BRUSHFIRE

The Ultimate Event Planning & Management Guide for Your Organization

Introduction

Today's organizations use events to attract, engage, and delight their audiences. Events can help bring people together, teach key concepts, and build excitement around your topic.

There are so many helpful tools making events better — and more complex — than ever before!

Guests expect a meaningful and valuable experience. Modern event management solutions should help make that experience hassle-free and well-organized. Planners have to be ready to pivot when unexpected problems arise.

Are you in charge of planning events for your organization? You should read through this guide. We'll walk through best practices and tools of the trade to help you do more than you ever thought possible.

This guide explores how event planners can rise to meet modern challenges and wow their guests.

What's Inside

Event Planning Has Changed

The rise of technology and the interruption of the COVID-19 pandemic forever changed the way events were hosted and planned. Today's planners are more prepared to adapt quickly and are more comfortable with using online platforms to host or supplement their events.

While many predicted an eventual "back-to-business-as-usual" approach, the majority of event planners aren't looking back. Modern tools have made it possible to do more, and to reach larger audiences.

A startling 93% of event marketers said they would invest in virtual events in the aftermath of COVID.[1]

The State of Modern Event Planning

Events are becoming more complicated.

Modern technology provides you with a lot of options. You can offer all kinds of different packages, ticket types, and discounts. Half of all paid events have promo code options to discount the ticket price.[8] The majority of paid events (90%) have as many as 20 different ticket types.[8]
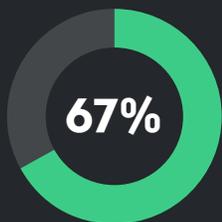
Not only is the initial registration step more complex, but many events require some sort of online integration. While in-person events might benefit from a landing page or Event App, hybrid and virtual events need a solid hosting platform. The vast majority (72%) of today's event planners say virtual platforms play a major role in their strategies.[6] And 35% of event organizers struggle to find the right venue to host hybrid events.[5]

Growth requires staying on the cutting edge.

What is an event if no one comes? Event planners continually look to attract more attendees and increase engagement levels for their guests. Nearly all event planners (94%) consider "pipeline-generated" leads an event KPI.[5] And attendee satisfaction is a top KPI for over 89% of event organizers.[5]

Virtual events are becoming increasingly popular, offering a convenient way for guests to join without traveling. A whopping 80% of event planners say they reach more guests with virtual events.[2] And 68% of B2B marketers say they generate more leads from virtual events.[3]

Hybrid events are on the rise as well, though, with event planners utilizing both in-person and virtual spaces to attract as many participants as possible. The majority of event planners (86%) report positive ROI within seven months of a hybrid event.[5]

67%

67% of event marketers find it a challenge to create a smooth experience with technology [5]
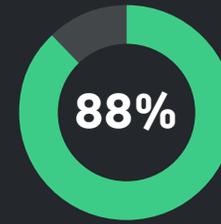
Event planners use data after events to do more.

