guidebook

The Reality of
Event Budgeting

guidebook

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guidebook

01 Budgeting for event technology

> *"84 percent of event planners say it's important to guests that events and meetings incorporate the latest technology."*
>
> **The X Letter**

Emergent technologies are important to your attendees—but many of them might seem out of range when you're in the budgeting phase. We spoke with vendors who cater to events of all sizes and budgets to help you understand what you can incorporate.

Budgeting for small events

Is money tight? More than 83% of Guidebook's event app users say it's difficult to fight for new tech tools while budgeting, so you're not alone. But a small budget doesn't prevent you from using high-tech tools to increase attendee satisfaction, gather valuable data, and position yourself as tech-forward.

AUDIO/VISUAL

You don't need a big event budget to amplify sound, but you'll need to keep it simple. Rent serviceable monitors, a mixer, microphones and speakers for about $400/day from your local camera shop.

PROJECTOR AND SCREEN

Help your attendees feel connected by projecting a live feed of social media mentions, photos or news—without breaking the bank. If you can't snag a projector from your office, you can rent a decent one for $40/day.
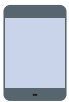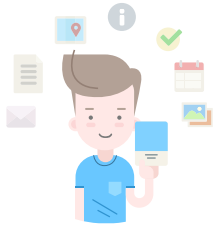
HANDHELD TECH

"If you're looking to give a presentation an interactive feel," says Ashton Arnold from Meeting Tomorrow, "rent enough iPads for each table to have one at the keynote speech." Meeting Tomorrow offers tech rentals for events of all sizes. According to Ashton, it's a low-cost way to push a presentation through to each table, and to allow for polling or other interactions.
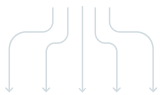
REGISTRATION

A platform like Eventbrite gives you flexible tech registration at any budget—in fact, if your event is free the tool is, too. Eventbrite's costs are based on ticket prices, helping them scale along with resources.

MOBILE EVENT APP

Small event? You can build a fully working Guidebook app for free, and give your attendees access to up-to-the-minute paperless schedules, maps, social media, networking and more. Build it now!

An in-the-middle event budget

At this level you can afford a solid version of the most effective tech tools. It means while you may not invest in things that are superfluous or 'just for show', you've invested in sound, visuals, registration and tech amenities to enrich your attendees' experience.

LCD VIDEO PROJECTORS

Your tech event budget can easily include projectors for showing presentations, pre-recorded video or live feeds from Twitter or a photo stream. Hire a technician to handle live-switching from different sources.

Why is this important? A video switching/scaling system is necessary for creating a seamless experience when different video sources haven't been created at the same resolution or speed, and a production technician will be responsible for using it correctly.

SINGLE CAMERA LIVE RECORDING/PROJECTION

If you're recording the keynote speech, action in the game room, or b-roll footage for a teaser video in advance of the next event, you may choose to hire a videographer for some single-camera action. For anything that requires sound you'll need a microphone. If you're recording an amplified speech, your videographer will want to get a feed from the house mixer for the cleanest sound or set up a separate microphone.

Whatever you choose, allocating budget to hire a professional videographer is your best bet. There's a huge difference between video that's watchable and video that's...inexpert. It's kind of like how it's famously inadvisable to hire your cousin to shoot your wedding, you know?

There's a huge difference between video that's watchable and video that's...inexpert.
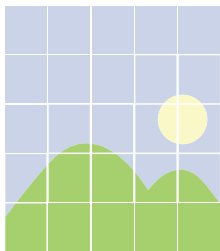
VIDEO WALL

An event productions company like Meeting Tomorrow can help install and program a 5x5 iPad video wall for a mid-price "smart wall" feel. We were able to find quotes in the $2K/day range for these dynamic installations.

Large event budget, sophisticated needs

When your budget has a few more zeroes attached, you can afford to explore cutting-edge, crowd-wowing tech installations, tools that memorably streamline the experience, and a fully branded multi-sensory atmosphere.

MULTIPLE CAMERA LIVE RECORDING/PROJECTION

If you've ever seen a recorded Ted talk, you know what a multi-camera shoot looks like. You'll need more than one camera operator, and a production technician if you want to mix the multiple cameras live on a big screen.

