

BUILDING SPONSOR-WORTHY EVENT EXPERIENCES

By Maximizing Attendee Value

STOVA

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How to Bring Sponsors into a High-Value Attendee Event Experience

Introduction

Due to shrinking budgets, rising sustainability concerns, and a newfound penchant for working from home, attendees' priorities have changed. While virtual events never really matured to entirely meet the needs of the event industry, their convenience and typically lower price point for attendees remain compelling reasons to include virtual options for content-heavy programs.

Moreover, attendees need a good reason to come to events in person now more than ever — and it shows in the attendance of major trade shows, which has yet to reach 2019 levels (and may not for quite some time). Indeed, according to [Skift Meetings](#):

77% of planners are finding it harder to attract attendees

73% are reporting lower attendance.

People may be craving in-person connection following years of isolation, but it's not clear that they are turning to business events to satisfy that need.

The relatively lower onsite traffic at events is forcing many corporate sponsors and exhibitors to reevaluate their participation in trade shows. For them, the return on investment (ROI) of these shows traditionally corresponds to the size of the audience as only a fraction of a crowd of highly qualified attendees will convert to future sales. They want to be where their customers and competitors are, but without the numbers on the show floor, a booth might not be enough to stand out and get the ROI they need to justify returning year after year.

Given this new reality in the meetings and events industry, how do you reconcile the attendee's new virtual-oriented habits and desire for a curated, high-value experience in person? Additionally, how do you ensure the event is a source for high-value leads that create converting opportunities and pipeline.

We created this guide to help you meet both imperatives to ensure that attendees and sponsors get the most value possible from your event experience, whether virtual or in person.

What do attendees want from business events now?

In order to create high-engagement sponsorship opportunities, it's important to understand what attendees are looking for in post-pandemic business events and what they will consider valuable enough to take on the added cost of attending in person.

Given the increased access to online content and virtual alternatives, one of the most valuable aspects of in-person events is the ability to make high-value connections between attendees, and between attendees and sponsors — an area in which many virtual-only events have yet to deliver at the level of in-person events.

64% of planners report that their attendees are more interested in networking at events than pre-pandemic.

Meanwhile, content is still important, but the more personalized and collaborative it can be, the better. Attendees are looking for content that is curated for and targeted to them, and that allows for collaboration and discussion with fellow event-goers. Useful programming, such as key industry updates from industry leaders, will attract interest.

In addition, events that can provide expedited research opportunities and a shortlist of business partner prospects will have a leg up. Attendees ultimately want their attendance to make business sense and to be able to take advantage of opportunities to connect and learn in a way they wouldn't be able to otherwise.



6

ENGAGING AREAS OF SPONSORSHIP THAT GO BEYOND THE BOOTH

How does this translate into high-value sponsorship opportunities?

Keeping attendees' needs in mind, here are six avenues for sponsorship that speak to what matters to audiences and, in turn, provide high-value leads to keep sponsors happy.

1. Sponsored Networking

Improve adoption and capitalize on real-estate

Since networking is likely to be most attendees' number-one priority, it's a clear point of engagement that presents various sponsorship opportunities. Within a modern event technology stack, sponsors will have the opportunity to brand digital assets, such as the mobile app and – if the event is virtual or hybrid – the event platform. Ensure both offer prominent real estate for sponsors to include things like banner ads.

When curating a networking experience for your event, be sure to use a technology solution with a user-friendly interface that reflects what attendees are used to in order to increase adoption. When it comes to chat and video conferencing, your technology doesn't need to reinvent the wheel.

