BEST PRACTICE REPORT

Reimagine B2B Events With AI

Increase Productivity, Deepen Attendee
Engagement, And Enhance ROI

February 5, 2024

By Conrad Mills with Steven Casey, Lisa Gately, Chantelle Fynn, Arianne Burnette

FORRESTER®

Summary

AI will help marketers overcome long-standing event planning and execution
challenges and improve pre-event productivity and efficiency, deliver more
personalized and inclusive experiences, and improve ROI through better data
analysis and content repurposing. To deploy AI successfully, marketers must work in
partnership with revenue operations and security and risk teams, build strong
internal governance, and focus on solutions with enterprise-level security. This report
shares data from Forrester's Q3 2023 B2B Events And AI Survey, identifies key
event AI use cases, and offers a framework for successful solution deployment.

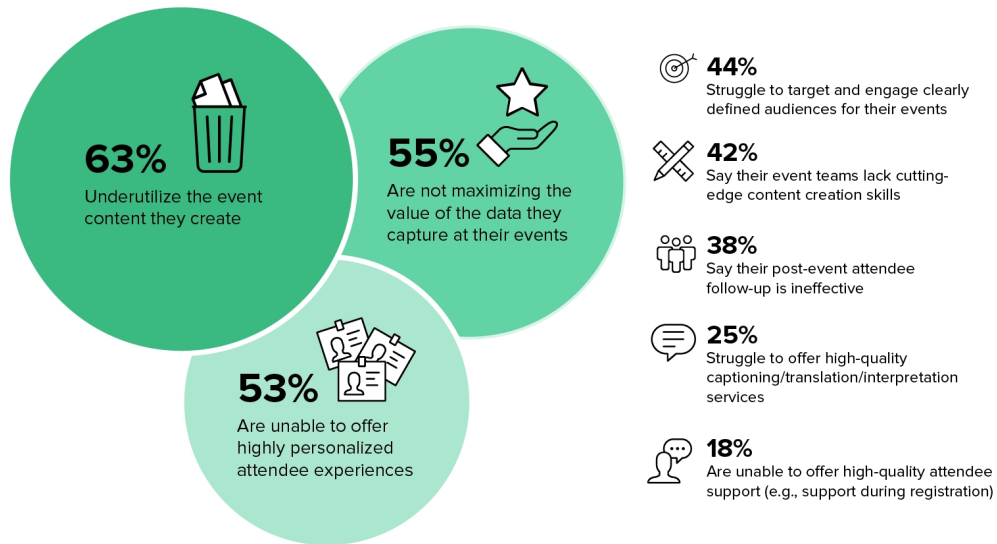# B2B Marketers Face Long-Standing Event Planning And Execution Challenges

Events account for a substantial portion of B2B marketing activity and budget. Webinars or virtual events and in-person events are the delivery mechanisms most often used by the demand and account-based marketing decision-makers surveyed by Forrester. However, overstretched event marketers are failing to maximize the value of the time and budget invested due to long-standing challenges (see Figure 1). The top three challenges teams face are:

- **Underutilized event content.** Marketing organizations make significant investments in high-quality content for events, but that content often languishes post-event as teams move on to execution for the next one. According to Forrester's Q3 2023 B2B Events And AI Survey, it's a well-recognized challenge, with 63% of marketers agreeing that they fail to maximize the value of the event content — a figure that increases to 72% for large enterprises. Content creation capabilities play a part in this inefficiency, with 42% of marketers saying that their event teams currently lack cutting-edge skills, even though 54% of B2B marketing decision-makers told us they plan to focus on improving content targeting and personalization capabilities over the next 12 months.

- **A failure to maximize the value of event data.** In the face of ever more restricted access to audience data, event data has the potential to be one of the best sources of zero- and first-party audience data. Too often, though, event data sits outside of standard data management processes on siloed platforms. Fifty-five percent of marketers recognize that they are failing to maximize the value of this data — a figure that increases to 65% for marketers in large enterprises.

- **An inability to deliver personalized attendee experiences.** Whether in-person or virtual, next-generation Gen Y and Gen Z event attendees expect events to be more digital and personalized experiences. Data from Forrester's Buyers' Journey Survey, 2023, shows that personalization influences purchase plans, with 27% of buyers at the start of their purchase process indicating that personalizing to their specific needs was particularly impactful. However, in Forrester's Q3 2023 B2B Events And AI Survey, 53% of the marketers surveyed told us they were unable to deliver the highly personalized event experiences that next-generation attendees expect.

