Event Data Pro | Research & Insights

A REPORT FOR PEOPLE WHO RUN ANNUAL CONFERENCES

AI That Actually Works

Event teams have the AI. The people using it name their own data as what holds it back, and that part can be counted before anything else is bought.



DATA AS OF
November 14, 2026

LENGTH
About 25 minutes

WRITTEN FOR
Directors of meetings, association leaders, conference teams, and the IT lead asked to approve an assistant

CONTENTS

What is in this report

Nine short sections, about 25 minutes to read.

- **Six in ten use AI for event content. Fewer than four in ten say it is paying off.**
  - Five findings
  - One ask

1 **The AI arrived**
  - 1.1 One year, from experiment to habit
  - 1.2 Interested is not the same as doing
  - 1.3 The money and the access arrived in the same year

2 **Where it works, and where it stalls**
  - 2.1 What is working, said fairly
  - 2.2 Using it is not the same as getting something from it
  - 2.3 Content against data
  - 2.4 Why the tools fall short, in the users' words

3 **The data underneath**
  - 3.1 What teams say about their own records
  - 3.2 Connected on paper
  - 3.3 What nobody has measured

4 **When the assistant can read the attendee list**
  - 4.1 What changed in 2026
  - 4.2 What people are worried about
  - 4.3 The sponsor's side

5 **In their own words**
  - Four things the comments have in common

6 **The playbook for a team of two**
  - 6.1 The readiness sheet: six counts
  - 6.2 The one-week check
  - 6.3 Thirty days of cleanup
  - 6.4 The data minimum, and three honest ways to get there

7 **A decision guide for technology and data**
  - 7.1 What it may read, what it may change, and who said yes
  - 7.2 Where the data goes, and whether anyone learns from it
  - 7.3 A log of every change
  - 7.4 Ownership, export and exit
  - 7.5 Ten questions to ask before switching anything on

8 **Methodology, timeliness and sources**
  - How this report was made
  - How fresh each number is
  - A note on where this comes from
  - Sources
  - Appendix: chart data

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Six in ten use AI for event content. Fewer than four in ten say it is paying off.

Somewhere this year you were told to "use AI," and you did. It writes the session descriptions and the reminder emails, and it is good at that. Then someone asked it a question about your own event, such as who came last year and has not registered yet, and it could not answer, because the two lists it would need do not agree on who a person is. This report lines up what has been published on AI in events, most of it in the last nine months, and on the state of the records underneath. Most of those surveys come from companies that sell event software, and each is labelled as such. They point the same way: the people using AI name the state of their own data as the barrier. No study here proves that cleaner records produce better AI results, and none surveys annual-conference teams on their own. What the surveys do show is where teams say they are stuck, and the state of your records is something you can measure.

Use AI for event content, and say it is paying off

59% and 37%

Forrester Consulting for Cvent, June 2026, preliminary, sample not published

Name data quality and access as a barrier to AI personalization

63%

Forrester, 400+ event decision-makers, Q1 2026

Capture and integrate event data across all their events

36%

Forrester Consulting for Cvent, June 2026, preliminary

Five findings

1. **Adoption moved fast, and it reached associations.** Forrester's survey of more than 400 event decision-makers found AI adoption "doubling across key use cases" in a year. At associations, frequent or daily use of AI communication tools rose from 12.5 percent in 2025 to 33.5 percent in 2026, in Naylor's survey of 665 association professionals.[1,2]

2. **AI is used most where it needs no data.** Writing and content is the most common use in each of the three surveys here that rank uses. ASAE found 87.5 percent of associations using AI for content and 44.3 percent for data. Fewer than a quarter of the organizations in Forrester's survey use AI to personalize the attendee experience.[3,4,5,6,1]

3. **Teams rate their own data poorly.** Sixty-three percent in Forrester's survey cite data quality and access as a barrier. In Cvent's survey of more than 1,000 marketers, 57 percent rely on disconnected systems and 56 percent struggle with data quality. At associations, using data for decisions entered the top three challenges for the first time.[1,7,2]

4. **Assistants can now read and change event records directly.** Between March and August 2026 at least three event platforms announced a connection that lets an AI assistant query live event data, and in each case change some of it. That turns a tooling question into a question about access, consent and trust.[8,9,10]

5. **Nobody has published the numbers that matter most, so you have to count your own.** No 2026 survey found for this report gives a duplicate rate, a match rate between registration and membership records, or the days it takes attendance to reach a CRM. Section 6 gives six counts a team of two can take in a week.

One ask

Before you buy or switch on another AI feature, count the people who appear twice in your list, and time one real question from asking to answer. Section 6 shows how. Those two numbers are a better place to start than a demo.

SECTION 1

The AI arrived

1.1 One year, from experiment to habit

In June 2025 Forrester described AI in events as "a promise waiting to be realized." Its survey that spring found 39 percent of organizations using AI for content creation, and only 7 to 15 percent using it for any of the three attendee-facing uses it asked about: better targeting, more personalization and improved assistance.[3] A year later, its Q1 2026 survey of more than 400 event decision-makers reported that "AI usage in events is increasing rapidly, with adoption doubling across key use cases." Forrester's summary does not publish the new percentages for each use, so the word "doubling" is all that can be quoted.[1]

The same shift shows up at associations. Naylor's 2026 Association Benchmarking Report, built on 665 responses from senior association professionals in North America, found the share using AI-powered communication tools frequently or daily rose from 12.5 percent in 2025 to 33.5 percent in 2026.[2] Naylor sells services to associations; its survey is in its 15th year and publishes its sample size.

Associations using AI communication tools frequently or daily

12.5% to 33.5%

2025 to 2026, Naylor, 665 respondents

Business and event leaders who say events matter more as AI floods other channels

