THE BUSINESS OF
INTERNAL EVENTS

Copyright

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About the Author

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EXPLORING THE INTERNAL EVENT ECOSYSTEM

If you ever want to make someone roll their eyes at you, just ask them how they feel about internal meetings.

You know they'll bring up the interminable staff meeting that's held every week whether there's anything new to discuss or not, or the mandatory workplace conduct training designed more to check HR boxes than address the root corporate culture issues causing the problematic behavior in the first place, or the team building meeting featuring incredibly awkward icebreakers.

While employees spend 37% of their time in meetings, according to the National Statistics Council, obviously not all of that time is being spent productively. In fact, 91% of respondents to a survey conducted by Verizon said they daydreamed their way through meetings, and 39% actually admitted to dozing off. Almost half of respondents to a Salary.com survey called out meetings as the biggest waste of their time – even beating out email and office politics.
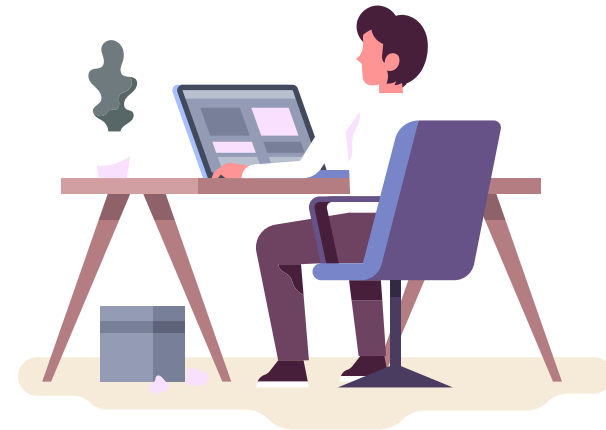
Everyone loves to hate internal meetings and events.

However, the reverse is also true: meetings can be extremely beneficial and efficient when those meetings are planned well and have clearly defined goals, a format appropriate to the purpose, and the right people in the room. Almost 64% of respondents to a recent exclusive EventMB survey said internal events help to retain employees.

In fact, once they stopped complaining, snoozing, and daydreaming, 92% of the Verizon survey respondents admitted that meetings are in fact an excellent opportunity to contribute and a key factor in their job satisfaction. More than two-thirds deemed internal meetings to be extremely or very productive; only a measly 1% said all meetings were a complete waste of their time.

87% of eventgoers say they prefer to meet face-to-face

67% say in-person

meetings are extremely/very productive

Source: Verizon Conferencing Survey

The internal event ecosystem is large and complex, with many moving pieces and many stakeholders. It also is where businesses and employees go to grow.

WHY INTERNAL MEETINGS?

There are as many different types of internal meetings as there are businesses and employees. They can range from being held for just a handful of attendees to hundreds, or even thousands. The reasons for holding an internal meeting also run the gamut from strategizing and brainstorming, to informing and training, to team building and product development.

What employers love about internal events is that they can control:

- **The audience** – from who attends to everything they do at the event, internal events are great for forming connections and breaking down silos
- **The experience** – effectively achieving goals for internal staff and stakeholders and making it possible to pinpoint, measure, and analyze attendee behaviors
- **The message** – internal events are perfect conduits for communicating what your brand stands for
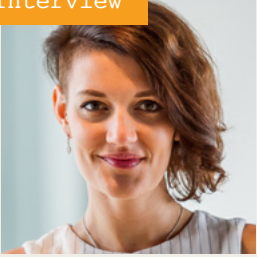
ALEKSANDRA PANYUKHINA

Head of Event Marketing, SEMrush

Aleksandra is a highly skilled event marketing professional with more than 10 years of experience in business, entertainment and sport events. Currently, Aleksandra specializes in event and experiential design in the digital marketing industry and leads the global event team at SEMrush.

Together with her team, she successfully manages 40+ events per year across 5 continents and ensures the events strategy is aligned with the overall brand's customer engagement strategy and business goals.

Her major focus is on creation of unique experiences and establishing personal relationships between brands and customers via offline events while driving the ROI of this marketing channel.

SUPPORTING INTERNAL EVENTS WITH STRATEGIC PURPOSE

For a long time, internal events had not been given proper attention and were underestimated in terms of the value they provided to the organization. This has led to the situation where internal events are not planned properly. It is a common thing to see an executive assistant, HR generalist or office manager struggling to put together large and costly events for fellow employees. While these people do their best, they do not have the experience required to not only execute logistics but strategically plan the activities, content and agenda.

Therefore, in my opinion, the biggest challenge in organizing internal events in 2019 is the level of professionalism in execution. This challenge negatively impacts the organization in three ways:

1. **Lack of strategic purpose.** The event is not strategically planned, and it does not focus on specific challenges or audiences, but is organized just because it is supposed to be organized.

2. **Lack of value for employees.** Even though you might not notice the impact right away, in the long run, people will be less and less inclined to attend internal events, thus decreasing their value for the organization.

3. **Lack of value for the organization.** Unless the goals of the event have been achieved and results delivered, stakeholders will not see the value of hosting offline events anymore, thus shutting down a very impactful channel of communication.

The good news is that companies have started shifting towards a more business approach to internal events, and this is the first step to overcoming the challenge. For the organizations that own in-house events teams, it is a good idea to involve them more in internal events as well – both as consultants and actual executors. Being one of those in-house events people, I can definitely say – we are always ready to help!

If there are no events professional in-house, it might be a good idea to at least consult a professional services agency and follow their recommendations for at least one of your events.

MY TOP 3 TRENDS

1. **Shift to strategic business thinking.**
This trend defines the next two. Think of your internal event as a marketer thinks of the next campaign: define the target audience and their challenges, and then plan the way to solve it and treat the employees as your customers.

2. **Justifying the ROI** in 1. value for money (for the organization) and 2. value for time (for the employee). Time is money. Therefore, taking all of your employees and basically artificially creating downtime in their work for an event must be a well-planned action with a clear goal, ROI and timeline for its measurement.

3. **Personalization and diversification.**
Personalize content, agenda and experience. Define challenges you want to solve for each of your target groups, curate the content, and clearly state what your attendees get out of the event. Even if your event targets a specific department, like a sales kick-off, make sure you personalize their experience and consider their region-specific wants and needs.

MY TOP 3 TOOLS

1. **Every organization has a CRM. If your** event is related to a product launch, sales boost, etc. – that is where you can track the impact of an internal gathering on actual revenue generated for the company.

2. **Post-event communication and feedback surveys** can easily be done with email automation software, like MailChimp or Yet Another Mail Merge Add-on, or survey-specific tools like SurveyMonkey or Google Forms.

3. **At the end of the day, it's all about the data**, therefore measure what you can with different platforms for analytics: Google Analytics to analyze traffic to online assets and HootSuite, SEMrush, SocialBakers or any other social media analytics tool (or just collect mentions manually) if you encouraged attendees to share and engage with the event on social media.

CHALLENGE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

It is easy to make assumptions about internal meetings and events – most of today's workforce has attended their fair share of internal events, and some have planned a few as well. But how do those assumptions hold up against real-world meeting planning?

EventMB recently conducted an exclusive survey to find out, taking a deep dive into the internal workings of the internal meetings and events ecosystem.

HOW PREVALENT ARE INTERNAL EVENTS?

Of the 620 total respondents to the 10-question survey, 320 said they planned internal events – but not exclusively. In fact, 90% of internal event planners said they also plan external events, while none of their 300 external-event-planner peers said they were tasked with working both sides of the meetings and events ecosphere.

This suggests that the volume of internal events that meeting professionals have on their agenda is relatively small:

46% reported planning five or fewer internal events annually, while just 20% said they managed more than 16.

