

BUSINESS TRAVEL & EVENTS

03 WHY ACCESSIBILITY IS ESSENTIAL IN 2023

08 IS A NET-ZERO EVENTS SECTOR IN REACH?

10 THE NEW SCIENCE OF ASSESSING TRIP ROI



**Want to drive real business outcomes at events?
Get emotional.**

Find out how emotions drive tangible business outcomes on **p.11**



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BUSINESS TRAVEL & EVENTS

Distributed in
THE TIMES

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ACCESSIBILITY

In-person events are back – but are they inclusive?

Greater awareness of a range of physical and mental health conditions has raised the bar for accessibility at conferences, seminars and other business events. What do organisers need to know to ensure everyone feels welcome?

Elizabeth Anderson

When footwear retailer Schuh held its spring-summer 2023 press launch in April, the team responsible for organising the event decided to focus on putting accessibility at the heart of the planning, communication and production.

For instance, to help attendees manage any conditions they might have, the event agenda was sent out ahead of time, explaining what to expect throughout the day; a two-hour 'quiet' slot was set aside when no music would play; and shoe displays were set at various heights to suit every guest's needs. The event was praised widely on LinkedIn by people impressed by the consideration shown.

"We've made many changes over the past two years to build disability confidence and trust," says Alice Cleary, Schuh's chief marketing officer. "We now have a blueprint for all our future events, whether they're industry-facing or aimed at customers or employees."

Indeed, as business events make a comeback after the Covid-related disruption, there is growing awareness among organisers of the need to prioritise accessibility and inclusivity in this way. That will mean putting more thought into how events should be adapted to meet every possible need.

After all, there's a huge range of potential conditions to consider, from so-called invisible conditions such as Crohn's disease, arthritis and diabetes to mental health issues and neurological differences such as autism and ADHD.

But being inclusive doesn't always mean that radical changes are needed. It simply means considering the full spectrum of attendees and offering options rather than a one-size-fits-most solution.

Rick Stainton is founder of The Power of Events, a not-for-profit that represents the main trade associations and major players in the events industry. He recommends that organisers of in-person events should prioritise looking for step-free access when choosing a venue, keeping an eye out for ramps, or at least handrails where steps are unavoidable. Plenty of accessible toilets are a must, and organisers may want to consider quiet areas or zones where people can self-regulate if they are feeling overwhelmed, he says.

"Most conference centres are fully accessible. Quirky venues are not



shymaher via iStock

always. A great safe bet is universities. They are fully bought into inclusivity and have the facilities to accommodate needs such as gender-neutral or individual bathrooms," adds Paul Ince, who runs an annual marketing conference in his role as CEO of LikeMind Media.

One challenge for event organisers, of course, is to do all the above in a cost-effective way. Ince notes that providing extra rooms will often cost more, but explaining what they are being used for at the booking stage may help negotiations, particularly with supportive venues. If the budget is tight, Microsoft PowerPoint can run live captions for people hard of hearing and offers the bionic reading font, which highlights parts of words to make text easier and faster to read for some people with dyslexia and ADHD.

When it comes to the structure of the event, consider regular breaks for those who struggle to sit for long periods and for people who need

frequent toilet trips. Build in time for people to stretch their legs between speakers, particularly if a speech is longer than an hour.

Likewise, accessible seating, and knowing where this will be located in advance, can help people plan where to sit. Some may prefer the front because of sight or hearing issues, while others may prefer to be at the back to avoid sensory issues.

"Clear maps of the venue, where there might be stairs, where the accessible toilets are, where seating areas are, plus whether there is parking (and if not, what nearby options I have as a Blue Badge-holder) helps mitigate anxiety as I can prepare," says Jen Parker, an editor and designer who has an autoimmune condition and suffers from chronic pain. She adds that a cloakroom is a must, as lugging coats and bags around is difficult when she walks with a stick.

Pre-event communication is key to all of this. Allow guests to provide

information about any individual requirements on the registration form – whether that's access issues, dietary needs or sign language – and let them know in the pre-event communications if there will be any flash photography, strobe lighting or images that may cause seizures, or loud sounds or music. Consider fast-track queuing for those not able to stand for long periods.

If that all sounds burdensome, technology is now able to help out here. For instance, audience-profiling tools give organisations detailed insights into their audience's needs. Guests are typically asked a handful of questions in advance, and the profiling tool analyses and summarises the data to help organisers shape an event around the answers.

"Individuals with neurological differences such as autism, ADHD or dyslexia can experience conferences in ways that differ from their neuro-typical peers," says Bruce Rose, head of audience at events agency LiveGroup, which recently launched an audience-profiling tool. "The overwhelming sensory environment of large crowds, bright lights and loud noises can cause sensory overload for some. Providing a quiet space can really help."

He adds that introducing a buddy system that pairs attendees with a volunteer to support them as they navigate the event can also greatly help guests. Another option is to offer a complimentary visitor ticket to anyone who needs extra support.

Equally, tapping into some of the technology we've all been using at home over the past few years can help too. For instance, if people can't physically attend a venue, they may be able to take part online, assuming the in-person event is set up for hybrid participation.

Leor Franks, business development director at law firm Kingsley Napley LLP, hosts many online events. He recommends Remo for virtual events thanks to its interactive breakout rooms and says Zoom works well for seminars and presentations. "Some platforms, such as Microsoft Teams, now offer automated real-time transcription tools, which is helpful for those who find listening to event audio challenging," he adds.

With so many new accessibility-enabling tools at their disposal, there's now no excuse for events organisers not to be considerate of guests' needs. After all, small changes can make a big difference – and need not blow the budget. ●

ORGANISERS MUST REMEMBER THAT NOT EVERYONE WILL WANT TO DISCLOSE THEIR CONDITIONS

Percentage of UK employees with invisible disabilities who do not routinely declare it in professional settings, by condition type



INvolve, 2023

WELLBEING

How business travel became an HR issue

Since Covid, HR teams have been getting more and more involved in planning business trips. It's all part of a greater focus on employee wellbeing

Jonathan Weinberg

Business travel has now returned to more usual levels following the removal of Covid-19 restrictions. But are companies doing enough to look after their employees' wellbeing when they take trips for work?

That's the question HR teams now need to answer as they grapple with issues related to the return of domestic and international business travel.

Ongoing health issues (including long Covid), anxiety about meeting new people, increased caring responsibilities and environmental concerns must now be considered, far more so than pre-pandemic.

Research from American Express shows why HR's role here has expanded. More than half (55%) of business travellers say their wellbeing suffers when they travel too frequently, and seven in 10 (71%) even admit that they would leave a role if they felt their wellbeing wasn't sufficiently supported while they are away from work.

HR expert and author Teresa Boughey says that modern business travel policies must commit to employee wellbeing. "It's important to balance the benefits of face-to-face meetings with the disruption and potential trauma that people may experience because of travelling," she explains. "Employees need to be empowered to make travel decisions that are right for them."

Sophie Bryan is founder of consultancy and training organisation Ordinarily Different and agrees. She advises HR to work alongside travel managers to provide guidelines, training and resources to promote responsible practices.

"HR should recognise the impact of travel on mental health, and support employees in managing stress and maintaining work/life balance during trips," she adds.

