



Great Expectations:
The Evolving Landscape of
Technology in Meetings



Methodology

American Express Meetings & Events surveyed 336 meeting planners and 161 meeting and event attendees in the first half of 2014. The survey was fielded globally, however respondents were primarily based in North America. Planners were required to have planned at least 4 meetings with more than 20 attendees in the past 12 months, including at least 1 virtual or hybrid meeting. Attendees were required to have attended at least 3 meetings or events with 20 or more attendees in the past 12 months, including at least 1 virtual or hybrid meeting.

The Evolving Landscape of Technology in Meetings

We're living in what can be described as a hyper-connected world. The evolution of the internet and connectivity, along with mobile and tablet devices has altered the way consumers communicate, transact, and deal with their everyday life. From social networks, data sharing, messaging, and shopping, all these tools are now part of our lives.

Digital solutions and technology touch many, if not all, aspects of how we source, promote, and create engaging and valuable meetings and events. Event attendees and meeting planners expect a consumer-type experience similar to, if not integrated with, their personal experience.

In an effort to better understand these opportunities, and how meeting owners and organizations overall can better affect their desired outcomes through their meetings and events investments, American Express Meetings & Events conducted research to explore the similarities and differences in expectations of meeting and event attendees and planners related to three areas:

1. virtual and hybrid meetings and events,
2. social media and
3. meeting and event apps.

Following is an analysis of the impact of these technologies and where meeting and event attendees and planners align, and where they differ as well as suggestions to consider for closing the gap.



Impact of Technology

The two technological advances in the past decade that have changed the landscape of the meetings industry are smartphones and affordable wireless data/streaming video. These advances have brought meetings and events to our fingertips. At big events we can not only look up schedules and speaker bios as we walk to our next session, we can find and interact with other attendees, schedule meetings with them, read session reviews and follow posts on Facebook and Twitter to find the best supplier offers and after-parties.

Our survey shows that 90% of attendees who have a Smartphone indicate that they use it for business at meetings or events. Seventy-seven percent 77% use it always or often. Forty-seven percent also have tablets, which, with their larger screens, are also very popular. Of the 47% of attendees who have a tablet for business purposes, 88% of those attendees are using their tablet at meetings and events, with 59% indicating they use it “always or often.” (Figure 1 and 2)

Today, almost all meeting attendees have a computer, and the tools required to attend virtual meetings and events are available on most business computers or are easily downloaded. This means that attending a virtual meeting today is often simply a matter of signing up and scheduling the time in the calendar.

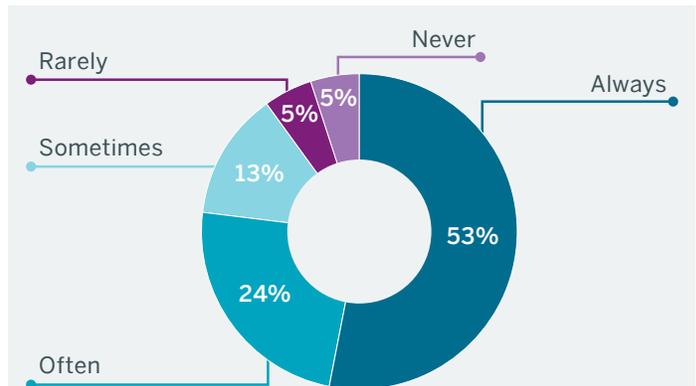


Figure 1:
When attending meetings or events, how often do you use your smartphone for business purposes?

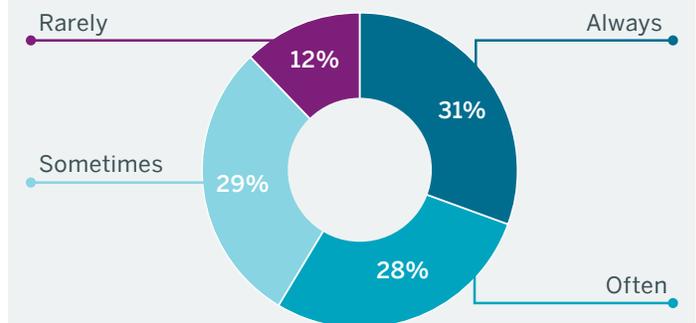


Figure 2:
When attending meetings or events, how often do you use your tablet for business purposes?

Virtual and Hybrid Meetings and Events

Reasons to attend/offer

Attendees surveyed attend meeting and events virtually for a wide variety of reasons. Twenty-one percent chose “reduced need to travel” and “reduced time away from the office” most often. Sixteen percent indicated that getting a better return on investment was a key factor in their decision to attend virtually and another 16% indicated that schedule was a key factor. Fourteen percent chose budget constraints among their top 3 factors. Reduced time away from home and family was chosen least often as a key factor, with eight percent attendees choosing it among their top factors.