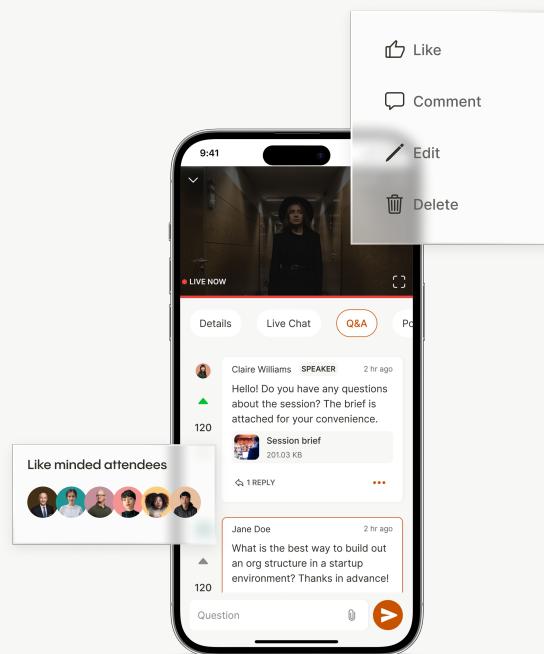
1. Sponsored Networking

Increase networking engagement through targeted spaces and activations

Sponsored onsite happy hours or networking sessions are also great ways for event partners to gain more exposure while facilitating an activity that attendees are seeking out. Possible session formats include speed networking, round tables, and birds of a feather sessions. The latter works particularly well as a sponsored session when the topic is related to the sponsor's company, so they can add useful information to the conversation. Happy hours or more casual networking events also present an opportunity for an activity such as a photo booth, which is fun, social-media friendly, and can be branded.

Focus on increasing the value of connections

Networking technology should empower attendees to make high-value connections with prospective partners and other stakeholders, allowing sponsors to improve the qualification process so they can spend more time with better leads. The [Stova mobile app](#), for example, includes AI-powered matchmaking that helps create a more personalized and effective networking experience for attendees. Event organizers can take advantage of the app's customizable registration module to ask about and capture relevant attendee info and areas of interest. The app will then use this data to recommend connections that will deliver the most value for each attendee based on their interests and activity within the app.

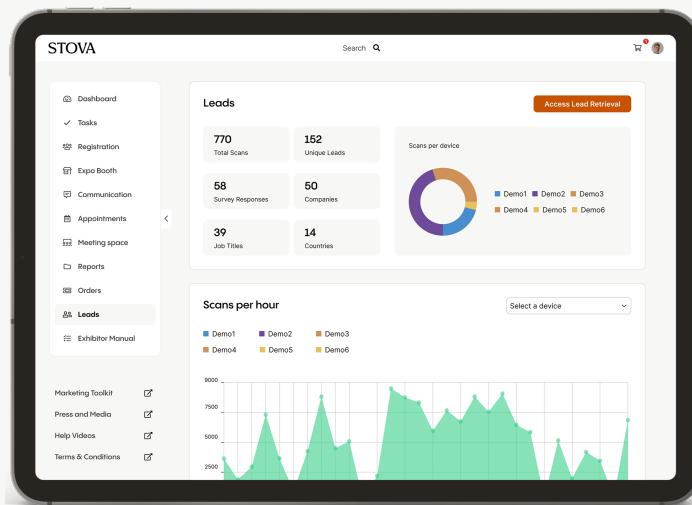


Proximity networking can take this one step further by notifying attendees with a location-enabled smartphone when they're near a session, connection, or activation that they might want to check out — further boosting high-value connections for both attendees and sponsors. In-app alerts to attendees may also be sponsored for added exposure.

1. Sponsored Networking

Improve direct connections with exhibitors

Using Stova's exhibitor resource center, [ExpoPro](#), exhibitors and sponsors can easily schedule meetings with leads as they make connections, manage appointments, and qualify leads as meetings take place. They can also analyze attendee data in real-time to make sure they're managing their time wisely, as well as view and respond to messages from buyers, ensuring a great experience for both parties.



2. Sponsored Collaborative Projects and Education

Providing collaborative and interactive educational opportunities is key to keeping attendees engaged and creating a high-value experience that sponsors can be brought into.

