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## 2019 PLANNER SOURCING REPORT

GLOBAL EDITION

cvent

# Introduction

## WELCOME TO THE GLOBAL EDITION OF THE 2019 CVENT PLANNER SOURCING REPORT.



Inside, you will find the results and insights of a Cvent-commissioned online survey, administered to event planners working in several global regions and covering the following key questions:

- What do planners expect in a relationship with a venue professional?
- What are event planners' processes and tools for sourcing venues?
- What needs or pain points do planners have during their sourcing efforts?
- How have planners' venue sourcing preferences, needs, and activities changed over time?

In total, 2,650 qualified individuals responded to the survey. To qualify for the study, participants had to be over 18 years of age, reside in North America, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, or South Africa, and be one of [seven types of event planners](#).



The results of this survey showed a remarkable commonality in responses across regions. Cvent expects to provide regional detail and distinctions as we publish additional results from the survey throughout the remainder of 2019.

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# Who We Surveyed

## MOST PLANNERS SURVEYED WERE MID-CAREER CORPORATE PROFESSIONALS; A SLIGHT MAJORITY WERE MILLENNIALS

- 85% of planners surveyed work full-time.
- 69% surveyed have received training as event planners.
- 64% surveyed primarily plan events for their own organization.

Fifteen percent work for their own association, and 3% work in government or as a SMERF (Social, Military, Education, Religious, and Fraternal groups) planner. The geographic profile of planners who participated in the global edition of the 2019 Cvent Planner Sourcing Report survey is consistent with our 2017 and 2018 global surveys. They made up a global sample of 58% from North America, and 42% split between EMEA (Europe, the Middle East, and Africa) and Asia.

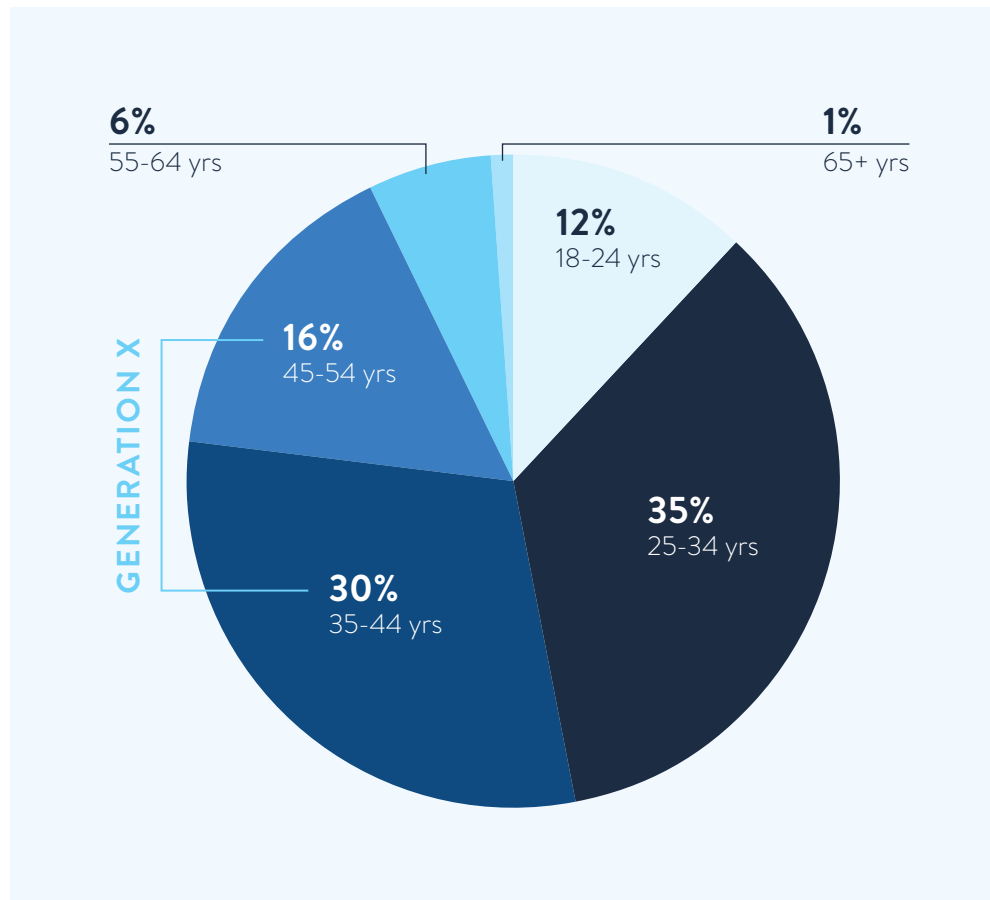
The respondents represent a corporate planner profile of a mid-career, experienced professional working across a broad selection of industries. Most have between six and 15 years of experience, with common job titles like director/manager of events, or meeting and event planner. It reflects a group of skilled professionals who are accustomed to planning corporate events as their primary role, and doing so within a small, hands-on planning team.

