2026 Festival and Event Playbook

The five trends that shaped **profit, partnerships, and planning** this year.

eventeny

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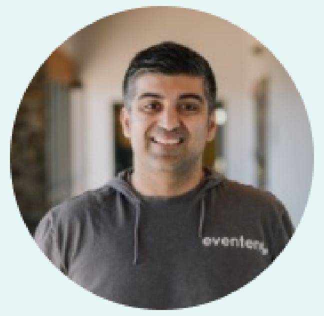
Introduction

In this first-of-its-kind report, we analyzed **tens of millions of data points from over 50,000 events nationwide** to provide a deeper look into the state of the festival and events industry. Insights were pulled from first-party data on Eventeny, quantitative survey respondents, and our own proprietary event search program.

We explored every facet of event management –from **application trends and volunteer rates** to the **impact of AI**, **sponsorship performance**, and more. This ebook offers a head start on what to expect in 2026, highlights key trends to watch, and shares practical insights to help you elevate your event planning.

Our data shows that events are entering a new era. Audiences are **getting bigger, operations are getting more complex, and expectations are higher than ever**. Record-breaking attendance is exciting, but it also raises the bar for how events need to be run. The organizers pulling ahead are the ones **simplifying their workflows, cutting down on manual work, and giving their teams time back**. And that time is being reinvested into better planning, stronger partnerships, and long-term growth.



Aly Hussaini
Founder and CEO of Eventeny

Rising costs shrink margins despite record-breaking attendance surges

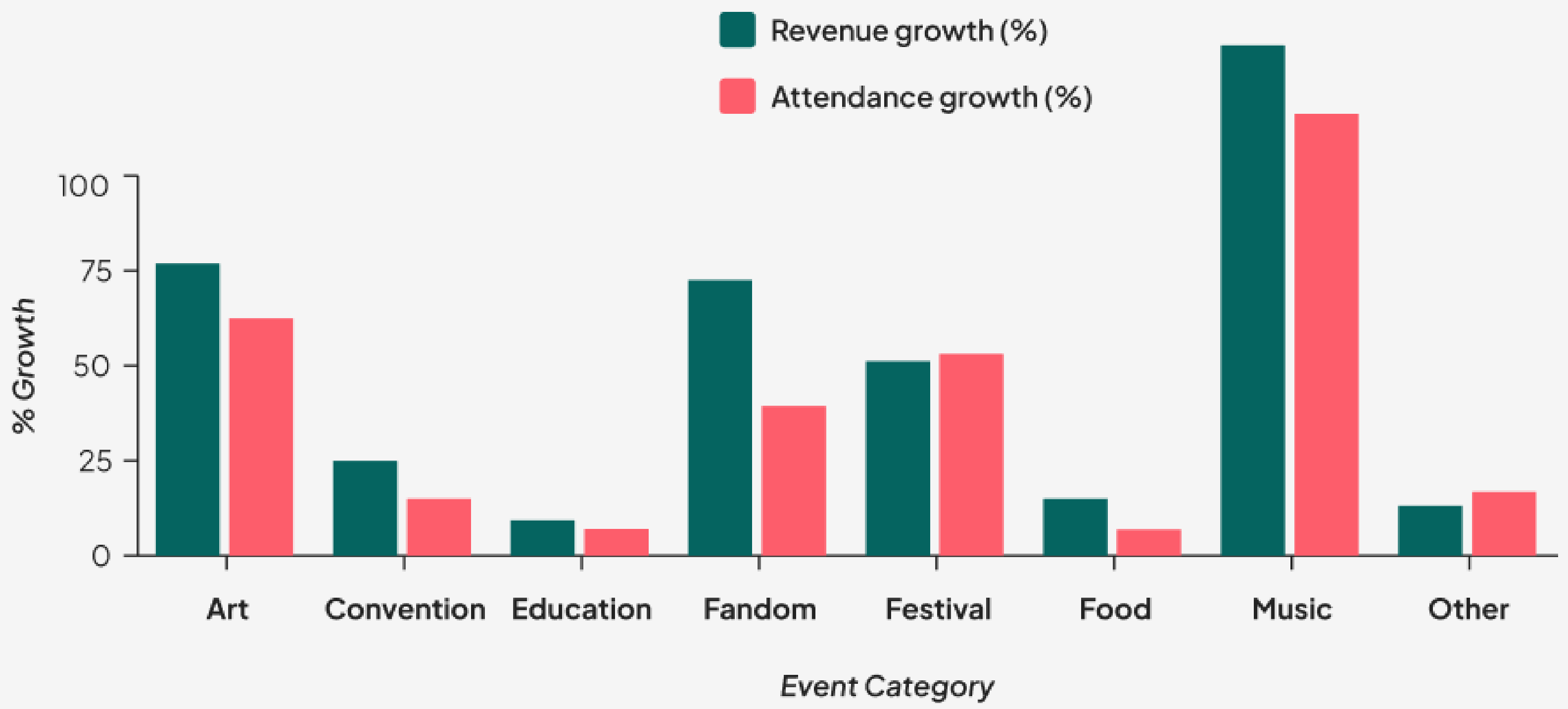
THE GOOD

2025 broke attendance records for many

2025 has seen **record-breaking attendance from events** across the board with community events leading the charts.

From established festivals to newer events, turnout reached new highs, with several organizers hitting maximum capacity and others experiencing rapid year-over-year growth. This surge is a continuing trend from the major live events rebound this decade. The pattern is expected to remain in 2026, with the projected event industry growing in step.

Attendance and revenue growth in 2025



Organizers rated their 2025 planning environment **4.1 out of 5**, suggesting relative stability and confidence, though not without ongoing challenges. These experiences tell a clear story: live **event attendance is up 50% over the past five years**, confirming a sustained return to in-person experiences.

THE INTERESTING

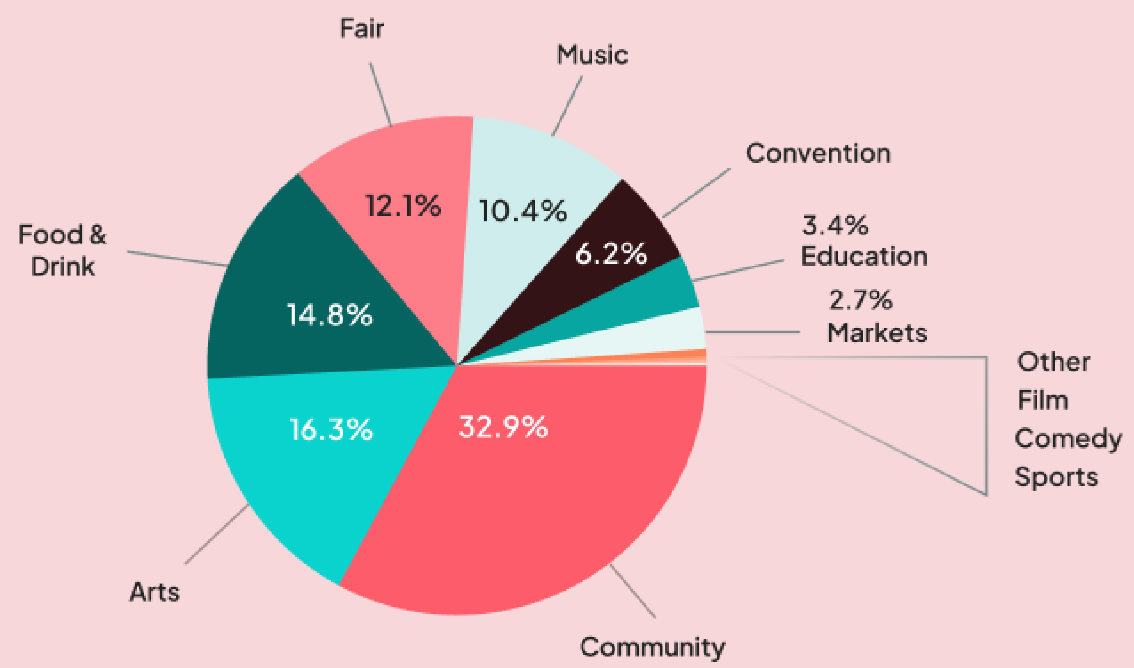
Growth with a cost

Attendance remains strong, but costs are rising. Venue fees are nearly 10% higher, and marketing now takes up to 30% of the event budget just to reach potential attendees. Social is still the most commonly used channel, but it's not performing as it used to, and search has become less reliable as AI-driven results reduce clicks. This means it costs more than ever to turn community interest into ticket sales.

At the same time, revenue is coming in later, closer to event day, which puts added strain on cash flow. Vendor participation has also fallen from its peak, and attendees are spending more cautiously—tightening margins, especially for community and municipal events with fixed budgets.

Events remain spread across the U.S., with community celebrations making up nearly a third. Conventions and educational events keep growing steadily, while arts, food, and drink events are slowing as markets mature.

Number of events by category



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Record crowds aren't enough. Profitability now depends on controlling costs, optimizing budgets, and protecting revenue in a pricier landscape.