Indeed, the need for a coordinated approach here might increase if the American Express research is anything to go by. It found that 42% of the companies surveyed plan to increase their



Sanjeri via iStock

Sanjeri via Gettyimages

“It's important to balance the benefits of face-to-face meetings with the potential trauma that people may experience”

He suggests that as business travel restarts in the wake of Covid, many HR teams will need to update their travel policies' wording and the liabilities covered. "Everyone needs to become more aware of the mental and sometimes physical consequences of travel," he argues. "HR should have an open-door policy for employees to discuss any hesitations over company travel. They should be involved in the creation of any travel policies, either through a forum or a survey."

There are also many legal issues to be considered by CHROs and their teams. Yvonne Gallagher, employment partner at law firm Harbottle & Lewis, suggests that an individual suffering "substantial long-Covid symptoms" may be deemed to have a disability, given that by now these symptoms would likely have lasted more than 12 months.

"Obligations to make reasonable adjustments would apply," she

advises. "If an individual is unfit to travel or it appears that travel – particularly long-haul – will worsen symptoms, then an employer should consider whether a reasonable adjustment can be made in the form of allowing meetings to take place remotely rather than face-to-face."

She explains that while it is permissible for employers to consider the benefits of in-person attendance, they shouldn't be seen to apply "hard and fast rules about travel where disability may be present". A disability could also be relevant when it comes to the needs of an employee's family member, she says.

Of course, if an employer believes that an employee is in breach of an obligation to "obey their employer's reasonable directions", HR's involvement could be critical. This would apply, Gallagher adds, if the employer has been clear about the need for business travel, can show that it is reasonably necessary, and

is not seen to be behaving unreasonably when scheduling travel.

These days, HR departments are also more likely to encounter employee concerns over climate change – and may feel a duty to act on that. This could even be "put forward as a protected belief for the purposes of the Equality Act", Gallagher explains, although she stresses this is yet to be tested by way of a legal judgment.

Other relevant considerations for HR might include whether it is realistic to ask LGBTQ+ employees to travel to parts of the world where they may face discrimination.

This is where Ema Boccagni of global mobility specialist ECA International says risk assessments must now come in. These should consider the full risk profile of the traveller, including aspects such as age, sex, ethnicity and any underlying health conditions.

"Whether business travel sits under HR, operations or somewhere else entirely, it is essential the two disciplines share a strong relationship," she argues. "If the two are not working together in a concerted way, the efficiency of planning business travel is likely to be negatively affected."

One further way for HR to demonstrate a commitment to compliance is the introduction of a proactive risk assessment framework known as ISO 31030. Chris Job MBE, director of risk management services at Healix, calls this "the world's first 'best practice' benchmark for travel risk management".

He concedes that not all HR departments plan corporate trips, especially in larger companies with dedicated travel teams, but he acknowledges that HR's role after the Covid crisis has become more entrenched in ensuring employee safety outside the office.

"By demonstrating compliance with the ISO's end-to-end guidance, organisations can show that staff welfare and safety throughout the trip is the number-one priority," he says. "This can go a long way in allaying any pre-travel concerns and building employee trust."

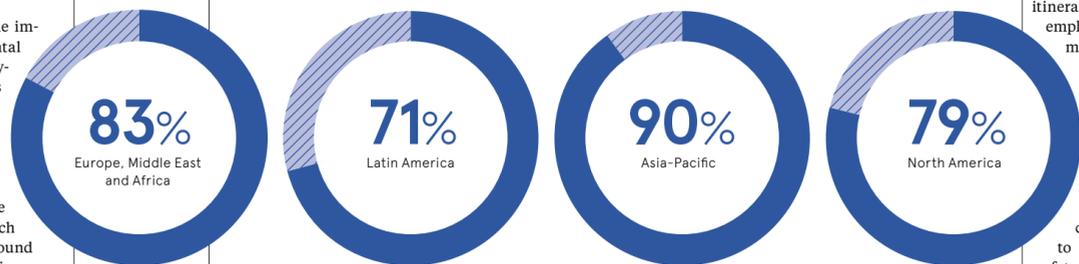
Job advises HR professionals and travel managers to pool their data for more individualised travel risk assessments. For instance, the specifics of long-term and high-risk business trips, such as location and itinerary, should be combined with employee profiles, including their medical considerations.

"HR leaders should involve employees by asking them about their concerns before an assignment," Job adds.

"With a personalised, accurate and interactive travel risk strategy in place, employees know that their company is doing its utmost to protect their health and safety and mitigate any threats associated with business trips." ●

MOST EMPLOYEES WORLDWIDE AGREE THAT BUSINESS TRAVEL AFFECTS THEIR WELLBEING

Percentage of employees who report that business travel affects their overall job satisfaction, by region



Global Business Travel Association, Sabre, 2022



Tom Wernervia Gettyimages

COMPARED WITH PRE-COVID, EVENT COSTS HAVE RISEN BY AS MUCH AS A THIRD

Average percentage increases in key event costs reported by corporate event planners worldwide, versus pre-pandemic levels



International Corporate Events, 2022

unless he can set up multiple meetings on the sidelines to make a trip more worthwhile.

Other steps that SMEs can take to minimise the cost of attending business events include selecting those that require less travel, or booking tickets and accommodation early to secure competitive rates. They may also seek to share accommodation with other attendees, which reduces costs and increases the opportunities for networking.

Ellen Green is the founder of Blue Badge Co, a British company that makes and distributes living aids. She takes a strategic approach to attending business events, conducting thorough research to identify those that will offer the most value and negotiating discounts with the organisers. She often speaks on panels as a way to gain free entry and to reach a wider audience.

"When you're a small business, it's vital to make strategic decisions about allocating resources," says Green. "This may mean passing up on certain events in favour of others that offer a higher potential return on investment," she says.

That said, the onus will usually be on event organisers to proactively lower the barriers to entry for SMEs. Most offer early-bird discounts, and many provide packages combining tickets, accommodation and travel for firms with smaller budgets.

Working with sponsors is one way organisers can reduce the overall cost of their events, according to Jonathan Morse, CEO and founder of Tripleseat, a catering and event management platform. He urges planners to look beyond the traditionally sponsored items, such as lanyards and gift bags, and ask partners to sponsor other elements of the event, such as custom cocktails, photo booths, meals or activations.

For instance, the Beyond Expo, which attracts some of the brightest tech minds in Asia to Macau each year, encourages SMEs to become a sponsor to gain discounted access for themselves and their partners. At this year's event, the VIP dinner was sponsored by an up-and-coming alternative protein company. "At only cost price, their product reached over 300 C-suites, top management reps and investors," says Stanley Chong, director at TechNode

Global, an activation partner of Beyond Expo. "On top of that, the media coverage generated a much higher return than they could have achieved on their own."

Technology is also increasingly important in cutting the cost of attending events for small businesses. For instance, machine learning can be used to analyse attendee data and feedback from events in order to allocate funds more precisely and reduce wasteful spending in future.

Michaela Jeffery-Morrison, CEO and co-founder of Ascend Global Media, the company behind the Women in Technology World Series, says she expects to see a raft of tech solutions bringing down the cost of events. "Venue sourcing technology with virtual walk-throughs can save time for organisers, registration technology can permit attendees to sign up easily, and onsite solutions can be used to manage and check-in attendees without fuss," she says.