Planners’ top factors for offering virtual attendance at meetings and events are roughly in line with attendees’ factors for attending virtually. However, despite high demand for the opportunity to attend meetings and events virtually among those surveyed, our data indicates that the majority of planners are still not offering virtual attendance at the majority of the meetings they plan. (Figure 3)

Attendees reported that larger meetings are less likely to offer virtual attendance, and they were less likely to attend large meetings virtually. (Figure 4)

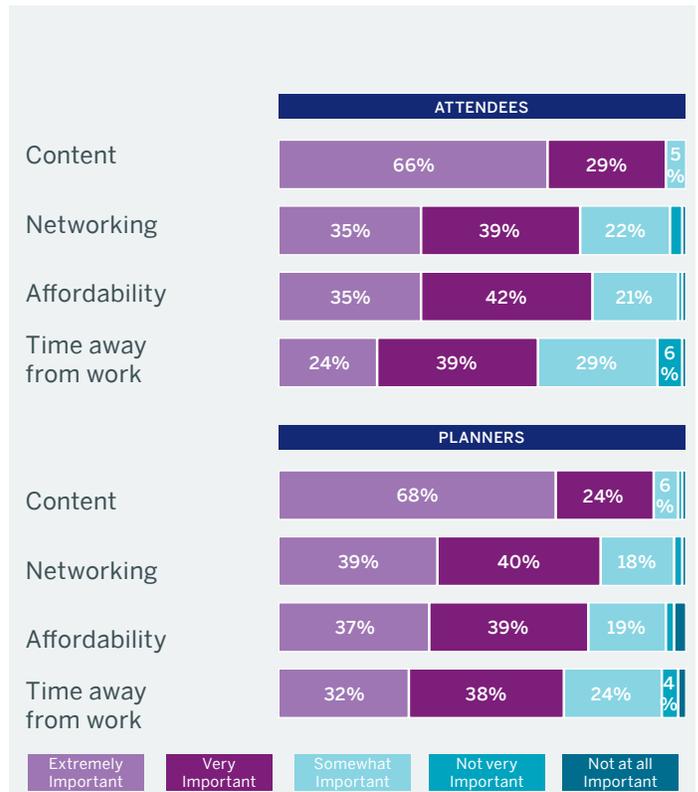


Figure 3: How important are the following factors when deciding which meetings and events to attend?

Offered Virtually 50% or more of the time	
Small (10-49 attendees)	50%
Medium (50 to 149)	42%
Large (150 to 499)	32%
Very Large (500 or more)	24%
Attended Virtually 50% or more of the time	
Small (10-49 attendees)	38%
Medium (50 to 149)	29%
Large (150 to 499)	21%
Very Large (500 or more)	18%

Figure 4



Reasons for not attending/offering

The number of meetings offered and attended virtually is growing overall, however the total is still surprisingly small as a percentage of all meetings. There are many reasons for this phenomenon that emerge from the research, including perceptions about attendee distraction and concerns about return on time/money.

Planners overestimate how distracted virtual attendees are likely to be. Sixty-eight percent (67%) of planners feel that: “Attendees are too easily distracted when they attend meetings and events virtually,” while only 45% of attendees agree with this statement. (Figure 5)

Only 36% of planners disagree that: “Attending virtually doesn’t provide enough return on time and/or money,” while 53% of attendees disagree. (Figure 6)

Surprisingly, attendees and planners agree that cost and technology issues no longer seem to be major virtual meeting hurdles. Only 18% of attendees and 16% of planners agree that: “Meeting and event organizers can’t afford to make meetings available virtually.” (Figure 7) And only 18% of attendees and 24% of planners feel that: “There are too many technology issues when attending meetings and events.” This is further evidence that virtual technology providers and the increased availability of bandwidth and streaming have improved the basic virtual meetings experience, removing technology issues from the list of primary concerns. (Figure 8, next page)

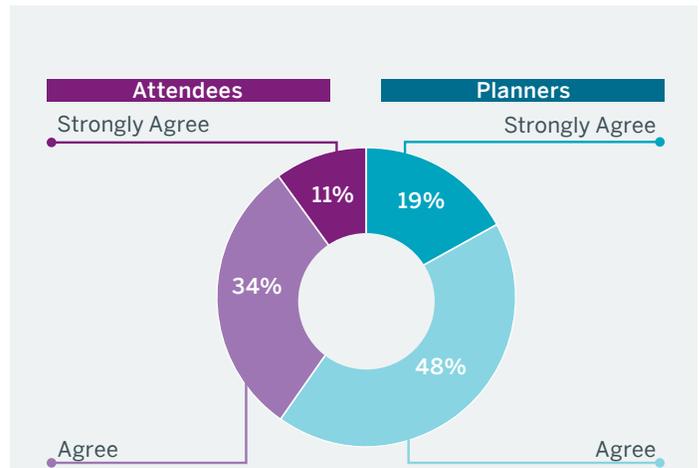


Figure 5: Too easily distracted when attending meetings/ events virtually

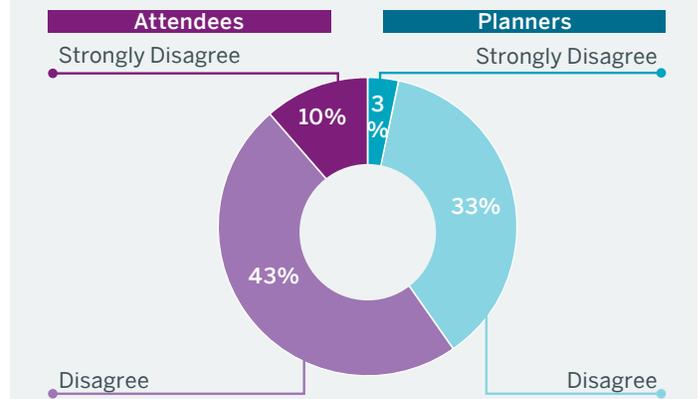


Figure 6: Attending virtually doesn't provide enough return on my time and/or money

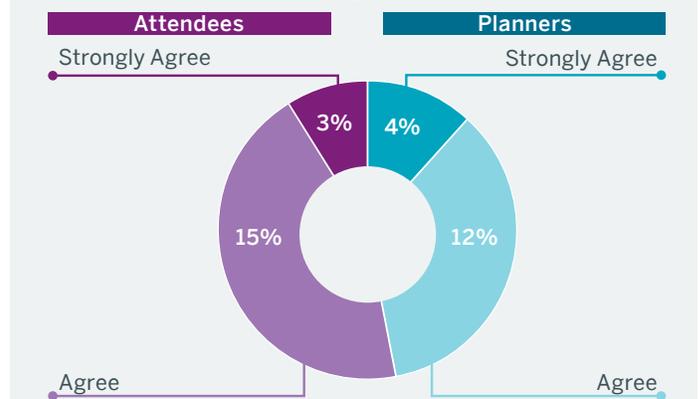


Figure 7: Meeting/event organizers can't afford to make meetings available virtually



Meeting Experience (Top-Ranked Features)

As discussed earlier, attendee distraction is a key concern for planners. Improving the meeting experience through interactive features such as surveys, real-time Q&A and other techniques can help keep virtual attendees engaged.

