guidebook

State of
Mobile Event Technology
Annual Report 2014

guidebook

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What we did

In the summer of 2014, Guidebook surveyed hundreds of event professionals who use event apps year-round for many kinds of events: ranging from 10-person meetings to 130,000-attendee conventions.

Over 500 event app administrators, primarily based in the U.S. and U.K., completed this in-depth survey. The results illuminate broad and industry-specific trends in app ROI, event pros' priorities and goals, the emergence of new tech, app promotion methodology, and the true costs of moving to mobile.

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Key findings

On average, the real cost of an event app is 1.2% of the budget for each attendee. Paper printing is twice as expensive.

Event apps are making planners better at their jobs. The #1 most important success metric for event planners – attendee satisfaction - is also the #1 value event apps deliver.

Planners are getting a return from event apps. Of respondents to whom the question applied, 91% said that their adoption of mobile event apps has produced a positive return on investment.

Eco-friendly events are a focus for most planners, and cutting back on printing and shipping is the best way to 'go green'. 70% of respondents said it's important for their organization to go green. 82% of those said the #1 way to go green is by reducing printing and shipping.

The top three benefits of going with an event app: planners can make last minute changes to the app, they save money on printing and shipping, and they can message attendees during the event.

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Event app benefits

Event app ROI

Planners are getting a return from event apps: 91% said that their adoption of mobile event apps has produced a positive return on investment.

When first considering a mobile event app, planners may have trouble securing budget (see page 30), but they are finding that the cost is minimal compared to the old-school techniques of designing, printing, and shipping paper programs.

Once the app has been adopted, event organizers see a dramatic return on the investment and overwhelming positive response from attendees and team members alike.
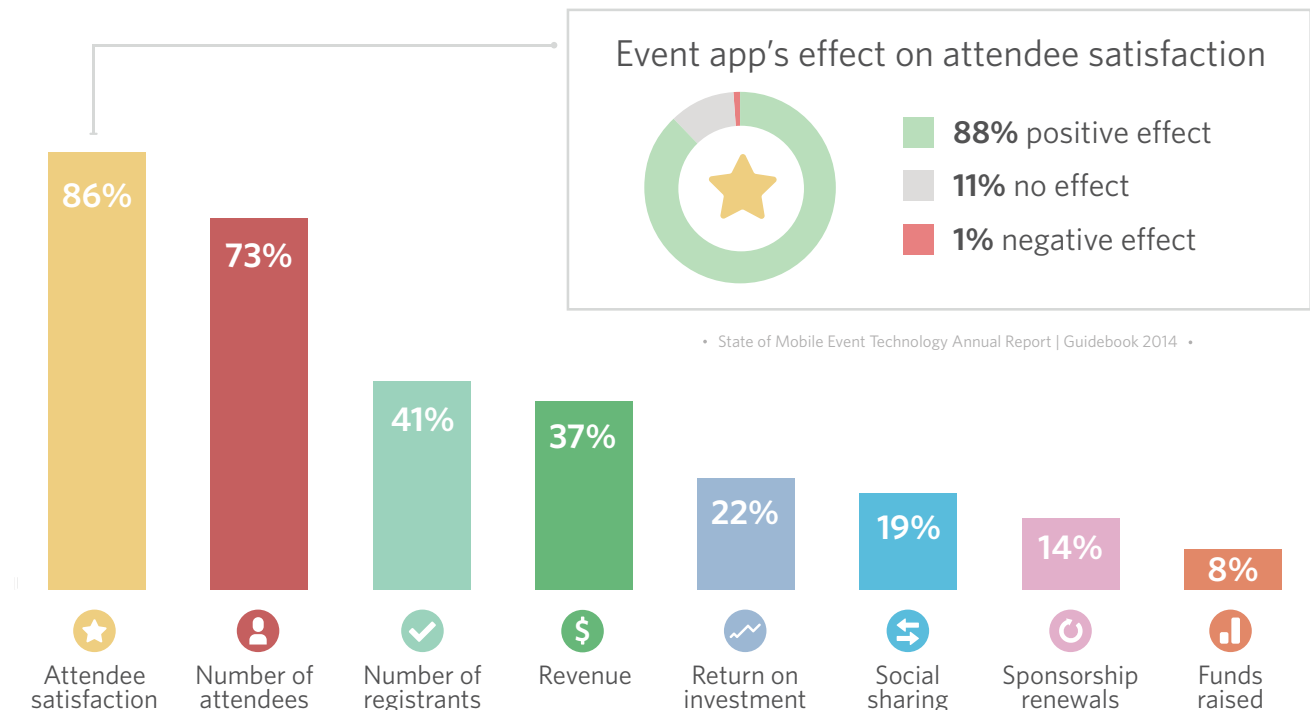
91% Event app produced positive ROI

Successful events

Event apps are making planners better at their jobs. Attendee satisfaction tops the list of metrics event organizers use to gauge the success of an event, with 86% of respondents choosing it as a 'top three'.

And that success is directly tied to having an event app: Attendee satisfaction is the #1 element most-reported as being positively affected by a mobile event app.

Event app's effect on attendee satisfaction

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

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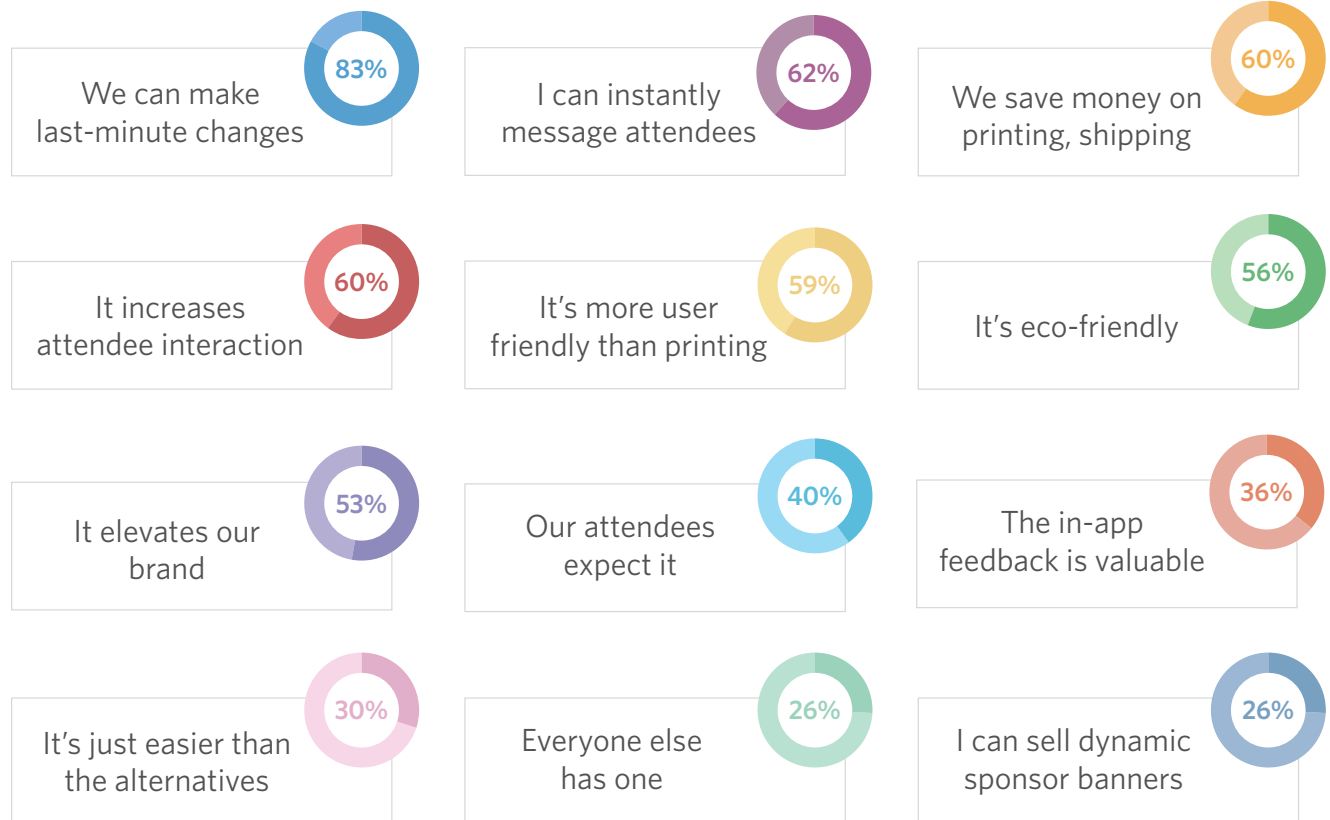| 86%	73%	41%	37%	22%	19%	14%	8%
Attendee satisfaction	Number of attendees	Number of registrants	Revenue	Return on investment	Social sharing	Sponsorship renewals	Funds raised

Gauges of event success

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Why an app?

Mobile app users say that making last minute changes to guides is the #1 reason to go with a mobile event app, with 83% citing it as a benefit.