70%

Forrester Consulting for Cvent, June 2026, preliminary

Venue and event professionals piloting or scaling AI

7%

Momentus, March 2026, mostly venue operators

1.2 Interested is not the same as doing

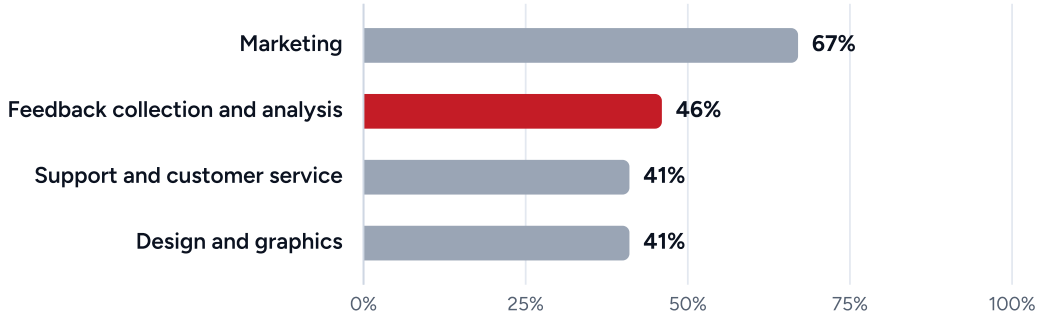
The third number in that row is a useful brake. Momentus, which sells venue and event management software, surveyed venue and event professionals in more than 20 countries in March 2026. Sixty-four percent rated AI as highly significant for their work and half expect it to be core to operations within two years. Asked where they actually are, 12 percent said not interested, 31 percent curious, 35 percent interested in specific uses, 16 percent actively evaluating, 5 percent piloting and 2 percent scaling.[11] Two cautions apply. Momentus gives no sample size on its public page, and the full report sits behind a form and was not read; a trade report describes the sample as "hundreds of venue professionals," with convention centres the largest group.[12] And these are mostly people who run buildings, not people who run conferences. Read it as a neighbouring population, not as your peers.

Trade show organizers were asked a different question: not whether they use AI, but what for. In the 2026 attendee acquisition study by Trade Show Executive, Lippman Connects and EVOLIO Marketing, writing and content creation was the top use of AI, though the summary gives no percentage for it.

Among organizers who use AI, 67 percent use it for marketing, 46 percent for collecting and analyzing feedback, 41 percent for support and customer service, and 41 percent for design.[4] The published summary does not give the number of respondents.

FIGURE 1 **What organizers who use AI use it for**

Share of AI users among trade show organizers, by task. Writing and content ranked first but was published without a percentage. The red bar is the one analysis job on the list.



Source: Trade Show Executive, Lippman Connects and EVOLIO Marketing, 2026 attendee acquisition study, reported May 5, 2026. Sample size not stated in the published summary.[4]

One detail runs against the usual assumption: 82 percent of professionals with more than ten years in the industry said they use AI, against 46 percent of those with ten years or fewer. The article does not explain the gap.[4]

1.3 The money and the access arrived in the same year

Vendors moved as fast as their customers. Taking each company's own announcement, in date order and with no ranking implied: Swoogo published a connection between its event data and outside AI assistants on March 24, 2026, with a press release on April 6. RainFocus announced one on July 7. Cvent announced more than 70 product changes on July 14, 34 of them new AI capabilities, alongside what it called a planned multi-year $1 billion investment in product development. Eventtia launched a connection on August 1.[8,9,13,10]

Section 4 looks at what those connections let an assistant do. The point here is simpler. By the summer of 2026, AI had been added to platforms that event teams already pay for, which changes the question from whether a team can get it to what the team can do with it. In the Forrester Consulting study that Cvent commissioned, 70 percent of respondents said events matter more, not less, as AI fills every other channel with synthetic content.[14] The pressure to make the event itself better is going up at the same moment the tools arrive.

SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY

List every tool your team pays for that now has an AI feature, and next to each one write what it is actually used for today. If the list comes back as mostly "writing," that is the honest starting point.

SECTION 2

Where it works, and where it stalls

2.1 What is working, said fairly

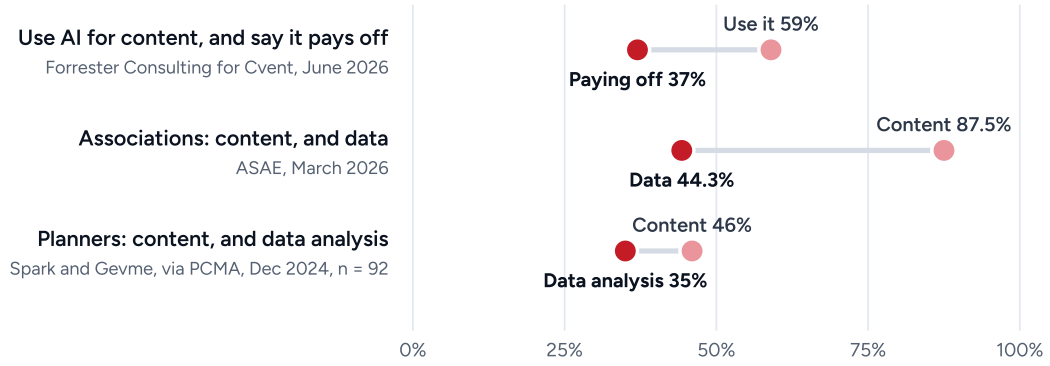
Start with what is true. AI writes a decent first draft of a session description, a speaker bio, a reminder email and a post-event summary, and it does so in seconds. Writing and content is the most common use in Forrester's 2025 survey, in the trade show organizers' study and in the survey of 92 planners that PCMA published in March 2025, and ASAE found associations using AI for content about twice as often as for data.[3,4,6,5] For a team of two, that is real time given back, and it needs nothing from your systems. A blank page is the only input.

2.2 Using it is not the same as getting something from it

The clearest measure of the gap comes from a study Cvent commissioned from Forrester Consulting in June 2026. In the preview Cvent released in July, "59% already use AI for event content, but only 37% say it is paying off."[14] Three things about that sentence should travel with it. The findings are labelled preliminary, pending a final study that had not been published when this report was written. No sample size has been published, and the people surveyed are described only in trade coverage, as "business and event leaders."[15] And the release does not say whether the 37 percent is a share of everyone surveyed or of those already using AI. Either way, fewer than four in ten say it is paying off.

FIGURE 2 **Use against payoff, and content against data**

Each row compares two answers from the same survey. The surveys asked different people different questions, so compare within a row, not between rows.



Source: Cvent press release of July 15, 2026, previewing a Forrester Consulting study it commissioned (preliminary, sample not published); ASAE State of Associations, March 2026; Spark and Gevme survey of 92 business events professionals, fielded December 2024 and published by PCMA Convene in March 2025.[14,6,5]

Marketing technology as a whole shows the same pattern, at larger companies. Gartner surveyed 413 marketing technology leaders between June and August 2025. Of those with AI agents in pilot or in production, 45 percent said the agents their vendors offer do not meet the business performance they were promised, and half of all respondents said their organization lacks the technical and data readiness to deploy them.[16] Gartner's 2026 survey of 401 chief marketing officers and senior marketing leaders, most at companies with more than $1 billion in revenue, fielded from January to March and reported by MarTech, found marketing teams putting an average of 15.3 percent of their budgets into AI while only 30 percent described their readiness to use it as mature.[17] Those are large enterprises, not conference teams.