On average, how many internal events do you plan per year?

1 to 5	**46.1%**
6 to 10	**23.3%**
16 plus	**20.7%**
11 to 15	**9.9%**

However, it's also possible that internal meetings, particularly small staff meetings or other regularly scheduled events, tend to be the Rodney Dangerfield of the meetings ecosystem: they don't get a lot of respect. When all the planner has to do is call a team into the conference room for a confab, there should be plenty of time to also plan an international trade show, right?

Compared to external events, internal events are:

Simpler to manage	**43.5%**
Require the same effort	**39.5%**
More difficult to manage	**15%**
I am not sure	**2%**
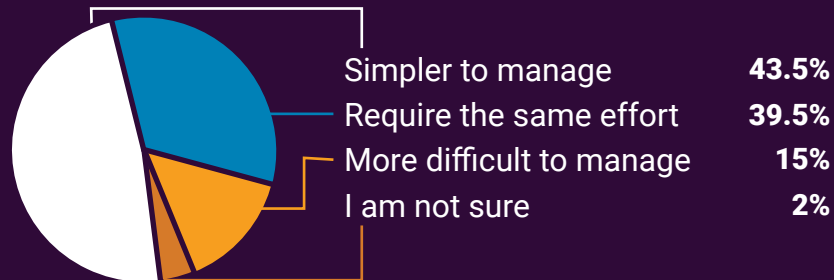
While some internal events are actually fairly simple affairs – 44% of the survey respondents said internal events were simpler to manage than external events – another 40% said they were at least as much work, and 15% said they were more difficult to manage than external events.

Of course, the difficulty of planning an internal event has everything to do with how complex that event actually is.

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INTERNAL EVENT TYPES: DISTRIBUTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Interestingly, almost half the respondents indicated team building and employee appreciation events as types they have to plan, followed by training and executive/leadership retreats. These tend to be shorter, closer-to-home, and smaller in scope than other types of internal events.

Further down the list were user conferences, sales kickoffs, incentive programs, product launches, and annual field meetings – all of which are more complex as they tend to entail travel, hotel guest room and event space booking, and more complex audiovisual and food and beverage requirements.

Onboarding and recruiting meetings were the least-frequently planned types of internal events – at least for the survey respondents, the bulk of whom were meeting planners (while these types of meetings generally fall more under human resources).

Small? Maybe. Unappreciated? Probably. Mighty? Definitely.

So, while some internal meetings may be smaller and more routine than others, the fact is that internal events are the engines that keep organizations running. The reason team building, employee appreciation and leadership summits top the most-planned list can be found in the answer respondents gave to this survey question:

Do internal events help retain employees?

Yes	**64.5%**
I am not sure	**28.2%**
No	**7.3%**
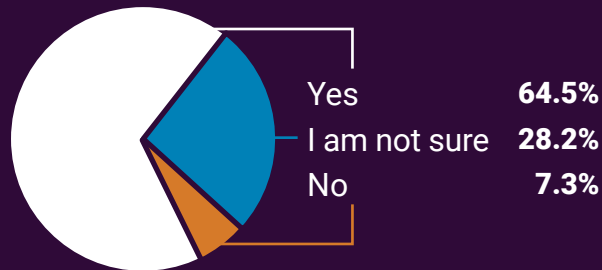
Do internal events help retain employees?

Almost 64% replied with a resounding "yes," while only 7% disagreed.

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Survey

Disparage them if you like, but face-to-face meetings build connections, increase collaboration, improve communication, and create networks and relationships, all of which are key to keeping in-house talent in house. This speaks to an imperative that 78% of business leaders say is important or urgent, according to the Deloitte 2019 Global Human Capital Trends report.

As they should: It costs a lot to onboard and train employees, and each person an organization loses leaves with valuable institutional knowledge, productivity, and even some of the morale of those staying on.

Almost two-thirds of respondents said their main drivers were recognizing and celebrating employees, as well as keeping them engaged, motivated, and loyal.

What are the top 3 reasons for doing internal events at your organization?

Reason	Percent
Keeping employees engaged, motivated & loyal	67.2%
Recognition and celebration events	66.6%
Workshops and breakout activities	44.9%
Set goals for the year	37.7%
Skills Development	35.9%
Developing employees into leaders	23.4%
Highlighting product enhancements	16.1%
Review sales strategy	15.5%
Spotlighting sales success	14.6%

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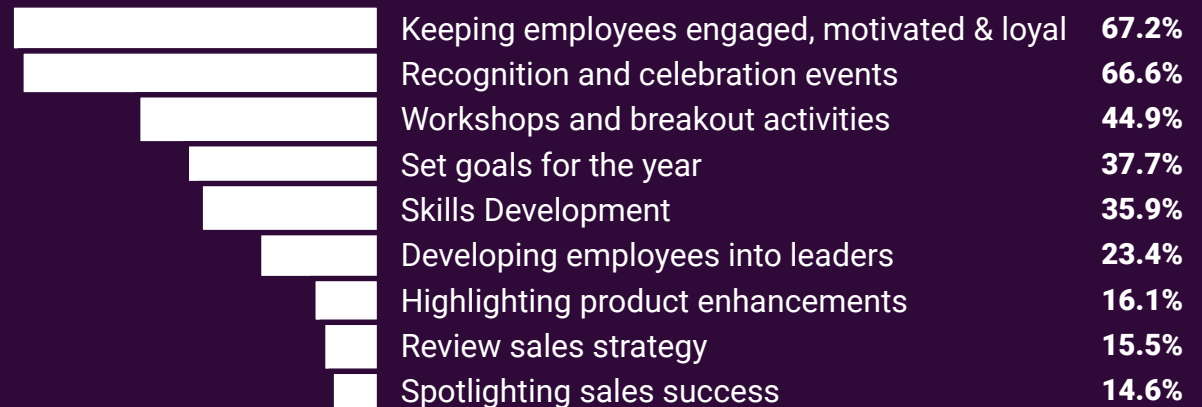
Other hands-on events, such as workshops and breakout activities, also scored highly. Again, working closely with peers, learning and collaborating in small groups, and having a shared goal are hallmarks of these types of events – and also of what helps keep employees motivated and satisfied.

All of these types of internal events also skew toward increasing collaboration and organizational transformation through individual enhancement, which are key goals for most internal meetings. In fact, research highlighted in

THE YEAR OF IMAGINATION

report found a global rise in collaborative learning and knowledge creation increasing concurrently with the incorporation of interactive workshops into business events. Almost three-quarters of business events included a workshop of some kind on their agendas.

While they also are on the agenda, broadcast-style meetings that highlight product enhancements, review sales strategies, and highlight sales successes appeared to be more perfunctory for survey respondents – more necessary evils than top drivers. In the middle range were things like goal-setting and skills/ leadership development events, which straddle the line between the types of meetings that motivate employees to remain employees, and those that simply broadcast necessary information.

BUDGET BLUES

Despite their importance in employee retention, organizations don't open their purses too widely for internal meetings and events. Approximately half of the survey respondents said they had less than $100,000 to spend annually on their internal events, with another quarter saying they had $100,000-$500,000 in their coffers each year. The numbers drop off dramatically after that, with just 10% each having budgets of $500,000-$1 million and $1 million-$5 million, and just 3% saying they had $5 million or more to spend each year on internal meetings and events.

Unsurprisingly, those with the highest budgets tended to organize more higher-ticket events, such as executive retreats, user groups, incentives, and product launches, whereas those reporting lower-level budgets tended to concentrate more on training, team building, and other lower budget types of events.

But even those with the smallest of budgets are planning more than the holiday party. It may be time for organizations to take another look at the amount they budget for internal meetings

and events. If they map what they are spending against how those events are helping them achieve their organizational goals of employee retention and beyond, they may just decide to put a bit more budget into events that move the needle in measurable ways.