The #2 reason to move to an app? 62% of organizers say they use event apps so they can message attendees during the event.

The #3 reason (a tie): 60% of planners like that they can save money on printing, shipping and layout, and that apps increases attendee interaction.

|		
We can make last-minute changes — **83%**	I can instantly message attendees — **62%**	We save money on printing, shipping — **60%**
It increases attendee interaction — **60%**	It's more user friendly than printing — **59%**	It's eco-friendly — **56%**
It elevates our brand — **53%**	Our attendees expect it — **40%**	The in-app feedback is valuable — **36%**
It's just easier than the alternatives — **30%**	Everyone else has one — **26%**	I can sell dynamic sponsor banners — **26%**

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Event app cost

We asked event app administrators to state their most recent event size, cost-per-attendee, their app costs, and their printing costs – the amount they would spend on printing if they weren't using an app at all.

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How much does an event app cost?

On average, an app costs 1.2% of the average budget for a single attendee.

In contrast, printed programs are more than twice as expensive.

Site rental

Catering

Entertainment

Marketing

Administration

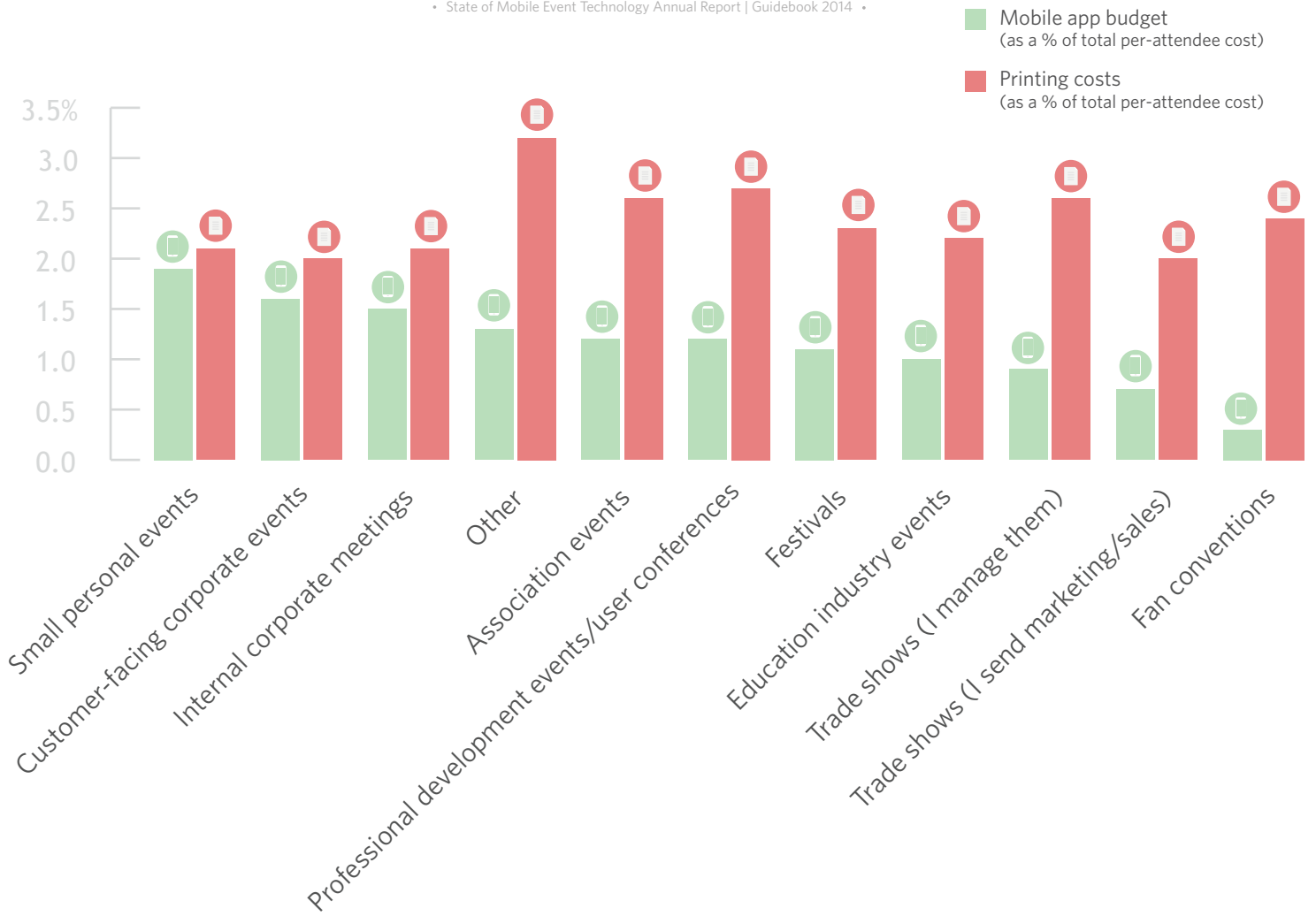Swag/gifts

Event app
1.2%
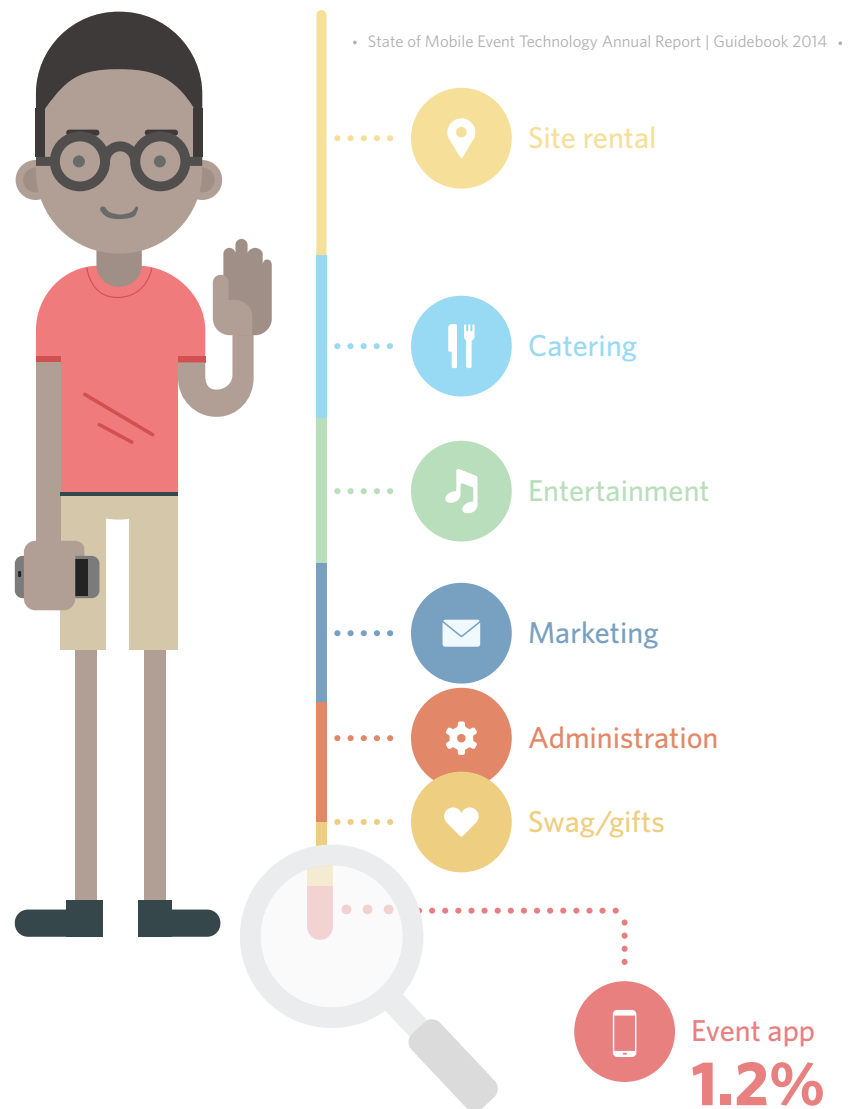
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By event type