Automating manual processes **unlocks 30%+ gains** in operational efficiency

THE GOOD

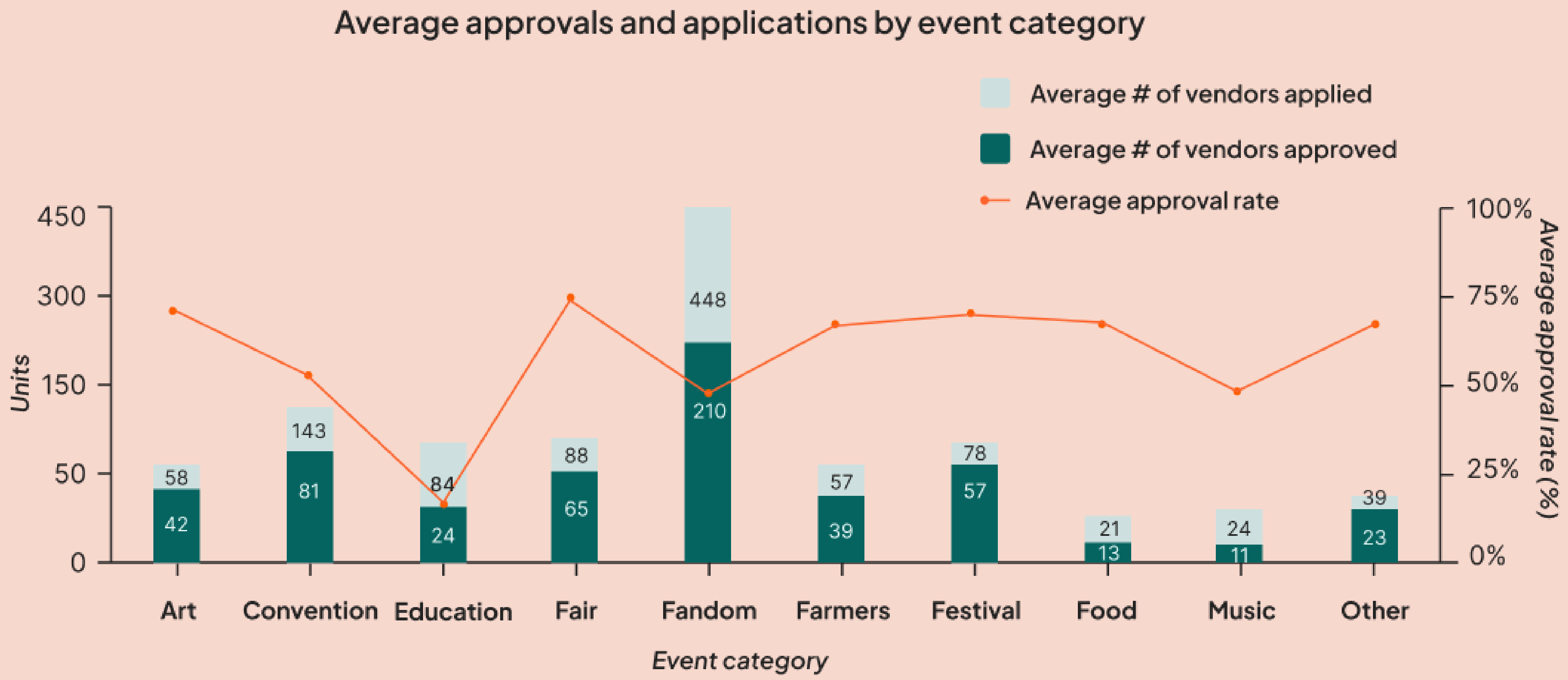
Organizers winning in 2026 are automating first

Where event operations are automated, efficiency is noticeably higher. Ticketing, payments, and check-in earned the strongest operational scores, with over 90% of organizers reporting positive experiences. Most tickets are sold online, and **onsite check-in can average up to 8 attendees per minute**, even as attendees arrive closer to event start times. This demonstrates an area of improvement: the more well-staffed an event is, the better an automated feature can work to streamline processes.

These systems scale well. As attendance and revenue grow, organizers can manage higher volumes without adding staff or operational complexity—clearly showing the upside of automation. Vendor approvals also show consistent outcomes when processes are functioning well. **A healthy event approves about two-thirds of vendor applications, with an overall average approval rate of 62.7%**. Smaller and mid-sized events—such as arts, fairs, farmers markets, and film—tend to approve 65–70% of applicants. Larger, more competitive events approach closer to 50%, reflecting higher demand rather than inefficiency. A key indicator of that is the approval rating tracked linearly with increased applicant volume for events.

Vendor approval timing is more predictable than many organizers assume. Most vendors are approved within a week, with little variation across seasons. This is notable because approvals can often blamed on seasonal volume or vendor delays, when in reality the timeline is largely stable. That consistency gives organizers a clear benchmark, making it easier to spot internal bottlenecks, plan workflows, and set realistic expectations with vendors.

INTERPRETING THE DATA



Vendor approval rates average 67%, but demand and selectivity vary widely by event category. Fandom and convention events attract the most applications and are the most competitive, with lower approval rates driven by high demand and limited space.

Fairs, festivals, art events, and farmers' markets approve most applicants, indicating capacity and recruitment matter more than filtering. Education events are the most selective by far, with strict curation and the lowest approval rate.

Overall, vendor approvals reflect where demand pressure exists versus where organizers need to focus on attracting the right vendors.

Continue reading

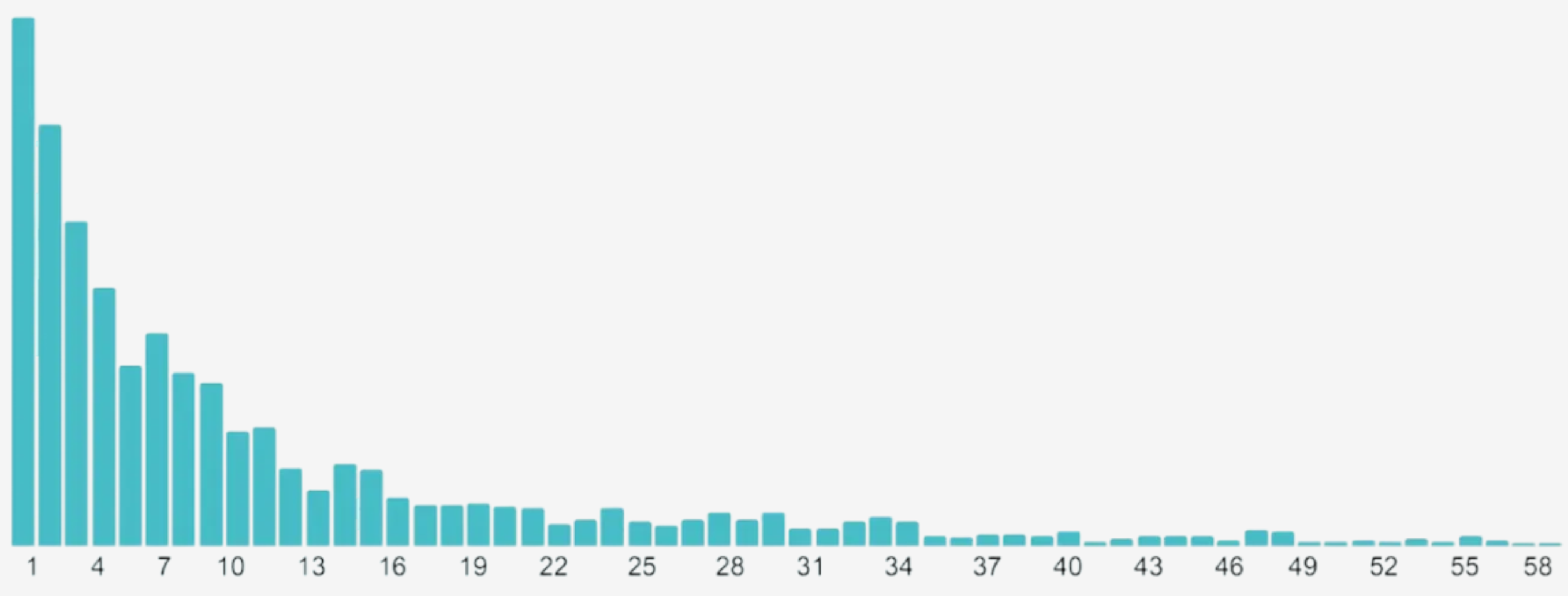
Automating manual processes unlocks 30%+ gains in operational efficiency

THE INTERESTING

Manual work is the efficiency bottleneck

Despite stable approval outcomes, **vendor workflows remain one of the least efficient parts of event operations**. Sponsors, volunteers, and vendors received the lowest operational positivity scores—60% or lower—highlighting where friction still exists.

Data from events using Eventeny shows that approval rates are not impacted by submission volume or review speed. For most organizers, approvals happen quickly, highlighting how streamlined tools and workflows can keep things moving even as demand grows. When delays do occur, they're typically tied to manual internal steps, such as reviews, email follow-ups, or disconnected systems that don't scale well. While these cases are the exception, about 5% of events still take more than two months to approve vendors, which can create ripple effects on payments and planning.



Seasonality affects volume, not efficiency. Approval rates remain consistent across seasons, hovering around the same averages, while winter consistently shows lower approval volume simply due to fewer vendor submissions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Automation works, and where it exists, efficiency follows. Ticketing data suggests that platform solutions streamline the event process. **Vendor, sponsor, and volunteer management, however, remain largely manual and are now the biggest operational drag**. Closing this automation gap represents one of the clearest opportunities for organizers to unlock over 30% gains in operational efficiency while reducing planning strain.

