

Global Exhibitor Insights 2019/2020

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Welcome



Dear industry colleagues,

Welcome to this latest UFI/Explori report covering the needs and expectations of our industry's customers around the world. Over the past years, these reports have evolved into trusted global snapshots of what exhibitors as well as visitors around the world are expecting from us, the providers of – in most cases – their core marketing channel.

After updating the visitors views last year, this report again focuses on the exhibitor side. Drawing on the full Explori database that covers more than 140,000 trade show exhibitor responses, the teams prepared a quantitative survey of exhibitors. My thanks to the many exhibition organisers and partners around the world who passed that survey on to their respective exhibitors! The success of this research is based on this wide global industry collaboration.

The result is a data set based on the specific feedback from around 1,500 exhibiting companies from 50 countries. As the title of our report clearly states, these are valid global insights into trends and expectations – they don't claim to be representative of specific markets or industries in general. To escape the bias of focusing on exhibiting companies, we also conducted a quantitative survey of marketing decision makers who have not exhibited in the last two years. And – as we did last year with the visitors – we also held in-depth individual interviews with exhibitors, event directors and senior marketers to discuss and analyse the findings.

The results of all this work are presented here. Some are encouraging, others challenging. All of them are for sure, interesting.

We hope that you will get a lot of take-away from this study and we would like to thank SISO for their support.

Finally, I invite you to share any feedback you have about this report with us. You can reach us at research@ufi.org.

I wish you an enjoyable and fruitful read.

Yours sincerely,

Kai Hattendorf

UFI Managing Director / CEO



About UFI

The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry

UFI is the leading global association of the world's tradeshow organisers and exhibition centre operators, as well as the major national and international exhibition associations, and selected partners of the exhibition industry.

UFI's main goal is to represent, promote and support the business interests of its members and the exhibition industry. UFI directly represents around 50,000 exhibition industry employees globally, and also works closely with its 54 national and regional associations members.

Around 800 member organisations in 87 countries and regions around the world are presently signed up as members.

Around 1,000 international trade fairs proudly bear the UFI approved label, a quality guarantee for visitors and exhibitors alike. UFI members continue to provide the international business community with a unique marketing media aimed at developing outstanding face-to-face business opportunities.

Key areas of focus

Building on UFI and Explori's previous Global Visitor and Global Exhibitor Insight reports, this study investigates:

1.

How the trade show industry has evolved in the eyes of exhibitors since 2017

2.

The exhibitor experience at individual shows and with trade show marketing as a channel

Methodology



A meta-analysis from Explori's database of over 140,000 trade show exhibitor responses in 30 languages



A quantitative survey of exhibitors, gaining 1,457 responses in 10 languages and representing trade show participation in 50 countries

3.

The role of trust in the exhibitor / organiser relationship

4.

How the exhibitor experience differs by region, sector and demographic

5.

How the views of current exhibitors differ from marketing decision makers who choose not to include trade shows in their marketing mix



A quantitative survey of marketing decision makers who have not exhibited in the last two years



In-depth interviews with exhibitors, event directors and senior marketers



Comparison with the 2018 Global Visitor Insights report - the full report is available at www.ufi.org/research

Key findings

The big picture

Whilst satisfaction with individual exhibitions remains consistent (3.57/5), overall, trade shows are getting slightly worse in the eyes of survey participants with half saying they are getting a little or much worse. There is also indication of marketers not intending to exhibit more frequently in markets where the industry is more developed, particularly in North America.



Experiences to remember

Whilst many exhibitors see the value in making trade shows a more memorable experience for visitors, they see the responsibility as shared between themselves and the organisers. 84% will aim to make their stand as enjoyable as possible, whilst 73% believe organisers should invest in making the event more enjoyable for visitors.

The power of face-to-face

Exhibitors believe strongly in the power of face-to-face marketing, rating trade shows more highly than all other channels in meeting their communication needs. But at the same time they are intending to increase their use of other channels, notably social media.

An experience with dissatisfying elements

Most exhibitors find participating in trade shows involves some dissatisfying experiences in the show build up as well as during the exhibition.

Cost of booth and services, visitor numbers and footfall are all important areas where they see potential for improvement in advance of and during the show.

PERCENTAGE OF EXHIBITORS SUGGESTING IMPROVEMENTS TO THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

90%
before show



Biggest potential improvement = cost of booth and services

96%
during show



Biggest potential improvement = footfall and visitor numbers

79%
after show



Biggest potential improvement = ROI support

Return on Investment is key

Unclear return on investment is the biggest driver of dissatisfaction, followed by overall cost. Many exhibitors find it challenging to measure sufficient return from the trade shows they attend to justify the outlay. Risk around ROI is the most frequently given reason for low advocacy scores.

Trust plays an important role

Whilst exhibitors believe trade shows are an effective channel for building trust with their own customers, this trust does not always extend to organisers and suppliers.

Exhibitors have particular concerns around unverified visitor numbers in some regions.

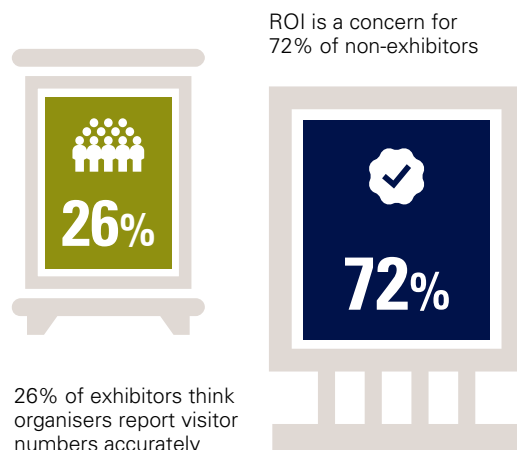
Exhibitors who are able to place more trust in organisers, typically give higher Net Promoter Scores™. Trust levels are not rising with those who exhibit regularly.

Little fish in a big pond

Aversion to trade shows as a channel is strongest amongst the group of small companies who also feel organisers do not give them enough support. This group also feels least able to take the risk of high trade show costs.

A risky business

Marketers who don't exhibit at trade shows perceive these as a risky activity with high costs and unpredictable return. 72% believe the return on investment is too low. Many view trade shows as ineffective or not suitable for their target audience. They place more value on digital and social channels.



Lack of advocacy from exhibitors

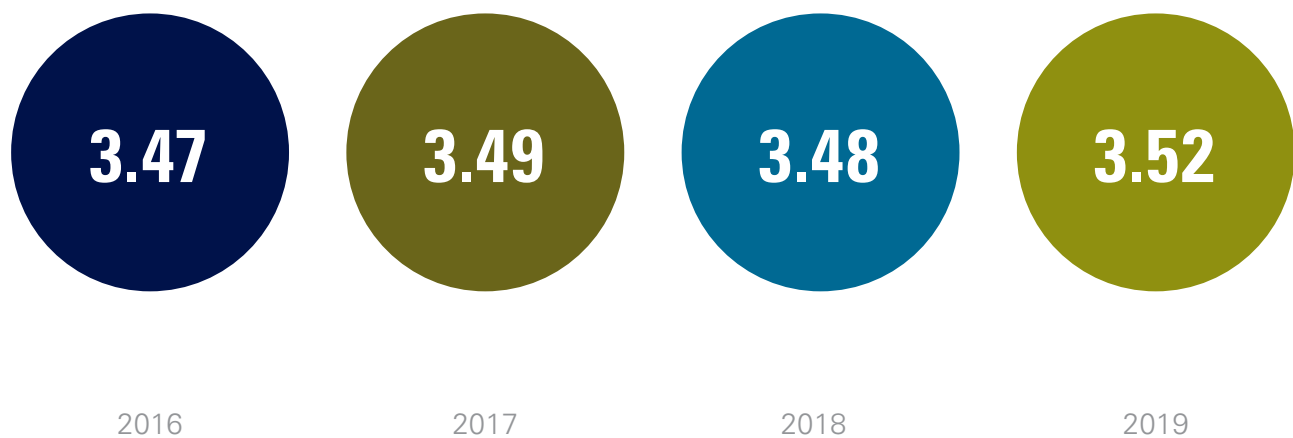
Following from the points raised above, whilst there are areas of outstanding exhibitor advocacy in every geography and every sector, overall the survey participants are giving the channel a Net Promoter Score™ (NPS) overall of -25.

This means that, currently, most exhibitors who took part in this survey would not recommend exhibit marketing as a channel to their colleagues – below the total industry score of -15 given by the full Explori exhibitor data set.