Give sponsors an active role in educating the audience

Depending on the event type, some options may include sponsored professional training, hands-on workshops, etc. Choose topics that are germane to your industry but in which your sponsor is a knowledgeable authority to ensure the content features them as an industry expert without becoming a transparent sales pitch.

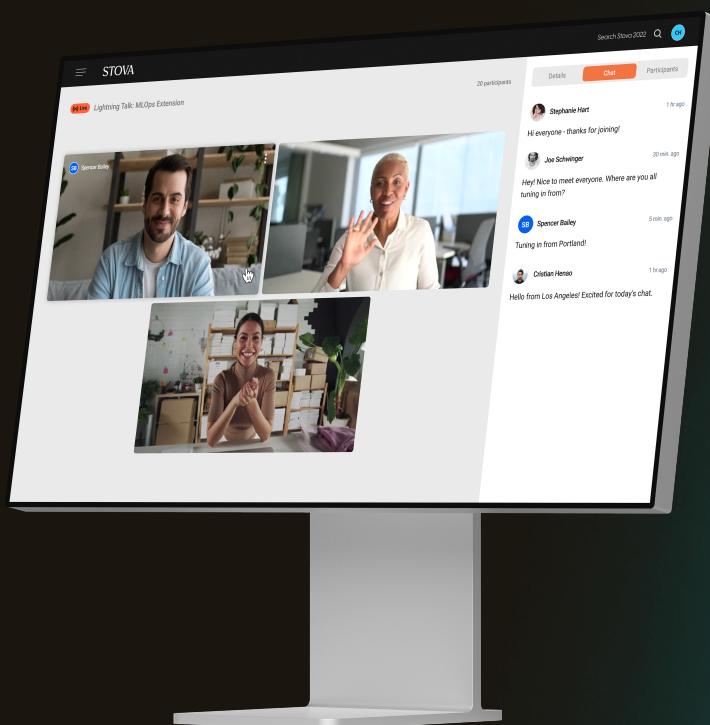
Since certain training and workshops can't be done virtually, these offerings serve as a big selling point for in-person events. That said, choose a platform that allows for on-demand recorded content to get more mileage out of that sponsor engagement after the event.

2. Sponsored Collaborative Projects and Education

Allow sponsors and attendees to co-create and co-curate the content

Capitalize on sponsor expertise with sponsored Q&A sessions or discussions where small groups of attendees have a chance to ask questions live. Host a session around a specific theme and ask sponsors to moderate breakout workshops. As long as they don't require hands-on activities, these types of sessions may be held virtually or in a hybrid format using technology with breakout capabilities and collaborative features, such as [Stova's virtual platform](#).

Allowing attendees to break into small groups will both create a more tailored experience for the attendees and offer more face time for sponsors. Sponsors can similarly host office hours in which attendees can jump into a video call with a company representative during set hours to request more information or ask any questions they may have – which also helps sponsors cultivate and identify warm leads.



3. Sponsored Content and Speaking Ops

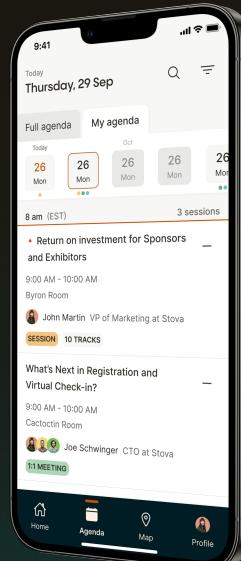
Sponsored sessions are arguably a logically simpler way to connect an audience with a sponsoring brand while still providing educational value to attendees. Depending on the sponsorship level, sponsored sessions and speaking opportunities may include keynote moderation, a slot on a panel discussion, a moderating or leadership role in a discussion group.

Make sure the sponsor-educators are topically relevant

The key to incorporating sponsored content is to ensure that sessions and speakers are thoughtfully curated and that sponsors don't feel shoehorned in — sessions or talking points that come off as too promotional will not have the intended effect and will risk turning off attendees, which will end up being a negative experience for everyone involved. However, sponsors that fit in seamlessly with the event and session topics will benefit attendees and earn more high-value leads.