Fan conventions, trade shows and education industry events have the **largest disparity** between app and printing costs, per-attendee.
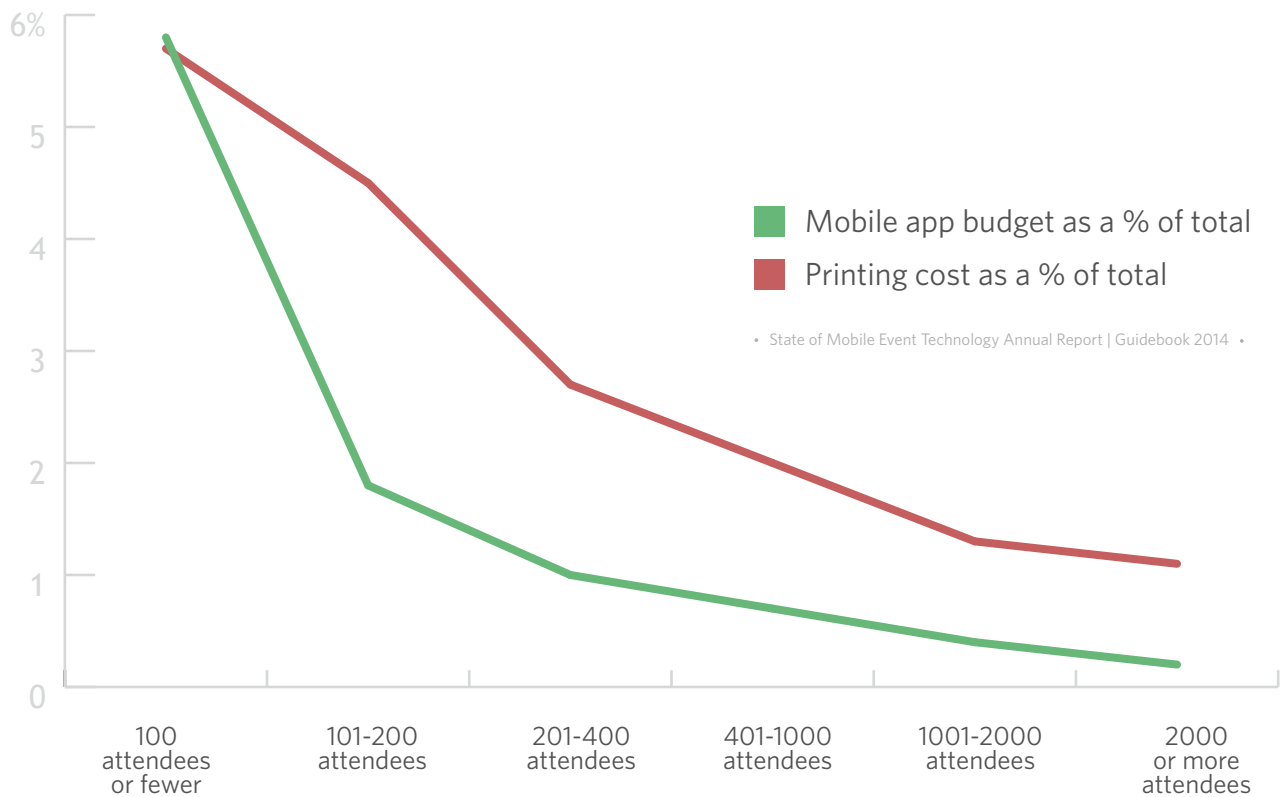
Percent of costs vs. event type

Mobile app budget
(as a % of total per-attendee cost)

Printing costs
(as a % of total per-attendee cost)

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By event size

Larger events saw a lower per-attendee cost for mobile apps. The disparity between app and printing costs increases as the event size grows.
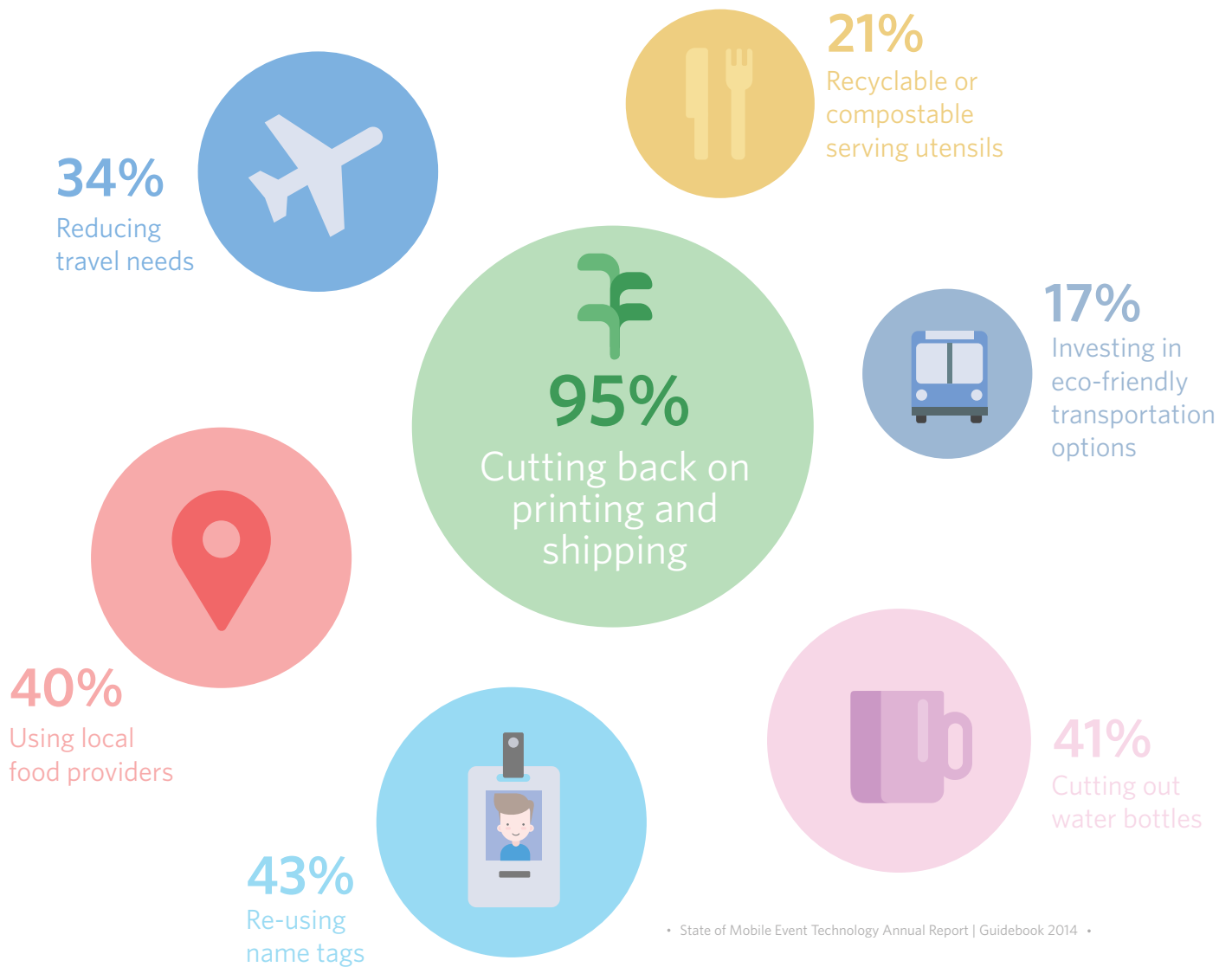
Percent of costs vs. event size

Legend:
- Mobile app budget as a % of total
- Printing cost as a % of total

X-axis labels:
100 attendees or fewer | 101-200 attendees | 201-400 attendees | 401-1000 attendees | 1001-2000 attendees | 2000 or more attendees

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Mobile event tech and going green

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Planners are considering environmental impact

70% of respondents said going green is important.

The best way to make events more eco-friendly? Cutting back on printing and shipping.

21%
Recyclable or compostable serving utensils

34%
Reducing travel needs

95%
Cutting back on printing and shipping

17%
Investing in eco-friendly transportation options

40%
Using local food providers

43%
Re-using name tags

41%
Cutting out water bottles

Cut out printing

Event apps allow you to reduce and remove printing. If you're looking to cut back on printing, talk to the 82% of respondents who were able to do so by moving to mobile!
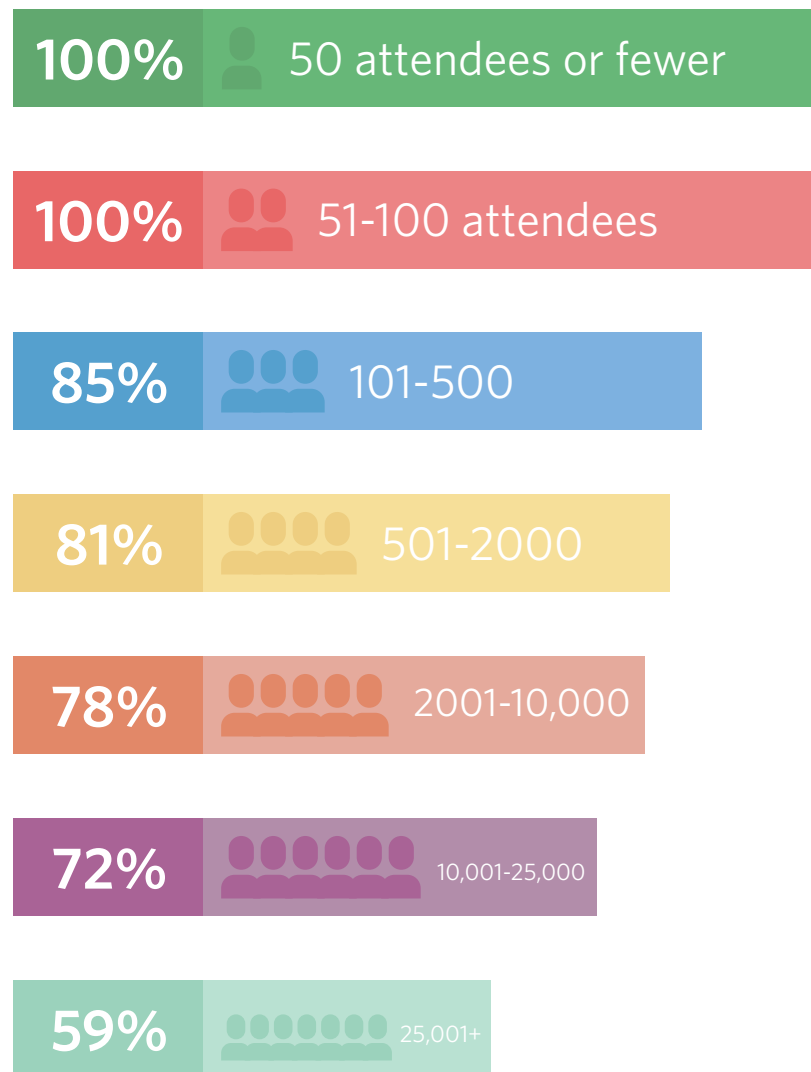
82%