Competitive vendor approvals are **reshaping booth pricing**

THE GOOD

Demand is giving organizers more pricing power

Vendor submissions remain strong overall, even as the pace has normalized. After a breakout surge from 2023 to 2024 (+71.8%), **growth from 2024 to 2025 is more sustainable at +36.8%**. Some event categories, including conventions, fandoms, festivals, and music show steady, repeatable growth, establishing themselves as reliable vendor magnets. Acceptance rates remain competitive, and attendance at events continues to be high, suggesting that vendors who opt out may be leaving potential sales on the table.

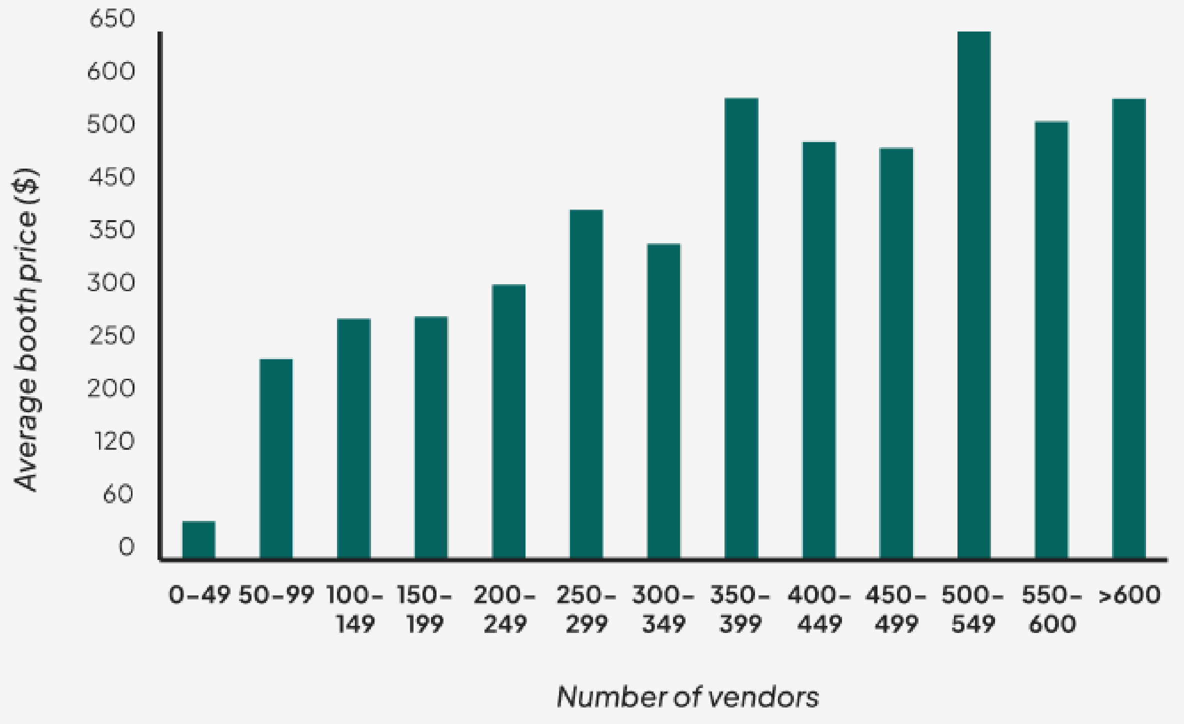
Booth pricing reflects this landscape: larger, high-visibility events continue to command higher fees, while smaller or community-driven events maintain more affordable booths, often under $100. Organizers are now navigating a more selective, demand-driven market where maintaining strong participation depends less on volume and more on managing, qualifying, and retaining the right vendors.

Vendor application growth

Event category	2023 → 2024	2024 → 2025
Art	58%	-2.3%
Convention	85.6%	+47.9%
Education	605.6%	+14.6%
Fair	258.6%	+133.3%
Fandom	54.6%	+45.4%
Farmers	173.1%	+26%
Festival	56.1%	+43.4%
Food	68.4%	-26.3%
Music	35.8%	+33%
Other	145.5%	+35.5%
All events	71.8%	+36.8%

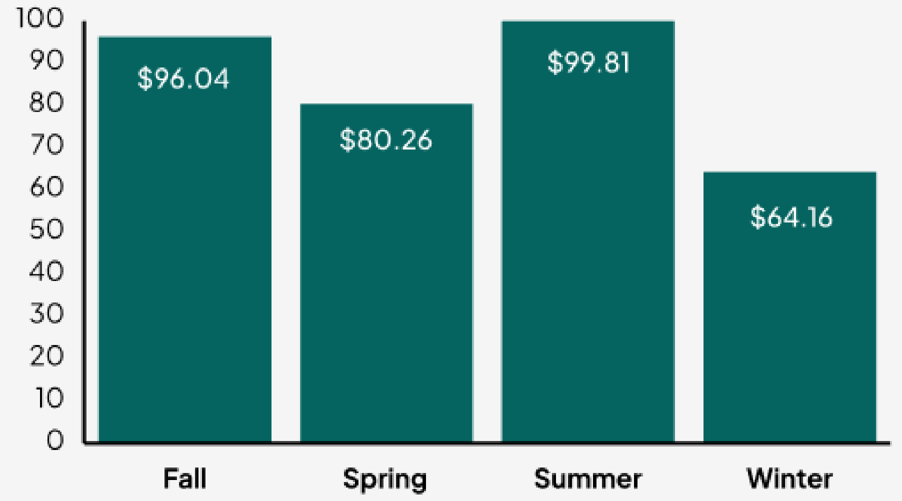
This competition is reflected in pricing. Events with more vendors consistently charge higher booth fees, with average prices increasing sharply once events exceed 50 vendors and continuing to climb as scale increases. Larger events with 200+ vendors command several times the booth price of smaller events, **reinforcing the link between demand, selectivity, and pricing power**.

Average price by number of booths



Seasonality also plays a role. **Summer events—when attendance and foot traffic peak—consistently support higher average booth prices than other seasons**, reflecting stronger demand from vendors seeking exposure. However, competition among local events and vendor volume will provide competitive pressure on prices throughout the year.

Average booth price by season



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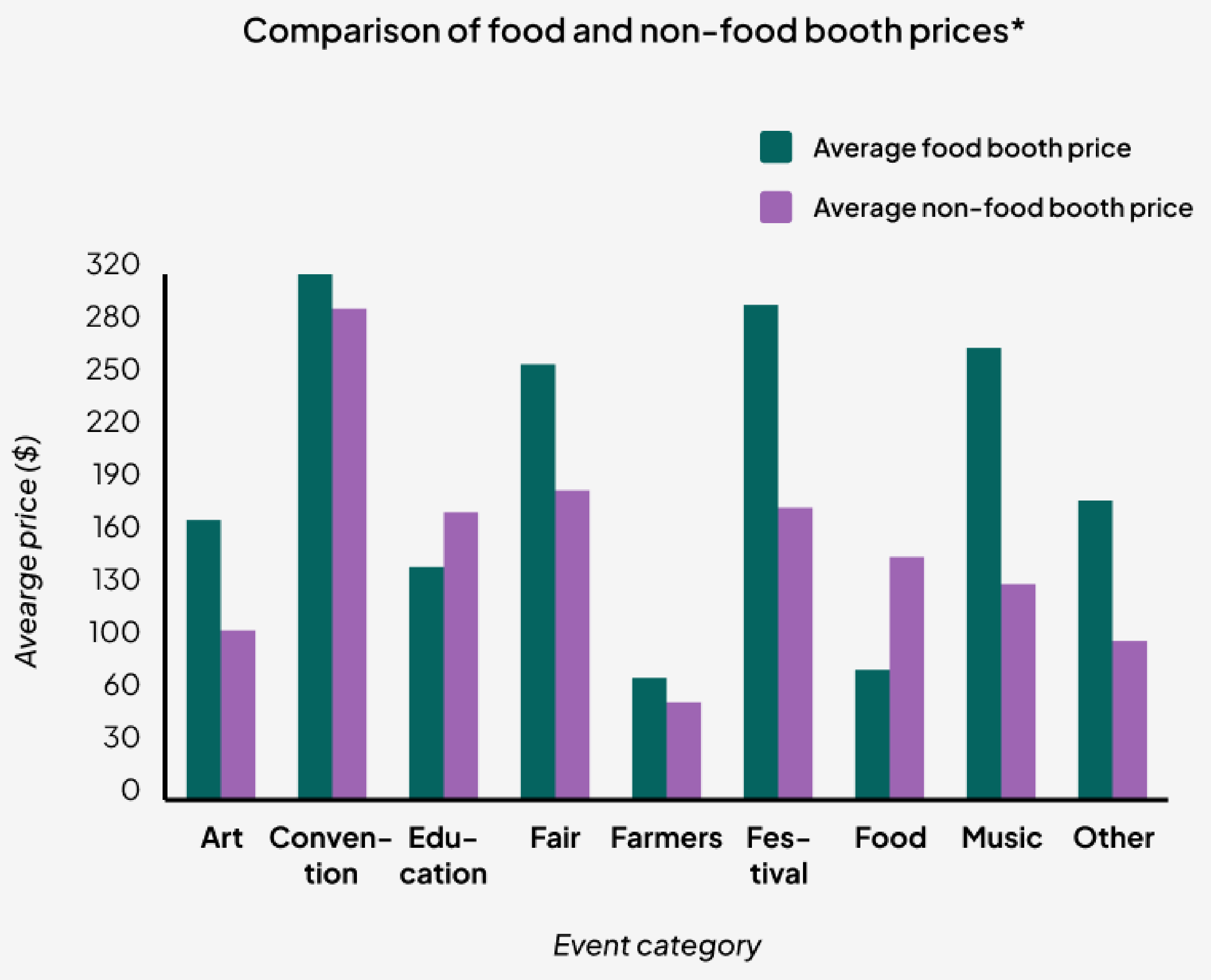
Competitive vendor approvals are **reshaping booth pricing**

THE INTERESTING

Most booths stay affordable, but the price gap is widening

Despite higher prices at the top end, most events continue to keep booth pricing low. The majority of booths are priced under $100, and a meaningful share of events still offer free or near-free vendor booths, particularly in community-driven and smaller formats.

