relates to how you learn at the most important event you attend? (% very/extremely important)

How effective are exhibitors at delivering on those areas you considered most important in the prior question? (% very/extremely effective)

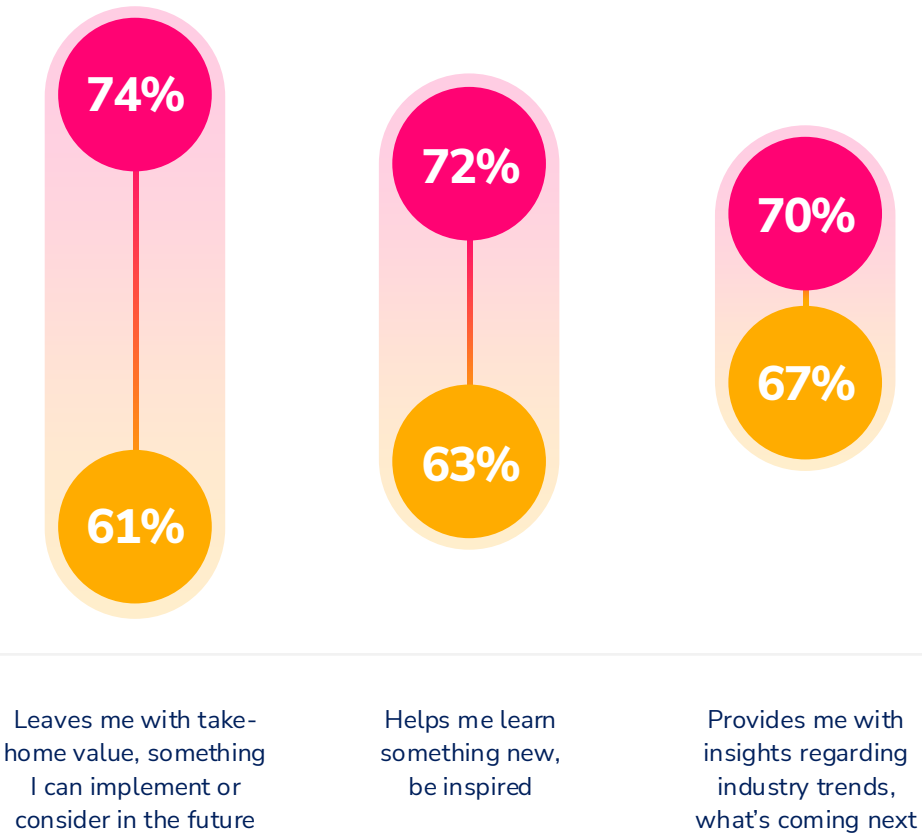
Attendees say exhibitors can do better at delivering take-home value

While 74% of surveyed attendees say that it's important for event exhibitors to deliver take-home value, only 61% say that exhibitors deliver in this area. The more exhibitors can close this gap, the more effectively they'll be able to represent their organization. The good news is that eight out of ten exhibitors see delivering take-home value as a priority (as we just mentioned in the previous page); what's needed are tangible ways to translate that intent into meaningful impact.

More data in appendix

Role of exhibitors in how attendees learn

Importance %
Effectiveness %



EXHIBITOR QUESTION

Please select your level of agreement with each of the following statements. My company's presence at professional events ... (% agree/strongly agree)

Exhibitor perception of thought leadership value

Most exhibitors believe thought leadership opportunities generate valuable leads

Exhibitors are telling us loud and clear: Thought leadership at events works. 81% say it generates valuable leads from sessions and connection opportunities beyond the booth.

Organizers who help exhibitors build and deliver strong thought leadership programming aren't just adding value for attendees, they're giving exhibitors a more compelling reason to come back.

81%

Generates valuable leads from sessions, connection opportunities, or other areas of the event outside of our booth

80%

Is intended to teach attendees something new about how to solve their challenges / needs

73%

Prioritizes the demonstration of thought leadership in our industry

73%

Links our offering / positionings to attendee learning opportunities at the event

EXHIBITOR QUESTIONS

At the most important events where your organization exhibits/sponsors, do you capture leads from any of the following sources? Select all that apply.

Rate the overall quality of leads sourced from each of the following sources at the most important professional event where your company exhibits and/or sponsors (% high/very high quality)