SMEs can also use machine learning themselves to decipher which events offer the best return on investment. Meanwhile, the more familiar social media sites allow them to network and keep up with other attendees and attend conference events, sessions and activities virtually if preferred.

Ultimately, organisers will need to put in extra effort to make sure their events are worthwhile for SMEs. In his experience, for example, Paynton often found the keynotes uninspiring and the networking opportunities too surface-level.

"The speakers that the event features will go a long way to determine the value of attending," says Morse. Getting the networking opportunities right is just as important. "Give attendees time and opportunity to build solid relationships that can benefit their career and their company's success," he says.

Phoenix Porcelli, vice-president of meeting and event sales at meeting planner Convene, predicts that an increased focus on quality and affordability will lead to fewer, more meaningful events in the future.

"My advice to planners is to review why events are on and how you can reduce the number of events hosted, while creating more experiential, unique events that maximise participation," she says. ●

PRICING

Tickets, please! Making events more affordable for SMEs

Small businesses are keen to get back to attending business events after Covid, but it's often an expensive exercise. What needs to change to bring down the barriers to entry?

Crystal Wilde

Now that the World Health Organization has finally declared an end to Covid-19 as a global health emergency, 2023 is shaping up to be a big year for business events. SMEs, which arguably suffered the most during the pandemic, are keen to get back out there to the shoulder-rubbing and hand-shaking that only in-person events can provide.

Indeed, according to a survey by American Express, SMEs are planning more meetings and events than any other category of firm, with as many as 65% budgeting to spend more on such activities this year compared with 2022. After all, the rationale is obvious. Major conferences and industry events can be great opportunities for SMEs to network, promote their services and learn about new industry trends, best practices and innovations.

But in many cases, attending an event can be prohibitively expensive for SMEs, especially amid a cost-of-doing-business crisis. Routine event expenditures, such as food, transport and labour, have pushed up the overall cost of attendance significantly in recent months.

So, what can organisers and the SMEs themselves do to minimise these costs and make attending business events more realistic?

Ian Paynton is the co-founder and growth director of We Create Content, a content agency based in Hanoi which helps global brands enter the Asian market. He used to attend many business events in his previous role at a media company, but now he finds it hard to justify the cost as a business owner.

"I would like to go to more events in big regional hubs like Singapore, as that's typically where our clients

are and it's important to me that we get out there, meet people and get some inspiration," he says. "But with the price of a ticket, airfare and accommodation, an event in Singapore can end up costing the equivalent of two or three people's monthly salary in Vietnam."

As a result, Paynton typically passes up on the most expensive events

“With the price of a ticket, airfare and accommodation, an event can end up costing the equivalent of two or three people's monthly salary”

THE BUSINESS TRAVEL BOUNCEBACK

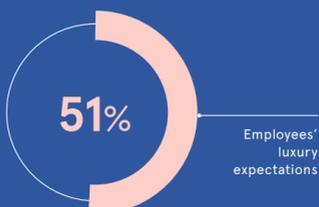
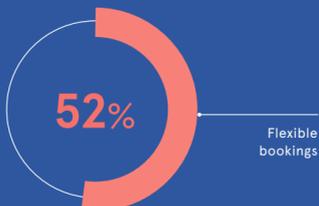
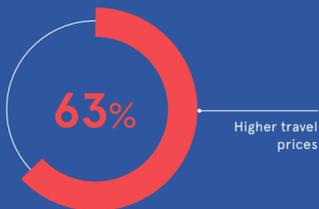
After a couple of years' enforced hiatus, business travel is back in a big way. But in the post-Covid world, it can prove an expensive exercise, especially for those keen to travel internationally. So, how are companies weighing the benefits against the rising costs?

Deloitte, 2023

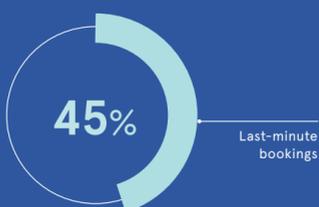
RISING PRICES AND THE NEED FOR FLEXIBLE BOOKINGS ARE HURTING BUDGETS

Top factors increasing business travel costs, 2023

45% of companies are currently limiting the number of trips they approve to control costs

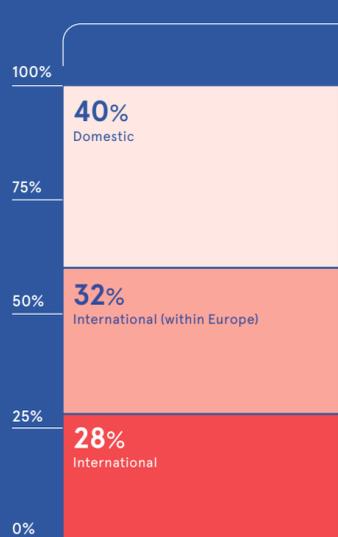
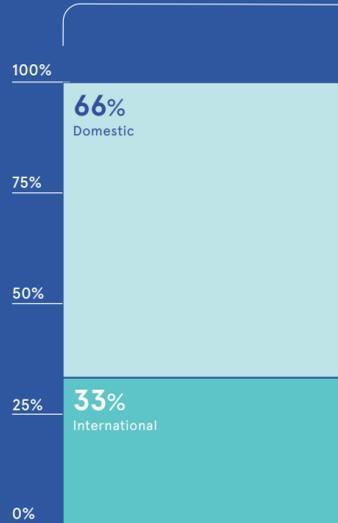


