kaltura

The State of Virtual Events 2022

A global survey of 1250+ organizers and attendees

Fall 2021

LIVE

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically reshaped all of our lives. In particular, the global workforce has changed irrevocably and as a result, so have the jobs of marketers and event organizers. In-person events are still largely on hold, and in fact the staying power of in-person events remains unclear. While the future is uncertain, the shift to the adoption of a digital mindset and with it, a digital toolset, is very clear. Whatever the new normal will be, it won't be anything like our pre-2020 expectations.

To support you in strategizing and navigating around these challenges, we spoke to marketers and organizers about how they've approached events since the pandemic, and what their plans are for 2022. To understand the audience's perspective, we also spoke to attendees, and asked them to evaluate their experience of virtual and hybrid events so far, and what their expectations are for the future.

We found that virtual events don't exist in a silo; they impact the entire marketing funnel. It's also clear that attendees have different expectations when they attend an online event, and so attempting to "lift and shift" your in-person events strategy won't work. While in-person events focus on networking, virtual events forefront education and thought leadership, and data becomes a powerful differentiator. For organizers who want to see ROI from both their events and their wider marketing strategy in 2022 – let this report be your guide.

Methodology

Our survey was split into two parts and completed by Global Surveyz, an independent survey company. The respondents were recruited through a global B2B research panel, and invited via email to complete the survey, with all organizer responses collected during August 2021, and attendee responses collected during September 2021. In both surveys, the answers to the majority of the non-numerical questions were randomized, in order to prevent order bias.

First, we surveyed 253 full-time employees from companies who had organized at least one large-scale virtual event over the past 18 months, including CMOs, VPs of Marketing, events managers and directors across the US and the UK. The company sizes ranged from 500 to more than 10,000. The average time they spent filling out the survey was 6 minutes, 26 seconds.

The second part of the report involved surveying 1,000 attendees from the same regions, who had gone to at least one large-scale virtual event over the past 18 months. The average response time was 5 minutes and 21 seconds.

Key Findings

1

Virtual events are here to stay.

92% of organizers have shifted to virtual events in 2021, with 94% planning for virtual events in 2022, and 48% planning to increase the number of virtual events they host next year. Virtual-only was the strategy for 25% of organizations in 2021, but a hybrid approach is more popular at 67%. On the attendee side, while before COVID-19, only 45% of people had attended a virtual event, since the start of the pandemic that number has increased by over 93% to 87%.

2

More than a quarter of organizations see greater ROI and engagement from virtual events...

It's clear that virtual or hybrid events are no longer simply a response to the pandemic, but a strategy for growth. The top three benefits of virtual events compared to in-person, as chosen by organizers are: **higher attendee engagement, greater number of registrations, and a better return on investment (ROI).**

3

...and attendees are also very positive about virtual events.

Virtual events are not just a strong strategy for organizers – attendees are overwhelmingly pleased with the results, too. 73% of attendees are satisfied with the experience they had at virtual events, despite many companies creating events on the fly in challenging circumstances, and **a huge 93% of attendees feel companies have done a good job with the transition from in-person to online.**

4

People are coming to virtual events in order to learn, not socialize.

We can see from the data that while attendees largely go to in-person events to build relationships (39%), **the top goal for virtual events is learning about the company/ product (36%) and general education (36%).** Building new relationships is third on the list for virtual events, at just 15% of the vote.

5

This is reiterated by the content attendees enjoy most: Expert Q&As and Demos.

Expert Q&As and product demos come out as the most preferred sessions, both for the types of virtual event content that attendees look forward to, **and what is most likely to impact their buying decisions.** In contrast, only 3% of attendees say that networking and social spaces impact their buying decisions.

6

Opportunities for networking should still be an important focus.

Education isn't everything, however. Two of the biggest drawbacks of virtual events for attendees are the inability to socialize (44%), and the difficulties networking (35%). That doesn't mean that virtual events need to offer the same kinds of social opportunities as in-person events do. **When asked their top desired features of virtual events platforms, 91% of attendees chose in-session text chat, and 85% chose profiles that allow other participants to find them.** These online communication tools can make all the difference in engagement.

Hosting Large-Scale Events: Pre- and During COVID-19

Virtual events are catching up to in-person events. On average, organizers hosted 4.85 in-person events annually before COVID-19 and are now hosting 4.68 virtual events since COVID-19 (*Figure 1*).

Looking at companies' events strategy for 2021, 92% of companies have made a clear shift to virtual events. This is split into 25% of companies who are producing virtual events only, and 67% are producing a mix of in-person, virtual or hybrid events. (*Figure 2*)

Organizer Tip: Consider creating one larger virtual event, and then smaller regional get-togethers in person for those who are able to travel locally.

* Percentages in Figure 1 do not add up to 100% due to rounding up of numbers.

Figure 1*

of Large-Scale In-Person Events Pre-COVID-19

■ In-Person Events (Before COVID-19) | ■ Virtual Events (Since COVID-19)

Weighted Average: 4.85 Events

Weighted Average: 4.68 Events

6% 4%
1 event

34% 46%
2-5 events

60% 51%
6+ events

Figure 2

Event Strategy for 2021

8%
We produced only in-person events

25%
We shifted to only producing virtual events

67%
We produced a mix of in-person, virtual, or hybrid events

The Organizers' Perspective
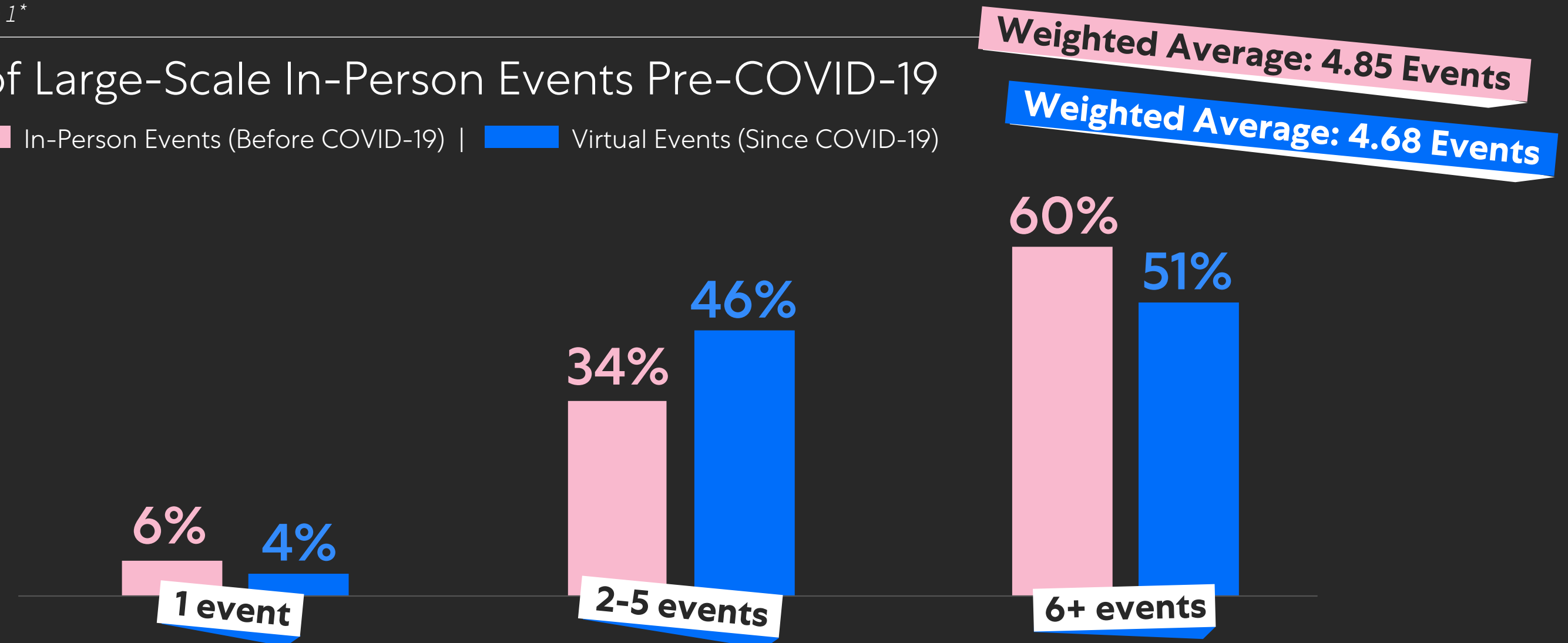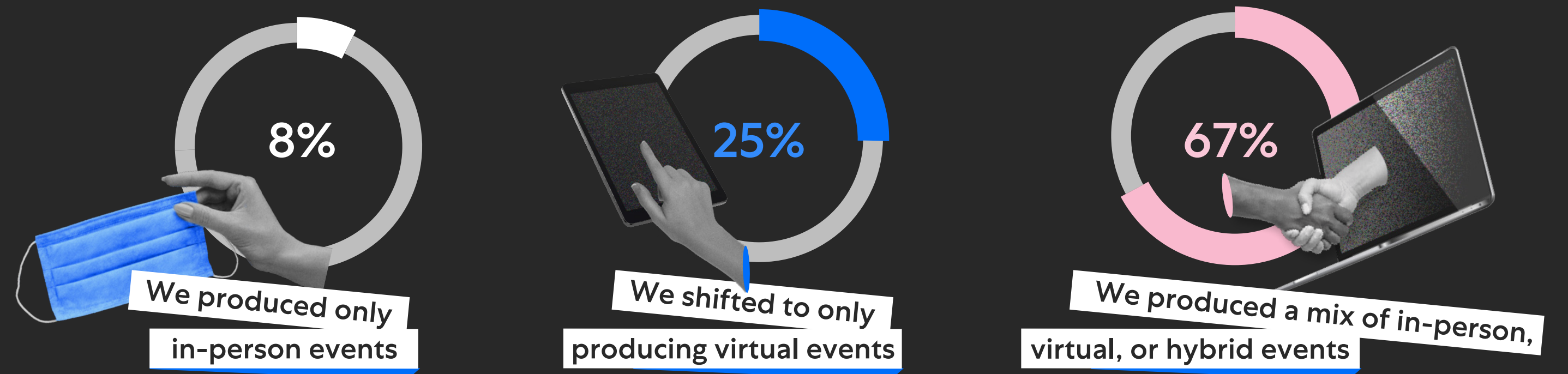
Large-Scale Event Attendance: Pre- and During COVID-19

Virtual events are indeed becoming the new normal. Prior to COVID-19, only 45% of people had attended a virtual event. Since the start of the pandemic, that number has jumped to 87% (an increase of over 93%).