Exhibitors are still missing opportunities to track leads in learning sessions

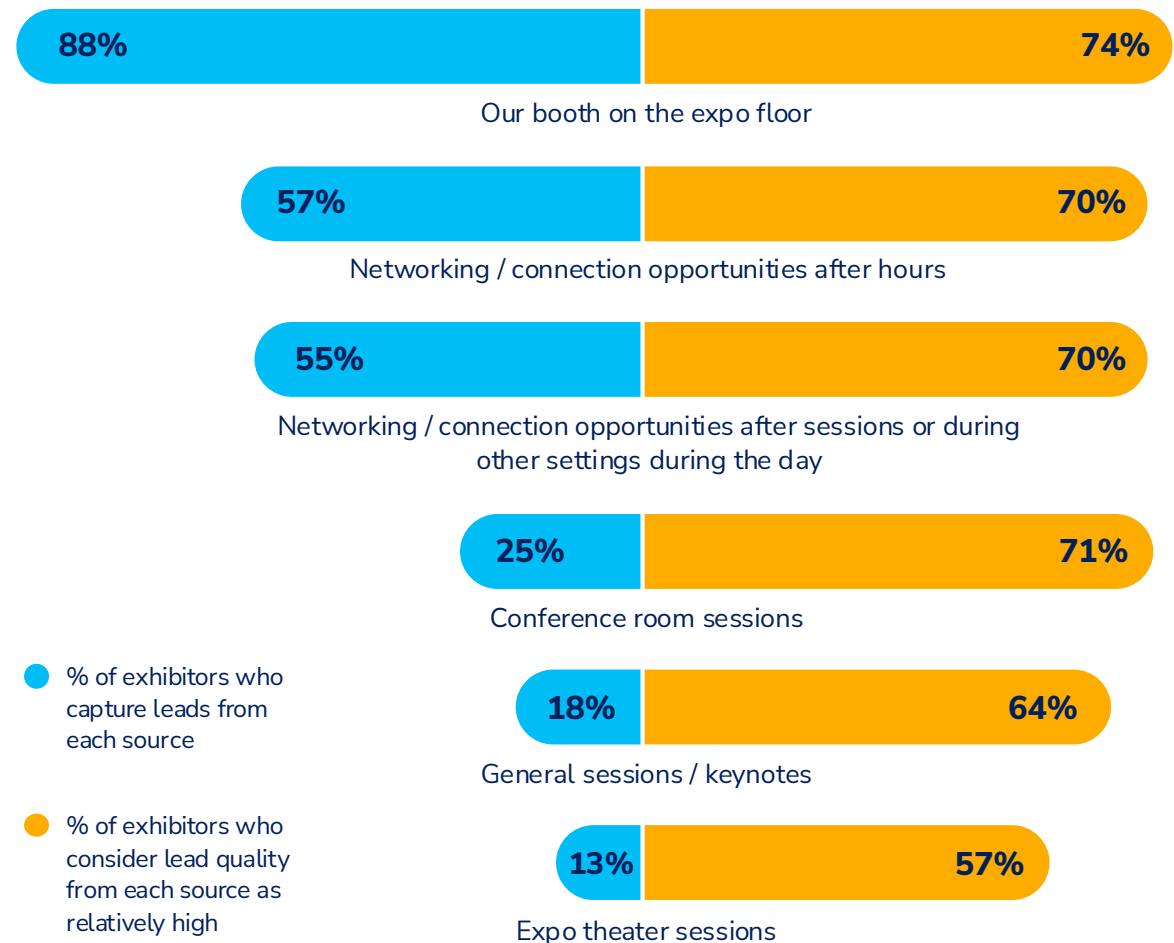
Exhibitors are already great at capturing leads from the booth — more than 88% say they do.

However, **fewer than one in four exhibitors capture leads from learning sessions, even though lead quality remains consistent across all event learning environments.**

The issue? Most exhibitors don't think of learning sessions as part of their lead generation strategy. The result is a lot of qualified pipeline walking out the door, uncaptured.

This is a big missed opportunity, especially since we know that attendees have made clear that sponsored booths and sessions often give better take-home value than more structured learning moments.

Perception of lead quality from different learning environments



EXHIBITOR QUESTION

What role do you believe your organization plays in how attendees learn at professional events where you exhibit and/or sponsor?

Most exhibitors see their role in attendee learning as practical and consultative: Helping attendees understand products, solve challenges, and connect with relevant resources. However, about **1 in 5 exhibitors say they play no role** in how attendees learn at events — a sign that some exhibitors need to reassess their role as educators.

Top comment categories*

53% Experiential product learning

30% Solution and consultative

24% Education content delivery

17% Limited or no learning role

*Will not sum to 100%, comments can fall into multiple categories or other categories not displayed

What exhibitors are saying about their role in attendee learning



'Sharing practical industry knowledge, operational experience, and real-world challenges in addition to promoting our products and services.'



'Beyond showcasing products, we aim to help attendees better understand current trends, identity verification challenges, and real-world implementation approaches.'



'We are industry experts and take a consultative approach to sales. We try to teach through the use of best practices.'



'We don't have a responsibility for the attendees learning agenda.'