2.3 Content against data

Look at what AI is used for and the wall has a shape. ASAE's first State of Associations report, published in March 2026, put it in one line: AI use is widespread, at 87.5 percent for content and 44.3 percent for data, but readiness lags, with most organizations citing limited expertise and data privacy concerns.[6] In the smaller planner survey published by PCMA, 46 percent named content creation and summarization as a top use and 35 percent named data analysis and reporting.[5]

Forrester's 2026 survey names the barrier in its own heading, which reads "AI adoption is rising (but data is the bottleneck)." Fewer than a quarter of organizations use AI to deliver personalized attendee experiences, "largely due to challenges with data quality and accessibility, with 63% citing this as a barrier."[1] Forrester does not say whether the 63 percent is a share of everyone surveyed or of those not yet personalizing. A year earlier, more than 40 percent of respondents had told Forrester, of those

attendee-facing uses, "We would like to do this but have no immediate plans."[3] The wish has been on record since early 2025.

Budget goes with it. In Forrester's 2025 survey, 68 percent of organizations spending more than $250,000 a year on event technology used or planned to use AI for data analysis, against 39 percent of low spenders, who were "more focused on using AI for simple content creation."[3] That figure is from 2025 and counts plans as well as use, and Forrester does not say what the higher spenders bought. It shows only that AI on data has so far been more common where the technology budget is larger.

2.4 Why the tools fall short, in the users' words

Momentus asked its venue and event respondents why AI tools fall short. Fifty-two percent said the tools lack knowledge of their kind of operation, 48 percent that they have no real-time awareness of what is happening, 40 percent that they do not turn data into something to act on, 36 percent that they do not scale to complex events, and 31 percent that they cannot coordinate changes across teams. Asked which single burden they would hand to AI first, 42 percent chose manual coordination across teams and 29 percent chose post-event reporting and reconciliation.[11] These are people who run venues, and knowing a building has little to do with records. Real-time awareness, acting on data, coordinating changes and reconciling after the event all depend on systems that can be read together.

SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY

Take one question about your own event that needs two lists, for example "which of last year's attendees have not registered this year?", and answer it the way you would today. Do not paste attendee lists into an AI tool your organization has not approved for personal data; Section 4 explains why. Write down what it took to get an answer you would trust. That is your baseline for Section 6.

SECTION 3

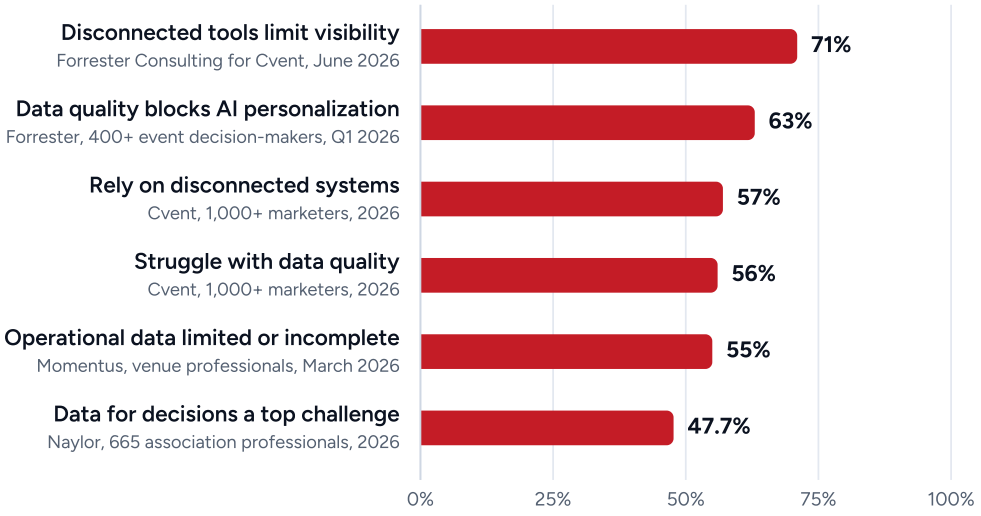
The data underneath

3.1 What teams say about their own records

Six questions from five studies, asked of different people in the last nine months, come back within about twenty-five points of each other. In five of the six, more than half report a problem with their data or the systems that hold it.

FIGURE 3 **What teams say about their own data**

Six survey questions fielded or published between March and August 2026. The questions and the people asked differ, so this shows a direction, not a single measure.



Source: Cvent press release of July 15, 2026, previewing a Forrester Consulting study it commissioned (preliminary, sample not published); Forrester Q1 2026 State of B2B Events Survey; Cvent 2026 Event-Led Growth Report; Momentus, March 2026 (no sample size on its public page); Naylor 2026 Association Benchmarking Report.[14,1,7,11,2]

Four of those six bars come from studies published or commissioned by companies that sell event or venue software, and a reader is entitled to discount them for that. Three of the four are Cvent's: one it commissioned and two from its own report. Cvent sells a platform that promises to connect event data. Momentus sells one for venues, and its bar is about the data venues hold on their own operations, not about attendee records. The other two are Forrester's own survey and the survey by Naylor, which sells services to associations, and they point the same way.

The association picture deserves its own look, because it changed this year. Naylor's top three challenges for 2026 are generating non-dues revenue (51.9 percent, down from 61), communicating member benefits (49.5 percent) and "leveraging data for strategic decisions" (47.7 percent). The third is in the top three for the first time. Data and strategy is also the area respondents most often call understaffed, at 38.5 percent, in a year when reported understaffing overall fell from 51.3 to 35.1 percent.[2] Naylor's release does not give last year's figure for data and strategy, so the comparison stops there.

Two more readings point the same way, with thinner evidence. iMIS, which sells membership software, reports from its 2026 benchmark that fewer than half of membership professionals can easily access and understand the data they need to monitor and improve performance; its page gives neither the exact figure nor the sample.[18] And the trade show organizers' study found that organizers collect role,

interest, industry and purchasing authority at registration, and that the data has not been turned into personalized outreach.[4] The fields are filled in. Nothing reads them.

3.2 Connected on paper

Here is the part that confuses boards. Ask whether the event platform is connected to anything and, in two of the three surveys below, most say yes. Ask whether the data can be used and most say no. Ask the stricter question, whether data from every event is captured and connected, and the yes falls to about a third.

FIGURE 4 **Connected, and still not agreeing**

Two answers from each of three 2026 surveys. The left column is about the connection. The right column is about what comes out of it.