Figure 3

of Large-Scale Virtual Events – Before and Since COVID-19

Before | COVID-19 | **Since**

54% | 36% | 6% | 3% | 12% | 49% | 19% | 19%
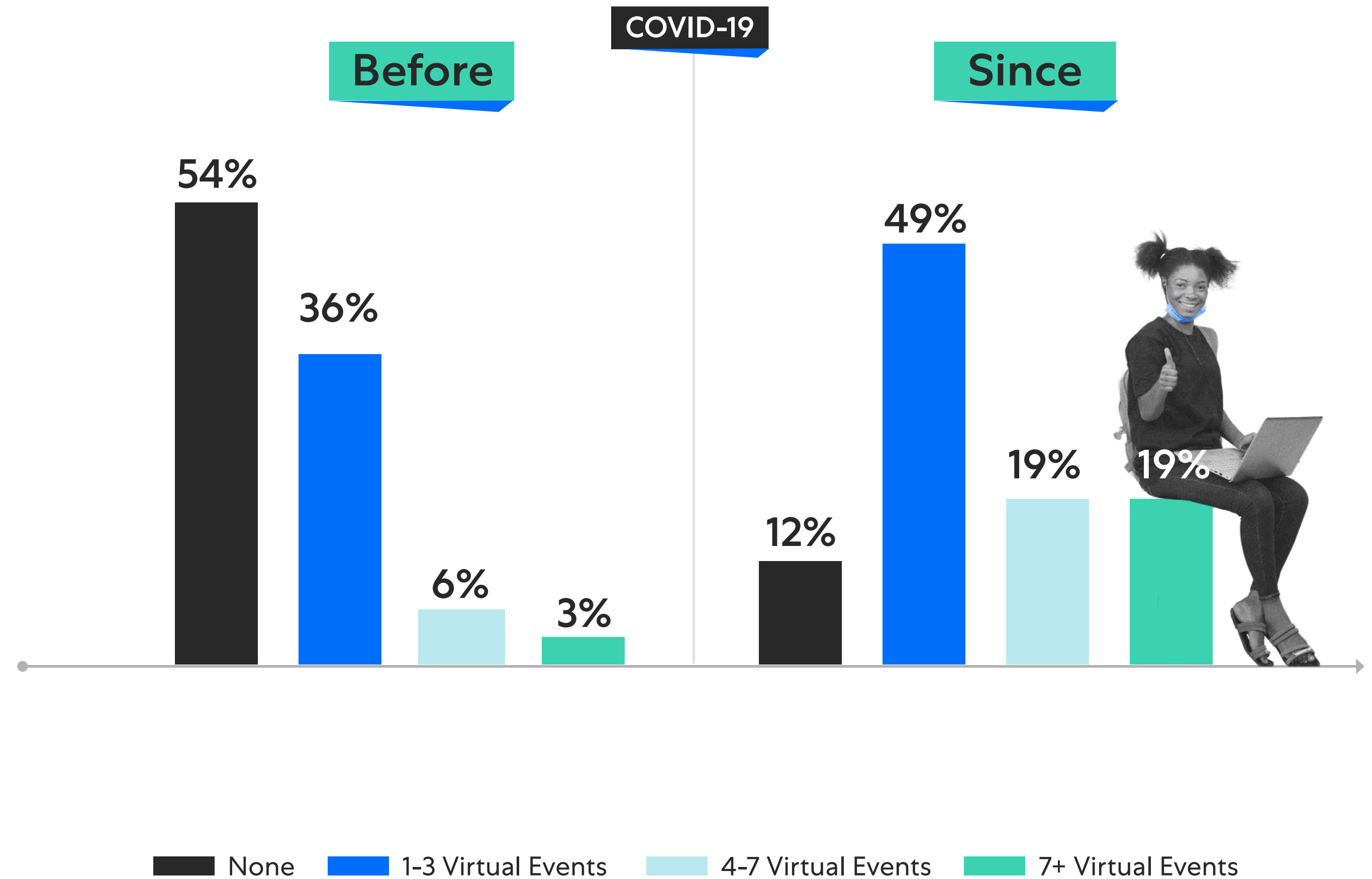
Legend:
- None
- 1-3 Virtual Events
- 4-7 Virtual Events
- 7+ Virtual Events

How Attendees See Companies' Transition from In-Person to Virtual Events

Overwhelmingly, attendees are pleased with the transition to virtual events. 73% indicated they are satisfied with the experience they've had attending virtual events (*Figure 4*). In addition, 93% said companies have done a good job adapting in-person events for a digital and virtual space (*Figure 5*).

Figure 4

Satisfaction from Virtual Events Experiences

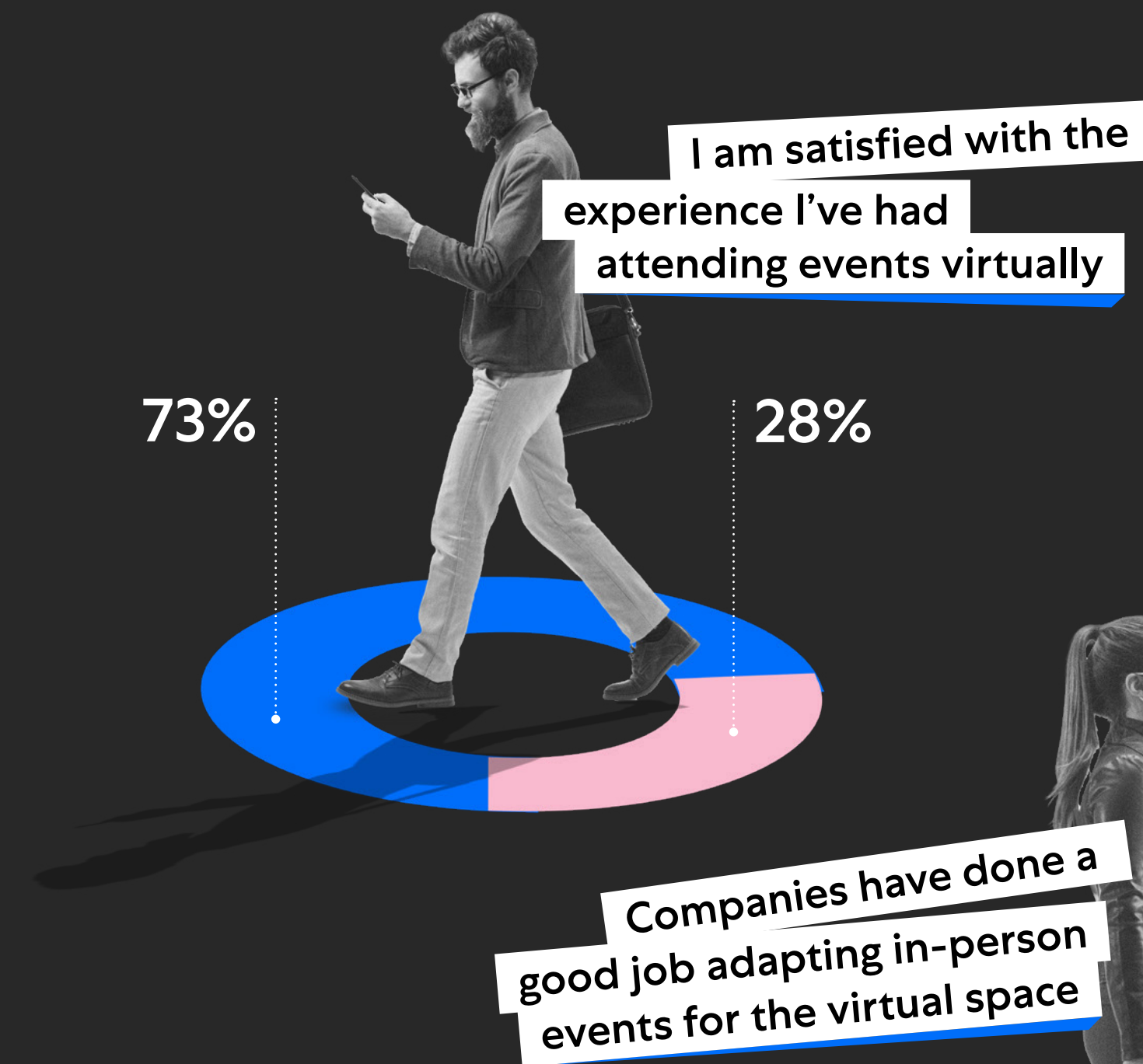I am satisfied with the experience I've had attending events virtually

73%   **28%**

Figure 5

Companies' Transition to Virtual Events

Companies have done a good job adapting in-person events for the virtual space
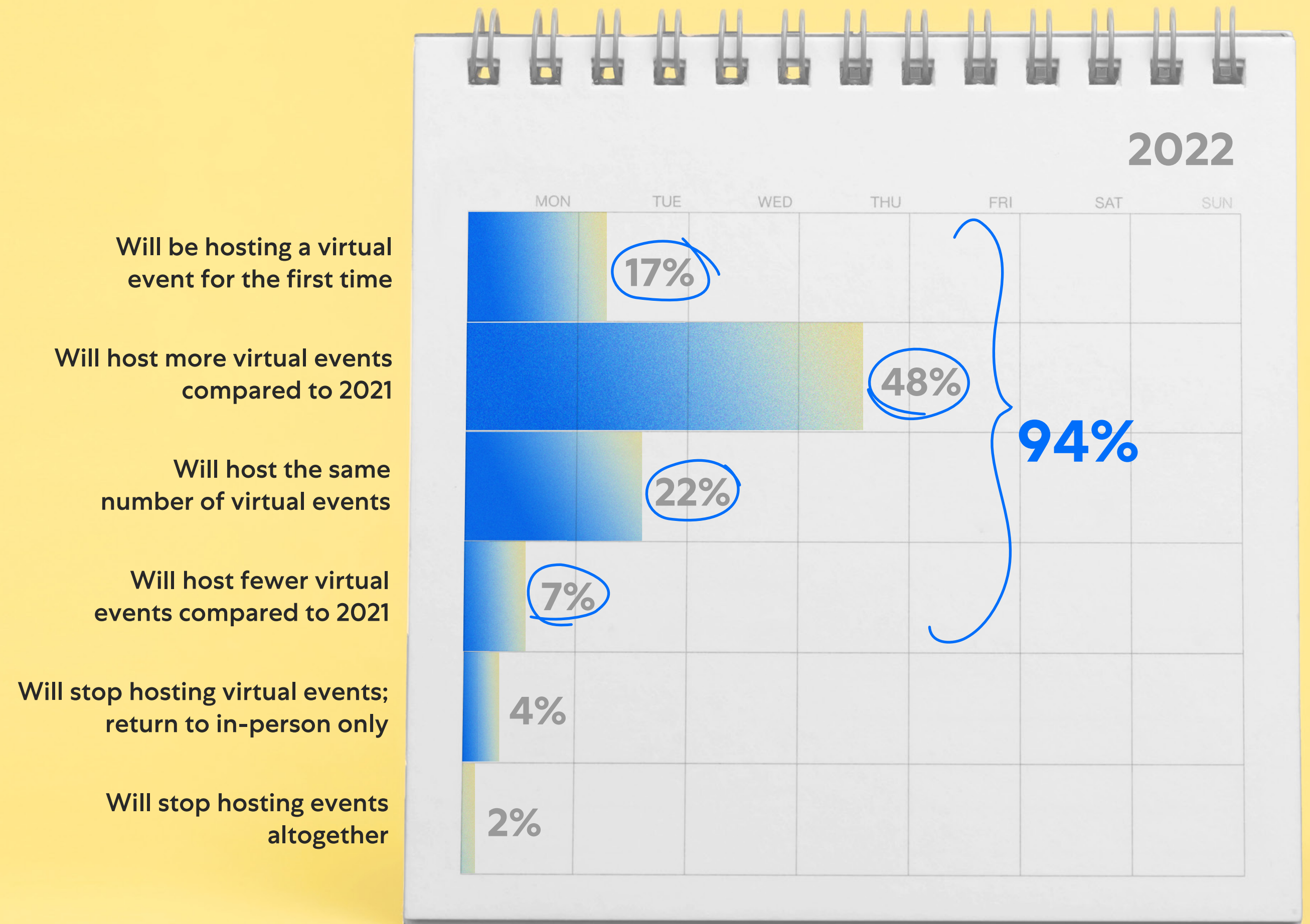
93%   **7%**

