



MEETINGS OUTLOOK™

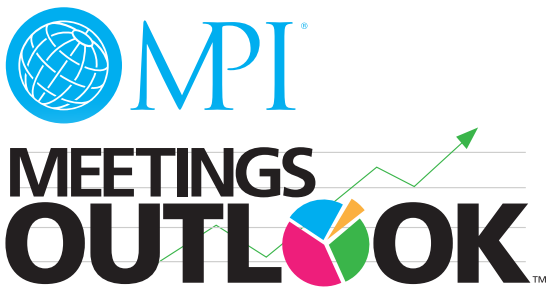


In-person meetings and events continue to surge, though Meetings Outlook data reveals more of a normalization of growth and optimism compared to the gangbuster momentum seen over the past couple of years.

Q2 2024



The most important event elements you need to ace right now



Destination appeal, scheduled networking opportunities and spontaneous conversations identified as leading components that will most impact the success of meetings and events throughout the near future.

Hollis Carter runs curated events for entrepreneurs at his company, The Baby Bathwater Institute, in Boulder, Colo., bringing founders together everywhere from ski mountains to the islands of Croatia. Typically, they stay at unique, independently owned hotels, talk business and have fun.

“It’s really just getting people out of the hotel conference environment and making sure they’re all peers—owners, founders and entrepreneurs who are scaling their businesses,” he says.

Carter’s business has thrived with a model that gives attendees membership in the Institute for a year along with admission to their first event for \$12,500. Many come back

to a second event—discounted with the membership—to stay in touch with the people they met at the first one.

“It kind of feels like a family reunion,” he says.

Carter is not alone among meeting professionals in embracing creative approaches to keep meetings appealing in a challenging business environment. In the Q2 2024 edition of MPI’s Meetings Outlook research, there was a notable pullback in expectations for favorable business conditions over the next year, with 68% of respondents expecting to see them materialize. That was the lowest result since Q1 2022, when 65% projected favorable conditions in the near future.

Digging deeper, in this latest quarter, only 15% of respondents are anticipating business conditions over the

“Current pricing has required us to critically reassess all of our programs, leading us to revising programs and scaling back certain functions to minimize the need for multi-day programs with heavy food and beverage needs.”

MARY ANNE WHITTLE, CMP

President
MPI Arizona Sunbelt Chapter

next year to be more than 10% better—the lowest result since Q2 2020. This is happening while full-time hiring is relatively flat, with 53% saying it remains the same and 16% saying it is decreasing. As to whether it’s still a seller’s market, 57% still believe it is, down slightly from 59% in Q3 2023.

The pullback in optimism, while concerning, could suggest a continuing normalization of the marketplace, given that results are closer to what we saw immediately pre-pandemic. Live attendance projections remains strong, and virtual/online attendance is up, the highest since virtual attendance projections began plummeting in Q2 2022.

Bright spots amid normalization

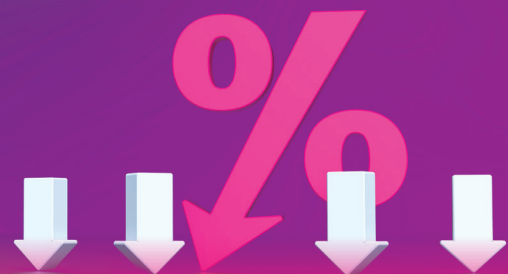
The brightest spots in the latest outlook are destination appeal—as Carter has found—networking receptions and the ability to have spontaneous conversations. These were the top three components that had a significantly positive impact on respondents’ meetings/events in 2023 and the elements they expect to continue to have a leading impact throughout 2024, the research found.

The ability to provide curated networking has contributed to a boom in business for Adam Sloyer, CEO and co-founder of Sequence Events, a full-service event production company in New York City. Many of his clients are looking for opportunities to help team members

BUSINESS CONDITIONS

Leveling Off

This quarter’s survey saw a notable pullback in expectations for favorable business conditions over the next year. This favorable percentage (68%) is the lowest we’ve seen since Q1 2022. Looking deeper, only 15% of respondents are projecting business conditions over the next year to be more than 10% better—that’s the lowest we’ve seen since Q2 2020.



	Q3 '23	Q4 '23	Q1 '24	Q2 '24
Favorable	80%	70%	76%	68%
Neutral	10%	14%	19%	16%
Negative	11%	16%	6%	16%

get to know each other better at employee-engagement meetings.