Reduced or removed
paper printing by
switching to a mobile app
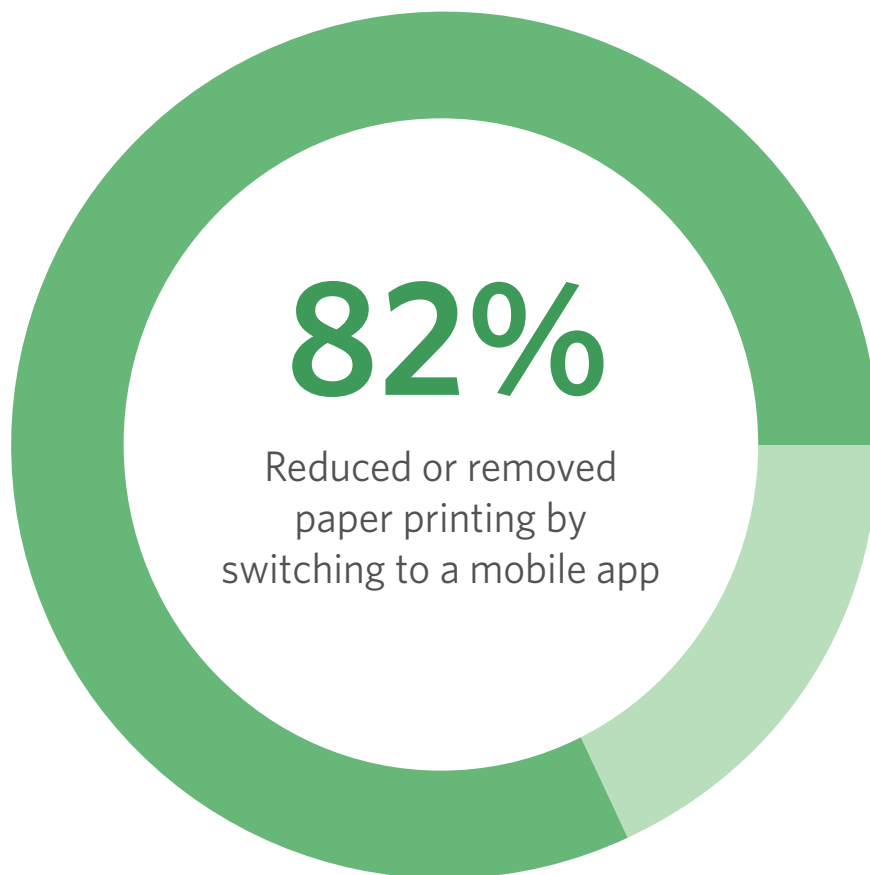
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By event size

Smaller events are more likely to be able to reduce or remove printing entirely.

## Ability to reduce or remove printing, by event size

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100% 50 attendees or fewer

100% 51-100 attendees

85% 101-500

81% 501-2000

78% 2001-10,000

72% 10,001-25,000

59% 25,001+

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By event type

91% of internal corporate meetings report being able to reduce or entirely remove printing. Small personal events, user conferences, education industry events and customer-facing corporate events are above average in printing reduction.

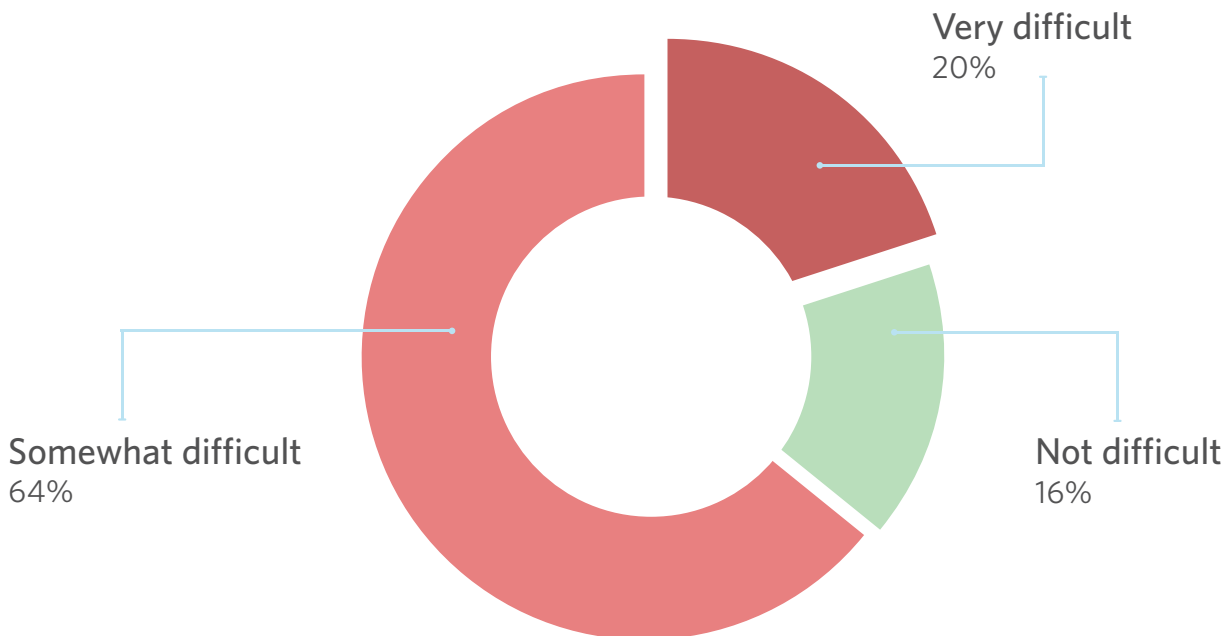### Ability to reduce or remove printing, by event type
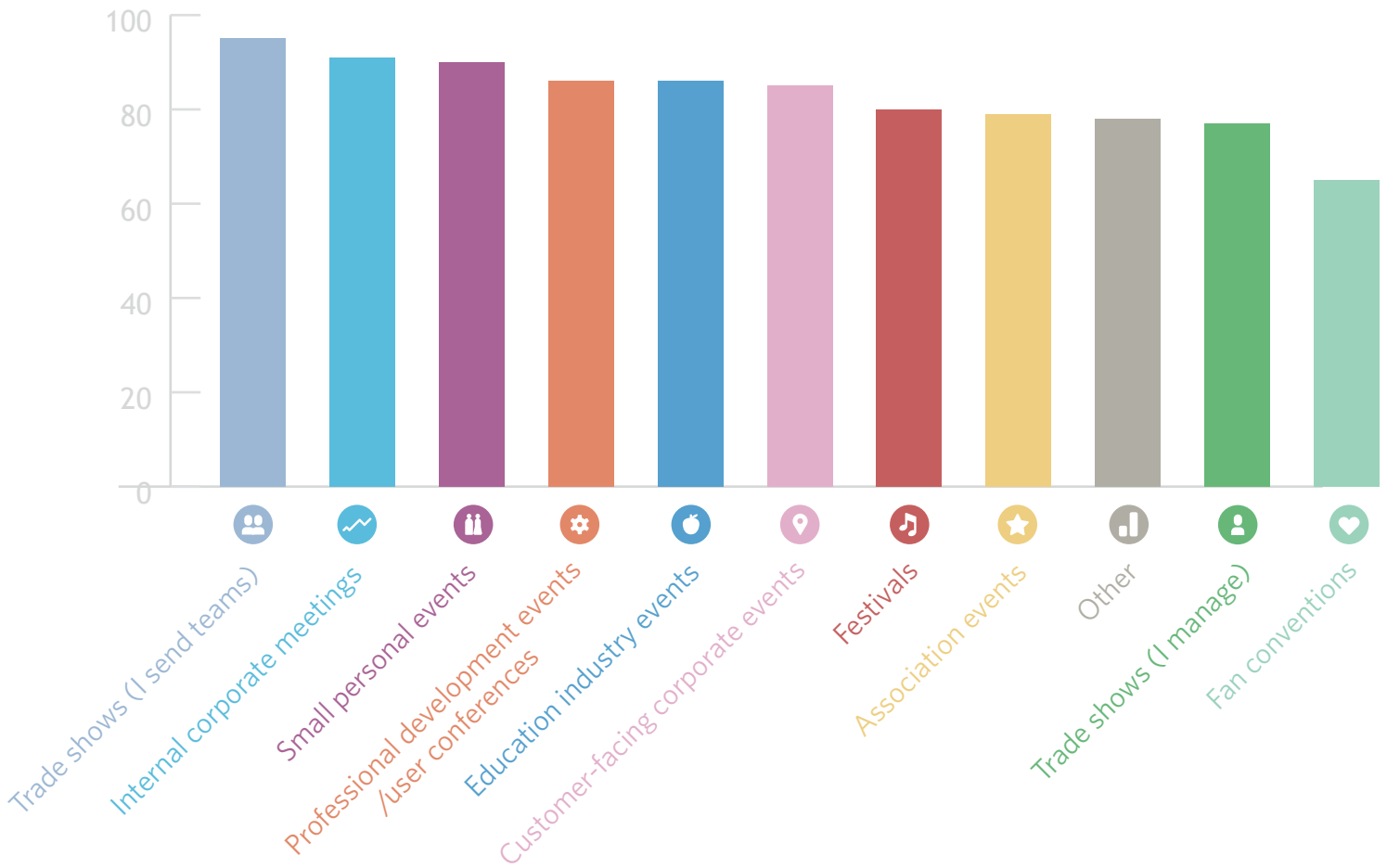
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New event technologies

