eventamin
Vision & Intelligence

EVIDENCE BRIEF
NOVEMBER 2026

EVIDENCE BRIEF · EVENT MANAGEMENT

# Screens Miss the Room

## How should events be studied online and offline?

Seventy percent of business-event stakeholders say face-to-face relationship building is the hardest part of events to replace. Studies of conferences, trade fairs, a start-up festival and an edtech event show what online, on-site and hybrid formats each let participants and observers see, and what they hide.

By Eventamin · How we work 12 November 2026

Europe, Finland, Germany, Australia, Worldwide

**5 studies** · 1 industry source

virtual events | hybrid events | event networking | event infrastructure | event apps | start-up events | Slush | trade fair floor plans | event observation | attendee attention

Also in Technology and AI

| | |
|---|---|
| EDITION | Evidence brief · Published 12 November 2026 |
| DOI | https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24378174 |
| CITE AS | Eventamin. (2026). Screens Miss the Room: How Should Events Be Studied Online and Offline? [Evidence brief]. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24378174 |
| WEB EDITION | eventamin.com/evidence/event-management/how-should-events-be-studied-online-and-offline, with interactive charts, chart data and the corrections log |
| LICENCE | Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) · © 2026 Eventamin |

KEY FINDING

Online and on-site events reveal different things: virtual formats lower costs and widen access but split attention and remove chance encounters, while on site, accreditation, floor plans, lounges and apps decide who meets whom. The mood, deals and networks events create are still read mainly in the room.

Four studies, 2013–2026; industry data 2026

## Key findings

- **Online cuts costs but splits attention.** Virtual events lower costs and travel and can open access to remote participants, but create digital divides, intensify fear of missing out and reduce shared attention when cameras are off[1].
- **Infrastructure decides who sees what.** Accreditation, gatekeepers, floor plans, VIP areas, virtual waiting rooms and muting shape access; at one trade fair, Chinese manufacturers were placed in a separate hall far from the main entrance[1].
- **Mood is designed.** Slush 2015 in Helsinki, with 15,000 attendees from 130 countries, 1,700 start-ups and 800 investors, cultivated enthusiasm through rock-concert lighting, smoke and gladiator-style speaker introductions[2].
- **Pitches sold markets, not impact.** Despite a theme of changing the world through business, most pitches in Slush's final competition were technical solutions focused on marketability and profit[2].
- **Apps and screens compete with the room.** At a three-day edtech event with more than 1,000 participants and 150 speakers, many participants worked alone on screens, and app notifications interrupted on-site interviews[3].

FOR THE MARKET

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24378174 · CC BY 4.0 · © 2026 Eventamin

## Market outcomes

What the studies mean for each part of the industry.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Organisers & associations** | Floor plans, hall allocation, lounges and the event app decide which encounters happen; placing exhibitor groups far from the entrance signals their status. Online access widens reach but needs deliberate formats for chance meetings. |
| **Exhibitors & sponsors** | Position on the floor plan and in the app shapes visibility as much as the stand itself; a rotating exhibition at the edtech event was barely attended while sessions filled. |
| **Academia** | Watching events in person, ideally as a team across parallel sessions, captures mood, gatekeeping and encounters that surveys and recordings miss; digital traces such as apps, chats and newsletters extend the view before and after the event. |

## Online, on site or hybrid

The events industry has returned to in-person formats, but not completely. In the Events Industry Council's 2026 survey, 70 percent of stakeholders said face-to-face relationship building was the hardest part of events to replace, and 29 percent expected less use of fully virtual formats[4]. In an industry survey cited in a 2022 study, 67 percent said networking at virtual events failed to meet expectations[5].

Studies that observed workshops, conferences, trade fairs and festivals before, during and after the pandemic show what each format lets participants and observers see.

### What online, on-site and hybrid events offer participants and observers

Classification of the studies' findings.