### TAKEAWAY FOR VENUES:

Planners are busy, hands-on multi-taskers. Save them time and make their day a little easier.

# Who We Surveyed

## THE ERA OF THE YOUTHFUL PLANNER?



- 12% surveyed are generation Z (ages 18-24)
- 35% surveyed are millennials (ages 25-34)
- 46% surveyed are generation X (ages 35-54)

This year, younger generations voiced their opinions in a big way: Close to 80% of respondents are aged 44 or younger, and 47% would qualify as either a millennial or within the generation Z cohort.



# Key Findings

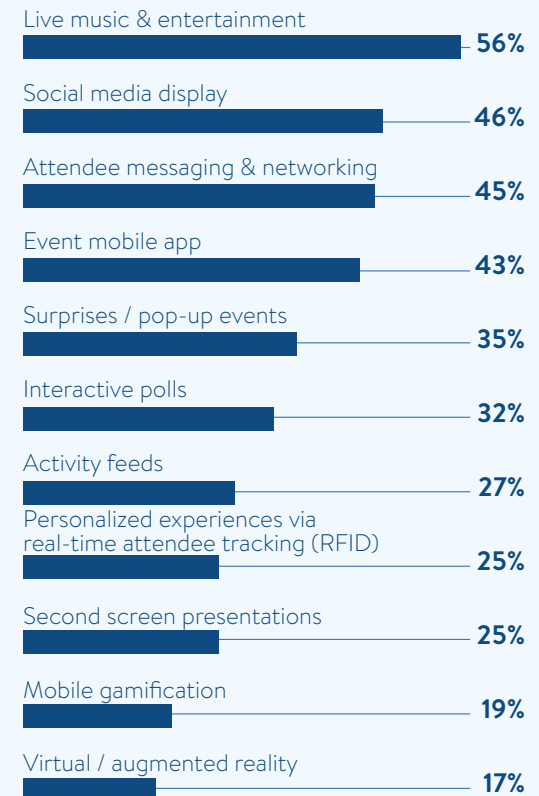
Event planners are busy people.

And if that sounds obvious, look a little closer: Planners are getting busier in all aspects of their workday, managing more events with more attendees, and handling larger budgets. What emerges is the unmistakable profile of a multi-tasking professional who has more to do – and increasingly high expectations of what hoteliers should provide. Hotels and venues that anticipate and meet these expectations can expect to develop a strong partnership with planners. On the other hand, this is an environment in which planners have no time to waste with venues that deliver partially complete RFP responses, inadequate communication, or bad service.

So just how busy are planners? Thirty-seven percent of respondents say they organize 50 or more events per year, and 16% plan more than 100 events per year. Add to that an increase in attendance for most types of events (over 50% say attendance has increased). Planners have also seen budgets increase for events – and expect budgets to continue to go up for essential allocations such as food and beverage (55% expect an increase). In addition, while control of budgets is mostly in the hands of planners and managers, other departments such as marketing and finance have influence as stakeholders and approvers.

Of course, this increase in the quantity of events doesn't allow for a decrease in quality – or expectations. Planners are under pressure to create compelling, tightly managed and financially successful event experiences. With more on the line, they say they expect event experiences that increasingly leverage live entertainment, digital touchpoints like social media, and creative alternatives such as pop-up events. “Be here now” entertainment is how most planners most often make their events memorable. For example, **56% leverage live entertainment such as music, and 35% use pop-up events and surprises.** High-tech options such as virtual/augmented reality and mobile gamification are less common.

## Strategies Used to Enhance Attendee Experience



# Key Findings

## How should hotels respond?

Faced with expectations from their own organizations, planners turn to venues for help – something that starts long before the event begins. They want hoteliers to be visible, responsive, and precise during the RFP process. They expect venues to invest in collaborative technologies that automate reservation management and meeting room layout planning. With more events to plan, the margin of error is smaller, and the time planners have to focus on just one event is compressed. The expectation is transparency, professionalism and efficiency.