72% That's down from last year, when the figure stood at 72%



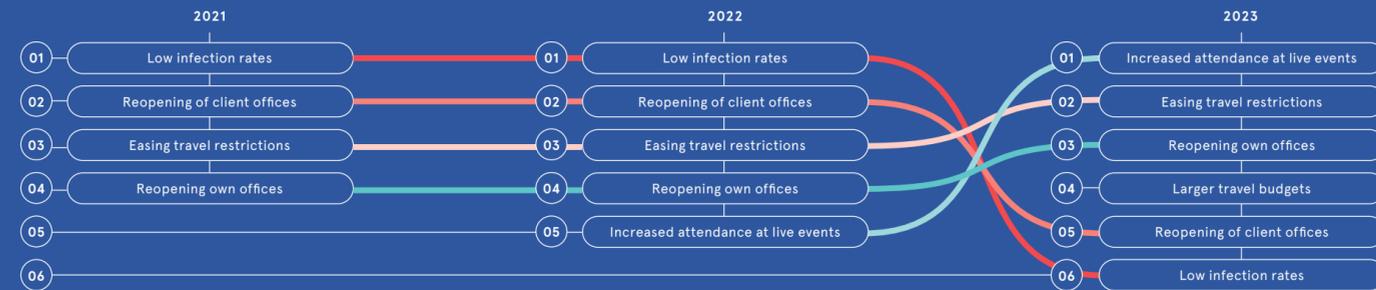
EUROPEANS ARE MORE LIKELY TO TRAVEL INTERNATIONALLY FOR BUSINESS

International travel as a share of corporate travel spend, 2023



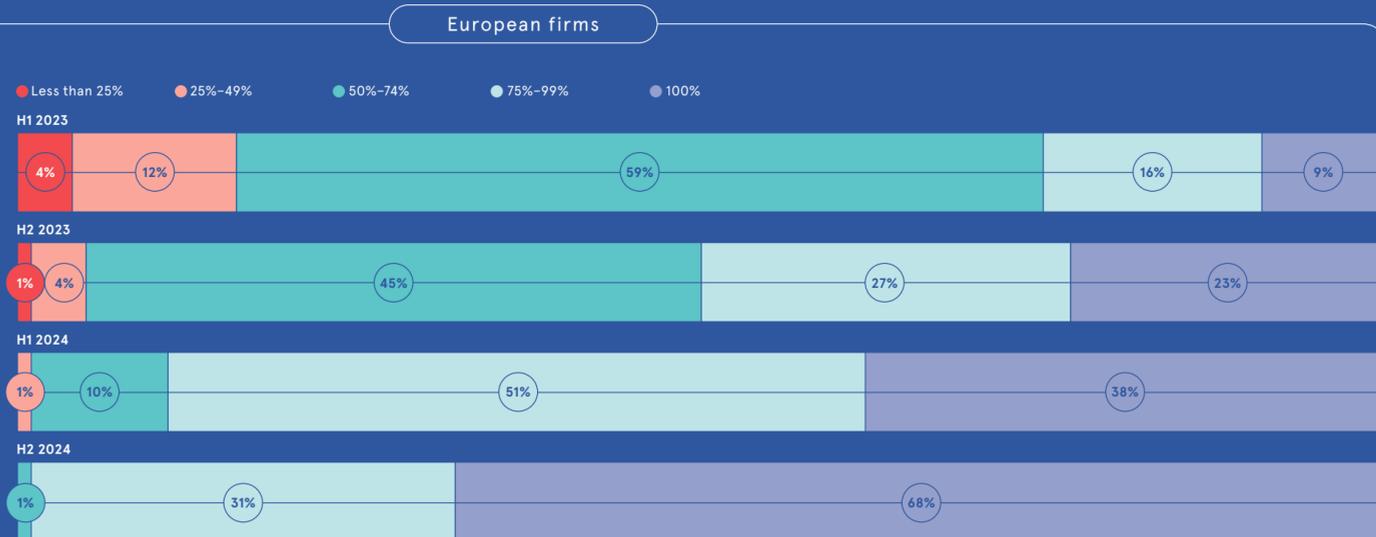
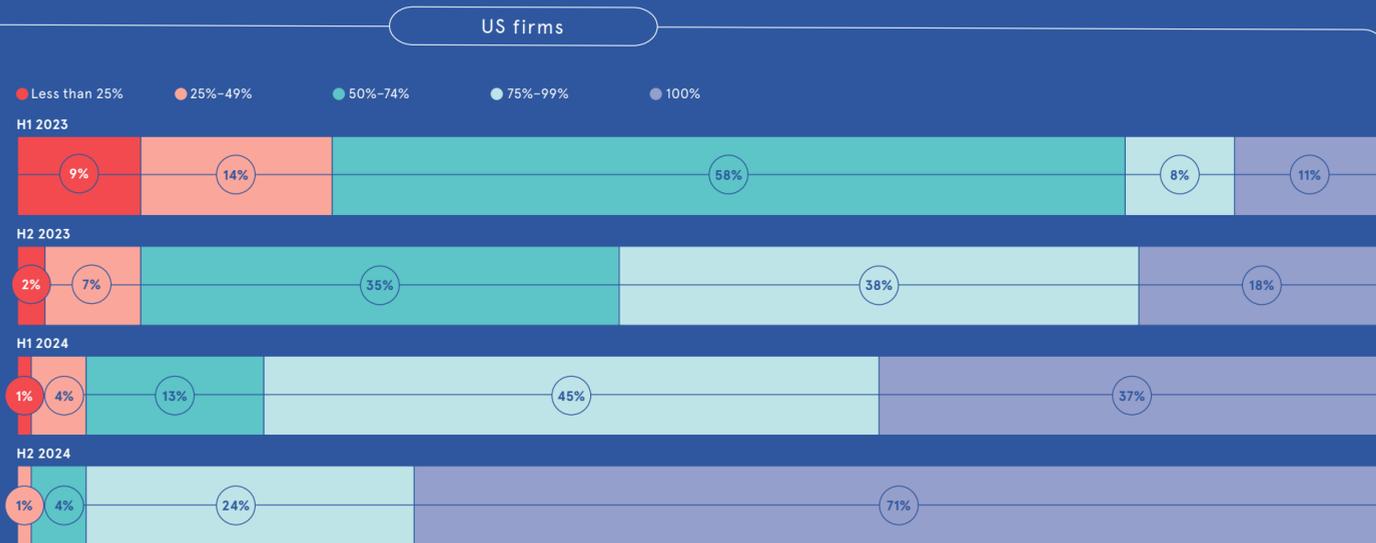
LIVE EVENTS ARE NOW THE MAIN FACTOR DRIVING THE RETURN OF OVERSEAS BUSINESS TRAVEL

Top developments making business leaders more likely to travel, 2021-23



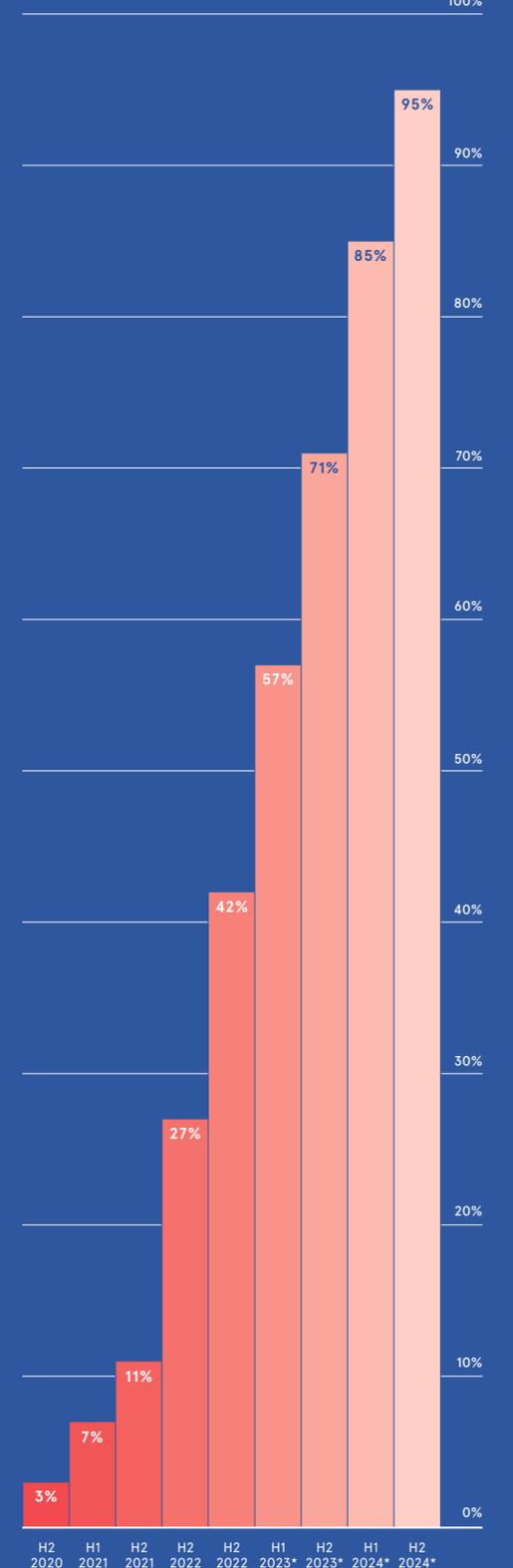
OVER THE NEXT 18 MONTHS, EUROPEAN FIRMS EXPECT A STEADIER RETURN TO BUSINESS TRAVEL THAN THEIR US PEERS

Expected corporate travel spend as a percentage of 2019 budget, by region



BUSINESS TRAVEL SPEND IS LIKELY TO RETURN TO PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS OVER THE NEXT YEAR

Corporate travel spend as a percentage of 2019 budget, US and Europe
*Forecast





SUSTAINABILITY

A new MO for net zero?

