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Vision & Intelligence

EVIDENCE BRIEF
NOVEMBER 2026

EVIDENCE BRIEF · EXHIBITOR ROI

Staffed to Sell, Visited to Learn

Do booths give attendees what they came for?

Across 69 U.S. trade shows, 95 percent of attendees named only information goals as their main reasons for attending, while sales and marketing staff made up 58 percent of booth teams. Studies of 9,215 attendees and 885 exhibitors, badge scans at a computer graphics show and interviews with exhibition managers, set beside Freeman's 2025 survey of 1,022 attendees and 969 exhibitors, show where booths miss what visitors came for.

By Eventamin · How we work 14 November 2026

U.S., China, Macau, United Kingdom, Germany

6 studies · 2 industry sources

trade show booth staffing | booth staff | trade show attendees | subject matter experts | hands-on demos | attendee behavior | booth traffic | trade show lead capture | expo floor layout | exhibitor experience

Also in Attendee behaviour

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KEY FINDING

Attendees come to discover products and talk to experts; few come to buy on the spot. Exhibitors staff booths with sales and executive personnel, value badge scans and follow-up emails more than attendees do, and underrate hands-on demonstrations that make purchase decisions more certain.

Six studies, 2004–2025; industry data 2025–2026

Key findings

- **Attendees come to learn.** At 69 U.S. trade shows, 95 percent of attendees named only information goals among their two main reasons for attending, and none named only buying[1].
- **Booths are staffed to sell.** Sales and marketing staff made up 58 percent of booth teams and executives 27 percent, while production, engineering, scientific and R&D staff together made up about 12 percent[1].
- **Experts beat scans.** Fifty-eight percent of attendees said speaking with subject matter experts would improve booth interactions, against 26 percent of exhibitors; 49 percent of exhibitors favored scanning badges and emailing afterwards, against 23 percent of attendees[2].
- **Discovery leads, buying trails.** Fifty-eight percent of attendees named discovering new products among their top two commercial goals at their most important event; six percent named making a purchase decision[2].

- **Visitors follow their agenda.** At a U.S. computer graphics show, two-thirds to nine-tenths of each segment's booth visits were planned before the show[3].

FOR THE MARKET

Market outcomes

What the studies mean for each part of the industry.

Exhibitors & sponsors	Booths that put engineers, scientists and product specialists beside sales staff match what most visitors came for. Hands-on demonstrations make purchase decisions more certain, and attendees who miss them shift attention to other vendors.
Organisers & associations	Floor plans that group exhibitors by segment, recommendation tools and expert-led formats help visitors reach the right booth. Managed congestion creates buzz, but exhibitors judge a show by the quality of the conversations it brings them.
Academia	Evidence on booth staffing rests largely on U.S. data from one research center and one contractor. Links between staffing mix and exhibitor outcomes such as leads or orders are untested.

