



Trade Show & Events Pulse Check Survey

Feedback from professionals on how the COVID-19 coronavirus has impacted their company's trade show & event schedule, budget, workflow and when they plan to get back to exhibiting

PREPARED BY:

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exhibits • graphics • services

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Introduction

In this report, Skyline Exhibits surveyed 445 exhibiting professionals from several different industries on how the COVID-19 coronavirus has impacted their trade show and event schedule, budget, workflow and the overall effect on their business. Our overall goal was to get a quick pulse-check on what participants feel needs to be done for them to attend future trade shows and events, their opinion on alternatives to live, face-to-face meetings and when they plan to travel for shows again.

Survey Demographics

A majority of our survey respondents were in the manufacturing and industrial industry (36%), followed by professional or business service employees (17%). Computers, technology or electronics workers were third (13%), followed by those in the health care and medical industries (12%).

The majority of respondents by age were between 30 and 59 years old (68%).

Company Industry	Total	Percent
Manufacturing or Industrial	161	36%
Professional or Business Services	75	17%
Computers, Technology or Electronics	58	13%
Health Care or Medical	51	12%
Government or Public Service	19	4%
Finance or Insurance	17	4%
Hospitality, Travel or Entertainment	15	3%
Food or Beverage	14	3%
Other	33	7%

Age Range	Total	Percent
Under 20	0	0%
20-29	31	7%
30-39	73	17%
40-49	93	21%
50-59	134	30%
60-69	79	18%
Over 70	9	2%
I'd rather not say	23	5%



Of the survey respondents, the majority (65%) work in marketing or trade show management. Sales and business development positions account for 15% of respondents, while senior management (CEO, CFO, COO) account for 14%.

Position Description	Total	Percent
Marketing	195	44%
Trade Show Management	95	21%
Sales or Business Development	66	15%
Senior Management	64	14%
Project Management	11	2%
Other	14	3%

What, if anything, is your company doing to combat the disruption of the COVID-19 coronavirus in the workplace?

- Adding or adapting our product offerings
- Adding wayfinding and social distancing signage at the office
- Additional disinfection and cleaning procedures at the office
- Communication of new company policies
- Donating personal protection equipment (PPE)
- Volunteering time or giving to charities
- Educating clients on disinfection and cleaning techniques
- Employees are working remotely
- Extending invoice terms or offering free services
- Focusing more on online or digital marketing
- Holding virtual meetings or training sessions
- Manufacturing personal protection equipment (PPE)
- Office space alterations for social distancing
- Social distancing at the office
- Wearing personal protection equipment (PPE) at the office

"Our company has implemented email newsletters and social media posts with updates, curbside pick up, staff wearing masks and more sanitizing."

*Senior Manager,
Sports & Recreation*

"We are no longer bringing customers in to our building for live demonstrations of our equipment. Instead, we are providing virtual demonstrations."

*Trade Show Manager,
Manufacturing*

Employment Changes

If you work for an organization, how has your employment been affected by the COVID-19 coronavirus?

The majority of respondents (58%) indicated that they were working remotely or at home during the early months of the pandemic as state governments have ordered "shelter in place" social distancing laws for citizens. Another 19% stated that they have been unaffected, meaning they were still traveling to work daily.

Eleven percent of respondents said that their salary or hours have been reduced, while 5% said they have had to lay off other team members at their company. Only 3% of respondents have been placed on furlough or laid off.

Company Employment Status	Total	Percent
Working remotely	257	58%
Unaffected	83	19%
Salary or hours have been reduced	49	11%
Have had to lay off other team members	22	5%
I have been placed on furlough	7	2%
I have been laid off	5	1%
Change in job description	2	0%
Other	18	4%

"We've seen increased hours with a focus on online communications and alternatives to events and onsite client visits."

***Marketing Manager,
Manufacturing***

"I am temporarily employed via the Paycheck Protection Program and a SBA grant."

***Project Manager,
Small Business***

For more helpful information on how to improve your event marketing during COVID-19, visit our blog: skyline-etips.com

Postponed or Canceled Trade Shows & Events

How many of your events/trade shows have been canceled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The majority of respondents indicated that between 3 and 10 of the trade shows or events they planned to attend have been canceled so far in 2020 (54%). Twenty-four percent of respondents said that over 11 of the shows they planned to attend in 2020 were canceled. Five percent noted that none of their events have been canceled.

Events Canceled	Total	Percent
None	21	5%
1-2 events	80	18%
3-5 events	143	32%
6-10 events	96	22%
11-15 events	34	8%
16-20 events	19	4%
Over 20 events	52	12%

How many of your events/trade shows have been postponed as a result of the COVID-19 coronavirus?

Most respondents said that between 3 and 10 of their trade shows or events have been postponed in 2020 (41%). Thirty-four percent of respondents also indicated that only 1 or 2 of their events have been postponed (34%). For those that attend 11 or more shows, only 10% said that their shows have been postponed. Fifteen percent said that none of the shows or events they attend have been postponed.