What is the total annual event budget you typically work with?

Less than $100K	**50.15%**
$100 - $500K	**26.13%**
$500 - $1 million	**10.21%**
$1 million - $5 million	**9.61%**
$5 million+	**3.90%**

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MEASURING SUCCESS

What metrics do organizations use to determine whether or not their internal meetings and events are hitting their goals?

When you want to know if employees feel empowered, appreciated, and engaged as a result of an event, it's only logical that you would ask them, so it's not surprising that feedback and surveys were the number-one metric respondents use to evaluate the return on investment (ROI) of their internal events, followed by engagement.

Attendance, which often is a key metric used to measure ROI for external events, also was a key performance indicator (KPI) for internal events, according to the survey results.

INTERNAL EVENT TECH STACK

Given the importance of gathering attendee feedback to measure an internal meeting's success, it's not surprising that close to half of respondents said a feedback/survey tool was their most go-to technology must-have. Engagement tools, such as online polling and live Q&A, also were in the top three tech tools, along with online registration.

Given that 23% of respondents said they plan sales kickoff events and 21% plan product launches, it isn't surprising that 23% also said the sales impact of the event was a key ROI metric.

However, given the importance of employee retention and the key role of internal meeting and events in achieving this goal, it's curious that turnover/staff retention was only a key ROI metric for 18% of respondents.

5 MUST-KNOW INTERNAL MEETINGS AND EVENTS TRENDS

1. **Internal meeting planners** are not exclusively planning internal events. In fact, 90% are also planning externally facing events.

2. **Internal meetings** tend to be simpler to manage than external events, said 44% of respondents. Except when they're not – 15% said they were in fact more difficult to manage.

3. **Internal meetings** don't have extravagant annual budgets to work with – half of respondents said they had less than $100,000 to spend on their internal meetings each year.

4. **Internal meetings** are vital tools for employee retention, according to 64% of respondents.

5. **When they want to measure ROI**, 65% said surveys/feedback are their go-to metric, followed by engagement (63%).

SHOULD ORGANIZATIONS MAKE PLANNERS DO IT ALL?

While it may be common to expect meeting planners to work on both internal and external meetings, is it a good idea?

On one hand, the expertise required to handle the logistics of both kinds of events is very similar: negotiating venue spaces and audiovisual needs, coordinating speakers, making sure the right people are invited, etc. It makes sense to ask the person who already has the expertise to apply it to both types, bandwidth permitting. (The fact is that it's a boatload of work to handle the logistics of any event, internal or external.)

But the real power of any event, particularly the internal variety, is determining what organizational objective the event needs to accomplish and how best to use the unique power of face-to-face meetings to do it.

To be done well, and to achieve the event objectives, both the logistics and the strategic underpinning must be flawless. Are organizations asking too much when they ask meeting professionals who have developed expertise in internal meeting and events to then add another layer of expertise they would need to communicate with, to, and about a very different external audience?
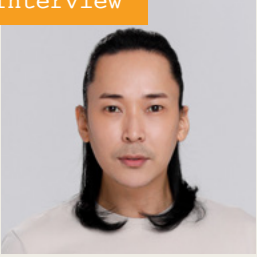
ALVIN LIM BAGASAN

Group Managing Director, The Geenger Group

Alvin is an events director and marketing communications practitioner based in Manila. He heads The Geenger Group, a marketing communications firm that focuses on branding, events management and AV production.

Prior to establishing The Geenger Group, he had stints in Hewlett-Packard Philippines, Universal McCann, Globe Telecom and Sun Cellular.

His 20-year experience in serving clients from varied industries such as automotive, IT, beverage, banking and telecommunications has earned him and his firm reputable multinational clients from Manila, HongKong and Singapore.

DEVELOP TESTING PLATFORMS TO FACE SHORTER LEAD TIMES

Timing and budgets take the top rank in challenges. With the majority of our clients, limited time also limits elements of the event that can be good or even great to have. And because some of the projects or campaigns they launch internally are information sensitive, the time to cascade for external third party agencies is also limited.

As internal events continue to require more commercial treatment, the budget allocation usually poses the greatest challenge in mounting them. For some of our clients with employees and stakeholders around 3500pax, technology-based tools like microsites and app-based management platforms are good tools to employ in managing their attendees. This is true for most contact center clients we work with. Especially for these clients with internal stakeholders ranging in age from 21-35, the use of such platforms can be an engaging aspect of the event.

However, due to the costs associated with these tools, like developing their event microsite and the backend management of them, they take a back seat. Other elements such as venue rental costs, production costs, security, talents, giveaways and F&B take priority in budget consumption.

Timing and preparation also greatly affects the utilization of such tools. With most of our clients, there is a short 6-week lead time to prepare for the event – sometimes, it's even shorter. Developing and testing actual platforms and how they will behave puts the overall experience at risk, so the integration of online experiences are replaced with the more traditional touchpoints.

Though, in practice, we have been educating our clients on the benefits of these platforms, we still find timing and budget to be a factor they also find challenging internally.

MY TOP 3 TRENDS

1. **The journey map and audience experience**

2. **Production value of aesthetic elements**

3. **Budget realignment or cuts**

MY TOP 3 TOOLS

Our clients have varied ways of measuring the effectiveness of their internal events.

Most of the projects we've handled allow us to gather online feedback forms, especially for those that don't entail sensitive data sharing.

For most of the sales-driven organisations, like pharmaceutical companies and financial institutions, they are measured a few months after based on sales revenues. Unfortunately, these are not shared with the agency.

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Stakeholders

INTERNAL MEETINGS ORGANIZERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Because internal meetings are all about an organization's employees and other key stakeholders, it's important to understand just who inhabits the internal meeting ecosystem.

While the specific stakeholders involved will vary depending on the purpose and goals of any particular meeting, here are some usual suspects you can expect to be involved in most internal events.

Stakeholders

MEETING OWNER

ROLE

This person(s) is responsible for calling the meeting or event. In the case of internal corporate meetings, this often is someone from the C-suite or a department head who has identified a need they want to address, a challenge that needs to be solved, or important information that needs to be disseminated.

COMMON TYPES

Common internal meeting owner types include:

- **Human resources**, especially in the case of personnel-related events and organizational policy training
- **A culture officer**, who would instigate events supporting corporate culture training. For example, Google created the office of Chief Culture Officer in 2006 to try to keep its start-up scrappiness from being completely subsumed as it grew into the giant multinational corporation it is today. As the #MeToo movement continues to grow, more organizations are adding diversity and gender equity to their corporate cultural values – and holding meetings to make sure everyone in the organization understands and will adhere to any changes to the culture that grew out of the #MeToo movement
- **The marketing and/or sales department**, which is often responsible for sales kickoffs, product launches, and user conferences
- **The product services department**, which may require anything from small staff meetings to company-wide events to review available products and services, develop and disseminate quality assurance policies and procedures, and train employees on new customer service and productivity protocols

While they are not technically meeting owners, **organizational policies and regulations** may also mandate board meetings be held at specified intervals and dictate how they are run.

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MEETING OWNER

RELATIONSHIP TO PLANNER

The meeting owner is responsible for communicating the event's goals, objectives and success metrics to the meeting planner. The planner then is responsible for relaying whether and how the desired outcomes were achieved once the event is complete.

ASK, ASK, ASK

Being on the same page as the meeting owner is absolutely imperative. Key questions to start the conversation include:

- **How do you envision the event?**
- **What do you attendees to take away from the event?**
- **How do you see the event unfolding?**
- **What specific outcomes do you expect?**
- **Have you defined success metrics and a method for tracking those?**

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INTERNAL MEETING SPONSOR

ROLE

This may or may not be the same person or department as the event's owner. The sponsor is usually the one footing the bill, which will depend on how meetings are financed in that specific organization. Some companies may direct all meeting spend through a centralized meetings/travel department, others through procurement, while others may come directly out of an individual department budget.