Note these key findings that reflect planners' requirements and preferences when engaging venues:

- **Nearly half (44%) of planners cite** communication problems as the reason for choosing to not submit an RFP to a venue. They expect speed and thoroughness when engaging with venues; the absence of these can limit a venue's opportunity to be considered for an event.
- **Over 70% of planners expect cost savings of at least 6%** before considering a switch to a second-choice venue. Venues that win business do so because they compete and win not principally on price but on satisfying other planner needs.
- **Forty-five percent of planners rank event space and layout as the most influential element in their venue selection.** That's even with cost and slightly ahead of dates (42%), and location (42%).
- **Almost 50% of planners say they manage room blocks manually,** but 59% would prefer a tech-driven solution.
- **More than half (59%) of planners will not return to a venue due to a lack of professionalism** among hotel staff.

Overall, the message from this year's Cvent Planner Sourcing Report is this: Planners are busy. They're searching for hoteliers who provide a collaborative partnership that emphasizes speed, efficiency and an exceptional event experience.



## SECTION 1:

# Welcome to the very busy life of today's event planner

Think for a moment about what goes into creating and managing a typical event – and then do it repeatedly over the course of a year. According to Cvent's [Day in the Life of an Event Planner](#), every one of these events goes through 10 distinct lifecycle stages, from strategy to sourcing, travel, housing, logistics and more.

The conclusion? Being an event planning professional is a high pressure, complicated job – and one that's getting busier. Nearly 40% of planners surveyed say they organize more than 50 events per year – and 16% plan over 100 events.

In this section we'll look at how busy planners have become, as well as the tactics they use to keep pace.

## PLANNERS HAVE MORE MEETINGS TO PLAN AND ATTENDEES TO MANAGE

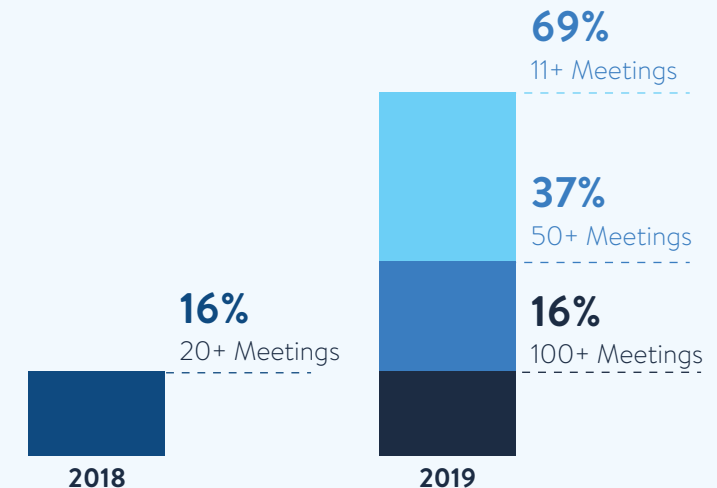
- 69% of respondents manage 11 or more events per year.
- 37% say they organize 50 or more events per year.
- 16% plan more than 100 events per year.
- More than 50% of planners surveyed say that attendance at most of the primary meeting types has increased.

Planners sit at the forefront of a growing industry, a reality that translates into busy days, long hours and extreme multi-tasking.

In addition to a heavier meeting load, most planners are now faced with increased attendance at events. Across the eight event types identified in the survey, more than 50% of respondents say attendance saw increased attendance for all but one – Annual, Board, or Shareholder meetings. Fundraisers (said 59% of planners), trade shows (56%), and conferences (56%) had increased in attendance compared with last year.

This trend toward more attendees across a large portfolio of managed meetings underlines the importance hoteliers should place on making every interaction with a planner quick and service oriented. Planners simply do not have the time to waste on inefficiency or miscommunication. In fact, 44% say that they have lost interest in a venue because of poor communication.

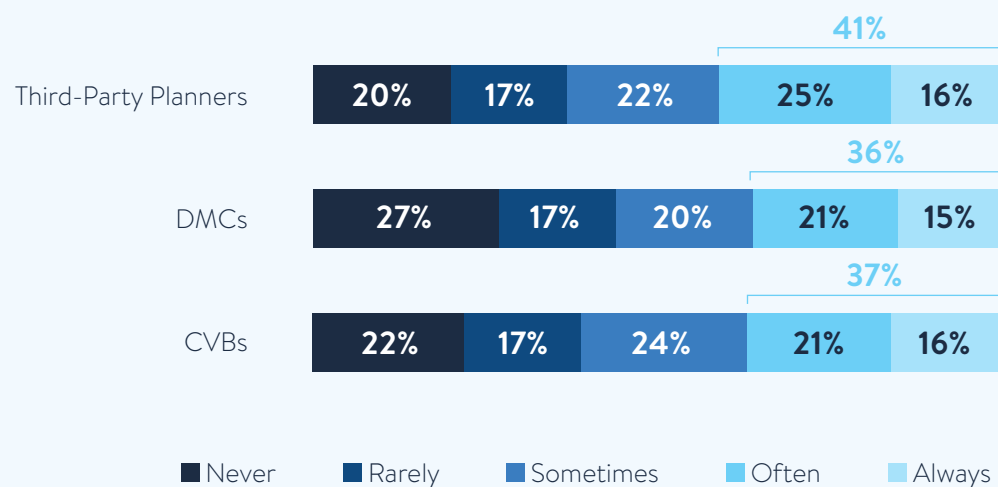
### Number of Events Planners Handled in 2019 Compared to 2018



**TAKEAWAY FOR VENUES:** Planners are busier than ever, so make communication prompt and efficient. Answer questions and be transparent up front. The time you save a planner may well be rewarded with an increased chance of winning the business.