Postponed Events	Total	Percent
None	68	15%
1-2 events	149	34%
3-5 events	121	28%
6-10 events	56	13%
11-15 events	10	2%
16-20 events	9	2%
Over 20 events	27	6%

1.6 million companies exhibit annually in the U.S.A.

Source: CEIR

The B2B exhibitions industry contributed over \$101B to the U.S. GDP in 2019.

Source: IAEE

What time frame best describes the earliest any of your postponed shows will take place?

The majority of survey respondents indicated that most of the trade shows or events they planned on attending, but were postponed, are scheduled to take place between August and October 2020 (56%). Twenty percent indicated that most of their shows or events will instead take place in 2021.

Postponed Show Months	Total	Percent
June	12	3%
July	42	9%
August	91	19%
September	111	23%
October	69	14%
November	31	6%
December	7	1%
Sometime in 2021	94	20%
N/A	20	4%

There are over 9,400 B2B events and over 2,000 B2C events in the U.S.A. annually.

Source: CEIR

Trade Shows & Events Outlook

What will be the driving forces for any decisions to exhibit at events/ trade shows in the second half of 2020 (regardless of whether that was the original date, or the event was re-scheduled)?

Decision Types	Total	Percent
Safety procedures are communicated and executed	123	28%
Personal decision	97	22%
Attendance restrictions or booth visitor limits	67	15%
Restrictions on airline flights	12	3%
Will not be attending live shows in 2020	9	2%
Budgets	8	2%
Expansion of show hall aisles to meet guidelines	8	2%
Until there is a proven vaccine	4	1%
All of the Above	26	6%
Other	87	20%

"The decision to attend trade shows or events will depend on if our major customers are in attendance."

*Trade Show Manager,
Manufacturing*

The top response was that safety procedures are communicated and executed, with the use of hand sanitizers, temperature checks, hand washing stations, etc. (28%). For 22%, it will be a personal decision on whether or not to exhibit at trade shows or attend events. While 15% said that they will attend if show organizers set restrictions on show attendance and the number of attendees that can be in a booth at one time.

Twenty percent of survey respondents also indicated other reasons that they will attend events in the future. Those include:

- Whether or not government "shelter in place" restrictions are lifted.
- CDC/WHO recommendations for large group gatherings.
- This will be our company's decision based on employee safety.
- Our company policy will determine if we attend, as well as the ability for customers to attend as some HCPs may be restricted by their institutions from traveling or attending large meetings.
- We are concerned that show attendance will be at an all time low this year and that will impact our decision to attend trade shows.
- The cost to cancel contracts and the availability of staff and assets for booths.
- If our partners will be hosting the shows physically or if they will be all virtual.
- I'm a senior citizen with underlying health issues. I might never return to the conference format.
- I've already paid for it and we're speaking, so it doesn't make sense not to go.
- Low attendance at shows = low ROI for that spend.
- Once sales return to pre-COVID-19 levels.
- The decision will be made depending if our major customers are in attendance.
- We need to get back to work and believe herd immunity is the answer to the end of this pandemic.
- Will the customer base actually show up. The fear is you have the total cost of the show with less than 30% of usual return.

"We will evaluate which trade shows and events we attend on a case by case basis."

*Marketing Rep,
Health Care & Medical*

"My company cannot afford to attend if customers traffic is drastically reduced."

*Senior Management,
Apparel & Personal Care*

"Our Executive Leadership team will determine our decision to travel and if we will be attending trade shows in the future. Safety is the most important piece for us."

*Trade Show Manager,
Health Care & Medical*

"Our company is reassessing whether trade shows and events are important to our business (is there a return on investment on the spend?)."

*Marketing Rep,
Business Services*

Have you considered exhibiting at or attending more local or regional events or trade shows to avoid airline travel or hotel room rental in the 2nd half of 2020?

The majority of respondents indicated that they do not plan to attend more local or regional trade shows or events in 2020 due to travel & hospitality restrictions or risks (43%). Fifteen percent said that they do plan to attend more local events (15%), while 42% indicated that it wasn't applicable or they didn't know.

Attend More Local Events?	Total	Percent
Yes	67	15%
No	192	43%
Not Applicable	115	26%
I Don't Know	69	16%

"Due to the risk associated with airline travel and hotels, we plan to attend more local and regional events in the near future."

*Senior Manager,
Computers & Technology*

When do you believe the event/trade show industry will get back to normal?

Eighty-three percent of respondents to the survey estimated that the trade show and event industry will return to "normal" after the end of 2020. Forty-one percent believe that shows will be back between January and March 2021, while 42% believe it is more likely after April 2021. Sixteen percent believe that this will happen during the 4th quarter of 2020 (September through December).

Date Range	Total	Percent
3rd quarter 2020 (May-August)	4	1%
4th quarter 2020 (September-December)	73	16%
1st quarter 2021 (January-March)	181	41%
Later than 1st quarter 2021	187	42%



Virtual Events

Do you plan to attend or create any virtual events/trade shows in 2020?

