



March 2026

Industry Trends

Industry Trends At-A-Glance

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- **COMING THIS SPRING:** "NextGen-Proofing Your Event" special report



Event ~~Planner~~ Strategist

When events guru Julius Solaris presented to Maritz's Client Advisory Board last month, he anchored on his signature quote:

“Planning events without data is planning parties.”



The quote was an apt summary of what our customers are experiencing:

Conditions are challenging, so...

...decisions must be more purposeful (data!)

...showing value to stakeholders is vital (data!)

...planners need to become strategists (data!)

With that, let's dive into what's happening.

Client Landscape

The factors shaping our
customers' worlds

Corporate Meetings & Incentives

Challenges + Impacts

- Rapid org change
- Pressure to implement AI
- Geopolitics – tariffs, immigration, visas, destination choice politicized
- Corporate sustainability mandates
- Demonstrating business impact & ROI
- Balancing experience expectations with less resources
- Pushback on changing legacy events
- Engaging new audiences with different needs
- Finding available space at reasonable cost



Actions + Adjustments

- Focusing on **data, measurement and value** – understanding what participants want; showing leaders how the event drives business results
- **Evaluating overall event portfolio** to maximize impact and control costs – adding new events, combining events, eliminating less critical events, regionalizing approach, etc.
- Trying to **scale back program elements** – (number of days, gifts, activities, etc.) without compromising **experience**
- Focus on **strategic sourcing** – considering different locations, trying to source earlier, negotiating more

WHAT'S TRENDING

Association Meetings

Challenges + Impacts



Actions + Adjustments

- Keeping up with rapid change (societal, legal/regulatory, technological) with limited staff and budgets
- Declining attendance and exhibitor participation
- Driving member retention & repeat attendance
- U.S. policies negatively affecting international attendees and sectors reliant on government funding (e.g. academia, scientific)
- Politicization of destination choice
- Finding available space at reasonable cost

- Evaluating **value proposition, offerings** and **pricing**
- Increased demand for **data insights and analytics** to drive acquisition and retention
- Seeking ways to **offset costs** (e.g. co-locating with other events, considering non-traditional venues, seeking new funding sources)
- Considering different **locations**, driven by both affordability and alignment with member values

WHAT'S TRENDING

Large Conferences and Trade Shows

Challenges + Impacts

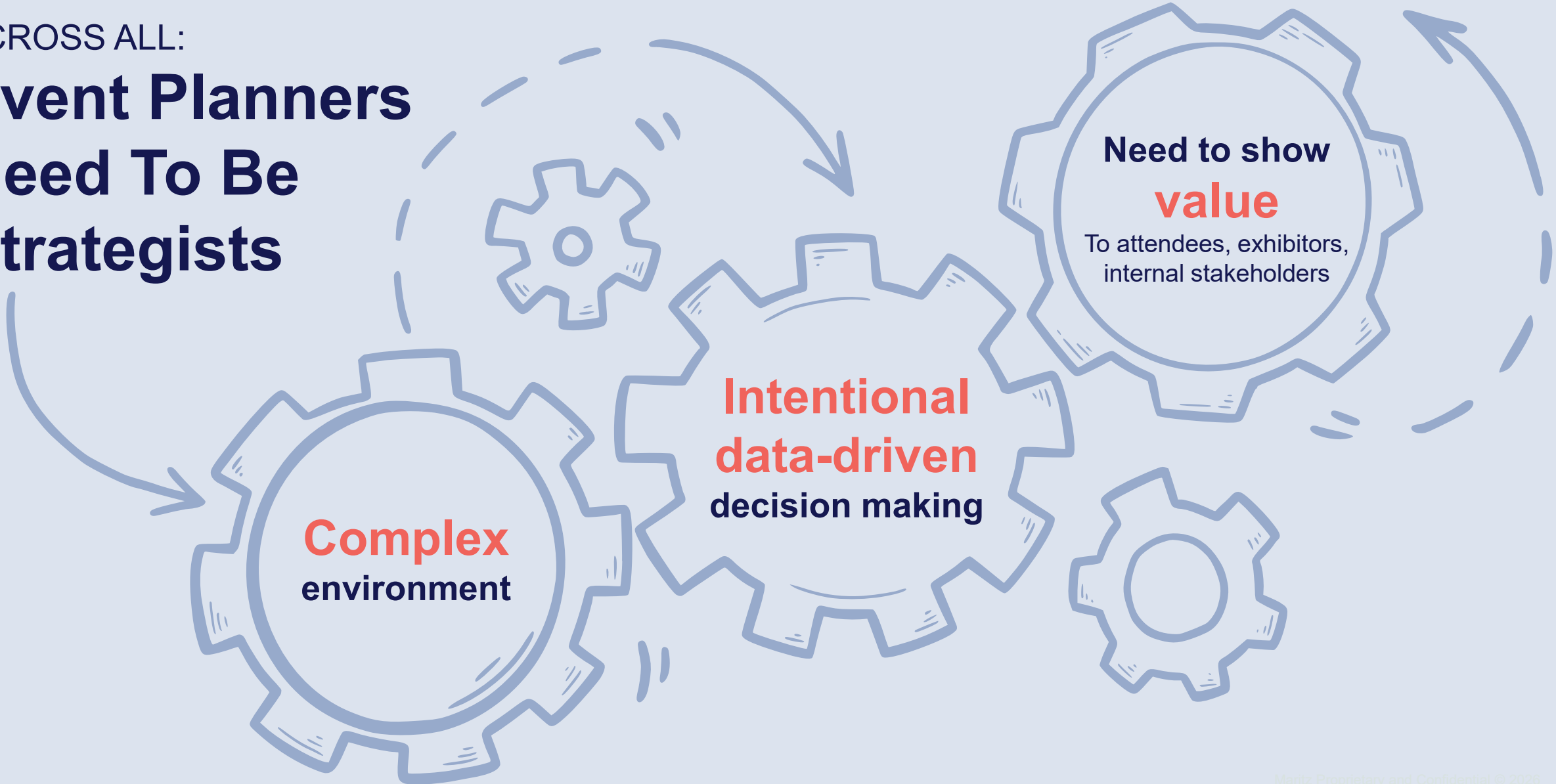
- Rising costs to organizers (*venues, A/V, F&B, etc.*)
- Rising costs to exhibitors, exacerbated by tariffs & customs (*booth displays, furniture, tech, etc.*)
- Risk of exhibitors pulling back if they can't justify the expense/demonstrate ROI
- Supporting exhibitor's extra needs (*marketing support, data analytics, etc.*)
- Increasing expectations around innovation, improved tech and a valuable experience
- Acquiring shows or being acquired
- Positioning the value of the event to host cities
- Late registrations negatively impacting room blocks