At the same time, pricing differences across event types are becoming more pronounced. **Fandom, conventions, and large festivals support the highest booth prices, while farmers' markets and art events remain at the lower end of the pricing spectrum**. Food vendors consistently command higher prices than non-food vendors, reflecting increased revenue potential and competition for limited space.



Note: This dataset excludes complimentary booths

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Vendor growth has matured from explosive expansion to **selective, demand-driven participation.** Organizers are shifting focus from “Can we get vendors?” to “How do we manage, qualify, and retain the right ones?” Booth pricing reflects and responds to demand: high-demand events use it to maximize revenue and manage competition, while smaller events prioritize accessibility. With submissions slightly down but acceptance rates stable, **organizers have the opportunity to optimize workflows, ensure booths are appropriately priced, and help vendors capture sales** at high-attendance events—reinforcing ROI for both sides.

Online ticket purchasing has become the industry default

THE GOOD

Online ticketing is a nationwide standard, creating predictable, scalable outcomes

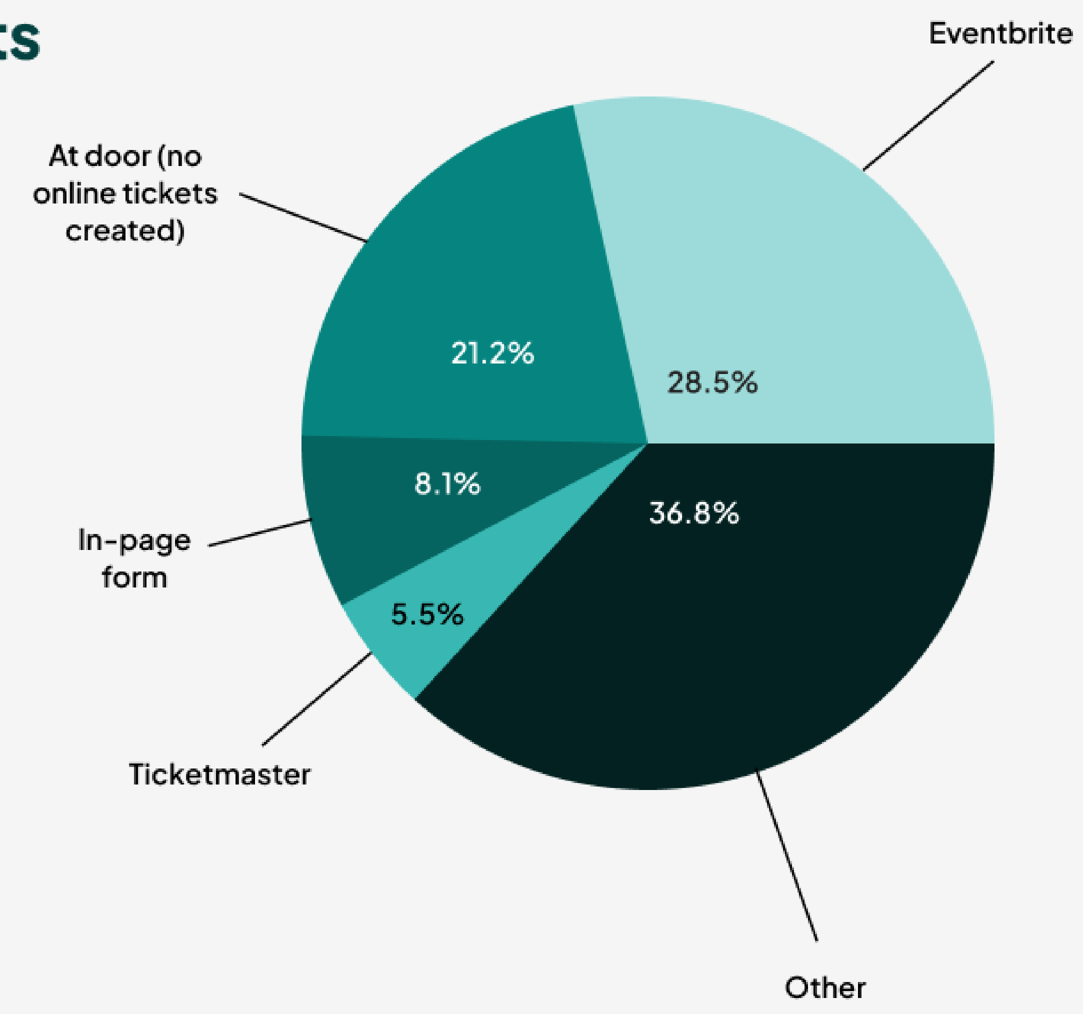
2025 has seen **record-breaking attendance from events across the board with community events leading the charts**.

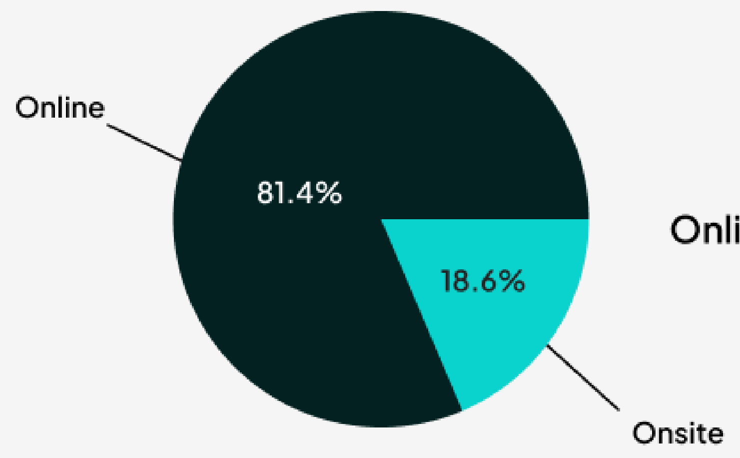
From established festivals to newer events, turnout reached new highs, with several organizers hitting maximum capacity and others experiencing rapid year-over-year growth. This surge is a continuing trend from the major live events rebound this decade. The pattern is expected to remain in 2026, with the projected event industry growing in step.

Ticketed events continue to be supported by a wide range of solutions. While Eventbrite is a popular choice, the ticketing landscape is still highly distributed. This gives organizers flexibility and choice, with no single platform fully dominating how events go to market.

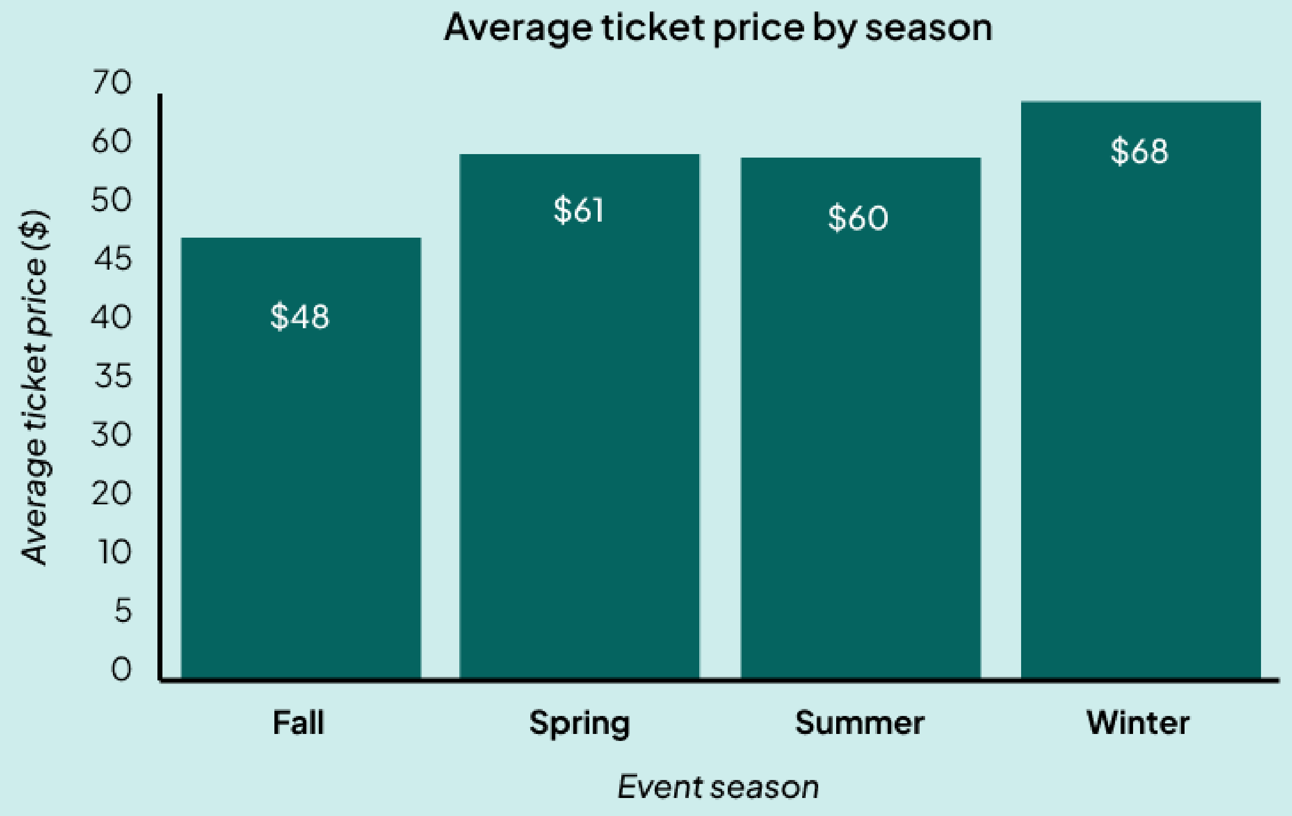
Online ticketing is firmly the norm. **More than 81% of tickets are purchased online across all event types**, with education, fandom, and market events reaching near-total online adoption. For most organizers, digital-first ticketing is no longer optional. It is simply how attendees expect to engage.