RIFD TECHNOLOGY

With more budget to play with, you can take advantage of engagement and measurement features like RFID wristbands. These chip-embedded bracelets serve to grant entry to an event and allow an attendee to interact with attractions, make purchases, and share contact info. From an organizer's point of view, RFID technology can generate valuable data about how attendees move throughout the space and experience the event, and can act as security (granting access to VIP areas only for certain ticketholders).

RFID technology can generate valuable data about how attendees move throughout the space and experience the event.

Analyzing attendee behaviors can be immensely valuable—this is the kind of big data marketers have been using to track behaviors on websites for years.

Suppliers like ShowClix can provide bracelets, RFID chips, and the technology needed to use them. Depending on event size, you could be paying $20/attendee on the low end. Once you get into customizing the bracelets and the way they're used, the price increases. (Note: the cost of the RFID chips themselves are minimal—they can be as little as 10 cents apiece wholesale. Our cost estimates include quotes for managing the entire system.)

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT WITH BEACONS

In the snazzy big-data tools department, beacons are a topic of discussion lately. If your budget capabilities allow it, here are the details.

Beacons refer to low-energy bluetooth signals that can be used for various types of movement and activity measurement in a physical space.

> *"If you're approaching the top of the escalator, we might send a message with an offer to upgrade your seats."*
>
> **Alex Finkel**
> Roximity

Alex Finkel runs partnerships for Roximity, which provides location-based advertising using beacon hardware, the software to make it work, and access to analytics.

Beacon technology fits in the "big event budget" category for a reason: brands tend to be the ones most able to take advantage of it. For example, Roximity partners with a large sports/entertainment arena to deliver prompts and gather data based on microlocation. "If you're approaching the top of the escalator, we might send a message with an offer to upgrade your seats," says Alex.

Large events like CES have used beacons to help attendees connect with vendors. The Roximity platform can help sponsors send targeted offers and messages to people nearby.

But there's a caveat: Users need to have an app to communicate with the beacon. "It's a misconception that you can just stick beacons in your booth and begin blasting messages," says Alex. "And in the wrong context, even if that did work, you want to work not to seem spammy."

The gist is that unless your attendees have an app that's connected to your beacon hardware/software, it won't work. This is why big brands, who often have high app adoption, and popular repeat-visitor locations like sports arenas are more able to benefit.

> *"If you have an app with hundreds of thousands of users, you're in a good position to better understand their behaviors and to communicate with them."*
>
> **Alex Finkel**
> Roximity

02 Who's going to pick up the cost of my event wifi?

Classic event wifi nightmare

On June 7 in 2010: Steve Jobs stands in front of a crowd of journalists, bloggers and Apple employees to demonstrate the newest features of one of the most dramatic reincarnations of the iPhone yet—the iPhone 4. He frustratedly looks at a message on a giant screen prompting him to connect to the cellular data network due to the lack of event wifi.

Cannot Open Page

Safari cannot open the page because it is not connected to the internet.

OK
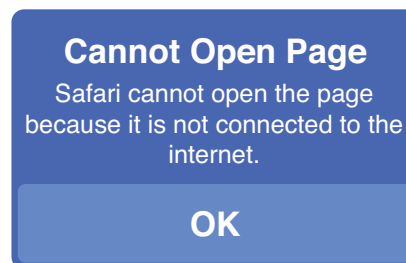
It's easy to imagine a small army of frantic underlings and network engineers racing to restore connectivity. It was everyone's event wifi nightmare come to life.

You may or may not be running an event or meeting with the stakes of an Apple product release. Regardless, connectivity issues at your event can create palpable frustrations among both attendees and event organizers alike. But short of being a network engineer yourself, most event organizers are left confusedly scratching their heads (or dramatically adjusting their budgets) when it comes to providing better event wifi.

"Our attendees complain every year that the wifi is awful in the convention centers. We also have several speakers that request event wifi but it's not always 100% reliable," says Becky Walker Sobeck, Conference & CEU Manager for Athletic Business Conference & Expo.

When both attendees and presenters have expectations about your event wifi but the solutions are elusive, what considerations do you need to make as an event organizer? And just where exactly do you start when it comes to making choices about your event wifi?