Strong Partial Weak No data

| | On site | Online | Hybrid |
|---|---|---|---|
| Low cost and travel | ✗ | ✓ | ◐ |
| Access for remote participants | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Spontaneous encounters | ✓ | ✗ | ◐ |
| Shared attention in sessions | ✓ | ✗ | ◐ |
| Reading mood and atmosphere | ✓ | ✗ | ◐ |
| Record of sessions | ◐ | ✓ | ✓ |

Sources: Schulte-Römer & Gesing; Decuypere et al.; Nikunen & Kolehmainen · Release dates: 2023 to 2026 · Region: Europe · Classification: Eventamin

## What virtual formats change

Virtual events lower costs and travel and can reduce resource gaps for participants from the Global South or remote regions, but they create new divides through digital access and intensify fear of missing out[1]. Joint attendance and joint attention drift apart online when cameras are off or only avatars are visible, and recordings weaken the sense of taking part[1].

Online platforms also produce their own events. At a virtual conference in 2021, access failures made the platform itself a running topic and turned into a community-building moment[1].

## Infrastructure decides who sees what

Access at events is built. Accreditation, gatekeepers, floor plans, seating, VIP areas, virtual waiting rooms, muting and platform features shape who can see and meet whom[1]. At one trade fair, Chinese manufacturers were placed in a separate hall for Asian exhibitors, far from the main entrance; at stakeholder events meant to green an industry, the absence of invited NGOs was itself telling[1].

At a three-day event for Europe's edtech start-up sector, with more than 1,000 participants, 150 speakers and around five sessions running at once, organizers built a collective spirit with games and app-based meetings, yet many participants worked alone on screens[3]. App notifications interrupted interviews, a rotating exhibition was barely attended, and promotion of the next edition began as soon as the event ended[3].

| ON SITE | ONLINE | EFFECT |
|---|---|---|
| **Accreditation and badges** | Registration and virtual waiting rooms | Decides who gets in and where[1] |
| **Floor plans and hall allocation** | Platform layout and menus | Sets who is seen first; separate halls signal status[1] |
| **VIP areas and speaker lounges** | Private rooms and muting | Creates a backstage for some participants[1,3] |
| **Event app** | Event app and chat | Arranges meetings but competes with the room[3] |

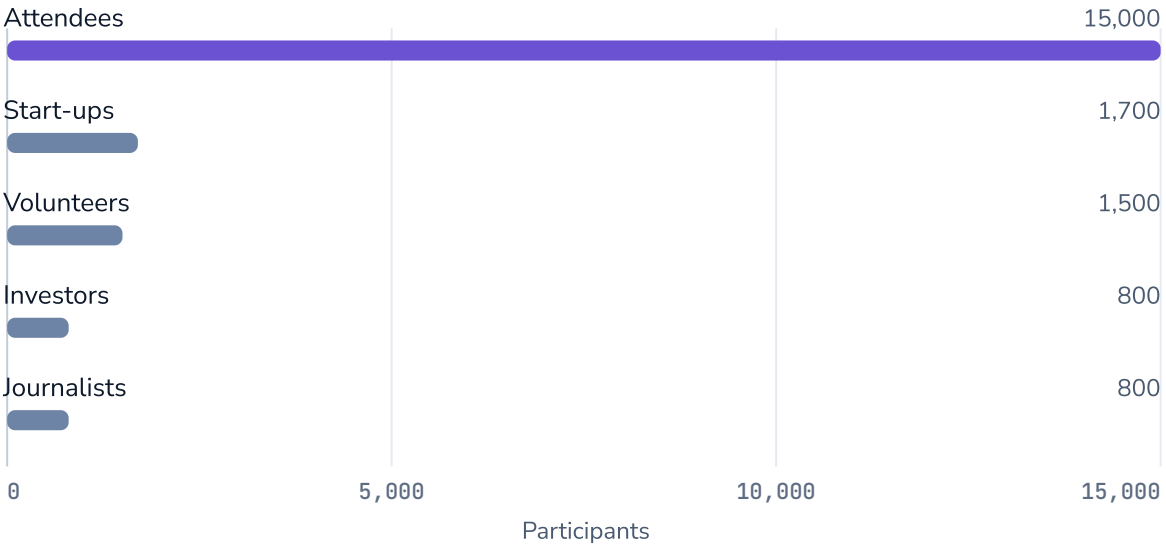
## The designed mood of a start-up festival