The majority of survey respondents claimed that they do plan to attend or create virtual events (46%). However, 28% of respondents also indicated that they did not know whether or not they would be, mostly due to not having enough information on how to conduct or host virtual meetings. Twenty-six percent of respondents said they would not be attending or creating virtual events.

Attend/Create Virtual Events?	Total	Percent
Yes	206	46%
No	114	26%
I Don't Know	125	28%

Do you think that digital events will replace live in-person events in the future?

Most respondents to our survey indicated that they did not believe that digital or virtual events would be replacing live, face-to-face in-person events (53%). However, 25% of respondents also stated that they did not know yet, and 22% said that it is possible.

Digital Events Replace Live Events?	Total	Percent
Yes	96	22%
No	238	53%
I Don't Know	111	25%

Digital trade shows cannot fully replicate the live demonstrations, networking and product sampling that take place at face-to-face events. However, they can help show exhibitors most of the main elements like keynote speakers, breakout presentations and roundtable discussions.

"We are working on attending a virtual trade show."

*Senior Manager,
Health Care & Medical*

"We are exploring virtual conference options for attendees and exhibitors."

*Marketing Rep,
Government Agency*

"One of our June meetings will be held virtually in July."

*Engagement Rep,
Health Care & Medical*



Importance of Face-to-Face Events

Rank the importance of face-to-face marketing to your company:

The majority of survey respondents (76%) felt that face-to-face marketing is important or most important to their company. Twenty percent felt that it is somewhat important, while only 3% of respondents felt it is not that important.

Importance of Face-to-Face Marketing	Total	Percent
1 (not important)	4	1%
2	10	2%
3 (somewhat important)	90	20%
4	202	45%
5 (most important)	138	31%

How do you think that the pandemic will affect future face-to-face communication?

Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents believe that once an antidote has been developed people will return to live, in person face-to-face events. However, 35% believe that with the proper personal protection equipment (PPE) and other safety procedures in place that people will want to meet face-to-face again at events. Nine percent believe that the pandemic has forever damaged in person face-to-face events and trade shows.

Face-to-Face Event Statement	Total	Percent
Yes, people will want to meet face-to-face again with safety measures	154	35%
Yes, once an antidote for COVID-19 is available people will return	250	57%
No, COVID-19 has forever damaged the trade show industry	38	9%

81.3 million people attend trade shows and events in the U.S.A. annually.

Source: CEIR

"The trade show model remains valid and has many positive purposes and outcomes. Trade shows will help the world economy recover by helping individual businesses recover."

*Trade Show Consultant,
Business Services*

"Trade shows will come back because they are one of the most efficient ways businesses communicate directly with customers, prospects & suppliers."

*Exhibiting Consultant,
Manufacturing*

Conclusion

As the survey results indicate, there is definitely a need for in person, face-to-face trade shows and events. **Seventy-six percent of respondents indicated that events are "most important" or "very important" to their business.** Survey results did show that several precautionary measures will be needed in order for these events to continue – which is to be expected to ease the spread of the virus. These are needed to ensure the safety of the exhibitors, attendees and convention staff. Proper disinfecting processes and techniques, along with social distancing measures will go far to rebuild the confidence of trade show and event attendees.

In addition to these cleaning and disinfecting processes, respondents indicated that they are taking other actions to help combat the disruption caused by the COVID-19 coronavirus. These include: adding new products or adapting current products to their offerings (including manufacturing personal protective equipment (PPE)), extending invoice terms or offering free services and instituting new company policies on social distancing, the use of PPE and travel.

Survey results also indicated that employers are working to redesign their office and workspaces with wayfinding and social distancing signage, educating employees on disinfecting and cleaning techniques and altering their working environments. The results also showed that 58% of respondents are working from home or are using virtual meeting tools and digital applications.

As for a timeline to when trade shows and events would "return to normal," most respondents (83%) believe that it will occur after January 2021, and more likely after the first quarter of that year (after March 2021). The main reasons given to why they will return were based on whether or not the state or federal governments lift "shelter in place" restrictions, or the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and/or World Health Organization (WHO) recommend large group gatherings to resume. Many also said the decision will be based on their company's policies on employee safety, as well as their own personal choice to attend. Event attendance projections are also a major factor as to whether or not companies will choose to exhibit. This would include attendance limits instituted at convention centers or exhibit halls.

When asked if they would be attending a virtual event or trade show in 2020, almost half (46%) of respondents said that they would be. However, 28% also indicated that they were unsure if they would be. When asked if they planned on scheduling or attending virtual trade shows or events in the future, 78% responded "no" or that they "did not know." These results show that there is still uncertainty in the use and reliability of virtual event tools.

What seems to be certain with these results is that the trade show and event industry is expected to recover by 2021 and it is recommended that exhibitors start planning now.

PREPARED BY:



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