## PLANNERS FREQUENTLY SEEK OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE FROM EXTERNAL RESOURCES

### Frequency of Planning Collaborations



- 41% often or always use third-party planners.
- 36% often or always leverage Destination Management Companies (DMCs).
- 37% often or always seek help from Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs).

The reality of handling so many meetings and the need to deliver a great experience may be why the number of planners who seek assistance from third-party agencies, DMCs or CVBs is so significant. Nearly half say they often or always work with external planning or destination-related organizations.

**TAKEAWAY FOR VENUES:** For busy planners, external organizations can provide support and local expertise. For hotels, it is important to build and maintain strong relationships with third party planners and DMOs.



## SECTION 2:

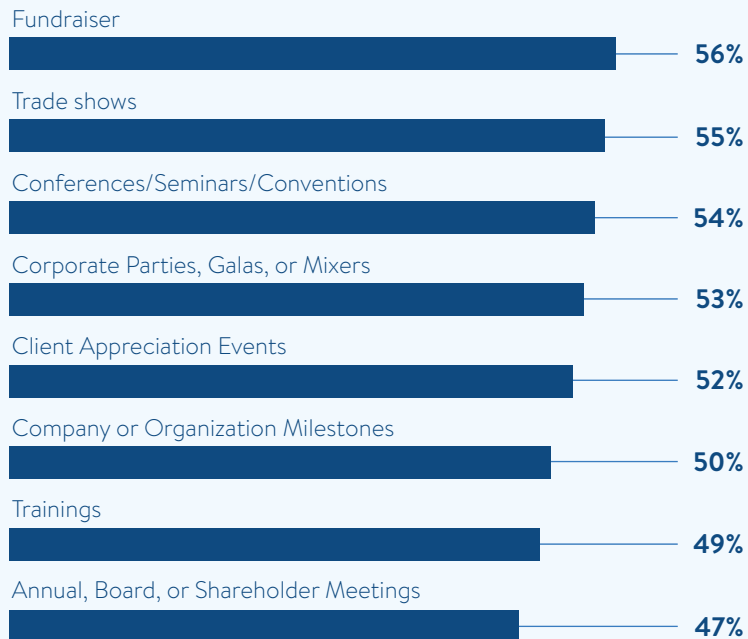
### Budgets have gone up, and planners expect more increases in specific areas

Sometimes, when the number of events go up, so do budgets. After all, busy planners need money to spend on all manner of items, from coffee consumption to rooms to speaker fees.

This year, more than half of planners say their budgets have increased for events. They also expect to see increases in specific event budget areas, such as food and beverage. Not surprisingly, with growing budgets, these planners must work with others in their organization, such as marketing and finance managers, who also have influence over event budget decisions. What emerges from the global edition of the 2019 Planner Sourcing Report is a profile of planners handling more event volume, more attendees, and more internal stakeholders.

## PLANNER BUDGETS CONTINUE TO RISE FOR CERTAIN EVENTS

### Budget Increases in the Last Year



- 56% report increases in fundraiser budgets.
- 55% report increases in trade show budgets.
- 54% report increases in conference/seminars/convention budgets.

In 2019, more than half of planners polled say that budgets have increased for events such as fundraisers (56%), trade shows (55%), and conferences/seminars/conventions (54%), and 20% of those said the increase was significant for trade shows and fund raisers. That makes sense given the number of events – and the growth in the number of attendees at these events – that planners now manage.

What's also interesting is that the increase in budgets is predominately associated with external, revenue-generating events. Fewer than 50% of planners say that budgets for non-revenue generating events, such as trainings and milestone meetings, had increased. This could reflect the increasing value of meetings and events for the marketing and sales functions in organizations, as well as the opportunity to counter increased spend with direct event revenue generated from sponsorships.

### TAKEAWAY FOR VENUES:

Budgets are going up, and it's pretty clear this is a result of increases in the number of events and attendees.

