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Vision & Intelligence

EVIDENCE BRIEF
NOVEMBER 2026

EVIDENCE BRIEF · TECHNOLOGY AND AI

The App Is Not the Event

Do event apps raise event satisfaction?

Event apps have become a standard tool for engaging attendees and measuring engagement. Survey data from conferences, a cycling race and meetings and incentive travel show that attendees value apps mainly for their usefulness, and that the rating of the app is only loosely linked to satisfaction with the event itself.

By Eventamin · How we work 9 November 2026 Updated 10 November 2026

UK, U.S., France and Spain

4 studies · 4 industry sources

event apps | mobile event app | attendee satisfaction | attendee engagement | event technology | conference app | event app features | MICE | repeat attendance | event ROI

Also in Attendee behaviour

EDITION	Evidence brief · Published 9 November 2026 · Updated 10 November 2026
DOI	https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24378086
CITE AS	Eventamin. (2026). The App Is Not the Event: Do Event Apps Raise Event Satisfaction? [Evidence brief]. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24378086
WEB EDITION	eventamin.com/evidence/technology-and-ai/do-event-apps-raise-event-satisfaction, with interactive charts, chart data and the corrections log
LICENCE	Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) · © 2026 Eventamin

KEY FINDING

Attendees rate event apps mainly on usefulness, not ease of use. A well-rated app goes with continued use of the app, but not with a higher intention to return to the event; that depends on overall event satisfaction.

Four attendee surveys, 1,435 respondents, 2019–2024

Key findings

- **Engagement is the leading success measure.** In 2026, 63 percent of event planners worldwide named attendee engagement as their main measure of event success, according to Cvent[1].
- **Usefulness comes first.** It was the most important feature of event apps in three out of four attendee surveys; at a multi-day cycling race, enjoyment ranked first[2–5].
- **Ease of use made no measurable difference.** It did not change how attendees rated event apps in either survey that measured it[3,4].
- **App users were not more satisfied.** App users and non-users rated four U.S. conferences almost equally, at 4.77 and 4.69 out of five[4].
- **The app does not bring attendees back.** Among UK conference attendees, a good app experience went with continued use of the app, but not with the intention to attend the event again[2].

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FOR THE MARKET

Market outcomes

What the studies mean for each part of the industry.

Organisers & associations	Usefulness and contact features, such as the program, documents, contact exchange and meeting booking, carry the most weight with attendees. App engagement is an app metric; event satisfaction and rebooking remain the measures of event success. The app mattered most where it carried the experience, which favors navigation, wayfinding and matchmaking over content libraries.
Exhibitors & sponsors	For exhibitors and sponsors, the value of event apps lies in contact and meeting tools. Meetings booked and contacts exchanged through the app are more informative measures of return than impressions.

Event apps in the events industry

Event apps are part of the core technology of most events. According to Cvent's 2026 Planner Sourcing Report, 63 percent of more than 1,650 event planners named attendee engagement as their main measure of event success, and 75 percent used artificial intelligence (AI) in their work[1]. Exhibition organizers are moving in the same direction. As of June 2026, 91 percent of exhibition companies worldwide used AI in some form, according to UFI[6]. Around 17 percent had built AI into their own platforms, and seven percent sold AI-powered products[6].

Proving the value of events remains difficult. In 2026, 40 percent of event professionals found it hard to prove the return on investment (ROI) of their events, down from 70 percent a year earlier, according to Bizzabo[7]. As engagement is