Virtual Events Plans: 2022 and Beyond

Looking at event planning for 2022 and beyond, 94% of companies will host virtual events. Almost half of the companies surveyed (48%) plan to host more than they did in 2021, and 17% are planning on hosting a virtual event for the first time. A digital mindset is now dominating our professional world, so it's not surprising to see companies shifting strategies to compete in this new reality.

Only 6% of companies plan to stop hosting virtual events. 2% are completely giving up on events altogether, while 4% are aiming to return to in-person only events.

Figure 6

Virtual Events Plans: 2022 and Beyond

Will be hosting a virtual event for the first time — 17%

Will host more virtual events compared to 2021 — 48%

Will host the same number of virtual events — 22%

Will host fewer virtual events compared to 2021 — 7%

Will stop hosting virtual events; return to in-person only — 4%

Will stop hosting events altogether — 2%

94%

Will All Events Be Virtual or Hybrid in 2 Years?

Both organizers and audiences are in agreement that the events industry has transitioned from in-person to digital. 90% of organizers believe all large-scale events will be hybrid or virtual in 2023 (*Figure 7*).

75% of attendees are committed to the vision of the organizers, and say they will attend virtual events even after in-person events have fully resumed. 84% of attendees would like to always have an online option available to them, so that they can attend any event as a virtual/remote attendee if they choose. (*Figure 8*).

Organizer Tip: Not having a virtual option could cut you off from a large segment of your audience, so it's important to adopt at least a hybrid strategy.

Figure 7

The Organizers' Perspective

10%
Disagree

90%
Agree

All large-scale events will be hybrid or virtual in two years

Figure 8

The Attendee Perspective

25%
Disagree

75%
Agree

I will attend virtual events even after in-person events have fully resumed

16%
Disagree

84%
Agree

I would like to always have the option to attend any event as a virtual/remote attendee

Are We Going Back to In-Person Events?

There are gaps within organizations when it comes to going back to in-person events. While 84% of events managers expect to go back to in-person events, only 65% of CMOs and other marketing managers agree.

This divide suggests that marketers may be more aware of the digital advantages of virtual events (such as harnessing first-party data and building lasting online communities) and therefore don't see an overwhelming need to return to in-person events.

Organizer Tip: Breaking down silos and aligning on shared goals between departments can support better decision-making when it comes to planning events.

Figure 9

Are You Going Back to In-Person Events? CMOs vs. Marketing and Events Managers

■ Yes   ■ No

65%   35%   CMO

64%   36%   Manager to VP Marketing

84%   16%   Manager to VP of Events
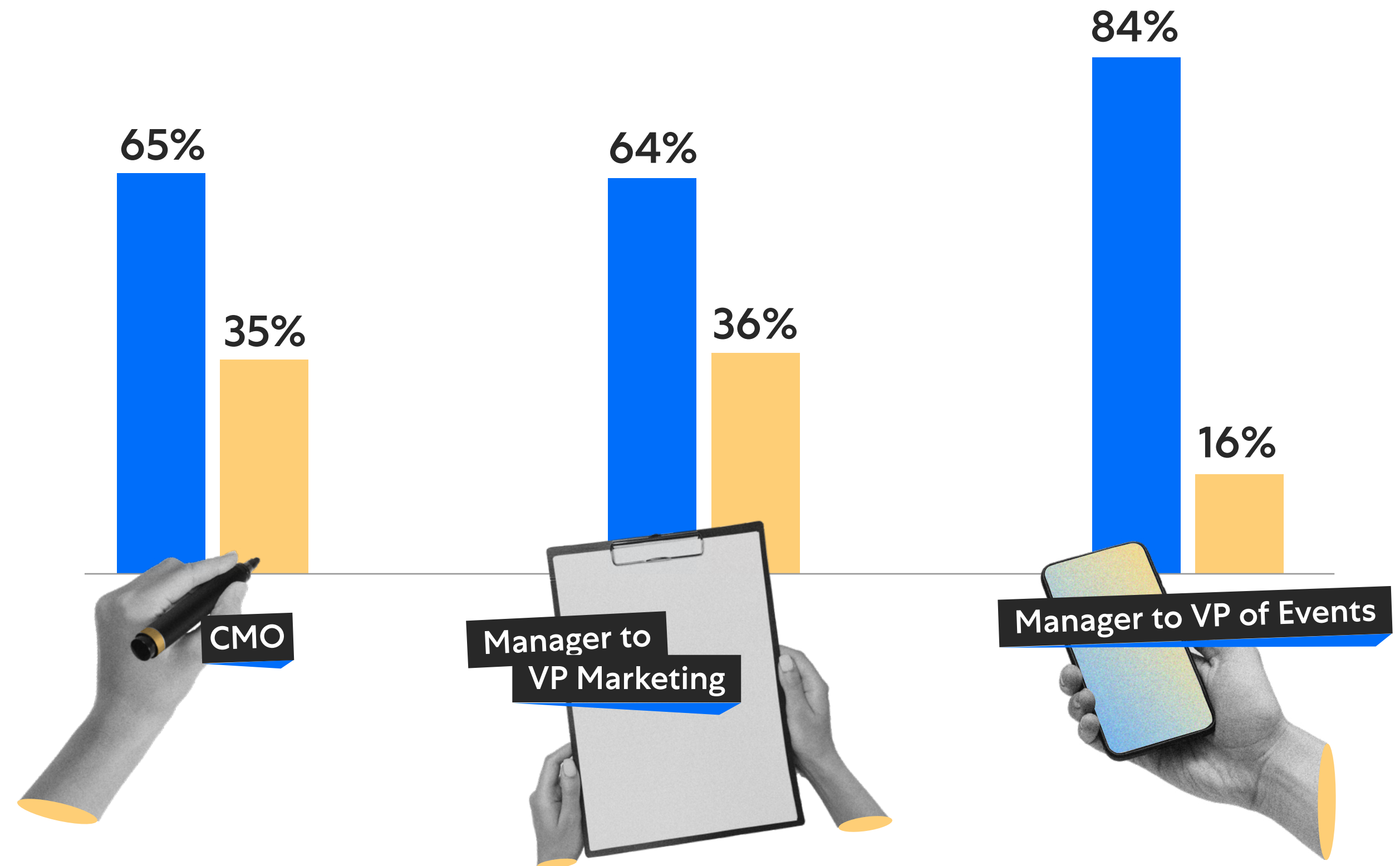
Organizers' Goals for Large-Scale Events: In-Person vs. Virtual

While 90% of organizers believe in-person large-scale events will be replaced by virtual or hybrid events in 2023 *(Figure 7)*, **the goals for each of these event types differ.**

For organizers, the top goal of in-person events is building new relationships (32%) while this is only the third most important goal for virtual events (17%).

Other goals for in-person events are increasing brand awareness (28%), nurturing existing relationships, and directly driving sales.

Virtual events tend to be seen as a large branding opportunity for organizers today, with the top goal being to increase brand awareness (28%) *(Figure 11)*.

Organizer Tip: As virtual events are here to stay, organizers should think more about how to ensure they are more than a branding exercise and instead can serve as a solid pipeline generator.
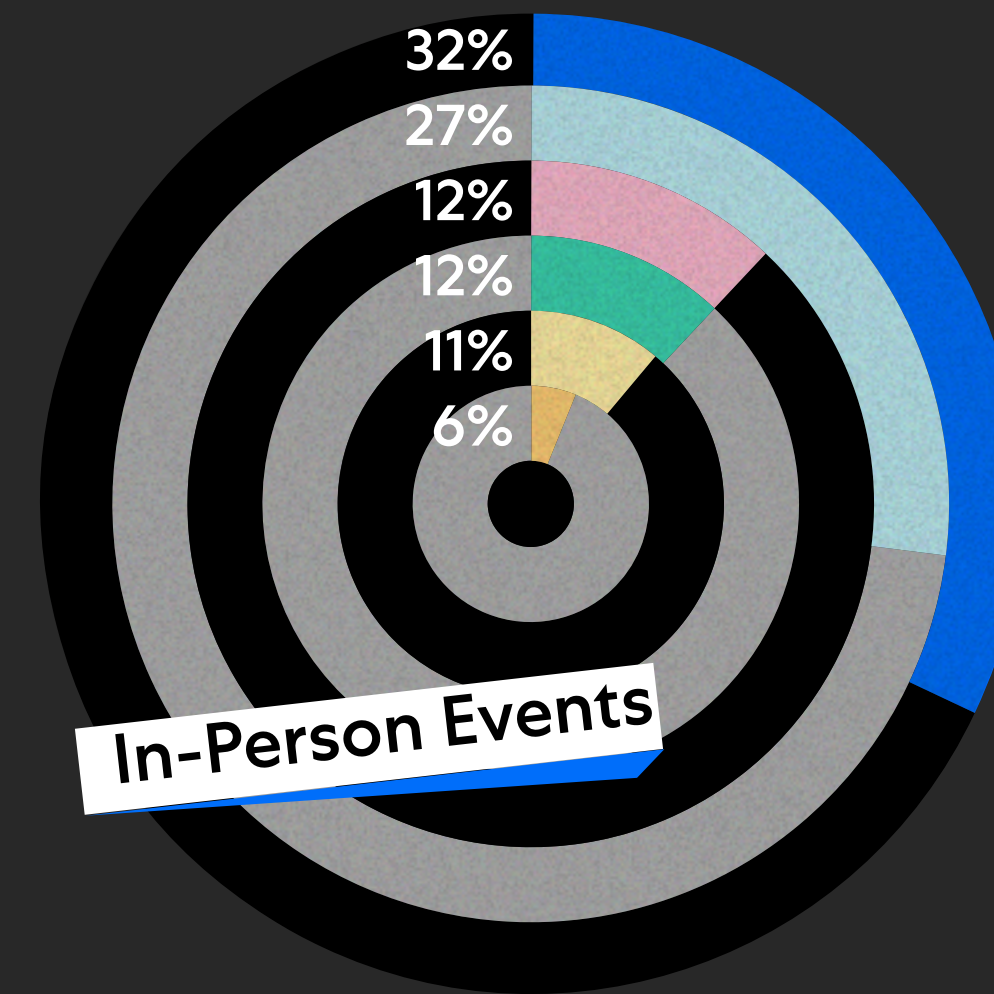
Figure 10