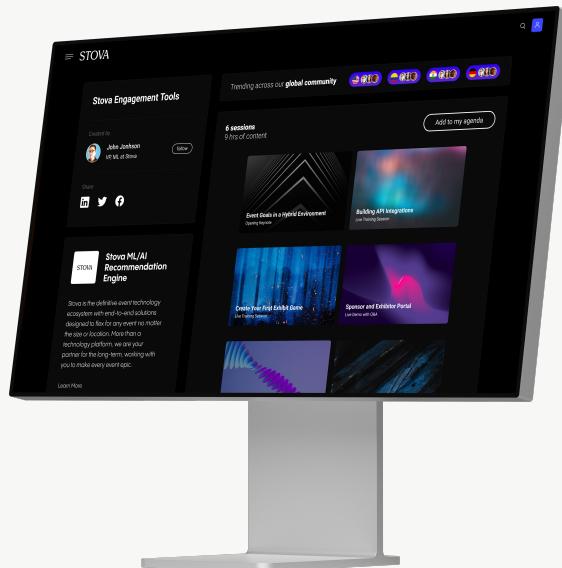
Use technology to allow attendees to engage with educational content on their own terms

Using technology to help disseminate partnered content assets will ensure maximum exposure during the event — both onsite and virtually — and that their shelf life extends far beyond the event's end date on demand. For example, the [Stova app](#) includes a content portal for sponsors to share useful content with attendees. On their end, attendees can use the app to access downloadable assets and resources, including videos, presentations, and more.



3. Sponsored Content and Speaking Ops

Meanwhile, [Stova's virtual platform](#) can host on-demand content for a certain period of time post-event so that attendees can check out content they may have missed or re-visit sessions they found particularly valuable. The platform also includes virtual booths, which sponsors can use as a content and information hub for remote attendees, and supports varied formats for virtual sessions, including pre-recorded, live, and simu-live. The latter is often an ideal option for sponsored sessions as it allows for live participation from the sponsor through the chat while the session takes place, boosting engagement from attendees.



Experiment with new formats and interfaces for consuming content

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) content is becoming more popular, with many attendees looking for immersive and interactive experiences. These technologies, while still in their relatively early stages, can be used for creative activations and content as long as they make sense and are not gimmicky. For example, certain practical applications such as AR wayfinding may present an interesting avenue for sponsorships.

Use the sponsor to produce thought leadership that can be shared ahead of the event

Another digital asset that can provide value for attendees, exposure for sponsors, and SEO for your own organization is a co-sponsored event listicle. Work with one or more sponsors to create an article that includes helpful content for attendees. If done well, articles like these can help to build hype around your event and reinforce your brand's industry authority. Topics may include a list of can't-miss sessions, activities to check out nearby, education on some of the fundamental and novel themes within the event, etc. The article can then be promoted by both the event organizer and sponsor before and during the event.

4. Sponsored Bleisure

Bleisure, the combination of business and leisure, has become especially popular following the pandemic. According to a [recent report](#) from the American Hotel & Lodging Association:

89% of business travelers want to add a private holiday to their business trips.

In addition, wellness has become a huge focus for event-goers in recent years: over a third of respondents to a recent [Hilton study](#) indicated that they will prioritize the ability to address and improve their mental health while on the road.

Let sponsors play a role in bleisure planning

These growing trends provide several opportunities to get sponsors involved and allow them to associate their brands with a rewarding and relaxing event experience. For example, a simple sponsorship may include a branded list of recommendations for activities and restaurants in the area that is shared with all attendees and stored on the event app.



Involve sponsors in meaningful activities

Wellness activities present a unique opportunity for sponsors to facilitate creative and meaningful experiences that are tailored to the event's target demographic. Have a sponsor fund an outing within a destination city that allows participants to learn more about the local history or culture, or to address a broader issue of social importance like a conservation project or a diversity initiative. This will not only connect participants with the sponsor's brand but associate it with shared values.

