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Vision & Intelligence

EVIDENCE BRIEF
NOVEMBER 2026

EVIDENCE BRIEF · INDUSTRY EVENTS AND MARKETS

Events Fail When Communities Drift

Why do field-configuring events fail?

The UK held more exhibitions in 2025 than in any year since 2015, yet the average show was smaller and shorter than before the pandemic. Studies of a French transmedia forum, carbon accounting standard setting, UN climate conferences and a U.S. bicycle show explain why events that once shaped their field lose that power.

By Eventamin · How we work 12 November 2026 France, U.S., Worldwide, UK

4 studies · 1 industry source

event failure | trade show decline | field-configuring events | event community | industry standards | event series | exhibitor retention | niche trade shows | standard setting | event strategy

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KEY FINDING

Events lose their power to shape a field when they fail to hold a stable community around shared categories and a narrative, when debates become technical and the organizer's central role is contested, and when stakes are low. Even successful events can decline when the market they define cannot sustain its participants.

Four studies, 2014–2024; industry data 2026

Key findings

- **Communities and categories come first.** Forum Blanc, a French transmedia event, drifted and closed after a decade because it opened to outsiders without building a stable community, shared categories and a consistent narrative[1].
- **Technical drift kills momentum.** Six standard-setting events on carbon accounting between 2003 and 2016 lost the momentum for regulation as debates turned technical and the standard setters failed to establish themselves as central[2].
- **Low stakes bring little change.** Regular UN climate conferences produced incremental progress, and the conferences' power to drive change faded as the field grew complex[3].
- **Success can turn into decline.** The North American Handmade Bicycle Show grew from 23 exhibitors in 2005 to 200 in 2013, then fell to 137 in 2015 as builders struggled to make a living[4].
- **Few livelihoods behind the show.** An estimated 30 to 60 frame builders in the U.S. earned a living from the handmade market the show helped define, and 73 of 326 former exhibitors had gone out of business[4].

FOR THE MARKET

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Market outcomes

What the studies mean for each part of the industry.

Organisers & associations	An event keeps its influence by curating a stable core community, a shared vocabulary and a clear narrative; opening the doors without that structure lets the event drift. Organizers who host standard-setting debates need a recognized central role and stakes participants care about.
Exhibitors & sponsors	A show that defines a niche brings visibility, but its value depends on whether the niche can sustain the exhibitors; falling repeat rates and a rising share of non-core exhibitors are warning signs.
Academia	Failure cases show the conditions for field configuration more clearly than success stories; event series need to be followed over a decade or more.

Why industry events fade

Events persist even as they lose weight. In the UK, the number of exhibitions in 2025 was the highest since 2015, yet average size, duration and attendance remained at 75 to 90 percent of their pre-pandemic level, according to the Events Industry Alliance[5]. Studies of events that once shaped their field show why some lose their influence and others disappear.

Four cases point to the same conditions. Events fail when they do not hold a stable community around shared categories, when debates turn technical and the organizer's central role is contested, and when the stakes are low[1–3]. A fourth

case shows that even a successful event can decline when its market cannot sustain the people it brings together[4].

Causes of decline of field-configuring events, by case

Classification of each study's findings.

Main cause · Contributing · Not observed · No data

	Forum Blanc, France	Carbon accounting standards	UN climate conferences	Handmade bicycle show, U.S.
No stable community	✓	·	·	◐
No shared categories or narrative	✓	◐	·	✕
Technical, abstract debates	·	✓	◐	·
Contested central organizer	·	✓	·	·
Low stakes	·	·	✓	·
Growing field complexity	·	◐	✓	·
Participants cannot make a living	·	·	·	✓

Sources: Gandia & Rüling; Giordano-Spring et al.; Schüßler et al.; Brewer · Release dates: 2014 to 2024 · Regions: France; Worldwide; U.S. · Classification: Eventamin

Community and categories

An event needs a core community and a shared language. Forum Blanc, an event for the emerging transmedia field in France, ran from 2009 to 2018[1]. Its organizers opened the event to outside actors but were reluctant to structure who attended and which concepts the event stood for[1]. Tensions built up, the event drifted and it eventually closed[1].