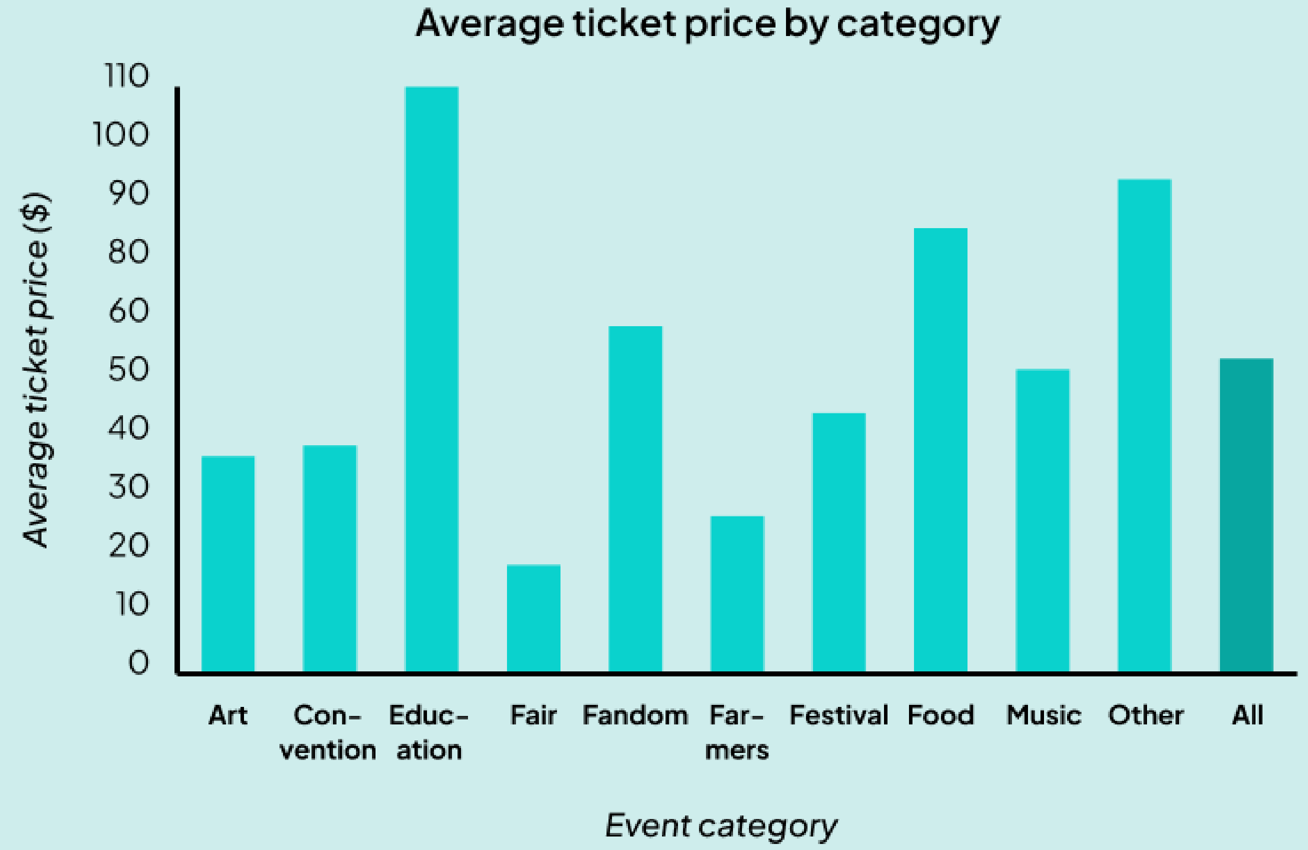
Ticketing solution used by events





Online vs. onsite





Ticket pricing has also remained steady. **Average base ticket prices sit around $58 overall**, with only modest variation across seasons. This stability gives organizers a predictable baseline when planning pricing strategies.

Continue reading →

Online ticket purchasing has become the industry default

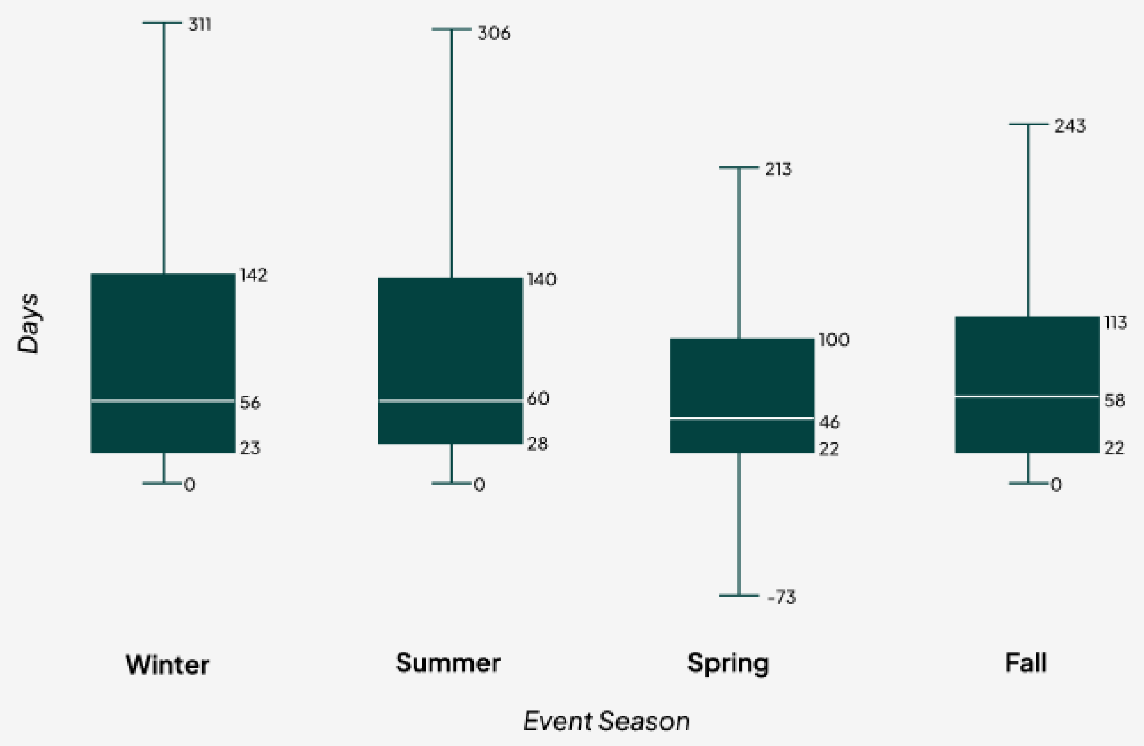
THE INTERESTING

Early tickets win – when and how you sell matters more than which platform you use

Despite the number of available ticketing platforms, the industry shows signs of product sameness. Choosing a single solution rarely changes the overall experience for organizers, as most platforms offer similar capabilities. What really impacts outcomes is **how and when tickets are sold, alongside how ticketing integrates with other event operations**.

Attendees continue to delay purchases until closer to the event date. This behavior adds pressure on cash flow and compresses marketing timelines, making it harder for organizers to plan with confidence. Platforms that combine ticketing with other event functions can help streamline operations and give organizers a clearer view of their event's performance.