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Securing tech budget

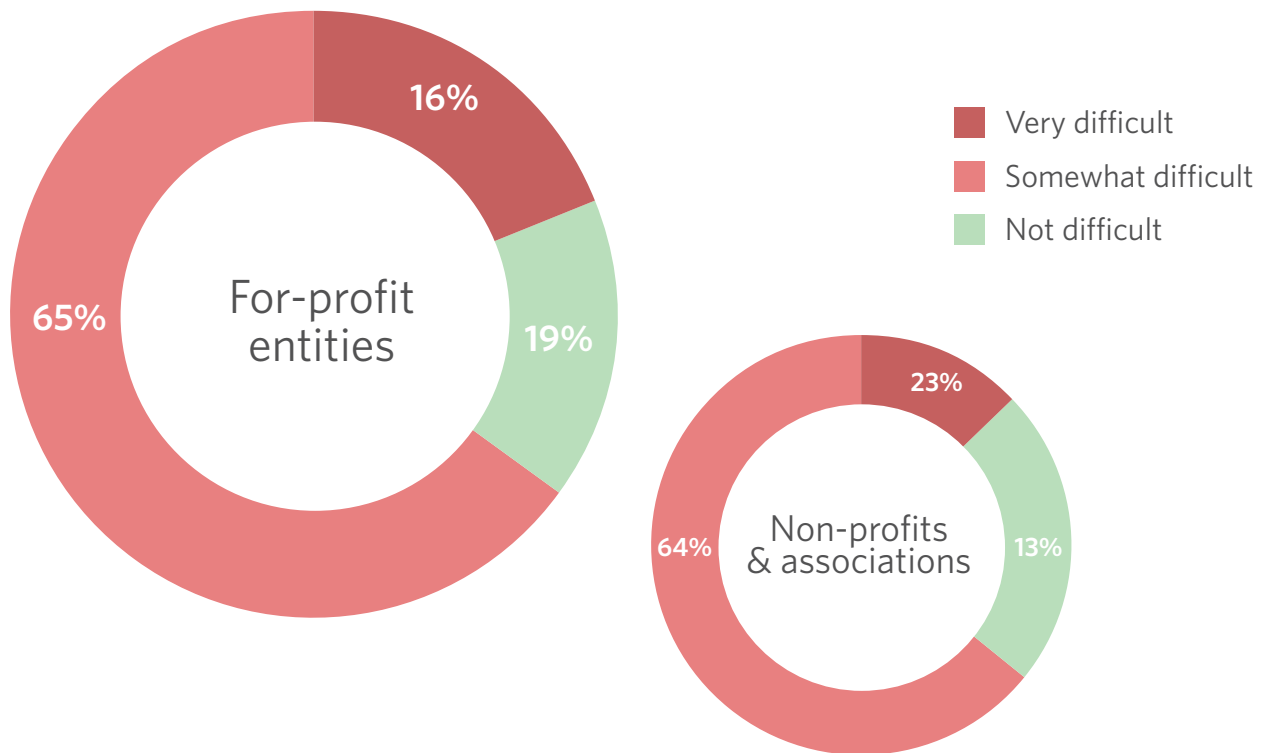Planners are finding it difficult to secure budget for new technologies.

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

Very difficult
20%

Not difficult
16%

Somewhat difficult
64%

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Non-profit vs. for-profit budgets

Ability to secure tech budget is minimally more difficult in the non-profit world, and the majority of entities still need to fight for budget.

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

For-profit entities

- 16% Very difficult
- 65% Somewhat difficult
- 19% Not difficult

Legend:
- Very difficult
- Somewhat difficult
- Not difficult

Non-profits & associations

- 23% Very difficult
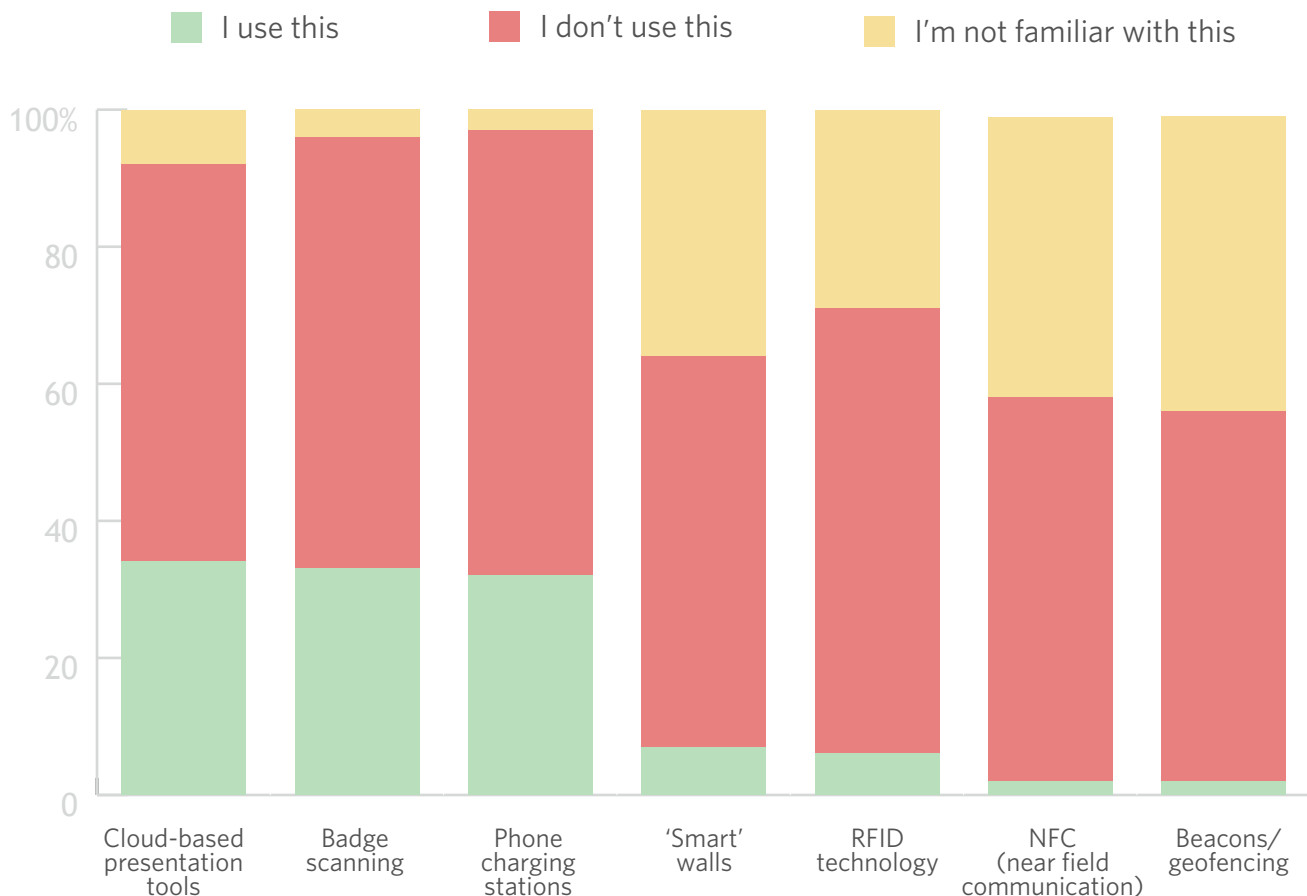- 64% Somewhat difficult
- 13% Not difficult

Event tech trends

1/3 of planners are using cloud-based presentation tools, badge scanning and phone charging stations.