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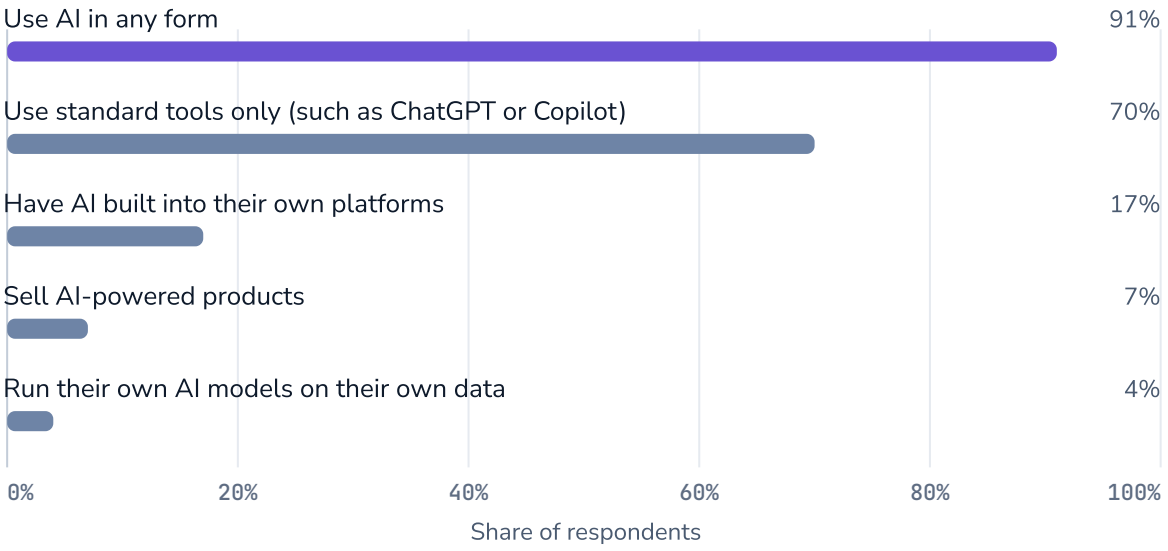
often measured inside the event app, the link between app ratings and event ratings matters for how organizers report success.

Share of exhibition companies using AI worldwide as of June 2026, by type of use

Share of respondents. Companies could use AI in more than one way.



Source: UFI · Release date: July 2026 · Region: Worldwide · Survey period: May to June 2026 · Number of respondents: 466 companies in 59 countries

What attendees value in event apps

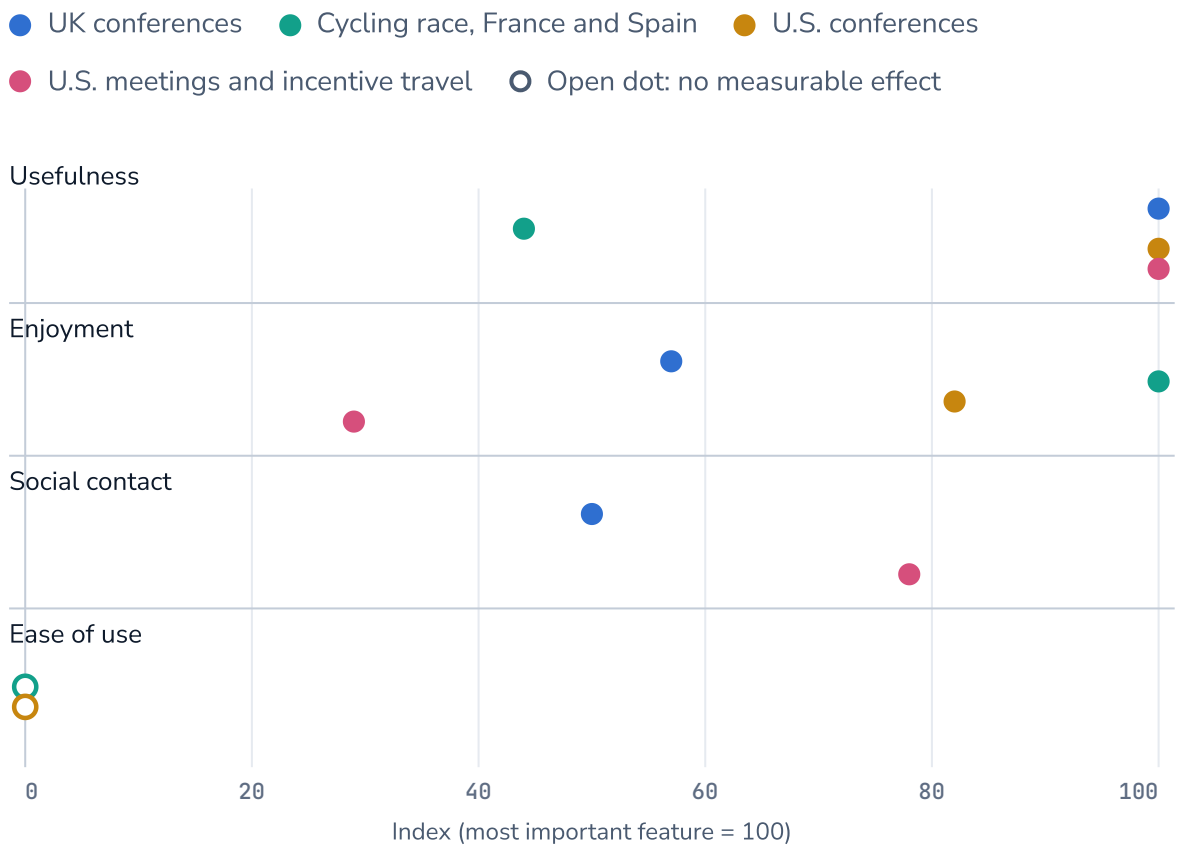
Attendees rate event apps mainly on how useful they are. Usefulness was the most important app feature in surveys of attendees at UK conferences, at four U.S. conferences and among U.S. meetings and incentive travelers[2,4,5]. At the Transpyr cycling race across the Pyrenees in 2022, enjoyment ranked first and usefulness second[3].