It's more crucial than ever for event planners to capitalize on the information at their fingertips. Smarter tools make it possible to access information useful for helping optimize future events.
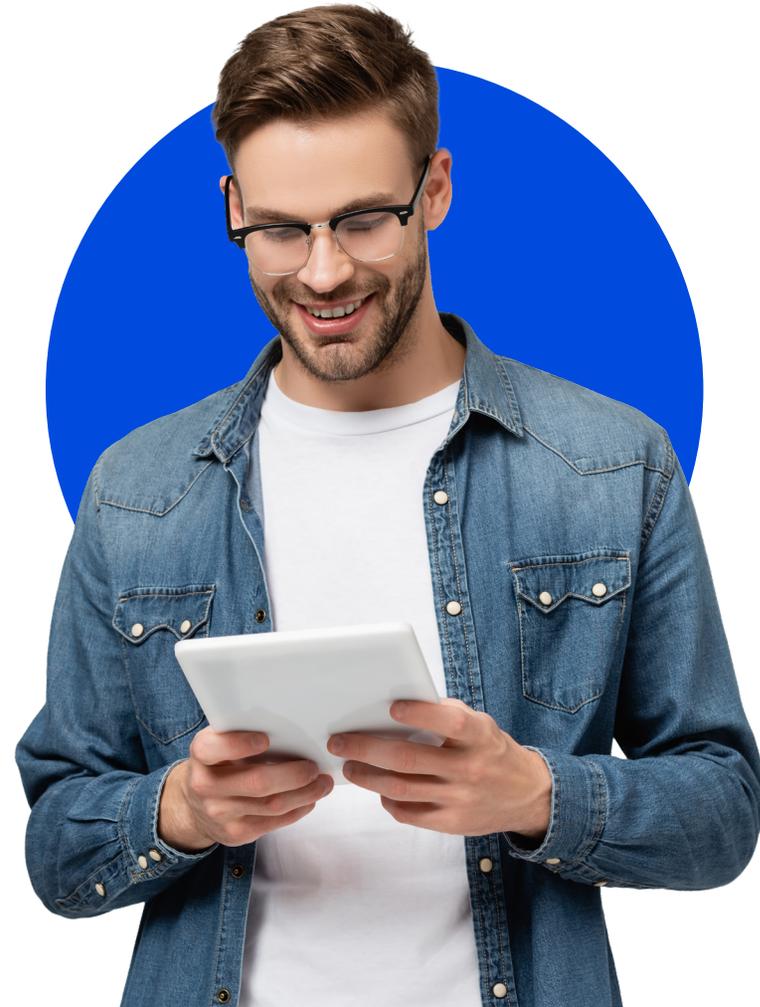
The leading goals for most event planners are financial opportunity (50%), internal improvement (28%), and marketing for future growth (21%).[9] There are many different ways in which event planners can collect data, including:

- Registration platforms
- POS systems
- Social media engagement
- Website traffic & activity
- Event hosting platforms
- Pre- & post-event surveys
- Real-time polls
- Manual count

Most look for metrics to measure ticket sales (42%), increased brand awareness (24%), feedback to improve events (17%), and engagement during the event (12%).[9] Event planners say they struggle with harnessing real-time analytics for event improvement (26%), as well as tracking ROI for their sponsors and partners (25%).

88%

88% of event planners use surveys to measure the satisfaction of guests [5]

Attendee expectations are changing.

Another important change to note is the expectations of the target audience. Today's event attendee expects a seamless transition between technology and manual processes. Guests expect to check in quickly and make on-site purchases instantly with a digital wallet or credit card.

Guests aren't usually looking for entertainment — they want to spend their time in a meaningful way. The majority of event attendees (72%) say learning is their primary goal at any events they attend.[4] And 81% of event planners say networking is necessary for audience satisfaction.[5]

While digital participation opens the door for more attendees, it's proven a challenge for many event planners. More than half of guests (57%) say they would rather attend an in-person event when possible.[5]

This response is largely because the experience is different from behind a screen. Attendees attending the virtual side of a hybrid event don't feel included (39%), and 46% of speakers struggle to connect with both virtual and in-person audiences at the same time.[5]

Interactive moments during virtual events can help reduce the disconnect. Many event planners (66%) say live sessions are the best way to boost audience engagement during virtual events.[5]

Are you ready to plan your next big thing? Let's dive in...

Getting Started:
How to Plan an Event

There are a lot of steps involved in event planning. To get started, think big picture.

Here are five initial steps you should take to help get your event moving in the right direction.

3. Determine Your Budget

How much are you going to spend? Decide what would be an ideal spend and the max you don't want to exceed. This may take some initial pricing research.

4. Create a Checklist

What needs to be done? Put together a to-do list of things you need to purchase, set up, or schedule. This list will be useful for delegating tasks.

1. Set the Event Type

Where will the event be held? Determine if you are going to make this event in-person, hybrid, or virtual.

5. Make a Planning Calendar

When are your deadlines? Start backward, working from the date of the event and filling in when you need to have certain tasks done or ready to go.

2. Establish Your Goals

What do you want to get out of your event? Set specific goals for reach, engagement, profits, and anything else that determines success.