SURVEY	THE CONNECTION EXISTS	THE DATA STILL FALLS SHORT
Cvent, 1,000+ marketers, 2026	71 percent use an event platform integrated with the rest of their marketing technology.	57 percent rely on disconnected systems. 56 percent struggle with data quality. 64 percent use more than one event platform.
Forrester, 400+ event decision-makers, Q1 2026	Two thirds have integrated their primary event platform with their sales and marketing systems.	63 percent cite data quality and access as a barrier to AI personalization.
Forrester Consulting for Cvent, June 2026, preliminary	36 percent capture and integrate event data across all their events.	71 percent say managing events across disconnected tools limits what they can see.

Source: Cvent 2026 Event-Led Growth Report summary, June 23, 2026; Forrester, June 25, 2026; Cvent press release, July 15, 2026.[7,1,14]

Both can be true because "integrated" can mean as little as a contact record moving from the event platform to the marketing system. It does not have to mean the two systems agree on who that contact is, what kind of member they are, or which sessions they sat in. The survey numbers are also not measuring the same depth. Forrester's two thirds is any integration of the main platform; the 36 percent in the Cvent-commissioned study is full capture across every event. Forrester found that the deeper kind matters: 62 percent of those with a deep integration were satisfied with their events, against 37 percent of those who had not integrated at all.[1] The Return Rate, an earlier report in this series, covers that finding in more detail.

Two of these surveys describe their respondents as marketers and event decision-makers; the third does not describe them at all. None is a survey of lean association or conference teams, so treat the numbers as a neighbouring picture. A small team may have fewer systems to reconcile, and fewer people to do it.

3.3 What nobody has measured

Every figure in this section is an opinion: a share of people who say their data is good or bad. None is a count. This report looked for a published 2026 figure, for event organizers, on any of the following, and found none as of November 14, 2026:

- the share of people who appear more than once in an attendee or contact list;
- the share of registrations that match a record in the membership system or CRM;
- the number of days between an event closing and attendance reaching the CRM or membership system.

That absence is the most useful finding here. The industry has many surveys on whether teams feel ready and none on whether their records are. The only way to know is to count your own, which is what Section 6 is for.

FIVE QUESTIONS AN ASSISTANT SHOULD BE ABLE TO ANSWER

- **Who came last year and has not registered?** Last year's attendance and this year's registrations have to agree on who a person is.
- **Which member companies sent fewer people?** Registration and the membership system have to agree on which organization someone belongs to.
- **Which sessions did first-timers attend?** Session scans have to carry the same person record as registration, and something has to know who is new.
- **Which sponsors' leads were followed up?** Lead scans have to reach the CRM against the right person, with a date.
- **Who registered twice?** Something has to notice that two records are one person.

This is this report's own test, not a published standard. Two of them may have no answer at all at your event: if sessions are not scanned, or sponsors keep their own leads, write that down instead. If the honest answer to any of the others is "after three exports and an afternoon," an assistant reading the same systems starts from the same place.

SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY

Pick one of the five questions and try to answer it by hand. Count the files you open. Keep the count; you will need it in Section 6.

SECTION 4

When the assistant can read the attendee list

4.1 What changed in 2026

Until this year, an AI assistant knew about your event only what you pasted into it. In 2026 several event platforms announced a direct connection. Three of the four announcements below call it an MCP server, after the Model Context Protocol, a shared way of letting an AI assistant use another system's data and actions; the fourth describes packaged tasks that outside assistants can run. In plain words each is a login for a program, with a list of what that program may read and what it may change.

WHAT AN ASSISTANT'S ACCESS LOOKS LIKE, IN PLAIN WORDS

Think of it as a new member of staff who never sleeps, reads fast and does exactly what it is told. It signs in as one of your users. It can see what that user can see. It can change what that user can change. It does not know that "Jon Smith" and "Jonathan Smith" at the same company are one person unless your records say so. Whatever it reads may leave your platform. Whether its changes are logged, and whether a human has to confirm them, depends on the vendor and on how you set it up.

Figure 5 sets out what four vendors announced. Three things follow from it, and none of them is about which vendor is ahead. First, an assistant with this kind of access can write as well as read. Every announcement above describes changes, not only questions. If the list has two records for one person, an assistant asked to "update her session" has to pick one.

Second, the common safeguard is that the assistant inherits the permissions of the person who connected it. That is sensible, and it means the real control is your own user list. If six people share an administrator login, so does the assistant.

Third, an attendee list is personal data wherever it goes. Twenty-four US states have now enacted a comprehensive consumer privacy law, counting Florida's narrower one; four of them (Alabama, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Vermont) did so in 2026.[19] Not all of those laws are in force yet, and whether any of them applies to your organization depends on its size, its status and where your attendees live. That is a question for counsel, and attendees from outside the United States bring other rules with them. When an assistant reads registrant records, those records pass through the AI provider as well

as the event platform. As one of the vendor pages puts it: "your AI provider has its own data policy. That is their document."[10] This report is not legal advice. It is a reason to ask the question before someone connects an assistant on a Friday afternoon.

FIGURE 5 **What four vendors announced, in their own words**

Listed by date. Taken from each vendor's own announcement; not tested for this report, and not a ranking. Where a cell says an announcement does not cover something, that is a statement about the announcement, not the product.

DATE AND VENDOR	WHAT IT SAYS AN ASSISTANT CAN DO	WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT CONTROL
March 24, 2026, Swoogo	Retrieve registrants, sessions, sponsors and speakers. Create or update sessions, speakers or sponsors. Cannot delete events.	Edits require confirmation first. Access "mirrors your Swoogo permissions exactly." Connecting needs a full user licence and API key access.
July 7, 2026, RainFocus	"Read data and write changes," with examples such as closing registration for a sold-out track or updating speaker details.	Access is switched on event by event. Each action is tied to an administrator's identity, with role-based access and "full audit logging."
July 14, 2026, Cvent	Task packages "that enable AI agents to execute event workflows directly," usable from outside tools. Expected in the third quarter of 2026.	The release says event program data is connected "in a secure environment." Controls for outside assistants are not covered in it. Whether the feature has shipped was not checked for this report.
August 1, 2026, Eventtia	"Read, write and delete, within your Eventtia role," including attendees, check-in and payment records.	"The assistant gets your permissions, and nothing more." Changes are recorded. The vendor says it does not train AI models on prompts or event data.

