



# Attendee Sentiment Report

The Inside Scoop on Attendee  
Expectations for 2023





Hey, there! And welcome to Goldcast's inaugural Attendee Sentiment Report for 2023.

As an attendee perspective survey, we're excited to deep dive into the minds of event-goers across North America to find out what attendees really want from events.

**No guessing. No trial and error. Just the facts.**

Because navigating the brave new world of events — from in-person, to virtual, and now hybrid — well, it's a challenge no event marketer should have to face alone.

## In this report, we'll use data from over 500 attendees to shine a light on:

- ③ Where we are in the event world right now
- ③ The types of experiences attendees want more of
- ③ What types of events attendees aren't so keen on
- ③ Tangible ways to exceed expectations in 2023

We know there's no 'one size fits all' when it comes to the perfect event strategy. Our hope is that this report will give you the insights you need to create an event program that works for your unique audience.

And now, let's get down to the data!



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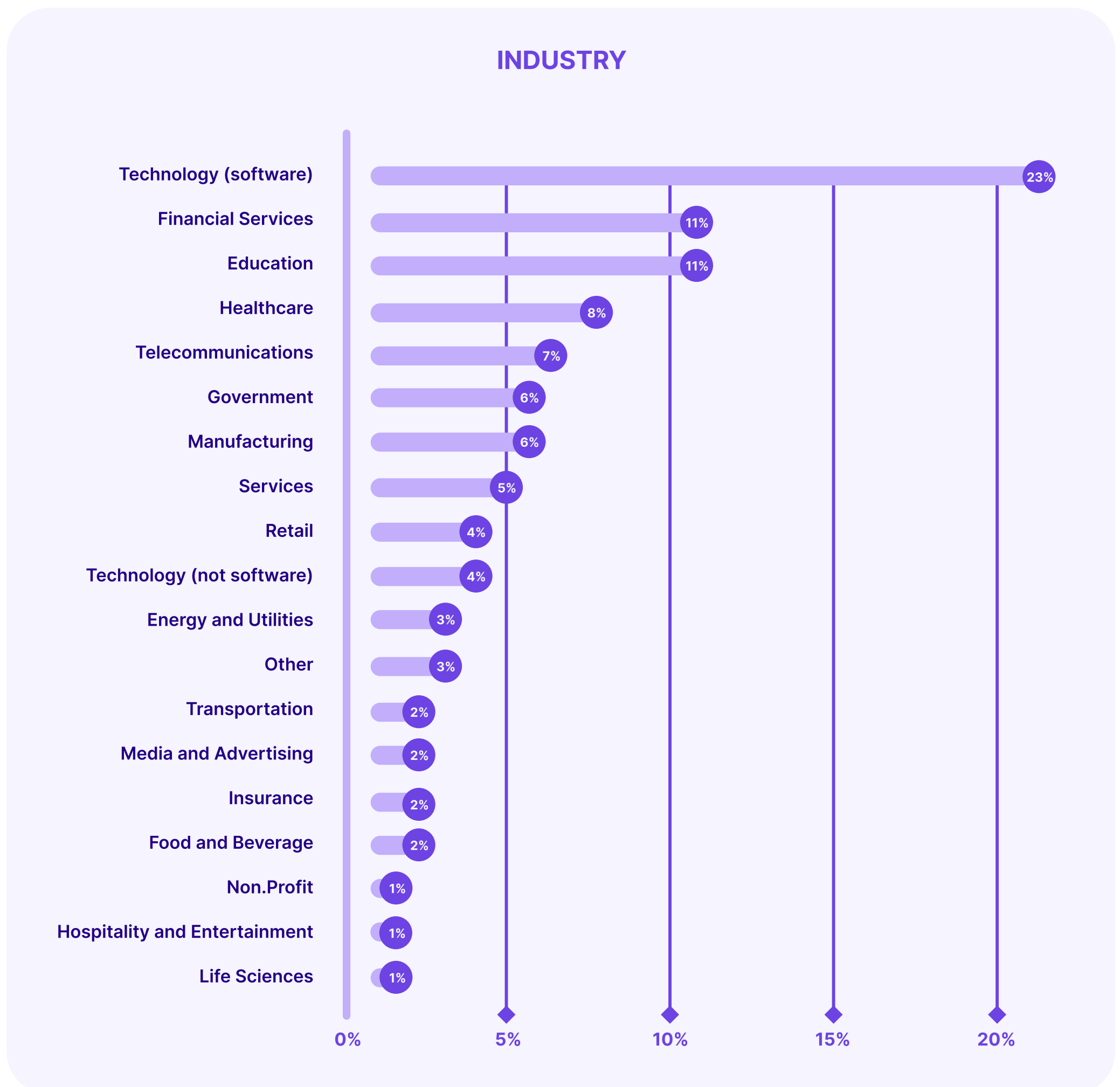
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# About the report

Our team surveyed 516 participants who had attended a work-related event in the last two years, and who had also attended both in-person and virtual-enabled events.