The large but fragmented events sector has only just started its decarbonisation journey. To reach its ambitious goals, it will need to rethink some old habits

Cath Everett

If the events industry is to achieve its stated aim of cutting carbon emissions to net zero by 2050, it'll need to overhaul the prevailing mindset.

That's according to James Rees, executive director of London's ExCeL centre and president of the Joint Meetings Industry Council (JMIC), which represents the global business events sector.

Although Rees does not imagine it will be necessary to revamp this diverse, fragmented and complex industry from the ground up, participants across all sub-sectors will have to collaborate and work together more than ever before, he says.

"The change is more about mindset, which includes sharing best practice across all different parts of the industry," he explains. "So sustainable ideas that work in the exhibitions space can be taken and applied in the congress and meetings sectors. That will help to change the mentality around what was done in the past and what might be appropriate in the future."

Rees hopes that the Net Zero Carbon Events (NZCE) initiative, launched by the JMIC at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, will kick-start this change. To better understand the sustainability challenges the events industry faces, it has established five working groups to explore some of the sector's key priorities: venues' energy usage; products and waste; food and food waste; logistics; and travel and accommodation.

The NZCE is also tasked with addressing a range of common sustainability sticking points, from creating practical methodologies

for emissions measurement and designing a common emissions reporting standard, through to weighing up the various rights and wrongs of carbon offsetting.

This work will feed into an industry-wide roadmap, the first iteration of which was published at COP27 in Egypt last November. Its aim is to provide guidelines and resources to help the events industry towards achieving net zero. The next tranche of work is due to be published at COP28 in Dubai in early December.

To focus the industry's attention yet further, the JMIC also launched its NZCE Pledge in November 2021. Some 550, mainly large players and a host of industry associations have already signed up. By doing so, they have promised to measure and track their Scope 1 (direct), Scope 2 (indirect) and Scope 3 (supply-chain) emissions. These firms have also committed to explain by the end of this year how they intend to both halve their greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and achieve net zero 20 years later, in line with the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Pledge signatories will be expected to report on their progress every two years, while also working with their partners, suppliers and customers to facilitate and generate change throughout their value chains. Possible activities here include sharing information and best practice, particularly with small businesses.

Although the JMIC is not a regulatory body and so is unable to make the NZCE targets binding, Rees does believe that "the industry is crying out for this". Interest has mounted steadily since the pandemic. But he

is also under no illusions about just how much of a shift the industry will need to make in order to achieve its sustainability goals. The journey here has only just begun.

One of the key challenges the sector faces is how best to encourage and support its large numbers of

small players – many of whom are freelancers and one-man bands – to effect change. A significant concern for many here, particularly in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, is how much of an outlay the transition to net zero is likely to entail.

But Rees says: "While there's an argument that sustainability costs more, if you're sensible and logical in your planning, you can reduce both your carbon impact and your costs, to make things cost-neutral. It's often just about changing your thinking around what's acceptable."

For example, if running a conference for, say, 200 delegates, organisers would traditionally order 200 vegetarian, 200 meat and 200 chicken dishes. This meant two-thirds of meals were simply thrown away.

How exhibition and event venue Olympia London tackles this situation today is to share any excess food with a local charity and food banks. What's more, it only purchases food from local suppliers and encourages all employees and catering partners to monitor and reduce their personal and corporate waste.

Ultimately though, whether small businesses are ready or not, change is coming, and coming quickly, believes Carina Bauer, chief executive of event management company The Imx Group.

"There are a few very large players and they're moving very fast, which will have a massive impact on the supply chain," she explains. "So, as these big organisations start purchasing lower-carbon products

and that becomes normalised, smaller companies will have to get on board, which means things will shift naturally."

Julie Driscoll, Olympia London's chief executive, agrees. The organisation is currently changing its procurement processes to require its suppliers to demonstrate their sustainability credentials, which includes signing the NZCE pledge.

It is also using its bonus structure to incentivise employees to prioritise hitting sustainability targets and to embed them in their day-to-day working practices. These objectives are monitored by a 'Grand Plan' taskforce, set up by Olympia's head of sustainability.

"Anyone with a specific bonus scheme has to show evidence of how they've achieved our Grand Plan objectives, and it's part of every single performance review," explains Driscoll. "It has to be a key part of the conversation because, if it's top of mind, people will ask suppliers the right questions. Conversation by conversation and meeting by meeting, that's how you drive real change."

A further challenge, however, relates to attendee travel and accommodation. Although typically the largest single contributor to an event's carbon footprint, it is also the factor over which events organisers have the least control.

As a result, the NZCE's roadmap currently recommends that organisers include such emissions when calculating the overall carbon footprint of their event – but they may be excluded from Scope 3 calculations. This policy will be reviewed in two years' time.

Rees explains: "Travel and accommodation is one of our workstreams but, in truth, we don't have the answers on how to deal with the situation right now. We're debating and

“Conversation by conversation and meeting by meeting, that's how you drive real change

discussing and looking at what we can do, but it's very difficult to provide a firm plan at this point."

Anna Abdelnoor is chief executive of Isla, a non-profit organisation founded in 2020 by events professionals to provide practical guidance and support on environmental issues. She believes that moving the focus away from travel for the moment is not altogether a bad thing.

"Sometimes people feel that audience travel has such a big impact, but because they can't control it, they wash their hands of the whole thing," she says. "It's a common narrative but it misses the many things the industry can do elsewhere."

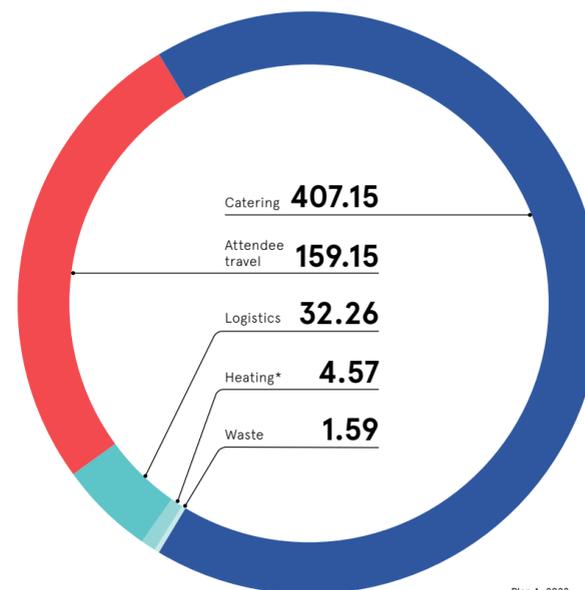
This includes focusing on using biodegradable, compostable and recyclable rather than single-use materials. It also means repurposing exhibition stands rather than throwing them away at the end of a conference, and using renewable energy wherever possible.