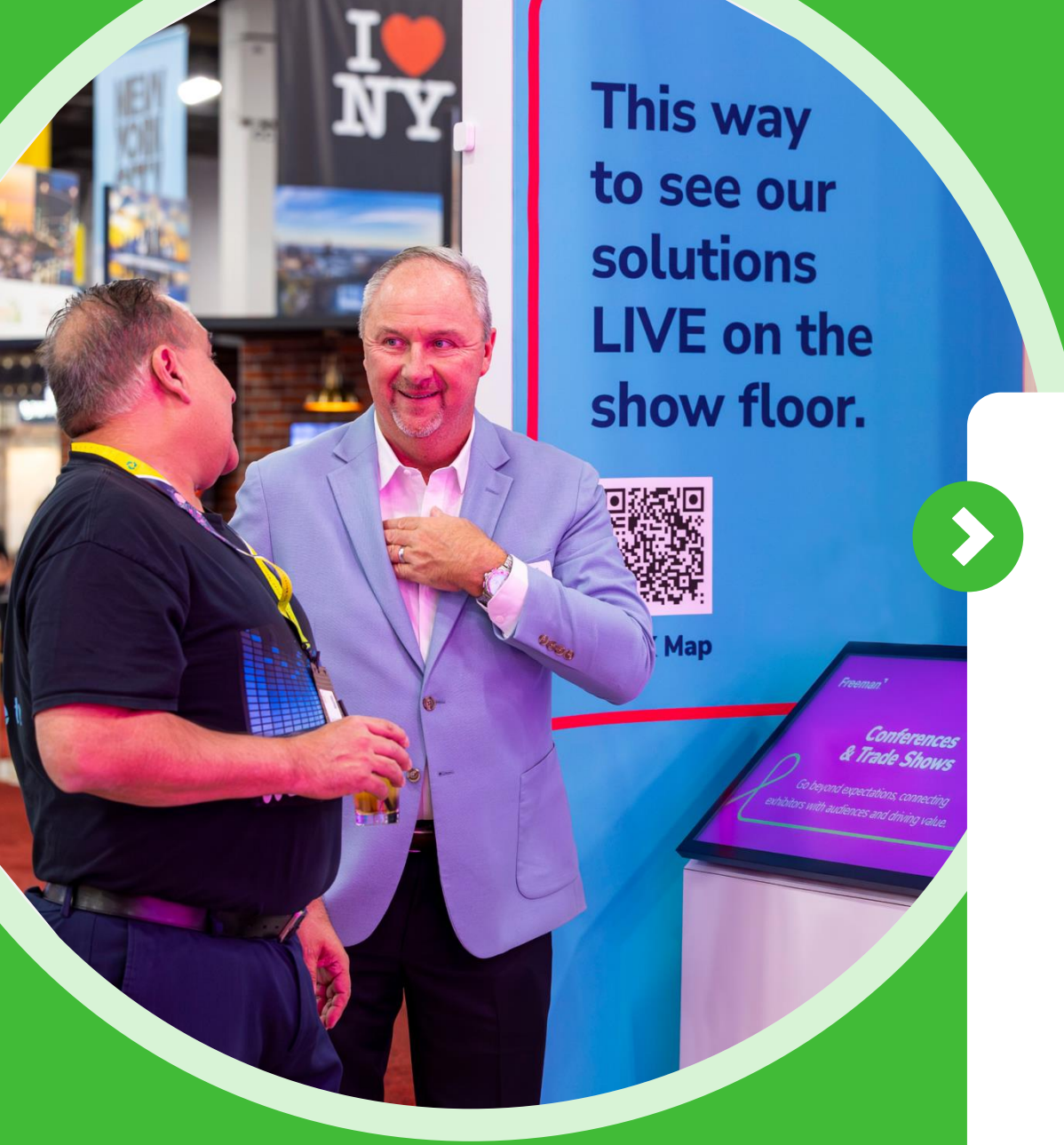
Action Item

Embrace the expo floor as a learning channel

One way that event organizers and learning directors can elevate the expo floor experience: by treating the floor itself as its own unique learning channel, just as one would for a keynote or conference room session. Here are a few questions that can help maximize impact:

- What can this learning channel offer that no other channel can?
- What metrics should define its success — and how might these differ from those that define success for the more traditional channels?
- How can exhibitors be best prepared to address attendees' highest needs, including opportunities for product discovery, hands-on learning, and connection with SMEs?

These questions can help organizers get closer to maximizing the learning experience everywhere.



Action Item

Position exhibitors to present thought leadership and deliver take-home value

The first step to showing up as a thought leader is understanding your audience. Share attendee interest data with exhibitors before the event, including registration data, session attendance patterns, and survey responses, so they can tailor their content to audience needs.

Attendees are looking for insights they can take back and apply. Exhibitors who deliver that are the ones who generate the most value from their event investment.

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a black and white patterned shirt, is shown from the side, holding a smartphone to scan a QR code. The QR code is on a blue display board with a red border. The text on the board says "This way to see our solutions LIVE on the show floor." and "IMEX Map". A red arrow points from the QR code to the text "LIVE on the show floor.".

This way
to see our
solutions
LIVE on the
show floor.



IMEX Map

Action Item

Provide lead-tracking tools outside the booth

Provide exhibitors with lead capture tools that work outside the booth, like QR codes tied to session attendance, digital badge scanning at expo theater sessions, and structured follow-up prompts after networking activations.