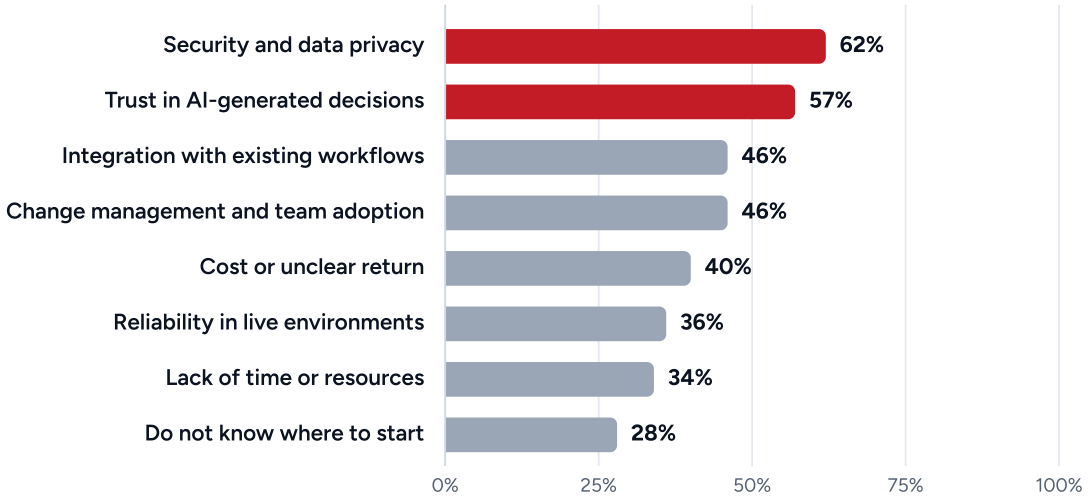
Source: the four vendors' own announcements, read on November 14, 2026. These are the four read in full for this report; the list is not complete.[8,9,13,10]

4.2 What people are worried about

The worries are the right ones. In the Momentus survey of venue and event professionals, security and data privacy led the list of concerns at 62 percent, followed by trust in AI-generated decisions at 57 percent. Integration with existing workflows and team adoption came next at 46 percent each. Asked how they want to operate, 66 percent chose people in the lead with technology in support, 18 percent an equal balance, 10 percent technology in the lead with human oversight, 5 percent mostly human with minimal technology, and 1 percent mostly technology.[11]

FIGURE 6 **What worries venue and event professionals about AI**

Share naming each as one of their biggest concerns. Respondents are mostly venue operators; no sample size is given on the public page.



Source: Momentus Technologies, The State of AI in Venue and Event Management, fielded March 2026 in more than 20 countries. Momentus sells venue and event management software.[11,12]

An older and smaller survey agrees on the order. In December 2024, 92 business events professionals were asked about their concerns with AI. Data security and privacy came first at 59 percent, ahead of lack of technical expertise at 48 percent.[5] ASAE's March 2026 report says most associations cite limited expertise and data privacy as the reasons readiness lags.[6] Three surveys of three different populations put data privacy at or near the top. Two of them put a shortage of expertise beside it.

4.3 The sponsor's side

The people most likely to ask for an AI answer first are sponsors and exhibitors, because they are already asking for the answer without the AI: who came, who engaged, which leads are worth a call. The Return Rate reported that nearly 60 percent of association sponsorship teams measure sponsor return inconsistently and 40 percent name the lack of consolidated reporting as their biggest barrier (Showcare, 2026, no sample size in the public material read).[20] Naylor adds a reason to care: sponsorship's share of association non-dues revenue slipped from 29.7 to 25.3 percent in a year.[2]

An assistant can produce a sponsor's audience summary in a minute. Whether that summary is right depends on whether booth scans, session scans and registration records carry the same person. Whether it is allowed depends on what attendees agreed to at registration. This report's recommendation, as in The Return Rate, is to ask attendees plainly at registration before sharing their activity with a sponsor, separately from the permission to use it yourself. What the law requires varies by state and country. An assistant changes neither question. It shortens the time between asking for a list and having one, which is the time in which someone used to check.

SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY

Find out who in your organization could connect an AI assistant to your registration platform today, and with whose login. If the answer is "anyone with the admin password," fix that before anything else in this report.

SECTION 5

In their own words

Surveys tell you how many. People tell you what it is like. The first comment is from an association data lead writing in the trade press in 2026. The rest come from public practitioner forums, quoted verbatim, with posters identified by role and community where the source gives one. None of the forum comments is about AI, and several come from nonprofit and sales teams, not conference offices. They are here because they describe the records an assistant would be reading.

"AI will amplify whatever foundation you give it. If that foundation is fragmented, your problems get bigger, not smaller."

Director of CRM and analytics at a medical specialty society, Associations Now, April 2026[21]

"Multiple contact records for the same people under different email addresses; like person A signs up for an event with their personal email one day, then a business email… matching rules don't allow you to check across multiple fields."

Poster on r/salesforce, May 2023[22]

"I have two exhibitors with slightly different organizational name spellings."

Cvent customer asking how to remove a duplicate exhibitor, Cvent Community, April 2026[23]

"The product claims to have an integration, but all it actually does is send data to a source field on a contact. If you interact with people across multiple events… this is super one-dimensional."

Revenue operations builder, r/tradeshows[22]

"Every file is formatted differently… It can result in a delay in getting the leads to the sales people."

Marketer loading attendee lists into a CRM, r/Automate[22]

"I have taken to inputting most of the Campaign members manually. It isn't sexy, but does seem to make the most sense."

Salesforce implementer for nonprofits, r/salesforce[22]

> "I'm terrified of a major donor having a bad experience because of a data error."
>
> Nonprofit gala organizer, r/Nonprofit_Marketing[22]

The Reddit comments come from a set of 55 threads read in September 2026. That set marks a vendor affiliation where a poster disclosed one and marks none for these five, though one describes themselves as a builder of revenue operations systems. It dates only one of them: the r/salesforce comment is from May 2023, older than the research in this report, and is included with its date because it describes the problem exactly. The Associations Now author adds a warning and a fix. The warning: skip the foundations of clean data, transparent processes and leadership, and "you'll automate problems you didn't know you had." The fix: "Standardize identifiers across systems, document where data originates and how it flows, define clear ownership for data accuracy."[21]

Four things the comments have in common

1. **The complaint is about what passes between systems.** The same person is in the list twice, a connection passes one field along, every file arrives in a different shape. Nobody here is complaining about AI.
2. **The duplicate is ordinary.** A personal email one day and a work email the next. A company name spelled two ways. Nothing went wrong; people simply behave like people, and the records split.
3. **The fix today is a person.** Someone types the campaign members in by hand, or reformats every file. That person is the reason the numbers are right, and their judgement is not written down anywhere an assistant could read it.
4. **The fear is a wrong answer in front of someone who matters.** For the gala organizer it is a donor. For a conference it would be a sponsor or a board member. An answer drawn from split records, by a person or by an assistant, is how that moment happens.

SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY

Ask the person who cleans your lists before every report what they fix by hand. Write the list down. It is the specification for what "ready" means at your organization.

SECTION 6

The playbook for a team of two

A readiness check you can run in a week with the systems you already have, and a month of cleanup that follows from it. The check needs no new platform and no AI tool. Parts of the cleanup may need your vendors' help, and the table says where.

6.1 The readiness sheet: six counts

Section 3 found no published benchmark for any of these. So every target below is this report's recommendation, and the first number you record is your benchmark. The point is to have a number at all, and to watch it move.

COUNT	HOW TO TAKE IT	WHAT TO AIM FOR
People who appear more than once	Export your main contact or attendee list. Count the extra records: where two or more records are one person, every record after the first. Find them in three passes: the same email; the same first name, last name and organization under different emails; then by eye for near misses such as Jon and Jonathan, or a company spelled two ways. Set aside group registrations where one person entered their own email for colleagues. Divide the extra records by all records.	No published benchmark. Record it, then halve it. This report's recommendation.
Registrations that carry a member or account number	Of all of last event's registrations, the share holding an identifier that exists in the membership system or CRM. Non-members lower it; note how many there are.	No published benchmark. Every member registration should carry one. This report's recommendation.
Member type that agrees	For the matched registrations, the share where member type in registration equals member type in the membership system on the day they registered, if the system keeps that; otherwise today's value, noted as such.	No published benchmark. A disagreement on the day of registration is a wrong price; aim for none. This report's recommendation.
Days from event close to attendance in the CRM or membership system	The date attendance for your last event became visible there, minus the last day of the event. If it never arrived, write "never"; that is a result too.	No published benchmark. Within the week while follow-up still matters. This report's recommendation.

COUNT	HOW TO TAKE IT	WHAT TO AIM FOR
Exports between a question and its answer	For each of the five questions in Section 3, the number of files someone downloads to answer it.	No published benchmark. Fewer each year; a question that takes a person three exports takes an assistant the same three sources. This report's recommendation.
Fields collected and never used	List every registration question. Mark the ones no report, email or person used after the event.	No published benchmark. Use it or stop asking. This report's recommendation.

Two notes. Look at name matches by eye before you call them one person; two people called Maria Garcia at a large employer are two people. Keep the list of pairs you decided were the same, so next year's count is made the same way. And these exports are personal data: keep them in one protected folder and delete them when the check is done.

6.2 The one-week check

Five working days, two people, an hour or two on most days and longer on Thursday. A spreadsheet is enough: a sort, a duplicate filter and a lookup between two sheets on email or member number. Do not fix anything this week. The job is to see the records as they are.

DAY	WHAT YOU DO	WHAT YOU WRITE DOWN
Monday	Export last event's registrations and attendance, and the current contact or member list. Count the duplicates.	Count 1, and the three most common reasons for a duplicate.
Tuesday	Match registrations to the membership system or CRM, on member number where there is one and on email where there is not.	Counts 2 and 3, and what the unmatched records have in common.
Wednesday	Find out when attendance from the last event reached the CRM or membership system, and how.	Count 4, and the name of the person who moved it.
Thursday	Answer the five questions from Section 3 by hand. Time each one. Have the second person answer two of them separately.	Count 5, the minutes each took, and whether two people got the same answer.
Friday	Go through the registration form field by field.	Count 6, and one page with all six counts for whoever asked you to "use AI."

Thursday is the day that matters. If two people answering the same question from the same systems get different numbers, the systems do not yet hold one answer for an assistant to find.

6.3 Thirty days of cleanup

WEEK	WHAT HAPPENS	WHAT HAS TO BE TRUE AFTERWARD
Week 1	Decide which system holds the record of truth for a person: usually the membership system or CRM, not the event platform. Write it down and tell the vendors.	Everyone can say where a person's name, email, employer and member type are corrected.
Week 2	Take a backup export first; many merges cannot be undone. Then merge the duplicates in last year's attendee list and in the contact list, starting with the people who came.	Count 1 has roughly halved, and the merge decisions are saved.
Week 3	Put the member or account number on the registration record, for the next event that opens. Ask your vendors, in writing, what it would take to have attendance written back to the CRM or membership system instead of exported, and what it costs. On some setups that is a setting; on others it is a project that will outlast the month.	A new registration can be traced to one member record without a person looking it up, and you have a dated answer on attendance.
Week 4	Try one AI use that depends on the work above, in a tool approved for attendee data, such as a list of last year's attendees who have not registered. Check its answer against a hand count; anything other than the same names is a fail.	You know, with a number, whether the assistant's answer can be trusted for that one question.

Thirty days assumes a quiet month. If the event is inside the next eight weeks, do Week 1 now and leave the rest until it closes. If you run several events, clean the flagship first. If a contractor or management company runs your registration, the counts still belong to you: ask for the exports.

6.4 The data minimum, and three honest ways to get there

Before an assistant is pointed at attendee records, five things should be true. This is this report's checklist, not a published standard.

- [ ] One person, one record, across registration, the app, and the CRM or membership system.
- [ ] Every member registration carries the member or account number.
- [ ] Member type agrees wherever it appears.
- [ ] Attendance reaches the CRM or membership system without a person exporting it, and you know how many days it takes.
- [ ] Every assistant connection has a named owner, its own login where the platform allows one, and a log that someone has actually looked at.

There are three honest ways to get there. The right one depends on your rules and your staff, not on the vendor.

- **The platforms' own connectors and AI features.** Right when the data is simple and someone on staff will watch it: one ticket type, contacts moving one way, a membership system the event platform already supports. For a simple setup that can be enough. Wrong when member types, group purchases or writing session attendance back are involved, because a built-in connector may stop at the contact record, as the revenue operations builder in Section 5 found.
- **A general automation or assistant tool that someone on staff owns.** Right when that person has the time and likes the work. Wrong when they are also the person who runs the event, because an automation that breaks during show week has nobody free to fix it.
- **A specialist build**, in-house or outside. Right when the rules are specific to your event, the deadline is fixed, and nobody on staff can own it. Wrong when a built-in connector would have done the job. Pay for complexity only when you have it.

Whichever route you take, the six counts are how you check it worked.

SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY

Block one hour a day next week for the check in 6.2 and tell one other person you are doing it. A date and a witness are what turn this from a good idea into a number.

SECTION 7

A decision guide for technology and data

For the reader about to switch on an AI feature, connect an assistant or sign a renewal that includes one. Dated, neutral, and explicit about what will have changed by the time you read it.