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Event Types

Businesses

- Conventions
- Conferences
- Daily Ticketing (Museums, Amusement Parks, Seasonal Attractions)
- Trade Show
- Professional & Minor League Sports Ticketing
- Holiday Events
- Webinars
- Company Parties
- Large Meetings
- Milestone Celebrations
- Product Launches
- Networking Events

Nonprofits

- Holiday Events
- Board Meetings
- Team-Building Events
- Volunteer Appreciation
- Galas
- Fundraisers
- Large Meetings
- Shows & Performances
- Milestone Celebrations
- Summer Camps
- Networking Events
- Community Events

Churches

- Conferences
- Conventions
- Holiday Events
- Board Meetings
- Fundraisers
- Large Meetings
- Shows & Performances
- Volunteer Appreciation
- Ministry Events & Training
- Retreats
- Summer Camps
- VBS

Schools, Universities & Clubs

- Conventions
- Conferences
- Trade Show
- Alumni Events
- Holiday Events
- Board Meetings
- Fundraisers
- Large Meetings
- Shows & Performances
- Student Events
- Sporting Events
- Milestone Celebrations
- Summer Camps
- Networking Events

What kind of event are you hosting?
There are many event types that could benefit
from better planning, organization, and optimization.

Conventions or Conferences

Hosting many guest speakers, vendors, or sponsors for a large event? Conventions and conferences really benefit from tools like Event App, where you can set up a digital program to keep everyone on the same page. **Provide important information, relevant resources, event instructions, check-in information, and more right on your custom app!**

Large Meetings

Need to explain important information to a large group? Meetings can be held virtually or hybrid to help increase your reach for employees, members, or guests who can't attend. **Make sure you have the interactive tools in place to encourage collaboration from the group.**

Company Parties

Boost morale with a celebration for your team, stakeholders, or leadership. Send out email reminders to increase attendance. **Digital registration can help you keep tabs on who is coming and track who showed up!**

Galas & Fundraisers

Encouraging your donors and partners to give money to a good cause is easier when you have a motivational event to get them excited. **Make payment processing for your fundraiser as hassle-free as possible to remove any roadblocks that could slow down generous benefactors.**

Holiday Events

Throughout the year, your organization may want to celebrate holidays in a meaningful way. Use special ticket packaging to offer things like meal tickets or assigned seats. **Let your guests choose the kind of participation that works best for them and make more money for your cause with sliding ticket prices based on value.**

Shows & Performances

A lot of work goes into putting on a big show or performance. You want opening night to go smoothly. Offer seating caps to fit your venue's capacity and custom seating charts so guests can choose their seats. **Make check-in a breeze with easy-to-scan QR codes that align with each guest's unique ticket.**

Webinars

51% of marketers say webinars are the most effective way to drive results with video.[7] However, a large swell of attendees can overload your setup. **Make sure you have the bandwidth to support your guests seamlessly with a hosting platform you can trust.**

Milestone Celebrations

When your organization reaches a big milestone, it's time to party! Milestone events can help boost team morale and increase brand awareness. **Offer hybrid events so more people can participate in your big moment!**

Summer Camps

Are you hosting camps for kids over the summer? Reports can instantly sort information on allergies, contact information, t-shirt size, camper age, signed form status, payments, and much more. **Organize your reporting to automatically send key information to the team members who need it.**

Product Launches

Kicking off a new product is an exciting and intense time for any company. Help your launch be more successful with an event that hypes up your target audience. **An engaging virtual event or in-person presentation can get momentum going around your latest release.**

Retreats

Hosting a getaway event can be a great way to bring together volunteer teams, staff, or members. **Provide registration that is clear on the timeline, accommodations, amenities, and event schedule.**
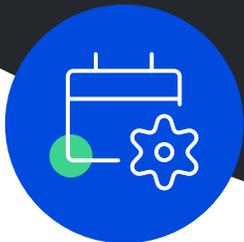
Networking Events

Get people connected with a networking event that fosters relationships. One of the most crucial parts of any networking event is person-to-person interaction. **Use engagement tools like Event App to help attendees connect with your vendors, partners, guest speakers, and other event participants.**

Organizing the Setup:
Tools, Venues, and Vendors for Your Event

For anyone planning a big event, managing the details can become an overwhelming task. Organizing your process reduces the burden on internal teams while improving your outcomes.

Here are seven steps to help you get on track for streamlined event planning.

1 **Choose a Venue or Platform**

The first five steps for event planning are more focused on strategies and planning processes. To organize the setup, you need to start putting together the details — like where you want to host your event.