Contact with other attendees also mattered. Among U.S. meetings and incentive travelers, social contact through the app, such as exchanging contacts and messages, was the second most important feature, with an index value of 78 against 100 for usefulness[5]. At UK conferences, the social benefits of the app carried around half the weight of usefulness[2].

Ease of use made no measurable difference to how attendees rated the app, both at the cycling race and at the U.S. conferences. Ratings of ease of use did differ by age: at the U.S. conferences, they fell from 4.79 out of five among attendees aged 20 to 29 to 4.35 among attendees aged 60 and over[4].

Relative importance of event app features for attendees, by event

Index: most important feature in each survey = 100. Features without a dot were not measured in that survey.



Sources: Sangkaew (University of Surrey); Habachi, Palau-Saumell & Matute (International Journal of Tourism Research); Talantis, Shin & Severt (Journal of Convention & Event Tourism); Wei, Ozturk, Fairley & Hua (Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology) · Release dates: 2019 to 2024 · Regions: UK, U.S., France and Spain · Number of respondents: 428; 219; 381; 407

Event apps and event satisfaction

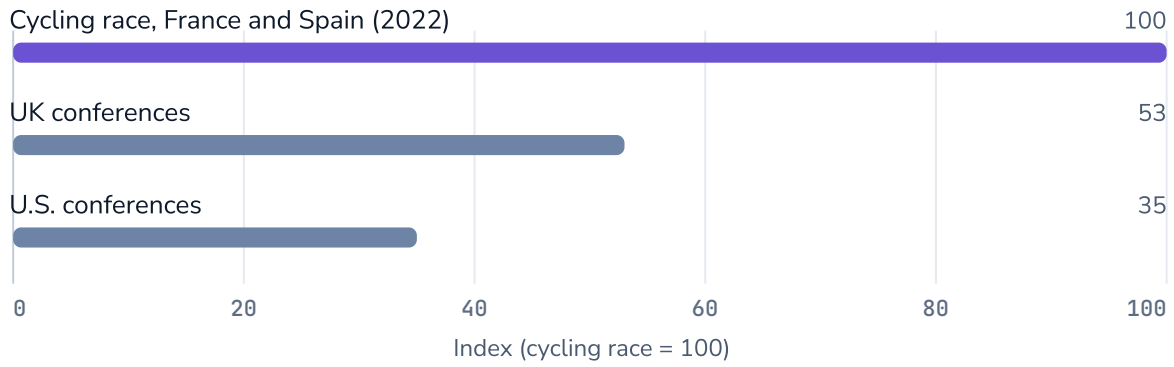
The link between the app and the event depends on the type of event. At the cycling race, where the official route app guided riders along an 800-kilometer

course in seven stages, attendees' rating of the app went closely with their rating of the event[3]. At UK conferences, the link was around half as strong[2]. At four U.S. conferences, it was around one-third as strong, and the app explained very little of how satisfied attendees were with the conference[4].