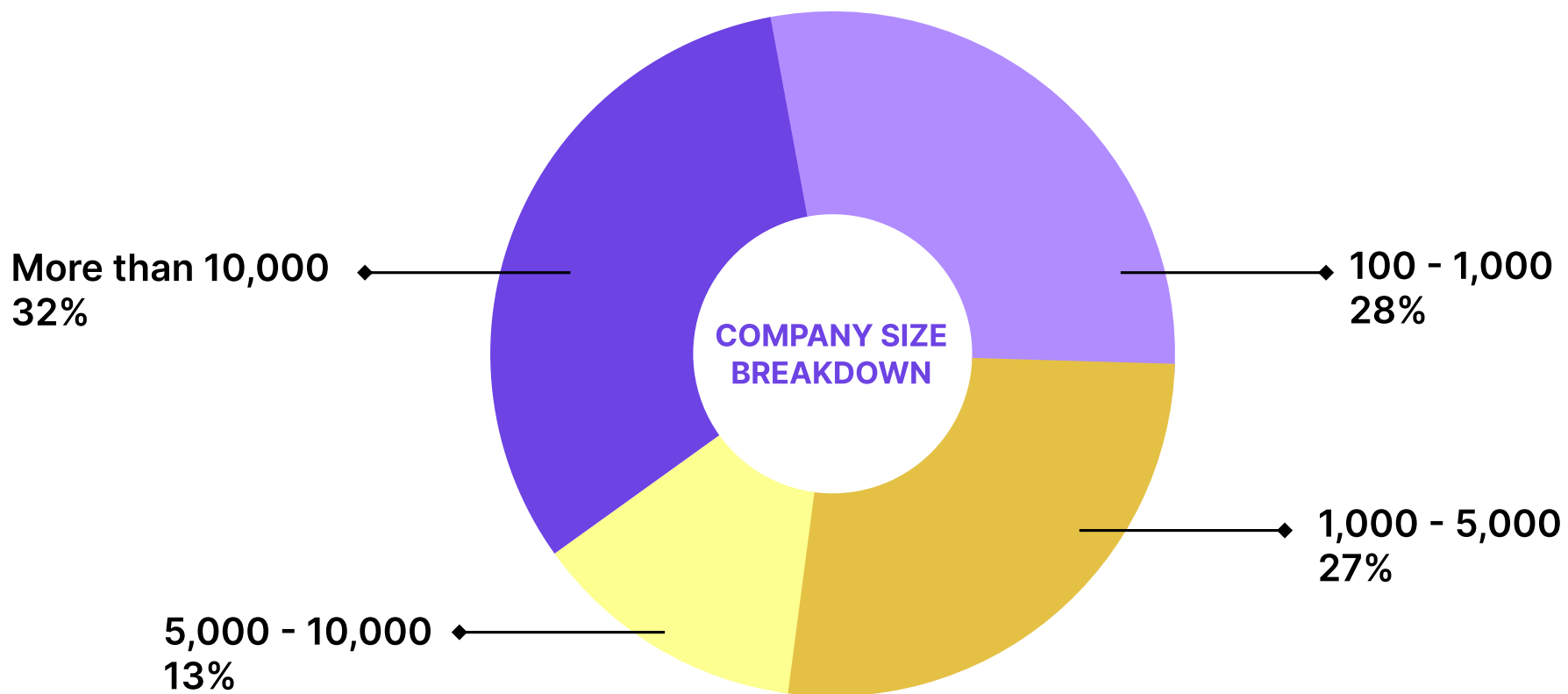
We had respondents from all levels of seniority, including executive, manager, and individual contributors. All respondents were based in North America, with the majority across Technology, Financial, Education, and Healthcare sectors.