Eighty-five percent of attendees indicated that the “Ability to attend virtually and watch streaming video of the meeting or event was at least somewhat important,” while 50% said that it was very important or extremely important. The response from planners was virtually identical. (Figure 9)

Ability to interact with the presenters and audience was more important to attendees and presenters than having a video host for virtual attendees. Eighty-nine percent of attendees said that “Ability to interact with presenters and live audience,” was at least somewhat important, while 60% said that it was very or extremely important. Planners are very in tune with attendees’ preferences on this front. (Figure 10)

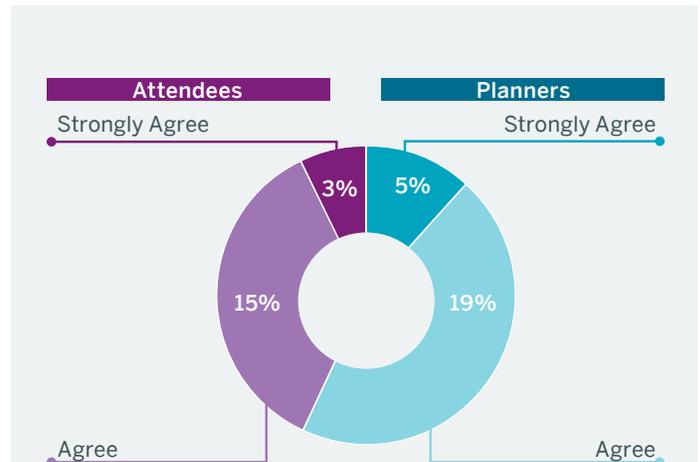


Figure 8: There are too many technology issues to include virtual attendees

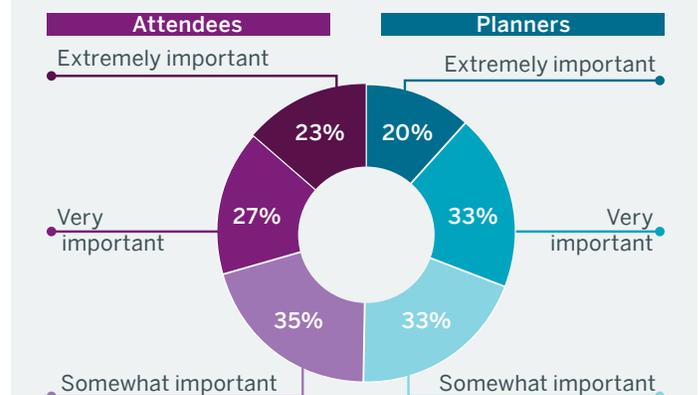


Figure 9: Ability to attend virtually/watch streaming video of the meeting/event

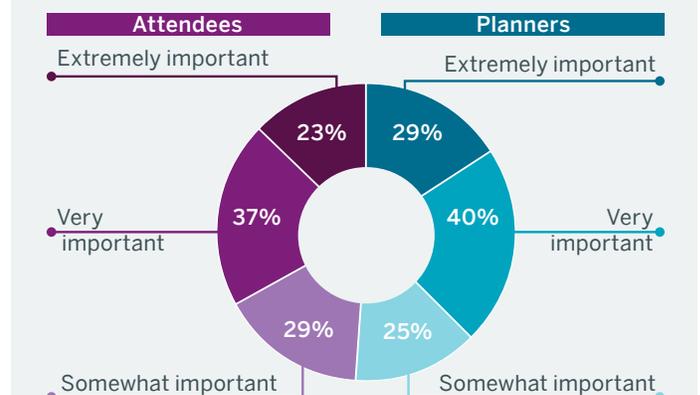


Figure 10: Ability to interact with presenters and live audience



Only 36% of attendees feel that a “Video host for virtual attendees” is very important or extremely important. The remaining 64% feel that is somewhat important or not important. More planners feel that video host is important: 45% responded that they are very important or extremely important and another 35% felt that they were somewhat important. (Figure 11)

There is strong agreement that in-person attendance still provides the best overall experience. Seventy-four percent of attendees and 85% of planners feel that: “In-person meetings are more valuable to me because they allow more social interaction.” (Figure 12)

Meeting organizers and technology providers still need to work on the virtual experience, as 47% of attendees and 49% of planners agree that: “It’s difficult to participate when attending meetings and events virtually.”(Figure 13)