## MOST PLANNERS THINK BUDGETS FOR F&B, VENUE SERVICES, AND CLIENT ENTERTAINMENT ARE MOST LIKELY TO INCREASE

- 55% expect increases in food and beverage budgets.
- 54% expect increases in travel budgets.
- 52% expect increases in venue budget.

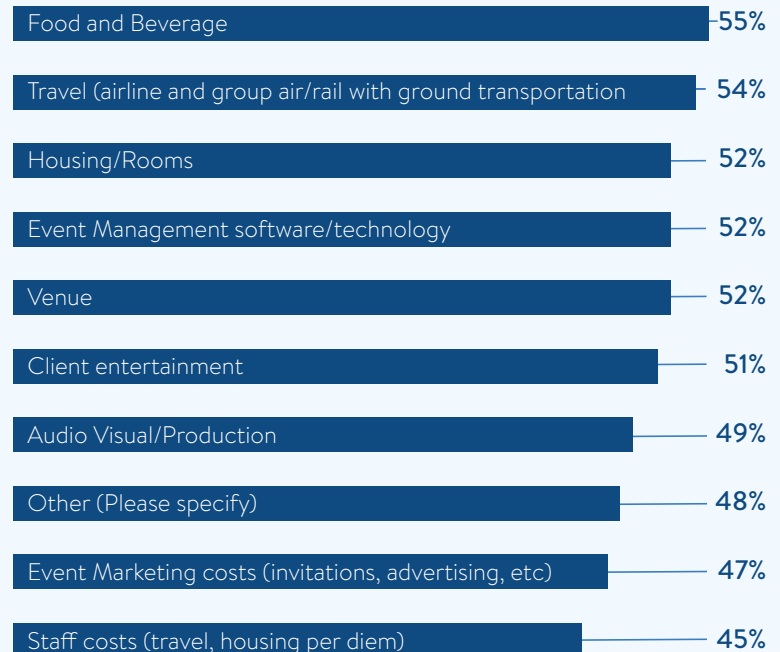
Regardless of event type, overall majorities of planners think budget allocations for essential expenses such as food and beverage (55%), travel (54%), and venues (52%) will increase. This reflects the practical reality that as the number of attendees at events increase, so too do costs associated with attendance, like food and beverage. It may also be a nod toward the emerging importance of dining experiences as a part of any event. Planners expect – and hoteliers are delivering – more diverse and exciting food choices.

Client entertainment is also cited as an area of possible budget growth (51%), along with audio/visual expenses (49%).



According to the Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants 2019 Culinary + Cocktail Trend Forecast, 80% of chefs plan to feature a vegan or raw dish on their menu. What fresh ideas are you offering planners who expect an increase in F&B budget?

### Expected Budget Increases



## PLANNERS SAY MARKETING, FINANCE, AND EVENT PLANNING DEPARTMENTS ARE MOST INVOLVED IN BUDGETING

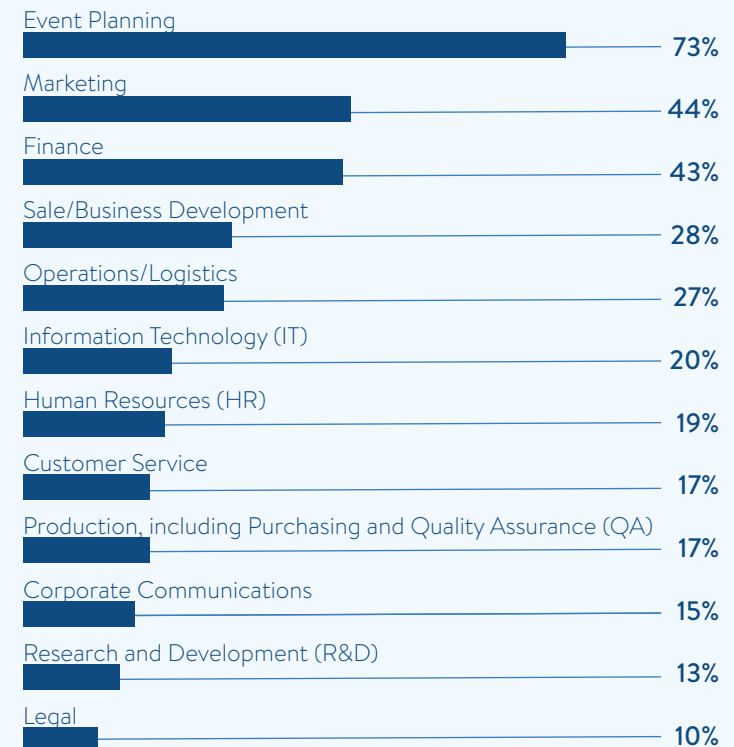
- 73% say event planning departments are involved in event budgets.
- 44% identify marketing departments as being involved.
- 43% say finance departments are involved with event budgets.