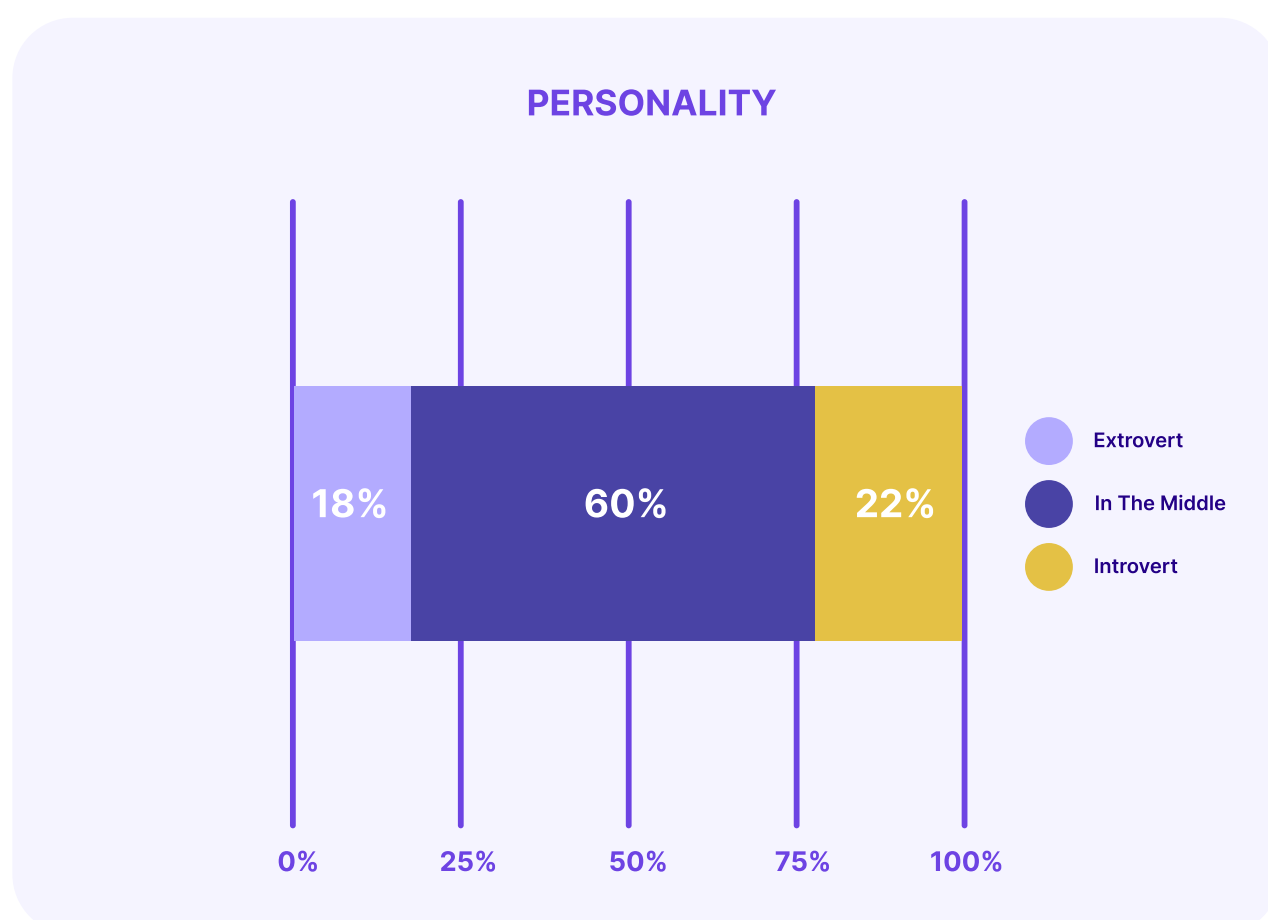


Respondents represented companies of all sizes: 32% from companies with 10,000+ employees, 13% from 5,000-10,000 employees, 27% from 1,000-5,000 employees, and 28% from 100-1,000 employees.

To ensure preferences were gathered from across personality types, respondents were also asked to identify themselves as either extrovert (18%), introvert (22%), or in the middle (60%).



The survey was administered electronically, and participants were offered a token compensation for their participation by our independent research partner, [Dimensional Research®](#).

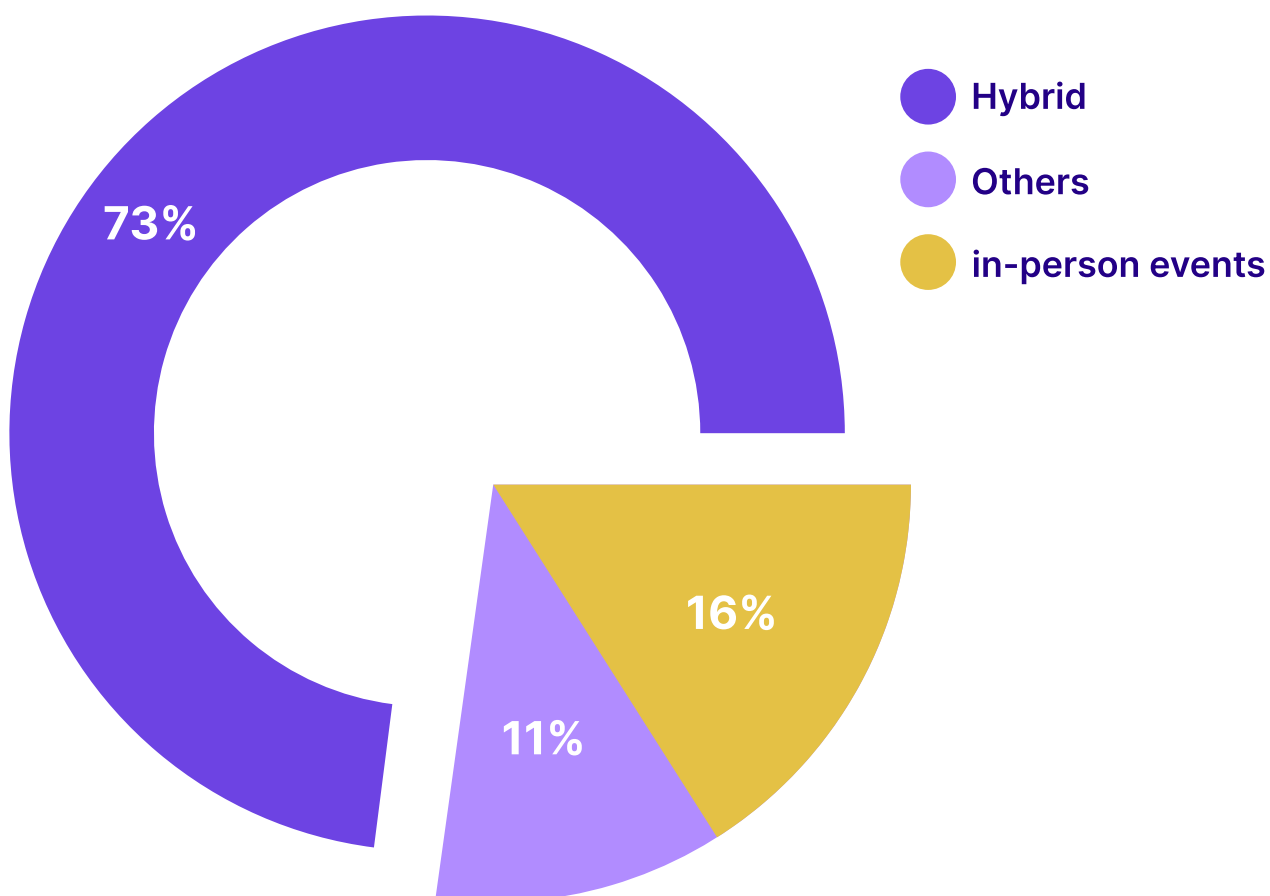




## Change is coming

Let's start with a spoiler — the overall takeaway from respondents points to the fact that hybrid events are the future.

In fact, 73% of those surveyed predict that they'll become the most common event format in the coming years



As you might expect, there are a few central reasons for this shift:

- With a changing economic climate and increasing environmental pressures, **66% of businesses are restricting travel budgets.**
- Rather than authorizing in-person offsites for all, **80% of leaders are actively encouraging the use of virtual and hybrid events** as an alternative.
- This seems to have reduced the overall number of large-scale events, with **75% of respondents stating that they are becoming less common.**

Combine this with the fact that a staggering **81% of attendees are more willing to sign up for hybrid and virtual events** compared to in-person, and it becomes clear that the new era of events is here.



# The dawn of digital

When global travel came to an abrupt halt in 2020, event strategies as we knew them became obsolete. Virtual events quickly took over as an essential lifeline for businesses around the world.