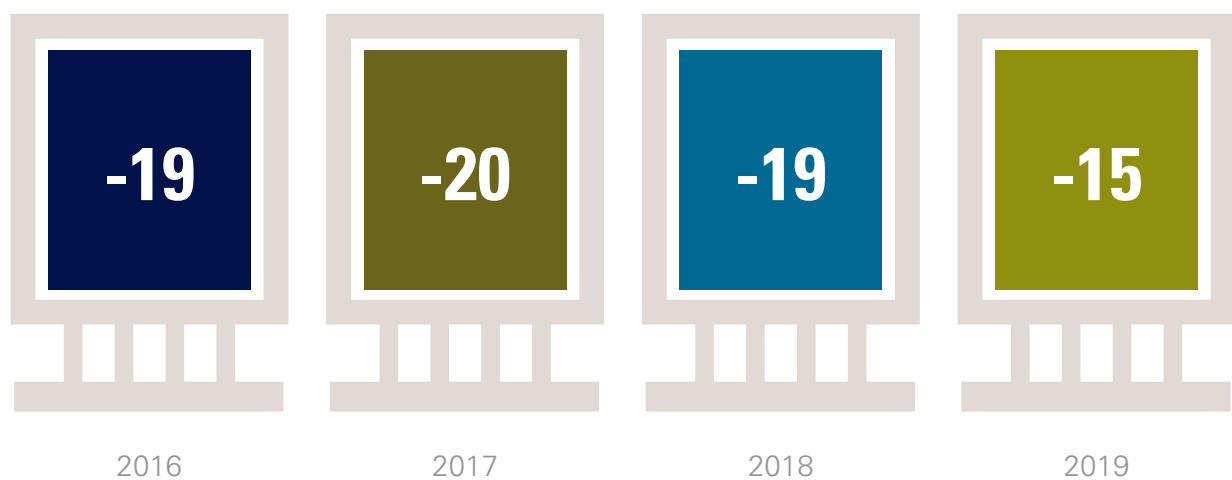
The big picture

Using Explori's global benchmarks from 2016 to 2019, we can see there is stable performance for the industry as a whole in key markers of exhibitor experience such as overall satisfaction and Net Promoter Score™ (NPS)*.

OVERALL SATISFACTION BY YEAR



NET PROMOTER SCORE™ BY YEAR



* Developed by Bain and Satmatrix, Net Promoter Score™ is a widely recognised measure of how likely an individual is to recommend a product or service. More information can be found at www.explori.com/nps-explained

Regional comparisons

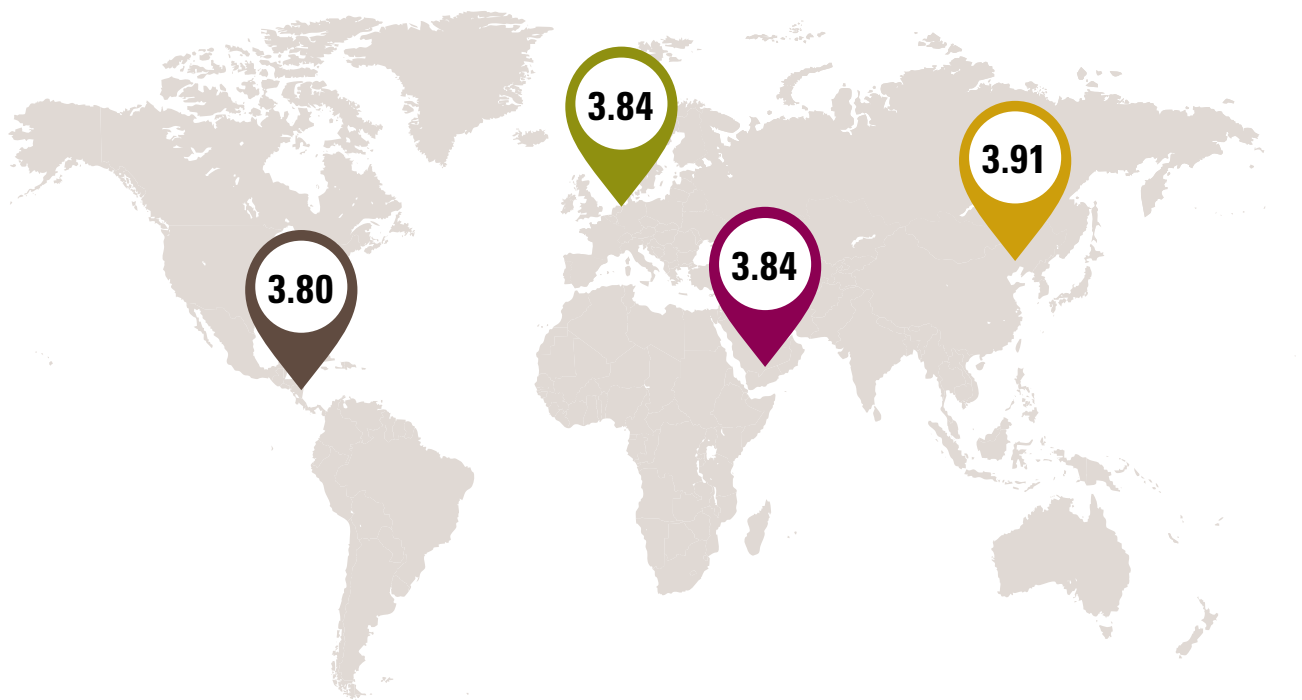


Taken from the Explori global dataset, we can see that regional scores for loyalty (measured by likelihood of return) and overall satisfaction, do not always follow the same pattern. Here scores are shown out of 5.

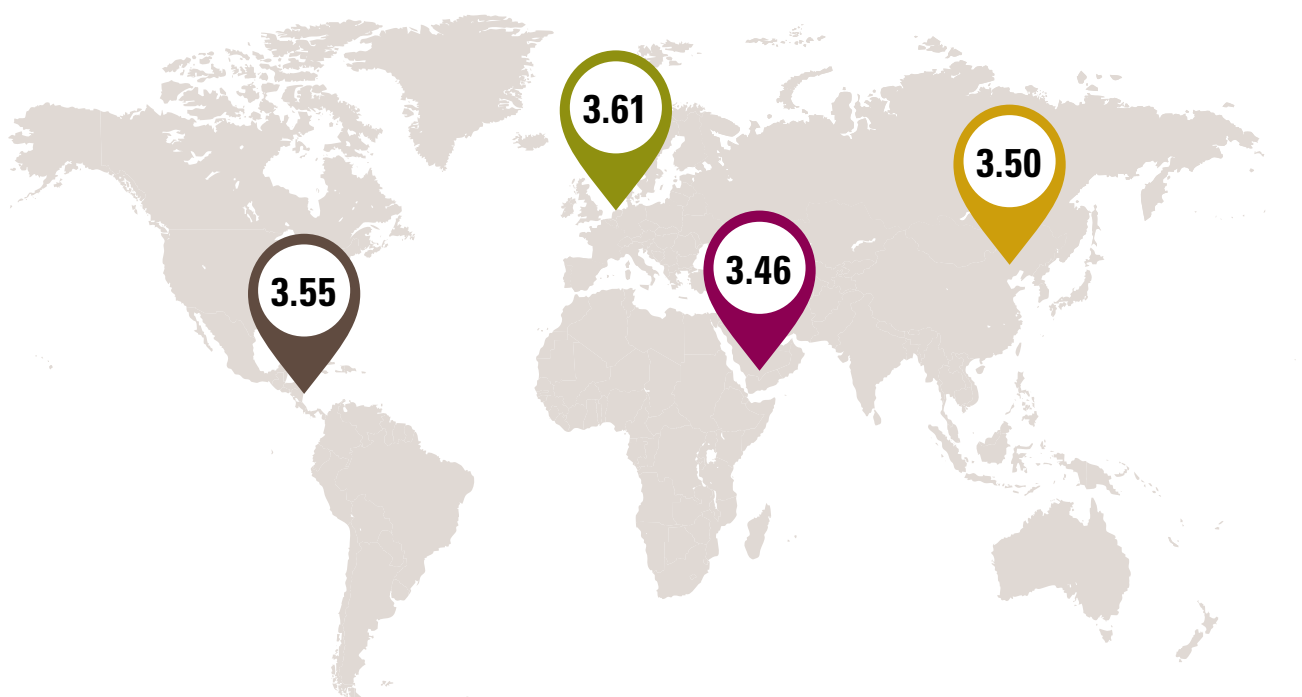


As with visitors, exhibitors in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) and Asia Pacific (APAC) are more likely to return to exhibitions that do not fully satisfy their needs when compared with their counterparts in Europe. This suggests an opportunity for disruption by new entrants that are better at satisfying the needs of their exhibitors, or are providing a better customer experience.