You've already determined what kind of event you are going to have, so now it's time to decide if you need a physical location, an online platform, or both! This is a good time to do some price comparisons and see what fits best in your budget and meets your planning needs.

PHSYICAL LOCATION

ONLINE PLATFORM

BOTH!

✓ **PRO TIP:**

With physical locations, it's possible to rent out *too much space.* You need a "Goldilocks" space that doesn't feel too crowded or too empty based on the number of attendees you have! Plan for around six sq. ft. per person to get a rough idea of what kind of venue you need.
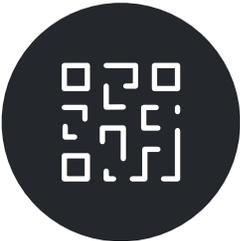
2 Set Up Ticketing & Registration

You need a platform that will allow you to manage different ticket types and set ticket caps to avoid overselling. While ticketing and registration are often overlooked pieces of the planning process, they can make or break your event. People get frustrated if they don't know how to register or can't get their ticket to go through.

Part of a seamless process includes a ticketing and registration setup that gives you control over pricing, ticket details, and information. Your platform should give you a simple way to connect with registrants via email so you can send out reminders or important event information.

✔ PRO TIP:
To simplify check-ins, email all guests a copy of their QR code so they don't have to look it up later. Send an event reminder two weeks out, and then send another reminder one week before the event.

3 Design an Event Guide

The right event guide can really help your guests feel informed. Event guides (or programs) can help highlight your sponsors, explain your purpose, introduce your organization, point out event opportunities, illustrate event maps, and more.

An event guide can be a fun way to help your guests connect with your event message. Design your program to provide value while offering a cohesive experience with a look and feel that aligns with your event.

✔ PRO TIP:
Create an Event App for a digital program guide that your event attendees can access *directly from their phones!* A custom app makes it possible to offer streamlined check-ins, event notifications, and real-time virtual interaction at in-person events.
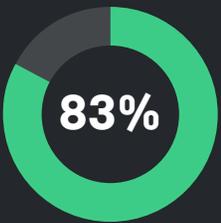
4 Schedule Marketing & Advertising

Spreading the word is crucial if you want to increase participation. 83% of brands say marketing has consistently helped increase event sales.[5]

Include outreach on your planning calendar so you don't neglect marketing. You don't want the event to flop because people don't know about it!

83%

83% of brands say marketing has consistently helped increase event sales

✓ **PRO TIP:**
Ask vendors, event partners, guest speakers, sponsors, and other key stakeholders to help you spread the word. People involved in the event should have a vested interest in helping grow attendance.

5 Select Vendors, Partners, & Guest Speakers

Include other parties to help your event be more of a success. Consider how different vendors, speakers, guests, and partners could make a positive impact on your event.

Consider what kinds of food, drinks, goods, entertainment, or learning another resource could offer your guests. Incorporating other groups or professionals can help alleviate the planning burden in some regards.

✓ **PRO TIP:**
Don't just ask people to help you with your event — show them how they benefit from the partnership. The clearer the value, the more likely you will have positive responses when you reach out to ask for support.

6   Organize Your Team

Volunteers and staff should be on the same page as you plan the event. It's easy to end up with a confused event team that isn't efficient at setting up or confident in providing attendee support. Make sure your team is on task and knows what to expect.

Ideally, you will hold training sessions with your team so the event runs smoothly. A team meeting before a major event can help calm nerves and iron out any last-minute questions. Make sure you set up a task manager so everyone knows who is handling what jobs.

✔ **PRO TIP:**
Put your veteran team members in charge of different parts of the event. By structuring more of a tiered leadership team, you can help filter out simple questions and avoid being overloaded by small requests all day. Senior members of your team can help train the newer staff or volunteers.

7   Measure Metrics & Run Reports

Finally, you need to see if the outcomes match up with your goals. You should have specific goals put in place and select metrics that will help you measure outcomes. These are called key performance indicators (KPIs).