When asked about who was most involved with budgeting for events, planners say their own departments are largely in charge, from the allocation of budget to sign-off and approval. In fact, 56% surveyed say meeting and event managers are involved in approving an event budget, and 29% have final sign-off.

The results, however, also suggest that other departments have influence on budgets and spend. This may reflect the continued evolution of group business as a diverse marketing and communications tool for companies. Events play an increasingly important and cross-departmental role in a broad assortment of corporate objectives – all of which may mean that more groups have more to say about event planning budget decisions.

**TAKEAWAY FOR VENUES:** Chances are good that additional corporate stakeholders beyond the planner alone are influencing an organization's event budget. It is important for venues to be aware of these influencers.

### Departments Involved in Event Budgeting





## SECTION 3:

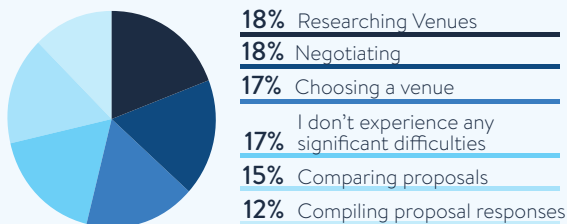
### Today's multi-tasking planner prioritizes speed, efficiency and professionalism

Longer days can make for a testy planner. And when that happens, things like late RFP responses with mistakes and omissions can make them rule out a return engagement.

Today, it's first about an efficient, professional relationship between planner and venue, then a compelling event experience built on trust and collaboration. In this section, we take a look at how planners handle sourcing and booking decisions, and dive into planner expectations around service standards and technology – two areas of critical importance.

## PLANNERS HAVE DIFFICULTIES AT SEVERAL POINTS IN THE SOURCING PROCESS; MOST ARE RELATED TO THE AMOUNT OF TIME IT TAKES

### Difficulties with Sourcing

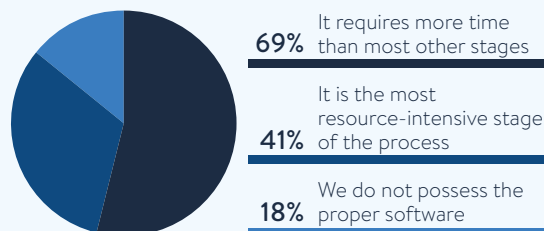


- 81% experience difficulties sourcing, from negotiations to research and RFP responses. Of those...
- 80% who say researching is difficult cite the amount of time it takes.
- 69% who have difficulty comparing proposals cite the time required.

Planners have difficulty with sourcing – but it's not necessarily due to one specific part of the process. In fact, problems occur at multiple points in the experience, from researching (18%) to negotiating (18%) and comparing proposals (15%).

So – what is it that has planners frustrated about sourcing? It's time – as in the amount of time it takes to complete a step. Eighty percent of planners who say researching venues is difficult cited the time it requires, and 69% who have difficulty comparing proposals also cite the time required.

### Please explain why you experience the most difficulty in selected stage



Overall, busy planners are telling hoteliers to be efficient and get to the point, so that they can make timely decisions that help deliver a great event and also allow them to focus on the next step in the process, or event. It shows the importance of speed to busy planners, and that time is a precious resource.

“

I would like to have responses as fast as possible so I can compare venues and start negotiations (that takes a lot of time). I want to meet deadlines -- and not have to rush at the last minute for all the other details.”

## COST IS JUST ONE OF MANY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PLANNERS DECIDE TO SUBMIT THEIR RFP

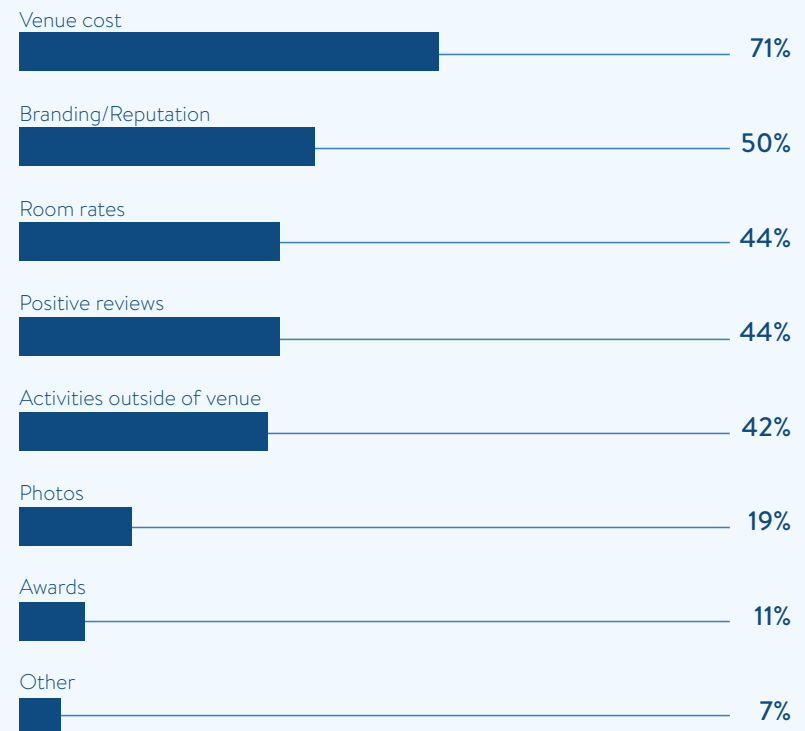
- 71% cite venue cost as one of the top three factors influencing whether to send a venue an RFP
- 50% consider brand and reputation as influential factors for determining RFP submission