Organizers' Main Goal for Large-Scale In-Person Events

- Build new relationships
- Increase brand awareness
- Nurture existing relationships
- Directly drive sales
- Generate revenue through ticket sales
- Education/Thought Leadership

In-Person Events

32%
27%
12%
12%
11%
6%

Figure 11

Organizers' Main Goal for Large-Scale Virtual Events

- Increase brand awareness
- Generate revenue through ticket sales
- Build new relationships
- Nurture existing relationships
- Directly drive sales
- Education/Thought Leadership

Virtual Events

28%
21%
17%
15%
11%
8%
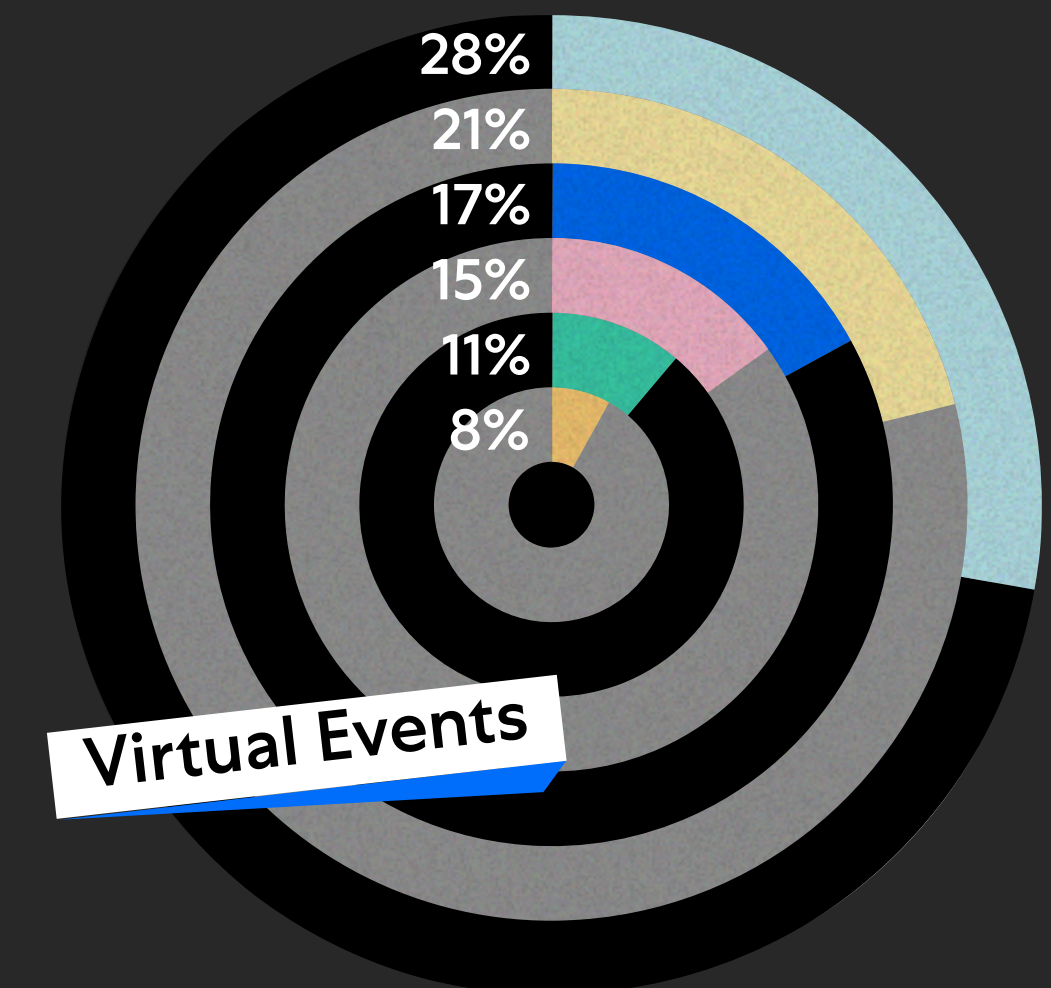
Attendees' Goals for Large-Scale Events: In-Person vs. Virtual

While virtual events are set to widely replace in-person events, **attendees have different goals when attending in-person vs. virtual events.** The top goals for attending in-person events are building new relationships (39%), learning more about the brand/company that's organizing the event (29%), and education (15%) *(Figure 12)*.

For virtual events, the top goals are learning more about the brand/company organizing the event (36%) and education (36%), while building new relationships drops to third place (15%) *(Figure 13)*.

Organizer Tip: Attendees' number one goal in virtual events is learning about your company. You can leverage this mindset to provide deeper education and opportunities to experience your brand. For example, you should consider extending the lifetime of your content by standing up an on-demand hub after your event wraps, creating a space for a "Netflix-style" microlearning experience.

* Percentages in Figure 16 do not add up to 100% due to rounding up of numbers.

Figure 12

Attendees' Main Goal for Large-Scale In-Person Events

- Build new relationships
- Learn more about the brand/company organizing the event
- Education
- Travel/Exploring host city
- Nurture existing relationships
- Directly drive sales for my own organization