When exhibitors send a subject matter expert to present, encourage their sales and booth staff to attend as well. They can capture conversations, observe the questions being asked, and follow up with attendees directly. A learning moment becomes a lead opportunity.

Most exhibitors already have a process for capturing booth leads. Help them extend that process to everywhere else they're showing up.

Sponsored Sessions



ATTENDEE QUESTION

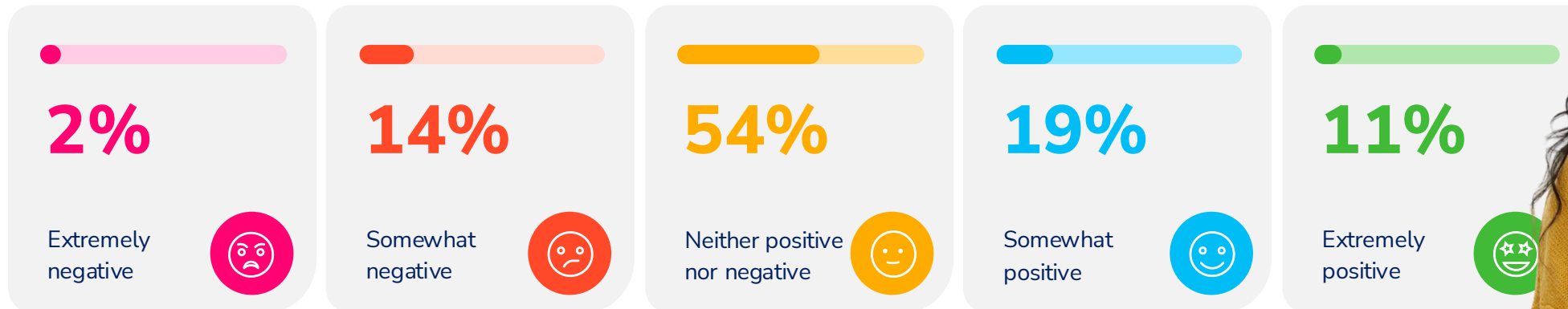
If the most important in-person professional event you attend features sessions that are corporate sponsored, how does the sponsorship impact your perception of the value those sessions will provide?

Most attendees don't perceive sponsored learning negatively

Organizers often refer to corporate-sponsored sessions as 'pay-to-play,' and believe that attendees treat them with skepticism. The data suggests that skepticism isn't shared by attendees. Only 16% of attendees view corporate sponsorship negatively, while 30% view it positively.

The majority of attendees are neutral — indicating that **sponsorship itself is rarely the deciding factor**. For organizers and exhibitors, that's an opening, but it comes with a condition ... (keep reading).

Attendee perception of sponsored sessions



ATTENDEE QUESTION

Select your level of agreement with the following statements.
Corporate sponsorship of sessions/learning elements ...
(% of agree/strongly agree)

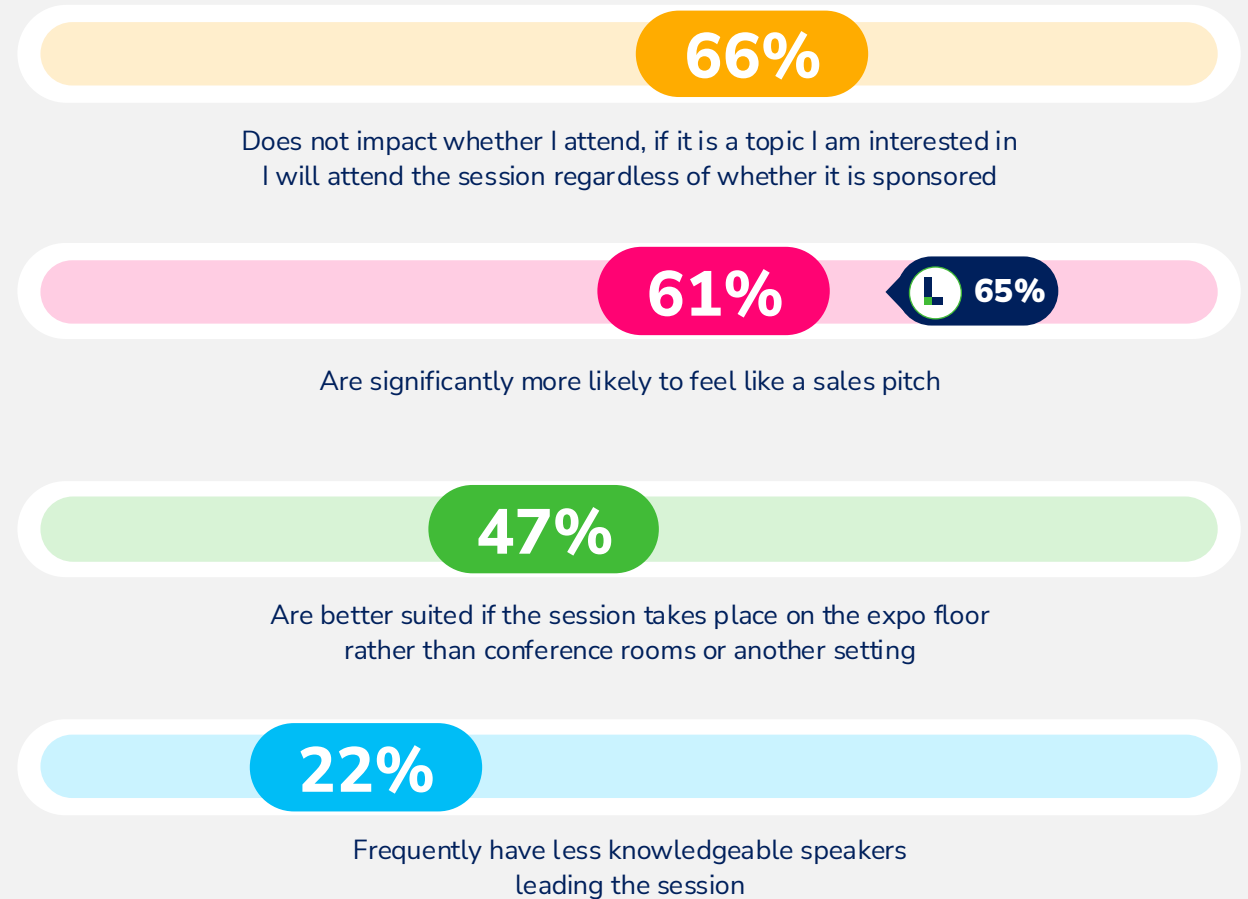
Attendees will show up for sponsored sessions if the topic is relevant