COMMON TYPES

Common internal meeting owner types include:

- **Internal sponsors** are the departments that are paying for the event, say human resources for a policy training, or marketing for a product launch
- **External sponsors** who may pay for certain aspects of the event in return for visibility to and/or engagement with the event's participants

RELATIONSHIP TO PLANNER

The sponsors communicate the funding level available to the meeting planner and ensure that the necessary funds are available. While it varies depending on the meeting type and the corporate structure, planners also often are responsible for reporting ROI back to the external sponsor, such as how many downloaded the sponsored app or attended the sponsored keynote. Planners also sometimes work with internal sponsors to tie metrics the department measures – for example, a bump in sales after a kickoff meeting – to metrics available to the planner, such as meeting attendance and the content covered.

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INTERNAL MEETING SPONSOR

GETTING STRATEGIC AROUND MEETING SPEND

Enterprise-wide strategic meeting management programs (SMMPs) have gained a significant toehold in the corporate world. The idea is that a centralized system provides more transparency and accountability than is possible when each department independently runs its own dedicated event budget. SMMPs are designed to capture meeting spend data so it can be analyzed to

- **find economies of scale**
- **streamline the meeting request and approval process**
- **provide a centralized picture of meetings organization wide**

Many also include a list of preferred vendors/suppliers with whom the organization has already negotiated contracts in order to streamline the planning process.

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MEETING AND EVENT PLANNERS

ROLE

The lifeblood of internal meetings, planners make the magic happen so the event goes off without a hitch – at least as far as attendees are concerned.

They determine everything from sourcing the meeting space and negotiating contracts to reconciling the billing post-event.

COMMON TYPES

The planners can be in-house employees or outsourced third-party independent planners. For some companies that outsource their meeting planning and have an SMMP, those third parties often are prime residents on the preferred vendor/supplier list.

Internal meetings and events also are often planned by unofficial planners, such as administrative assistants, though the rise of the SMMP and sophisticated event management technology is also causing more meeting planning functions to be centralized under one department to make it easier to track spend and attendee data.

MEETING SUPPORT SPECIALISTS

ROLE

In some cases, it may in fact take a village to make a meeting happen. In addition to meeting planners, there are a wide range of others in the organization who have a hand in internal meetings.

COMMON TYPES

- **Internal event technologists**, including audiovisual specialists and people responsible for the implementation and management of the entire event tech stack
- **Corporate kitchen/catering staff**, who could be called upon to provide food and beverage for in-house events
- **Internal communications specialists**, who coordinate group messaging pre- and post-event to drive home the key points
- **Moderators, facilitators and coordinators**, who are essential to ensuring the message is delivered in an engaging, easy-to-understand way

RELATIONSHIP TO PLANNER

The number and variety of the support personnel an internal event will require will depend on the size and complexity of the meeting, but all internal event planners should work closely with each of their support staff to ensure that the sound and visuals are what they need, that they have enough mics for their speakers, that the food and beverage is appropriate and yummy, that the messages are amplified in ex-meeting communications, and that their attendees learn what they are there to learn.

ATTENDEES/ PARTICIPANTS

Of course, the key stakeholders of any meeting are the participants you invite! The trick to a positive ROI is a carefully culled list that targets those who would derive the most value from the event depending on its goal, format, budget, location, etc. Remember that your internal event is a prime opportunity to connect peers with each other and with organizational leaders, and to strengthen their commitment to staying with the organization, as the EventMB survey results show.

While most internal meetings already have a pre-determined attendee list, usually provided by the meeting owner, it's vital for planners to really understand who will be in the room so they can shape the event to provide the best learning environment for that specific group.

Once you have identified who would most benefit from attending, get to know them. Survey them, have one-on-one conversations, collect as much data about them as possible. While surveys and feedback are the top post-event ROI metric identified in the EventMB research, they are doubly useful when you can connect the data collected pre-event with the results after. At the end of conversations with prospective attendees, ask them who else might benefit from being at the meeting – you may get some interesting insights that way.

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Stakeholders

LEARN THE LINGO

Every profession has its own lexicon, full of acronyms and buzzwords and jargon that can be unintelligible to outsiders. Everyone involved in planning an internal meeting or event should also take the time to learn at least some of the lingo – which is especially important for marketing a non-mandatory events.

Executives tend to talk in terms of ROI, cost savings, and actionable insights, while engineers tend to speak in mathematical terms. Salespeople are all about lead generation, quotas, and ABC (always be closing), while programmers tend to speak geek fluently – don't mix up your Heisenbugs (bugs that disappear as soon as you try to study them) and your Hindenbugs (data-destroyers par excellence)!

TRACY RIES

Corporate Event Planner, HHT

Tracy Reis is experienced in creating and executing memorable events for VIPs and companies. Specializing in high-end domestic and international travel destination, Tracy thrives on the details and the behind-the-scenes chaos that come with events.

PEER COLLABORATION: THE KEY TO TOP EXECUTIVES' BUY-IN

The biggest challenge for me, as a corporate planner in 2019, is gaining buy-in on the company's event strategy from newly appointed top executives within the organization, especially when they bring with them a corporate strategy shift (and a potential lack of respect for the planner's role within the organization). It's not always clear the best way to advise them on an event's ROI while still meeting bottom-line, but it's crucial to help them to understand the face-to-face value (especially when you do not have sponsors or ticket sales to bring in revenue) rather than only seeing the costs associated with it.

To help overcome this, I believe corporate planners need more coaching and peer advice/councils available to them. While there are many great tools and event management platforms available to compile ROI data/create graphs and reports, etc. – when you are struggling to even get an audience with the top executives and/or navigate office politics, it is frustrating and disheartening. Coaching (or just someone to listen/brainstorm with who understands the issues involved with being an internal corporate planner) on how to handle these frustrations effectively would be great.

MY TOP 3 TRENDS:

1. Creating a memorable experience vs "just another conference"
2. Combining business with leisure/ extended stays for attendees
3. Political/news headlines impacting destinations

MY TOP 3 TOOLS

1. Attendee feedback
2. Loyalty/engagement by attendees
3. Data/reports from event management software (i.e. YoY sales following event)

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Event Type

INTERNAL EVENT TYPES

Here are some of the main types of events that make up the internal events and meetings ecosystem.

SALES KICKOFF EVENTS

Sales meetings, which 23% of EventMB survey respondents said are in their often-planned repertoire, are vital communication channels for most companies that market products or services. Sales reps often spend a good chunk of their time out of the office as they travel to meet with customers. Bringing these wide-ranging reps together for a meeting or conference helps keep everyone on the same page when it comes to existing products and services, provides a platform for introducing new products and marketing campaigns, and also gives management a prime opportunity to motivate the sales team.

Other types of kickoff meetings also are common in the corporate world, most notably project-related events where the project team, its leader, and potentially even the project's client(s) get together to discuss the project's goals and timelines, the role each member will play in bringing it to successful completion, and who will take on specific tasks.

6 WAYS TO ROCK A SALES KICKOFF

To achieve measurable results, sales events should:

- **Have a reason to be held.** As with any other event, don't hold a sales event just because you always hold one in the third quarter. Be sure you have something to share that will move the needle for your sales team, be that new ways of prospecting for leads, better closing techniques, or selling points that have proven effective for the company's top qualifiers.

- **Set the tone for success by starting off with some good news.** Celebrate hitting sales targets, acquiring new accounts, or any other wins you can share with the team to get them fired up and ready to learn how to increase their sales potential.