Despite these challenges, Rees believes that the industry should be able to meet its goals over time.

"I think it's doable. As Nelson Mandela said: 'It always seems impossible until it's done.' So we may not have all the answers just yet, but the industry is already making big strides," he concludes. ●

IF AN EVENT DOES NOT REQUIRE LONG-DISTANCE ATTENDEE TRAVEL, FOOD WILL BE THE MAIN SOURCE OF EMISSIONS

Scope 3 emissions breakdown of a consciously sustainable event, in kg CO2e
*Figure represents an event hosted during the summer



Plan A, 2022

Low-carbon meetings demand creative thinking

With meetings and events back in full swing and with strong demand on show around the globe, decarbonising events is now imperative. That means it's time to think outside the box

For businesses worldwide, made up of increasingly dispersed workforces and taking part in more digital interactions than ever before, getting together face-to-face has never been so important. Future business productivity depends on energising and engaging employees, networking, embedding corporate culture and retaining staff – an alchemy that's best achieved by meeting in-person.

However, such activities come at a cost, and with many companies now committed to net zero and slashing emissions, the focus is on how the carbon footprint of events can be reduced over time.

"Businesses need to balance the current strong desire to return to face-to-face meetings with the need to be more environmentally conscious. It's a dilemma for the corporate planner," explains Ian Cummings, global head of CWT Meetings & Events, a leading international business travel and meetings specialist.

"Right now, budgets for crucial corporate get-togethers that boost corporate productivity are being protected," he continues. "The challenge is how we can manage them more effectively. How do we make them more efficient and sustainable, generating fewer emissions? The future of corporate travel depends on it."

Simply going online won't cut it either. For instance, a 2023 survey of 475 UK businesses by the Business Travel Association found that just over three-quarters of businesses (79%) still prefer in-person meetings to virtual ones.

"But at the same time, two-thirds of our customers tell us that sustainability goals are top of their priority list," says



Attendees sample crickets at an event promoting sustainable food sources

Cummings. "The pandemic has been a catalyst for change, yet it's a fine balance."

From measurement to fresh ideas

Cummings offers the following solution: "Greater sustainability monitoring, as well as a more proactive approach, can square the circle between business meetings and ESG." It's a familiar approach at CWT, which managed more than 2.2 million people attending 15,810 events in 2022, across six continents, and is on track to organize more than 30,000 meetings and events this year.

After all, out of all the categories of corporate carbon emissions, travel is one of the most easily quantifiable. Extensive data analytics now allows businesses to monitor – via detailed methodologies and sophisticated calculators – individuals' carbon budgets and also those of specific meetings and events.

"It starts with measurement. You can then make choices to bring down the climate impact of a meeting, whether that means staying at a newer hotel that uses less energy, switching to an airline that deploys more efficient aircraft, pooling ground transportation, using electric vehicles, or choosing destinations that are more strategically located to reduce the collective emissions for travelling participants," explains Cummings, who heads up more than 1,000 CWT employees across 43 countries.

And the decisions that businesses take can make a real difference, whether it's reducing food waste at event dinners in hotels, choosing suppliers that use renewable energy or working with businesses that have their own strong emissions reduction targets.

"This is about sending a message to those employees who are taking these trips that this issue is being taken seriously. And to do that, we encourage clients to be imaginative when it comes to ESG. For instance, why not deploy a local chef at an event, who can guide corporate guests in preparing food which would otherwise go to waste for their own evening menu? This sends a clear message about sustainability and authenticity, while also enabling networking," says Cummings.

Going forwards, CWT's aim is to encourage and promote urban centres, hotels, airlines and ground transport providers who take sustainability seriously, especially those that are leading the way in pitching themselves as low-carbon destinations. Many of these are less popular, secondary cities.

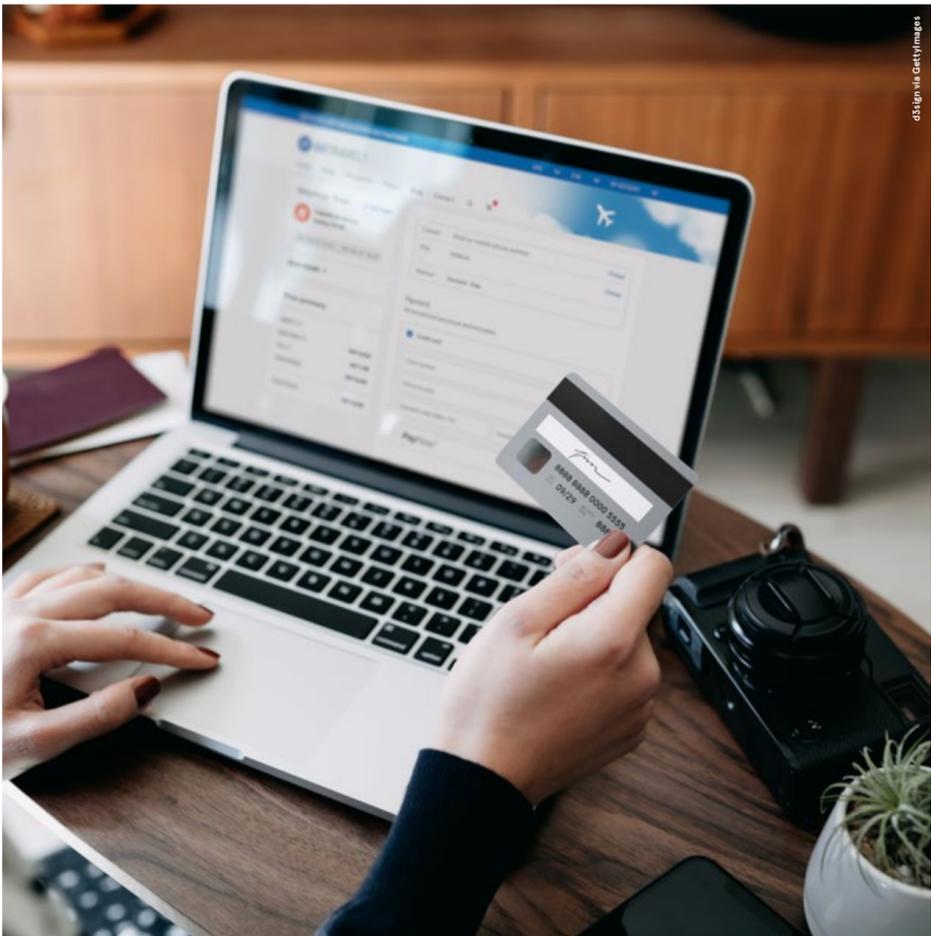
And that's not the only upside of getting serious about sustainability. With the right long-term planning, event organisers can save money, reduce their carbon footprint and make a real difference.