LIKELIHOOD OF RETURN



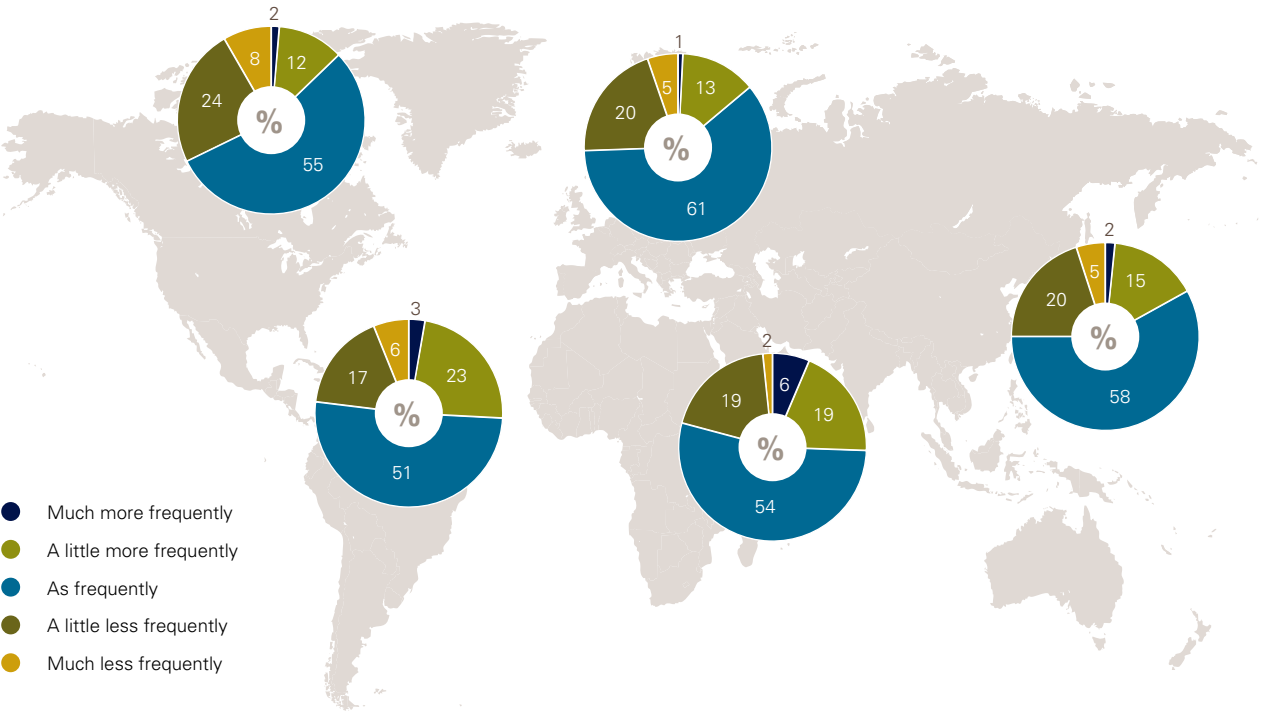
OVERALL SATISFACTION



Fatigue and future use



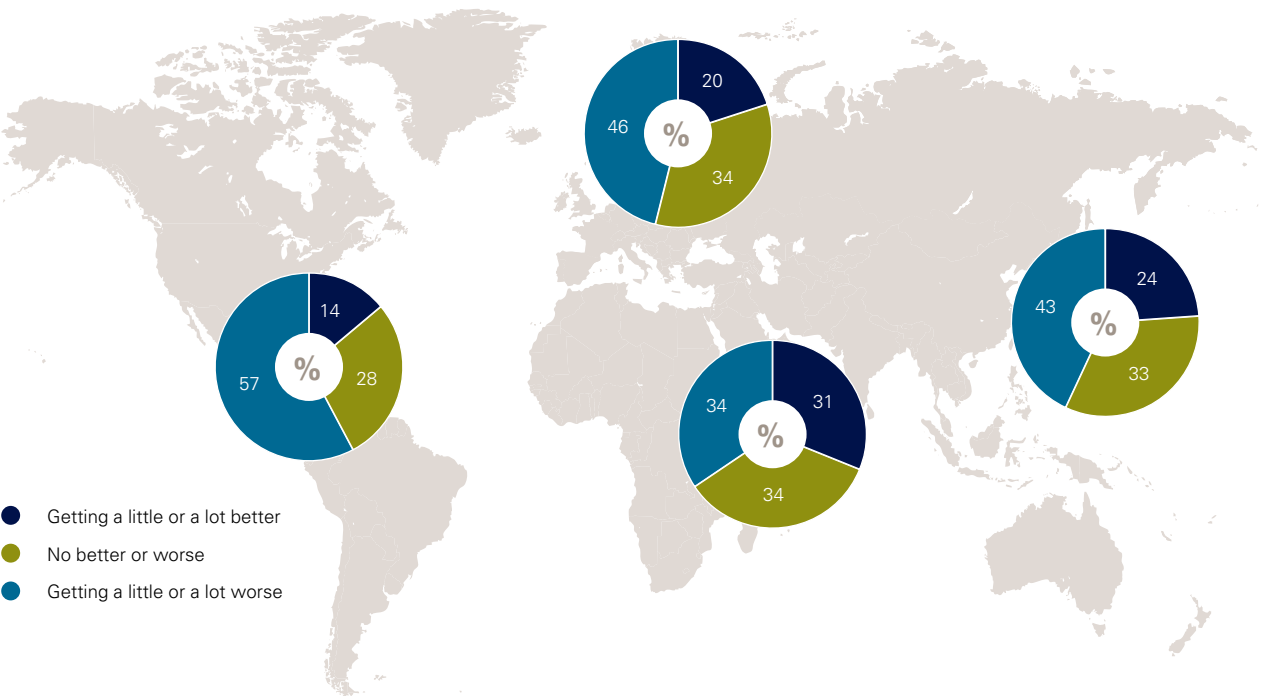
Whilst most regions could anticipate seeing levels of exhibiting to remain stable or decline somewhat, in MEA and Latin America, survey respondents are more likely to report that they intend to increase the number of shows they participate in.



Are trade shows are getting better or worse?



Half of survey respondents feel that trade shows are getting a little or much worse. This figure is higher for North America.



“

...I do think trade shows are a great way to meet unknown and unexpected potential customers.

Exhibitor

“

The face-to-face interaction does so much to open the conversation about your brand and its quality, as well as your integrity in the industry.

Exhibitor

“

...the overall trade show cycle has become a time-suck that distracts and diverts our attention and efforts from what's most important.

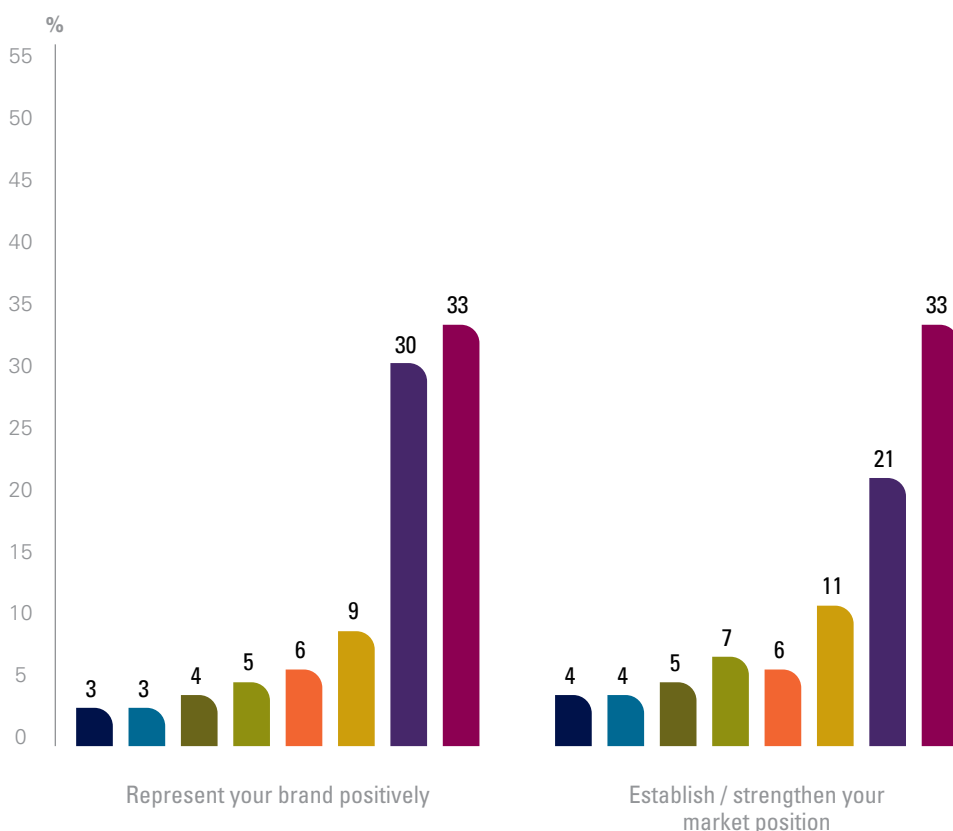
Exhibitor

Comparison with other channels

Exhibitors believe in the power of face-to-face marketing. They rate trade shows as the top performing channel to meet all their business communication objectives. However, they do appreciate the value of other channels, especially social media, when it comes to representing their brand positively and enhancing their position in the market.

FAITH IN FACE-TO-FACE

- Online marketplaces
- Trade associations
- Conferences
- Trade media
- Corporate events
- Online knowledge platforms
- Social media
- Trade shows