39%
29%
15%
9%
6%
2%

Large-Scale In-Person Events
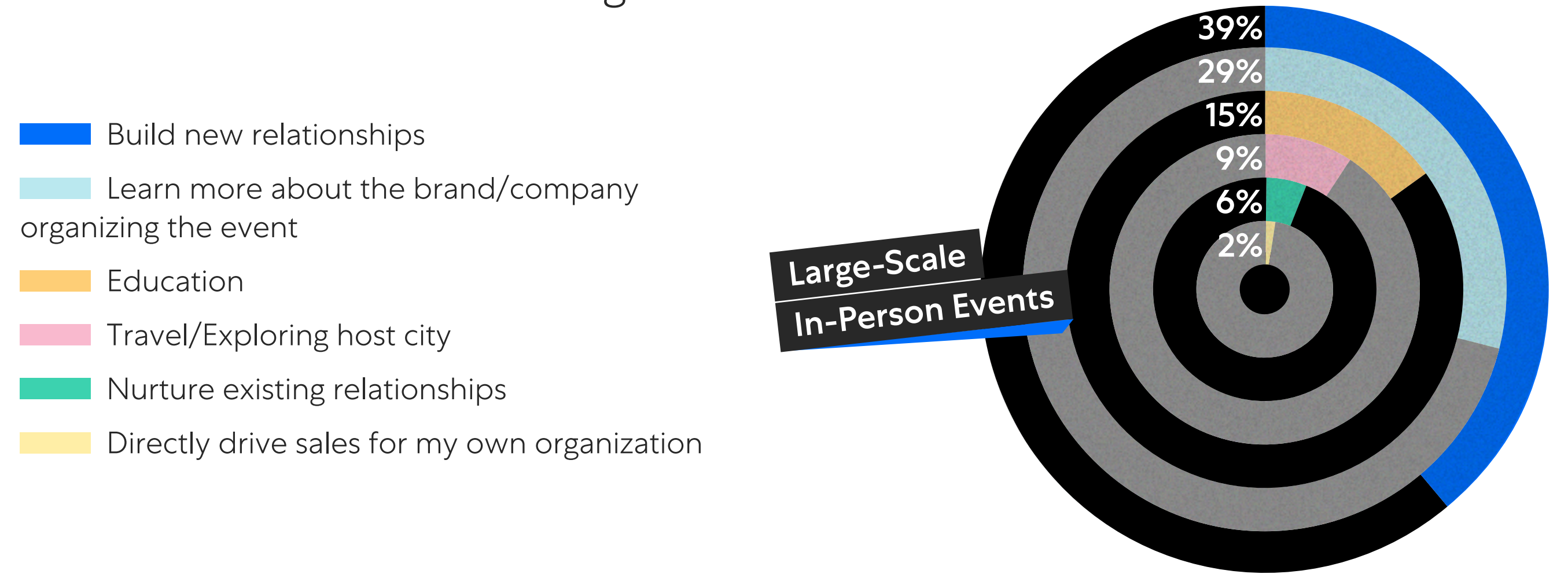
Figure 13

Attendees' Main Goal for Large-Scale Virtual Events

36%
36%
15%
8%
5%
0%

Large-Scale Virtual Events

- Learn more about the brand/company organizing the event
- Education
- Build new relationships
- Nurture existing relationships
- Directly drive sales for my own organization
- Travel/Exploring host city
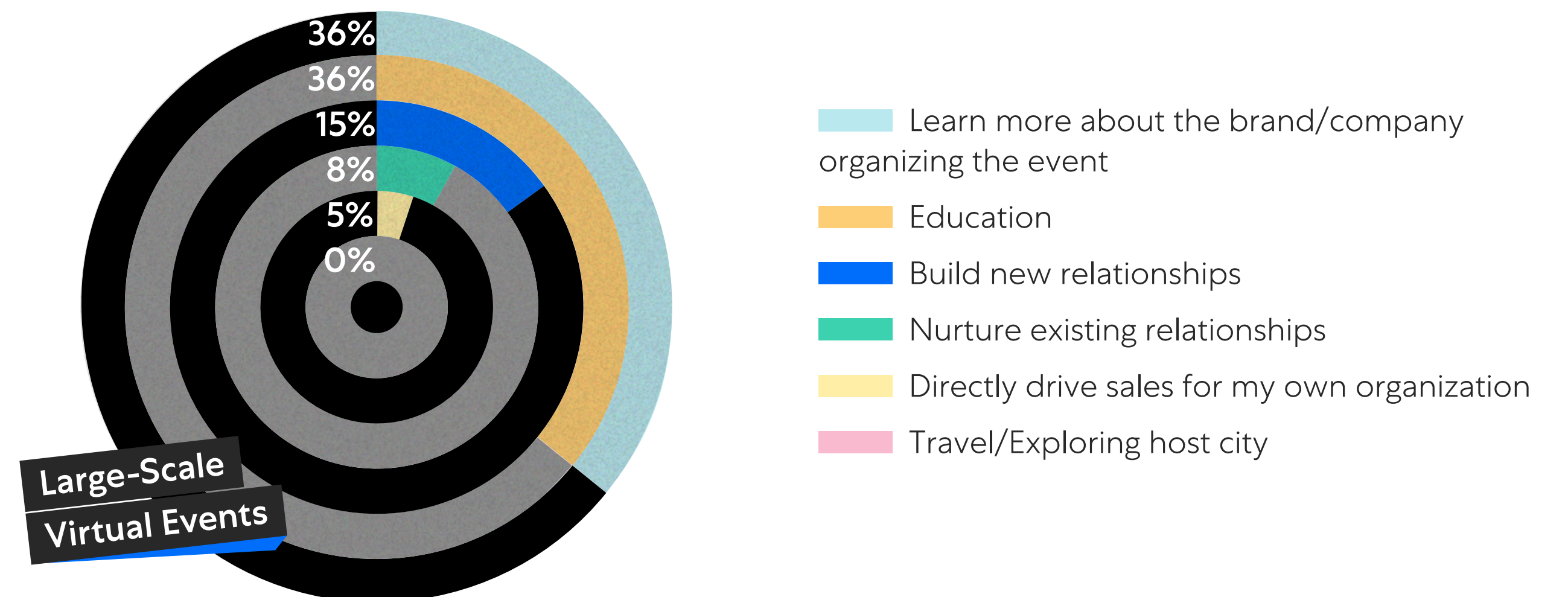
Paid vs. Free Virtual Large-Scale Events

83% of companies are charging or planning to charge attendance fees for large-scale virtual events next year *(Figure 14)*. Half of attendees are also happy to pay for large-scale virtual events *(Figure 15)*.

The increased focus on revenue from organizers seen in Figures 10, 11, and 14 could be connected to the lower cost of creating online events vs in-person events. Costs are likely to be more easily recouped with ticket sales, something which was unusual for in-person events pre COVID-19.

It's also true that if attendees need to pay, they are more likely to attend once they have registered for the event, solving for the challenge of high registrations but low attendance.

*Percentages in Figure 14 do not add up to 100% due to rounding up of numbers.

Figure 14

Organizers' Approach to Charging for Large-Scale Virtual Events

94%

68%

15%

10%

8%

Not charging and no plans to do so

Not charging but plan to next year

Charging and plan to continue doing so

Charging and plan to stop
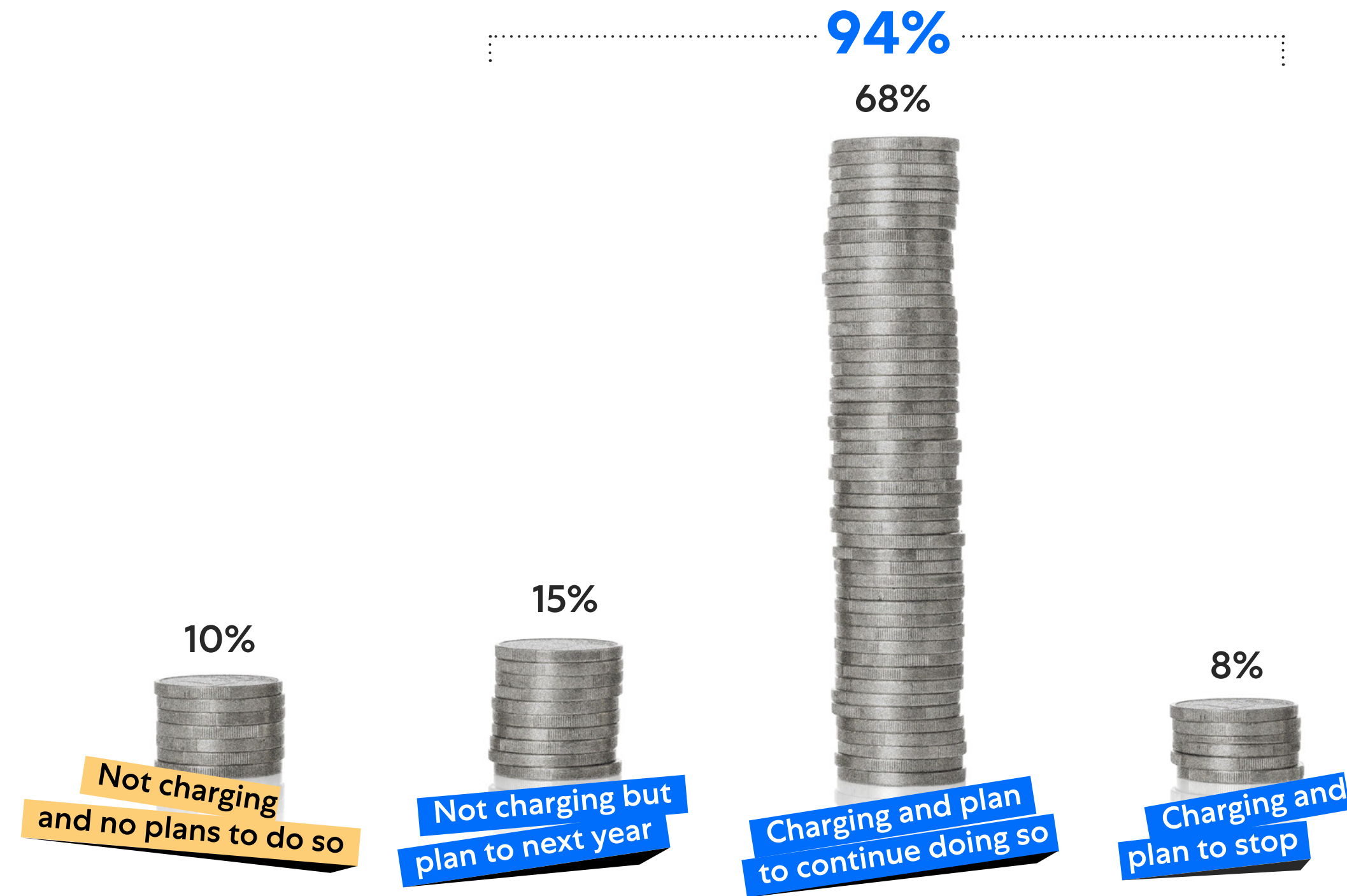
Figure 15

Attendees' Willingness to Pay for Large-Scale Virtual Events

Yes, I'm willing to pay — 48%

No, I'd rather not pay — 52%

Top Benefits for Organizers of Large-Scale Virtual Events Compared to In-Person Events

Organizers were asked to choose their top three benefits when considering large scale virtual events over in-person events. These were **increased registration** (36%), followed by **greater ROI** (26%) and **greater attendee engagement** (25%).

The benefits are clearly greater than simply maintaining business continuity throughout the pandemic, and while organizers may not be prioritizing new relationships *(Figure 11)*, this is still a notable benefit of virtual events.

This question allowed for more than one answer and as a result, percentages add up to more than 100%.

Figure 16

Top Benefits for Organizers of Large-Scale Virtual Events Compared to In-Person Events

Benefit	Percentage
Increased registration	36%
Greater ROI	26%
Greater attendee engagement	25.3%
Greater attendance from high-value attendees/VIPs	24.9%
Increased attendance	24.5%
Get richer insights about attendees	24%
Generate digital content that can be integrated into marketing/sales efforts	23%
Lower production costs	22%
More opportunities to personalize event experience to different audience segments	22%
Easier to run	21%
Audience is more global/geographically dispersed	20%
Easier to integrate data or content into marketing/sales efforts	14%

The Organizers' Perspective

Top Benefits of Large-Scale Virtual Events: Attendees

The top benefits, according to attendees, for attending large-scale virtual events are that they are **easy to attend** (67%), have a **low cost to attend** (49%), and **present no pressure to be "on"** (36%).

These results are in line with what organizers are seeing: an increase in registration for virtual events *(Figure 16)*.