Why attendees come

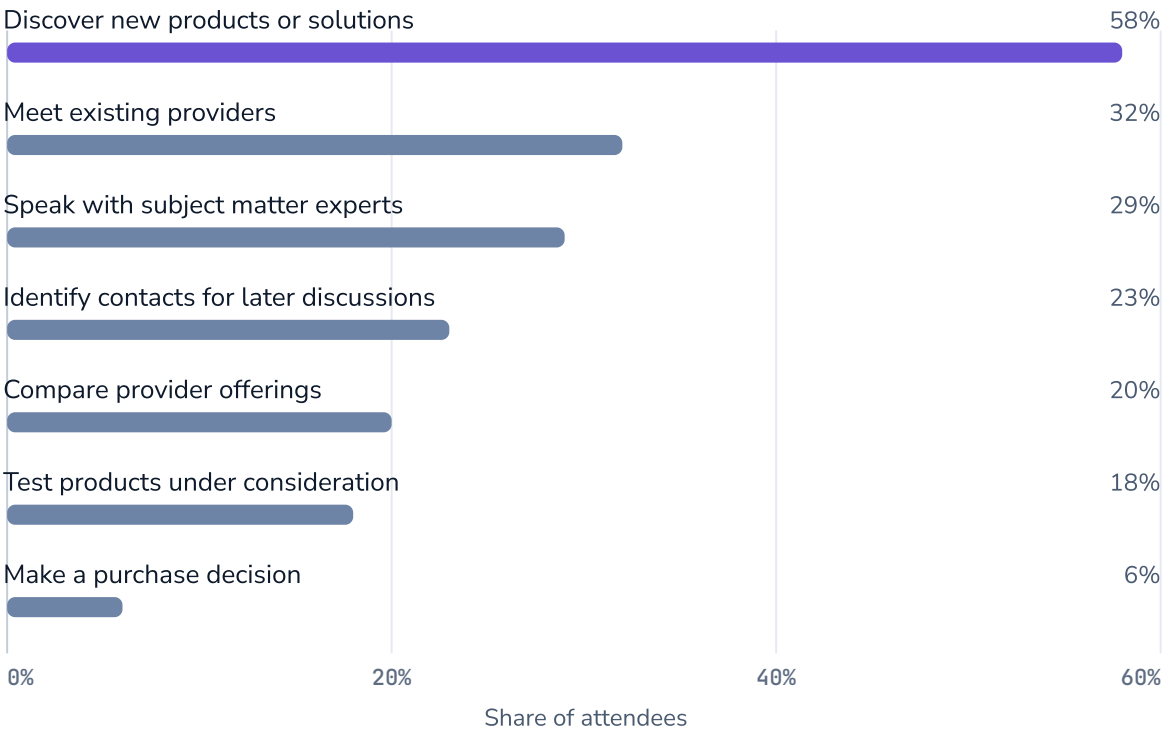
Attendees visit trade shows to discover, not to buy. In Freeman's 2025 survey of 1,022 attendees and 969 exhibitors, 58 percent of attendees named discovering new products or solutions among their two main commercial goals at the most important event they attended, while six percent named making a purchase

decision[2]. Freeman's 2026 research found that attendees would ideally spend 54 percent of their learning time outside traditional session rooms[4].

Research data show the same pattern. Among 7,741 attendees of 69 U.S. trade shows surveyed by the Center for Exhibition Industry Research, 95 percent named only information goals among their top two reasons for attending, the rest mixed information and buying, and no attendee named buying alone[1]. Looking for new products and vendors was the most common reason[1].

Top commercial objectives of attendees at their most important business event

Share of attendees naming each objective among their top two.



Source: Freeman · Release date: April 2025 · Region: Mainly United States (90 percent of attendees) · Number of respondents: 1,022 attendees