Using the app did not make attendees more satisfied. App users rated the U.S. conferences at 4.77 out of five on average, compared with 4.69 among attendees who did not use the app[4]. The difference in strength reflects the role of the app. At the race, the app was part of the event itself. At conferences, the app holds the program, documents and contacts for an event that would take place without it.

Link between attendees' rating of the event app and their rating of the event, by event

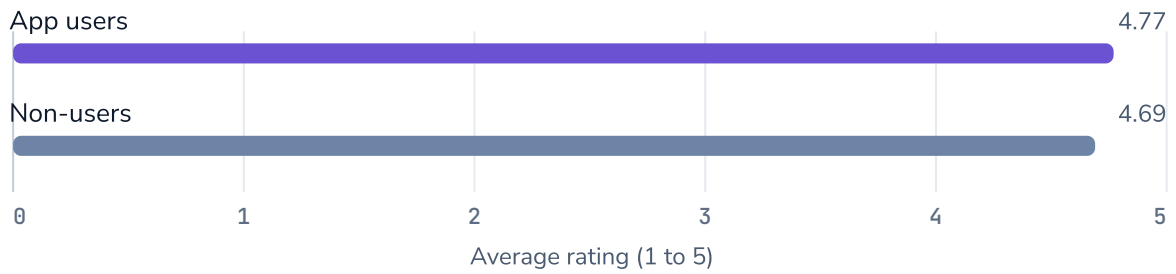
Index: cycling race = 100. A higher value means the rating of the app goes more closely with the rating of the event.



Sources: Habachi, Palau-Saumell & Matute; Sangkaew; Talantis, Shin & Severt · Release dates: 2024; 2019; 2020 · Regions: France and Spain; UK; U.S. · Number of respondents: 219; 428; 381

Average satisfaction with four U.S. conferences among app users and non-users

Average rating on a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).



Source: Talantis, Shin & Severt (Journal of Convention & Event Tourism) · Release date: February 2020 · Region: United States · Number of respondents: 381

App use and repeat attendance

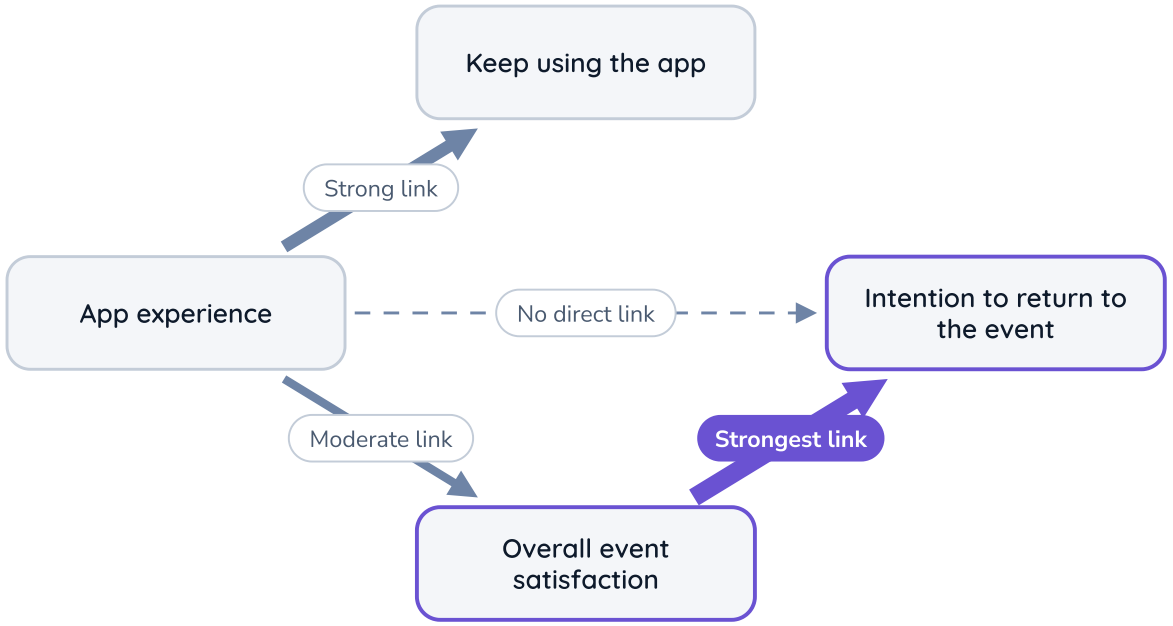
Among 428 attendees of UK conferences, a good app experience was strongly linked to continued use of the app and moderately linked to overall satisfaction with the event[2]. It had no direct link to the intention to attend the event again. The intention to return depended on overall satisfaction with the event, which was the strongest link in the data[2].