Figure 1

B2B Marketers Face Long-Standing Event Planning And Execution Challenges

63%
Underutilize the event content they create

55%
Are not maximizing the value of the data they capture at their events

53%
Are unable to offer highly personalized attendee experiences

44%
Struggle to target and engage clearly defined audiences for their events

42%
Say their event teams lack cutting-edge content creation skills

38%
Say their post-event attendee follow-up is ineffective

25%
Struggle to offer high-quality captioning/translation/interpretation services

18%
Are unable to offer high-quality attendee support (e.g., support during registration)

Base: 118 B2B marketing professionals
Source: Forrester's Q3 2023 B2B Events And AI Survey

AI Will Help Marketers Overcome Challenges And Maximize Event Value

AI has the potential to help marketers overcome these challenges, deliver enhanced attendee experiences, and maximize the value of the events they're executing. Although uptake of AI for events is currently low, Forrester's Q3 2023 B2B Events And AI Survey shows that 57% of marketers believe that AI will fundamentally change how they plan and execute events within 24 months. Exploited effectively, AI will deliver value across all three event phases by improving pre-event productivity and efficiency; delivering more personalized and inclusive at-event experiences; and maximizing post-event ROI through improved data analysis and content repurposing (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

AI Will Deliver Value Across The Three Event Phases: Pre-, At, And Post-Event

Pre-event: AI improves efficiency and productivity.

Enhancing event content creation

Simplifying event management

Improving audience definition and targeting

Delivering highly personalized attendee experiences

Maximizing the value of event content

Improving attendee assistance

Improving event data analysis

Personalizing attendee follow-up

Delivering more inclusive events

Post-event: AI helps maximize ROI through analysis and content repurposing.

At event: AI delivers more personalized and inclusive experiences.

© Forrester Research, Inc. Unauthorized reproduction, citation, or distribution prohibited.

Pre-Event: AI Improves Efficiency And Productivity

Event success is largely determined during the pre-event phase. Have you identified the right audience for your event, and are you able to engage them with customized, engaging communications? Do you have sufficient resources to manage the time-consuming pre-event administrative project management while also focusing on strategic areas such as designing a post-event engagement plan? Marketers should use AI to deliver efficiency and productivity gains by:

- **Improving audience definition and targeting.** Data analysis and predictive intelligence capabilities will help marketers improve target audience selection and targeting. A quarter of marketers intend to use AI for this purpose within the next 12 months. Mark O'Sullivan, senior event marketing manager at Signifyd, is already using Vendelux's AI capabilities to identify priority events for his organization to attend based on predicted attendees and competitor participation (see Figure 3). As he said, "Rather than spending my time reviewing PDFs of job titles and

company names that attended last year, I'm now able to tell with a high degree of certainty how many of my target accounts are likely to be at a specific event. And, importantly, I can target them in advance to drive better event engagement."

- **Enhancing event content creation.** Although AI offers the potential to deliver unparalleled levels of high-quality and engaging content, it shouldn't be seen as a replacement for human creativity. Instead, focus on using it for ideation and fine-tuning to ensure consistency of content tone and style. Existing event technology vendors, such as Cvent with its integrated AI Writing Assistant, offer support for activities such as writing event titles, outlines, session overviews, attendee communications, and event scripts, whereas new vendors such as Tome can deliver AI-generated event mood boards, multimedia landing pages, and slide content.

- **Simplifying event management.** AI streamlines and semiautomates many of the repetitive, time-consuming event planning activities, such as venue selection, event setup, scheduling, and resource management. It also simplifies budget management in a number of ways, from offering initial cost estimates based on historical data to making budgetary recommendations to prevent cost overruns. More innovative capabilities include Versy AI's text-to-space capability, which enables marketers to design and iterate venues and rooms virtually.