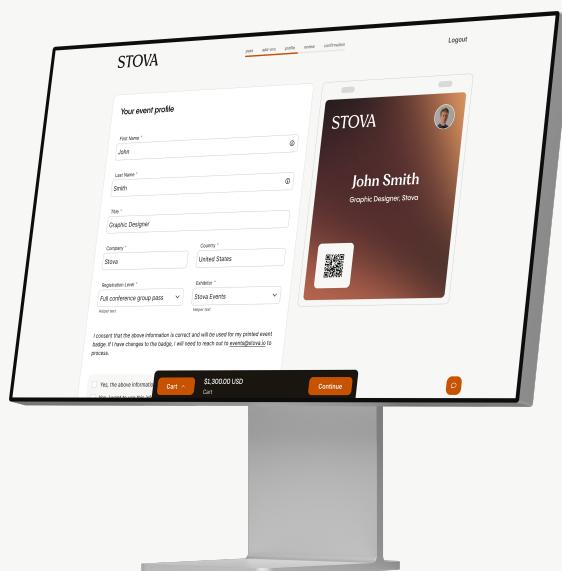
Create positive associations with sponsor brands

Similarly, allow sponsors to create spaces throughout the event where guests can relax and unwind with snacks and beverages and sponsored activities such as a meditation class, stretch breaks between sessions, sponsored gym passes, or a scenic morning group run.

4. Sponsored Bleisure

Use technology to ensure sponsored extracurriculars run smoothly

To make things easy for attendees, use technology that lets people sign up for activities, reserve placements if necessary, and connect with people who are interested in similar things. Stova's [custom registration](#) and [website-building](#) features allow event organizers to share important information and promote sponsored activities that attendees can participate in. In addition, sign-ups for activities can be included on the registration form – having limited spots tends to build interest and excitement.



5. Sponsored Digital Assets

If your audience does stay home, give sponsors access to them there

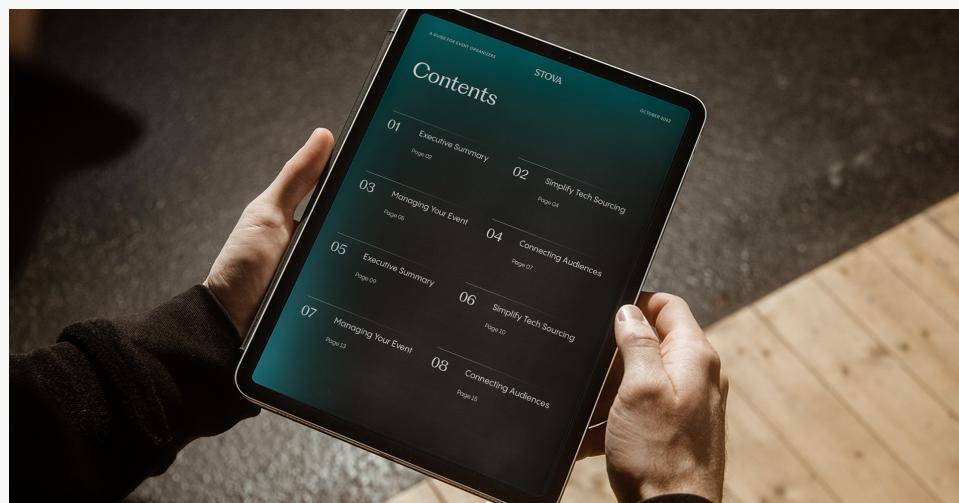
One upside of the pandemic has been the rise of digital tools and the ability to easily incorporate them into any event, even if in-person is now the priority. Including the option to attend virtually gives attendees who want to stay home the ability to participate, and as a bonus, digital formats often have much better engagement tracking than in-person.