Ticket purchase distribution by event season (in days)*



*Each box shows average ticket purchasing window

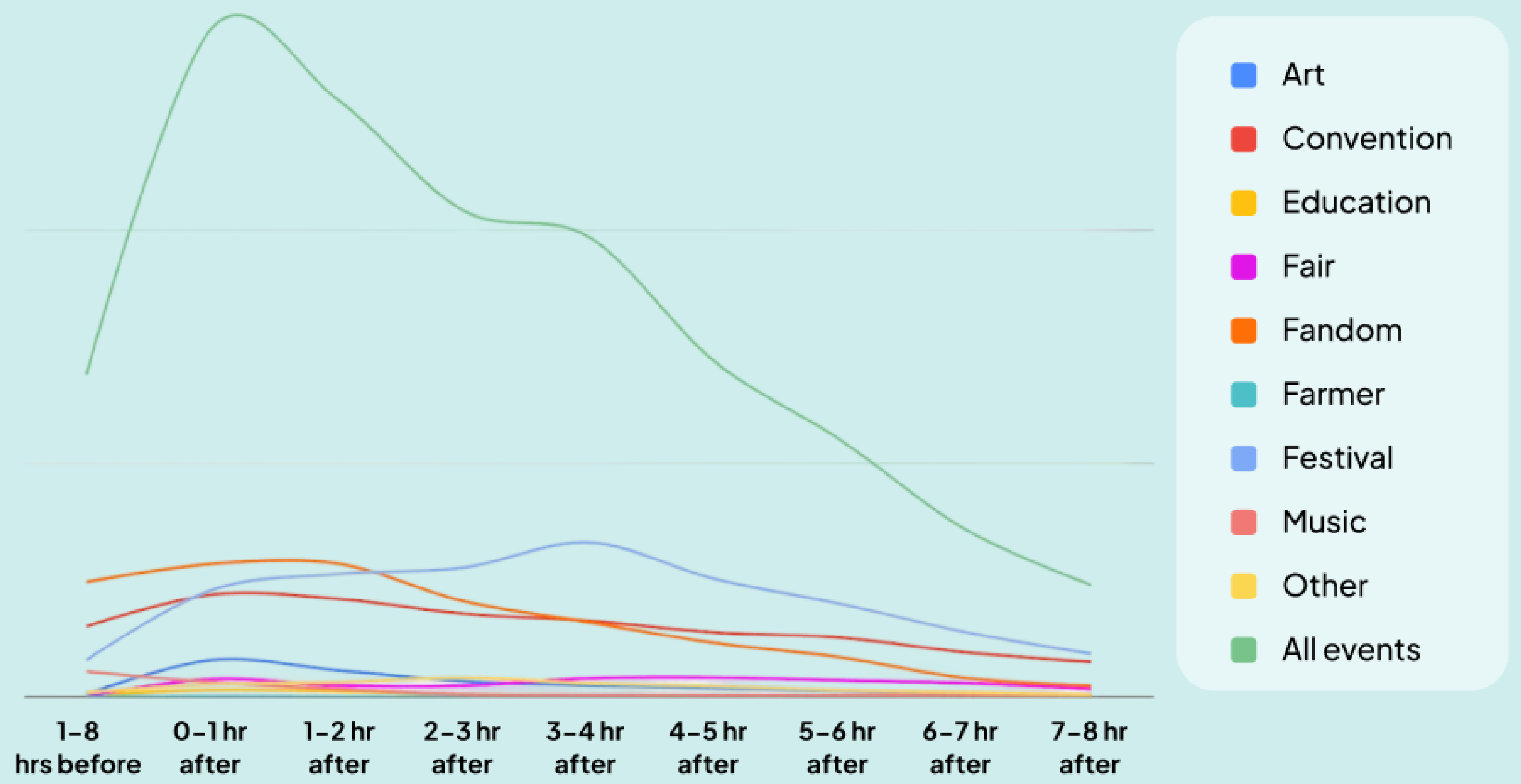
Events that made tickets available earlier saw attendees buying sooner, even though last-minute purchases are still common. That said, launching early isn't always easy. Locking in venues, talent, and key logistics has become more challenging, which can push ticket timelines back. When tickets are available earlier, it's clear that delays are often about timing, not attendee hesitation.

Pre-sales can help bridge this gap, especially for annual events. Many repeat attendees are already primed to buy based on a great experience the year before, making early ticket sales a form of built-in marketing. Pairing pre-sales with light promotional campaigns can encourage earlier commitments and give organizers more breathing room to plan with confidence.

To get more insights, check out our Psychology of Ticket Buyers blog.

Pricing patterns reveal another important shift. Prices do not fluctuate meaningfully by season or category. Instead, **events cluster around similar price points, suggesting that competition and attendee price sensitivity are the primary forces shaping ticket costs**.

Time for ticket check-in before event start

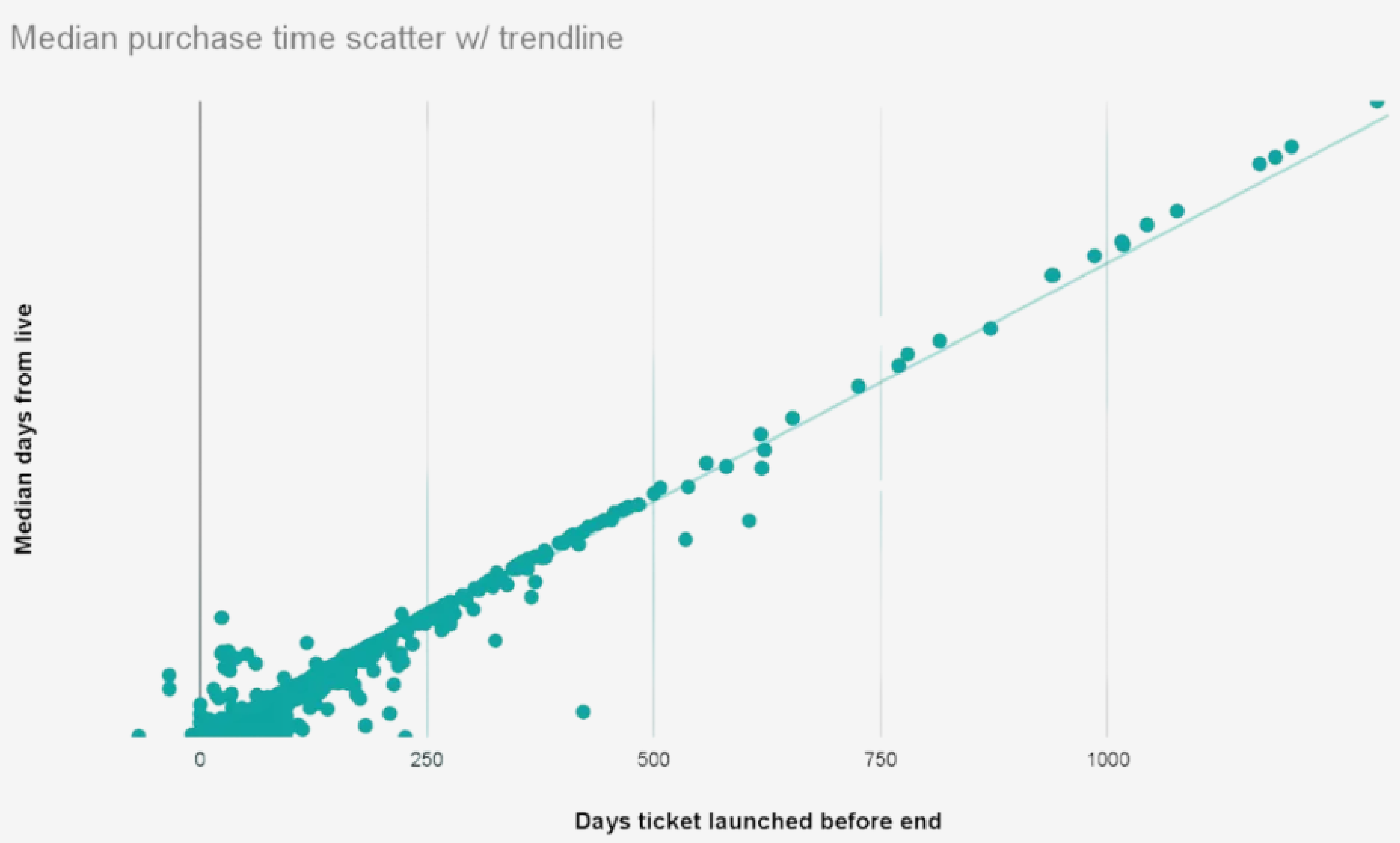


With that said, interestingly enough, check in time saw massive engagement at the start of the event across most event categories - with attendees arriving even before their ticket start time.

Continue reading

Online ticket purchasing has become the industry default

INTERPRETING THE DATA



The relationship between ticket launch timing and median purchase time is clear. **As tickets go live earlier, the median purchase date moves earlier as well.** This reinforces a simple insight. Attendee behavior responds to the structure organizers set. When tickets are available earlier, buyers adjust accordingly.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Online ticketing is the default across nearly all event types, and pricing has stabilized across both seasons and categories. While attendees are increasingly buying closer to event dates, **earlier ticket launches consistently lead to earlier purchases and healthier revenue pacing.** Competitive pressure and attendee budget sensitivity now shape pricing, positioning, and communication the real drivers of ticketing success.