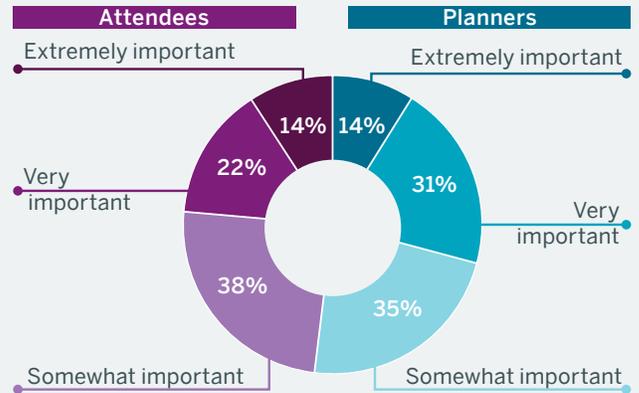


Figure 11:
Video Host for virtual attendees

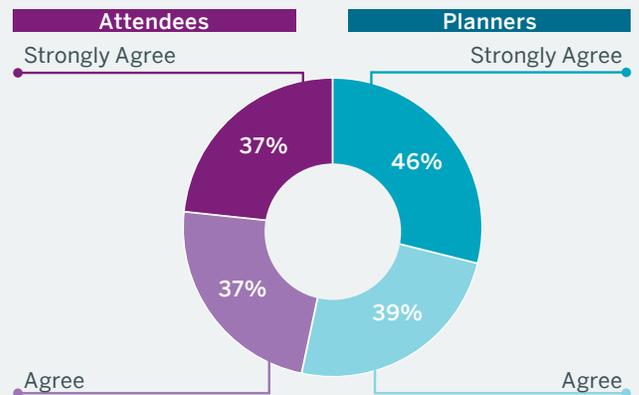


Figure 12:
In-person meetings are more valuable to me because they allow more social interaction

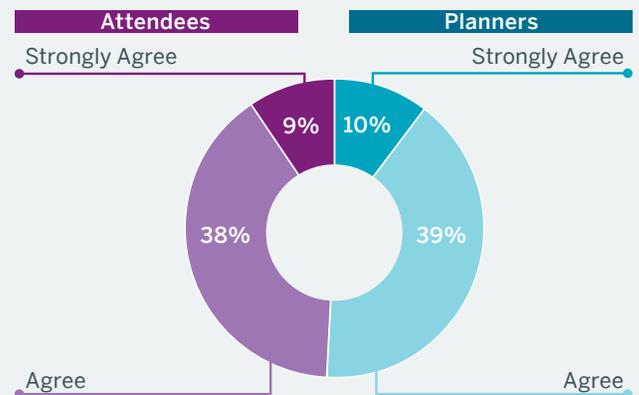


Figure 13:
It’s difficult to participate when I attend meetings/ events virtually



Key Considerations

The study shows that attendees are looking for more opportunities to attend meetings and events virtually. But there is a gap between planners' and attendees' expectations. Nearly half of planners, 48%, haven't come to the realization that there is demand for more virtual attendance options. One-third of planners, 33%, also feel that virtual attendees reduce a meeting's ability to reach its goals.

Additionally, some planners feel that meeting and event owners (those who are the requesters and directors of the meeting content) are responsible for holding back the growth of virtual meetings. While an equal number disagree, 33% of planners say that: "Meeting and event owners seem unwilling to add virtual capabilities and change the traditional format." To remedy this gap in expectations, meeting planners should consider how they approach these two areas:

1. Determine the Need for Virtual

Surveying target attendees can help provide meeting planners with meaningful data to present to meeting owners when evaluating the use of virtual. Pre-meeting surveys with attendees can evaluate their desire to attend virtually, the ability of the event to extend to those who would not be able to attend otherwise, and help identify the specific aspects of the meeting that would benefit the most from virtual technology. Moving a meeting owner to understand the potential benefit of virtual technology may require hard data. Your attendees can be a strong influence on this decision.

Sixty-three percent of attendees agreed with the statement: "I would attend more meetings and events virtually if the option were available," while only 17% disagreed. Nearly half of the planners surveyed, 48%, did not agree with the statement: "Attendees would attend more meetings and events virtually if the option were available." (Figure 14)

Forty-five percent of attendees agreed that: "Virtual attendance should be available for all meetings and events," while only 35% of planners agreed. (Figure 15)

Meeting owners and planners should discuss where it makes sense to include virtual technology based on the goals and objectives of each meeting. Some meeting types and elements of larger meetings are simply better suited to provide a successful virtual experience while others are not. Planners should look to understand where offering virtual attendance will drive the best outcome for attendees and meeting owners alike, then present that information to meeting owners to help close the gap.

2. Creating Meaningful Content

Once the decision is made to incorporate virtual, it is important to create a meaningful experience to keep attendees engaged. Taking content for the live audience and putting it online without modifying it to ensure appeal to virtual attendees can create dissatisfaction and a negative experience. Careful consideration needs to be given to both altering the content for use with a virtual audience, as well



as preparing speakers to deliver to this audience. Speakers and facilitators must make a point of bringing virtual attendees into the discussion and making them feel included. Not all speakers have experience with delivering content virtually.

Two-thirds of planners, 68%, feel that virtual attendees are too easily distracted and only 36% feel that virtual attendees get a good return on their investment. These attitudes and this disconnect are responsible for the slow adoption of virtual meeting solutions. Carefully crafting content and the virtual meeting experience to keep attendees engaged can shift this dynamic.