“

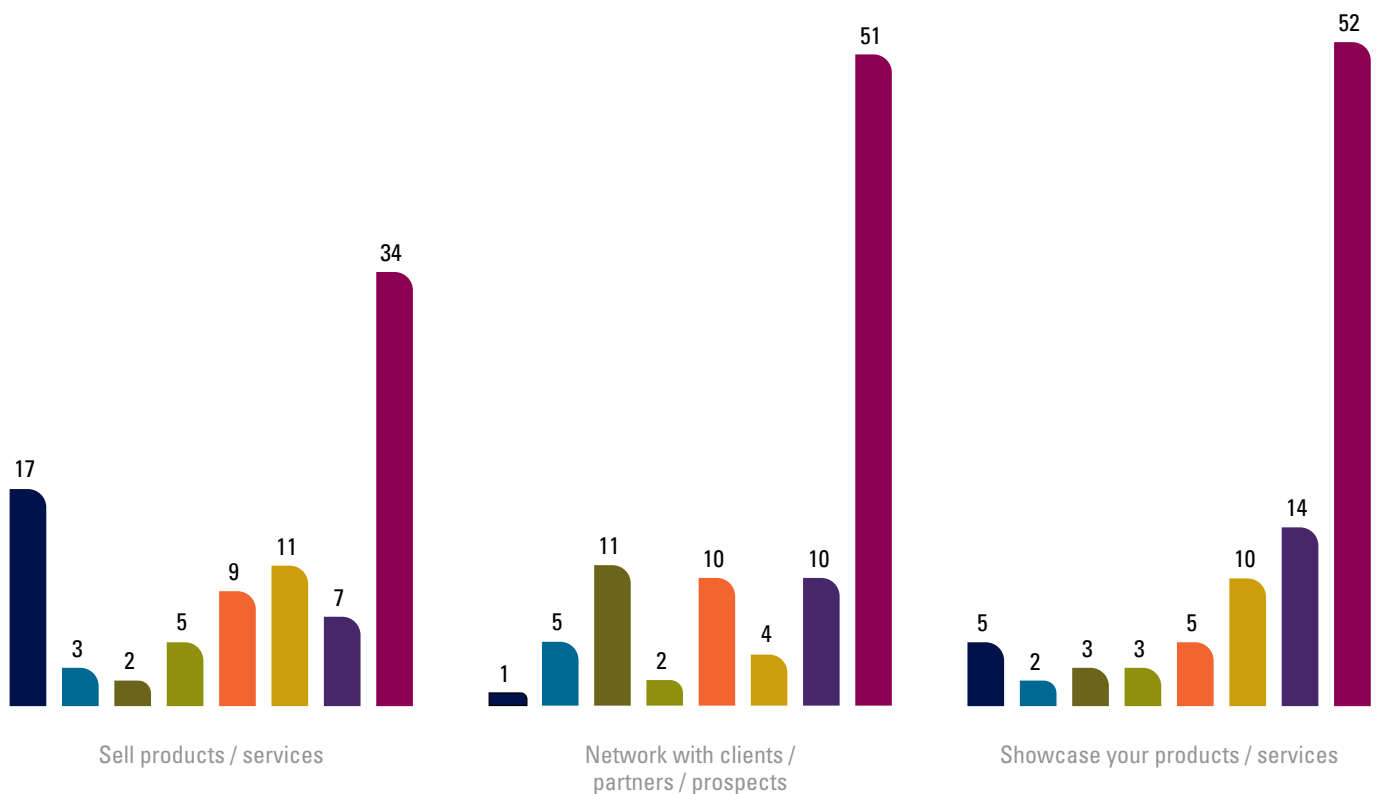
There are other, more cost-effective, marketing channels, specifically digital, to reach a broad audience with targeted messaging, for a lower cost.

Exhibitor

“

The internet is making trade shows less critical relative to finding new customers. Social media is making interacting with customers on the show floor less important.

Exhibitor



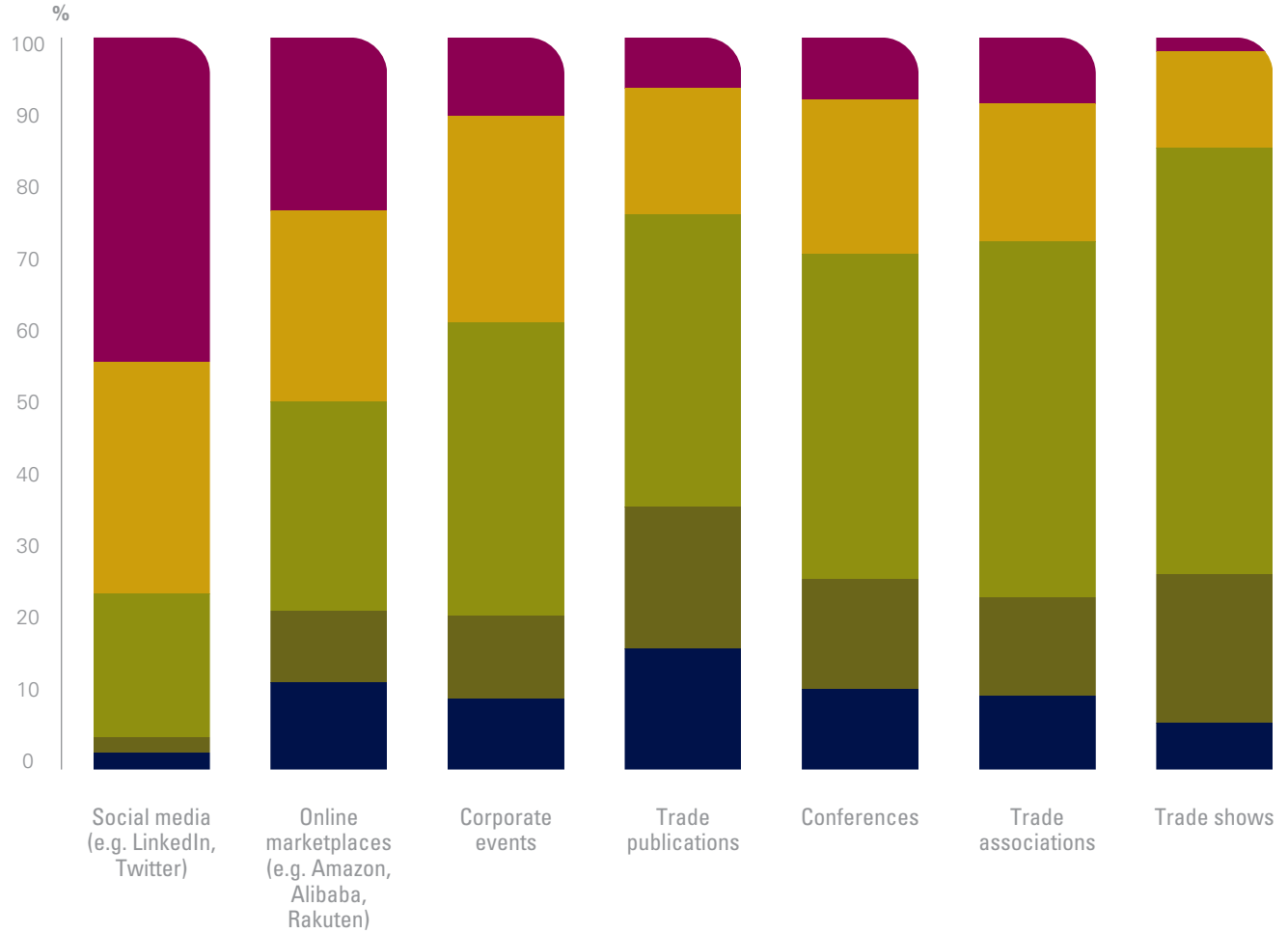


Whilst in most regions survey respondents told us they intended to somewhat reduce the amount they exhibited, they intend to notably increase their use of social media, online marketplaces and corporate events.

They also indicate that they would like trade show organisers to make more use of digital and social channels to engage, and extend the value the show can bring to them beyond the few days they are exhibiting – sending a clear message to trade show organisers about how they want the offering around the show floor to develop.

THE RISE OF OTHER CHANNELS?

- Much more frequently
- A little more frequently
- As frequently
- A little less frequently
- Much less frequently



“

Online tends to be more structured and I think one of the big pluses of events is that you also have unplanned meetings and you discover new opportunities that arise that you never would have thought of before.

Organiser

“

I think people are still finding that trade shows have such a valuable place in the market because digital doesn't replace face-to-face or the ability to actually physically look at products....

Organiser

“

I've recently done an analysis of our marketing from the last five months and our conferences have a very low conversion rate compared to our website, marketing partnerships, and online listings.

Exhibitor

Drivers of exhibitor experience

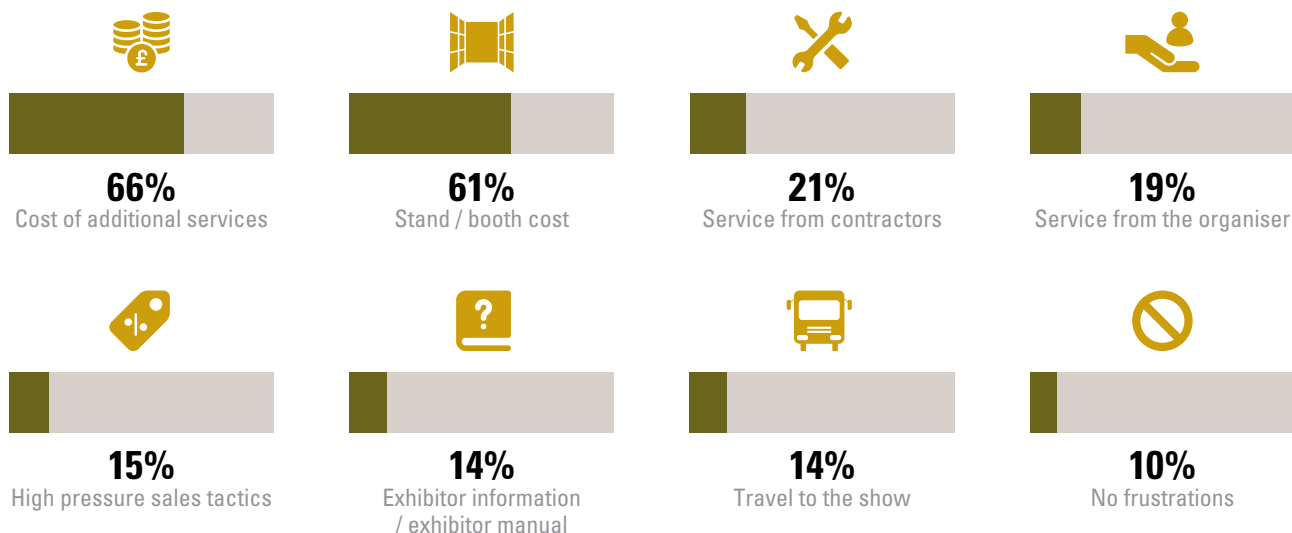
Dissatisfaction during the show cycle

» Dissatisfaction with the exhibiting experience in part explains the low levels of satisfaction and advocacy the industry experiences. Exhibitors have given organisers a clear indication how to improve the customer journey for them during key stages: the sales and planning process; being on site; and the follow-up process.