Who staffs the booth

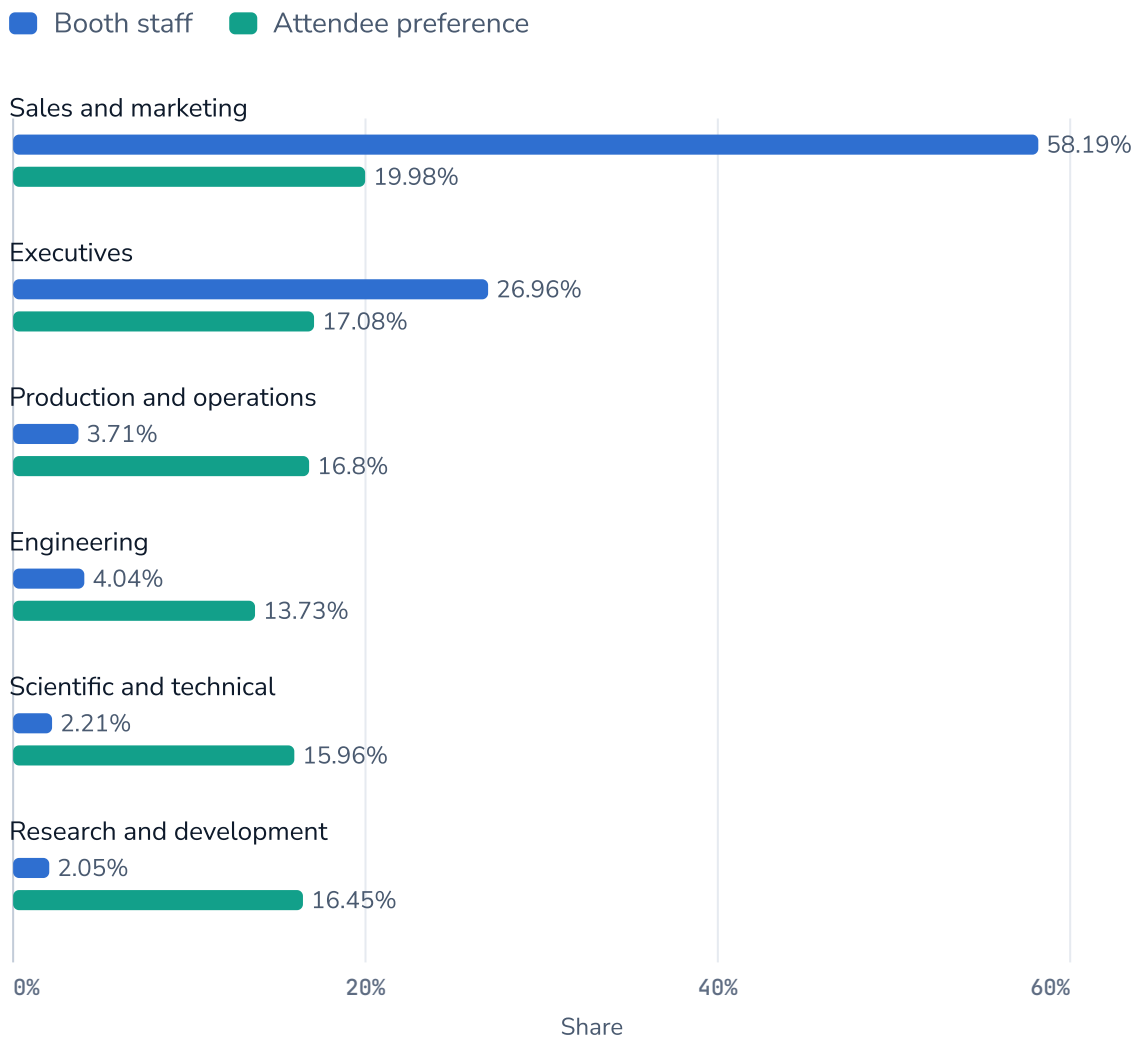
Booth teams do not match these goals. Exhibitors at the 69 U.S. shows staffed their booths with 58 percent sales and marketing personnel and 27 percent executives[1]. Attendee preferences were spread almost evenly across six functions,

from 13.73 percent for engineering to 19.98 percent for sales and marketing, yet production, engineering, scientific and R&D staff together made up about 12 percent of booth teams[1]. The gap held for B2B and B2C shows, for influencers and decision-makers and for attendees from small and large firms[1].

Attendees who came only for information preferred engineering, scientific and R&D staff, while those who also planned to buy preferred sales staff and executives[1].

Booth staff by function and attendee preference for each function, U.S. trade shows

Share of booth staff (exhibitors) and share of converted attendee preferences, in percent.



Source: Haon et al. · Release date: 2020 · Region: United States · Data: CEIR surveys at 69 trade shows · Number of respondents: 831 exhibitors, 9,028 attendees