From keeping employees connected, to reaching prospects and maintaining client relationships — digital events became the marketing play of the day.

And while they may have required some adjusting to, it's clear that we humans did precisely what we do best: we adapted, we evolved, and ultimately, so did our events.

According to our survey respondents, discovering that digital events could actually rival our previous in-person experiences has been the key catalyst for the latest evolution in attendee preferences.

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Flexibility, efficiency, and lower costs are the top reasons attendees like virtual events.

## 1 Digital events are convenient

74% of those surveyed enjoyed the convenience of digital events

Being able to log in from anywhere, fit viewing time around other responsibilities, and watch recorded sessions on demand are just a few of the benefits that allow attendees the flexibility they've become accustomed to.

When it comes to convenience, **30% of respondents do not enjoy** lugging around physical materials at in-person events. In fact, **42% would prefer hassle-free access to digital event materials**

## 2 Digital events are affordable

51% of respondents liked the fact virtual events were a cheaper alternative

In-person events can be costly affairs. Add up your ticket price, hotel stay, food and drink charges, travel expenses, overtime hours, and even the reduced operational capacity while out of office, and you're asking for some serious budget (and buy-in).

But where event attendance once meant shelling out the big bucks, the rise of virtual has meant that event expenses have been drastically reduced, or even eliminated entirely.

You might assume there would be pushback from event-goers eager to travel and socialize, but the data shows that attendees are aligned with the cutbacks. With **43% stating that not having to travel** was a big plus, it's clear that the bar for getting people out of their homes and into your event space is now much higher.

## 3 Digital events are efficient

48% of survey participants name efficiency as a reason they like virtual events

By eradicating travel costs and reducing time out of office, virtual events have reset the bar for companies looking to improve their bottom lines.

Instead of taking multiple days away from their core business function, virtual attendees can network from the comfort of their office chairs.

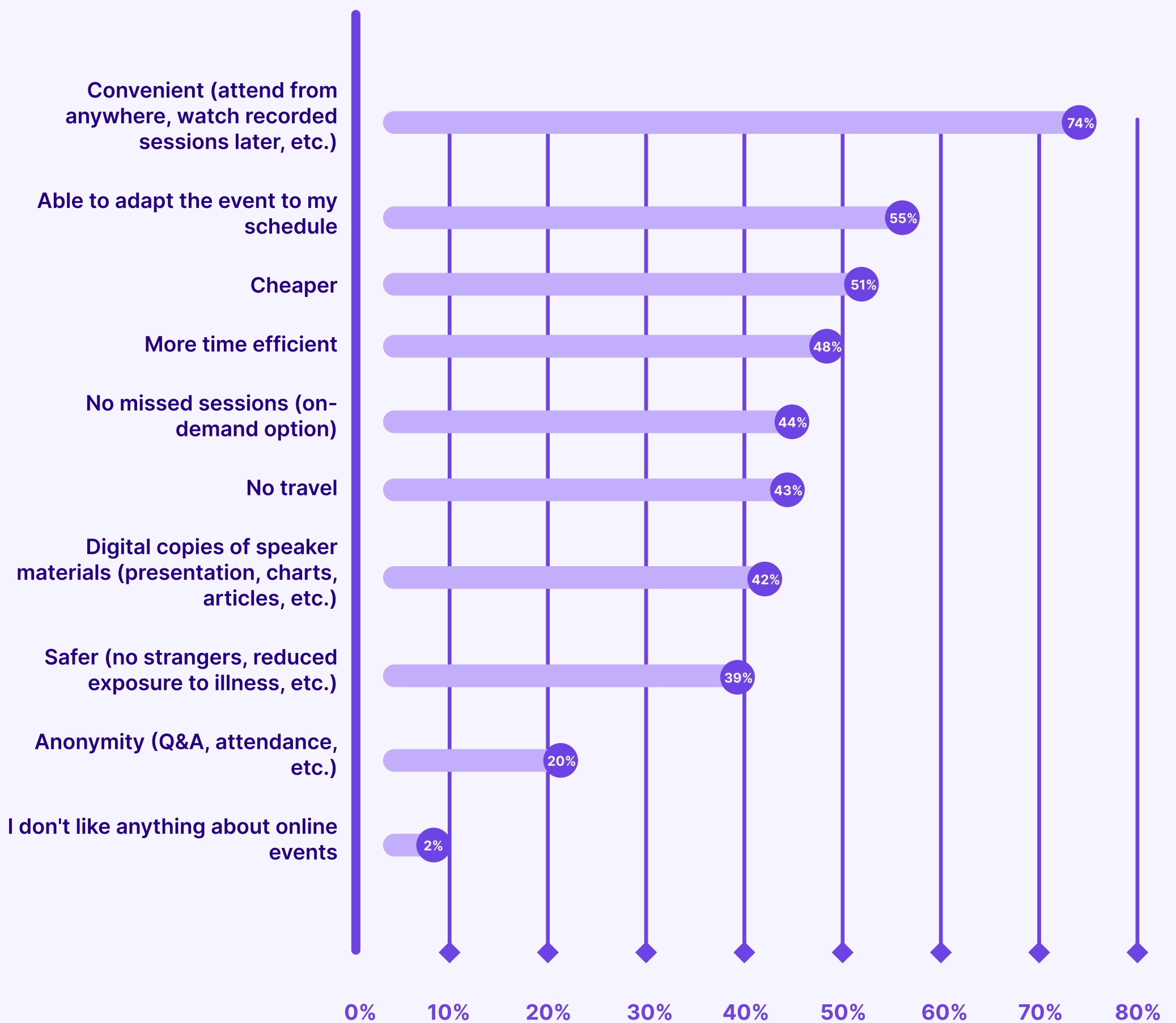
Better still, virtual events combat the number one reason **70% of attendees say they don't enjoy in-person events: the scheduling conflicts.**

The survey found that for **44% of attendees, never having to miss a session is a major benefit.** With on-demand viewing options, attendees can decide which live sessions to attend, safe in the knowledge that anything they miss will be available to them after the event.