Sales and planning process

» 90% of exhibitors experience some kind of dissatisfaction in the run-up to the show. This is a particular issue for exhibitors in North America, where the cost of additional services is a notable pain point. However exhibitors in regions where the trade show market is still developing, experience less frustration around pricing - they are more concerned with the information they receive, for example through exhibitor manuals.

ELEMENTS OF THE PLANNING PROCESS CAN BE UNSATISFACTORY





“

Extortionate rates to exhibit and increasing year on year. [...] they are becoming economically unviable. [...]

Exhibitor

“

Price. Between booth cost, higher hotel costs, travel costs and living costs it's very expensive to exhibit.

Exhibitor

“

Lack of information for vendors/ exhibitors. This includes what is needed of us, move in/out instructions, detailed show information, etc.

Exhibitor

“

When you schedule for the same thing every year, prices should not have that big of a difference. [...]

Exhibitor

“

Registration paperwork – not clear, complicated, hard to fill out, time consuming.

Exhibitor

At the show



In more developed markets, the number of visitors and footfall are the biggest concerns, especially in North America where over half of exhibitors experience this as a source of disappointment. But in less developed markets, wi-fi becomes the most reported frustration.

In most markets, at least one in three exhibitors feel the position of their booth didn't meet their expectations.

Yet it is visitor numbers which have the strongest impact on whether an exhibitor feels trade shows are beneficial to their business.



There are too many shows now and it makes my customer choose which to attend. This means I have to guess where my customer will be and where it is worth the investment. [...]

Exhibitor



I've been doing trade shows for 24 years. The past 10 years have been slowly getting worse and worse as far as buyers who attend the trade shows.

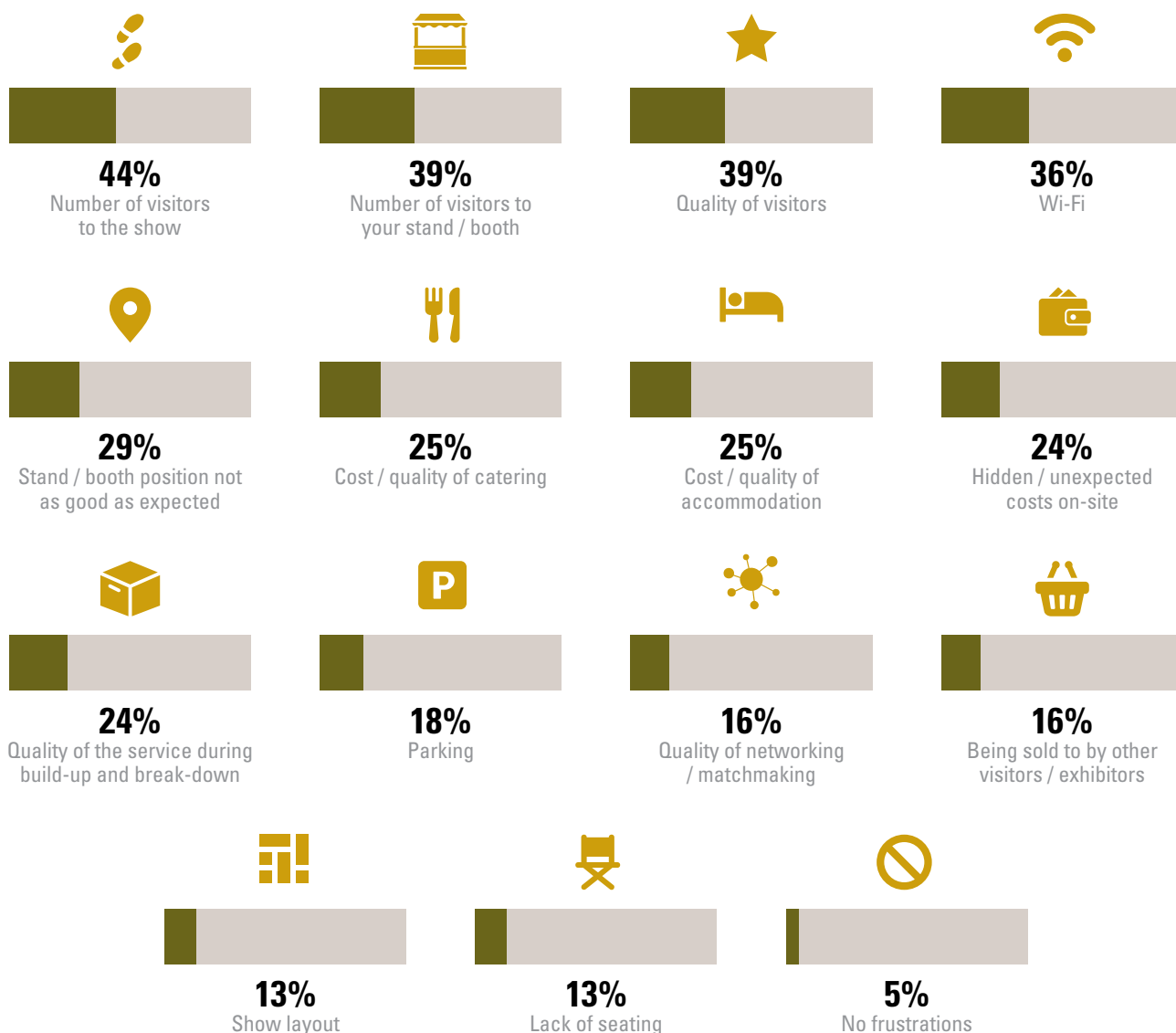
Exhibitor



Everything is very manual, it's so archaic. We went to a show one year where they requested that we fax them the forms. It just takes so much effort to register and figure out how to get everything.

Exhibitor

VISITOR NUMBERS AND FOOTFALL CAN CAUSE CONCERN



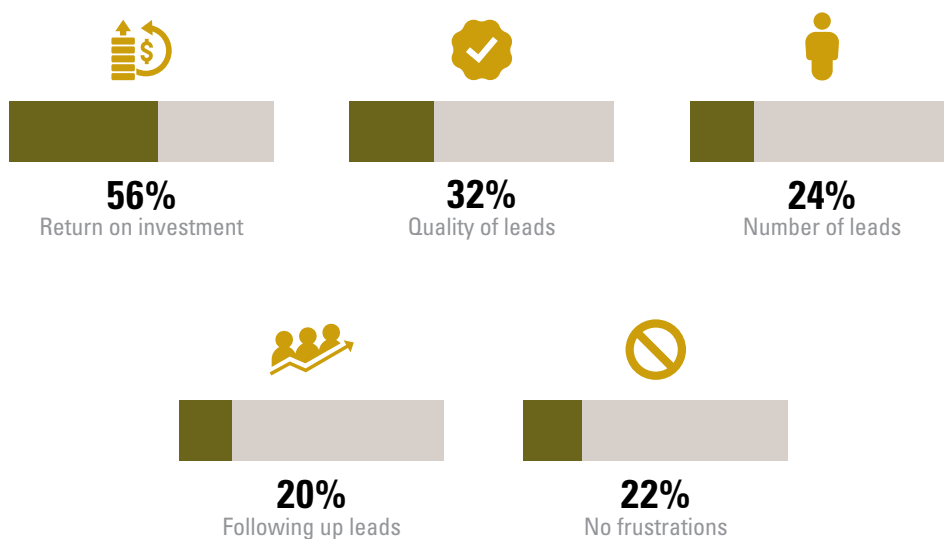
What are your biggest frustrations at the show?

After the show

>> The picture is somewhat more positive in the weeks following the event, with at least one in five exhibitors not experiencing any further pain points rising to one in four in Europe and MEA. However, over half are disappointed with their return on investment, rising to 60% in North America. Over a third feel frustrated by the quality of the leads they have collected.

Areas that are within the control of the exhibitor can also cause negativity, with one in five struggling with following up the leads they have collected.

GENERATING ROI CAN PRESENT A CHALLENGE



What are your main frustrations after the show?

“

The ROI can be hit or miss and cannot always be tangible in terms of actual sales which can make the financial investment a risk.

Exhibitor

“

ROI can be low – a very high risk to the exhibitor.

Exhibitor

“

I think the return on investment on trade shows today is not necessarily great, and especially for a company such as ours. We're a comparatively small company in the business so obviously our ability to spend huge amounts of money on having a huge and flashy booth at a trade show are very limited. So the amount of exposure that we can afford is very, very limited.

Exhibitor

What are the most important drivers of exhibitor satisfaction?



In this derived importance analysis, based on Explori's global database, we can see how important different aspects of exhibiting are for driving exhibitor satisfaction.

The data suggests that exhibitors are successful at meeting objectives around awareness and branding. However, they are much less successful at meeting their more commercial objectives such as generating new sales leads and taking orders. Yet these are the objectives that are the biggest drivers of satisfaction.

Where organisers are successful in helping exhibitors meet these commercial objectives, they are more likely to score highly for overall satisfaction. This is an important influence on exhibitor Net Promoter Score™, which, in the 2017 Global Exhibitor Insights project, Explori demonstrated was linked to the commercial growth of a trade show in terms of visitor numbers, exhibitor numbers and exhibitor revenue.

There are three aspects to this chart:

1.

The size of the bubble represents how common the objective is (min 10%).

2.

Its position on the vertical axis represents how successful exhibitors are in meeting this objective, with a score out of five, where five is the best possible result.

3.

Its position on the horizontal axis represents how closely this objective is correlated with satisfaction.



A platform of trust?