“A lot of the companies that have gone remote-first or virtual need motivation and experiences to get people together in person,” Sloyer says.

Many event organizers are looking to break through the distraction factor that comes with online events.

“Even when you’re on Zoom, you’re wondering, ‘Are they looking at the Zoom or answering email?’” Sloyer says. “When you get people in a room, you have the best chance of capturing their attention and having them be present. There’s a new lens around the importance of that for brands and organizations, whether the meetings are internal or external.”

Keeping that in mind, Sequence Events has focused on delivering curated conversations to help employees connect with colleagues in other departments or achieve other goals they have set for the meeting. It sets key performance indicators (KPIs) to make sure attendees have actually connected with people they wanted to meet by the end of the meeting.

“You’re putting yourself in the attendees’ shoes and figuring out what success looks like and then ensuring they feel that way when they walk out,” Sloyer says.

Activity-based networking, he says, has been especially helpful in achieving those goals.

“Being able to do a whiskey tasting, build-a-bike or some other type of volunteering is super-effective because it diminishes the anxiety around meeting people,” he says.

Many of Sloyer’s clients are seeking interesting

destinations for both internal meetings and client-facing events.

“We’re doing something in a couple of weeks for a venture capital firm,” he says. “It’s the first event of its kind for their portfolio companies. Most are on the West Coast, and a few are in New York, and they wanted something destination-wise that was going to be appealing and that was going to have a bit of a name-drop.”

They opted to hold the meeting in Napa Valley, Calif. For another client’s recent companywide meeting, the client chose Chicago for the destination’s easy accessibility for participants.

That said, one factor with which Sloyer must contend is that locations are exceptionally busy right now.

“We have clients that are looking to book hotels and offsites for 2025, and availability and locations are limited,” he says.

Meetings Outlook data also found a notable jump in the percentage of respondents saying that trade shows were important in 2023, with that percentage up from 18% in 2023 to 27% in 2024. This underscores the anecdotal evidence of record-breaking show attendance that’s been seen in news headlines this year.

The associations behind the shows are jumping on the opportunity to bring more value to their events. With many of its members looking to build their networks, the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA), for instance, has been emphasizing mingling more at its



MARKET LANDSCAPE

Sellers Still Calling the Shots

Overall, the majority of respondents are still living in a seller’s market.

	Q3 '23	Q4 '23	Q1 '24	Q2 '24
Buyer’s market	18%	17%	21%	25%
Balanced market	22%	22%	20%	18%
Seller’s market	59%	61%	58%	57%

*“A lot of the companies that have gone remote-first or virtual need **motivation and experiences** to get people together in person.”*

ADAM SLOYER

CEO and Co-founder
Sequence Events

CattleCon conference and NCBA Trade Show.

Before the events start, the organization, based in Centennial, Colo., and Washington, D.C., encourages attendees to share that they will be attending on social media—even creating fun graphics for them—and to connect through the group’s mobile app, notes Kristin Torres (MPI Rocky Mountain Chapter), the association’s executive director, meetings and events.

To support members who want to make more connections, the group upped the number of networking lounges from its usual three or four to eight, located around the trade show floor, at its Orlando event this past year. Among the lounges were the Meating Place, with nook-pods as seating areas; the Grove, an orange-tree-decked area with a space for photo ops; the Caffeinated

Cow coffee lounge; a beer stop with a set of picnic tables and a beer truck; and the Gator Lounge, complete with a gator handler with live gators. There were also daytime and evening receptions each day, giving attendees and exhibitors a chance to network off of the show floor.

“All of these areas/events not only offer opportunities for attendees as well as exhibitors to network, [they] also allow us to offer unique and fun sponsorship opportunities,” Torres.

On top of this, the group encourages its exhibitors to hold their own events in conjunction with its convention.

“While these aren’t ‘official’ events of the convention it’s still allowing attendees time to connect while at the event,” she says.

Some planners are also gamifying networking. Sarah

FOOD & BEVERAGE

FEEDBACK

In which of the following ways are F&B costs affecting what you’re able to offer your clients, participants or peers?