Actions + Adjustments

- Evaluating **marketing strategies, pricing packages and offerings** to entice attendance
- Need for enhanced **data and tech** offerings
- Evaluating **sponsorship strategies and fee structures** to grow revenue from attendees, exhibitors and sponsors
- Focusing on segments and verticals with **high growth** potential
- Offering more tools for exhibitors to **measure/maximize ROI** (post-show reports, marketing tools, etc.)
- Sharing registration pace and attendee trends with hotel partners to minimize attrition risk and strengthen **room-block performance**

ACROSS ALL:

Event Planners Need To Be Strategists





Maritz®

The Latest Attendance Data

Looking at data from 2025 and
what it could mean for 2026

2025 Attendance Data

We analyzed data from over **300 client trade shows** for which Maritz managed registration in 2023, 2024, and 2025, comparing year-over-year attendance.



Trend



Data

Attendance was a bit soft



- Attendance was **down 3%** in 2025.
- More shows saw a **decrease** (37% of shows) than an increase (25%). The rest were flat.
- Among those seeing a decrease, the **average decrease** in attendance was **10%**.

...But not for everyone



- One quarter (**25%**) of shows saw **increased attendance**.
- Some of these increases were substantial, growing attendance by **20% or more**.

International attendance was particularly soft



- **More than half of shows (52%) saw a decline in international attendees** in 2025, a reversal of 2024's positive trend.
- Among those seeing declines, **20%** was the average decline.

Countries with Steepest Declines

We looked at our Top 20 international markets to see which ones saw the largest change in attendance at U.S. trade shows. As shown, **14 of the top 20 markets that our clients' events draw from saw declines in excess of 5%.**

While Canada's decline was not as high as other markets, the loss of 10% is significant – it's our clients' largest market with ~100K attendees coming to their events each year.

Country	2025 vs. 2024
Spain	26% (-)
France	21% (-)
Netherlands	17% (-)
Italy	15% (-)
Colombia	15% (-)
Germany	13% (-)
Brazil	13% (-)
Norway	12% (-)
Australia	12% (-)
UK	11% (-)
Canada	10% (-)
Israel	9% (-)
Mexico	8% (-)
Turkey	8% (-)
South Korea	4% (-)
Nigeria	3% (-)
Japan	2% (-)
India	2% (-)
China	Flat (0%)
UAE	1% (+)



Key markets like Western Europe saw significant declines, mirroring trends in U.S. tourism.