"This is a rallying call for meeting and event organisers. It is up to us all, including the travel and meetings industry, to be creative, to think outside the box, to offer lower-carbon alternatives and to realise a future that is good for the planet, people and value creation. We are only at the early stages of this journey, with a long way to go," concludes Cummings.

“Businesses need to balance the current strong desire to return to face-to-face meetings with the need to be more environmentally conscious

Find out how CWT Meetings & Events can help you create a more sustainable meetings and events strategy: [cwt-meetings-events.com](https://www.cwt-meetings-events.com)





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BUDGETING

Trip counter

New ways to calculate ROI are helping firms see the true cost of their business trips. So, how can they get more for their money?

Nick Easen

Try to book a last-minute, premium economy seat on a flight from Europe to China for your sales team lead. You'll likely be met with eye-watering ticket prices. Two questions will probably spring to mind in this scenario. Is taking on this cost – and generating all of those emissions – really justifiable? And couldn't the meeting just be done virtually anyway?

With inflation, supply constraints and high demand pushing up travel prices, these are questions that businesses are increasingly reconsidering, as the return on investment (ROI) of business travel comes under intense scrutiny. Their answers, though, can go either way. "If we don't go in-person to a sales pitch, our competitors will," explains Will Jackson, managing director of Zalaris UK, a payroll and

HR services firm. After all, client acquisition is often a sure-fire way to get a trip signed off, since it feeds the bottom line. That's why the race to win new sales has driven much of the global business travel recovery. But the cost-benefit analysis here is something that even the largest global enterprises are finding difficult. CEOs and CFOs are understandably frustrated by what they see as a lack of credible mechanisms

by which to judge travel budgeting decisions. Business trips have historically been treated as part and parcel of the cost of doing business, qualified but not quantified, budgeted for, but not totally justified.

"It's fiendishly difficult to calculate the ROI of some trips," says Tom Housden, CEO of Hand & Eye Studio, a UK-based lighting company. "If we exhibit our products in New York, we may not see sales until six or nine months down the line. Word of mouth might generate interest in our business, but that's not specifically attributable to the exhibition. So it's never black and white when it comes to budgeting." Therein lies the rub. If corporate trips aren't directly focused on winning business, keeping top talent within the company, strengthening client relationships or visiting vital operations overseas, then there are lots of grey areas in determining whether that travel budget is being spent wisely.

"Our research shows that 25% to 30% of business trips are of low value," says Scott Gillespie, CEO of tClara, a travel advisory service. "Eliminating these trips would do little or no economic harm to the organisation. At the same time, low-value trips can be predicted before booking with 75% accuracy."

On that front, there's now a raft of tools to help companies make better decisions on trip ROI, ranging from pre-, mid- and post-event surveys to various data-capture platforms. Yet none represents an independent gold standard across the travel industry. Cynics would argue that it's not in the interest of the sector to create a comprehensive tool since it would see the number of trips slashed, affecting their bottom line.

Cynicism aside, because a lot of information can now be processed about any flight, hotel, restaurant or ground transportation booking, businesses are able to evaluate their trips in far greater detail.

"We're also seeing greater integration of travel and expense policies, which means companies can report on the true cost of winning a deal, from the plane ticket to the dinner," says Fred Stratford, CEO of travel management company Reed & Mackay. "And with more granular sustainability data, we can even begin to wrap in the CO₂ impact."

Any remaining opacity, therefore, lies within organisations, their specific budgets, allocations and decision-making processes.

There is also a large, long-standing void of data about the true value of any business trip. Data of this kind is rarely, if at all, shared with the business travel industry and travel management companies.

“It’s fiendishly difficult to calculate the ROI of some trips. It’s never black and white

Another fundamental challenge with calculating ROI is that not all business travel directly feeds the bottom line or is financially motivated. "Downstream benefits might be revealed at a later time, by way of a contribution to corporate social responsibility goals, greater ability to attract and retain talent, or increased employee engagement and productivity," explains Richard Johnson, head of the global solutions group at travel management company CWT Meetings & Events.

Nevertheless, CFOs and other senior executives can't afford to abandon their discipline when it comes to deciding who travels and why – especially as the economy tightens.

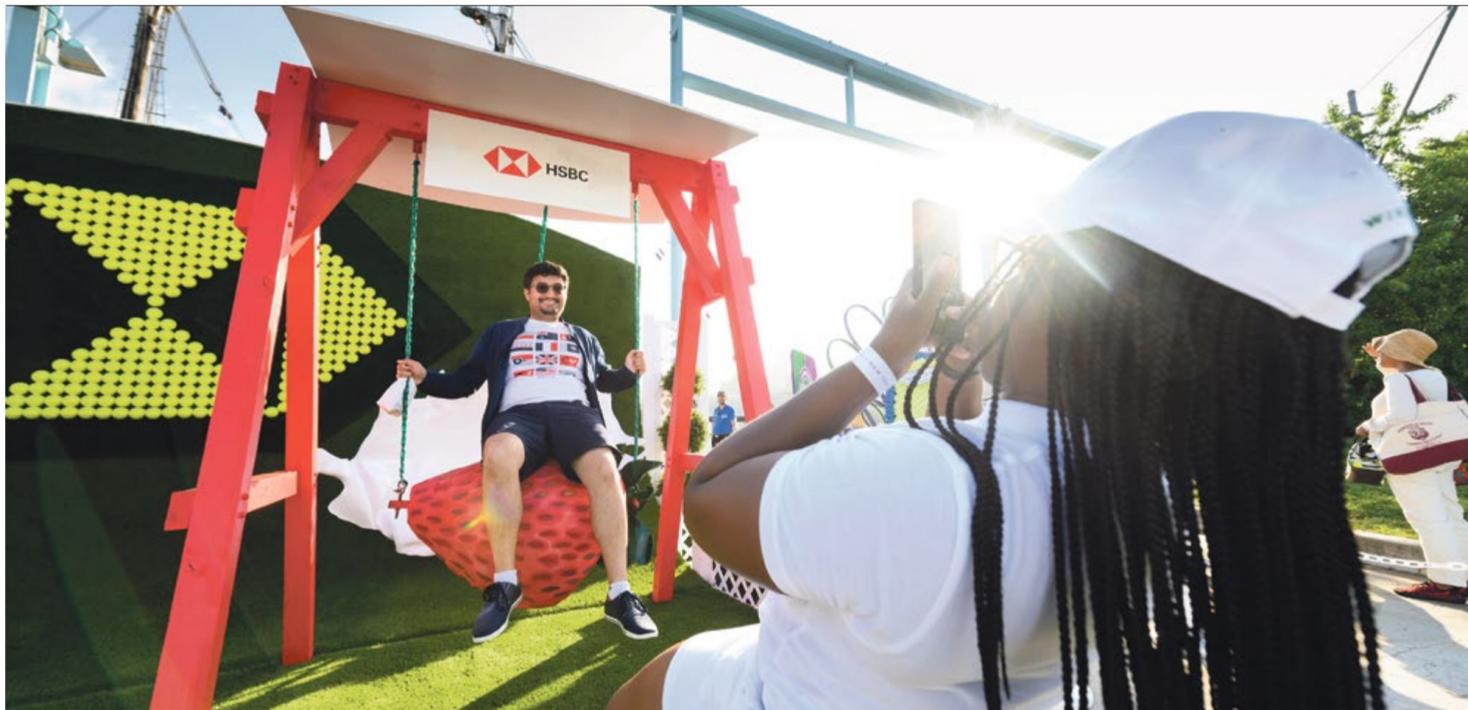
For instance, Zalaris UK's Jackson believes that since the Covid crisis, employees have been using business trips to fill the social gaps in their professional lives, having sorely missed these interactions during the lockdowns. With many more executives now working from home, there is pent-up demand to be sociable, and employees will find just about any way to justify a trip.

