swapcard

The Marketing Leader's Guide to Driving Engagement & Revenue

The State of Event Engagement
Volume 2

Trade Show Organizations   Media Companies

Associations   Nonprofits

Attendee engagement is the #1 factor in protecting exhibitor ROI & event growth

Attendee engagement is your growth engine

As an engagement or communications leader, your mission is simple: **activate attendees, keep them engaged, and ensure they leave with value.**

When attendees are passive or disconnected, exhibitors lose qualified leads, sponsors see poor ROI, and renewal rates for your event drop. Engagement is not a side metric—it is the foundation of event satisfaction, retention, and revenue.

The data is clear:

- **60–65% of networking happens before the event day**—if you wait until doors open, you've already missed most of the opportunity.

- **40% of all leads are created pre-event**, and another 10–15% post-event. Onsite activity is only half the story.

- **67% of all leads at Trade Show Organization+ events and 85% of all leads at Association+ events come from digital engagement**, not badge scans—proving that your app, platform, and communications strategy drive real ROI.

- **44% of leads are created via online booth visits**—showing the power of curated digital exhibitor listings.

- Attendees using **AI matchmaking see a higher acceptance rate** (100% increase at Trade Show Organization+ events and 45% increase at Association+ events), and at large events, AI increased connection acceptance by 100% (Trade Show Organization+) and 160% (Association+) connection success.

Amplifying The Gathering's branding with increased event engagement

Increase in app engagement saw audiences interacting and making meaningful connections.

Design High-Impact Engagement Journeys for Attendees

Engagement isn't a "nice-to-have." It's the engine that drives exhibitor leads, sponsor ROI, and long-term event growth. As a marketing director, your role is to inspire attendee participation—whether that's sparking networking, encouraging session interaction, or boosting overall activation. When engagement thrives, your sales team can confidently rebook partners with clear proof of ROI, ensuring your events continue to scale year after year.

So how do leading events achieve this?

Our analysis of 1,100+ Trade Show Organization+ and Association+ events uncovered **four key investments that deliver the greatest impact on engagement and ROI.**

The four engagement levers that matter most

- **Digital-first is the growth engine**
  With **67–85% of all leads coming from digital interactions**, your platform isn't just a companion—it's the core driver of ROI. Strong digital engagement means exhibitors capture more leads, sponsors see measurable value, and your revenue trajectory stays positive.

- **Early onboarding sparks stronger activation**
  When attendees log in and complete their profiles well before the event, networking and matchmaking begin earlier. Platforms opened **25 days (Trade Show Organization+) or 20 days (Association+) in advance** create earlier peaks in activity and push engagement rates to **75% and 83%**. This means participants arrive more prepared, connected, and primed to engage.

- **Structured networking creates meaningful connections**
  Left unstructured, networking falls flat—up to **65% of requests go unanswered**. With **AI matchmaking and timely nudges**, you transform missed connections into accepted, high-value meetings that attendees and exhibitors both recognize as ROI-positive.

- **Sessions double as lead engines**
  Up to **25% of all digital leads originate from session interactions**. When content is designed with engagement in mind—interactive Q&A, polls, or exhibitor tie-ins—sessions shift from being purely educational to becoming one of your most powerful lead-generation tools.

Prioritizing these four pillars ensures engagement remains strong. Without them, events risk weak connections, declining ROI, and reduced retention. With them, you set the foundation for growth, renewals, and long-term success.

The data-driven engagement framework for marketing teams

Using these insights, we built the following **Before / During / After framework** to guide marketing and communications teams. It outlines the actions required to activate attendees, keep them engaged throughout the show, and extend value beyond the event.

Timeline	Key engagement tactics	Expected outcomes
Before the event (3–4 weeks prior)	• Launch platform at least 3 weeks before the event date • Tailor onboarding journeys to capture maximum profile details for facilitate AI matchmaking • Give exhibitors early access to the marketplace to complete their booth listing and set up meetings • Trigger drip campaigns with session & networking suggestions	• Kickstart networking (60-65% starts before event) • Capture 40% of leads created pre-event
During the event	• Send in-app nudges: "Trending now," "3 new connections waiting" • Create interactive sessions with polls, Q&A, speaker meetups • Use AI-powered matchmaking to boost networking • Monitor real-time dashboards to re-engage inactive groups	• Session interactions convert up to 25% of digital leads • AI-recommendations increases acceptance of networking requests by 45%
After the event (2–3 weeks post)	• Send personalized event recap: contacts made, recordings, recommendations • Facilitate post-event matchmaking ("People you missed") • Provide access to on-demand content • Send surveys and collect ratings to improve NPS	• Secure the 10–15% of leads created post-event • Extend engagement, drive retention & loyalty

Ready to transform engagement into revenue?

Your mission is clear: **invest in onboarding, data-driven matchmaking, and content strategy** to turn attendees into active contributors, not passive participants. By aligning sales, marketing, and communications around engagement, you secure exhibitor ROI, protect sponsor investments, and build attendee loyalty year after year.

Book a strategy call with our engagement team to see how Swapcard can help you implement this framework and unlock sustainable growth.

Or **Download the full Engagement Report** for detailed benchmarks and best practices.