Figure 17

Top Benefits of Large-Scale Virtual Events
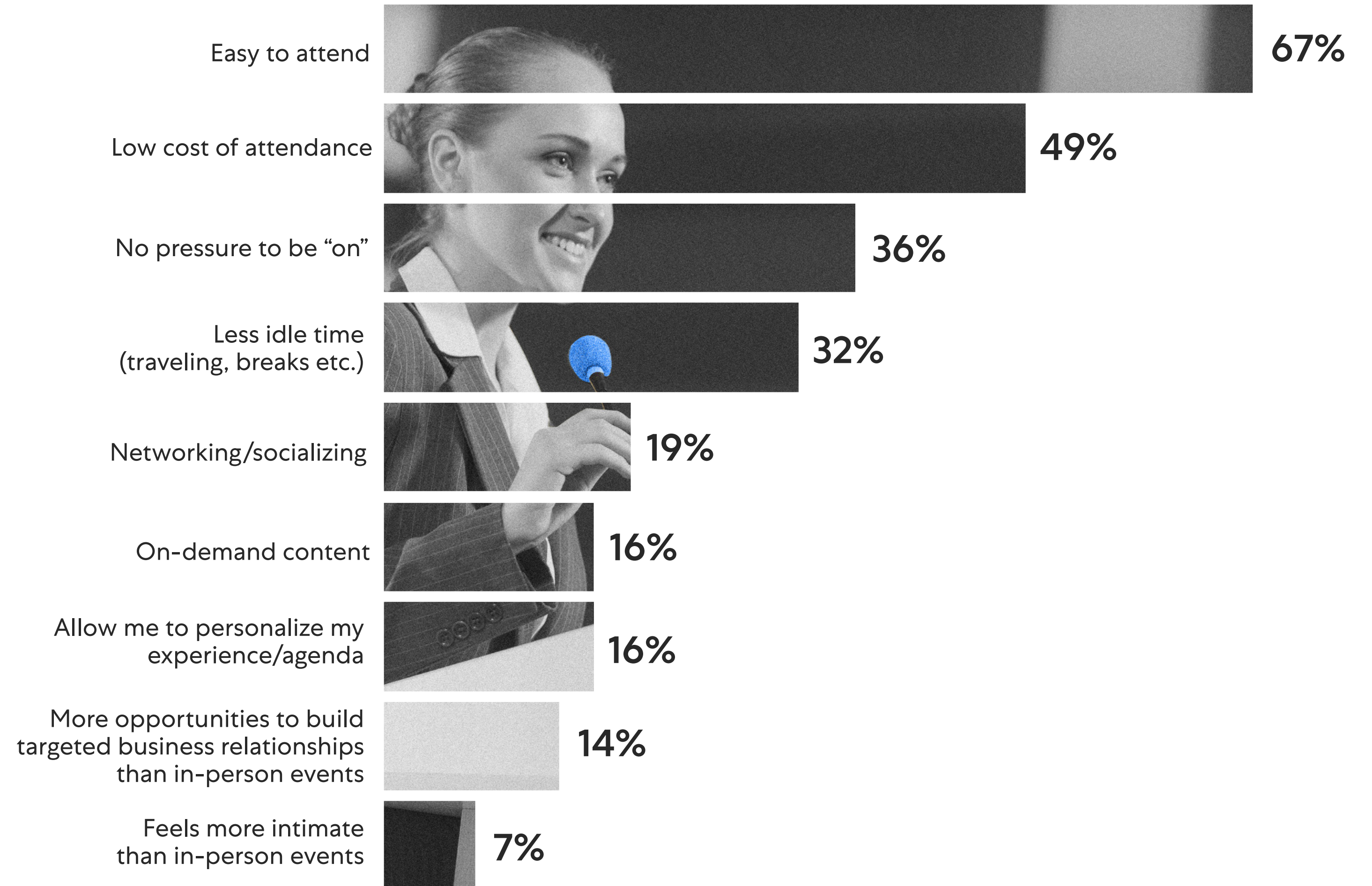
Easy to attend	**67%**
Low cost of attendance	**49%**
No pressure to be "on"	**36%**
Less idle time (traveling, breaks etc.)	**32%**
Networking/socializing	**19%**
On-demand content	**16%**
Allow me to personalize my experience/agenda	**16%**
More opportunities to build targeted business relationships than in-person events	**14%**
Feels more intimate than in-person events	**7%**

* This question allowed more than one answer and as result, percentages will add up to more than 100%.

Top Challenges Post-Event of Large-Scale Virtual Events

The top challenge for organizers when it comes to post-event operations of large-scale virtual events is **integrating registrant data into their CRM (77%)**.

This was followed by integrating data into existing marketing operations (50%) and coordinating follow-up with sales teams (37%).

While virtual events provide the opportunity to glean more data than in-person events do, they have opened up new challenges for integrating this information cross-functionally.

Organizer Tip: Have a post-event plan for integrating and using event data so you can hit the ground running with marketing and sales efforts, and so you don't leave valuable insights on the table.

* This question asked respondents to select their top 3 choices, and as result, percentages will add up to more than 100%.

Figure 18

Top Challenges Post-Event of Large-Scale Virtual Events

Challenge	Percentage
Integrating registrant data into CRM	77%
Integrating event data into existing marketing operations	50%
Coordinating follow-up with the sales team(s)	37%
Managing post-event on-demand resources	36%
Coordinating with virtual events platform vendor	34%
Coordinating follow-up with marketing team(s)	23%
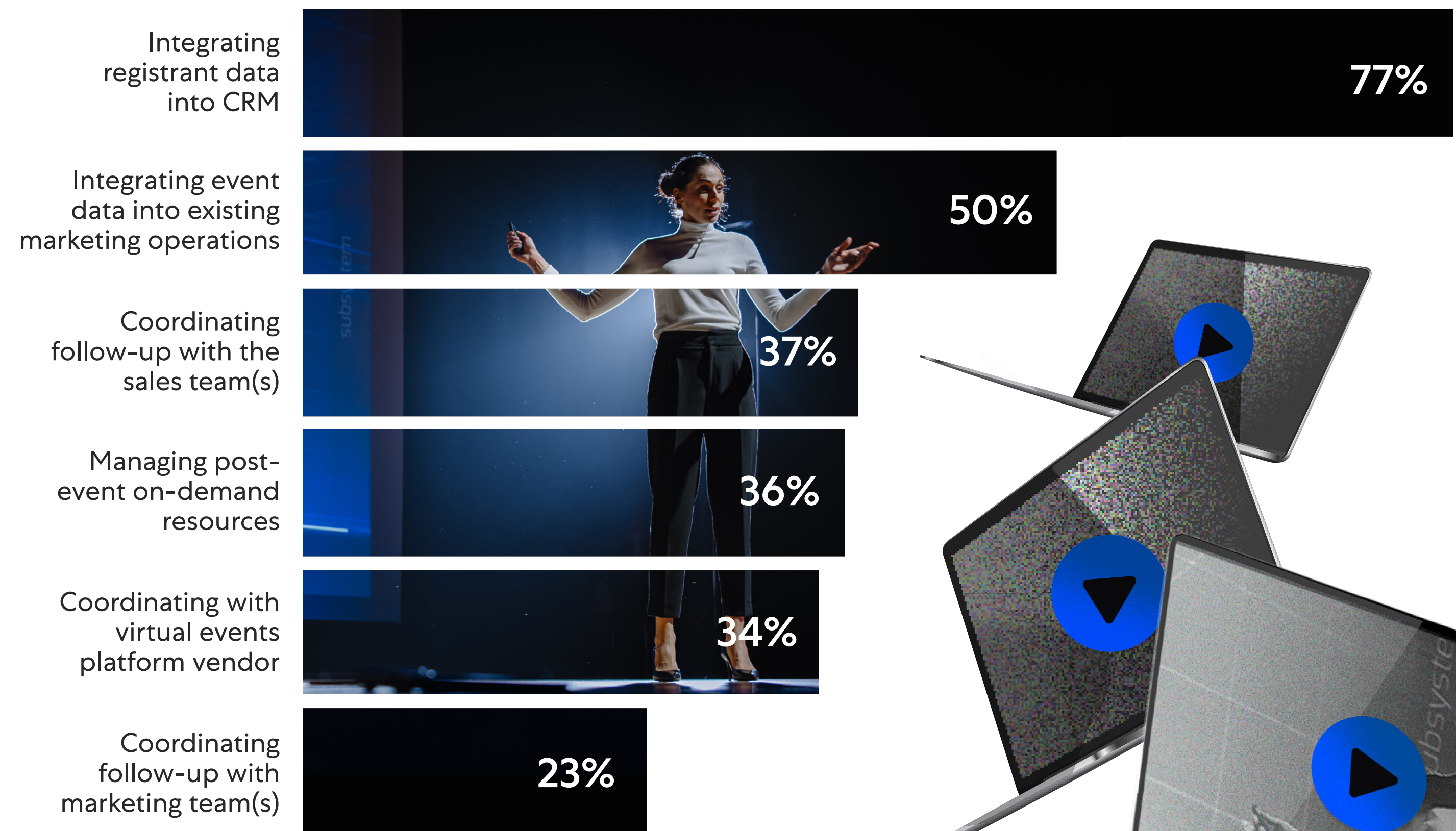
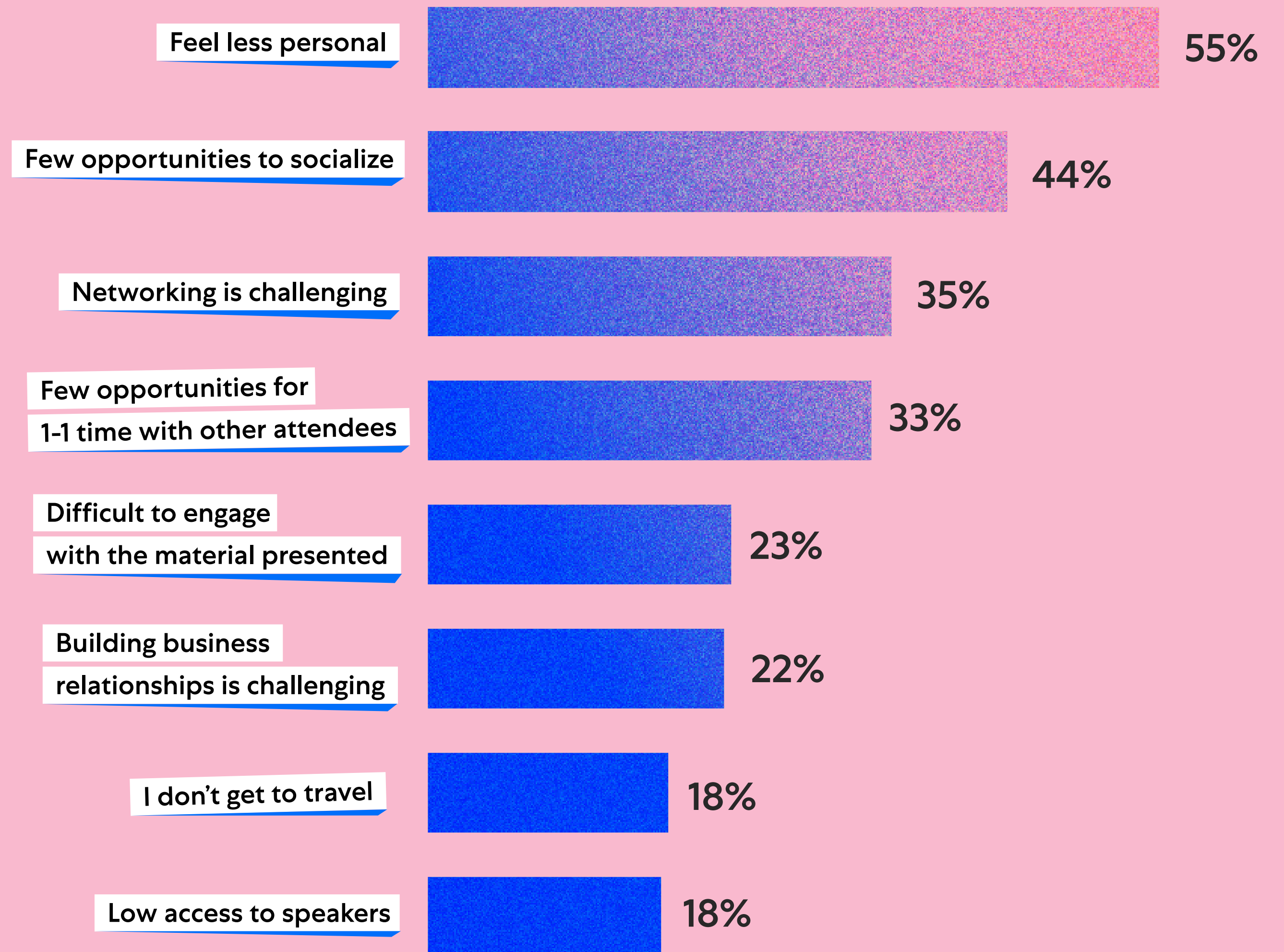# Biggest Drawbacks of Large-Scale Virtual Events: Attendees

The top drawbacks of large-scale virtual events, according to attendees, are that they **feel less personal** (55%), followed by **fewer opportunities to socialize** (44%) and **challenges in networking** (35%).