- According to the EventMB internal meeting research, **34% use voting and live Q&A** for their internal events. If you are among the remaining two-thirds, start using on-site survey and polling technology to capture audience input and facilitate discussion. Poll them about the bottlenecks or obstacles that are getting in their way. What feedback are they hearing from clients? Show them the pain points they share via live polling results, and ask the team to brainstorm solutions to the common problems they have surfaced.

- **Interaction and engagement are key to a productive sales meeting**, so don't be afraid to ask them to workshop solutions to specific problems. Consider including some role play with feedback to help fine-tune their pitches.

- **Invite subject matter experts**, whether internal or from outside the organization, to share insights and best practices they can use to improve their sales techniques.

PRODUCT LAUNCHES

While some organizations' product launches are breathlessly awaited by the public and press – think Apple executives announcing the latest iPhone version from the Steve Jobs Theater – that product has to first be launched internally so everyone understands just what it is they are going to push out to the public. These meetings are organized by development and product team leads to get buy-in on the product message, the sales strategy, and each person's role in the launch.

Product launches, organized often by 21% of EventMB survey respondents, usually include product descriptions, key activities and timelines, what specific problem the new product solves, who the customer base is, and the product's features. The sales and marketing team will need to know pricing details and the promotional plan as well. These pre-public-launch activities also should include sales collateral, the goals and metrics that will be used to track how those goals are accomplished, and training for key sales and possibly channel partners.

These often take the form of a town-hall type of meeting, followed up by email updates, intranet reminders, and even posters in the break room with reminders of key points.

BRAINSTORMING MEETINGS

When an organization needs to come up with new products, services, ways of operating – any sort of innovation – face-to-face meetings can help bridge gaps between siloed departments and allow product teams to glean insights from other perspectives. Cross-pollinating ideas and perspectives from different groups that don't usually work together can often spur some real out-of-the-box thinking.

TRY THIS!

Some ideas to try to get brainstorming meetings off to a good start:

- Have everyone write their ideas – good or bad – on a Post-It notes for five minutes. Then, collectively decide on several that are worth pursuing. Alternatively, rotate the Post-its and let participants build on the ideas as they go around.
- Practice 'Yes and.' Instead of reacting to an idea with "Yes, that's a good idea, but... (we already tried that and it didn't work/we don't have the budget, etc.)" try building on the idea by saying "Yes and … (let's see if conditions have changed since we tried that 10 years ago/how can we could tweak the budget to make it work)."
- Write down all the assumptions involved in the situation you're addressing, then challenge each of those assumptions. What if that new product wasn't a new product, but rather a service? Is your usual customer base really who you want to reach with that new product, or is there a new niche you might be able to pull into your orbit?

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COMPANY-WIDE MEETINGS

Seminars, conferences, panel discussions, or other company-wide events can last anywhere from a few hours to several days, and they serve to keep employees informed, inspired, and aligned with the organization's goals and objectives. While these events are primarily educational, they can include networking, entertainment, team building, and recreational outings. Some may even include key customers and suppliers, depending on the nature of the information being shared.

Another form of a company-wide meeting is the 'town hall', which is usually more of an informal gathering. Many companies that are scattered nationally or globally choose to hold these online or, less frequently nowadays, in a company-wide conference call.

TRY THIS!

A big challenge with educational sessions at information-sharing meetings is that, like all one-way communication, it can be hard to get and keep attendees' attention. Here are some ways to keep the educational portion of these meetings from being snooze-fests or email-checking opportunities:

- Provide speaker training to the executives who will take the stage, most of whom, while excellent at their day jobs, likely are not the most scintillating of orators. Be sure to include tips on how to keep PowerPoint presentations on target, including limiting the number of bullet points and/or text per slide, using graphics to illustrate points, and keeping the font large enough to be readable at the back of the room.
- Break up presentations into short segments. Be sure to provide 'body breaks' at regular intervals, or at least announce at the beginning of the event that people should feel free to take breaks as needed.
- Ensure that panelists reflect the diversity of the audience and can represent, and speak to, the concerns of everyone in the room.
- Provide live polling, Q&A, and other audience interaction opportunities frequently.

TEAM BUILDING EVENTS

Team building events are the most-often organized types of internal events, with 49% of EventMB survey respondents regularly planning them. Love 'em or hate 'em, they are tried-and-true ways to bake in the corporate culture, strengthen relationships, and discover previously unknown talents and skills among team members.

Often held in conjunction with kick-off meetings, retreats, company-wide meetings, and other internal events, they also can be stand-alone events. You may have your work cut out for you in trying to generate excitement around these events, since only 11% of workers believe that off-site team building enhances their confidence, and only 14% say it enhances communication with managers and peers, according to hr.toolbox.com.

BOOST PRODUCTIVITY

To keep team building events productive,

- Do your homework. Are there work conflicts that may keep people from participating fully? Dig around to see where any misalignments or miscommunications may be so you can resolve them before the event.

- Choose activities based on which aspects of the team specifically need improvement, whether that be communication, coordination, or just basic trust issues.

- Include everyone on the team. Be prepared to accommodate team members who have physical disabilities, religious considerations, or other aspects that will need to be taken into consideration in food, lodging, or activities.

- Take them off-site if at all possible. Just getting people to a new, hopefully stimulating and interesting environment can help shake people out of their usual ruts and roles and help them focus on engaging in the team building process.

- Keep it fun and engaging, and don't be afraid to introduce topics and activities that have nothing to do with their every-day jobs.

- Celebrate successes, emphasize people's strengths, and look for synergistic opportunities to build camaraderie.

LITTLE-KNOWN FACT

If someone in Russia asks you to join a 'flying meeting,' they aren't expecting you to hop on a plane. It's just what the Russian term for a last-minute get-together.

Source: Wikipedia

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BIANCA DRAGAN

Brand and Event Manager, Paddle

Bianca is the Brand and Event Manager of Paddle. Since joining Paddle she has organized successful internal and external events – everything from office warming parties, summer retreats, Christmas parties to trade show booths and workshops.

Prior to Paddle, Bianca managed successful fintech events across New York, Sydney and Amsterdam and is a graduate of Events and Conference Management.

In her spare time, she loves traveling to far-flung places, hacking travel points and playing strategy video games.

COLLABORATION TO ACHIEVE INCLUSION

The biggest challenge is inclusivity. At Paddle, we try to cater to every request and requirement of all employees, whether that means an exhaustive dietary requirements list, complicated travel logistics or satisfying some very interesting requests.

I think it's worth getting extra help in prepping the event and making sure everyone feels included in the event, regardless of nationality, diets, background or age. In the end, you're the one who is getting better feedback regarding event satisfaction.

MY TOP 3 TRENDS

1. **Employee engagement.** Internal events are seen as a good way of connecting teams that work in silos, improving productivity and boosting happiness.
2. **Aligning employees to the company culture.** With culture being top of mind in workplaces nowadays, events are a great way to create a sense of togetherness and teamwork.
3. **Internal events are a perk that complete the benefits package.** Rewarding employees for their hard work by bringing them together and highlighting the great work that has been done. Awards ceremonies are a fantastic way to reward employees and motivate others to strive for more.

MY TOP 3 TOOLS

1. **Incentivised timely surveys.** A survey is key to getting qualitative feedback that you can act on when the next event comes along. I found great success sending this on the way back from an event – we are usually on a bus trying to pass time and I can do a personal call for feedback.
2. **Employee satisfaction and engagement.** The people team at Paddle send regular monthly surveys for employee satisfaction, and that way I can see if the events have had an impact.
3. **Merch use.** This might be controversial, but hear me out. I put a lot of time and effort into making swag bags as good as possible. Whenever I see someone in the office months later wearing the swag, I feel like they are taking the memory of a great event and reliving it over and over - so invest in swag!