Your KPIs will show whether you were successful or need to plan differently in the future. You might have KPIs surrounding attendance, interaction, social media posting, revenue, and more. It's crucial to have a good reporting system that can provide you with actionable insights after your event.
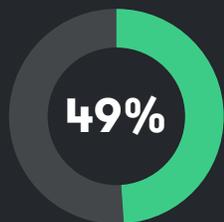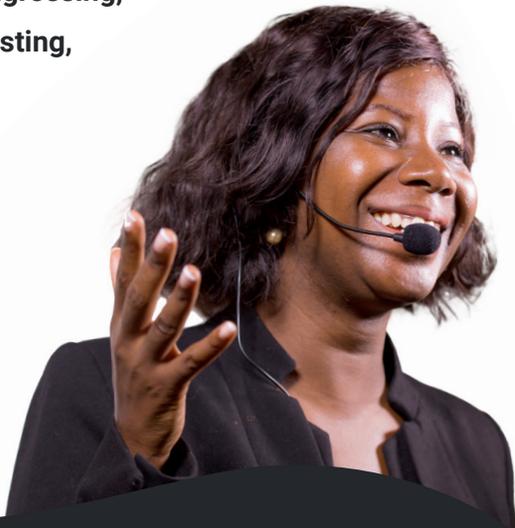
✔ **PRO TIP:**
Don't be afraid of failure. While no one wants to miss the mark, it's worse to fail and not even know it. If your expectations don't line up with reality, then you know you need to adjust your expectations or change your strategy for the next event.

5 Ways to Increase Event Engagement

Event planners agree: audience engagement is a top KPI for every event. Yet, 67% of event planners say they find it challenging to keep attendees engaged during virtual events.[2]

Here are some tips to help make your event more engrossing, entertaining, interesting, and memorable.

49%

Nearly half of marketers (49%) say audience engagement is the biggest contributing factor to having a successful event [10]

1 Make It Interactive

Find ways to encourage participation from your event guests. Always keep the interaction a top priority, no matter the event type or size. This might include quizzes, polls, Q&A sessions, icebreaker games, competitions, door prize drawings, and more.

Many guests will jump at the chance to join in on an event activity if you offer it.

2 Provide Clear Communication

Event planning usually has a lot of moving parts and it's easy to let things slip between the cracks. Pay extra special attention to helping attendees know what to expect — send out reminders for timelines, deadlines, event details, maps, check-in information, and more.

Keeping things clear helps reduce confusion and helps your guests relax and participate in the event.

3 Stay Focused on the Message

Find ways to encourage participation from your event guests. Always keep the interaction a top priority, no matter the event type or size. This might include quizzes, polls, Q&A sessions, icebreaker games, competitions, door prize drawings, and more.

Many guests will jump at the chance to join in on an event activity if you offer it.

4 Offer Omni-Channel Outreach

Do you have in-person engagement down? Try expanding to offer more virtual platforms where your guests can connect. Chat features on your virtual platform, event-specific social media hashtags, and SMS-based polls are all examples of outreach on various channels.

Offering a variety of outreach options makes it easier for guests to connect with you wherever they feel most comfortable.

5 Provide Relevant Resources

Look for opportunities where you can connect your audience to additional information. Supplement break-out classes, lessons, meetings, performances, and presentations with resources that are helpful after the event is over. Ongoing interactions through email, social media, and SMS can help your event have a lasting impact.

Engagement shouldn't stop when the event ends — create ways to keep providing value to your audience and connecting with them.

Top Tools for Event Planning

There are many incredible tools to help event planners accomplish more. Take advantage of convenient payment processing, automated event updates, better reporting, and smoother check-ins with tools from our list of favorites!

Ticketing & Registration
Brushfire

Online Hosting
Brushfire Online, Zoom, Youtube, Vimeo, Resi

Organization & Planning
Monday, Asana, SpotMe

Contact Management
Planning Center, Salesforce, Zapier, Zendesk

Analytics & Reporting
HubSpot, keap, Google Analytics

Marketing
Mailchimp, Facebook, Gloo, Constant Contact, HubSpot

Payment Processing
Square, Stripe, Tithely

Security & Legal
DocuSign, Hellosign, Authorize.net

Elevate Your Event Planning Game

At Brushfire, we are passionate about helping organizations do more with our responsive support team and state-of-the-art technology. With an increased demand for better tools and data, we want to help you get the most out of every event. We currently support more than 30,000 events every year.

Schedule a Call

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