Volunteer check-in rates **hover around 35%**, creating strain on onsite operations

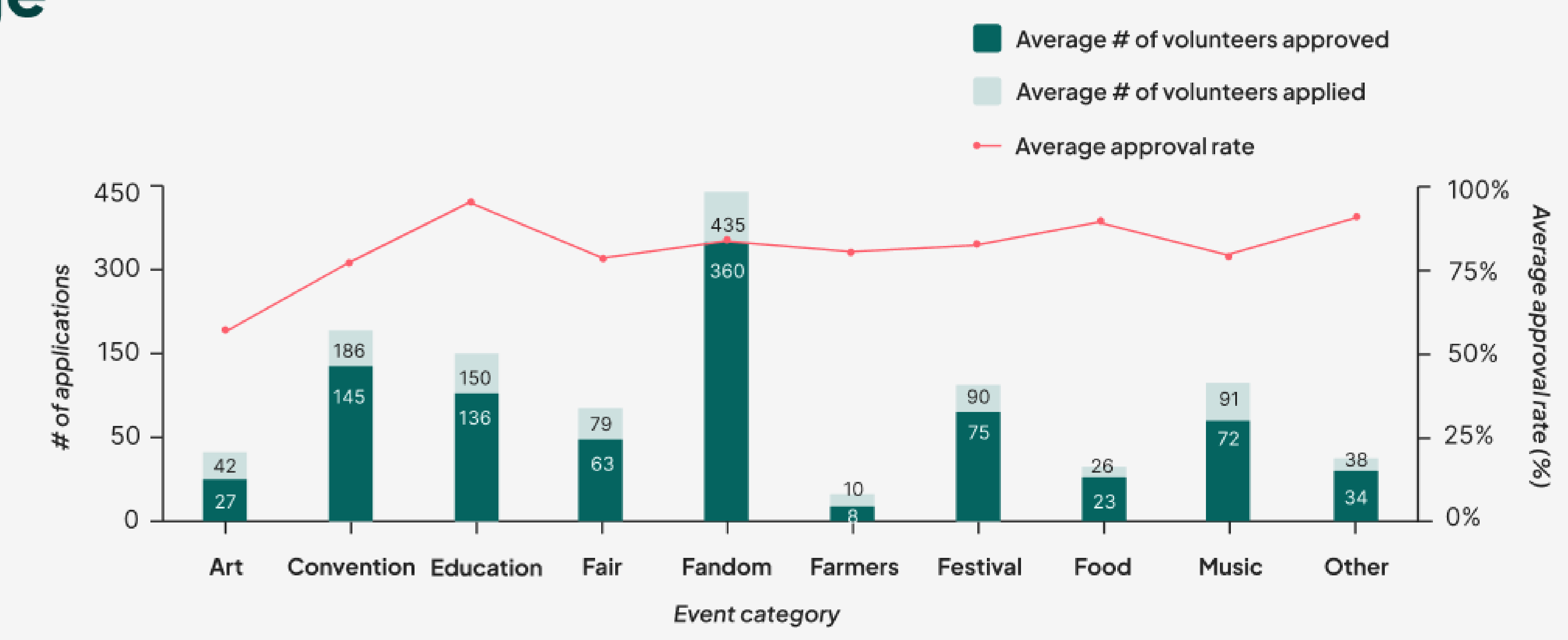
THE GOOD

Volunteer interest is high, but execution remains a challenge

As financial pressures grow, volunteers remain essential to running sustainable events. However, volunteer application volume has dipped, **highlighting the importance of incentives and setting stretch goals** to ensure strong onsite participation.

Approval rates remain high, averaging 80% across event categories. These reflect both strong demand for volunteers and organizers' heavy reliance on them to fill operational gaps.

Average approvals and applications by event category



INTERPRETING THE DATA

Volunteer submissions continued to rise overall, **increasing from 21.2% in 2023–2024 to 33.1% in 2024–2025**, but growth varied sharply by event type. Education events led the surge, posting sustained triple-digit growth , while art events rebounded strongly, **jumping from a -38.1% decline to +97.0% growth** year over year. Community-based events like fairs **(+29.5%)** and farmers markets **(+40.8%)** remained strong but slowed compared to the prior year, suggesting increased competition for volunteers.

Vendor submission growth

Event category	2023 → 2024	2024 → 2025
Art	48%	+0%
Convention	55.2%	-6.7%
Education	69.2%	-59.1%
Exhibition	7.1%	-6.7%
Fair	76.9%	-8.7%
Fandom	-28.6%	+13.3%
Farmers	70%	+23.5%
Festival	63.2%	-13.1%
Music	36.8%	+42.3%
Other	170%	-8.6%

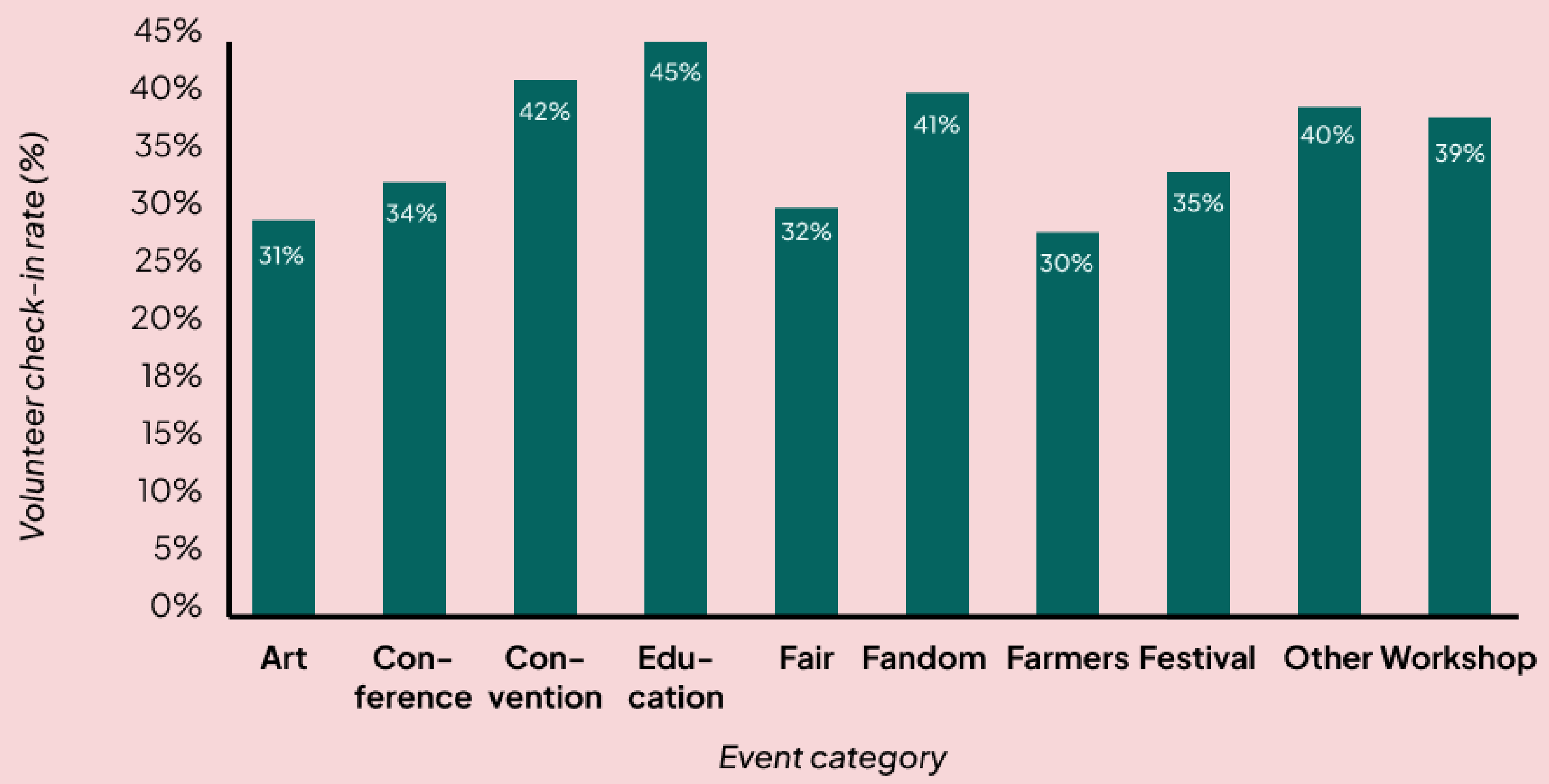
THE INTERESTING

Approved but absent - volunteer gaps grow

High approval rates do not translate into reliable staffing. Only about 35% of approved volunteers checked in onsite, with most event types falling between 30- 45%. **Organizers are anticipating more volunteers than they ultimately see on event day, creating planning risk**.

This challenge is growing as volunteer submissions declined in 2025 after a post-COVID surge. Overall participation fell roughly 5% year over year, tightening the volunteer pool just as dependence on volunteers increased. While a few categories saw growth, most experienced declines.

Volunteer check-in rate per event category



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Volunteers continue to be a cornerstone of event operations and cost efficiency, but reliability remains a challenge. High approval rates combined with low check-in rates signal the need for more structured volunteer programs. As submissions soften, **organizers who invest in communication, performance tracking, and recruitment strategies** will see more consistent support and less day-of uncertainty.

Organizers embrace proven tools while AI finds its footing

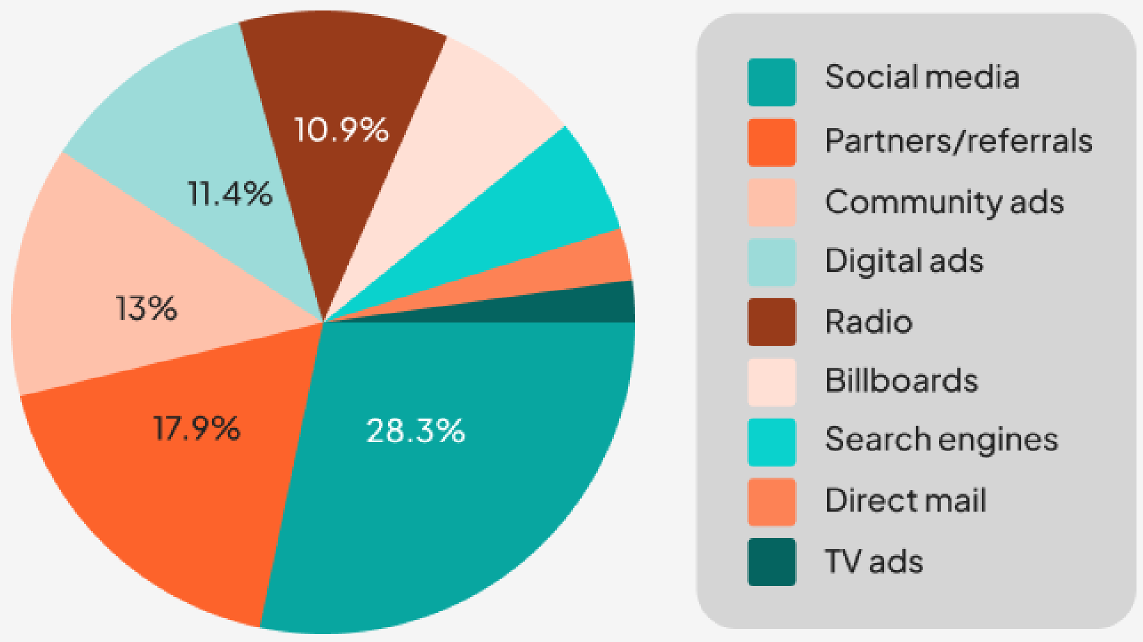
THE GOOD

Established tools are doing the heavy lifting

Event organizers continue to lean into tools that reliably reduce friction. **More than 80% use digital registration and marketing tools, making them the most widely adopted technologies across events**. Organizers using centralized platforms report higher ease-of-planning scores year over year, averaging 8.6 out of 10, compared to 7.8 among those relying on more manual workflows.