App metrics such as downloads, sessions and ratings therefore describe the app rather than the event. On their own, they are a weak indicator of rebooking.

Links between app experience, event satisfaction and the intention to return among UK conference attendees

Strength of each link as an index: strongest link = 100.

Main route Other links Thicker arrow: stronger link · dashed: no measurable link



Source: Sangkaew (University of Surrey) · Release date: 2019 · Region: United Kingdom · Number of respondents: 428

Demand beyond the session room

Attendees increasingly look for contact and learning outside formal sessions. According to Freeman's July 2026 Trends Report, attendees would spend 54 percent of their learning time outside session rooms[8]. AI matchmaking is already the most common AI feature that exhibition organizers offer, according to UFI[6]. App features such as navigation, matchmaking and meeting booking address this demand more directly than a digital program.

Notes on the data

The figures on event apps are based on four attendee surveys at UK conferences, four U.S. conferences, the Transpyr cycling race in France and Spain, and among

U.S. meetings and incentive travelers, published between 2019 and 2024, with 1,435 respondents in total[2–5]. Index values show the relative importance of each factor within one survey (most important factor = 100) and cannot be compared in absolute terms between surveys. No comparable data are available for trade fairs. Sources marked Reported were taken from publisher summaries or press releases and should be checked against the full report before quoting.

Sources

● Study ○ Industry source

1 Cvent. (2026). 2026 Planner Sourcing Report [Survey report]. Retrieved November 7, 2026, from cvent.com — Reported

2 Sangkaew, P. (2019). An investigation of how the adoption of event mobile applications influences satisfaction and post event behaviours of business event attendees [Doctoral thesis]. *University of Surrey*. — First-hand

3 Habachi, S., Palau-Saumell, R., & Matute, J. (2024). Transforming event experiences: The role of application technology in shaping behavioral intentions and attachment to places [Journal article]. *International Journal of Tourism Research, 26(5), e2782*. https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2782 — First-hand

4 Talantis, S., Shin, Y. H., & Severt, K. (2020). Conference mobile application: Participant acceptance and the correlation with overall event satisfaction utilizing the technology acceptance model (TAM) [Journal article]. *Journal of Convention & Event Tourism, 21(2), 100–122*. https://doi.org/10.1080/15470148.2020.1719949 — First-hand

5 Wei, W., Ozturk, A. B., Fairley, J., & Hua, N. (2023). What drives event attendees' intention to continue using mobile event apps? The role of app attributes, social exchange and social-image [Journal article]. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology, 14(3), 476–489*. https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-04-2022-0097 — First-hand

6 UFI. (2026, July). Global Exhibition Barometer, 37th edition [Survey report]. Retrieved November 7, 2026, from ufi.org — First-hand

7 Bizzabo. (2026). Event industry trends 2026 [Article]. Retrieved November 7, 2026, from bizzabo.com — Reported

8 Freeman. (2026, July). Freeman Trends Report: attendees want more event learning outside the session room (press release) [Press release]. Retrieved November 7, 2026, from globenewswire.com — Reported

The evidence

4 studies · 4 industry sources

SAMPLE

Four attendee surveys with 1,435 respondents

YEARS

2019–2024 (release dates)

METHOD

Survey data from the UK, the U.S., France and Spain; results shown as index values within each survey

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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