The study concludes that configuring a field requires a relatively stable community associated with the event, a shared set of categories and a consistent narrative[1].

When debates turn technical

Standard setting can stall inside its own events. Between 2003 and 2016, six events, four public consultations and two dialogues between standard setters, addressed how companies should account for carbon emission rights[2]. The momentum for regulation in 2003 eroded as debates became increasingly technical and abstract and too many positions were represented[2].

The international standard setters involved could not establish themselves as central to the recurring events[2]. Accounting for emission rights was gradually decoupled from climate change and carbon markets, moved to the research pipeline and forgotten[2].

Stakes and complexity

Events without high stakes change little on their own. Among the UN climate conferences from 1995 to 2012, the many regular conferences produced unspectacular, technical progress, while the few high-stakes ones created momentum[3]. As the field grew more complex and issues multiplied, the conferences lost much of their power to drive change, and delegations from the least developed countries struggled to keep up with technical expertise and night-long sessions[3].

When a market cannot sustain its makers

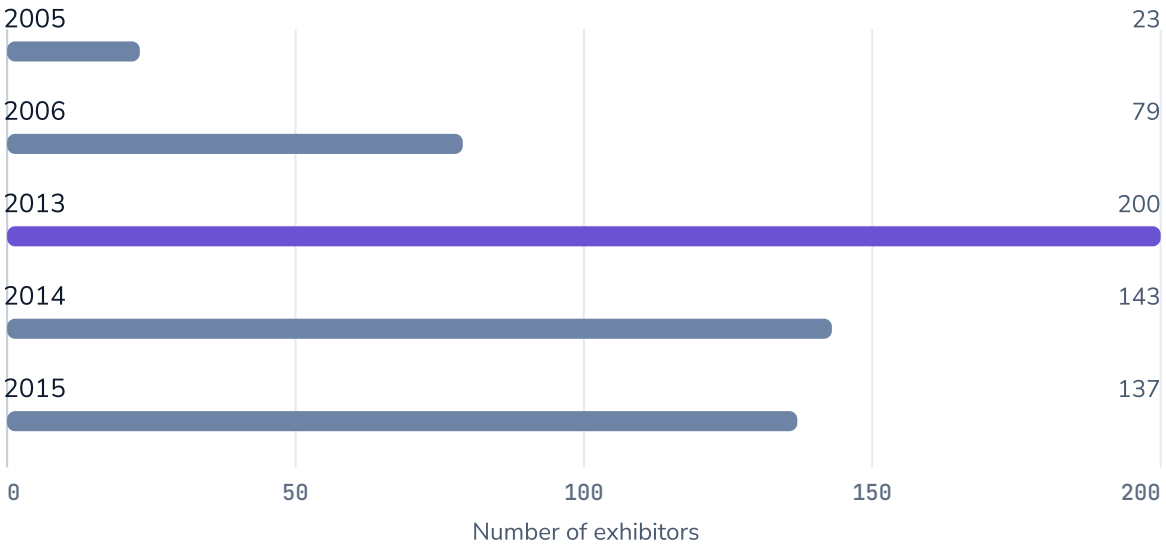
A show can define a market and still decline. The North American Handmade Bicycle Show was founded in Houston in 2005 with 23 exhibitors, because the main industry fair was too expensive for small builders[4]. With no trade association or trade press, it became the de facto promoter of the U.S. handmade bicycle segment and grew to 200 exhibitors in 2013[4]. It gave the segment its name and trends that major brands later adopted[4].

The success had limits. Single-person workshops could hardly scale, new entrants pushed prices down, and an estimated 30 to 60 builders earned a living from the craft[4]. By 2014 and 2015, exhibitor numbers had fallen to 143 and 137, builders

made up only around half of the exhibitors, and fewer than half returned from the previous year[4].