"Our attendees complain every year that the wifi is awful in the convention centers... [speakers] request event wifi but it's not always 100% reliable."

Becky Walker Sobeck
Athletic Business Conference & Expo

Who's using my event wifi and for what?

> *"For corporate meetings...the meeting is focused around productivity. If you don't have reliable connectivity, your productivity goes out the window."*
>
> **Ian Framson**
> Trade Show Internet

It may seem like a no-brainer, but the best place to begin when evaluating your wireless options is with the users themselves. Who is trying to connect at your event?

THE ATTENDEES

In most instances—especially when it comes to association events or trade shows—the people that will be looking to connect to event wifi are your attendees and exhibitors. Often times, however, the focus of these events is to turn a profit. If you're running a cost-conscious event, a dedicated wireless solution probably isn't for you. In this case, you'll want to know more about the venue's in-house internet service provider and network, or simply rely on the attendees' cellular data networks. It keeps costs low but could also keep tensions high for those dropping signal or struggling with slow speeds.

EXECUTIVES AND PRESENTERS

Ian Framson is the Co-founder and CEO of Trade Show Internet, a company that provides dedicated network solutions for events. He says, "For corporate meetings— especially private corporate meetings—where it's a sales or vendor conference, the meeting is focused around

productivity. If you don't have reliable connectivity, your productivity goes out the window." In this instance, event wifi may be mission-critical, and an organizer might want to consider a third-party dedicated network solution.

> *"The cost of event wifi becomes a productivity cost and it's not measured against ROI."*
>
> **Ian Framson**
> Trade Show Internet

Who's going to pick up the cost of my event wifi?

Depending on whether it's just attendees using the internet, or you have a more critical productivity-based need, the cost of wifi is going fall with either you, your attendees or somewhere in between.

THE ATTENDEES

Most of the time, it's not going to be practical to supply wifi for your attendees. While they may see maintaining a snappy connection to their social networks and personal blogs as a must, factoring those conveniences into your event's bottom line may not be the most sensible choice. In this case, you'll be relying on the personal data plans

Who's providing your event's internet?

1 | Attendees
Relying on your attendees' data plans and cell phone connections keeps costs down, but it can leave you with **weak signals and cranky customers**.

$ Costs you very little.

Click here to see the full infographic!

they've purchased for their own devices—the most cost-effective and simplest solution by far.

THE VENUE

Most venues will offer some sort of in-house connectivity, and the cost is likely to be shared between you and your attendees. Whether it's being subsidized in the price of their hotel rooms, or it's been factored into the cost of the venue itself—you'll be at the mercy of the venue's network infrastructure and internet service provider. Make sure you know what you're getting yourself into in this situation. If you're going to be relying on an in-house solution for your event wifi, it's important to know the right questions to ask of the venue. (More on this later.)

THE ORGANIZER

If you're looking to put a price on connectivity, Ian Framson of Trade Show Internet encourages event organizers to ask themselves "What is the business purpose?" If your "business purpose" is the main event, you might find yourself considering a dedicated custom

wifi solution. At this point it's best to bake it into your budget as early as possible. It may be the most expensive solution, but it's hard to beat the peace of mind a service like an on-site network engineer can afford at crucial meeting moments.

What event wifi questions should I be asking?

If you'll be relying on the venue for wifi, you're going to want to be as informed as possible about the connectivity's scope and limitations. Framson suggests the following essential questions for the venue's IT Manager:

• Do you have a distributed antenna system (DAS)?

> *A note on DAS: Cell phone signals are at the mercy of a variety of environmental factors. If you've ever had a great cell connectivity experience in a big building or underground, it was likely the result of a DAS. A DAS is like an in-building cell tower and, when properly installed, can boost data connectivity for users by amplifying carriers' signals. If you're lucky enough to have a venue with a DAS, make sure to find out what areas are covered and which carriers are participating. A DAS that only supports Verizon event wifi at a venue where most of the devices will be connected to AT&T won't do you or your attendees much good.*

guidebook

What event wifi questions should I be asking?

- Is there wifi in the meeting space? If so, what is the capacity of the wifi network?

- How many devices can be online at the same time before the system crashes?

- How much bandwidth will be dedicated to our meeting?

- What sort of guarantees can you offer?

