The 2026 Event-Led Growth Report

Report

cvent

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01 Introduction

Events have grown fast.

Over the last few years, marketers have rapidly expanded their event programs. They've added new formats, increased frequency, and diversified their mix of owned, sponsored, and partner events.

As events moved to the center of the go-to-market strategy, high-growth companies went all in on event-led growth. They stopped treating events as one-off moments and started using them as a primary channel for acquiring and retaining customers.

What is Event-Led Growth?

Event-led growth (ELG) is a go-to-market approach where events drive customer acquisition and retention. It uses data-driven programs that connect efforts across channels to deliver stronger value and engagement at scale.

To make the shift to ELG work, marketers focused on answering one question:

What actually drives pipeline and revenue?

Here's What Changed in 2025

The surge:
Many marketers kicked off the year having hosted double their event volume year over year in 2024.

The pressure:
The mass increase in events exposed new challenges around:

- Budget strain
- Attendance dips
- Team capacity limits

The reset:
Marketers did what they do best.
They recalibrated.

Instead of chasing volume like previous years, they made precision and performance their primary goals in 2025.

As ELG strategies mature, focus is shifting from filling seats to capturing attention from the right audiences. Marketers are no longer just hosting events. They're refining them into ROI engines designed for long-term revenue and business impact.

What This Report Covers

We surveyed 1,000+ marketers across the U.S. and UK to understand:

- Why ELG continues to outperform other GTM strategies
- How marketers are approaching events this year
- What performance-driven event marketing looks like in 2026

02 The State of Events Heading into 2026

Confidence in events remains high.

81% of marketers tie their events to business growth, and 87% say events help their company stand out. That confidence is showing up in 2026 planning too, with 82% of marketers expecting their total marketing budget to rise over the next year.

Companies Are Investing More Across the Entire Event Portfolio

48% of marketers plan to increase their owned events

47% of marketers plan to expand their sponsored events

43% of marketers plan to grow their partner events

Despite expected budget increases, marketers are still facing obstacles around rising event costs that impact their planning and spending decisions.

Top Challenges for Marketers in 2026

41% of marketers cite rising costs

40% of marketers point to tighter budgets

28% of marketers call out pressure to prove ROI

These challenges are pushing companies to get more selective, double down on performance, and demand clear proof of impact from every event.

03 Why Event-Led Growth Remains a Differentiator

Unlike the surge the year before, 2025 saw a return to sustainable event programs.

Here's why: ELG proved teams don't need more events to drive more impact, just smarter strategy.

More than half of marketers (53%) say their team now uses an event-led growth (ELG) approach. The impact of ELG strengthens year after year, reinforcing that ELG isn't a short-term experiment. It's becoming the go-to strategy for companies to build strong relationships, drive pipeline, and close more deals.

Why ELG Wins

ELG delivers the strongest results when applied across the entire event program.

This allows events to become a strategic touchpoint for every revenue team, from sales to marketing to product and beyond.

- 67% of marketers use events across the entire buyer's journey (and ELG teams were 33% more likely to do so than those without an ELG approach)
- ELG teams were also 31% more likely than those without an ELG approach to directly trace a defined portion of pipeline back to event touchpoints, showing sharper measurement and attribution

The gap is widening between ELG teams running events as a connected growth engine and non-ELG teams treating them as one-off tactics.

The ELG Difference

Teams using an ELG approach consistently outperform their peers.

47%

Teams using ELG were 47% more likely to rank events as their most effective marketing channel (consistent with 2024)

88%

88% of ELG teams say events generate steady revenue for their business

46%

46% of ELG teams attributed 40%+ of their closed-won deals to events in 2025 (up year over year)

High-Growth Companies Know ELG is the Winning Strategy

Companies that grew 50%+ over the past three years are leaning further into implementing ELG across their total event program between owned, sponsored, and partner events.

They were 53% more likely than average to plan more partner events in 2026. Additionally, over half of ELG teams plan to host more owned and sponsored events this year.