Number of exhibitors at the North American Handmade Bicycle Show in selected years from 2005 to 2015

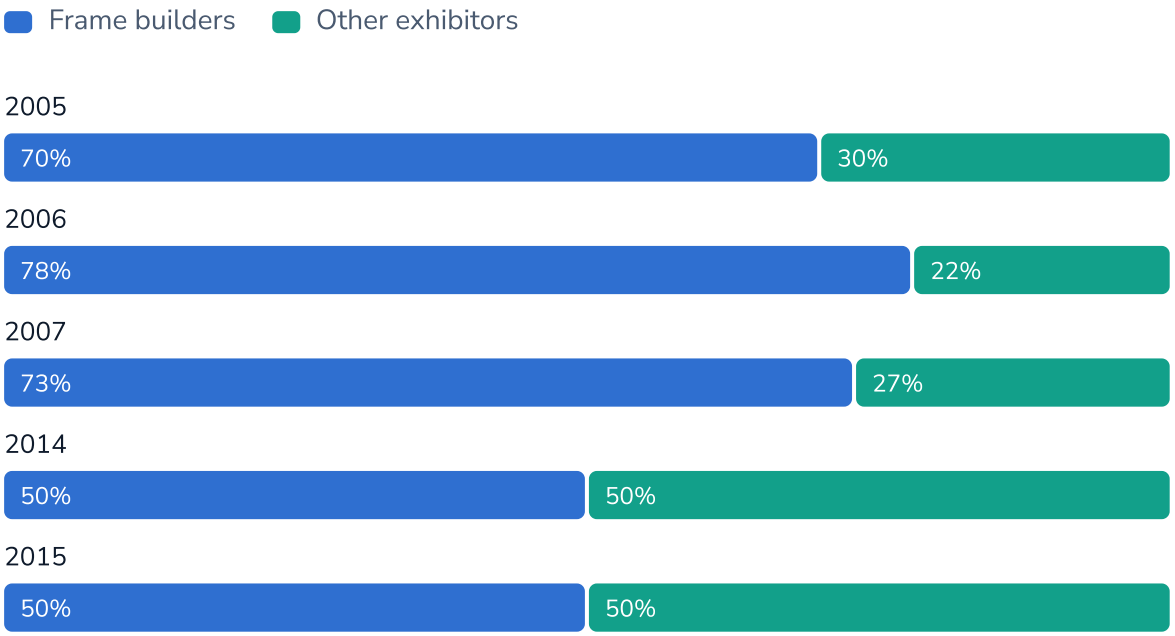
Number of exhibitors.



Source: Brewer · Release date: 2017 · Region: United States · Period: 2005 to 2015 · Data reconstructed from show records

Share of frame builders among exhibitors at the North American Handmade Bicycle Show in selected years

Share of exhibitors.



Source: Brewer · Release date: 2017 · Region: United States · Period: 2005 to 2015

Notes on the data

The figures are based on four studies published between 2014 and 2024: a longitudinal case of Forum Blanc from 2009 to 2018, document analysis of six standard-setting events, a study of 17 UN climate conferences and a case study of a U.S. bicycle show from 2005 to 2015[1–4]. Two of the studies were available to Eventamin in part. Exhibitor data for the bicycle show were reconstructed from incomplete records, and shares for 2014 and 2015 are approximate. The classification of causes is Eventamin's coding of the findings.

Sources

● Study ○ Industry source

1 Gandia, R., & Rüling, C.-C. (2022). Failing to configure? The life and death of Forum Blanc (Chapter 5) [Book chapter]. *In A.-S. Béliard & S. Naulin (Eds.), Trade shows in the 21st century: The role of events in structuring careers and professions (pp. 80–101). Edward Elgar.* https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800886049.00013 First-hand

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4 Brewer, B. D. (2017). Making the 'handmade' bike and trying to make a living: market objects, field-configuring events and some limits to market making [Journal article]. *Consumption Markets & Culture, 20(6), 523–538.* https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2017.1331646 First-hand

5 Events Industry Alliance. (2026, April). The Size and Scale Index for Exhibitions (SASIE) 2025 [Report]. Retrieved November 9, 2026, from cdn.asp.events First-hand

The evidence

4 studies · 1 industry source

SAMPLE

Four studies: a decade-long event case, six standard-setting events, 17 UN climate conferences and a bicycle show over ten years; one industry index

YEARS

2014–2024 (studies); 2026 (industry data)

METHOD

Longitudinal case studies with observation, interviews, documents and exhibitor data in France, the U.S. and international policy

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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