Most attendees (66%) say they will attend a sponsored session if the topic is of interest. Topic relevance is the deciding factor, not the sponsorship label.

That said, 61% believe sponsored sessions are more likely to feel like a sales pitch, and 22% say they frequently feature less knowledgeable speakers.

Attendees are willing to show up. **What they're asking for in return is transparency** about the sponsorship and a presenter who knows their stuff.

Value of sponsored sessions



ATTENDEE QUESTION

Consider sessions focused on industry trends or state of the industry sessions. How likely would you be to attend the session based on each of the following presenter types? (% very/extremely likely)

Attendees are just as likely to attend industry trends sessions delivered by exhibitors as industry influencers

Exhibitors routinely underestimate their own credibility. Attendees are just as likely to show up for an industry trends session led by an exhibitor's expert as one led by an independent industry influencer.

The assumption that a third-party speaker carries more weight simply doesn't hold. **Attendees are looking for expertise over everything.**

Commerce-focused attendees are even more open to exhibitor-led sessions at 55%.

The expertise is already in the building. **Organizers who help exhibitors put that expertise on stage are adding learning value without adding cost.**

Likelihood of attending industry trends session based on speaker type



51%

Industry influencer / expert (not affiliated with an exhibitor / provider)



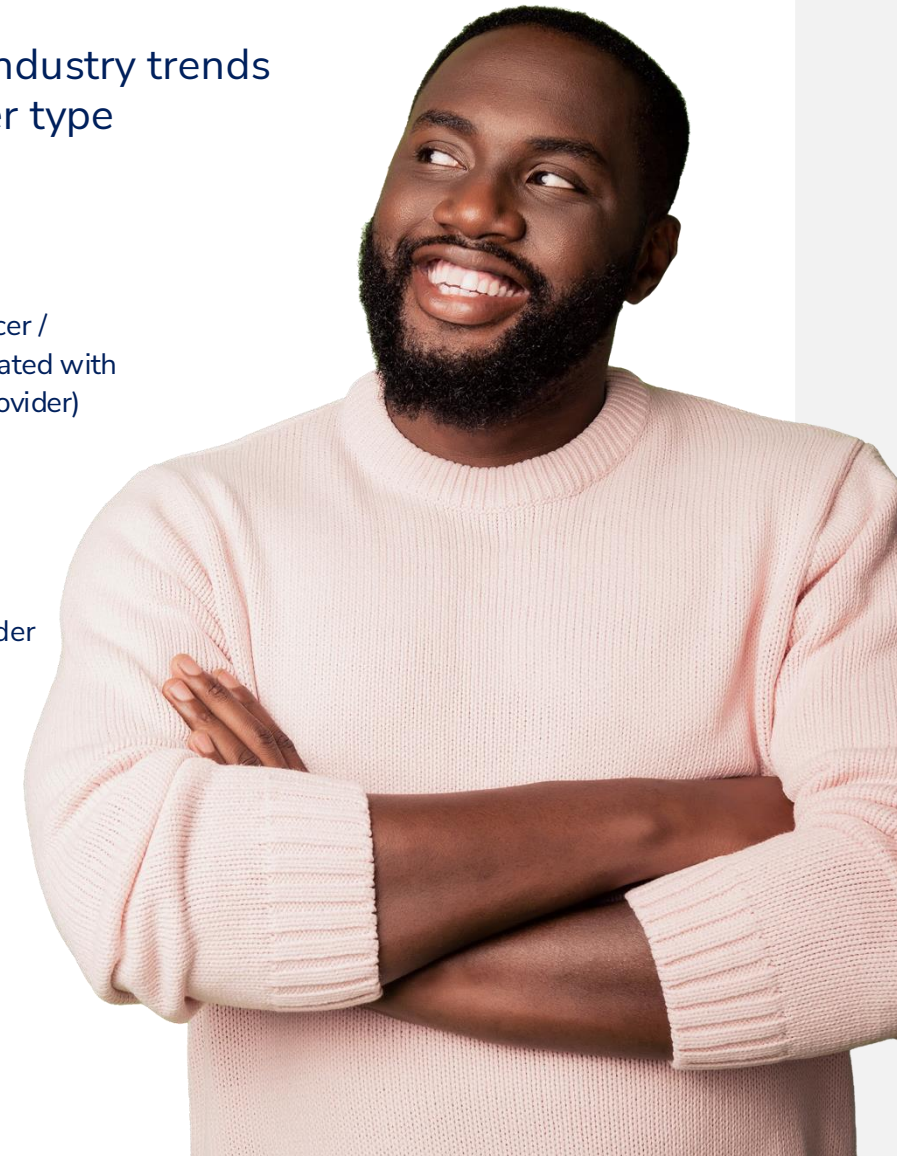
50%

Exhibitor / provider staff / expert



41%

Event organizer staff / expert





Action Item



Leverage sponsored sessions and set exhibitors up for success

Be transparent about sponsorship. Attendees are comfortable with a sponsored session; they just want to know upfront who's behind it, and what makes their expertise worth their time.

Label it clearly and let the content speak for itself.



Action Item



Elevate “Know Before You Go”

Consider revisiting the standard “Know Before You Go” briefing, that’s typically focused on logistics for exhibitors. In addition, use this resource to empower exhibitors to show up at your event in a more impactful way — whether it’s best practices for leading a product demo, asking attendees thoughtful questions, or leaving the conversation with a specific call-to-action. This resource can also encourage exhibitors to better incentivize, facilitate, and measure the impact of subject matter experts, and help them identify the themes and topics that will engage attendees the most.

So, What Now?



Action Items



Assess attendees' needs using the XLNC framework

Different attendees come to learn in different ways and from different sources. Understanding who's in the room — and what they're there to get — is the starting point for everything else.



Embrace the expo floor as a learning channel