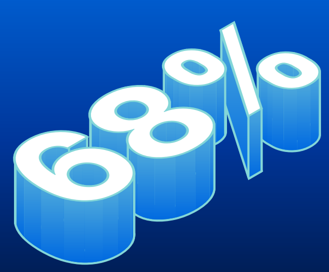
Across three consecutive event studies (2022–2025), one pattern remains constant: teams that adopt ELG and treat events as a connected system are more likely to drive revenue, attribute pipeline, and maintain year-over-year growth.

04 How Events Drive Results

Events continue to be one of the clearest drivers of business impact.

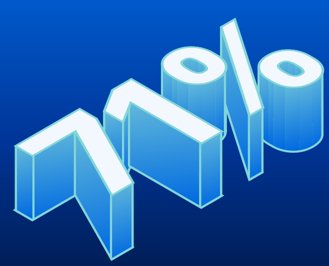
In 2025, the strongest results came from teams that focused on events that perform.

Marketers See Consistent, Measurable Impact from Events



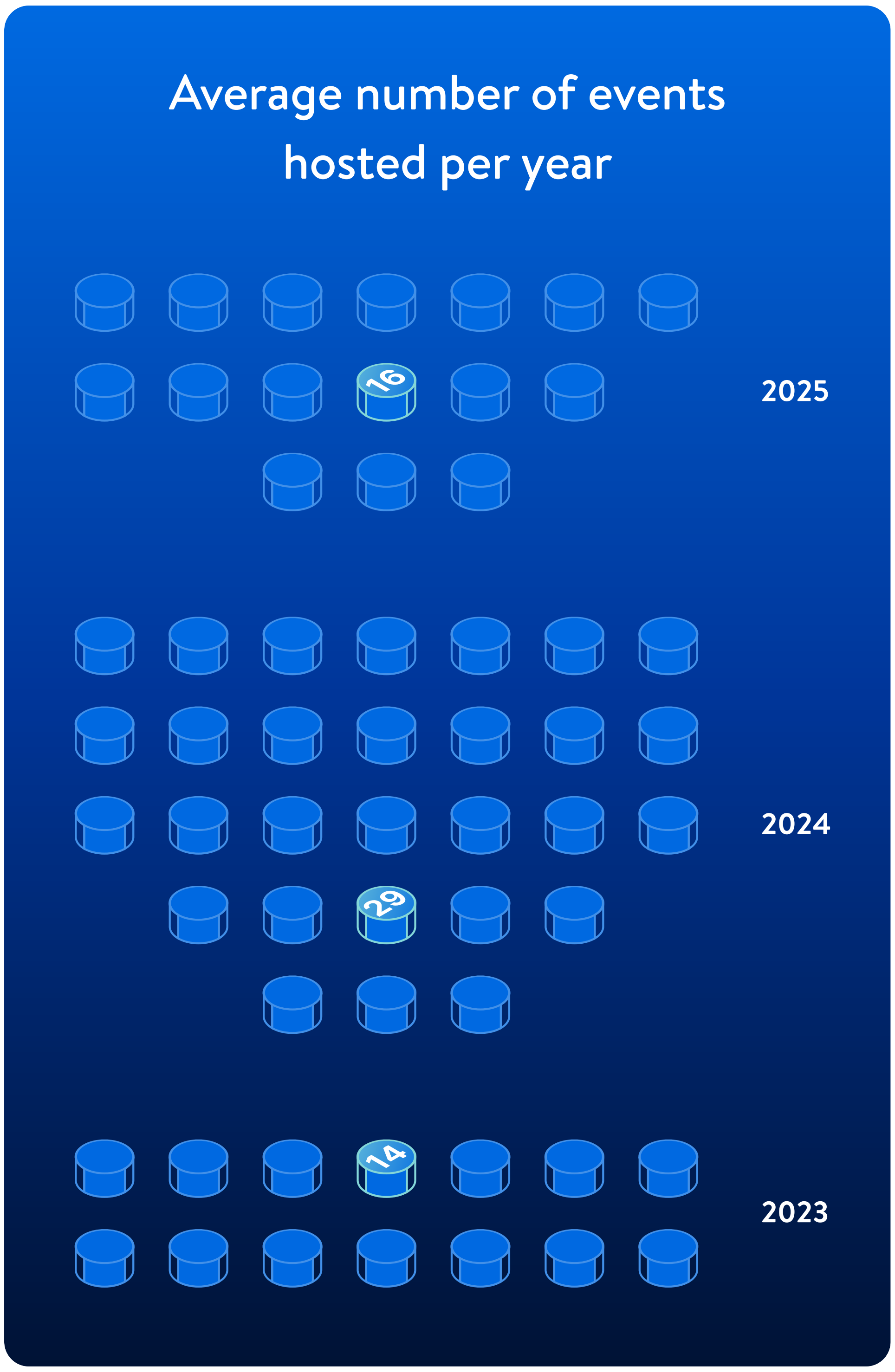
68% say events are their most effective marketing channel