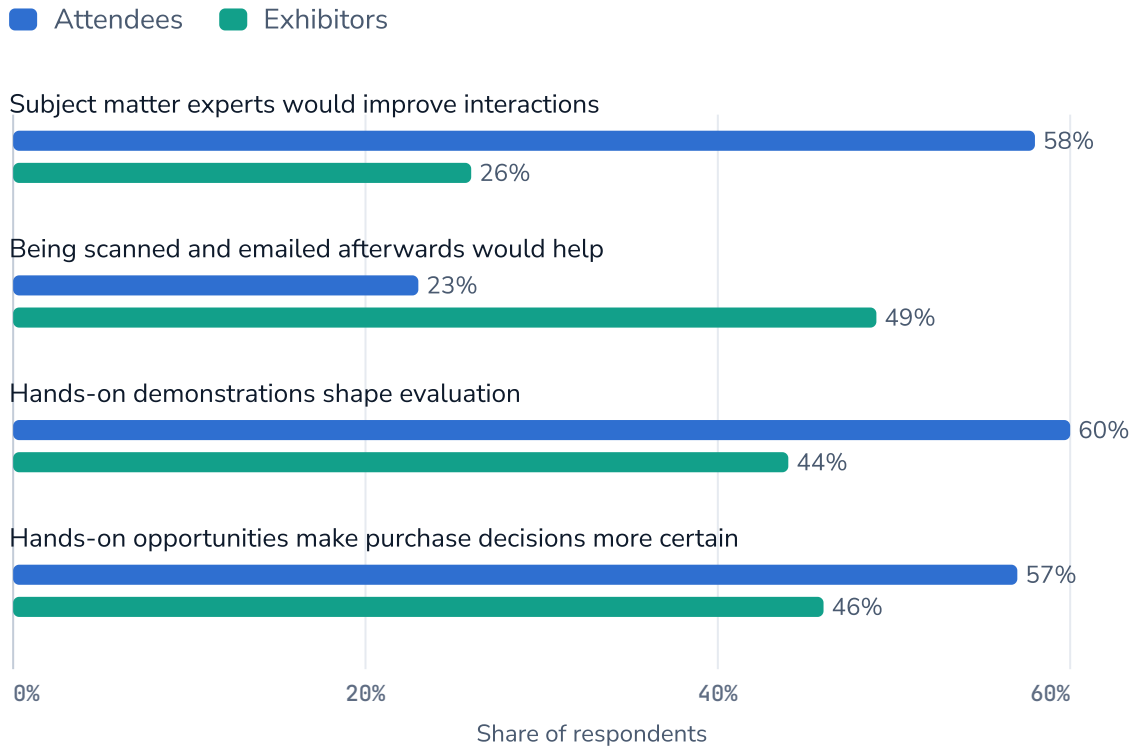
Experts, demonstrations and scans

Exhibitors and attendees value different things at the booth. Fifty-eight percent of attendees said speaking with subject matter experts would improve their interactions with exhibitors, against 26 percent of exhibitors, while 49 percent of exhibitors favored scanning badges and emailing afterwards, against 23 percent of attendees[2]. Sixty percent of attendees said hands-on demonstrations shape how they evaluate offerings; 44 percent of exhibitors saw that effect[2].

Missing the demonstration costs vendors. Twenty-four percent of attendees had no hands-on experience with any exhibitor's product at their most important event, and 42 percent of them said they were more likely to turn to other vendors as a result[2]. Ninety-three percent of attendees called capable booth staff extremely or very important, but 78 percent felt exhibitors delivered[2].

Views of attendees and exhibitors on what improves booth interactions and purchase decisions

Share of respondents selecting or agreeing with each statement, in percent.



Source: Freeman · Release date: April 2025 · Region: Mainly United States (90 percent of attendees) · Number of respondents: 1,022 attendees, 969 exhibitors