Organizer Tip: These large challenges of socializing and networking show how important it is for organizers to look for ways for attendees to meaningfully connect, as this is something that's clearly missing today.

This question allowed more than one answer and as result, percentages will add up to more than 100%.

Figure 19

Biggest Drawbacks of Large-Scale Virtual Events

Feel less personal — **55%**

Few opportunities to socialize — **44%**

Networking is challenging — **35%**

Few opportunities for 1-1 time with other attendees — **33%**

Difficult to engage with the material presented — **23%**

Building business relationships is challenging — **22%**

I don't get to travel — **18%**

Low access to speakers — **18%**

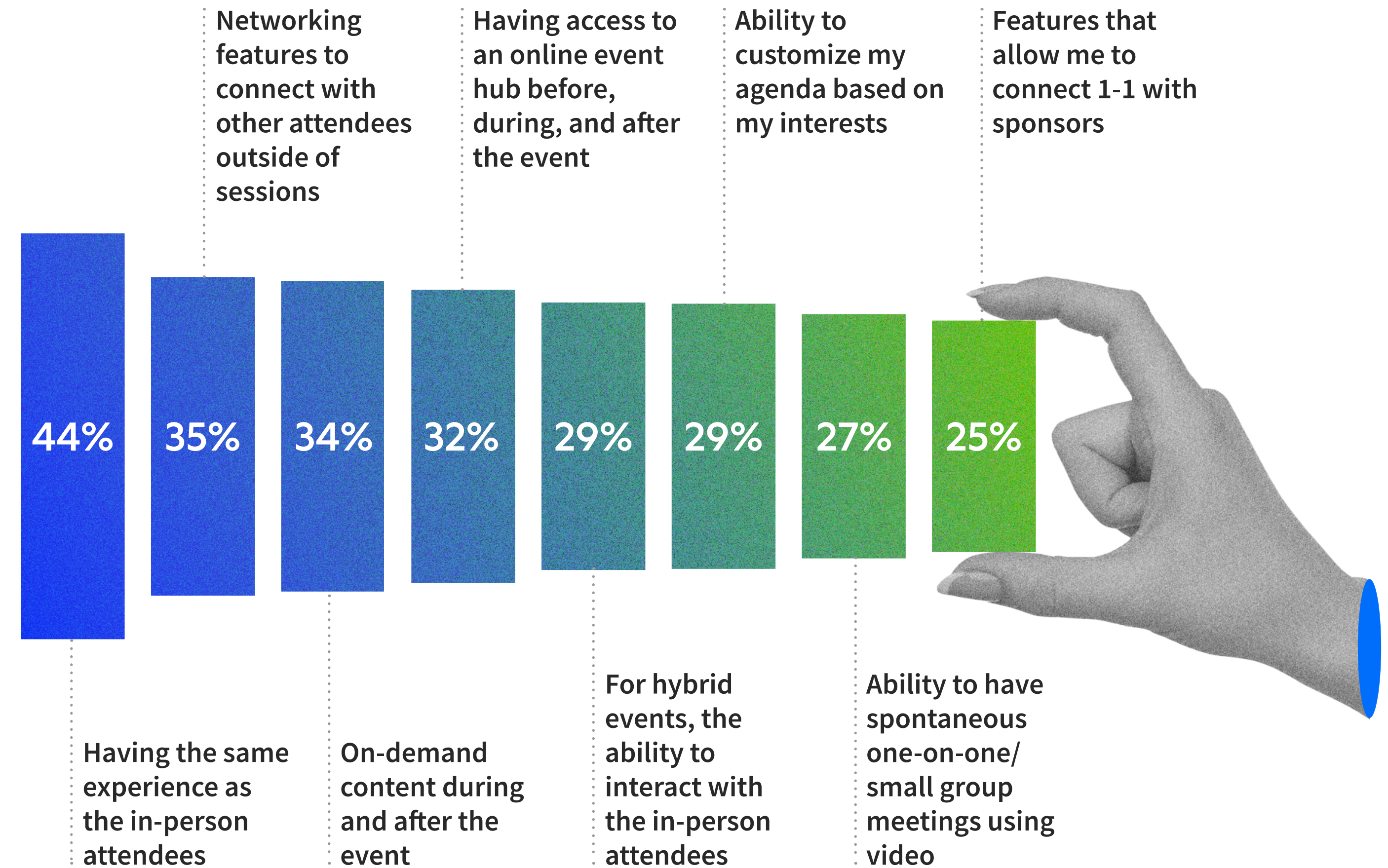# Top Desired Elements of Virtual Events According to Attendees

We asked attendees what the most important elements are when attending a virtual event.

The top answers were **having the same experience as an in-person attendee** (44%), getting **networking opportunities** outside of sessions (35%), and having **on-demand content** during and after the event (34%).

Organizer Tip: If you are going to <u>focus on a hybrid strategy</u>, it's clearly very important to create an environment where those attending virtually have as strong an experience as those who attend in-person. This should be complete with opportunities for on-demand learning and networking.

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* This question allowed more than one answer and as result, percentages will add up to more than 100%.

Figure 20

Top Desired Elements of Virtual Events According to Attendees

Bar chart showing percentages:
- 44% — Having the same experience as the in-person attendees
- 35% — Networking features to connect with other attendees outside of sessions
- 34% — On-demand content during and after the event
- 32% — Having access to an online event hub before, during, and after the event
- 29% — For hybrid events, the ability to interact with the in-person attendees
- 29% — Ability to customize my agenda based on my interests
- 27% — Ability to have spontaneous one-on-one/ small group meetings using video
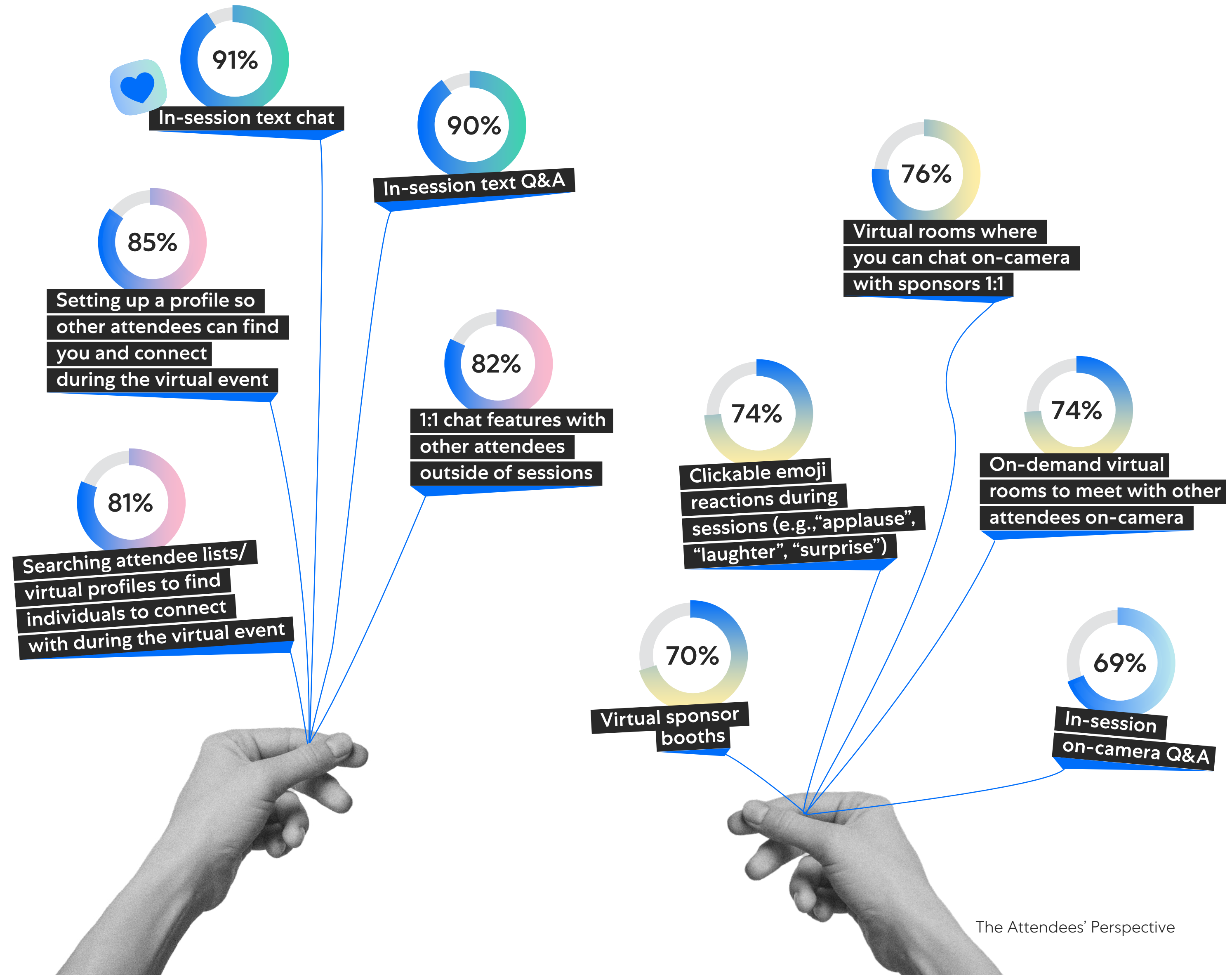- 25% — Features that allow me to connect 1-1 with sponsors

Top Features of Virtual Platforms According to Attendees

The top features attendees are most likely to use in a virtual event platform are in-session text chat (91%), in-session Q&A (90%), and setting up a profile so that other attendees can find them and connect during the virtual event (85%).