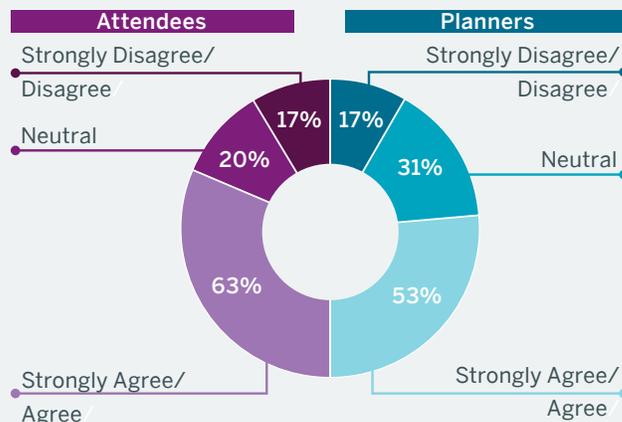


Figure 14:
Attend to more meeting/events virtually if the option were available

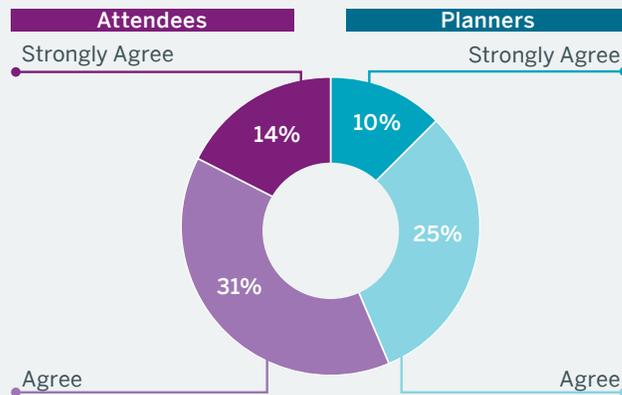


Figure 15:
Virtual attendance should be available for all meetings/events

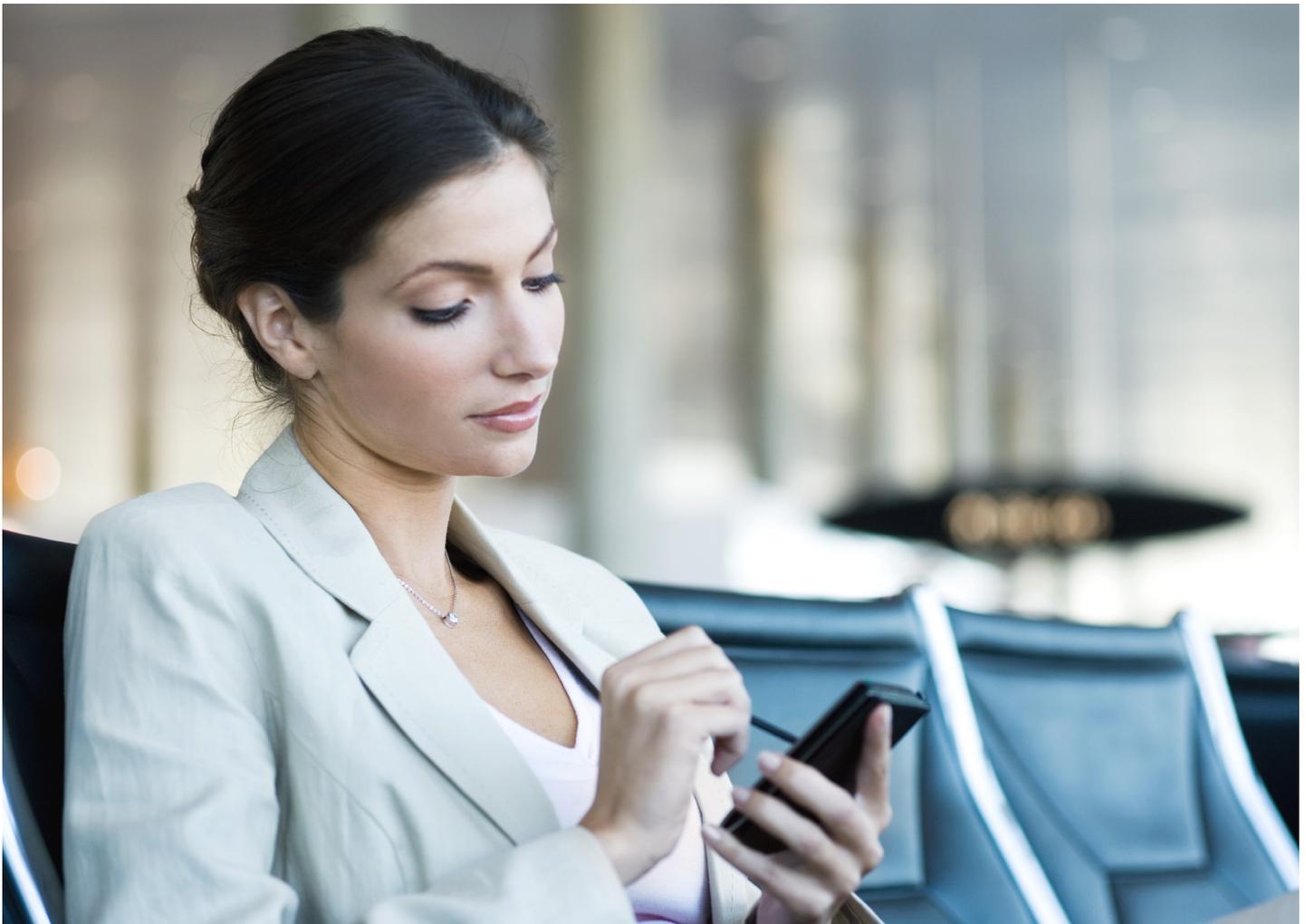


Social Media

Social media is a growing phenomenon in meetings and events. Organizers use social media for everything from getting the word out about the meeting or event, to getting real-time feedback on individual sessions, to tracking the overarching sentiment of attendees during the event. There is no question that social media is here to stay and it is evolving to address business challenges and create new opportunities.