When choosing which venues will receive their RFP, planners want to know the venue is in their budget range. However, there is much more than cost that goes into planners' thinking at this stage – they want to submit their RFP to venues that present a good opportunity for a compelling event experience.

Half of planners surveyed highlighted the venue's brand and reputation as a key consideration for RFP submission. More than 40% cited positive reviews (44%) and activities held outside of the venue (42%). Photos (20%) are also important. The increase in planners citing activities outside the venue (only 21% in 2018's survey) and photography (15% in 2017's survey) points again to the importance planners place on creating a strong event experience.

**TAKEAWAY:** It takes a lot more than the right price to make sure your hotel is selected to receive a RFP.

### Top 3 Resources Influencing Sourcing Decisions



## HOTELIERS IMPROVE RFP RESPONSES, BUT PLANNERS WANT IMPROVED ATTENTION TO DETAIL

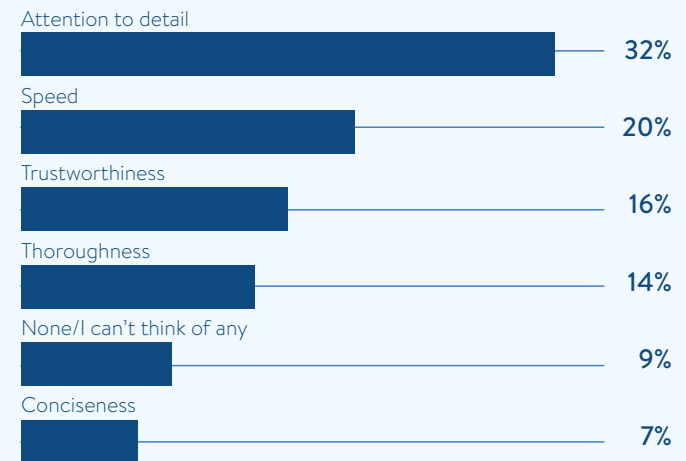
- 32% want better attention to detail in RFP responses.
- 20% look for hotels to speed up their response to RFPs.
- 16% highlight trustworthiness in RFP responses as an area for improvement.

Hoteliers continue to improve their performance in responding to RFPs. For example, just 16% say that trustworthiness is the primary area that needs improvement – a shift that compares favorably to 30% in 2018. In 2019, planners were more likely to call out hotelier quality of response as an area for improvement, with 32% of planners choosing attention to detail and 14% citing thoroughness.

“It’s the little things that matter. Most event planners are very focused on the big picture - so it really helps when the hotels/ conference centers pay very close attention to ALL the details that the planner gives them. If the planner misses something, the hotel is there to pick it up.”

“Many hotels do a one-size fits all approach. It would be great if they could have more attention to detail in the beginning and personalize it to my organization’s needs.”

### Areas to Improve RFP Responses



Hoteliers can “level up” by providing proactive solutions to planner needs. How can you make that extra effort a part of your team’s RFP response routine?