7.1 What it may read, what it may change, and who said yes

The announcements in Section 4 describe three kinds of control: the assistant inherits a user's permissions, access is switched on per event, and edits wait for a person to confirm them.[8,9,10] Ask which of the three your platform has, and get the answer in writing. Then look at your own side. Where your plan allows it, connect the assistant through its own user with the narrowest role that does the job, read-only to begin with. One of the announcements says a full user licence is needed, so this may carry a cost.[8] Decide who is allowed to connect one, and how that access is removed when they leave. A read-only assistant with a named owner keeps people in the lead, which is what two thirds of the venue professionals in Section 4 said they want.[11]

7.2 Where the data goes, and whether anyone learns from it

Two separate companies see the data when an assistant reads your attendee list: the event platform and the AI provider. Each has its own policy on storing it and on using it to train models. Skift Meetings' 2026 coverage lists attendee data being used to train third-party models, and agents acting without an audit trail, among the new risks for planners.[24] One of the vendors in Section 4 states that it does not train models on prompts or event data and points customers to the AI provider's policy for the rest.[10] Ask both companies, and ask the same of AI features built into the platform itself. Check that your registration privacy notice covers it.

7.3 A log of every change

If an assistant can change a session, a speaker or a registration, there has to be a record of what changed, when, and on whose authority. Two of the four announcements in Section 4 say changes are logged; the others do not address it in the text read for this report.[9,10,8,13] That is not a finding about any product. It is a reason to ask, and to test it: make one change through the assistant in a test event and go and find the log entry.

7.4 Ownership, export and exit

The Return Rate covered what happens to a connection when a vendor is bought: get export and access commitments in writing, and read the acquisition clause. One addition for AI. Ask whether the assistant's access is part of your plan or a separate line priced by use, and what it costs at your volume. These terms are new and will change.

7.5 Ten questions to ask before switching anything on

1. What exactly can the assistant read, and what can it change or delete, payment records included?
2. Does it act with one user's permissions, can we give it a narrower role of its own, and does that need another licence?
3. Can access be limited to one event, switched off in one place, and removed when a member of staff leaves?
4. Does a person have to confirm a change before it is made, and can a change be undone?
5. Is every read and every change logged, and can we see the log?
6. Is our attendee data used to train anyone's model, yours or the AI provider's?
7. Where does the data go when the assistant reads it, how long is it kept, and which agreement covers that?
8. What does this cost at our volume, and is it priced by use?
9. How does it decide that two records are the same person, and does it treat text an attendee typed into a form as data or as an instruction?
10. Can we try it on a test event first, and does our registration consent cover this use?

SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY

Send questions 1, 5 and 6 to your registration vendor by email. Whatever comes back, file it where the person who approves access to attendee data can find it.

SECTION 8

Methodology, timeliness and sources

How this report was made

This is a desk-research report. It draws on research published between March 2025 and November 14, 2026, read in the original where the publisher makes it public and otherwise through the trade press that reported it. One forum comment from May 2023 is older and is dated where it appears. Practitioner comments come from the trade press, a vendor community forum and 55 Reddit threads read in full in September 2026; quotes are verbatim and attributed by role. No vendor was interviewed or paid, and no vendor reviewed the text. No Event Data Pro client data was used. Before publication, a reviewer briefed to argue against the draft re-read the public sources, and the text was corrected where the argument held. The Reddit threads, the gated full reports and Gartner's own release pages could not be reopened in that check; Gartner's figures were read through trade press.

Most of the evidence here comes from companies with something to sell. Cvent sells event software, commissioned the Forrester Consulting study and published the Event-Led Growth Report. Momentus sells venue and event management software, Naylor sells services to associations, and iMIS sells membership software. The planner survey of December 2024 was run by PCMA's own AI product, Spark, with Gevme, the event technology company that built it. Forrester's own survey, ASAE's report, Gartner's surveys and the trade show organizers' study, which was run by a trade magazine and two firms that serve trade show organizers, are the sources here that do not come from a company selling event or membership software. Forrester's consulting arm is the one Cvent paid.

Several sample sizes are not published. The Forrester Consulting study for Cvent is preliminary and gives no sample. Momentus gives none on its public page for its AI survey, and its full report sits behind a form that was not filled in; the only description found is "hundreds of venue professionals" in one trade report, and its respondents are mostly venue operators, not conference organizers. For that reason Momentus was kept to one of the four charts, one row of another and one headline tile, and its other figures appear only in the text of Sections 1, 2, 4 and 7, labelled each time. The trade show organizers' study, the iMIS benchmark and Showcare's survey do not state a sample in the public material read, and ASAE's release gives none for its AI figures. The text says so where each appears.

Three limits deserve their own sentences. No study in this report shows that cleaner data makes AI produce better results for an event; the surveys show that people who use AI name data as the barrier, which is not the same thing. And no published figure was found for duplicate rates, match rates or

days to the CRM among event organizers, so every target in Section 6 is this report's recommendation. And no survey here asks association or annual-conference teams about AI in their own events; the evidence comes from enterprise event marketers, venue operators, trade show organizers and associations in general.

Left out, and why: a claim that 80 percent of organizers use AI for routine tasks and about 40 percent for planning, which appears in coverage of a 2026 marketing report with no survey behind it that could be found; a Freeman figure on exhibitors wanting clearer audience information, seen only in an aggregator's summary; two sponsor figures from a Bizzabo networking report, which Bizzabo's own pages word in two different ways; AI usage figures from the American Express Global Business Travel forecast for 2027, because the trade coverage that could be read gave no percentages; a cross-industry data management benchmark; a Cvent survey on barriers to audience trust, which measures something else; a secondary report that one vendor's assistant connection was free only for a limited period, which could not be confirmed at the vendor; and every vendor claim about accuracy or hours saved, none of which came with a method. The product announcements in Section 4 were read at the vendors' own pages and were not tested.

How fresh each number is

Every statistic is dated in the text or in the source list. Section 4 will date first. The table shows when the main sources refresh.