These are all about networking – reiterating that **organizers need to emphasize the social experience so that attendees don't feel like they're missing out.** These don't need to mimic in-person experiences, but instead should harness socializing and networking features that feel digitally native (e.g., social profiles, text and video chat, messaging, etc.).

This question allowed more than one answer and as result, percentages will add up to more than 100%.

The Attendees' Perspective

Figure 21

Top Features of Virtual Platforms According to Attendees

- **91%** In-session text chat
- **90%** In-session text Q&A
- **85%** Setting up a profile so other attendees can find you and connect during the virtual event
- **82%** 1:1 chat features with other attendees outside of sessions
- **81%** Searching attendee lists/ virtual profiles to find individuals to connect with during the virtual event
- **76%** Virtual rooms where you can chat on-camera with sponsors 1:1
- **74%** Clickable emoji reactions during sessions (e.g.,"applause", "laughter", "surprise")
- **74%** On-demand virtual rooms to meet with other attendees on-camera
- **70%** Virtual sponsor booths
- **69%** In-session on-camera Q&A

Most Popular Virtual Event Session Types: Attendees

The top sessions attendees look forward to at virtual events are expert Q&As (47%), demos (38%), and virtual happy hours (33%).
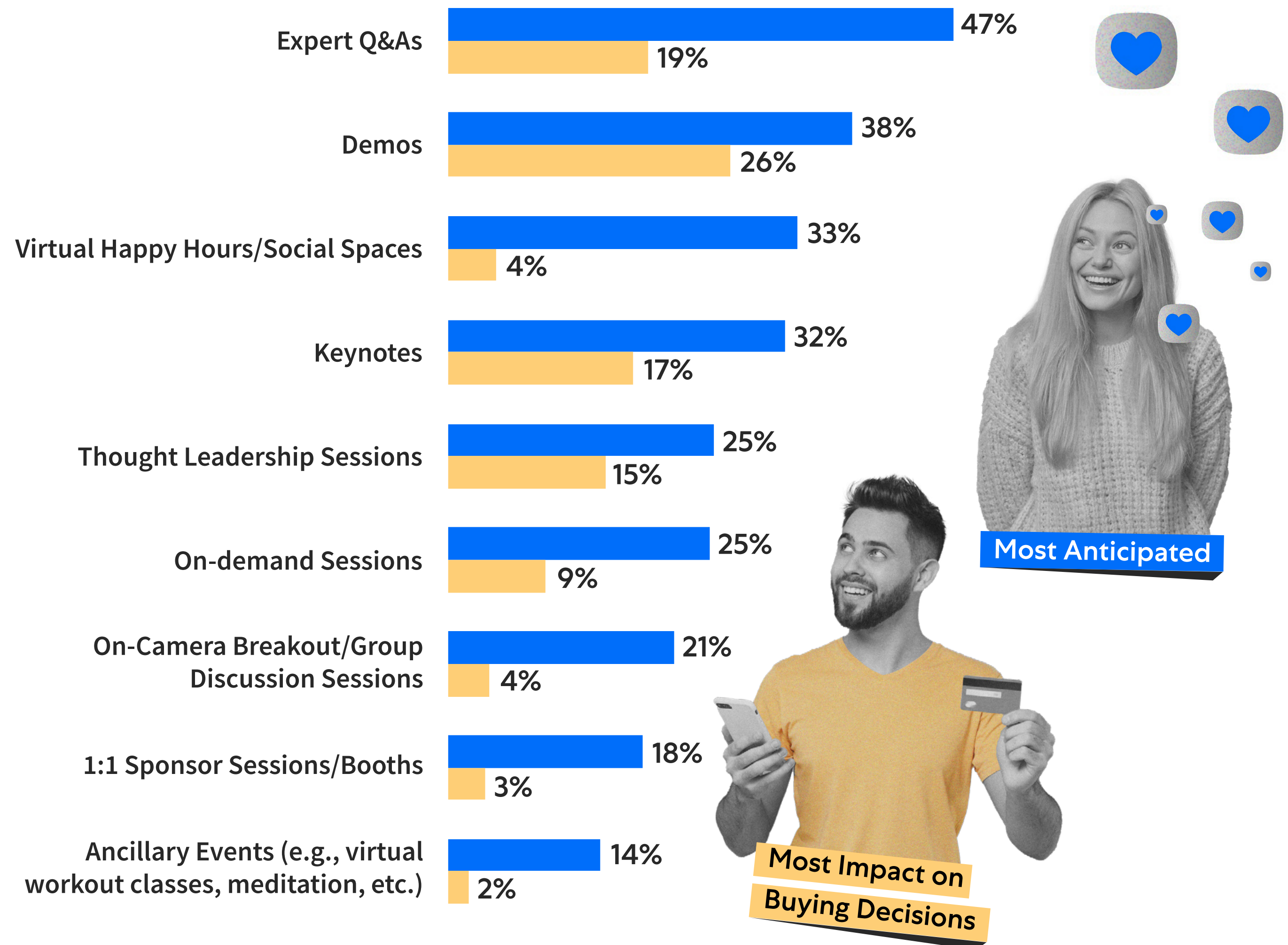
As for session types that they feel are most successful at helping inform their buying decisions, the top sessions are demos (26%), expert Q&A (19%) and keynotes (17%).

People may enjoy the socializing aspect of virtual events, but it doesn't necessarily impact their buying decisions, at just 4% of the vote.
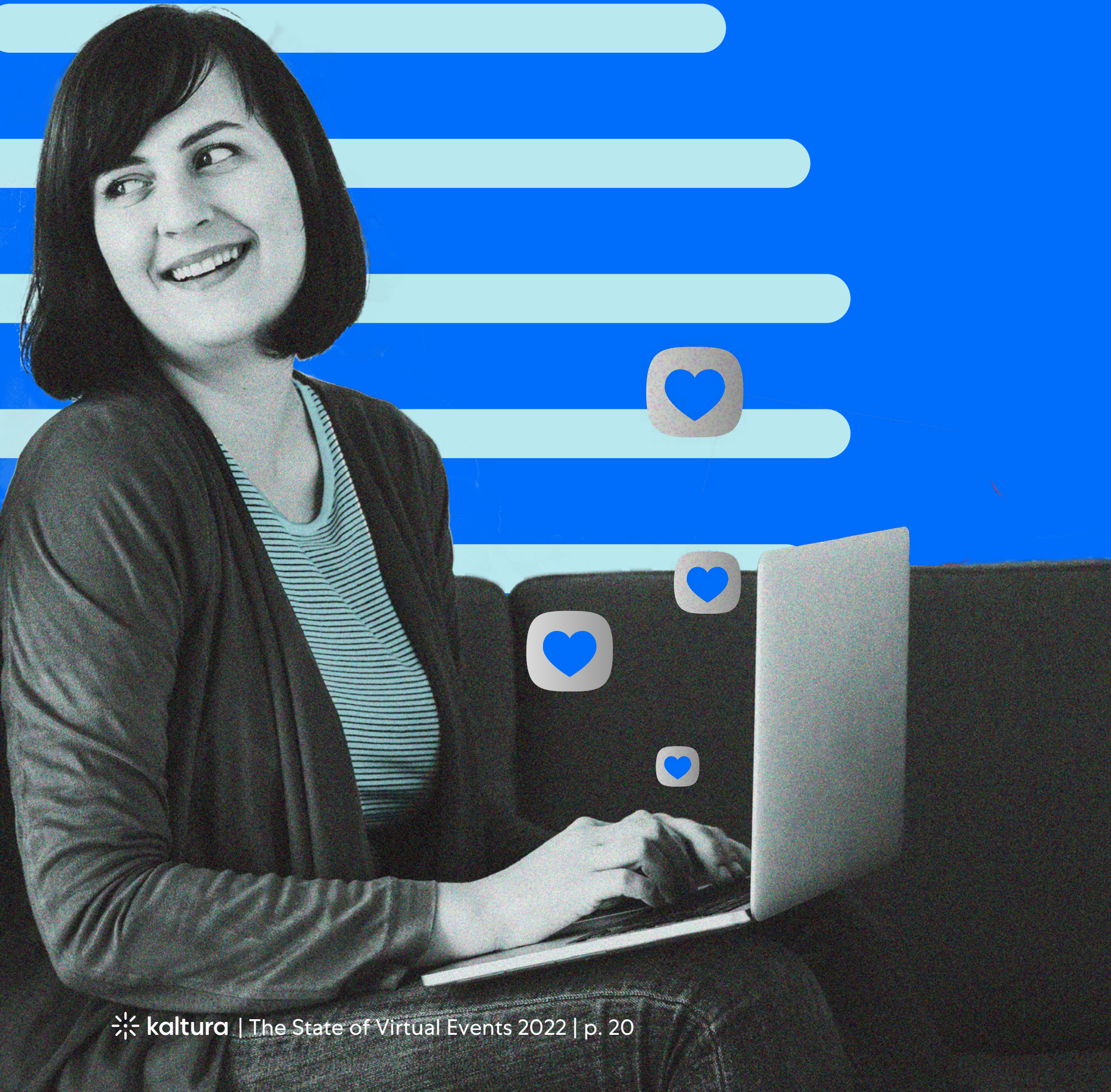
*"Most Anticipated" allowed more than one answer and as result, percentages will add up to more than 100%. "Most Impact" was a single choice and percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding up of numbers.

Figure 22

Virtual Event Session Types – Top Anticipated vs. Most Impact on Buying Decisions

Session Type	Most Anticipated	Most Impact on Buying Decisions
Expert Q&As	47%	19%
Demos	38%	26%
Virtual Happy Hours/Social Spaces	33%	4%
Keynotes	32%	17%
Thought Leadership Sessions	25%	15%
On-demand Sessions	25%	9%
On-Camera Breakout/Group Discussion Sessions	21%	4%
1:1 Sponsor Sessions/Booths	18%	3%
Ancillary Events (e.g., virtual workout classes, meditation, etc.)	14%	2%

Most Anticipated

Most Impact on Buying Decisions

The Attendees' Perspective

About Kaltura

An industry-leading, fully customizable platform, Kaltura Virtual Events provides the full range of video technology to power any event, of any size, while delighting your audience and boosting engagement.

A full video tech stack supports multi-day or multi-track events, live keynotes, webinars, lectures, workshops, 1:1 chat, and virtual sponsor booths. And with real-time analytics, Kaltura Virtual Events offers you the data you need to optimize the attendee experience and enhance your audience segmentation.

Kaltura Virtual Events is carefully designed and flawlessly managed. Kaltura offers planning and design event services to help you create the right experience for your brand and community, as well as operations support you can rely on to ensure a smooth event end-to-end.