"The solution to valuing a business meeting is to ask the traveller or their manager to set a cost at which the trip can no longer be justified," says Gillespie. "And the key to maximising the return on a travel budget is to prevent low-value trips and invest in high-value trips."

The question, then, is how much of a return is required. The direction of travel appears to be towards raising the bar, ensuring every trip counts and ticks multiple boxes: sales, networking, innovation, visiting overseas operations, and even incorporating leisure.

"If companies encourage 'purpose amplification' when travelling, the ROI to the company is also amplified and more justified," points out Paul Tilstone, managing partner at travel consultancy Festive Road. "So, for example, staying an extra day at a conference where you're marketing your products, and visiting some clients or someone innovating in your space can help with this process."

It's a change of mindset which could make a big difference when budgets are tight. ●



Creative and emotional events drive business value

The power of emotion has huge potential for the meetings and events industry, but to make it work, organisers will have to embrace a new way of thinking

Today, it's more important than ever to know your events are driving business value, since budgets are receiving unprecedented levels of scrutiny. For instance, now that prices for flights, hotels and venues are sky-high, management teams are questioning the money they ringfence for these expenses. Post-pandemic, video-conferencing offers a fall-back option for connecting staff, and there are questions to answer about the sustainability of get-togethers. That's why every corporate event must be worth it.

“We know that meetings, exhibitions and experiences are a great place to spark unified emotion, which is highly effective in changing behaviour and perceptions

In an age where productivity is more easily measured and when many employees are time-poor, dragging executives off for three days of back-to-back PowerPoint presentations in a dimly lit hotel room to be force-fed company culture is a questionable investment at best. Yet in an attempt to provide cost-effective, functional and pragmatic corporate events, this is often what happens. Reimagining this format is therefore an imperative.

"Emotional, exciting, creative experiences sound expensive and there is a temptation for bosses to scale back on creativity in this phase of the economic cycle. Yet research tells us that these memorable moments actually make a difference. Impactful experiences are powerful, driving value and strong returns to the business. They're far from fluffy," explains Katie Stretten, head of creative strategy at WRG, a leading global experiential agency.

Energise events with emotion
With disparate, globalised workforces and many employees working from home, so-called 'energising events' that bring people together for a memorable moment are being deployed by those businesses that have the budgets to invest. They realise the power of emotions to heighten people's attention, create memories and drive new patterns of behaviour.

Enlightened businesses are therefore using different metrics to evaluate their events' expenditure.

"We know that meetings, exhibitions and experiences are a great place to spark unified emotion, which is highly effective in changing behaviour and perceptions, delivering value to individual attendees, as well as creating a long-term business impact. This is backed up by behavioural science and real-world evidence. But this involves evaluating meetings in a different way," says Jessica Holt, senior behavioural science consultant at WRG and one of the company's more than 200 experiential experts in the UK and US.

Beyond net promoter scores and whether an attendee would recommend an event, companies are now looking at meetings from a behavioural and psychological perspective, seeing whether there are shifts in people's outlook and intentions after the event has finished.

"When corporations organise meetings, they often focus on the 'who', the 'where' and the 'when', with a mindset locked in on logistics and operations. There's a lot of investment in the physical elements of the delivery, yet the 'why', the 'what' and the 'how' are often an afterthought," says Holt.

"Key questions should include: why are you ultimately bringing people together? What attitudes or

behaviours do you want to drive to support the business or brand? How might you engage individuals to positively influence those behaviours and perceptions? This is where focusing on emotions and what they can deliver can help. Unfortunately, many decision-makers divorce emotions from business, yet we buy into brands, work-places and corporate culture for all kinds of emotional reasons."

Intentional creativity is worth the investment

Often, businesses approach meetings and events organisers way too late in the organising process. Budgets are allocated, decisions are made, timelines are set, all with CEO sign-off, without initially considering the real objectives, outcomes and terms of engagement. This constrains meetings and events before they've even got off the ground.

"Certainly, businesses need to start prioritising emotion and the power

that it can bring to an event early on. This way, organisers can understand what types of emotion they want to trigger and how this can be achieved. Emotional cues are different for each audience, whether focused on promoting new products or a brand vision. Once corporations go down the creative and emotional route, this can help teams to start thinking outside the box," says Stretten.

"Having an upfront strategic approach focused on behavioural outcomes is essential. Research shows that intentional creativity for meetings and events really does work if it's based on behavioural science, calibrating intentions and delivering outcomes. This also creates a virtuous circle focused on the art of the possible. Creative events deliver powerful business outcomes."

For more on experiences, go to: wrglive.com



Pharma leadership team leans into awe

Senior leadership meetings run the risk of being extremely dry, purely because there's so much business-critical information to convey. Yet they're a critical opportunity to inspire and motivate key leaders when they're all together in one place.

A global pharmaceutical client wanted their event to go beyond sharing insights about their latest innovations. For this event, WRG leant into the emotion of awe and located the event in Iceland. This provided the life-sciences company with a rare chance to use the dramatic landscape as a backdrop, deploying the opportunity to see the Northern Lights and a glacier as a way of inspiring the leadership team.

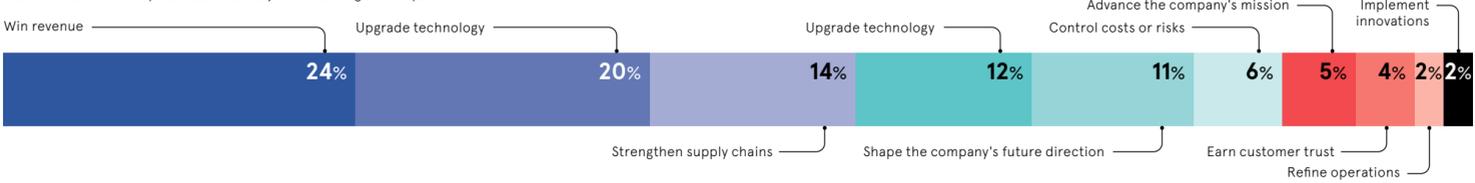
That feeling of awe would then be associated with brand vision and certain key learning moments in the memories of the attendees.

The Harpa Concert Hall in Reykjavik was used as a breathtaking setting for this event. With world-leading sustainability credentials, it provided a memorable backdrop for sessions that were creatively delivered. For instance, instead of dry slides, statistics and presentations divorced from their emotional value, the event included real-life patients.

After the event, 99% of attendees reported a positive experience and 86% felt inspired to lead their teams through the next chapter of their business evolution.

TRAVEL SPEND IS MOTIVATED BY A WIDE RANGE OF BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

Share of travel costs, by main business objective, among US companies



tClara, 2023



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