Attendees are already learning from exhibitor conversations and floor discoveries. Bring the same intentionality you apply to your session program to the expo floor.



Position exhibitors to present thought leadership and deliver take-home value

Help exhibitors show up as educators, not just vendors. Share attendee interest data before the event so they can tailor their content accordingly and share their expertise.



Provide lead-tracking tools outside the booth

Exhibitors are missing qualified pipeline at every Learning touchpoint beyond the booth. Extend their lead capture process to expo theater sessions, sponsored content, and networking activations.



Leverage sponsored sessions and set exhibitors up for success

Attendees are open to sponsored content when it's relevant and transparent. Label it clearly, match the format to the environment, and help exhibitors put their most knowledgeable people in front of the room.



Elevate “Know Before You Go”

Take the exhibitor-facing “Know Before You Go” briefing to the next level by sharing best practices for delivering a product demo, asking attendees thoughtful questions, or leaving the conversation with a specific call-to-action.

Every Space is a Learning Space

Event professionals have spent decades perfecting the formal learning program, from speaker selection, to lesson design, to stage sets. That craft matters and it shows.

But as this report makes clear, attendees learn from the whole event. From the exhibitor conversations, the peer exchanges, and the discoveries that happen between sessions. This “unstructured learning” is just as valued as anything that happens on a stage or in a conference room session.

Designing excellent learning experiences means designing for every learner, every environment, and every moment where someone might walk away knowing something they didn't before.

The events that treat every space as a learning space will be the ones attendees can't afford to miss.



Future of the XLNC Framework

The idea behind XLNC doesn't end with the research.

XLNC started by asking a simple question, now shared with over 7 million attendees and over 500,000 exhibitors: Why do you come to events?

The simple truth they shared: They come to **learn, network, have fun**, accomplish their **core objectives**, and **do business**. That has become the basis for our XLNC point of view and framework.

So while our series on 'Unpacking XLNC' concludes, the **XLNC measurement framework** and our commitment to understanding your audience does not. We'll keep researching how attendees and exhibitors are changing, and we'll keep sharing what we learn — because **the questions that make events better are never finished being asked**.

These truths live on in every attendee deciding what's worth their time, and every exhibitor deciding how to show up. **eXperience, Learning, Networking, Commerce** — these are still the reasons people walk through the door, and they will keep shaping what great events look like.