83% say events generate a steady flow of revenue for their business



71% hit their revenue goals in every quarter of 2025

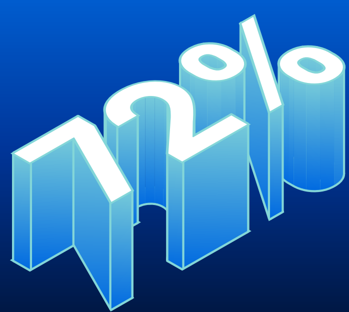
Companies planned an average of 16 events in 2025, down from 29 in 2024 and close to 14 in 2023. The shift toward fewer, more focused events shows that success comes from strategy, not scale.



And that strategy shows its strength in pipeline performance.

How Events Impact Pipeline

When used strategically, events are proven to accelerate deals and build high-quality pipeline for teams.



72% say deals close faster when prospects attend events

49% attribute 21% or more of total pipeline directly to event activity

74% can trace a defined portion of pipeline creation back to event touchpoints

These outcomes compound over time, which is why measurement matters.

Purpose of Each Event Type in Event Programs

Events support every stage of a business, from pipeline and retention to community and product adoption.

Here's how marketers ranked the purpose of each event in their programs.

Event Formats	Pipeline Generation	Retention	Community Building	Product Adoption
Flagship	24%	30%	37%	9%
Tradeshows & conferences	36%	21%	32%	11%
Webinars & digital events	29%	25%	32%	14%
Field marketing event	30%	24%	32%	14%

Event Formats that Drive the Highest ROI

When it comes to the highest-performing events, hands-on and interactive formats outpace traditional panels and roundtables.

How Long Results Take

Events are commonly considered a long game.

While 39% of marketers see quick wins, the real value from events shows up over months as prospects turn into closed deals. This explains why 50% of marketers say they see measurable impact later, between 6-12 months.

ELG teams in particular were both more likely to see results within 6-12 months and attribute more pipeline and closed-won deals to their events.

04A Putting Community at the Center of Events

While revenue still matters, it's not the only reason companies run events.

As programs matured over 2025, marketers prioritized other non-revenue outcomes too, ranking brand awareness and reach as one of their top priorities.

This balancing of revenue and non-revenue priorities explains why more companies are adopting an ELG approach.

With ELG, they don't have to choose between revenue and relationships. Events are designed so awareness, engagement, and advocacy all work together to drive pipeline, retention, and expansion.

How Event Design is Evolving

Marketers are moving away from scale and spectacle and toward experiences built for connection.

In 2025, marketers said these were the top priorities when designing their events:

55% prioritized community-building elements like peer groups and meetups

49% prioritized content and speaker quality

42% prioritized elevating customer voices in programming

40% prioritized venue selection and venue partnerships

This emphasis on connection is reshaping who marketers design their events for.

Audiences Shifted from Prospects to Customers in 2025

In 2025, customers became the primary audience across the most common event formats, a clear pivot from 2024 which leaned more prospect-focused.

Instead of predominantly using events to source new leads, marketers are using them as a key way to keep current customers happy and expand business within existing accounts.

This shift signals a broader move toward retention, expansion, and community-driven growth.

Community-building isn't just a goal, it's the centerpiece for event strategy across the board.

- 37% of marketers say flagship events are built primarily to build community
- 32% of marketers say the same about trade shows + conferences
- 32% of marketers say the same about webinars + digital events
- 32% of marketers say the same about field marketing events

The Highest-Performing Events Prioritize Connection

51% of marketers say workshops deliver the highest ROI, while 43% say dinners and 41% say experiential pop-ups/activations.