Slush, Helsinki's start-up festival, shows how an event manufactures enthusiasm. Its 2015 edition brought together 1,700 start-ups, 800 investors, 800 journalists and 15,000 attendees from 130 countries, run by 1,500 volunteers from 50 countries[2]. Rock-concert lighting and smoke, speakers introduced as gladiators and high fives cultivated an atmosphere that the national press described as glowing[2].

The festival's theme was changing the world through business, but most pitches in the final competition were technical solutions focused on marketability and profit[2]. Contestants had three minutes to win investors, and judges responded to the founder's character as much as to the idea[2].

### Participants at the Slush start-up festival in Helsinki in 2015, by type

Number of participants.




Source: Nikunen & Kolehmainen · Release date: 2025 · Region: Finland (Helsinki) · Event date: November 2015

## Watching events in person

Observing events in person records behavior, conversation and experience as they happen, and has informed strategies on crowd behavior, public risk and safety[6]. It suits events where a survey would interrupt the experience or cannot be run at all[6]. Teams of observers can cover parallel sessions, but digital notes and photos shared in real time still leave a gap between having been there and seeing the session secondhand[3].

## Notes on the data

The figures are based on four studies published between 2013 and 2026: a methodological study drawing on two researchers' observation at workshops, conferences, trade fairs and a festival between 2010 and 2021, a team study of one edtech event by eight researchers, a short field observation of one start-up festival, and a review of participant observation at events available to Eventamin as an abstract[1–3,6]. Industry shares are from the Events Industry Council's 2026 survey and an industry survey cited in a 2022 study[4,5]. The classification of formats is Eventamin's coding of the reviewed findings.

## Sources

● Study ○ Industry source


1 Schulte-Römer, N., & Gesing, F. (2023). Online, offline, hybrid: Methodological reflection on event ethnography in (post-)pandemic times [Journal article]. *Qualitative Research, 23(6), 1620–1646*. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941221110172 First-hand

2 Nikunen, M., & Kolehmainen, M. (2025). Affective capitalism and the (new) entrepreneurial mood: Slush as a field configuring event [Journal article]. *European Journal of Cultural Studies, 28(2), 271–288*. https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494241228015 First-hand

3 Decuypere, M., Brandau, N., Hartong, S., Joecks, L., Ortegon, C., Loft-Akhoondi, A., Tierens, T., & Vanermen, L. (2026). Tracing the infrastructural unfolding of (edtech) events through hybrid team ethnography [Journal article]. *Learning, Media and Technology, 51(2), 345–359*. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2025.2458667 First-hand

4 Events Industry Council and Oxford Economics. (2026, May). 2026 Global Economic Significance of Business Events [Report]. Retrieved November 9, 2026, from news.eventscouncil.org First-hand

5 Jung, S., & Lee, J. (2022). Current and future influences of COVID-19 on the knowledge management function of conventions and First-hand

exhibitions [Journal article]. *Service Business, 16(2), 391–410*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11628-022-00488-7

6 Mair, J., Whitford, M., & Mackellar, J. (2013). Participant observation at events: theory, practice and potential [Journal article]. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management, 4(1), 56–65*. https://doi.org/10.1108/17582951311307511 First-hand

## The evidence

**5 studies** · 1 industry source

SAMPLE

Four studies: observation at workshops, conferences, trade fairs and a festival from 2010 to 2021, an eight-person team at one edtech event, field observation at one start-up festival and a review of participant observation at events; two industry sources

YEARS

2013–2026 (studies); 2026 (industry data)

METHOD

Methodological studies based on observation at online, on-site and hybrid events in Europe and Australia

## 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.

eventamin.com · contact@eventamin.com · How we work: eventamin.com/method