[Explore more Freeman Trends](#)



Connect with Freeman

Whether you need data-fueled direction or on-the-ground expertise, Freeman Strategy equips you with the tools to lead successful events.

For details, reach out to:

Annie Malone

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Ken Holsinger

ken.holsinger@freeman.com

Community Needs Discovery

Uncover unmet learning needs among past and current attendees and exhibitors through targeted surveys, helping you design unstructured learning experiences that align with what your community actually wants.

Learning Everywhere Assessment & Roadmap

Assess how learning currently shows up across your event (whether it's in sessions, on the expo floor, or within sponsored content) and surface where learning happens by accident rather than by design. Develop practical action plans for expanding learning intentionally into every environment attendees value.

On-site Event Assessment

Pinpoint what matters most to existing and prospective attendees and exhibitors. Evaluate your attendees' unique motivators and uncover where your event meets (or misses) the mark using our proprietary XLNC assessment tools.

Exhibitor and Sponsor Learning Strategy

Identify where exhibitors and sponsors have the strongest opportunity to show up as credible sources of learning and prepare them with the audience insights, attendee needs, and content guidance they need to succeed well ahead of the event.

Appendix

Methodology and complete dataset

Attendee Demographics

Attendee Demographics

Job Title / Function

Corporate Management	32%
C-level	5%
Owner / Partner / President	13%
VP / SVP	2%
Director / Manager	12%
Healthcare	19%
Technical	8%
Sales/Business Development	6%
Production/Operations/Maintenance	5%
Consultant	5%
Marketing/Advertising	5%
Government	4%
Buyer/Purchasing	3%
R&D	3%
Other	10%

Industry

Medical/Healthcare	22%
Education	11%
Government	9%
Industrial/Heavy Machinery and Finished Business Outputs	7%
Business Services	6%
Food/Beverage	6%
Consumer Goods	5%
Building/Construction/Home and Repair	5%
Technology/Communications/IT	4%
Raw Materials/Agriculture/Utilities	4%
Transportation	3%
Financial, Legal, and Real Estate	3%
Retail	2%
Other	2%

Attendee Demographics (Continued)

Purchase Decision-Making Status

Key/sole decision-maker	33%
Significant influence	32%
Some influence	23%
No influence/end user	12%

Type of Event Attended

Conference	50%
Trade show	50%

Decision-Making Status on Event Attendance

Sole decision-maker	44%
Significant influence	31%
Some influence	19%
No influence	6%

Attendee Demographics (Continued)

Organization FTEs

1-100	53%
101-500	17%
501-2,000	9%
2,001-5,000	6%
More than 5,000	15%

Gender

Male	51%
Female	46%
Non-binary/non-conforming	1%
Choose not to specify	2%

Generation

Gen Z	6%
Millennials	34%
Gen X	38%
Boomers	22%

Location

United States	91%
International	9%

Exhibitor Demographics

Exhibitor Demographics

Job Title / Function

Corporate		
President, Partner, Owner	11%	
VP, EVP, SVP, GM	5%	
Director	8%	
Sales & Marketing		
VP	4%	
Director/Manager	24%	
Other role sales/marketing	4%	
Exhibits/Events		
Director	3%	
Manager	11%	
Other role exhibits/events	12%	
Sponsorships		
Director	2%	
Manager	5%	
Other role sponsorships	3%	
Other	8%	

Industry

Medical/Healthcare	16%
Industrial/Heavy Machinery and Finished Business Outputs	13%
Technology/Communications/IT	12%
Education	9%
Consumer Goods	6%
Business Services	6%
Building/Construction/Home and Repair	5%
Raw Materials/Agriculture/Utilities	4%
Transportation	4%
Food/Beverage	3%
Government	2%
Financial, Legal, and Real Estate	2%
Other	18%

Exhibitor Demographics (continued)