Figure 3

Vendelux AI-Generated Event Analysis

| NAME	STATUS	VENDELUX ATTENDEES SUM	EXPECTED ATTENDEES SUM	PROSPECTS SUM	SAVED BY	COUNTRY	START DATE	END DATE	↓ BUDGET SUM
E-commerce Berlin May 2022	Committed	604	TBD	114		Germany	2022-05-05	2022-05-05	$25,000.00
Saastr Annual 2022	Committed	6,271	10,000	1,553		United States	2022-09-13	2022-09-15	$3,000.00
Groceryshop 2022	Committed	5,289	TBD	1,857		United States	2022-09-19	2022-09-22	$2,950.00
AWS re:Invent 2022	Committed	14,046	TBD	3,469		United States	2022-11-28	2022-12-02	$2,487.00
Oracle CloudWorld 2022	Committed	6,703	TBD	1,288		United States	2022-10-17	2022-10-20	$2,404.00

Source: Vendelux

At Event: AI Delivers More Personalized And Inclusive Experiences

Over time, AI will revolutionize the idea of an "at-event" experience as virtual and in-person experiences start to blur and AI robots engage with attendees, deliver content, and even attend events on our behalf. In the short term, marketers should focus on using AI to enhance the at-event attendee experience by:

- **Delivering highly personalized attendee experiences.** Deep analysis of attendee demographic, firmographic, and behavioral data will deliver an enhanced level of event personalization. According to Forrester's Q3 2023 B2B Events And AI Survey, a quarter of all B2B marketers plan to use AI for this purpose within the next 12 months. Personalization incorporates everything from individualized attendee landing pages and event app interfaces to making content recommendations and matchmaking to improve networking. Leading vendors like RainFocus offer deeper levels of personalization by capturing hundreds of attendee data points over multiple events and combining this with sales and marketing data to offer highly personalized event journeys.

- **Improving attendee assistance.** Chatbot support is one of the most common current AI event use cases. Forrester's Q3 2023 B2B Events And AI Survey reveals that 14% of marketers are currently using chatbots and a further 24% plan to within the next 12 months. Assistants from vendors such as LivePerson and IBM watsonx deliver an enhanced level of attendee assistance, going beyond standard 24/7 support by extending into areas such as providing physical location navigation and making personalized session recommendations to attendees (see Figure 4).

- **Delivering more inclusive events.** AI-powered captioning/translation/interpretation is the most common current AI use case at events. According to Forrester's Q3 2023 B2B Events And AI Survey, 16% of marketers are using this capability now and a further 25% are planning to use it in the next 12 months. Closed captioning ensures that hard-of-hearing attendees can follow sessions, while real-time translation and interpretation from vendors such as Wordly and Interprefy enable marketers to expand target audiences. Additional AI-related accessibility use cases include crowd monitoring to identify venue accessibility challenges and advanced facial recognition technology to eliminate badge scanning and facilitate attendee entry.

Figure 4

LivePerson AI-Powered Attendee Support
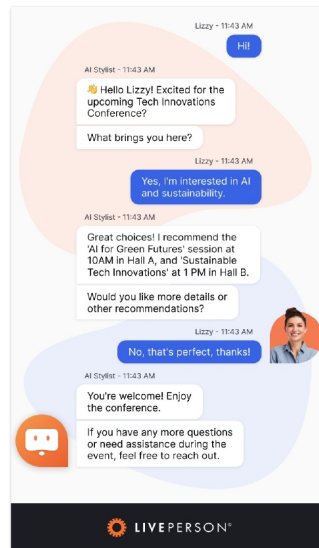
Source: LivePerson

Post-Event: AI Helps Maximize ROI Through Analysis And Content Repurposing

A well-planned and well-executed post-event phase is crucial to maximize event value, but too often overstretched event teams lack the time and skills in key areas such as data analysis and content creation to deliver on this. AI enables teams to simplify and automate key post-event activities and boost event ROI. Marketers should focus on these three use cases:

- **Maximizing the value of event content.** Reusing and repurposing event content for an omnichannel post-event follow-up requires significant budget and technical skills that teams lack. AI automates this process and removes the need to work with agencies. Although only 10% of marketers are currently making use of this capability, as indicated by Forrester's Q3 2023 B2B Events And AI Survey, a further 34% plan to within 12 months. At its simplest, AI delivers event and session transcripts and summaries with chaptering, which can be turned into standalone assets such as whitepapers, blogs, and e-books.

AI also helps event marketers make greater use of video content with shorter, snackable, and personalized assets based on key criteria such as session engagement. ON24's integrated AI engine enables marketers to generate multichannel assets from a single webinar. VMware uses AI for content repurposing: Craig Chapman, senior manager broadcast and live events at VMware, said, "We've used both ContentGroove and GlossAi to extract the most important topics from event sessions and create short, high-quality video snippets for our marketing teams to use" (see Figure 5).