# Flexibility, Efficiency, And Lower Costs Top Reasons Attendees Like Digital Events

## WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT ATTENDING DIGITAL EVENTS?



# There's still room for in-person experiences, but attendee preferences have shifted

Virtual events know how to make an entrance, but according to our findings, it's clear that they have some staying power too.

But does the rise in digital herald the end of in-person events?

According to our survey respondents, not so much. There's still plenty of love for the in-person experience, and a whole lot to learn from it too.

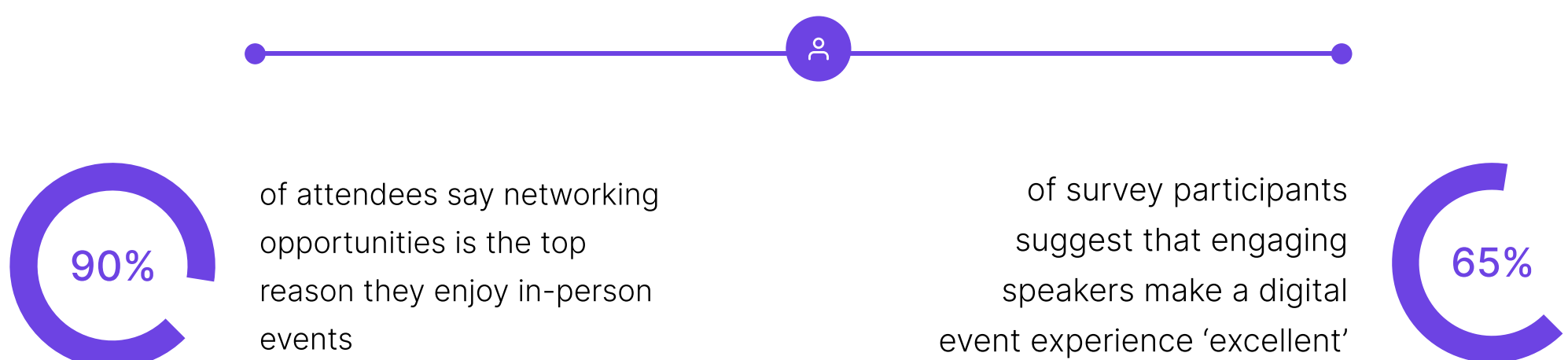
## 1 Networking opportunities

### 90% of attendees say networking is the top reason they enjoy in-person events

In almost all cases, networking is the main motivation for choosing to attend an in-person event.

Whether it's facilitating peer-to-peer introductions or getting rare one-to-one time with key accounts, networking is a crucial part of the overall event experience for the majority of attendees surveyed.

The data on virtual experiences supports this, with lack of face-to-face networking cited as the number one thing **65% of attendees don't like** about virtual events.



These statistics are reflective of the common narrative that virtual events simply cannot replace the networking power of their in-person counterparts.

At Goldcast, we see this as a narrative which, while sadly supported by a sea of sub-standard virtual experiences, does not have to be true.

Digital event networking no longer needs to consist solely of an awkward group chat and some one-way speaker dialogue. With technological advancements in the digital event space, there is now much more scope to network freely and in a way that replicates the in-person experience, including:

- 1-to-1 messaging and video calling
- Public, session, and booth chat
- Text and video Q&A
- Polls and gamification
- Breakout rooms

So what does this data actually tell us? As an industry, we have work to do when it comes to correcting the virtual event experiences of the past and delivering a networking-first digital event attendees will appreciate.

## 2 Visiting exhibitor booths

**73% of respondents identify visiting exhibitor booths as something they like about in-person events**

When you boil this one down, you come right back to networking. But this time, respondents are differentiating exhibitors and sponsors from speakers and peers.

When attending in-person events, visiting exhibitor booths is an experience of its own. It's the exchanging of business cards, the product demo, the schmoozy conversation over a coffee or glass of bubbly, and of course, the happy retrieval of a branded pen or notebook.



And again, you only need to look at the data to identify yet another perceived misconception: that there is simply no way to replicate the exhibitor experience in a virtual setup.



While firm handshakes are admittedly off the table, there's no reason virtual events can't clone the rest of the exhibitor booth experience attendees are craving.

As for the 67% of respondents who cite swag as an in-person favorite, there's no need to sacrifice there either — virtual swag bags are a great option for your digital event offerings.

### 3 Socializing

#### 67% of survey participants like the social aspect of in-person events

In addition to face-to-face networking, our survey revealed that attendees enjoy the holistic event experience that in-person events make possible — think: conference by day, soirée by night.