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EXECUTIVE RETREATS

Also called leadership summits or leadership retreats, these are usually small, high-level gatherings of the organization's top tier. Retreats, which were the fourth most-common type of event, tend to be held off-site – usually at a resort or an unusual venue that helps to keep the executives' minds off the daily grind and on new ways of thinking and creative solutions to their organization's challenges. These can be luxurious or rustic, but most executive retreats will include a mix of business, brainstorming, team building, and entertainment/relaxation.

TIPS AND TAKEAWAYS

- Don't keep them in the boardroom all day – use all the resort's nooks and crannies. For example, hold an after-dinner chat at the firepit, or luncheon at the clubhouse overlooking the 18th hole.
- Provide the background material ahead of time. Don't waste precious away-from-the-office time rehashing old information. If it can be summarized and sent prior to the retreat, do it, and save the on-site time for brainstorming new ways forward.
- Give them some downtime. While you do want to maximize their time together, you do not want to burn them out! Create 'white space' in the schedule where they can let what they are learning sink in, come up with new approaches, or just relax with a spa treatment.

BOARD MEETINGS

Board meetings are formal meetings of an organization's board of directors that are run according to the organization's official rules and procedures. Held at regular intervals and presided over the board chairperson, these meetings address policy issues and problems, and must be attended by a quorum (a minimum number of board members).

Topics of discussion usually include any unresolved business, financial standings, new business and any other concerns board members may have. They end when someone asks the meeting to be closed and the suggestion is seconded by another. Minutes are recorded for each meeting, and are summarized and read aloud at the start of the next meeting.

STUDY UP

While not all board meetings are sticklers, it is a good idea to at least have a glancing knowledge of parliamentary rules, as laid out in Roberts' Rules of Order, when planning or running board meetings.

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INCENTIVES AND EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION EVENTS

INCENTIVES, planned by 22% of the survey respondents, are designed to reward valuable employees for a job well done and motivate them to continue to top their previous efforts. These usually take the form of trips to far-flung and fabulous resorts for top-selling salespeople, though some organizations include some level of incentive travel for non-sales staffers as well. Research by the Society of Incentive Travel Excellence, the Incentive Research Foundation, and Financial and Insurance Conference Professionals indicates that spending on incentive travel is on the rise, as is the number of those who are qualifying for incentive travel. According to the 2018 Incentive Travel Industry Index, approximately half of buyers said their overall incentive travel budget increased in 2018, and more than half of all buyers plan to increase the number of people who are eligible for travel rewards.

INCENTIVE TRIPS are usually focused on providing fun and unusual experiences that qualifiers would not be able to get on their own, which makes them challenging for planners, destination management

companies, and meeting venues. Many companies also include the C-suite to foster a stronger corporate culture and provide qualifiers some face time with corporate leadership. Many companies now are also including some educational aspects as well as entertainment and adventure.

Employee appreciation events, organized by 48% of survey respondents, are another way organizations thank and motivate their staff members. This could be a party at the office, a meal at a local restaurant, or a full-blown event with team building, awards, activities, and entertainment, held either in house or at a local event venue.

TOO MUCH FUN?

While incentives should be fun, they are still a form of business event and must be planned accordingly:

- Have a defined goal for the incentive trip, be it increased sales, a better motivated workforce, or something else. But do make it a SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound).
- Find out what your qualifiers value so you can tailor the program to their specific wants.
- Understand the tax implications – incentive trips can count as taxable income in some circumstances.

USER CONFERENCES

User conferences, which are organized by 32% of EventMB survey respondents, aim to bring the team together with key clients and prospects – in some cases, thousands of them. These are important opportunities to educate them on the upcoming product pipeline, best practices for products or services, and the latest and greatest in their industry.

These events are great opportunities for the company to learn from the clients as well, and can be used to open a dialogue and encourage peer-to-peer sharing. They allow the company's team to meet and mingle with clients to foster better client-employee communications and relationships.

Another form of user conference is the road show, where select representatives hold a series of events in different locations to offer presentations and demonstrations of the organization's products or services, answer questions, and bolster the brand awareness around (especially new) products and services. These can generate a lot of buzz, as events often include entertainment, a fun environment, and enticing food and beverages. A field event is a scaled-down version of the road show.

KEEP IT ALL ABOUT THEM

While their focus is going to be on your products, your focus should stay relentlessly on them:

- Interact with them pre-conference on their preferred social media channels, user forums, or other online or in-person gathering points.
- Provide solutions that reach further than just your products. Connect them with information on how to better run their businesses, catch onto new trends, and all-around improve their professional lives.
- Make sure representatives of your organization are accessible, easy to identify, and well-informed.

HUMAN-RESOURCES MEETINGS

From recruiting and onboarding to training and exit interviews, HR is the engine that runs a good proportion of an organization's meetings. Recruiting could take place at job fairs, or the organization could run informational programs designed to appeal to prospective employees.

Training can take the form of ongoing seminars or workshops, either in-house, at a training facility, or as part of a company-wide event. Increasingly. organizations are using webinars and online modules for routine training on company policies and procedures that doesn't require any hands-on activities or interpersonal interaction.

GETTING CREDIT

- Some organizations rely on external sources for their employees' professional training, including conferences and conventions held by associations serving their professional niche as well as colleges and other learning institutions, while others keep it in house.

- One rising trend in both externally and internally provided training is micro-credentialing, where learners can take a course and earn a digital badge that they can display on their resume and social media profiles. This gives learners a visible way to demonstrate their mastery of new material or skills.
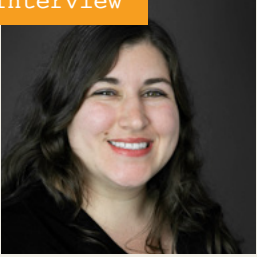
CASEY SMIRNIOTOPOULOS

Sr. Event Marketing Manager, Ekata

Casey leads global events at Ekata and is focused on using in-person experiences to deepen relationships, exchange knowledge, and bridge the physical-digital divide. She has worked in global corporate events for more than six years and has a passion for giving her event participants lasting, positive memories. Casey holds a Master's in Education from Argosy University and a BA in Literature from Claremont McKenna College.

MAKE YOUR AGENDA PARTICIPATORY

While the trends for 2019 lean towards more active employee participation in company meetings, and leadership is starting to see the need for it, one of the biggest challenges is still overcoming employee perceptions and expectations.

When you move to an internal event model that demands engagement and two-way knowledge sharing, you need to facilitate a culture shift in the attendees. It's more work than merely sitting and consuming (or ignoring) what leadership presents. This might involve prework or creating an event agenda that draws participants into the mindset over a series of activities.

This certainly involves more active participation from leadership: they need to wholeheartedly buy into the process, demonstrate an all-in attitude to the activities, and convey a genuine desire to learn from the other employees. There also needs to be a promise fulfilled to act on the learnings or outcomes from the event.

Nestled within this large challenge is an even more important one: a company has one chance to do this right. If an event asks for active participation, receives it, then bungles the results, trust is lost. Momentum is lost. Those new employee expectations must be met.

MY TOP 3 TRENDS

1. **More employee participation**, two-way dialogue, and the goal of getting employees to not only understand the vision for the year, but to feel inspired by it.

2. **We are moving away from the alcohol-fueled party** toward something Ekata has done for years: creating a festive, activity-filled party for participants of all ages to enjoy. This can involve holiday crafts, cocktails, mocktails (!), themed photo booths, and more.

3. **I'm seeing more team building events** that eschew trust falls for shared experiences like wine tasting, glass blowing, and boating in an effort to strengthen team bonds and effectiveness.