This also makes digital assets a high-potential opportunity for sponsors to get their brand in front of attendees. Fold branded real estate on the mobile app and virtual platform into sponsorship packages. Sponsor packages can include branded banner ads, splash screens, or even the entire app/platform.

4. Sponsored Digital Assets

Set sponsors up to cooperate with you on event promotion

Specify promotional activities that you will undertake to bolster engagement digitally. Prepare social media assets as part of your team's promotional activities, and then share them with sponsors so they have something to promote on their own socials, thereby creating a reciprocal buzz effect.



Incorporate multimedia assets on digital platforms

Make the most of the platform's capabilities by incorporating video assets as well, such as sponsor demos, pre-recorded sessions or exclusive interviews. On-demand content hosted on the platform can also be viewed by in-person attendees who may have had to miss concurrent sessions, so branding digital spaces increases visibility for both online and onsite audiences.

6. Sponsored Gamification

Gamification is an effective way to make the event experience more fun and engaging for attendees and [boost traffic for exhibitors](#), and it can be incorporated at both in-person and virtual events.

Incentivize sponsor engagement using points and prizes

Attendees may earn points for attending a session, viewing a video, visiting exhibitor booths, or completing an event scavenger hunt. Feel free to get creative here. With Stova's platform, you can customize gamification activities, track completed tasks, award points, and offer prizes to the winners.

6. Sponsored Gamification

Just remember to stagger point thresholds and associated prizes so that everyone can play and nobody feels like they're too far behind the leaderboard to care what happens in the game. Set up prizes or event perks incrementally so attendees always have a reward that's just beyond their reach to motivate them to get to the next level.



Let sponsors in on the prizes or let them brand the game itself

The game itself can be presented by a sponsor, and a leaderboard is a great place to include some additional branding. Meanwhile, the prizes provide an opportunity to give away sponsored swag (although not all items need to be branded). Ideally, these items should be practical and sustainable, such as a reusable tote bag that attendees can carry around the event, a compostable phone case, a fitness towel, a tree planting kit, etc.

Depending on the games and activities, attendees may be encouraged to post on socials, further increasing sponsor exposure.

3

MORE TIPS FOR IMPROVING ATTENDEE- SPONSOR CONNECTIVITY

Here are some extra tips and ideas to help provide a high-value trade show experience for sponsors and attendees alike:

- **Curated sponsor trial packages**

Offer a free trial period for a selection of products that play well with others, offer integrations, or have complementary services so that attendees can explore options and capabilities before potentially making a commitment. If possible, avoid sponsors requiring payment information to access trial software subscriptions so that attendees don't need to worry about auto-renewals before they're ready.

- **Sponsor-friendly technology showcase**

Go beyond simple alphabetical exhibitor listings to allow for searching and filtering as these features turn your event technology into a research tool that empowers buyers to do research more effectively leading up to the event. For example, attendees should be able to narrow down sponsoring companies by industry, product type, etc.

- **Curated ads**

Ensure that branding aligns with relevant sessions and content for the best possible attendee experience. For example, include a certain sponsor's banner ad on session pages related to their company instead of randomly throughout the app. This ensures that attendees are seeing relevant content at all times and can help pre-qualify leads since people who click on the ads are already viewing content related to the sponsor.

Conclusion

Although in-person events are now fully back, the transition hasn't been without its challenges. Many large trade shows are still operating with reduced attendance compared to 2019, making it more difficult to attract sponsors who tend to prioritize attendance numbers.

However, having fewer attendees isn't necessarily a bad thing – it just requires some adjustment on the part of both the event organizer and the sponsor. Smaller crowds allow for more personalized and targeted experiences, which is what many attendees are looking for in post-pandemic events. When done right, these experiences also provide excellent sponsorship opportunities that provide sponsors with high-value connections and qualified leads.

LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW

**STOVA can help you create
engaging experiences for attendees
and provide high ROI for sponsors**

Contact us today to book a demo with one of our event experts.

[Book a Demo](#)