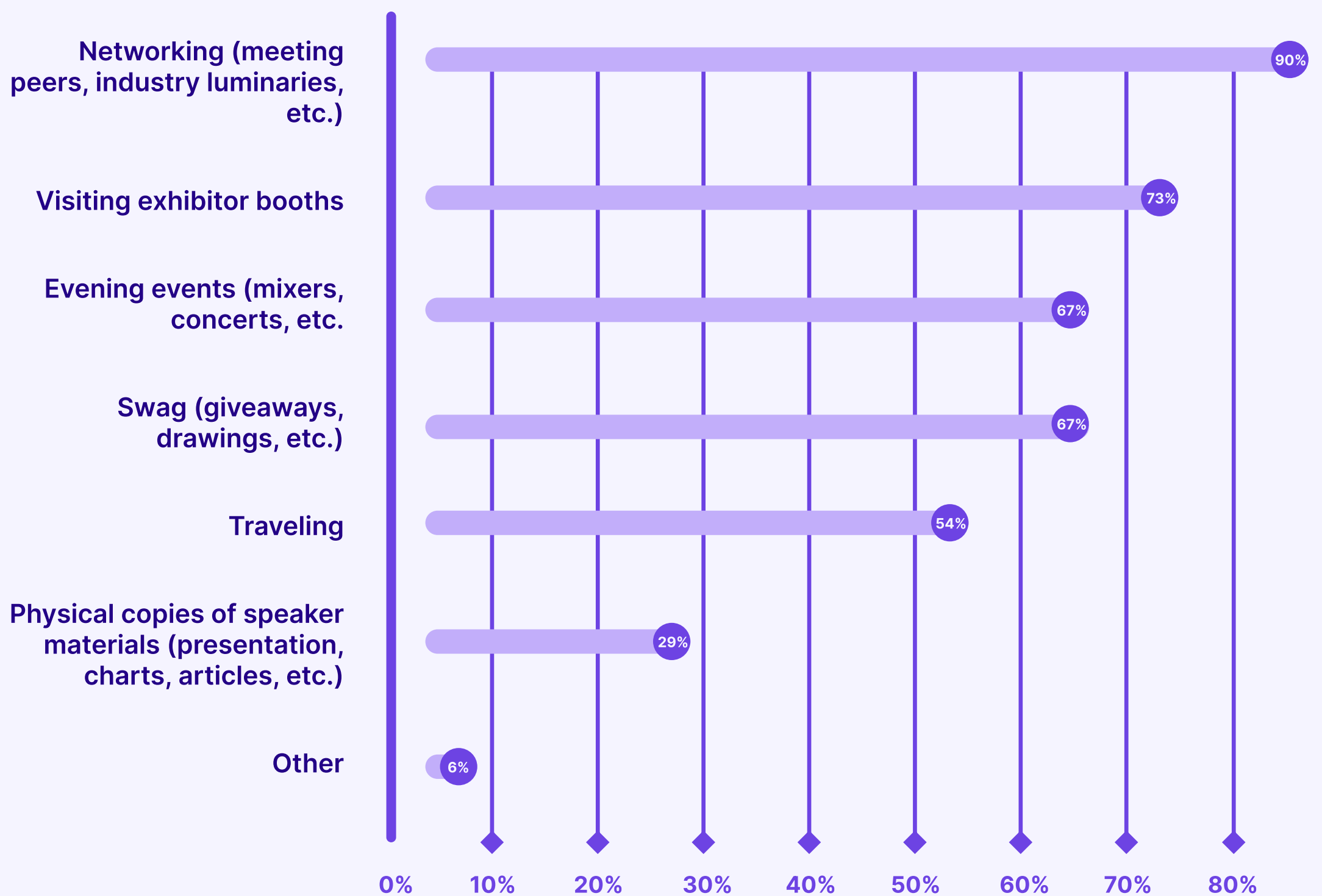
But as previous data points have illustrated, there's a common misconception that social interactions can't be replicated virtually. In this case, 61% of respondents state a dislike for the perceived lack of socializing offered at virtual events.

# Networking leads reasons people like in-person events

Here again, while ordering drinks and demolishing canapés may be off the agenda, enjoying an experiential after party can certainly be a part of any digital event offering.

Whether it's hiring a DJ to rock living rooms, a live band to serenade guests from afar, or a superstar chef to spice up the night — as long as attendees receive the goods to make it happen from home, a virtual evening full of excitement is still in the cards.

## WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT ATTENDING IN-PERSON EVENTS?



# Digital is the future, but there's plenty of room for improvement.

Virtual events know how to make an entrance, but according to our findings, it's clear that they have some staying power too.

But does the rise in digital herald the end of in-person events?

According to our survey respondents, not so much. There's still plenty of love for the in-person experience, and a whole lot to learn from it too.

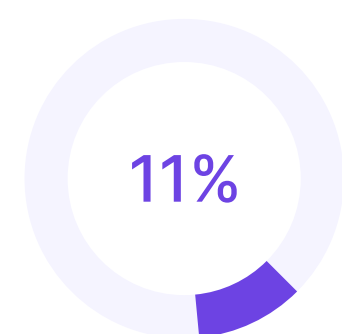
Let's recap what our report has revealed so far:

- Attendees are loving the flexibility, cost-saving, and efficiency of digital events.
- But experiences such as networking and socializing are where in-person holds its own.
- And while virtual and hybrid events can replicate those in-person experiences, many attendees are unaware of — and therefore not optimizing for — the many advances in virtual audience engagement.



**Only 10% of virtual event attendees rated their experience as 'excellent'**

**only 11% of hybrid attendees said the same**



If attendees aren't receiving the hybrid and virtual experiences they want, yet remain convinced that these formats are the future — what's the missing link for bridging that gap?



# 1 Quality technology

## 72% of those surveyed state that it's the technology that makes a virtual event excellent

If attendees are only ever experiencing low quality virtual events, they're going to get the wrong impression about what's actually possible. And for our participants, the right technology plays a big role in that.

Technology covers everything from video, engagement features, event access, and beyond. And these are just a few of the key capabilities respondents say are critical for digital event success.

### Easy access

When it comes to event show and stay rates, you have to remember two things: humans are forgetful and they give up easily. So, it's no surprise that three of the top four critical capabilities relate to easy 'don't-make-me-think' event access:

As you might expect, there are a few central reasons for this shift:

- **51% prioritize automated calendar invites** — sent straight to your inbox upon registration, with a login link in the body.
- **49% want email reminders** — in the run up to the event, and on the day of, again with a login link present.
- **45% recommend magic link technology** — seamless event entry without the need for profiles, usernames, or passwords.
- **28% suggest automatic attendance technology** — to guide attendees to the next session without any manual action required.
- **84% indicate that on-demand content increases viewing time** — and with 96% of participants expecting session and event content to be available on-demand, this is one area not to miss.