The power of face-to-face



Exhibitors believe strongly in the power of face-to-face marketing, particularly when it comes to building trust in their brand, with 70% of exhibitors stating they believe trade shows are an effective channel to build trust amongst their customers.

Of the communication channels available to them, they see trade shows as being the most effective platform to build trust, with trade publications and online marketplaces being the least effective channels in their opinion.

FACE-TO-FACE BUILDS CUSTOMER TRUST

- Very effective
- Fairly effective
- Somewhat effective
- Not very effective
- Not at all effective



How effective is this channel in building trust with your customers?

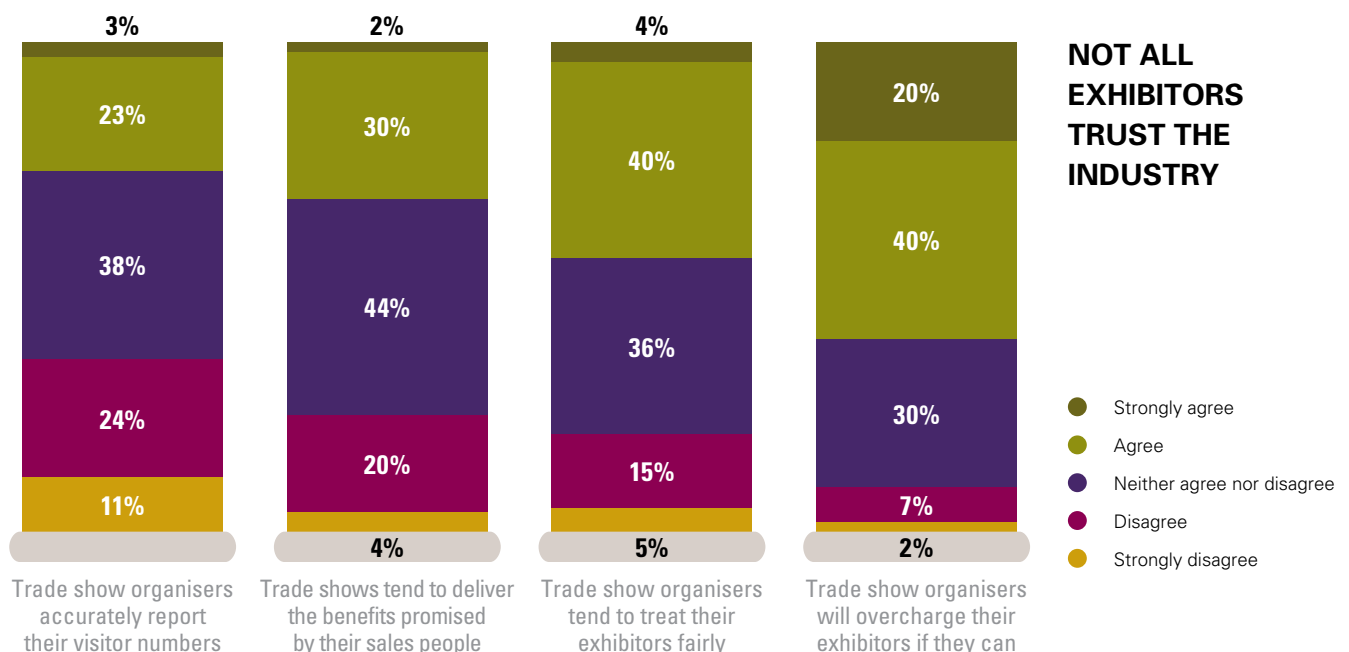
Trust is lacking between exhibitors and organisers

>> This trust however, does not extend to the relationship between the exhibitors and the organisers themselves. When asked to rate their agreement with a series of positive and negative statements, survey respondents revealed that they perceive a lack of transparency from organisers.

Perceived overcharging and unverified visitor numbers were areas of particular concern. Two-thirds of exhibitors felt that organisers would overcharge if they could and only one quarter believe that organisers accurately report their visitor numbers.

Exhibitors from North America are significantly more likely to agree that organisers overcharge than exhibitors from other regions.

Almost one in ten exhibitors strongly disagree that organisers report their visitor numbers accurately. Again North America report the lowest trust in this aspect, whilst exhibitors in Europe and APAC are slightly more likely to agree that organisers report accurately.



Experience of non-exhibitors



In addition to seeking the views of current exhibitors, Explori also surveyed marketing decision makers who had not exhibited at a trade show in the last two years*.

Their preference for other channels was quite widely split, with 30-40% making use of direct selling, digital marketing, print advertising and direct mail respectively. But non-exhibitors do strongly favour social media, with 84% including it in their marketing. 60% also reported that they expected their use of social media marketing

to increase, vs. only 13% who anticipated any increase in their use of trade shows.

When asked why they didn't use trade shows, less than 5% stated they had a bad experience exhibiting in the past. The most common apprehension is financial, while issues with target audiences and time commitment are factors for some. They frequently referred to exhibiting as being a high-risk marketing activity, with comparatively large costs and less predictable return.

MARKETERS EXPERIENCE MANY BARRIERS TO EXHIBITING



4%

We used to exhibit at trade shows but had (a) bad experience(s)



7%

Concerns about sustainability / environmental impact of trade shows exhibitions



7%

Too much travel required



10%

I'm not sure how to go about exhibiting



10%

There is no suitable event in my region



10%

I prefer other marketing channels



13%

I just haven't considered it



17%

There is no suitable event in my industry



17%

I don't have the time



22%

I don't think trade shows are effective



23%

Our target audience does not attend trade shows



37%

I don't have the budget

» Concern about return on investment is a more common reason for not exhibiting than the overall expense. Over two-thirds feel return on investment is too low, compared to half of marketers who do regularly exhibit.

* Accessed via a data broker, 115 respondents from UK, USA and Germany.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT IS SEEN AS BIGGEST RISK

28% They are too expensive

72% The return on investment is too low

44% They take too much time and effort to organise

32% It is too hard to measure the return on investment

What could entice non-exhibitors?



The majority of non-exhibitors remain open to the channel if their concerns can be addressed. However, at 34%, every third non-exhibitor surveyed for this report felt there was nothing that could be done to encourage them to exhibit at trade shows in the future.

The biggest single recommendation by far was to reduce cost (31%) with other notable responses being increased footfall (7%) and better support for small businesses (7%).

TWO THIRDS OF NON-EXHIBITORS COULD RETURN



34% Nothing



31% Reduce cost



7% Visitor footfall



7% Deals for small businesses

“ ”

I would love them to be a bit more financially acceptable and have more logistical ease.

Non-exhibitor



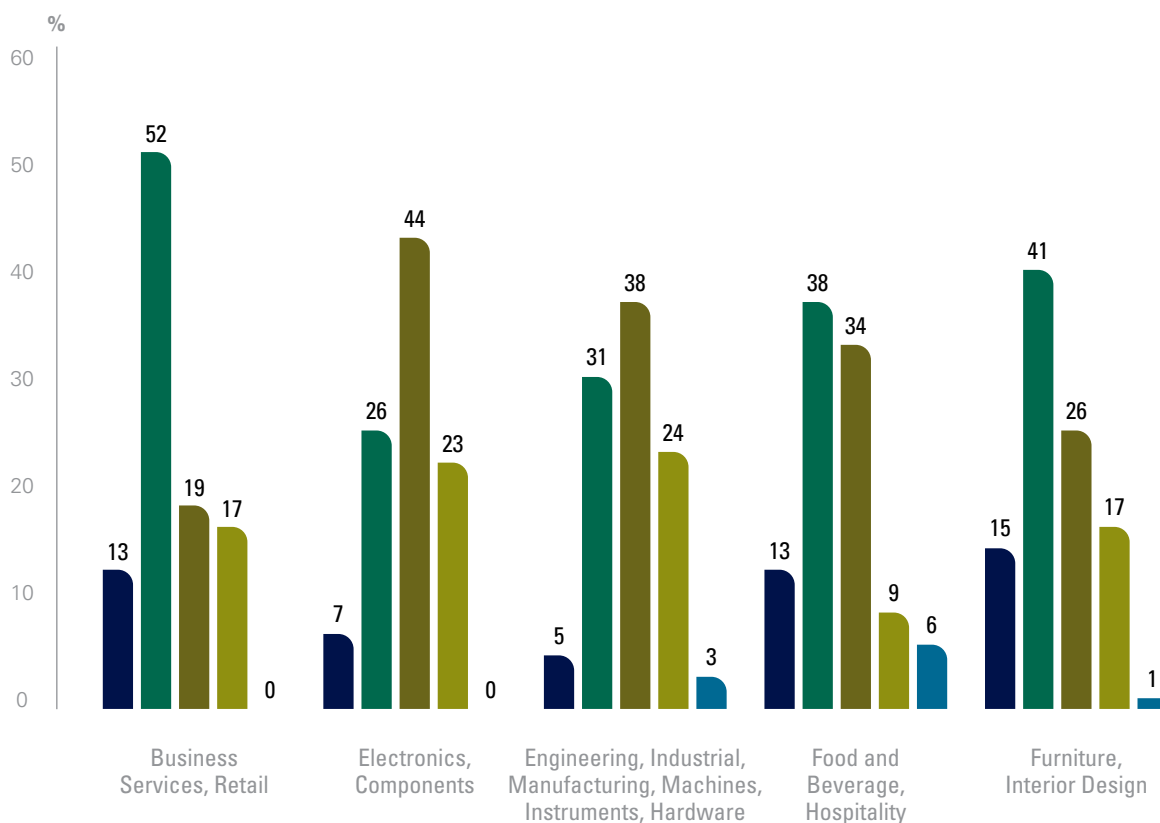
How do sectors compare?