- What is the backup plan if the primary provider goes down?

Framson says it's best to get the answers to these questions in writing, with an added financial penalty if anything goes wrong. "This aligns everyone's incentives and shows them you mean business—that you're going to hold them accountable for what they're promising you."
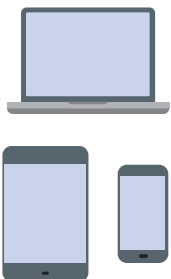
Knowing how your attendees will behave at your event can also help to provide the correct type of connectivity. While communicating when leading up to the event, consider taking a survey of how many devices each attendee plans on using and which carriers they will use to connect.

Know what's possible with your wifi

Understanding wifi essentials can help mitigate any frustrations you may have with venues' offerings. Like many event organizers, Becky Walker Sobeck is hoping for more from her venues.

> *"We are looking forward to the future when convention centers have better options and price points for dedicated event wifi for our attendees."*
>
> **Becky Walker Sobeck**

03 What will your event app cost?

Budget challenges

To determine the event app costs for organizations of all sizes and types, Guidebook published a 35-page report based on survey responses from more than 500 event app administrators–pro event and meeting planners who are event app power users.

Planners may worry that they can't squeeze an event app into their already tight budget. And it's true that the cost of everything is up and budgeting is a major concern–they told us so in the Mobile Event Tech Report 2014.

So we learned more about how much event planners are really spending on event apps. Check out the full infographic here!

View the infographic

Site rental

Catering

Entertainment

Marketing

Administration

Swag/gifts
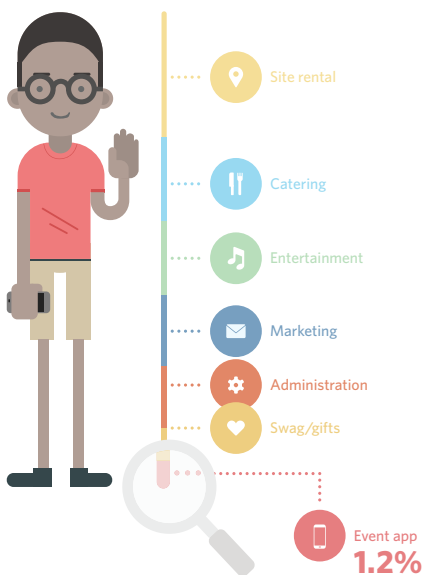
Event app
1.2%

What we learned:

Make instant content changes

Facilitate networking

Sell trackable, dynamic ads

Interact directly with attendees

It turns out that the average cost of an event app is only **1.2% of what you would normally budget on a single attendee... less than $5**. And depending on your event size that number can decrease dramatically. In fact, your average cost-per-attendee for a large fan convention app is only $0.05.

Compared to all the other costs that go into feeding, sheltering and delighting a single attendee, the cost for an event app is minimal.

Traditional paper printing—the primary alternative to an event app—is twice as expensive. And there are myriad benefits you can't get with paper. You can't make instant content changes and populate them everywhere— mobile phones, tablets and the web. You can't promote networking with pieces of paper. You can't sell dynamic ad space, and you definitely can't interact directly with attendees.

What we learned:

In our report we also learned that largely due to printing paper reductions and increased attendee satisfaction, 91% of planners say their adoption of event apps has produced a positive ROI. 82% say they can reduce or remove printing by moving to mobile.

To find more illuminating data about event app costs, the concerns planners are facing, current event tech and more, read our free 35-page State of Mobile Technology Annual Report 2014.