## PLANNERS SELECT VENUES BASED ON MULTIPLE CONSIDERATIONS, MOST NOTABLY LAYOUT, COST, AND LOCATION

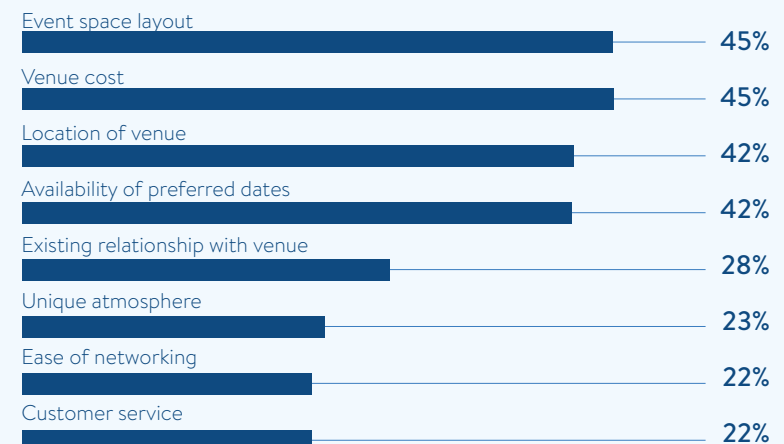
- 45% rank event space and layout as having the biggest influence on which venue they choose.
- 23% rank a venue's unique atmosphere as one of the top three influences

According to planners surveyed, the feature that has the biggest influence on their venue booking decisions is event space and layout. Forty-five percent of planners rank the details of the space first, second, or third, even with cost and ahead of location (42%), and dates (42%). It reveals the importance to the planner of ensuring a positive event experience, and is a sign that planners expect hotels to provide more flexibility and greater transparency in space design and decision-making.

The importance of non-cost factors in planners' venue booking decisions is highlighted by their reluctance to consider switching to a second-choice venue offering a lower price. Nearly 3 in 4 planners **(72%) would expect a cost savings of at least 6% before considering a switch to their second-choice venue.**

**TAKEAWAY:** Yes, cost matters in your bid to win the business. But other factors, including space layout and location and other items that play into how your venue can support an outstanding event -- matter more.

### Top Features Influencing Booking Decisions



“Every year we get proposals that say our 16x24x3 stage will fit in their ballroom with x number of chairs, and a minimum ceiling height of 11'. When it comes to the details of the contract, I look at the capacity chart and realize the hotel was incorrect -- either the square footage is too small or the ceiling is too low.”

## PLANNER LOYALTY STARTS WITH HOTELIER PROFESSIONALISM AND INCLUDES THE VENUE SELECTION PROCESS

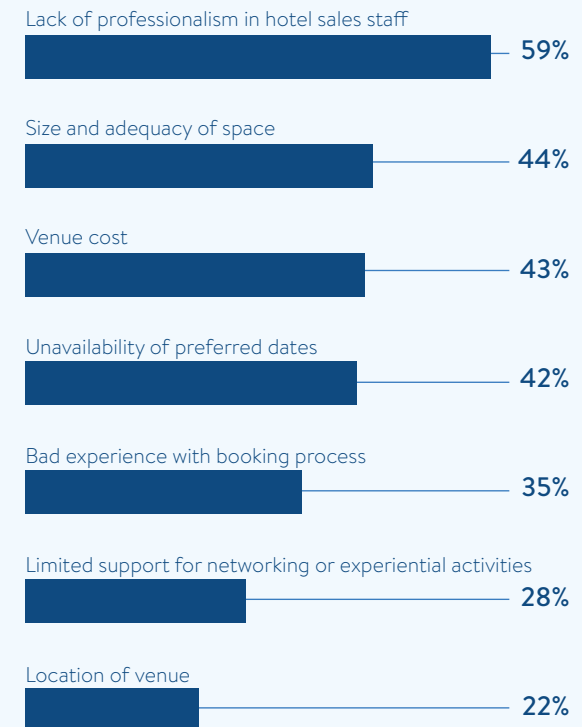
- 59% say lack of professionalism will prevent them from returning to a venue.
- 35% cite a bad experience with the venue selection process

When it's time to consider a return to a venue for an event, 59% of planners rank lack of professionalism as the most important factor preventing them from giving the venue repeat business. Many more planners cited this factor than did in 2018 (45%).

Concern over professionalism ranks higher than more obvious items like venue size (44%), cost (43%), or available dates (42%). Planners also weigh their experience of the venue booking process (35%) as a top return consideration. Of course, many factors outside the venue's control go into the return decision. Planners must consider attendee preferences, corporate stakeholder feedback, and more. But these findings underscore most important priorities for planners's relationships with venues in today's very busy and ever-changing events landscape: speed to a decision, precise and transparent information, excellent customer service and an exceptional event experience.

“Even if a venue does not provide something we want, this should be clearly stated in their RFP response. We do appreciate, however, when a venue applies lateral thinking to our needs and makes unexpected recommendations.”

### Top Factors Preventing Return to Existing Venue



## ABOUT CVENT

Cvent is the global meeting, event, travel, and hospitality technology leader. Cvent provides easy-to-use, integrated technology solutions to maximize the impact of meetings and events of all sizes. We help organizations plan and market events, execute onsite, engage audiences, and measure and analyze results.



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