## Networking opportunities

Previous trends proved just how important networking is to attendees. But to facilitate those personal interactions, the following tech tools are vital according to respondents:

- **44% would like a Q&A panel** — which requires a virtual event platform that can facilitate a variety of event formats.
- **40% would opt for video Q&A technology** — bringing attendees on-stage to ask their question and participate in the conversation.
- **38% believe breakout rooms are the way forward** — to avoid multiple links and exiting the main event, pre-set and randomized breakout room technology is a must.
- **36% are in favor of live chat functionality** — bringing together all attendees and providing direct input into the session.
- **31% go a step further, enjoying peer-to-peer communication channels** — for direct conversations between attendees.

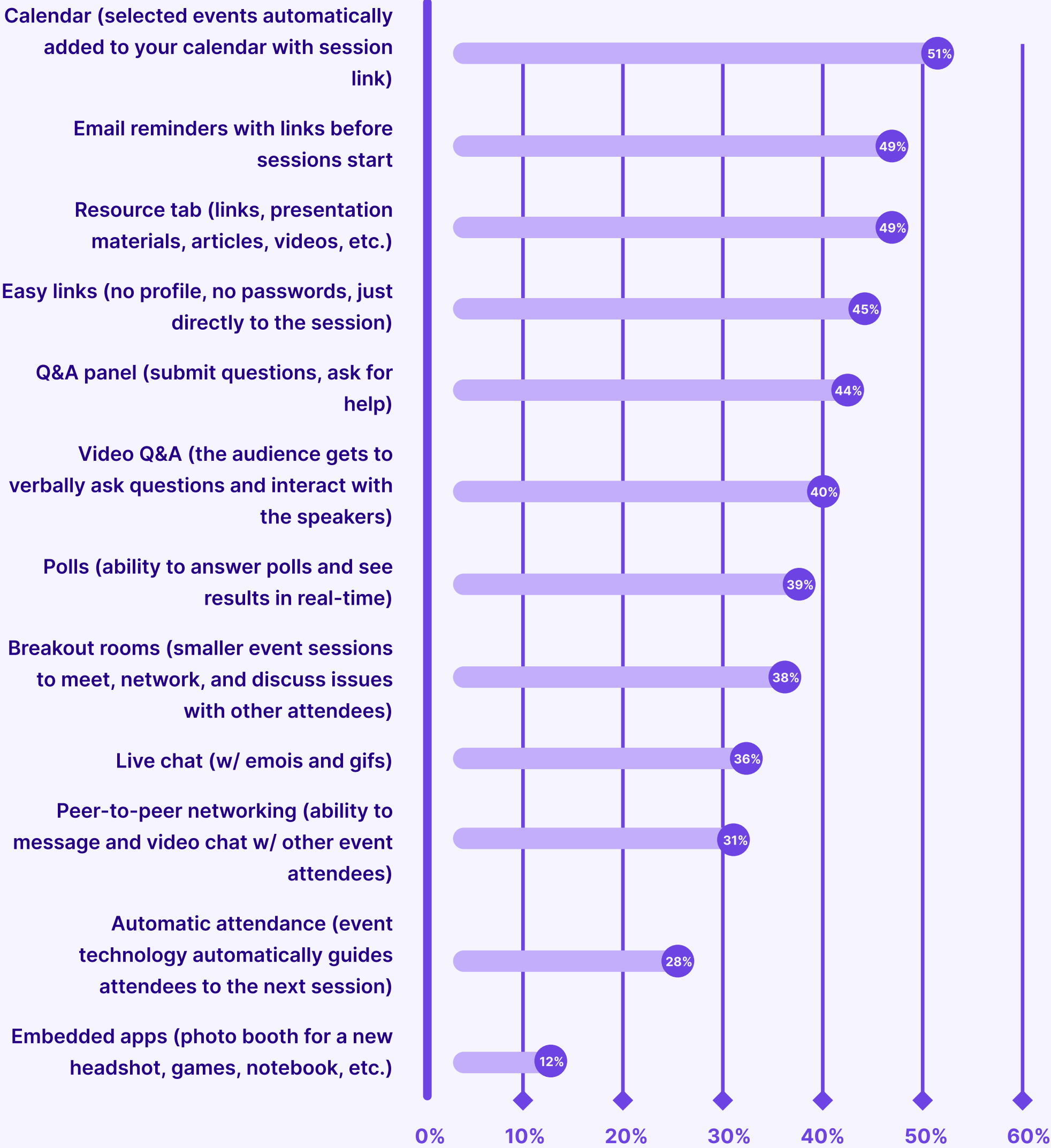
## Engagement features

With vast room for improvement, keeping attendees entertained at all times must be a priority at your digital and hybrid events. Here are the the remaining three features highlighted by those surveyed:

- **Resource tabs are a top four favorite, with 49% deeming them important** — event hubs can include links, presentation materials, articles, videos, and more.
- **Polls are also up there for 39% of respondents** — a crowd-pleaser, polls allow attendees to answer in real-time and shape the direction speakers take in their sessions.
- **Embedded engagement apps are an added bonus for 12%** — this really can be anything, from virtual photobooths for social sharing to event gamification technology.

# 3 Of The Top 4 Critical Capabilities For Digital Events Focus On Ease-Of-Use

## IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT CAPABILITIES ARE KEY FOR ATTENDING AN VIRTUAL EVENT?







## 2 Quality sessions with quality speakers

**65% of survey participants suggest that engaging speakers make a virtual event experience excellent**

To achieve an 'excellent' virtual event rating, attendee preferences lean towards shorter overall events and shorter sessions too, with 90% opting for sessions of 60 minutes and under.

But within that short timespan, 65% of respondents suggest that engaging speakers is the second most important consideration for an excellent rating.