Source: Maritz attendance data for Association and Tradeshow events comparing the same set of shows in 2024 and 2025.

What Does This Mean For 2026?

We expect a similar outlook this year with muted but stable attendance due to sustained underlying conditions:

Headwinds ←

- Geopolitical uncertainty
- Economic concerns

→ Tailwinds

- High perceived business impact of in-person events
- Greater need to build trust and connection as tech and AI proliferate



Questions Around The Data

Which events are included in this registration data?

Maritz client events in the **association and trade show market** for which we have registration data for 2023-2025, **representing over 300 events**. Both regular attendees and exhibitor attendees are included.

What are some cautions about this data?

There is **high variability across events**, with some seeing large decreases in attendance and others seeing significant increases. Attendance is impacted by many factors that vary year to year (locations, dates, etc.) so we should be cautious in drawing sweeping conclusions about causality.

How is the data trending for my specific industry?

Our data isn't classified by client sector, but in general those with the largest decreases in attendance are concentrated in academia/higher education, science, and those in tariff-exposed industries like manufacturing, heavy equipment, automotive and consumer products.

How does Maritz's data compare to industry data?

Similarly. **Industry sources paint a similar picture** of muted attendance in 2025 as well as a high degree of variability. Results also mirror U.S. Travel Association data showing a 6% drop in foreign visitors to the U.S. in 2025, with the steepest declines coming from Canada (28% decline) and Western Europe.



Engaging Your **NON**-Attendees

The hidden reasons
they're sleeping on
your event



The Non-Attendee

Much attention is given to those who attend our events, and the reasons are understandable: **they're visible**. They provide a revenue stream, a behavioral footprint and maybe even survey feedback.

With an estimated only 10-20% of association members typically attending the association's largest annual event, **the remaining 80-90% represent an enormous opportunity**.

What's holding up this pool of could-be attendees?

It's useful to explore the commonly overlooked barriers to attending events – particularly the next generation – who are on course to comprise one third of the workforce by 2030.

Three Common Barriers

1

They lack a buddy

59%

Fifty-nine percent of Gen Z will avoid an event if they don't know someone else going.

2

Free events aren't free

Hidden costs:

What a 'free' event might cost the attendee

EXAMPLE COSTS

Airport parking for 3 days	\$50
F&B during transit / outside of event hours	\$100
Childcare for 3 days	\$500
Housesitting / pet sitting for 3 days	\$150
Foregone wages from gig work	\$200

TOTAL OUT OF POCKET COSTS \$1,000

3

There's not enough in it for them

For the up-and-coming attendee, here's what the research shows "value" looks like:

- Speaking their language (real voices, real stories > star power)
- Something they couldn't get on YouTube or TikTok
- Rolling their sleeves up and doing something with others
- Connecting with "their people", micro-communities around shared interests
- Immersing in the local culture – and positively impacting it
- Time to decompress and invest in self-care

The Opportunity

In spite of progress, today's events tend to be designed through a lens of yesterday's attendee, with lengthy keynotes, packed agendas, passive learning formats and networking that puts the onus on them.

The world of "If we build it, they will come" no longer applies to today's increasingly empowered attendee – and this goes for all generations. In other words, being thrown into a cocktail reception and told to network won't cut it in terms of a valued experience.

A whopping 59% of Gen Zers will avoid an event if they don't know anyone else going – significantly more than for other generations. Contrary to popular belief, it's not that younger generations only want to interact through screens. They actually crave in-person connection and the career advancement opportunities that come with it, just like their elders.

Additionally two thirds of Gen Z'ers work in the so-called gig economy, either as their main job or to supplement income from their primary job to make ends meet. Even with free or discounted registration, attending an event can be costly for students and early-career professionals. This also stays true for older generations, especially in today's economy.

Event strategists will continue to have to address these common barriers in order to bring value to all attendees, but even more so to increase attendance and gain new members.





Destination Trends

Top locations clients are booking

TOP CLIENT-BOOKED DESTINATIONS FOR

Meetings, Conferences & Trade Shows

Overall
Top 10

Top 5 by Event Size

Largest

10,000+ room nights

1. Washington, D.C.
2. Chicago
3. Atlanta
4. Las Vegas & San Diego
5. Orlando

Large

5,000-10,000 room nights

1. Denver
2. Chicago
3. San Diego, Nashville, Las Vegas
4. Washington, D.C.
5. Houston

Midsized & Smaller

<5,000 room nights

1. Dallas
2. Chicago
3. Washington, D.C.
4. L.A./Anaheim
5. Phoenix



#1
Dallas

2. Orlando
3. Washington, D.C.
4. L.A./Anaheim
5. Chicago
6. San Diego
7. Las Vegas
8. Atlanta
9. Phoenix
10. Denver

Data reflects number of Maritz client events contracted in 2024 and onward. Includes data from Corporate, Association and Trade Show markets, all event types excluding incentives.