How visitors move through the hall

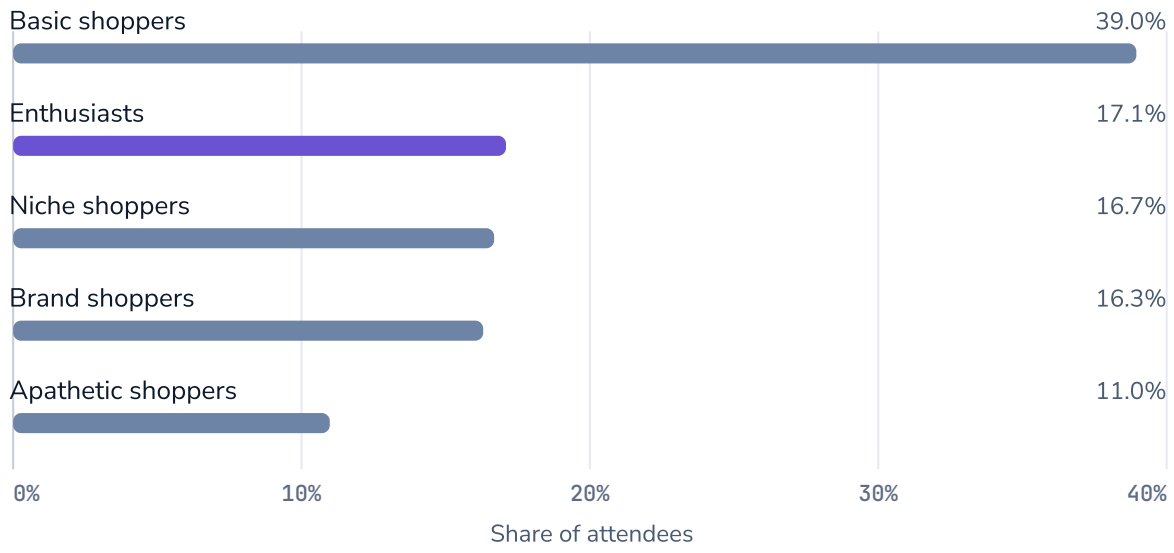
Visitors arrive with a plan. Badge scans of 281 attendees at SIGGRAPH, a U.S. computer graphics show with 238 booths, revealed five segments, from basic shoppers who made about seven serious booth visits to enthusiasts who made 24[3]. In every segment, between 68 and 86 percent of visits went to booths planned before the show, unlike unplanned retail shopping[3]. Niche shoppers sought out small and mid-aisle booths, brand shoppers large ones[3].

Attention at the booth is short. Visitors give an exhibit about seven seconds before deciding whether it interests them, and at CeBIT 2003 an active visitor stayed about 11.8 minutes at a booth, according to a 2004 review[5].

Organizers shape the flow. Ten English exhibition managers described creating moderate congestion to generate buzz, while placing magnets such as catering and content at the back or far ends of halls; financial outcomes for the organizer came first and exhibitor outcomes ahead of attendee outcomes[6]. Visitor-flow data from more than 200 exhibitors in Shenzhen show same-industry exhibitors competing for a limited pool of visitors at the same hours[7]. Among 596 attendees of an education expo in Macau, booth personnel's conduct was the strongest driver of perceived interaction quality[8].

Attendee segments by booth-visit behavior at a U.S. computer graphics trade show

Share of attendees.



Source: Gopalakrishna et al. · Release date: 2010 · Region: United States · Data: pre-show survey and badge scans at SIGGRAPH · Number of attendees: 281

Notes on the data

The figures are based on six studies published between 2004 and 2025: surveys of 9,215 attendees and 885 exhibitors at 69 U.S. trade shows collected by the Center for Exhibition Industry Research, a pre-show survey and badge-scan records of 281 attendees at SIGGRAPH, interviews with 10 exhibition managers in England, visitor-flow data from more than 200 exhibitors in Shenzhen, a survey of 596 attendees of an education expo in Macau and a review of German exhibition practice[1,3,5–8]. Attendee preferences for staff functions are converted ratings, not head counts. Industry figures are from Freeman's 2025 Commercial Trends Report, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percent, and Freeman's 2026 learning research[2,4].

Sources

● Study ○ Industry source

1 Haon, C., Sego, T., Drapeau, N., & Sarin, S. (2020). Disconnect in trade show staffing: A comparison of exhibitor emphasis and attendee preferences [Journal article]. *Industrial Marketing Management, 91, 581–595*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.03.016 First-hand

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First-hand

The evidence

6 studies · 2 industry sources

SAMPLE

Six studies: surveys of 9,215 attendees and 885 exhibitors at 69 U.S. trade shows and of 596 attendees of an education expo in Macau, badge-scan records of 281 attendees at one computer graphics show, visitor-flow data from more than 200 exhibitors in Shenzhen, interviews with 10 exhibition managers and a review of German exhibition practice; two industry sources

YEARS

2004–2025 (studies); 2025–2026 (industry data)

METHOD

Surveys, latent class segmentation, structural models, optimization modeling and interviews

About Eventamin

Eventamin reads the peer-reviewed research on events, exhibitions and hospitality, sets it against industry data and states what it means for the market. Every brief is published by Eventamin as an organisation: its sources, method and corrections are open.

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