Smart walls, RFID tech, NFC and beacons are still under the radar in 2014 for most planners.

These breakdowns are generally consistent across industries.

Event technology use

Legend: I use this | I don't use this | I'm not familiar with this

Categories: Cloud-based presentation tools, Badge scanning, Phone charging stations, 'Smart' walls, RFID technology, NFC (near field communication), Beacons/geofencing
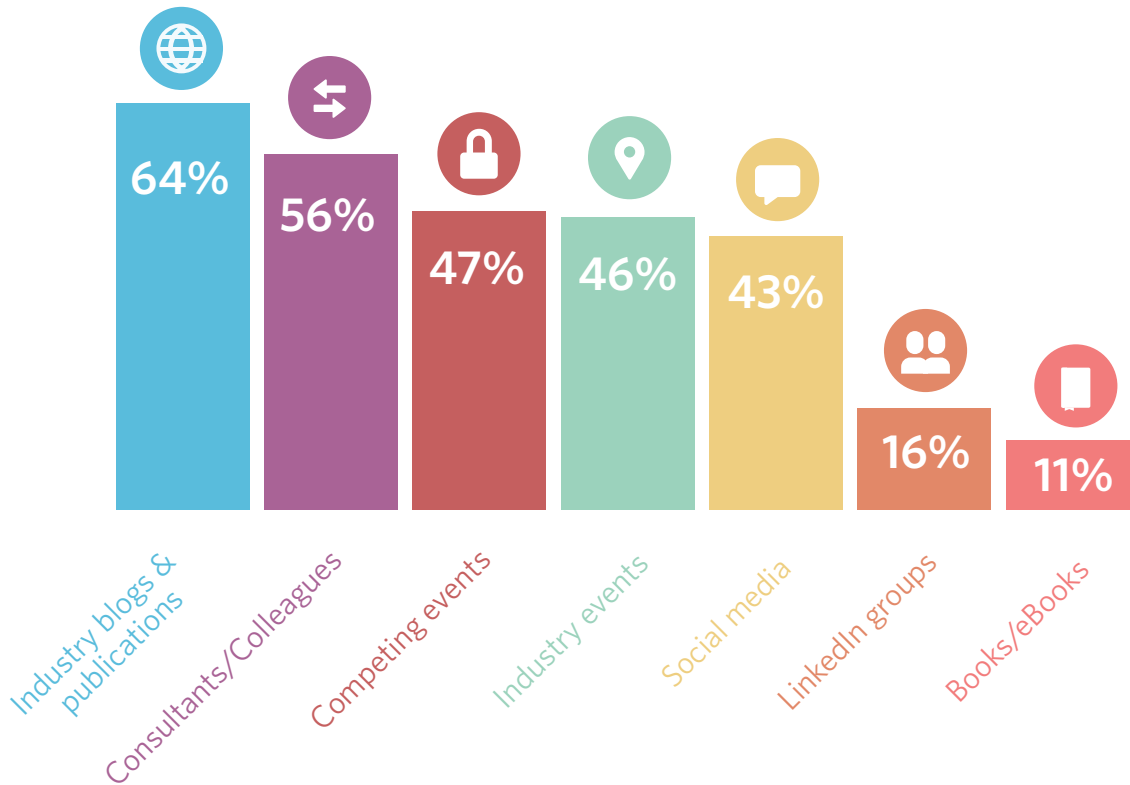
Get the skinny

Planners are primarily looking at industry blogs and publications for info about new event technologies – and they learn from colleagues and other events, too.

Where do you go for information about new event technology?

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Industry blogs & publications	Consultants/Colleagues	Competing events	Industry events	Social media	LinkedIn groups	Books/eBooks
64%	56%	47%	46%	43%	16%	11%

First adoption

The majority of event app administrators began using event guides in 2012 and 2013.

### What year did your organization build their first mobile event app?

Year	Percentage
2014	21%
2013	23%
2012	35%
2011	13%
2010	4%
2009	1%
Earlier than 2009	2%

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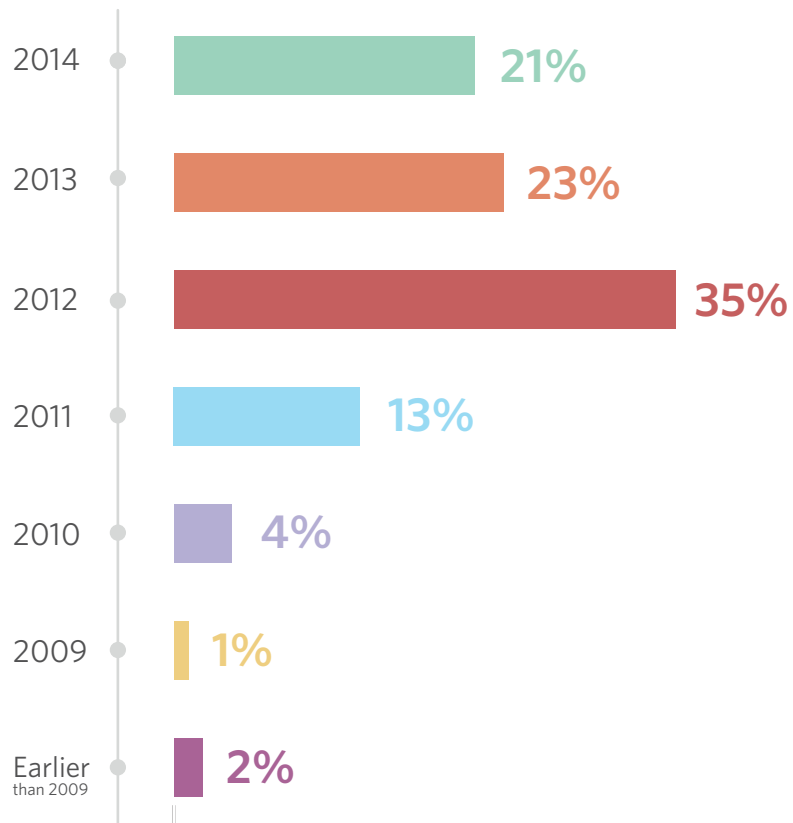
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Event app user adoption

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App guide promotion

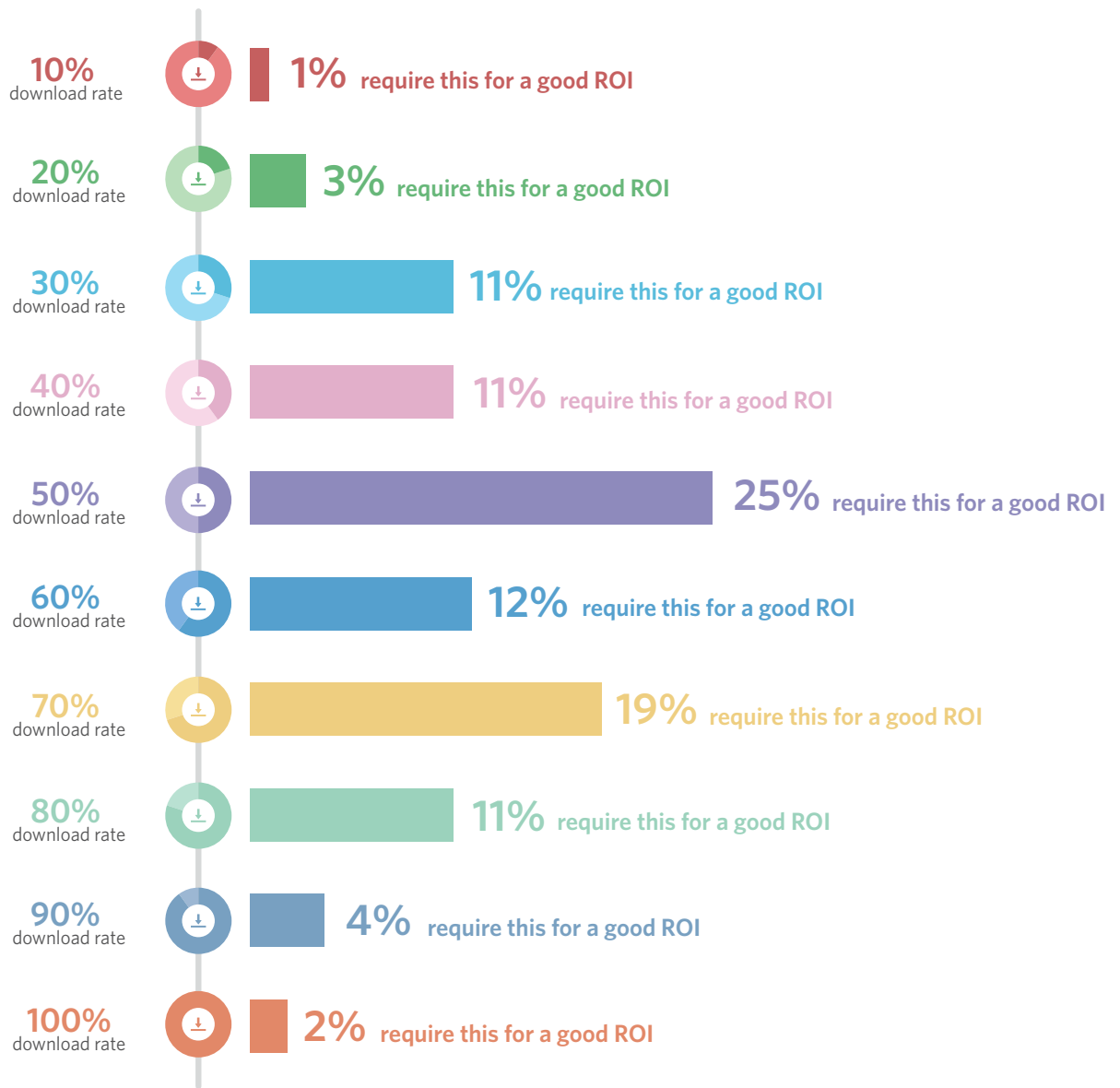Over half of mobile event app administrators know they're not doing enough to promote their guides.