TOP BOOKED BY

Client Types

Corporations only

Top 10 by Sector

Healthcare

1. Newark
2. Dallas
3. St. Louis
4. Philadelphia
5. Chicago

Technology

1. Dallas
2. San Francisco
3. Boston, Atlanta, Austin
4. L.A./Anaheim
5. New York City

Financial

1. New York City & St. Louis
2. Dallas
3. Phoenix
4. Charlotte
5. Chicago



Associations only
**Overall
Top 10**

#1

Washington D.C.

2. Dallas
3. Orlando
4. Denver
5. Chicago & L.A./Anaheim
6. Atlanta
7. San Diego
8. Las Vegas
9. Boston
10. Nashville

Data reflects number of Maritz client events contracted in 2024 and onward for all event types except incentives

Top Booked for Incentives

Non-U.S.


#1 Los Cabos

2. Cancun
3. Nassau
4. Puerto Vallarta
5. England + Scotland

U.S.

#1 Hawaii

2. Los Angeles
3. San Francisco
4. Savannah, Denver, Salt Lake City
5. New York City + Atlanta



As in the past,
sun and surf top
the list of client
faves

Based on number of incentive programs sourced in 2024 onward



Inflation Outlook

New data, same story

UPDATED:

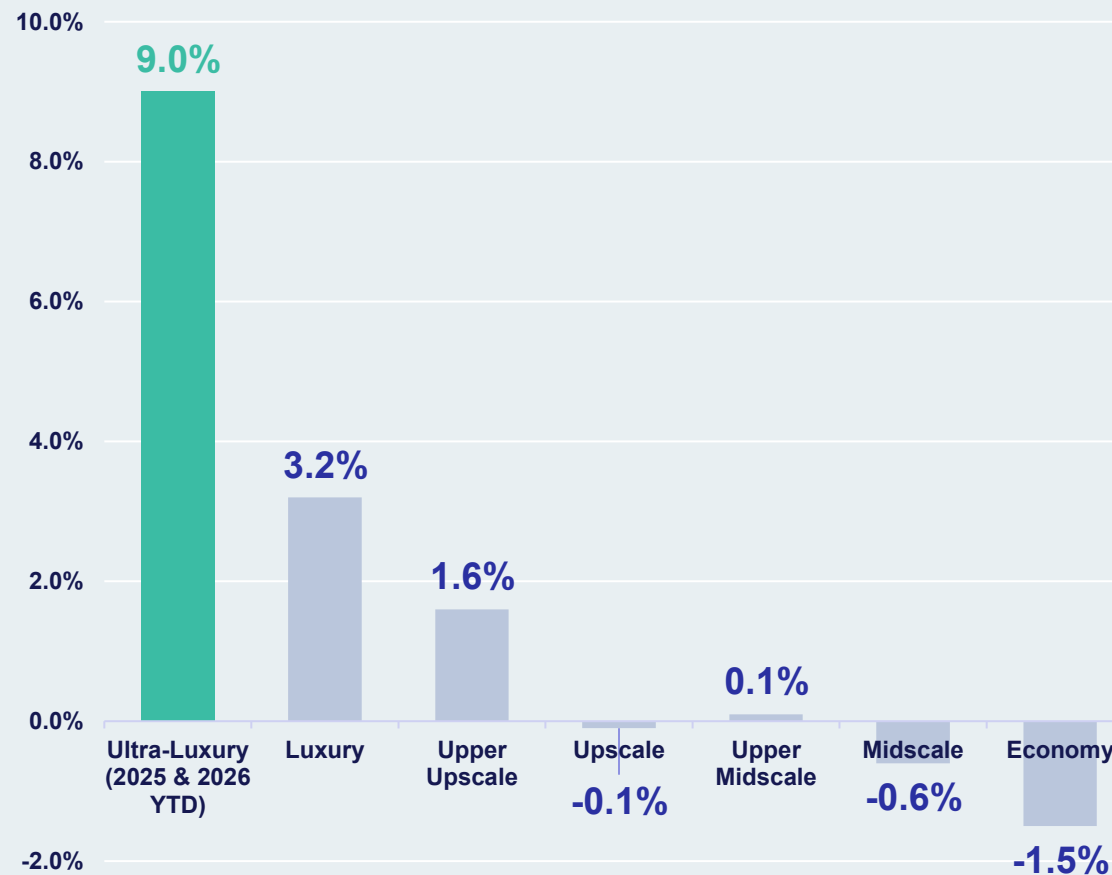
Hotel Rate Forecast

The story isn't new: high-end hotels are enjoying strong pricing power while the lower end struggles.