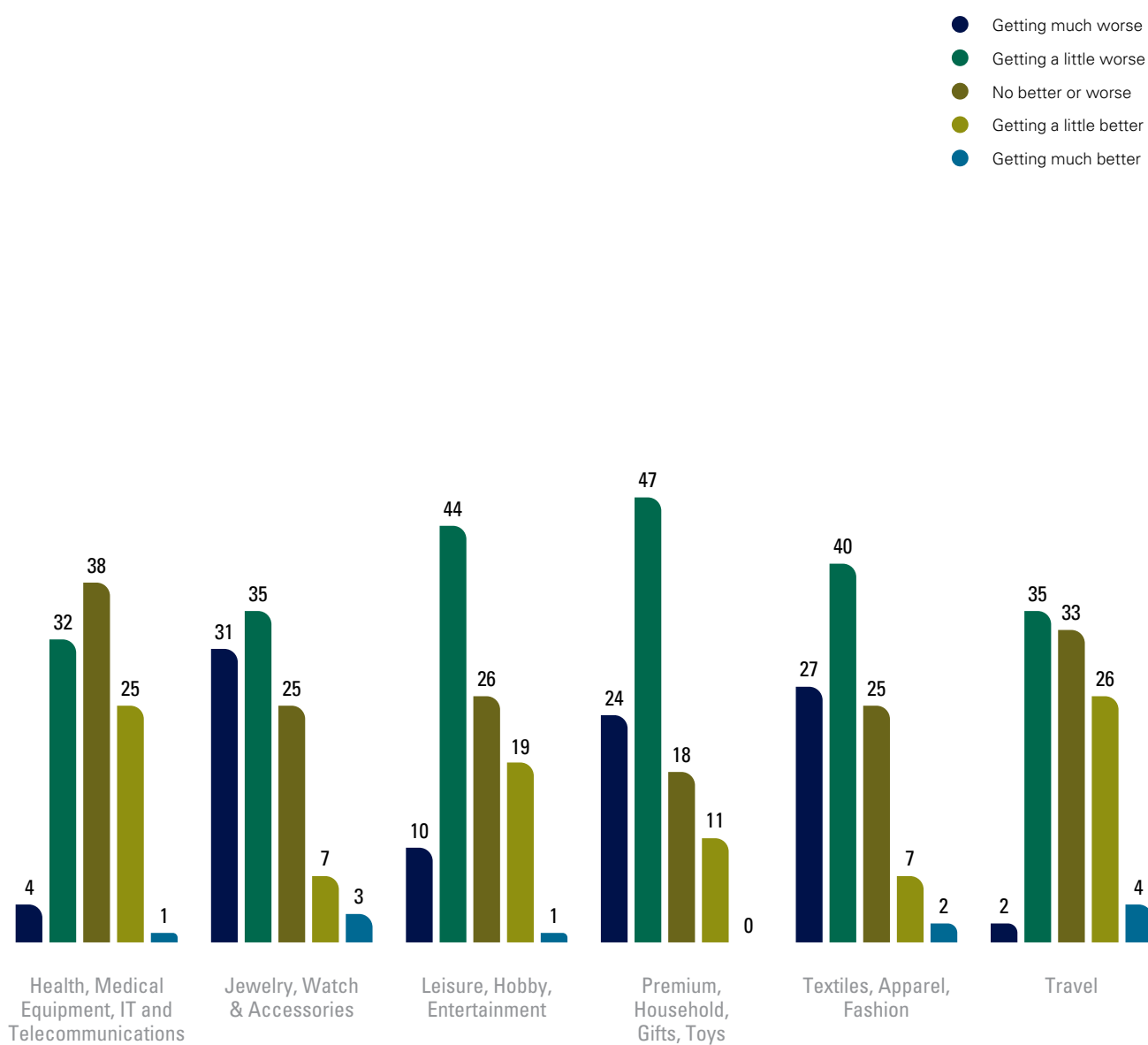


As in previous studies, survey responses suggest that different sectors are more similar than they are dissimilar. However, based on UFI's industry sector categories (and where sample size was large enough to determine) we can see that fatigue with trade shows as a

channel is more notable in the Jewellery / Watches / Accessories; Premium Household / Gifts / Toys and Textiles / Apparel / Fashion sectors. The Engineering / Industrial / Manufacturing and Travel sectors are seen to be maintaining their standard, if not getting a little better.

EXHIBITOR VIEWS VARY BY SECTOR





Experience of small companies

For smaller businesses, trade shows present a much bigger risk to their investment and they are more sensitive to decisions by organisers which affect their booth position or the footfall to their stand.

“

It's too easy for small companies to get lost in the crowd at big shows. Placement for new upcoming companies is bad, which makes it very hard to succeed.

Small company

“

For small companies they are very expensive, not only in logistics but also in time out of the office for the primary sales personnel.

Small company



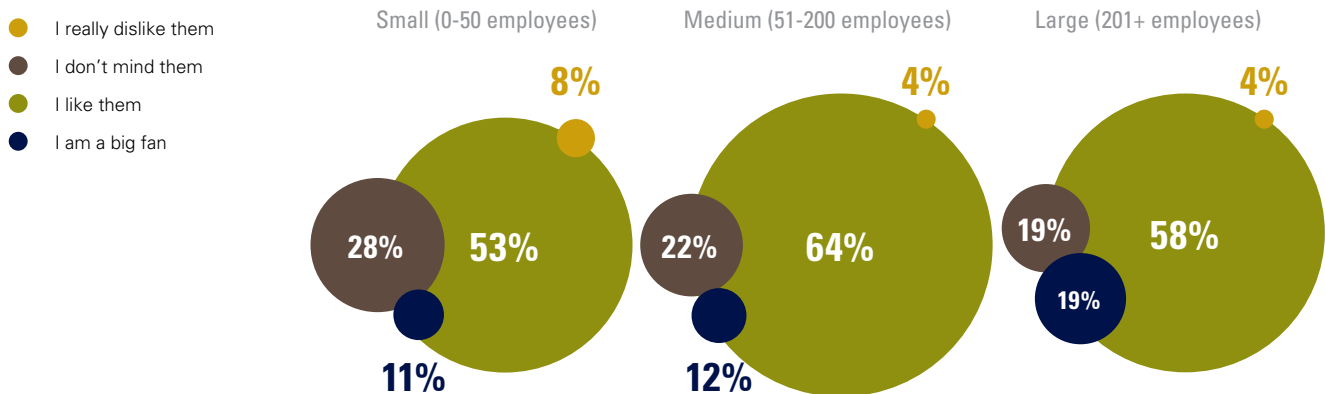
When we delve further into those companies that have a generally more negative view of exhibiting, we can see a trend. Amongst those who find trade shows less beneficial; harder to measure, and are less likely to increase their use in future; small companies are disproportionately represented.

Small companies are twice as likely to say they dislike trade shows than large companies.



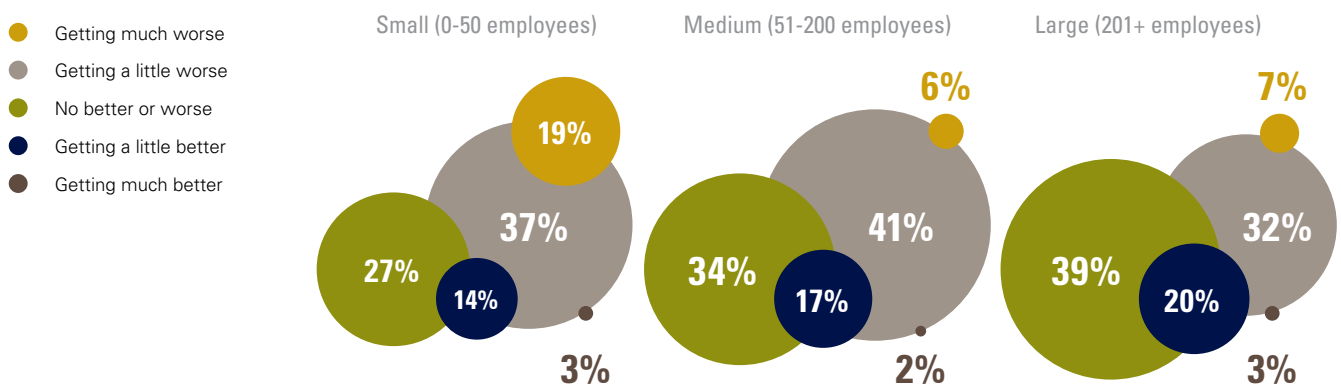
They are also more than twice as likely to think trade shows are getting much worse than their peers from large companies.

PROFESSIONALS FROM LARGE COMPANIES ARE MORE POSITIVE



What best describes your feelings about trade shows?

SMALL COMPANIES ARE MORE SENSITIVE TO POOR EXPERIENCES



Do you think trade shows are getting better or worse?

Sustainability

Approach to sustainability



Like trade show visitors, exhibitors are becoming more aware of issues around sustainability, with the majority of respondents (73%) indicating they feel it is important that trade shows display a strong commitment to sustainability. They are also taking steps to improve their own sustainability as exhibitors.

This commitment is also impacting on behaviour when deciding which shows to support, with one third of exhibitors stating that they now wouldn't exhibit at a show that had a poor approach to sustainability. 7% of non-exhibitors state concern about the environmental impact of trade shows is the reason why they don't exhibit.

Unlike the visitor views shared in the 2019 Global Visitor Insight project, exhibitor views on sustainability vary little by age and geographical region.