- 53%** Simpler designs for F&B experiences
- 50%** Fewer breaks with F&B
- 42%** Fewer meal options
- 36%** Less alcohol
- 32%** Fewer meals
- 30%** Fewer beverage options
- 29%** Smaller portions
- 18%** More local produce
- 9%** Less time for meals
- 8%** Less local produce



“Before the events start, the organization encourages attendees to share that they will be attending on social media—even creating fun graphics for them—and to connect through the group’s mobile app.”

KRISTIN TORRES

*Executive Director, Meetings and Events
MPI Rocky Mountain Chapter*

Gemmell, a lead generation trainer and networking expert based in Gainesville, Ga., hosts her own events and often attends up to seven meetings a week to make new connections. She finds that attendees are gravitating away from “free mingling,” because of the hit-or-miss aspect, and prefer to know ahead of time whom they may be meeting.

“They want to know there is a 95% chance they will walk out of here with some kind of benefit to their business,” she says.

More organizers at the events she attends are using card decks with prompts to make it easier for attendees to strike up a conversation.

“The gamification of getting people into conversations

ATTENDANCE FORECASTS

A VIRTUAL RISING

Live attendance projections remain strong. Surprisingly, “favorable” virtual/online attendance projections are up—the highest we’ve seen since Q2 2022, when virtual attendance projections were plummeting.

Projected Live Attendance

	Q3 '23	Q4 '23	Q1 '24	Q2 '24
Positive	82%	70%	76%	71%
Flat	10%	15%	11%	19%
Negative	8%	15%	13%	11%

Projected Virtual Attendance

	Q3 '23	Q4 '23	Q1 '24	Q2 '24
Positive	17%	17%	18%	23%
Flat	30%	33%	33%	31%
Negative	50%	50%	49%	46%

“The gamification of getting people into conversations has been wildly popular in networking.”

SARAH GEMMELL

*Lead Generation Trainer and Networking Expert
Gainesville, Ga.*

has been wildly popular in networking,” Gemmell says.

Jen Kem, CEO of Master Brand Institute, a brand strategy and leadership development firm in Walnut Creek, Calif., has put her own spin on the trend with “Unicorn Connection Cards.” Attendees address two questions: how they help people in the world and what help they need in terms of referrals and resources. If they meet someone they want to follow up with, they make a note on that person’s card about what they discussed, where they met and what they hope to connect about in the future.

“We call it the Uniform Connection Card because what we’re looking for is the other rare people or rare breeds that are in the room,” Kem says. “Our purpose is to keep it simple and make it easy for people to play.”

She calculates that clients who attended her small-group events over the past six years have generated \$22 million in new business as a result of the cards.

Entertainment that helps start conversations is also a hit in today’s business environment. Karen Kuzsel (MPI Greater Orlando Chapter), owner of The Psychic Lady in Ocoee, Fla., finds that as attendees seek more connection at meetings, she’s been in high demand as a psychic for corporate team-building events.

“The way I connect to people at events isn’t, ‘This is going to happen to you,’” she says. “It’s more of, ‘This is what I feel from you,’ and then people can engage in conversation and there’s a lot of back and forth.”

Those darn budgets

Of course, there are also budgetary realities to consider.

Many meeting professionals say they are paying close attention to the financial side of meetings. Mary Anne Whittle, CMP, president of the MPI Arizona Sunbelt Chapter, anticipates that rising costs for food and beverage and labor will continue to be significant factors in the next 12 months and beyond.

“Current pricing has required us to critically reassess all of our programs, leading us to revising programs and scaling back certain functions to minimize the need for multi-day programs with heavy food and beverage needs,” she says. “Functions we have had to cut to meet our budgets include once-anticipated welcome receptions and breakfast networking segments. We have also shortened signature meetings to eliminate lunch and dinner functions.”

At the same time, Whittle has turned an eagle eye to contracts.

“Given the influx of new charges and additional charges layered onto already exorbitant service charges, I collaborate closely with my sourcing partner to ensure our contracts clearly delineate what is to be considered complimentary and what charges we will not be acceptable,” she says. “This concerning trend of incremental fee assessments has compelled me to adopt a firmer stance during negotiations—not only for venue contracts, but also increasingly in-house audiovisual services.”

In response, she’s shopping around more.

Ultimately, meeting professionals are finding that it’s all about the attendee experience. The trick is continuing to improve upon it as the price of doing just about everything keeps going up.



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