# 3 Of The Top 4 Critical Capabilities For Digital Events Focus On Ease-Of-Use

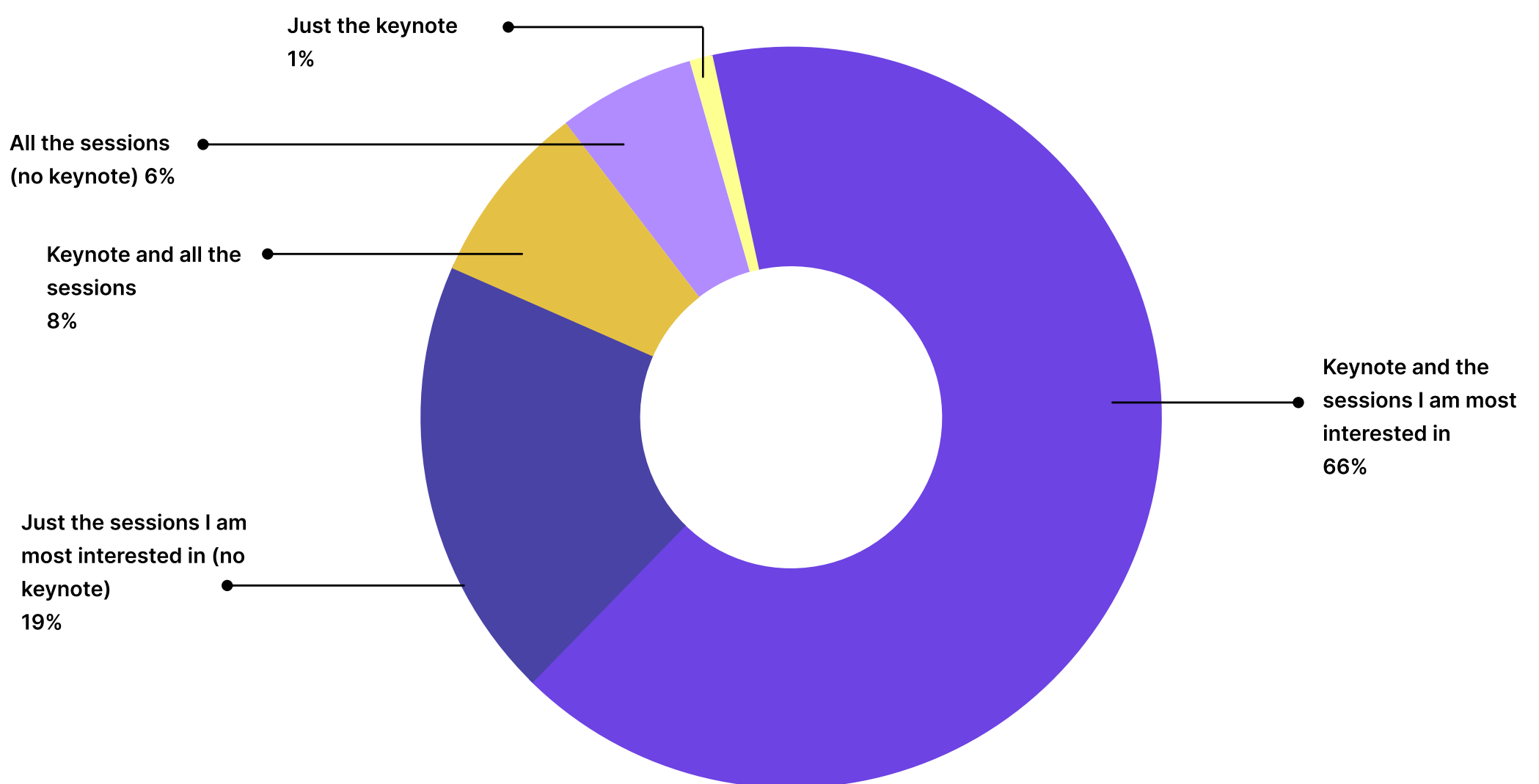
## IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT MAKES AN EXCELLENT VIRTUAL EVENT?



For multi-track events, this means quality checking speakers across all sessions. Because while the common thinking is that your keynote will be the most heavily attended, the truth is that 66% of attendees will simply choose the sessions they're most interested in.

Given that this interest is based on personal preference, each one needs to bring the content.

## Most Participants Want To Attend The Keynote And Select Sessions



# Digital event offerings are here, but they're far from perfect

The key findings of this report suggest that while attendees agree hybrid and virtual events are the future, these formats have a long way to go before they reach the level of excellence attendees are used to.

The good news is, the desire for digital events to succeed is clearly there — with both businesses and attendees seeing the many benefits virtual and hybrid events have to offer.

As the digital event space matures, early adopters who maintain a firm focus on convenience and high-quality digital experiences will secure the competitive advantage moving forward, while increasing attendance for their events.

By simply harnessing the power of emerging virtual event technologies, event marketers across the world can finally host digital offerings that truly live up to the in-person experiences we miss, but don't want to go back to.



## About Goldcast

If you are a B2B marketer, you know how important events are. With the rise of remote work, the modern-day workforce is demanding options to engage digitally. So savvy B2B marketers aren't just thinking about in-person events – they're also going big on digital events to reach prospects and customers where they are.

But most marketers are forced to use clunky, boring event platforms with a Windows 98-era interface that puts audiences to sleep. And for B2B marketers focused on driving revenue, these tools don't give any actionable engagement insights — insights that help sales and marketing teams build relationships and open new doors with prospects and customers.

That's why we built Goldcast, the only digital events platform purpose-built for B2B marketers (like you) to host memorable and engaging brand experiences that drive revenue.

But don't take our word for it — see why top B2B brands are making the switch, or reach out and let us show you the ropes.

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## The State of B2B Events

What do B2B event attendees really want out of experiences in 2023?

Watch our full review of the report, plus a deep-dive from Sangram Vajre, Co-Founder and CEO of GTM Partners, on how modern B2B brands are leveraging events as a top pipeline-generating channel.

[Start Watching](#)