How strongly do you agree with the following?

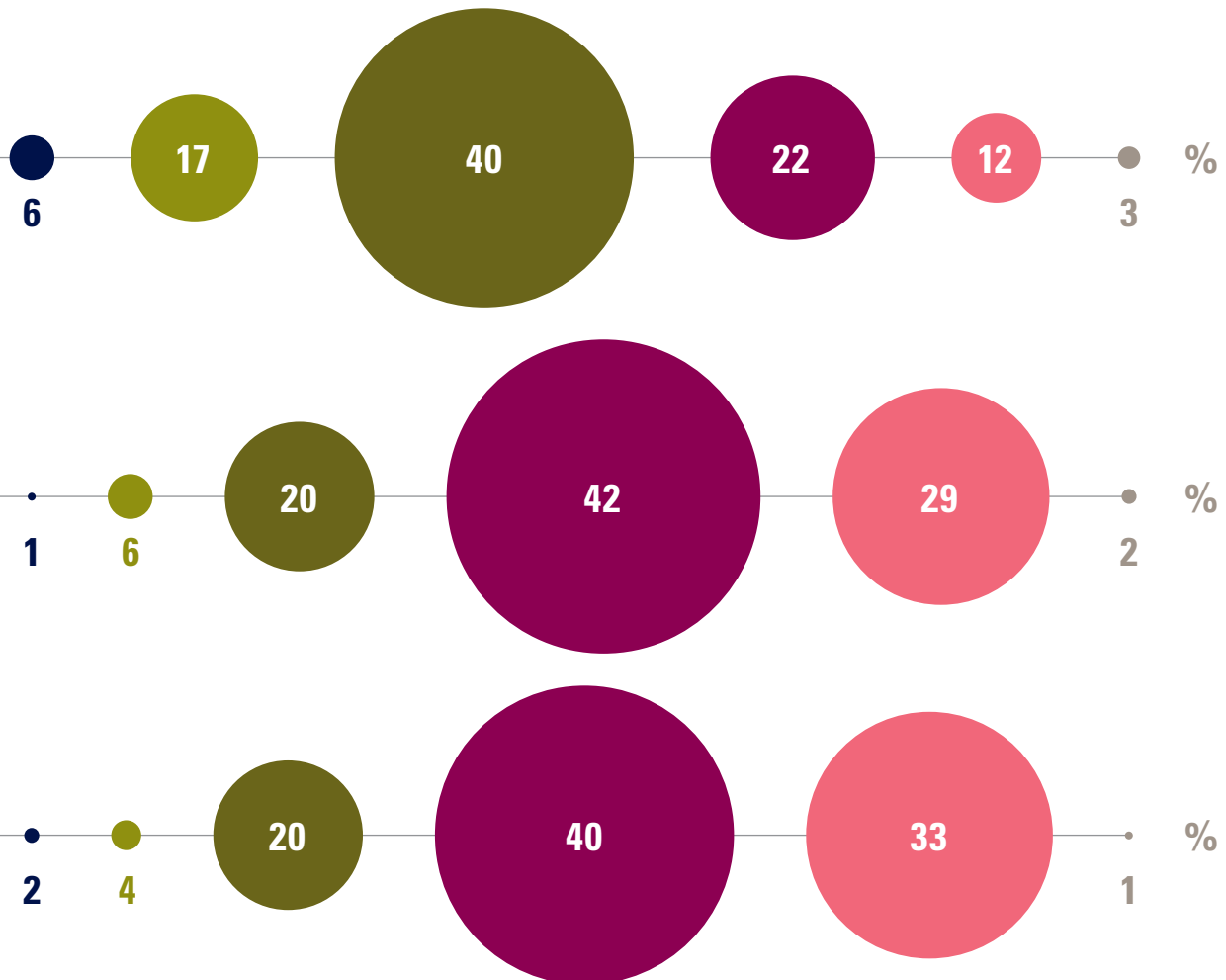
I would not exhibit at a trade show if it did not have a responsible approach to sustainability

My company is taking steps to improve its sustainability as an exhibitor

It is important that a trade show displays a strong commitment to sustainability

SUSTAINABILITY IS BEGINNING TO DRIVE EXHIBITOR BEHAVIOUR

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know



Other trends

The importance of experience



Like visitors, exhibitors recognise the trend of trade shows increasingly investing in experiential or “festival” elements with the objective of creating a more enjoyable or memorable experience.

The majority recognise that creating a memorable experience is now an important visitor expectation and believe it is an area that organisers should invest in.

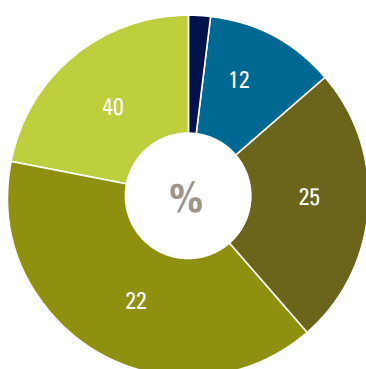
There is no difference in attitude to “festivalisation” by age or geographical region.

They also believe that event format is important to create more interaction on their stand. But the majority recognise their own responsibility to create enjoyable interactions on their own stand rather than solely placing the responsibility on organisers.

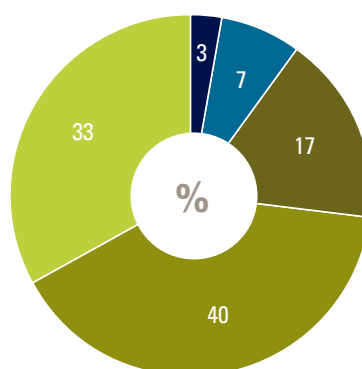
Investing in the visitor experience has the potential to have commercial impact for organisers. Almost a quarter of exhibitors reported they were more likely to exhibit at a trade show that was more entertaining, but 42% felt negatively about this.

44% of exhibitors are concerned that a focus on entertainment distracts visitors from buying. Like trade show visitors, they accept festivalisation as part of the show experience, but only alongside being able to meet their commercial objectives.

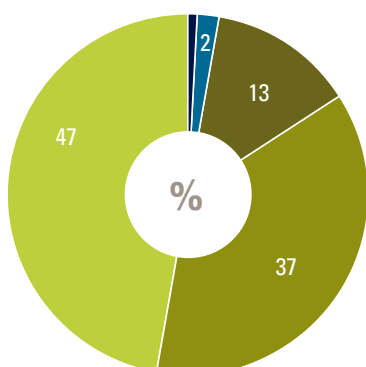
EXHIBITORS RECOGNISE THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO VISITOR EXPERIENCE



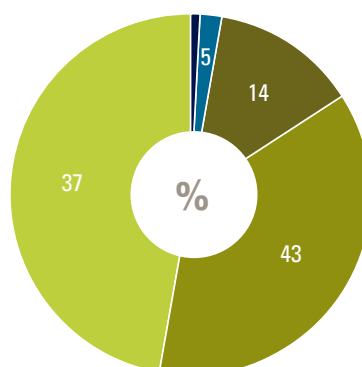
Visitors expect trade shows to provide a memorable experience



Organisers should invest in ways to make the visitor experience more enjoyable in order to increase foot traffic



As an exhibitor, my company aims to make interacting with us as enjoyable as possible



Having the right event format is essential to attract visitors to my stand

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

The trade show of the future...

1.

It will build trust with its current and prospective exhibitors

The strong relationship between trust in organisers and high NPS suggests that organisers who build trust will experience higher advocacy and the associated commercial benefits to both exhibitor and visitor metrics. Transparency in reporting, pricing and setting exhibitor expectations will become increasingly important differentiators.

2.

It will offer tailored support to exhibitors throughout the show cycle

In partnership with suppliers and venues, it will focus on reducing the frustrations felt around service and time commitment needed to exhibit. Smaller exhibitors in particular will benefit from support packages that help them to get the most value from the experience.

3.

It will work in partnership with exhibitors to increase their success

A deep understanding of exhibitor objectives combined with careful show design and educating exhibitors on the best strategy to meet them will be a core part of the organiser approach.

4.

It will use technology purposefully to drive meaningful interactions between visitors and exhibitors

Supporting both exhibitors' commercial objectives and visitors' discovery objectives, technology that matches the right visitors and exhibitors will be used to drive improved return on investment. But space will still be made for chance connections - a special aspect of face-to-face marketing that exhibitors value highly.

5.

It will demonstrate a strong commitment to sustainability

To meet the expectations of both visitors and exhibitors, organisers will need to continue to improve sustainability in partnership with venues and suppliers. But they will also ensure they engage exhibitors in this process, to build on their own efforts and to increase transparency and trust.

6.

It will create memorable experiences in partnership with exhibitors

Capitalising on exhibitors' recognition of the importance of visitor experience, organisers will work with them to create many areas of surprise and delight that contribute to the value of the show for all participants.



About Explori

The official research partner of UFI

Explori provides scalable research solutions for exhibition organisers all over the world. With a global client base including Hyve, Clarion Events, Informa, Comexposium, Messe Frankfurt, Emerald, Diversified Communications and many others contributing to their global data set of industry benchmarks.

Explori's research platform is designed to support organisers in gathering meaningful customer experience insight across multiple territories and languages. Over 2,700 events worldwide now work with Explori including trade shows, consumer shows and conferences.

As part of their partnership with UFI, Explori produces annual reports giving insight into the customer experience of visitors and exhibitors across the industry.

Explori is independently owned by its founders, directors and employees and is headquartered in London.

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