- **Improving event data analysis.** Generative AI (genAI)'s ability to quickly ingest and analyze large volumes of diverse event data coupled with natural language processing means that marketers can get quick answers to complex questions that were previously out of scope for most teams. As O'Sullivan said, "I've stopped building pivot tables and instead input my data into ChatGPT-4 using advanced data analytics and ask it to tell me which event was most successful that year and run year-on-year comparisons." AI enables marketers to analyze events in ways that were previously impossible. Christian Fortier, director of field marketing events at Autodesk, is using AI to analyze anecdotal data to understand attendee sentiment — something he estimates has saved "hundreds of hours." Marketers can input energy and waste data to drive sustainability improvements and use tools such as Sprinklr for social listening and Zenus for facial analysis to track and analyze booth and show floor behavior and better understand virtual event attendee engagement.

- **Personalizing attendee follow-up.** Too many marketing teams limit their post-event attendee nurturing to generic emails based on a high-level audience segmentation. AI changes this by combining deeper audience insight with the ability to cost-effectively create personalized assets at scale and automate their delivery. Although only 8% of marketers are currently making use of AI here, according to Forrester's Q3 2023 B2B Events And AI Survey, a further 40% plan to over the next 12 months.

Figure 5

ContentGroove AI-Generated Video Snippets
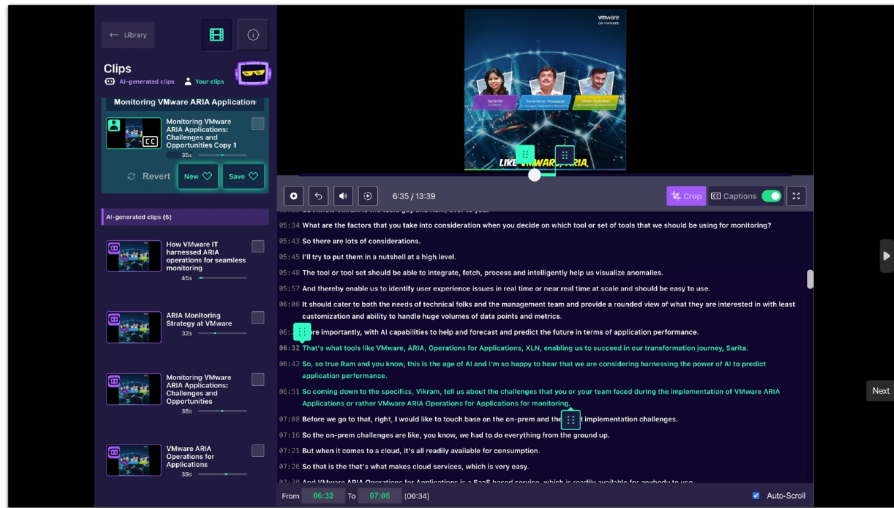
Source: ContentGroove

Successful AI Deployment Requires Alignment, Governance, And Security

Most marketers believe that AI will fundamentally change how B2B events are planned and executed over the coming 24 months. However, Forrester's Q3 2023 B2B Events And AI Survey reveals that 87% of marketers agree their organizations are in learning mode when it comes to leveraging AI as part of their event strategy. In the absence of comprehensive legislation and strong internal governance, leaders are adopting cautious approaches. Although marketers are bullish when it comes to exploiting AI in the future, they recognize there are significant hurdles to overcome in terms of data, privacy, brand risk, IP protection, and differentiation. To successfully deploy AI, marketers must (see Figure 6):

- **Maintain and upskill teams.** Event content leaders must keep humans central to the event content creation and review process and use AI to ideate and refine, not for wholesale content generation. Teams that over-rely on the same open genAI solutions that other organizations use risk creating bland, generic event content that will fail to stand out and engage prospective attendees. Fifty-four percent of

marketers identified this as a challenge to exploiting AI. At the same time, leaders must build new AI-specific skills (for example, AI event design) into their teams and guide them to new ways of working to maximize the value that AI can bring to their event content. Fortier noted that his team is having to learn how to ask and refine the questions they pose their genAI solutions to get to a compelling response.