Organization FTEs

1-100	49%
101-500	23%
501-2,000	11%
2,001-5,000	6%
More than 5,000	11%

Gender

Male	47%
Female	49%
Choose not to specify	4%

Generation

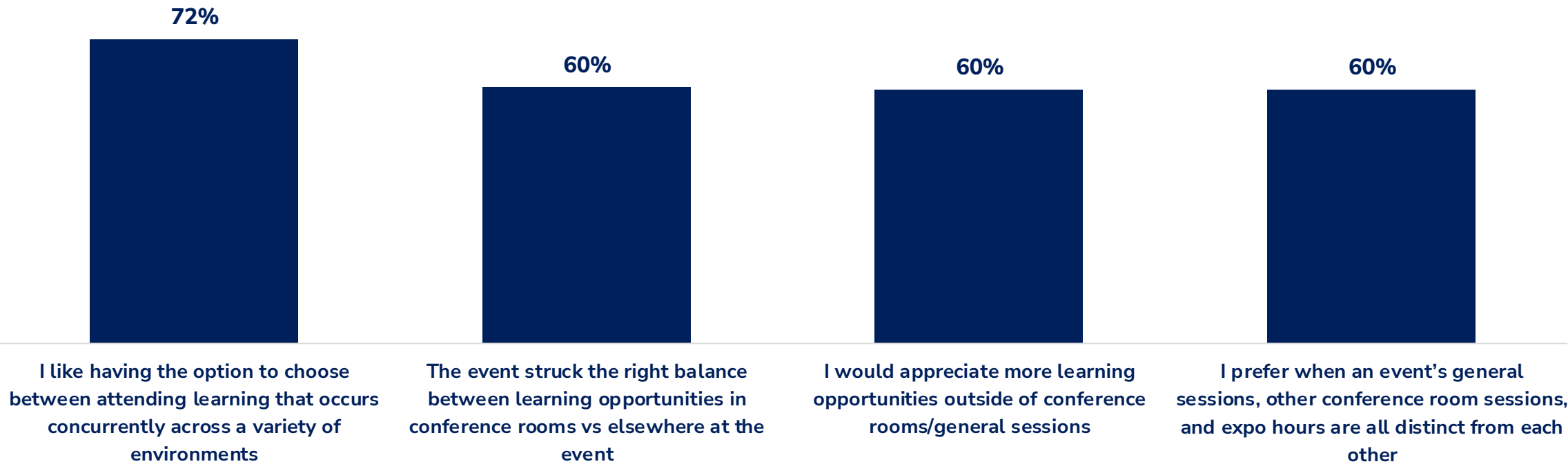
Gen Z	4%
Millennials	32%
Gen X	41%
Boomers	23%
Silent	<1%

Full Data Slides

ATTENDEE QUESTION

Please select your level of agreement with each of the following statements at the most important in-person professional event you attended. (% agree/strongly agree)

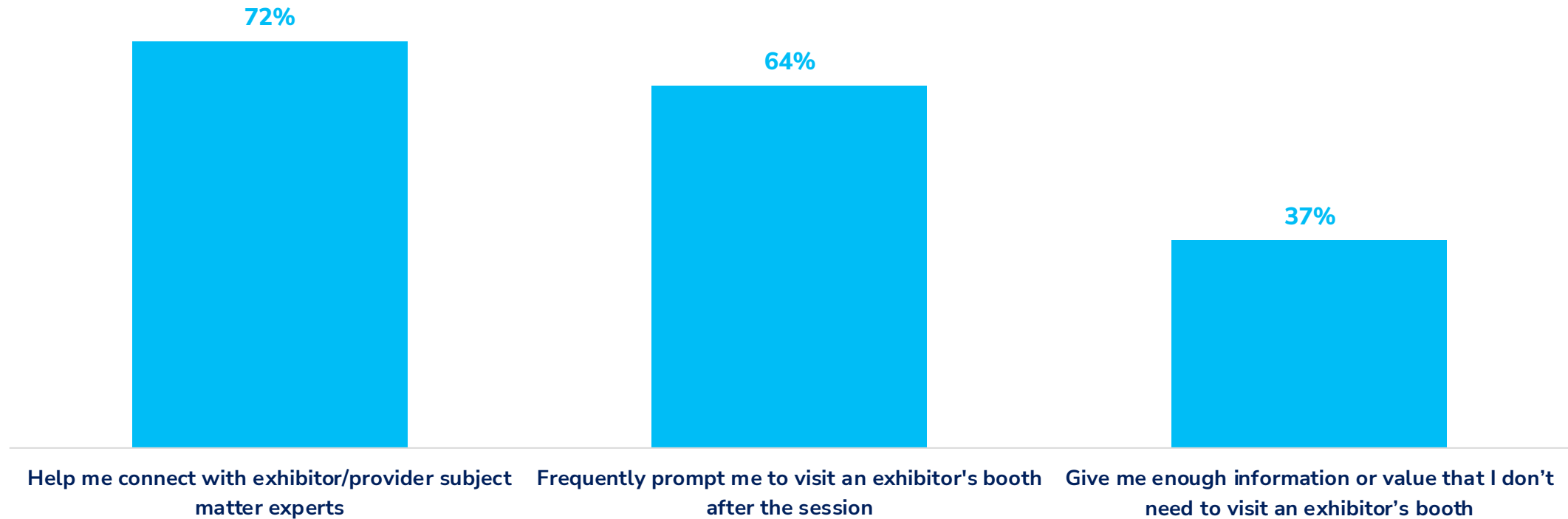
Balancing Learning Across Event Environments



ATTENDEE QUESTION

Consider expo hall theater sessions or other thought leadership that are presented by an exhibitor. Select your level of agreement with each of the following statements.
Provider/exhibitor-led sessions ... (% agree/strongly agree)

Value of Exhibitor/Provider Expo Theater Sessions



ATTENDEE QUESTION

Question 1: How important is it that exhibitors provide each of the following as it relates to how you learn at the most important event you attend? (% very/extremely important)

Question 2: How effective are exhibitors at delivering on those areas you considered most important in the prior question? (% very/extremely effective)

Role of Exhibitors in How Attendees Learn