Overall this study indicates social media is more relevant to meeting planners than it is to attendees, with 43% of planners feeling that social media

capabilities are very important or extremely important, and only 35% of attendees feeling the same way. Participating in games and contests via social media was ranked lowest in importance among attendees, with more than half of attendees indicating that this feature was not important. The most popular response from both attendees and planners for almost all of the social media questions was that these offerings were “somewhat important.” This indicates that while social media is nice to have at a meeting or conference, it’s not yet of great significance in this context.



Twitter

Forty-six percent of attendees felt that “a designated Twitter hashtag for tweeting about the meeting or event” is not important, 23% think it’s somewhat important and 31% think it’s very important or extremely important. A hashtag was more important for planners: 41% rank it very important or extremely important, 24% somewhat important and 35% not important. (Figure 16)

Posting and Reviews

Thirty-nine percent of attendees felt that “Posting and reading commentary or reviews about the meeting or event” is very important or extremely important, 40% think it’s somewhat important, and 21% think it’s not important. Posting and reading is more important for planners: 50% rank it very or extremely important, 31% somewhat important and 19% not important. (Figure 17)

Games and Contests

Fifty-four percent of attendees felt that “participating in games or contests” is not important, 29% think it’s somewhat important and only 17% think it’s very or extremely important. Contests and games are more important for planners: 26% rank it very or extremely important, 33% somewhat important and 41% not important. (Figure 18)

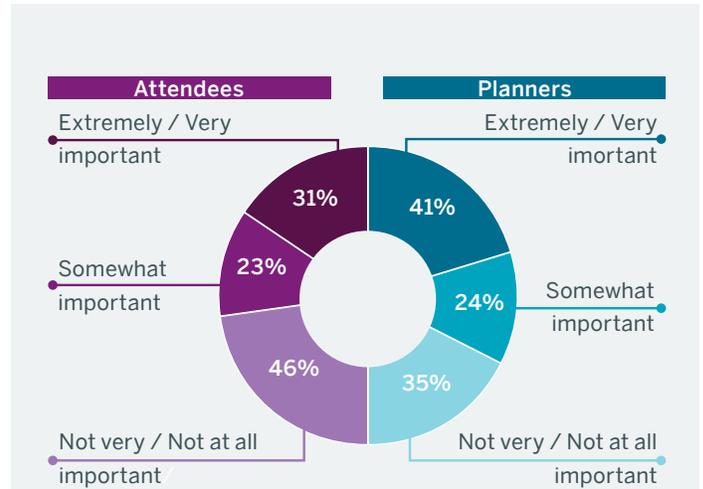


Figure 16: A designated twitter hashtag for tweeting about the meeting/event

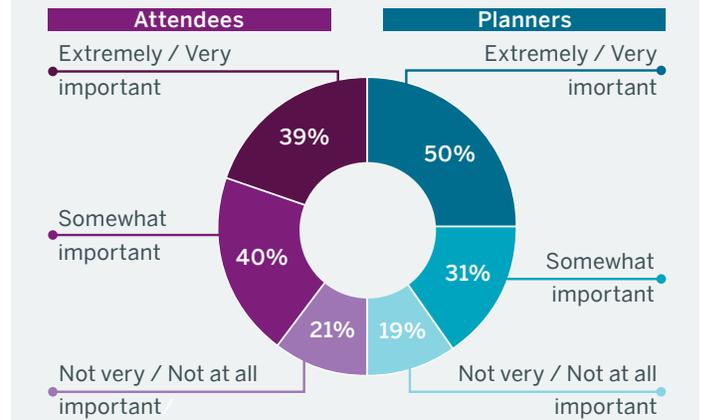


Figure 17: Posting/reading commentary or reviews about the meeting/event

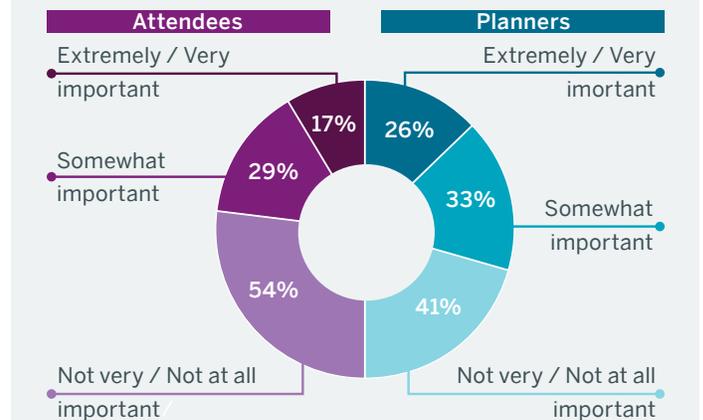


Figure 18: Participating in games or contests



Key Considerations

Today, planners view social media as an important communication and feedback tool, and while some attendees believe it is an important communication outlet, it appears that a significant portion are still not comfortable with the “public” element of social media as related to meetings and events. So far social media has only won over about a third of attendees as an important part of the meeting and event experience. Many attendees are conscious of posting only content that is relevant to the majority of their followers on social media. Therefore, posting about a meeting or event they are attending via large-scale social media outlets such as Twitter or Facebook may be less important given that the same experience is not being shared by the majority of their social media followers. However social media networks that are specific to the meeting itself are getting more attention and use from attendees according to meeting app developer [DoubleDutch](#). Their data shows that the most used feature of the mobile apps they have developed for meetings is the “activity feed” which is a running commentary from attendees on the meeting – an internal social media network, specific to that meeting or event.

This usage data points to attendees’ desire to engage in a social media exchange, but to do so with others at the meeting or event they are attending to ensure relevancy to the audience. Planners may want to leverage these meeting-specific social media opportunities to connect attendees and encourage in-meeting conversation.