Event Formats that Drive the Highest ROI by Industry

Different industries lean into different formats, but they still share the same goal of creating genuine connection.

- Travel + Hospitality teams were 28% more likely to cite dinners
- Retail + D2C teams were 35% more likely to highlight pop-ups and activations
- Financial Services teams were 50% more likely to say executive roundtable

05 How Teams Measure Event Success

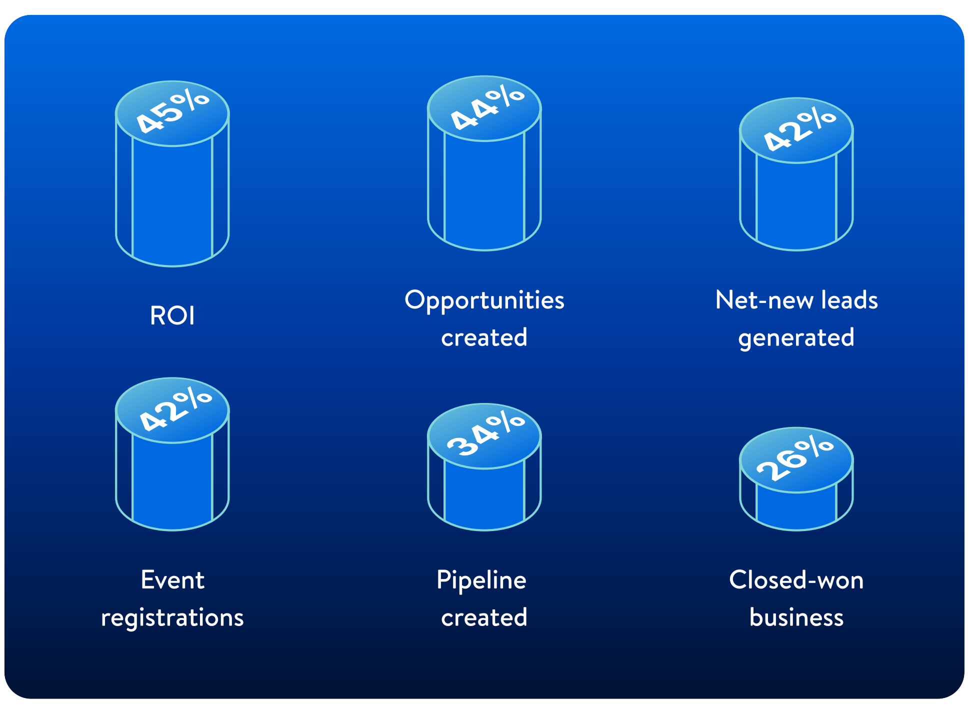
Over the last year, event measurement shifted from isolated event metrics to a more program-level view.

Teams began reassessing how success should be defined across their entire event portfolio, placing greater emphasis on metrics that reflect sustained engagement, pipeline contribution, and long-term impact.

A big driver of this shift came from teams adopting an ELG mindset. ELG gives teams measurable frameworks for their programs, making it easy to compare event performance and connect engagement directly to pipeline and revenue in one place.

Top Event Metrics Marketers Track

While performance varies based on the goal of every event, marketers consistently said these are the most important metrics for measuring overall success:

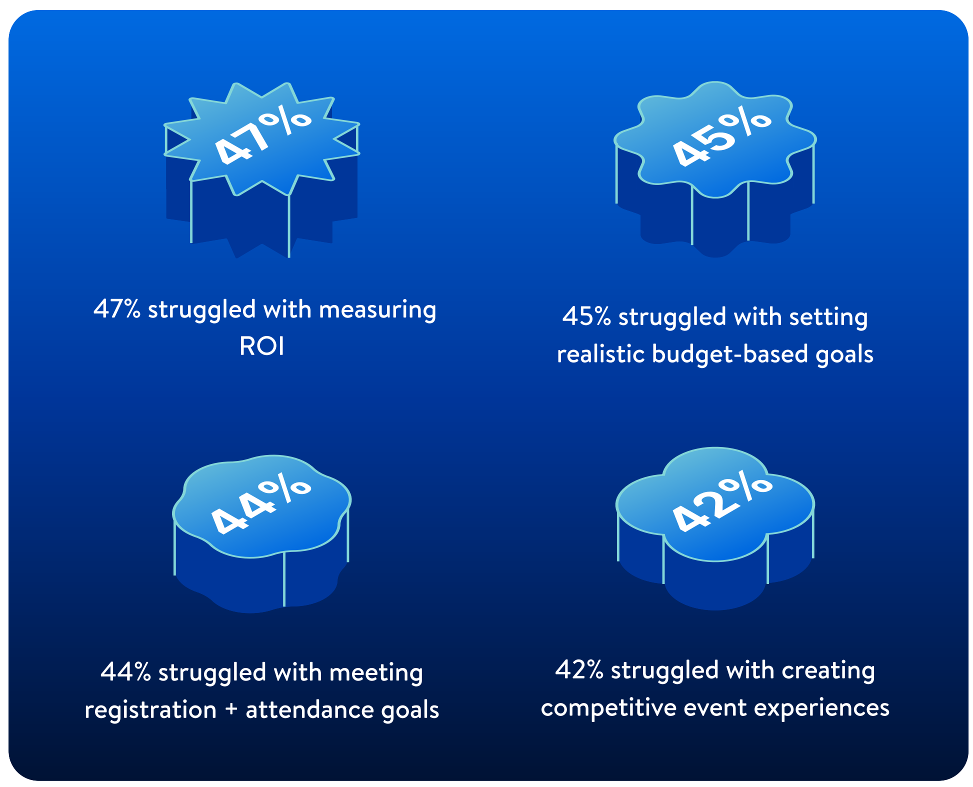


In particular, attendance rates are becoming less important for measuring success, dropping by 8% from 2023. This decline is proof that while turnout still matters, it's not a primary indicator for performance like it once was.

Teams now judge success by how events contribute to pipeline and revenue.

But measuring impact is easier said than done.

In 2025, Marketers Regularly Struggled with:



Trade shows were a particular challenge when it came to measuring success.

61%

Most teams went big with 61% sponsoring booths and onsite activations

57%

57% running partner events

48%

And 48% hosting wraparound events or meetups

However, turning that effort into clean, actionable data for teams wasn't easy:

- 49% experienced delays or lost follow-ups post-trade show or conference
- 47% dealt with messy or incomplete data post-trade show or conference
- 46% faced inconsistent lead capture post-trade show or conference

When it comes to other formats, digital events still play a pivotal role in programs.

91% of marketers say webinars and virtual events are important to their strategy, and 78% rely on them to increase reach and lead generation.

Webinar type	Most lead generation	Better performance
Live webinars	53%	47%
On-demand webinars	55%	45%

Marketers use virtual events throughout the entire buying lifecycle, not just solely as a top- or bottom-of-funnel tactic.

- 66% say they mainly use virtual events to drive awareness at the top of the funnel
- 66% say they mainly use virtual events to support prospects at the middle or bottom of the funnel
- 78% say they use webinars and digital events throughout the entire funnel

But virtual event performance has taken a hit over the last year.

- 41% of marketers report declining attendance and engagement
- 44% of marketers say they have limited visibility into how virtual programs impact pipeline

Virtual fatigue still exists and marketing noise is high, leaving marketers to find creative ways to keep online programming relevant, engaging, and impactful.

06 Why Event Technology is Essential

For teams wanting to run ELG programs at scale, technology makes complex programs manageable.

As events stretch across formats, teams, and stages of the prospect and customer lifecycle, marketers are leaning on tech to connect the dots, keep experiences consistent, and understand what's actually working.

That reliance is already widespread.

71% of marketers say they use an event platform that integrates with the rest of their marketing technology stack, including their CRM. This marks a clear sign of how central event data has become to broader GTM efforts.

Event technology ownership varies with 24% of teams reporting marketing owns their event platform, while 22% say ownership is shared across multiple teams.

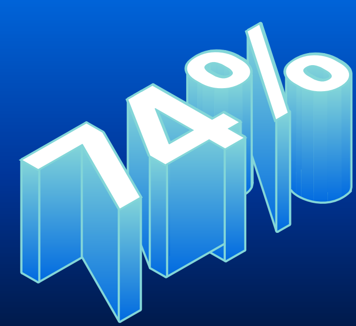
More Tech = More Events

76% of marketers say they would host more events if they had technology that made creating and replicating events easier.