- **Build strong internal partnerships.** Marketers can't deploy AI event solutions in isolation. They must partner with revenue operations to ensure AI solutions have access to high-quality data. Teams must also balance a desire to exploit AI capabilities with compliance requirements and should work with privacy and risk experts to build robust and ethical attendee privacy principles. Marketers recognize the challenges here: 65% said that access to the large volumes of high-quality data required for target attendee identification and experience personalization is a challenge. Chapman agreed: "If we allow outdated information to make its way into our AI models, it impacts the output — at best minimizing its effectiveness but at worst delivering a terrible attendee experience."

- **Mitigate risk through strong governance.** Teams need to implement governance that satisfies existing and impending regulatory requirements and adheres to responsible AI principles. Leaders must focus on governance that helps build event attendee trust through transparency and preserves corporate values. Although marketers see the benefit of being able to quickly and cost effectively create derivative assets from event content, 60% also recognize that automating the production and distribution of this content presents significant risk to their brands. Risk comes not only from poor quality, poorly targeted content, but also from areas such as unintended bias. As Chapman remarked, "Strong corporate governance around how we use AI is critical to successfully exploiting it."

- **Deploy enterprise-level security.** Marketers must work with IT and revenue operations to evaluate prospective AI partners and ensure they operate secure, closed platforms that comply with organizational security requirements. Solution selection policies should also be reviewed and updated. A failure to deploy secure platforms is a risk to both organizational IP (cited as a challenge by 56% of marketers) and data privacy (cited by 60% of marketers). For one associate director at a global professional services firm, it was the number one challenge: "Privacy is the biggest consideration by far; we need providers that offer enterprise-grade security and standards."
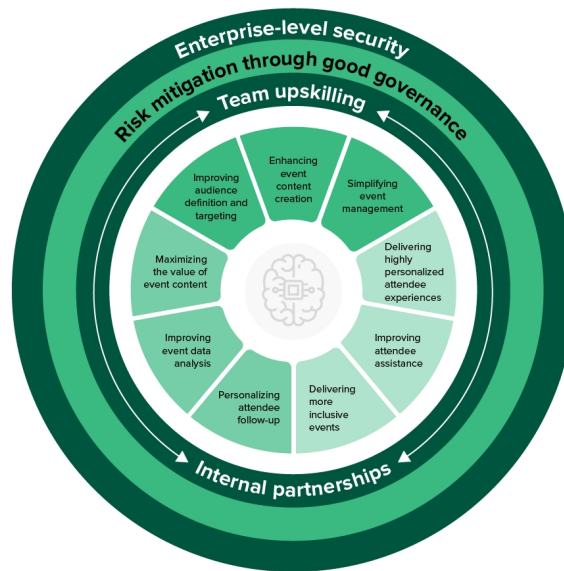
Supplemental Material

Research Methodology

Forrester's Q3 2023 B2B Events And AI Survey was fielded between August 2023 and September 2023. This online survey yielded 102 respondents in B2B organizations across the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific. The survey population includes B2B marketing professionals such as CMOs, VPs, marketing managers, directors, and executives. This survey used a self-selected group of Forrester contacts knowledgeable about B2B events. Therefore, it is not random and may include some sampling bias. Participants were offered a complementary summary of the survey results as an incentive for taking part.

Companies We Interviewed For This Report

We would like to thank the individuals from the following companies who generously gave their time during the research for this report.

Autodesk

ContentGroove

LivePerson

Signifyd

Vendelux

VMware

FORRESTER®

We help business and technology leaders use customer obsession to accelerate growth.

Obsessed With Customer Obsession

At Forrester, customer obsession is at the core of everything we do. We're on your side and by your side to help you become more customer obsessed.

Research

Accelerate your impact on the market with a proven path to growth.

- Customer and market dynamics
- Curated tools and frameworks
- Objective advice
- Hands-on guidance

Learn more.

Consulting

Implement modern strategies that align and empower teams.

- In-depth strategic projects
- Webinars, speeches, and workshops
- Custom content

Learn more.

Events

Develop fresh perspectives, draw inspiration from leaders, and network with peers.

- Thought leadership, frameworks, and models
- One-on-ones with peers and analysts
- In-person and virtual experiences

Learn more.

FOLLOW FORRESTER

Contact Us

Contact Forrester at www.forrester.com/contactus. For information on hard-copy or electronic reprints, please contact your Account Team or reprints@forrester.com. We offer quantity discounts and special pricing for academic and nonprofit institutions.