Event app's effect on attendee satisfaction

88% positive effect
11% no effect
1% negative effect

• State of Mobile Event Technology Annual Report | Guidebook 2014 •

86% Attendee satisfaction

73% Number of attendees

41% Number of registrants

37% Revenue

22% Return on investment

19% Social sharing
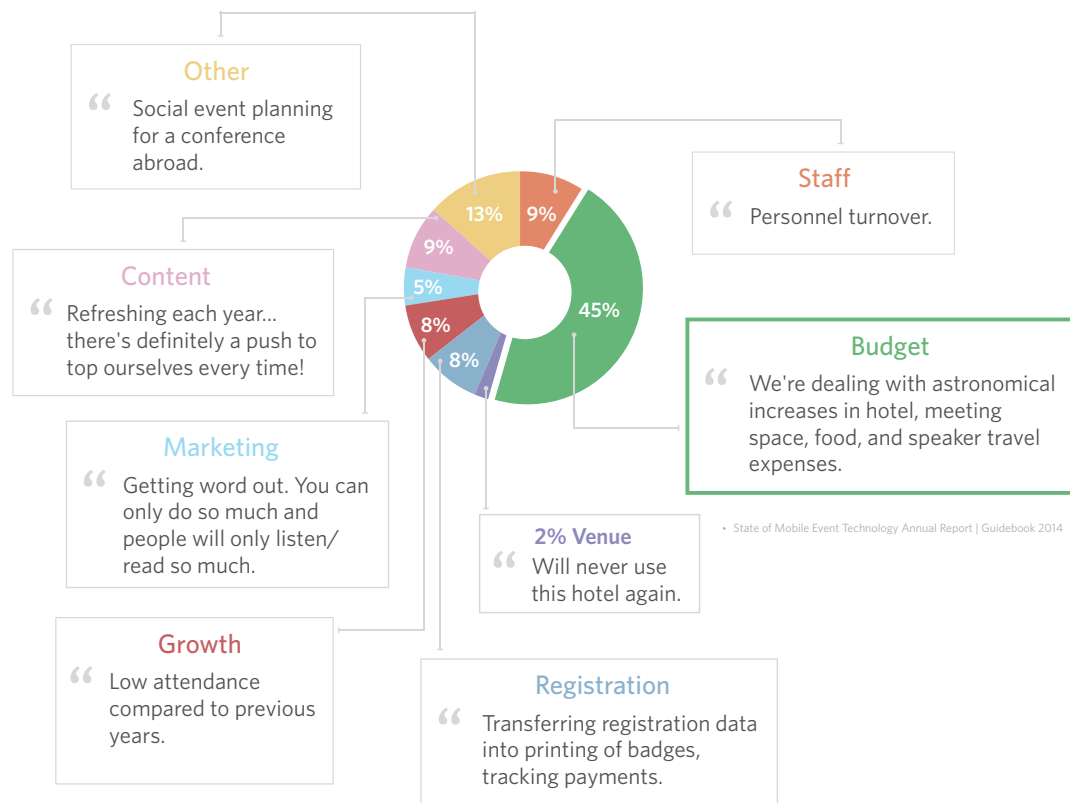
14% Sponsorship renewals

8% Funds raised
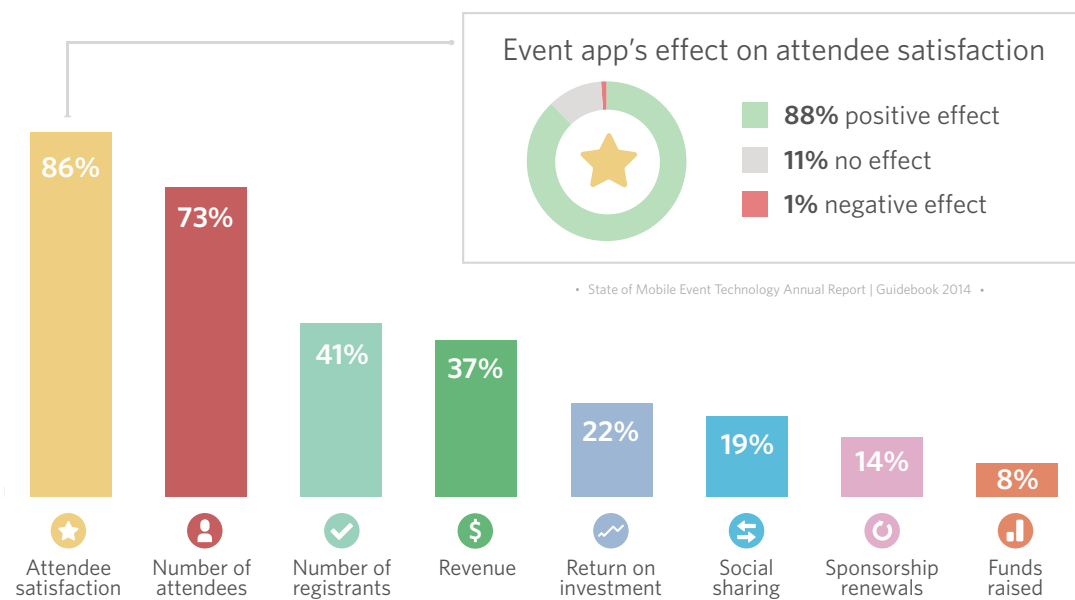
Gauges of event success

04

Are you 'over it' with event costs?