MY TOP 3 TOOLS

1. Post-event survey (repeated at 3/6/9 months) asking employees to state the vision/strategy for the year and rate how well they thought the company was doing to execute on it...anonymously, of course

2. Post-event scalar feedback on how well they got to know new-to-them employees

3. Actionable ideas coming out of the black box activity that would benefit the company line, the impact of which would be reviewed on a 3/6/9/12 month cycle

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POWERING UP INTERNAL MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Event technology has been a huge game-changer for internal meetings and events, with systems now available that can support, manage, and track every stage of an event from soup to nuts.

Research has shown how meeting planners that use technology increase attendance, boost productivity and reduce costs[1].

EVENT TECH CAN

- Automate manual processes (so long, Excel spreadsheets!)
- Collect data on attendees
- Prove return on investment (ROI)
- Engage attendees pre, during, and post-event
- Streamline registration and payment processes

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1 Frost & Sullivan: Technology Key in Transforming Meetings and Events
https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/frost--sullivan-technology-key-in-transforming-meetings-and-events-232840181.html

CONSIDER THIS

It makes sense to consolidate your internal event activities as much as possible, as bringing all your business to one supplier increases your negotiating power. This is especially true when you are sourcing venues using RFPs, but also if you are looking for technology tools to support planning and delivery.

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EVENT MANAGEMENT

Almost a quarter of EventMB survey respondents said they relied on event management software, which often comes in the form of a complete meeting management platform that includes other popular event technology tools, including venue sourcing, event registration, abstract management, and event apps.

VENUE SOURCING

Planners no longer need to Google themselves silly looking for an appropriate off-site venue that ticks all the boxes for the type of meeting or event they are building. Now there are vast databases of global event venues you can search and filter to get a list of venues that have what you are looking for, from meeting room capacity, average hotel room rates and number of sleeping rooms, to on-site food and beverage options. Once you narrow it down to the best matches for your event, all you need to do is plug your needs into an electronic request for proposal (eRFP) template, send it off and wait for the responses to roll in. Because the same templated information goes to all your prospective venues, the bids should be easy to compare, as opposed to manual proposals, which can vary widely from venue to venue.

AN eRFP CAVEAT

Just because you can send hundreds of eRFPs with ease, that doesn't mean you should. Hotels have noted a big bump in the number of eRFPs they are receiving, and sometimes this can slow down the response time considerably. Instead of spamming every and any venue that may meet your needs, take some time to pare down your list to just the top contenders. Your hotel partners will thank you.

EVENT REGISTRATION

It should be quick and easy to register on your event website, and event management technology can help by prepopulating registration forms with attendee information. It also can help you segment your audience so you can personalize their route through the registration process to sign up for what is most relevant to them.

In addition, external meetings tend to be plagued with potential registrants who drop out half-way through the registration process – either because they aren't yet fully committed to attending, or maybe they just got distracted and forgot to complete it. One of the beauties of planning mandatory internal meetings is the added luxury of knowing that they have to complete the process, and you can ask for as much information as you need up front. That may be why almost 42% of EventMB survey respondents said online event registration is a must-have for their internal meetings tech toolkit.

ROOM BLOCK MANAGEMENT

One best practice is to integrate housing and travel information into your registration process.

For example, if your internal event requires off-site housing, technology can make room-block management a lot easier to manage. There now are systems that enable planners to track room, pick-up and attrition across several properties and events in real time, as well as customize booking sites for each event. Some registration platforms feed guest room booking directly into hotel reservation systems as well.

ONSITE CHECK-IN AND BADGING

Technology also can help reduce long registration lines and vastly improve an attendee's first impressions of the event by enabling them to check-in onsite on a touchscreen and get their badge printed on demand.

An added bonus is that using onsite check-in and badging allows the meeting organizer to reduce the number of people staffing the check-in table, and also cut down on the hours staff spends pre-printing and organizing name badges. There also are some systems now that use facial recognition to make the process even faster – in essence, the attendee's face becomes their ticket and all it takes to get their badge is a quick scan.

SESSION & MEAL ATTENDANCE TRACKING

The ability to scan attendees' badges as they go from session to session and head into networking functions provides data you can use to determine your space and F&B needs moving forward – and gives you instant feedback if you need to shift anything on the fly as well. It also gives you insight into the attendee journey onsite, which starts when they walk in the door.

Many scan badges – and now, facial recognition software is being used for session and meal tracking as well as registration – to ensure that all who were supposed to be at mandatory sessions actually were in attendance.

DEMONSTRATING ROI

The health of any internal meeting or event depends on the return it can provide on what the organization invested in it, called ROI. Event technology pulls all the data you need to develop a data-based report on key performance indicators (KPIs).

For 58% of EventMB survey respondents, these included attendance, which of course can be pulled from the registration data. Data on engagement and motivation, key metrics for more than 63% of respondents, can be pulled from polls, surveys, live voting, Q&As, and other feedback and engagement tools.

INVITATIONS AND 'NURTURE' EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS

Personalization and customization are consumer trends that have become increasingly vital for internal events – everyone, including your attendees,

wants to feel that their specific needs are understood and taken into account.

While not really necessary for meetings of small, cohesive teams, those who plan events for larger teams and company-wide meetings can use today's technology to break the email list down by job title/role, past attendance, and more. This lets you more closely tailor pre-event communications to better engage potential attendees – and better engagement means increased learning and retention, and a more motivated workforce.

MOBILE APPS

Mobile apps have become a staple of most large external congresses and conventions as a way to both save printing costs and engage attendees more fully through surveys, polls, live Q&A features, social media feeds, and photo-sharing. Native mobile apps also allow for push notifications, which offer organizers a channel for keeping attendees up-to-date on any changes or additions – or even a cool social event they may not know about otherwise. Event apps can be used for wayfinding, as many include interactive maps that help attendees find their way around the meeting venue.

Naturally, event apps are perfect for bolstering networking, especially at large internal events. They often include features common to smart devices, like

peer-to-peer messaging and scheduling tools, and can also facilitate smart matchmaking in the form of AI-powered suggestions based on common interests and proximity.

MOBILE APPS AND INTERNAL MEETINGS

While mobile apps can add value to most types of internal meetings, they are especially useful for:

- Providing easy ways for all to participate and provide feedback in town hall meetings
- Engaging and creating buzz at product launches and sales kickoff events
- Keeping everyone on the same page during a fast-moving, multifaceted roadshow event
- Facilitating learning through interactive polling, Q&A and quizzes during seminars and workshops

Technology

SURVEYS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE EVENT

The more you know about your attendees, the better you can tailor the event to their needs and learning preferences. Surveying them before the event will help you fine-tune the agenda and speaker roster. Real-time surveys and polls during the event help to up the engagement factor – and get their thoughts and feedback while the experience is still fresh in their minds. And post-event surveys will help you determine if you met the event's target goals and demonstrate the value of the program, which is especially useful in the case of training, strategic planning, and team building events.

SOCIAL MEDIA

No doubt your attendees will be tweeting and Facebooking and Snapchatting their way through your internal event. If there will be confidential information shared, or just inner-circle musings best kept in the room, be sure to inform all attendees that certain things under discussion are not to be shared.

On the other hand, if you want the word to get out and get viral, say for a product launch, encourage participants to get social by giving them event hashtags, holding contests to reward your most-active sharers, and live-tweeting content from the event. Selfie stations and other visual cues can help spur attendees to share their take on the event to their social circles.

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KAREN HARTLINE

Senior Event Marketing Manager, Particle

Karen is the Senior Event Marketing Manager at Particle, a company in the IoT space, and works on events for developers and enterprise companies.