Marketing remains central to attendance growth, but it's getting more expensive. Customer acquisition now accounts for 25–30% of festival budgets and is expected to keep rising. This is driven by more competition for attention, from streaming platforms to more live events, and by the fact that search and social just don't perform like they used to.

Event marketing channels used



Social media dominates the marketing mix, **accounting for 30% of total spend**, with 98% of organizers using it to drive awareness. Traffic acquisition data shows that Instagram is now the clear leader, generating roughly 60% of social referral traffic, compared to just 10% from Facebook—highlighting a meaningful shift in where engagement is actually happening.

Local partnerships and referrals make up **18% of the mix and are used by 60% of respondents, while community advertising accounts for 13%, with 40% leveraging these channels**. Overall, organizers are actively reallocating budgets toward channels that show measurable reach and engagement, while pulling back from tactics like print and radio that deliver weaker returns.

THE INTERESTING

AI remains early, while manual work defines the real bottlenecks

Despite growing interest, **AI is used by less than 5% of event organizers**. Adoption remains limited and exploratory, especially when compared to the strong uptick of operational and marketing tools. The largest efficiency gaps still appear in sponsor and volunteer management, where workflows remain highly manual and dedicated tools are less established.

AI can be used to simplify tasks like writing event descriptions, application questions, sponsorship copy, or planning content, but it isn't replacing core operations. **Organizers tend to focus on tools that save time and reduce effort**. Google Analytics shows that searches related to vendors drive a large share of traffic from generative engines, about 20% of referred sessions, showing that organizers are already turning to digital tools to make parts of their work easier.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

As competition for attendees intensifies and marketing costs climb, **organizers are doubling down on proven tools that deliver clear results. Nearly all utilize social media to generate awareness.** Registration and marketing platforms are now foundational, while AI remains in an early testing phase. Organizers are aware that it will be used more in future event planning, but do not utilize it just yet. The data suggests the next wave of gains will come not from emerging tech alone, but from reducing manual work in sponsor and volunteer workflows—where efficiency still lags behind demand.

2026 predictions and areas of opportunity

1

Attendance will continue to grow – but **revenue per attendee** becomes the focus

Attendance is expected to rise again in 2026, but **growth will increasingly be measured by revenue per attendee rather than headcount alone.** Organizers will look for ways to monetize attendance through segmented experiences, optional upgrades, add-ons, and premium access. **Planning these revenue layers earlier will help** convert demand into sustainable growth and reduce last-minute pressure.

2

Costs keep rising, making **efficiency a competitive divider**

Even if cost increases slow, expenses across operations, staffing, and marketing will continue to climb. **The gap between events that operate efficiently and those that rely on manual processes will widen**. Efficiency will shift from a behind-the-scenes concern to a defining factor in which events can scale, adapt, and remain profitable.

Continue reading →

2026 predictions and areas of opportunity

3

Experience and talent-driven events capture more spend

Attendee spending is increasingly tied to perceived value. **Events centered around talent, exclusive guests, or differentiated experiences are expected to lead growth in per-attendee spend.** General admission alone will matter less, while thoughtfully programmed experiences become a primary driver of both attendance and revenue.

4

Adaptability becomes essential in a crowded attention economy

As more events compete for the same audiences, **experimentation will define success**. Organizers will test new formats, marketing strategies, pricing models, and on-site experiences. **The ability to adapt quickly, based on performance and audience response**, will separate events that grow from those that plateau.

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2026 predictions and areas of opportunity

5

Digital sales expand beyond ticketing

In 2026, digital transactions will extend well beyond tickets. **Applications, upgrades, vendor fees, sponsorship assets, and on-site purchases will increasingly move into structured digital workflows**. Organizers will likely emphasize managing these diversified revenue streams to reduce friction and support growth across the entire event.

Acknowledgements

This is the first-ever State of the Festival, and this industry report would not have been possible without the support of so many incredible people and organizations. We hope you find the insights as engaging and exciting to read as we did compiling them.

First and foremost, thank you to the dedicated team who brought this report to life. The remarkably fast turnaround required for this project did not go unnoticed—nor did the countless data points, analyses, and charts that ultimately did not make it into the final publication.

We would also like to extend special thanks to our outstanding industry partners: FestForums, led by President Laurie Kirby, and the International Festivals & Events Association (IFEA), led by President Steve Schmader. These organizations represent the pinnacle of meaningful connection, industry leadership, and forward momentum within the festivals and events space.

Finally, our deepest thanks go to our amazing customers. In December 2025, they surpassed 26,000 events created on Eventeny, generating a wealth of meaningful, multi-faceted first-party data that made this report possible. They were also incredibly generous with their time and insights through detailed qualitative survey responses. Our customers continue to inspire us to build a better, more powerful event planning experience for festivals and events everywhere.

Interested in learning more about Eventeny?

Eventeny is an all-in-one event management platform that has supported over tens of thousands of events across all types of event types and sizes.

They focus on helping event organizers beat the stress of multiple spreadsheets, forms, and more by consolidating everything on one platform. Learn how Eventeny can help with vendor applications, ticketing, mapping, sponsor management, volunteer tracking, managing talent booking, scheduling, and more.

Book a demo to learn how to save 3 months of manual work!

Definitions

Arts	Events primarily focused on promoting and celebrating the visual arts. These events often feature juried entry, artist competitions, or formal scoring of artwork presented at the event.
Community/ Festival	Large-scale public gatherings intended to celebrate a shared social, cultural, or historically significant aspect of a community. These events are typically free to attend and may include heritage festivals, Independence Day or holiday celebrations, Pride events, Latino or multicultural festivals, and similar community-focused experiences. Many events within this category can be further segmented into sub-categories.
Convention/ Fandom conventions	Events centered around a specific interest group, hobby, fandom, or industry. These events often include exhibitors, guest speakers or celebrities, panels, and activities that celebrate a shared culture or profession. Common examples include comic conventions, gaming expos, card shows, tattoo expos, and business conventions. (Please note that since this is a significant customer cohort on Eventeny, Fandom conventions have been segmented from general conventions.)
Fair	Events typically hosted at the local, regional, or state level that showcase regional talent, agriculture, animal exhibitions, and amusement or thrill-based attractions. These events often include competitive exhibitions, rides, and entertainment, with “State Fair” or “County Fair” frequently appearing in the event title.

Food and drink	Festivals primarily focused on food, beverages, or culinary experiences. These events often center around a specific cuisine, product, or tasting experience and are typically reflected in the event name. Common examples include “Taste of” events, beer, wine, whiskey, chocolate, or BBQ festivals.
Markets/ Farmers/ Flea	Vendor-driven events featuring goods for sale, often produced locally or independently by participating vendors. These events commonly occur on a recurring schedule (weekly or monthly) and include farmers’ markets, pop-up markets, bazaars, and flea markets.
Education	Events primarily focused on learning, professional development, networking, and the exchange of industry knowledge. These events typically feature speakers, structured educational sessions, and networking or hospitality components. Common examples include conferences, seminars, and workshops.
Music	Events centered around multiple live musical performances. These events often include nationally or regionally recognized musical artists and may span one or multiple days.
Other	Events that appear to be completely absent from the categories listed above.

Please do note that while many events may naturally span multiple categories, each event was assigned to one primary category for this analysis to ensure consistency and comparability across datasets.

Survey data was collected voluntarily. Respondents received a cash-equivalent incentive valued at $10 upon completion of the survey. All survey responses were anonymized and aggregated before analysis, and no personally identifiable information was used in the preparation of this report.

 The Eventeny dataset may include limited test data, draft events, or events created without the intent of execution. Additionally, certain estimates, projections, and averages exclude outliers or anomalies that may otherwise materially affect results.

Eventeny’s proprietary data-processing methodologies incorporate, in part, artificial intelligence and automated systems to collect, authenticate, classify, and synthesize information. Such systems are inherently subject to limitations and may produce errors or inaccuracies.

The dataset includes events scheduled to take place between January 2023 and November 2026. Accordingly, certain analyses may include both historical and future events. All insights and conclusions reflect conditions as of 2025 and are subject to change without notice as market conditions, industry practices, or data availability evolve.