Budget challenges

Event costs and budgeting concerns are the #1 challenge faced by event planners in 2014. 45% said budget is their primary concern in the 2014 State of Mobile Event Tech Report.

Top challenges

Other
" Social event planning for a conference abroad.

Staff
" Personnel turnover.

Content
" Refreshing each year... there's definitely a push to top ourselves every time!

Budget
" We're dealing with astronomical increases in hotel, meeting space, food, and speaker travel expenses.

13%
9%
9%
5%
8%
8%
45%

Marketing
" Getting word out. You can only do so much and people will only listen/ read so much.

2% Venue
" Will never use this hotel again.

• State of Mobile Event Technology Annual Report | Guidebook 2014 •

Growth
" Low attendance compared to previous years.

Registration
" Transferring registration data into printing of badges, tracking payments.
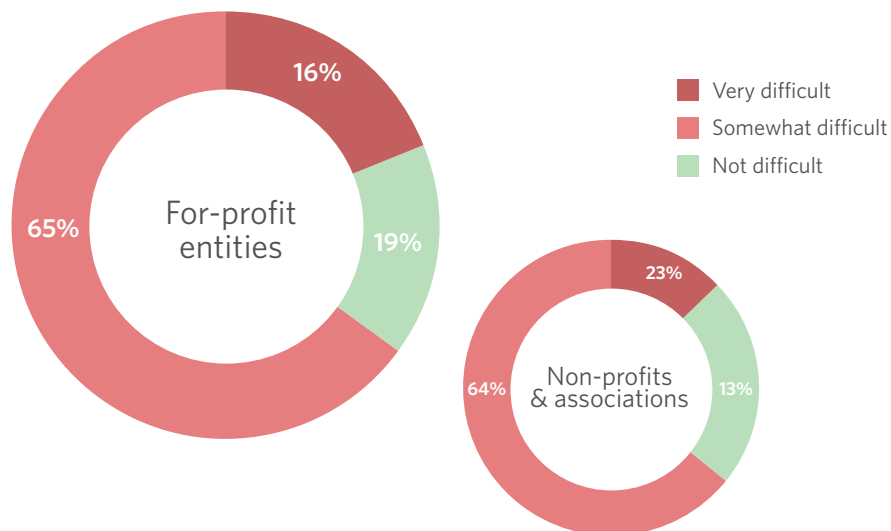
"The cost of everything is up."

Real event planner

Yes, it is. US hotel rates have increased by 5% in 2014, according to the Hotel Price Index. And event costs in every sector seem to be rising more quickly than normal, especially in larger, more event-focused cities like Las Vegas, Orlando, New York, San Francisco, Chicago and Atlanta.

"Managing a tight budget is very difficult."

Real event planner

Yes, it is! Event planners at for-profit and non-profit entities say it's difficult to secure budget for new technology tools. And when your attendees are asking for more, you're being asked to squeeze blood from a stone.

How difficult is it for you to secure budget
for a new event technology tool?

For-profit entities: 16% Very difficult, 19% Not difficult, 65% Somewhat difficult

Non-profits & associations: 23% Very difficult, 13% Not difficult, 64% Somewhat difficult

Legend:
- Very difficult
- Somewhat difficult
- Not difficult

What can you do to fight rising event costs?

Moving to mobile can cut down considerably on costs. We hear again and again that the shift to an event app and away from paper printing has saved money. Here's a dramatic example: The RSA Annual Conference is saving around $20,000 by moving to mobile.

Printing paper programs is double the cost of an event app, and 91% of event planners who use apps say that going mobile has produced a positive return on investment.

Don't take our word for it, though. Read the 35-page 2014 State of Mobile Event Technology report, and learn what planners are saying about rising costs, what competitors are doing, how they're using technology and much more.