While not a major driver for attendees and planners at the moment, broad social media solutions such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter will certainly continue to evolve, becoming more powerful and sophisticated as communication channels. As the social networks evolve and new solutions are delivered, we expect that these networks will play an ever-growing role in meetings and events.

Meeting Apps

Meetings apps have become very common at very large association and industry conferences and large meetings in general. Our research found that both attendees and meeting planners find meeting apps useful and important. On average, meeting planners found the apps more important than attendees. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of planners indicated that features were either very important or extremely important, and 55% of attendees felt the same way. Access to basic but critical information about the program—as well as communication and scheduling features—were most important to both groups. The ability to participate in games and contests was least important to both groups. And not surprisingly, branding and information about sponsors was much more important to planners than to attendees.

The table right lists the features in order of importance to attendees. (Figure 19)



Feature	Attendees: Very Important or Extremely Important	Planners: Very Important or Extremely Important
Access to meeting or event schedule	79%	88%
Access to meeting or session descriptions	75%	82%
The ability to get updates from meeting organizers	69%	82%
The ability to create a personalized schedule for the meeting or event	64%	73%
The ability to network and share contact information with other attendees	63%	69%
Access to meeting room and exhibit hall maps	63%	77%
Directory of meeting or event attendees	60%	62%
The ability to schedule appointments with other attendees	59%	50%
The ability to capture contact information via badge scanning	51%	59%
Access to speaker bios	51%	67%
Guide or map to local services in the area (outside of the meeting or event)	48%	69%
The ability to respond to polls or surveys	46%	67%
Meeting-specific branding (look & feel)	43%	70%
Access to information about sponsors	29%	55%
The ability to participate in games or contests	27%	35%
Average	55%	67%

Figure 19



Innovative New Features

Communication and networking rank among the most important features in a meeting app. App developers continue to look for ways to enhance those features. For example, some apps now let attendees connect with each other. You can search for other attendees based on things like company, professional title and interests. Once you're connected you can send and receive messages and schedule meetings. Apps are also using Bluetooth functionality to identify who else in the room is using the app. You can then connect with others who are also online via the app.

Another important feature within apps is the scheduling function. This includes both keeping track of the meeting schedule, but also having a way to schedule meetings with exhibitors and attendees during the event. With the popularity of pre-arranged, one-on-one meetings during events, this function could quickly become one of the essential and standard features of event and meeting apps.

As discussed in the previous section, the integration of social media networks within apps ranks lower, however social media feeds specific to an event known as "activity feeds" are getting a lot of use by attendees. Most apps allow integration of a Twitter feed using an event's hashtag. This gives attendees another option to interact with each other, make new connections and share things such as video clips, photos, session and speaker reviews, as well as any comments that attendees want to share.

Key Considerations

Creating social media buzz has become an important part of the overall marketing strategy of meetings and events. Organizers will continue to leverage larger social media networks to promote their events. However, attendees seem less inclined to tweet or post a Facebook status update that is not relevant to their own followers, making an event-specific activity feed more appealing to attendees. Organizers can then take comments and re-post, tweet or blog about that activity to further promote their event, but may need to adjust expectations about attendee activity on social media networks such as Twitter, LinkedIn or Facebook during the course of an event.

Meeting apps present the opportunity to get the most valuable and timely information to attendees' fingertips, as well as the potential to harness the power of social network information flow. Meeting apps have become a critical part of large events and conferences. We expect that meeting apps will also become an essential part of medium and large meetings. Instant mobile access to the event schedule is the "killer-app" feature that ensures that everyone will download the meeting app, and activity feeds are seeing substantial use by attendees according to data from app developers. Features that allow for scheduling and connecting with other attendees are expected to continue to grow in popularity.

Meeting planners have the opportunity to experiment and learn from this highly measurable tool, however, planners must ensure ample Wifi access for attendees or the app becomes meaningless to attendees and can lead to dissatisfaction. When planners work ahead to ensure available Wifi and access on a variety of devices, apps can shed light on what attendees' value and provide guidance on how to increase attendee satisfaction within an event.



Measuring Success

All the ways of monitoring attendee engagement were rated at “effective” by at least 69% of the meeting planners surveyed. Planners gave the highest marks to in-person monitoring (94% for both large and small events) and post-meeting surveys (91% for large meetings and 92% for small meetings). Twitter and other social media had the lowest scores, but the majority of planners still deemed them effective (72% for large meetings and 69% for small meetings). Planners also reported that monitoring engagement via meeting apps and virtual meeting was effective. (Figure 20)

One surprising result is that, while all these methods of monitoring engagement were deemed to be effective, the planners we surveyed use none of them frequently. Only 29% of planners indicate that they always or often monitor attendee engagement. About 37% report that they never monitor attendee engagement. (Figure 21)