With over fifteen years of event production experience in areas of recreation, conferences, technology, and special events, Karen Hartline, CMP, brings creativity and a personal touch to create truly special events for her clients. She prides herself on event design and strategy to make an unforgettable event.

Karen has a B.S. in Recreation Management from the University of Central Oklahoma and a certificate in Meeting and Event Planning from Madison Area Technical College. From Oklahoma City, Karen calls Las Vegas "home," and enjoys spending time with her pups, exploring Sin City, and traveling in and out of the local airport.

KNOW YOUR KEY COMPANY DATES TO GAIN MORE LEAD TIME

As with most events, the planning lead time is becoming shorter and shorter. This may be due to companies being reactive instead of proactive, which can be hard to get in front of.

Short lead times have consequences, including difficulty finding the best location, an increased risk of employee conflicts or out of office dates, and even inflated costs due to rush fees from vendors. If your employees have to be flown in, flight costs are likely to be higher the closer to the date of booking.

Internal events should be budgeted and planned for, not treated as an afterthought. Allowing everyone proper time to plan will in turn allow all attendees to be fully present during the event. Give those presenting enough time to create presentations and disseminate relevant information and updates for attendees to review before the event.

As the planner in your organization, you should take the lead in suggesting internal events so everyone can be better prepared. Think about the overall goals defining who should attend and who should present. Look at other events happening throughout the year so you're aware of the calendar in order to suggest the best dates. You may also want to consider if there are important announcements the company would need to make, like a product unveiling or update, that can be shared at the event to educate everyone at the same time.

Once you have these areas outlined, you can jump into logistics and planning, hopefully with more advanced notice!

MY TOP 3 TRENDS

1. **Unique venues.** Whether it's a meeting, like a sales kickoff, or a holiday party, companies want to show how much their teams mean to the business. Having a unique venue for your event shows you care about your team.

2. **Team building.** Think outside of the box for unique activities! I once organized a private dinner in an arts district that included a group

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painting session. Each person received a 5" x 8" canvas with a 'paint by numbers' space to paint in, and the rest to be painted as each person desired. When all the panels were put together, the company logo was prominently displayed with each individual panel having its own personality.

3. **Getting face-to-face.** With remote and international teams becoming increasingly normalized across organizations, virtual stand-ups and remote calls are par for the course. Internal events are an important opportunity to bring a group together face-to-face. There are major benefits, like building trust and picking up on non-verbal communication, and the sort of team camaraderie that comes from dedicated group learning opportunities and celebrating wins, big announcements, and company updates.

MY TOP 3 TOOLS

1. **Surveys/Google Forms.** It's probably best to send the survey soon after the event to collect the feedback, but you may want to consider sending a second survey out a few weeks to a few months after the event in order to get a better idea of how the event takeaways are being applied to work.

2. **In-person or video call for feedback.** By meeting in-person or via video, you may pick up on some non-verbal communication that you can follow-up on individually. To properly measure ROI, there should be a follow-up call scheduled for a few weeks after the event to get additional feedback on how items have been implemented and whether any notable results have been produced.

3. **Review of material shared.** Internal events are often focused on education for the company, so what better way to measure success than having a review of the material that's been shared. This can be varied depending on the teams, for instance, the sales team may be asked to present a live demo with any updates from the event while the product team may be asked to talk through the updates or take a short online quiz.

VIRTUAL AND HYBRID EVENTS

How is the remote landscape changing internal meetings and events?

Early on, the limitations of virtual meetings (choppy video, buzzy audio, people talking over each other due to sound time lags) made them something most would use only when absolutely necessary. Now, those glitches are mainly figured out (though glitches still happen, like that bottom-of-the-well echo chamber Skype users still encounter at times).
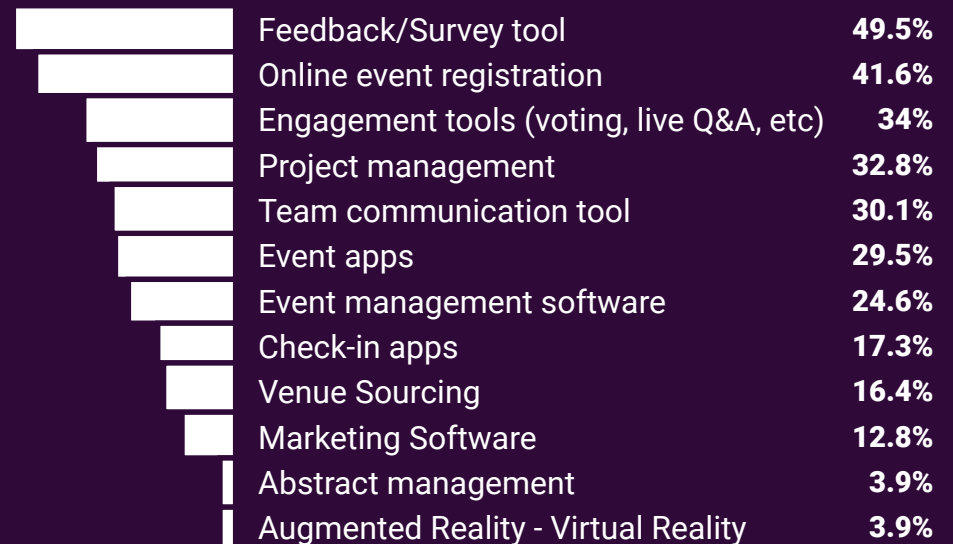
There are many video conferencing and webcasting platforms available now that are relatively seamless, easy to use, and cost-effective, especially when the other option would be flying in attendees to a meeting's locale, feeding them, and putting them up in nice accommodations.

The cost and time savings of virtual events are enticing, and many organizations prefer to incorporate them into routine training and other types of internal events, particularly to include those who otherwise may not be able to make the event at all. However, although the research in this

area is thin at the moment, anecdotally it appears that virtual events are, in most cases, complementing rather than replacing face-to-face meetings.

If the event involves collaboration, team building, strategic thinking, or peer-to-peer communication at its heart, gathering together physically rather than virtually may best help you accomplish those goals.

Which event tech tools do you rely on most for internal events?

Tool	Percentage
Feedback/Survey tool	49.5%
Online event registration	41.6%
Engagement tools (voting, live Q&A, etc)	34%
Project management	32.8%
Team communication tool	30.1%
Event apps	29.5%
Event management software	24.6%
Check-in apps	17.3%
Venue Sourcing	16.4%
Marketing Software	12.8%
Abstract management	3.9%
Augmented Reality - Virtual Reality	3.9%

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Conclusion

Our research speaks loud and clear: internal events help retain employees. Event professionals agree on the power of internal events to drive culture shift, celebrate accomplishment and motivate the workforce.

It seems that internal events are becoming a de facto tool for HR managers to offer better employee engagement over time, with some of our contributors sharing how they should be part of the employment package.

The traditional perception of internal events as very expensive parties seems a thing of the past, with a wide array of tools and formats now available to event professionals to increase management buy-in and ROI reporting.

ABOUT CVENT

Cvent is a leading meetings, events, and hospitality technology provider with more than 4,300 employees, 27,000 customers, and 300,000 users worldwide. The Cvent Event Cloud offers software solutions to event planners and marketers for online event registration, venue selection, event management and marketing, onsite solutions, and attendee engagement. Cvent's suite of products automate and simplify the planning process to maximize the impact of events. The Cvent Hospitality Cloud partners with hotels and venues to help them drive group and corporate travel business. Hotels use the Cvent Hospitality Cloud's digital marketing tools and software solutions to win business through Cvent's sourcing platforms and to service their customers directly, efficiently and profitably – helping them grow and own their business. Cvent solutions optimize the entire event management value chain and have enabled clients around the world to manage millions of meetings and events.

For more information, please visit Cvent.com *https://www.cvent com*
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