Teams want to invest more in event technology, but justifying the budget is a problem.

While 67% of marketers say their company plans to invest in event technology in 2026, nearly 72% also say budget constraints are limiting how much they can expand those investments.

The Value of Event Technology is Clear



74% of marketers agree centralized event technology helps deliver more consistent, branded experiences at scale

76% of marketers say better technology would make it easier to repeat what works

But there's a clear need for event technology that supports the total event program.

36% of organizations say their event program is fully or nearly fully consolidated on a single integrated event platform

Another 40% report partial consolidation

While 24% say their program is still mostly fragmented

Fragmented event technology is impacting workflows for marketers, creating disconnected systems and inconsistent data.

The Need for Unified Event Tech

64% of marketers say they're using multiple event technology platforms to power their events.

57% of teams rely on systems disconnected from the rest of their marketing stack. And even among those with integrated platforms, issues persist:

- 56% struggle with data quality
- 27% experience bi-directional sync problems
- 18% deal with deduplication issues

When the right technology is in place and data is connected and accessible, marketers are able to use attendee insights to immediately improve their programs.

In 2025, Marketers Used First-Party Event Data to:

58% used first-party data to personalize in-person experiences

53% used first-party data to benchmark and inform strategy

47% used first-party data to optimize their events in real time

This data points to a shift away from experimentation and toward technology that supports smarter, more intentional event programs across GTM teams.

07 What's in Store for Events in 2026

Planning for 2026 reflects a more measured kind of optimism.

82% of marketers expect their company to increase its marketing budget in the next 12 months and 43% expect increases of 25% or more. Healthcare leads the pack, with teams 35% more likely than average to anticipate budget growth above 50%.

The decisions about where that budget goes are no longer based on volume plays. Instead of rushing to scale every program, marketers are doubling down on events that drive better execution and long-term performance.

More Teams Are Implementing ELG

Nearly 76% of event teams now operate as cross-functional GTM groups. While this creates bigger impact for businesses, it also creates friction when execution and measurement tools aren't aligned. As teams expand their event programs, there's a growing need for technology and processes that unite revenue departments around their shared goals.

A clear sign: 67% say their company plans to invest in event technology in 2026.

Teams that grew 50% or more over the last three years are 24% more likely than average to invest in event technology, proving that the right tool can substantially boost alignment, event performance, and overall revenue.

Events Will Continue to be Integrated, Strategic, and Tied to Pipeline

Most marketers agree that events aren't limited to top-of-funnel awareness or bottom-of-funnel acceleration.

They've become an integral piece in every step of the GTM motion.

- 69% map their full event program to the buying journey
- 67% use events across every stage of that journey

Bottom Line for 2026

Together, these trends point to a more intentional era of events. One where teams consolidate tech, align cross-functional teams, and lean into events as a core driver across the entire customer lifecycle.

08 Conclusion

In 2026, the advantage will belong to teams running their entire program through an ELG strategy built on connected data, intentional design, and a unified platform.

Rather than doing more, top-performing companies are refining how events support revenue, pipeline, and long-term relationships, while investing in the systems and data needed to measure what works and prove value.

Event strategies for 2026 will come down to three fundamentals:

- Performance
- Connection
- Accountability across the full event program

As budgets remain tight and programs continue to mature, events are no longer being used as a standalone tactic.

They're a strategic engine, rewarding teams that execute consistently and treat every event as part of a connected ELG strategy.

Learn more about how event technology can help you market, measure, and scale your in-person, hybrid, and virtual events.

About Cvent

Cvent is the global meeting, event, travel, and hospitality technology leader. Cvent provides easy-to-use, integrated technology solutions to maximize the impact of meetings and events of all sizes. We help organizations plan and market events, execute onsite, engage audiences, and measure and analyze results.

Learn More

Survey Methodology and Demographics

The 2026 Event-Led Growth Report survey was conducted between December 15, 2025 and January 6, 2026. Cvent surveyed a total of 1,067 respondents in the United States and United Kingdom who work in marketing full-time and have a hand in their company's events program. The study was conducted at 95% confidence with a +/- 3% margin of error.