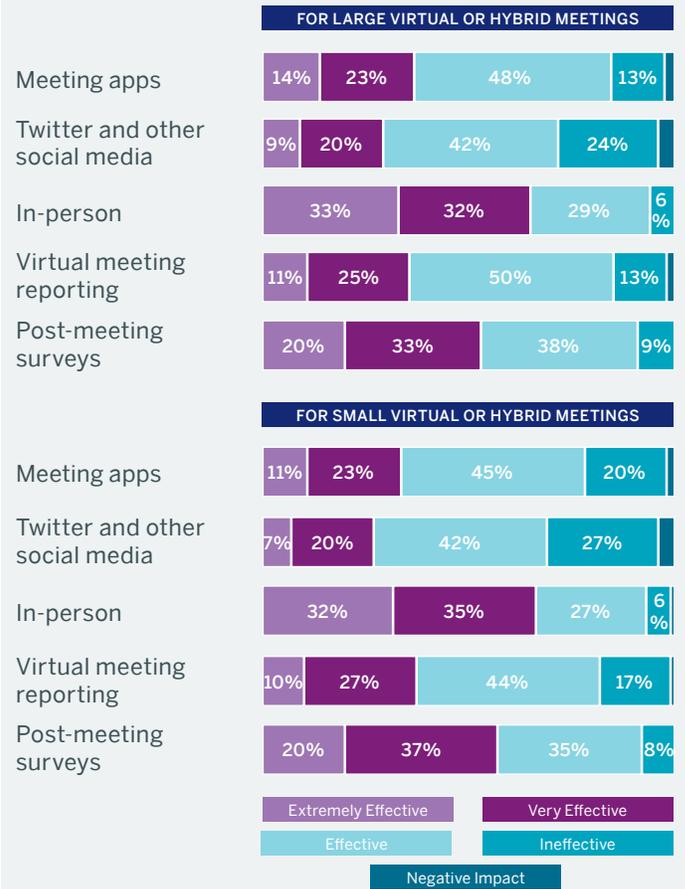


Figure 20:
How effective are the following ways to monitor meeting attendee engagement?

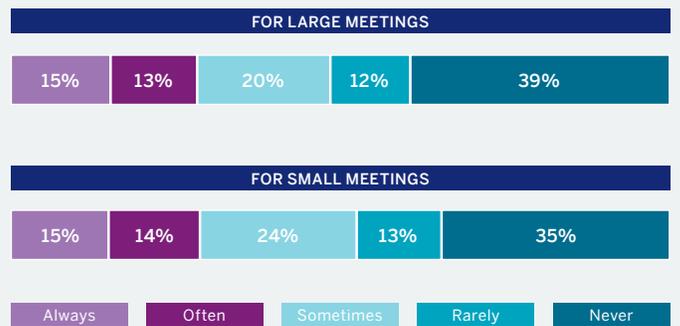


Figure 21:
How often do you monitor attendee engagement in virtual or hybrid meetings or events?



Gathering feedback and making adjustments has been a standard best practice many years. It's an essential part of any good process improvement cycle. It is surprising to see that so few planners are monitoring engagement and gathering feedback from attendees throughout the meeting lifecycle. These results suggest that very few are measuring the success of their meeting, which means that even fewer are setting goals upfront and measuring return on investment.

Meeting owners would do well to turn their attention to this issue. Meeting spend has historically been among the first areas to get cut during an economic downturn. One of the primary drivers is the lack of understanding amongst senior management on the return their companies get from meetings and events. There is real opportunity to improve the progress in the gathering of attendee feedback and the measurement of return on investment. Simple steps such as surveying attendees before and after the event to see if opinions or intentions against key meeting goals (such as awareness, intent to purchase or understanding of a key concept) have shifted go a long way toward reporting measurable outcomes from a meeting investment.



Conclusion

The proliferation of technology provides meeting organizers and planners new opportunities at all stages of the meeting process: setting goals and objectives, marketing and promotion, designing the meeting experience and measuring results.

The process starts with gathering input on goals and objectives. Unfortunately, this step is often skipped. In today's interactive world, it's a tremendous mistake to forego the opportunity to get input from and align on goals and objectives with your attendees. For large user conferences or industry meetings, planners can use the interactivity that meeting apps and social media provide, not just to promote a meeting, but to align on outcomes with attendees. Planners can also gather input on the format of sessions using these tools. For example, attendees may prefer round-table discussions or panel discussions to long PowerPoint lectures. They might also prefer to attend virtually or to have shorter TED-like presentations. Using valuable pre-meeting input, organizers and planners can continue to enhance their offerings to be consistent with their attendees' expectations. Often we rely on post-event surveys to tell us what attendees would have liked versus asking ahead and providing that experience. Shifting the dynamic can go a long way toward driving attendee satisfaction and increasing your return on the event investment.

During the meeting, planners can use social media and meeting apps to communicate with attendees, gathering real-time feedback for course-correction during the meeting and identifying opportunities for improvement that can be used for planning future events, including feedback on goals, presenters, facilitators, content, format and design.

Technology continues to change the landscape of meetings and events, presenting new opportunities to increase engagement, reach a broader audience, and deliver value for attendees and meeting owners alike. Meeting planners and meeting owners bear the burden of incorporating these technologies into meetings and events in a way that drives value for meeting attendees. Understanding the expectations of your meeting attendees as it relates to technology is an important step in the meeting planning process. This is a time of opportunity for meeting owners to take their meetings to the next level by engaging their attendees with these tools, and using these tools to measure the value of the meeting experience and meeting investment.





MEETINGS & EVENTS

American Express Meetings & Events

We view meetings as opportunities. To connect. To generate value. To create a meaningful experience with both immediate and lasting impact. At American Express Meetings & Events, we know meetings are an important part of your business, and we want to help you make the most of your investment.

American Express Meetings & Events offers best-in-class capabilities and a wide-range of scalable, customizable solutions to address client meeting needs. Whether you need help with a single meeting or managing your entire meetings portfolio, our solutions help you deliver powerful meeting experiences. Our approach enables clients to consistently achieve business results, maximize saving opportunities, and leverage greater visibility with each specific meeting or event.

Our offerings are enhanced by unparalleled global access to consultative experts and industry-leading partners. Through best-of-breed tools, technologies and analytics designed to reach business goals in a more cost effective way, we ensure clients are confident, satisfied, and in control.

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