But the latest data shows an even further widening gap between the have's and have-not's of the hotel world.

All three of the highest-end hotel tiers saw further acceleration in rates since our last update, while the three lowest tiers saw further deceleration.

2026 U.S. Hotel Rate Forecast by Chain Scale YoY % Change



*Source: CoStar/STR, updated February 25, 2026; Ultra-Luxury is a Maritz classification.

Budgeting for 2026-2028

The latest data reinforces our guidance from last month: Budget a 2-4% increase each year to achieve the same program in 2026-2028 as in 2025. If your program meets any of the following characteristics, a 5-10% increase is recommended.



In popular locations or held overseas (vacation hotspots and major cities)



At peak times of year for that location (consider both conferences and tourism)

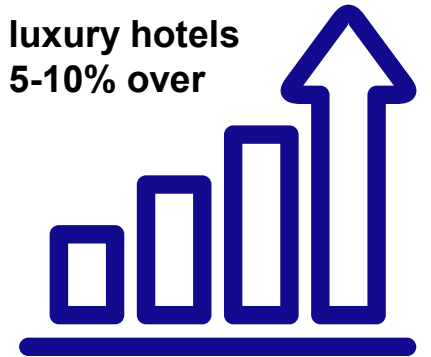


Luxury oriented (e.g. high-end hotels, premium airfares)

Establishing Your Benchmark

For programs with these characteristics, a minimum 5-10% yearly increase in budget is likely needed to achieve the same program experience year over year. A few data points:

- **Maritz air teams assume a 6% yearly increase in ticket prices when creating budgets**
- **Our sourcing teams anticipate luxury hotels increasing rates an average of 5-10% over the coming years**



If your program meets these characteristics, a 5-10% yearly budget increase is likely needed to achieve the same program experience

Idea Spotlight

You asked – we answered.
By client request, each month
we'll share an idea or
story that caught our eye.

Small Event Materials. Big Sustainability Wins.

Sometimes big sustainability gains at events come from rethinking the basics.

From badges to signage, event materials are a big source of waste. But with a few smart shifts, clients can reduce their footprint, cut costs and still deliver standout brand experiences. Maritz has [teamed up with the University of Texas - Austin](#) to identify and quantify where conferences can reduce their carbon footprint.

The Opportunity

Event materials are often **over-personalized, over-produced and under-used**. The result? Excess waste, unnecessary emissions and missed chances for reuse.

Why It Matters

- Guests are noticing and calling out waste
- Clients are asking for measurable carbon reductions
- Sustainable choices often lead to **operational efficiency and cost savings**



The Takeaway

The most sustainable events aren't about doing more – they're about doing **better**.

When sustainability is built into planning from the start, simple material decisions can:

- Reduce waste
- Lower emissions
- Save money
- Strengthen the brand

Read on for specific ideas on how exactly you can do this.



The Smarter Approach

We talked directly with our travel directors and sustainability leaders, and here's what leading event teams are doing differently:

→ Print only what you need, when you need it

- On-site, on-demand printing for badges and letterhead reduces waste from no-shows and last-minute changes
- Fewer shipments = lower freight emissions and a smaller carbon footprint

→ Design for reuse, not one-and-done

- Generic company branding (no dates, no event names) allows materials and merchandise to live beyond a single event
- Reusable signage also extends brand impact
- Gifts and giveaways that feature just the company's logo (versus event-specific branding) have more opportunities for reuse or re-gifting

→ Choose materials that do more

- Switching from foam core to sustainable alternatives like falcon board improves recyclability and can lower costs
- Sustainable swaps can also help the budget

→ Be intentional with suppliers

- Source locally when possible
- Prioritize responsibly made products (like ethically produced lanyards and signage)

→ Give materials a second life

- Unused notebooks, poster boards and supplies can be donated to local schools and organizations
- Sustainability doesn't end when the event does; it shows up in the communities you leave behind



Coming this Spring

There's a lot more
where this came from.

This spring, look for Maritz's new report,

**"NextGen-
Proofing Your
Event."**

We'll share the latest research and
recommendations to capture the up-and-coming
attendee and earn their loyalty.



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