Guide promotion is most effective when it's part of a planned, multi-channel marketing-style effort over time; before the event launches and on-site. And guide promotion is directly tied to ROI – the more downloads, the more worthwhile the cost and effort.

Do you believe you're doing everything you can to promote your guides?

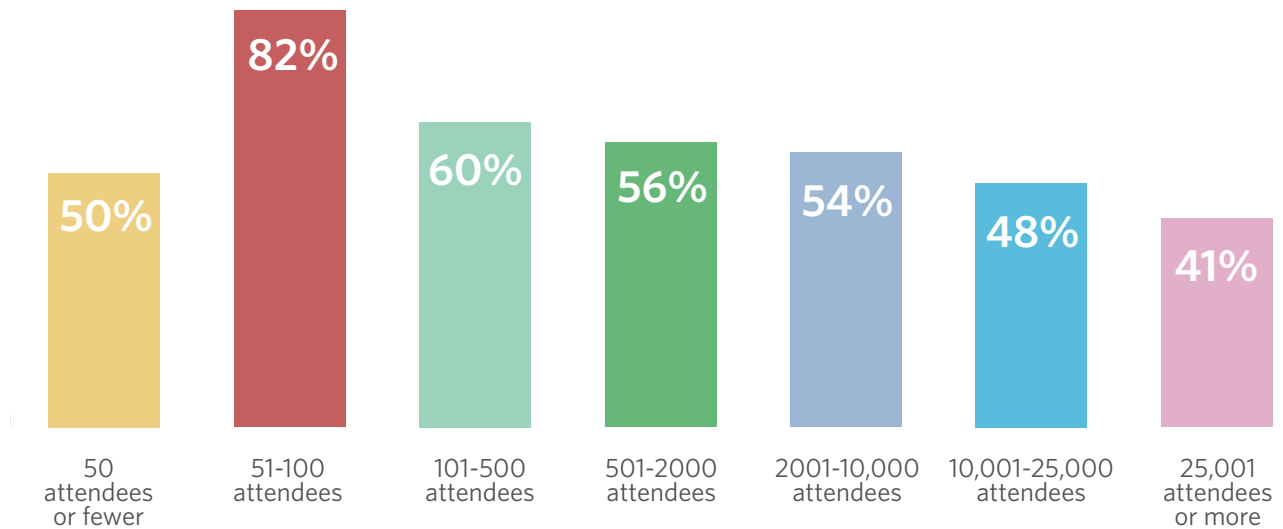| 47%	Yes

53%	No

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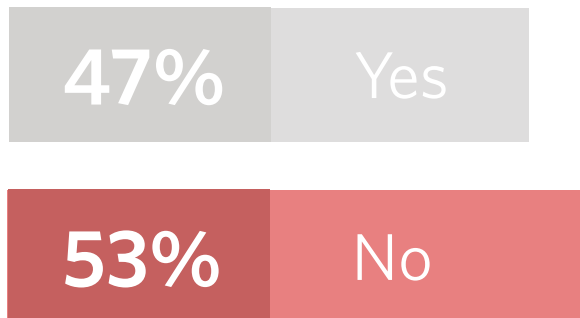
Downloads and ROI

We asked event app administrators: how many attendee downloads do you need in order for an app to be a good investment?

10% download rate — **1%** require this for a good ROI

20% download rate — **3%** require this for a good ROI

30% download rate — **11%** require this for a good ROI

40% download rate — **11%** require this for a good ROI

50% download rate — **25%** require this for a good ROI

60% download rate — **12%** require this for a good ROI

70% download rate — **19%** require this for a good ROI

80% download rate — **11%** require this for a good ROI

90% download rate — **4%** require this for a good ROI

100% download rate — **2%** require this for a good ROI

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Adoption rate by event size

Smaller events tend to require a higher adoption rate to get a return. This graph shows the average adoption rate (percent of total attendees who used the mobile app) planners say is required to get a positive ROI.

Average required adoption rate for positive ROI, by event size

| 50%	82%	60%	56%	54%	48%	41%
50 attendees or fewer	51-100 attendees	101-500 attendees	501-2000 attendees	2001-10,000 attendees	10,001-25,000 attendees	25,001 attendees or more

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App promotion methods

Email marketing and on-site signage rank as the most effective ways to increase app downloads.

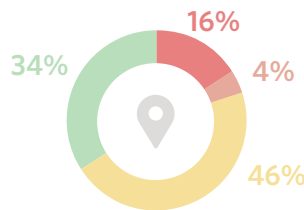## Effectiveness at driving downloads

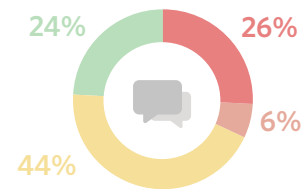🟩 Very effective 🟨 Somewhat effective 🟧 Not effective 🟥 I don't do this
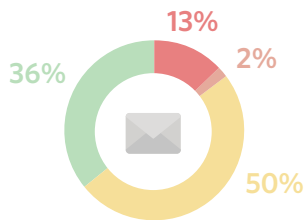
Email marketing about the app
- 13%
- 2%
- 50%
- 36%

On-site signage
- 16%
- 4%
- 46%
- 34%

Social media posts with the download link
- 24%
- 26%
- 6%
- 44%
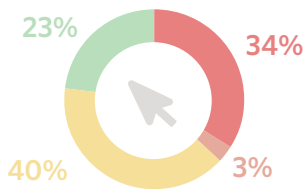
Embedding the web-based guide on my website
- 23%
- 34%
- 3%
- 40%
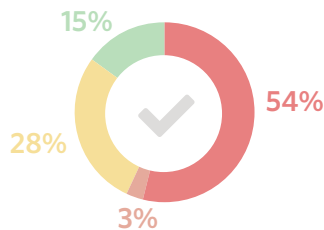
A link on the registration thank-you page
- 15%
- 54%
- 3%
- 28%
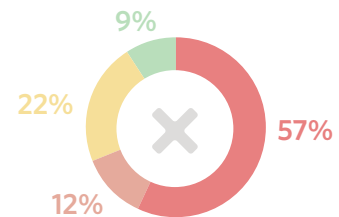
Removing printed materials entirely
- 9%
- 57%
- 12%
- 22%

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Direct feedback

Survey respondents offered some additional ways to increase event app downloads.

> Incentivize them! We offered a gift card from a random drawing to those who downloaded the app by a specific date.

> We SMS the link to attendees' phones.

> We promote the app in session intros and wrap-ups.

> I add the app details to our online event brochure and create a "task" for everyone to use the app.

> Face-to-face contact: Our onsite staff mention the app during the registration/check-in process. They assist with install and use if needed.

> We put the app details and QR code on the back of our volunteer t-shirts.

> We mention the mobile guide during the meeting introduction.

> We make the app front-and-center in vendor promotions.

> Word of mouth, focusing on features like photo sharing and personal schedule especially, which you can't get without the app.

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Event planner concerns

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Competitors

We asked event planners to enter a free response to this question: **If you have event "competitors", what are they doing that worries you?**
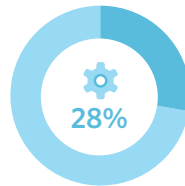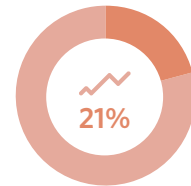
Top competitor worries

28%

Budget

"They spend more money because they get more sponsorships."

28%

Technology

"They're very on top of the latest trends. "

21%

Size

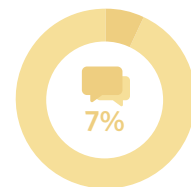"They're going bigger, expanding with partnerships."

10%
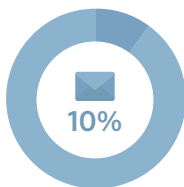
Marketing

"More blogging & social media, and more attendees discussing online."

7%
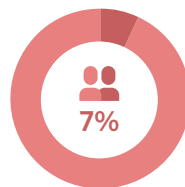
Audience

"They have better outreach to young professionals."

7%

Event content

"They have more educational / interesting / interactive content and sessions."
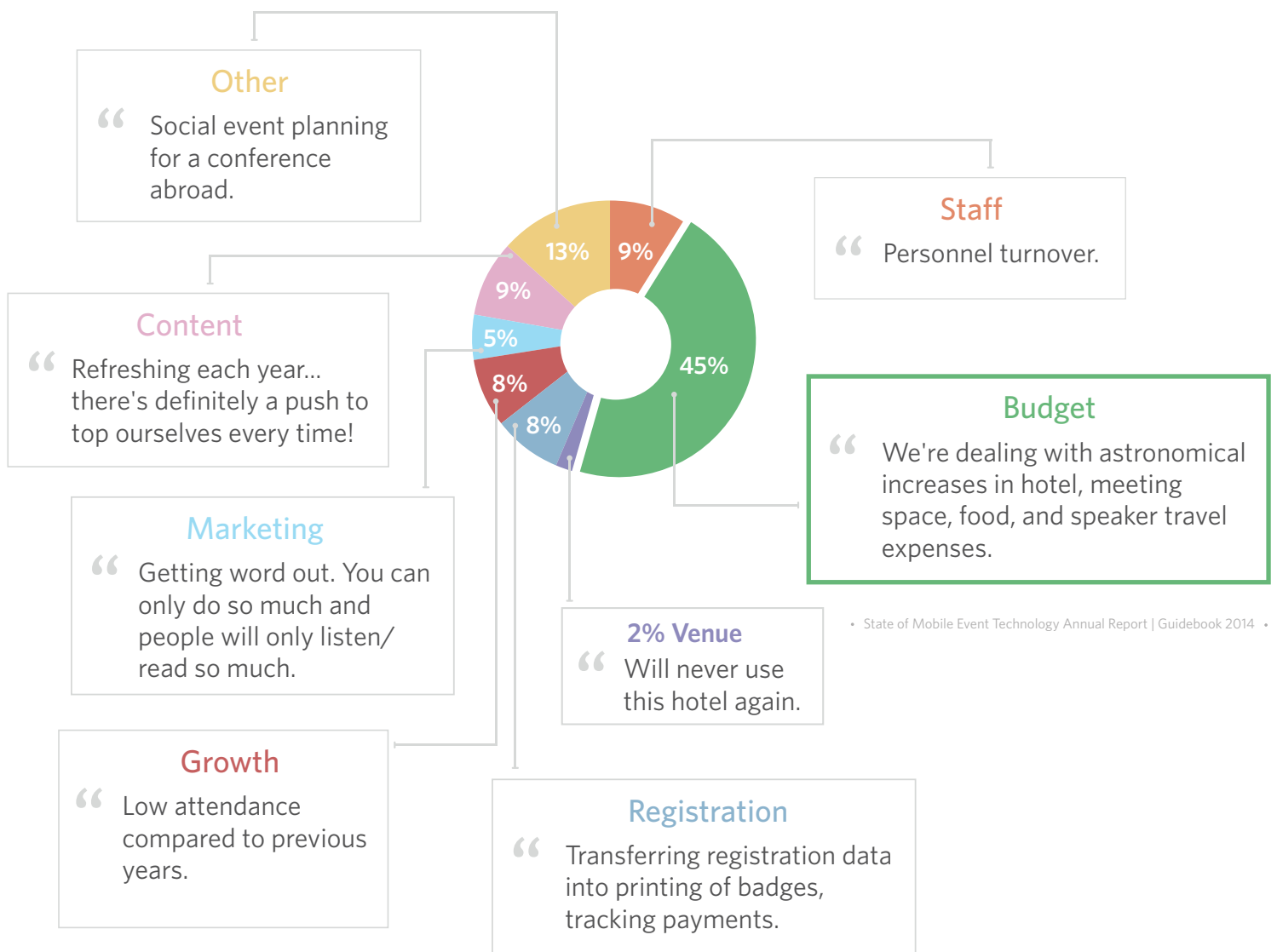
Other

"They're serving sub-niches of our already-niche population in specific ways."

Biggest challenges

We asked event planners to enter a free response to this question: **What are the biggest challenges you faced as an event/meeting planner this year?**

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.

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.

Growth
" Low attendance compared to previous years.

Registration
" Transferring registration data into printing of badges, tracking payments.

Chart values: 13%, 9%, 9%, 5%, 8%, 8%, 45%

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Methodology and demographics

Methodology and demographics

Guidebook sent a 31-question survey to 2,200 event app administrators, to be completed between Thursday, August 14 and Thursday, August 21.
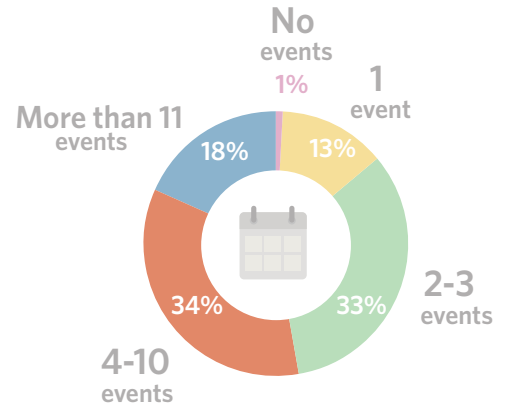
528 people completed the survey in this time, and were given a gift card for their participation.

Types of entities they manage events for

- Agency
- For-profit business
- Non-profit/association
- This question doesn't apply to me

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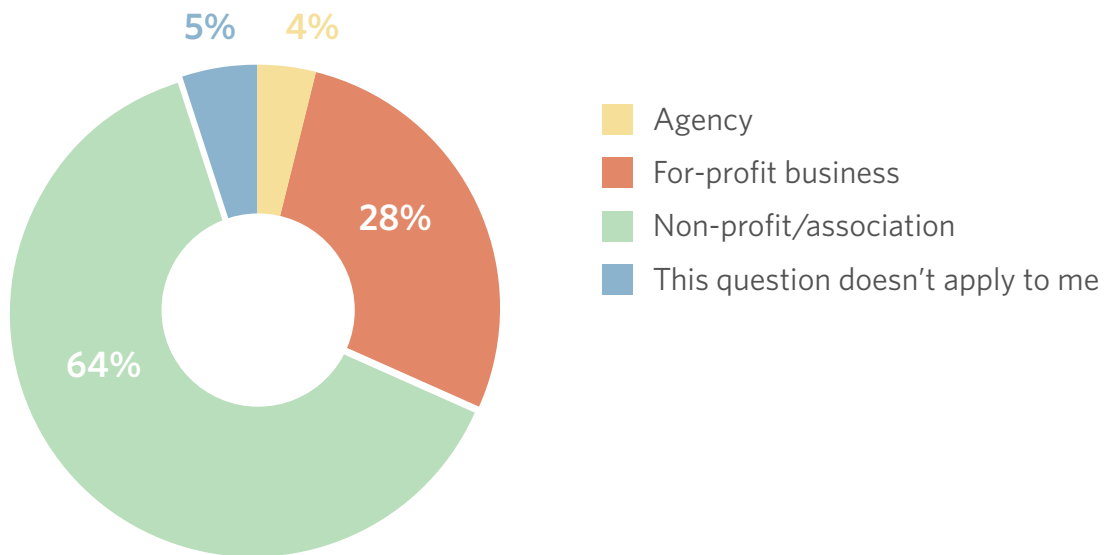
Methodology and demographics

Number of events in a year (of any size) they help organize

- No events 1%
- 1 event 13%
- 2-3 events 33%
- 4-10 events 34%
- More than 11 events 18%

Types of events they manage

Type	%
Association events	45%
Professional development events /user conferences	43%
Internal corporate meetings	24%
Education industry events	24%
Trade shows (I manage)	20%
Other	16%
Small personal events	14%
Customer-facing corporate events	13%
Trade shows (I send teams)	9%
Festivals	8%
Fan conventions	7%

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Methodology and demographics

Smallest event they helped organize

- 55%
- 13%
- 20%
- 7%
- 2%
- 1%
- 1%

Largest event they helped organize

- 1%
- 3%
- 31%
- 41%
- 16%
- 4%
- 4%

Legend:
- 50 attendees or fewer
- 51-100 attendees
- 101-500 attendees
- 501-2000 attendees
- 2001-10,000 attendees
- 10,001-25,000 attendees
- 25,001 or more attendees