SOURCE	EDITION USED	REFRESHES	NEXT EXPECTED
Forrester State of B2B Events Survey	Q1 2026 (published June 25, 2026), with Q1 2025 for the base	Annual, fielded in the first quarter	June 2027
Forrester Consulting study for Cvent	Preliminary findings, June 2026, released July 15, 2026	One-off so far	A final study is pending; check before quoting
Cvent Event-Led Growth Report	2026 (summary June 23, 2026)	Annual	2027
Naylor Association Benchmarking Report	2026 (August 3, 2026)	Annual, summer	August 2027
ASAE State of Associations	March 2026	Annual	March 2027
Momentus State of AI in Venue and Event Management	Q1 2026 (fielded March 2026)	First edition	Unknown
Trade Show Executive, Lippman Connects and EVOLIO attendee acquisition study	2026 (reported May 5, 2026)	Annual, spring	Spring 2027

SOURCE	EDITION USED	REFRESHES	NEXT EXPECTED
Gartner marketing surveys	October 2025 (AI agents); 2026 CMO Spend Survey (May 2026)	Annual, with releases through the year	A late 2026 release on AI agents is possible; none was found
Showcare Sponsorship Pulse and iMIS Membership Performance Benchmark	2026 editions	Annual	2027
Vendor announcements of assistant access	March to August 2026	Continuous	Recheck before acting; terms and scope are changing
State privacy law count	October 28, 2026	Continuous	Recount before acting; effective dates of the four 2026 laws were not checked for this edition

A note on where this comes from

Event Data Pro connects registration systems, event apps, CRMs and membership systems for conferences, so the people who wrote this spend their weeks looking at the duplicates and the mismatched member types described above. That is the bias to be aware of. It is also why the report is about what to count and not about what to buy. If you would like a second pair of eyes on your six counts, we offer a free consultation and will tell you honestly if a built-in connector is enough. Write to contact@eventdata.pro.

Sources

1. Forrester, "The Next Era Of B2B Events: Eight Data-Backed Shifts Defining 2026," findings from Forrester's Q1 2026 State Of B2B Events Survey (over 400 event decision-makers globally), June 25, 2026. www.forrester.com/blogs/the-next-era-of-b2b-events-eight-data-backed-shifts-defining-2026/
2. Naylor Association Solutions and Association Adviser, "2026 Association Benchmarking Report Reveals Associations Are Getting More Intentional About Data, AI, and Revenue" (665 survey responses from senior association professionals across North America), August 3, 2026. www.naylor.com/blog/2026/08/03/2026-association-benchmarking-report-reveals-associations-are-getting-more-intentional-about-data-ai-and-revenue/
3. Forrester, "AI In Events: A Promise Waiting To Be Realized," findings from Forrester's Q1 2025 State Of B2B Events Survey, June 3, 2025. The post does not state the sample size. www.forrester.com/blogs/ai-in-events-a-promise-waiting-to-be-realized/
4. Trade Show Executive, report on the 2026 attendee acquisition study by Trade Show Executive, Lippman Connects and EVOLIO Marketing, May 5, 2026. The article does not state the sample size. tradeshowexecutive.com/?p=30154
5. PCMA Convene, "AI Pulse Check: How Event Planners Are Using Gen AI," March 18, 2025 (survey by Spark and Gevme, 92 business events professionals, fielded December 2024). pcma.org/event-planners-gen-ai
6. ASAE, "State of Associations Report," news release, March 23, 2026 (drawn from a series of pulse polls; the release gives no sample size for the AI figures). www.asaecenter.org/about-us/news_releases/2026/asae-releases-first-ever-state-of-associations-report-offering-data-driven-view-of-industry-present-and-future
7. Cvent, "Events Are a Revenue Engine. Here's What 1,000+ Marketers Told Us," summary of the 2026 Event-Led Growth Report, June 23, 2026. Fielding dates and research firm not stated. www.cvent.com/en/blog/events/events-are-revenue-engine

8. Swoogo, "Your Event Data Now Talks to Your AI Tools With Swoogo's MCP Server," March 24, 2026; press release distributed April 6, 2026. swoogo.events/blog/swoogo-mcp-server/
9. RainFocus, "RainFocus Launches AI Agent Connectivity for Event Data with MCP Profiles," press release, published July 7, 2026 (dateline July 8). www.rainfocus.com/company/news-press/rainfocus-launches-ai-agent-connectivity-for-event-data-with-mcp-profiles/
10. Eventtia, "AI Agents for Event Management: Inside the Eventtia MCP Server," August 26, 2026 (server launched August 1, 2026; the page has been updated since). www.eventtia.com/ai-agents-event-management-eventtia-mcp-server/
11. Momentus Technologies, "The State of AI in Venue and Event Management," Q1 2026 research report (venue and event management professionals in more than 20 countries, fielded March 2026). No sample size on the public page; the full report is gated and was not read. gomomentus.com/state-of-ai-report
12. micenet, report on the Momentus study ("hundreds of venue professionals," the largest group from convention centres), May 14, 2026. mice.net.au/?p=47519
13. Cvent, "Cvent Unveils More Than 70 Product Innovations at Cvent CONNECT 2026, Backed by $1 Billion Technology Investment," press release, July 14, 2026. www.cvent.com/en/press-release/cvent-unveils-more-70-product-innovations-cvent-connect-2026-backed-1-billion
14. Cvent, "Cvent Announces New Center for Event Insights," press release, July 15, 2026, with preview findings from "a commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Cvent, June 2026. Preliminary; pending final study." Sample size not published. www.cvent.com/en/press-release/cvent-announces-new-center-event-insights
15. MarketScale, report on Cvent's $1 billion commitment and the Forrester Consulting study for Cvent, July 28, 2026. www.marketscale.com/industries/marketing-tech/cvent-commits-1-billion-to-event-tech-as-forrester-data-shows-70-of-leaders-say-live-experiences-matter-more-in-an-ai-saturated-world
16. Gartner, "Gartner Survey Finds 45% of Martech Leaders Say Existing Vendor-Offered AI Agents Fail to Meet Their Expectations," October 29, 2025 (413 marketing technology leaders, June to August 2025), read through Communications Today, October 30, 2025. www.communicationstoday.co.in/45-of-martech-leaders-say-vendor-ai-agents-short-of-business-expectations/
17. MarTech, "CMOs are buying AI that their organization isn't ready for," May 12, 2026, reporting Gartner's 2026 CMO Spend Survey (401 CMOs and senior marketing leaders in North America and Europe, January to March 2026). martech.org/cmos-are-buying-ai-that-their-organization-isnt-ready-for/
18. iMIS, "Common Data Challenges for Associations and the Impact on AI," April 27, 2026, citing "The 2026 Membership Performance Benchmark Report by iMIS." Sample size and exact figure not stated on the page. blog.imis.com/association-data-challenges-ai
19. MultiState, "Twenty-Four States Now Have Comprehensive Consumer Privacy Laws," October 28, 2026. www.multistate.us/insider/2026/10/28/twenty-four-states-now-have-comprehensive-consumer-privacy-laws
20. Showcare, "Event Sponsorship Trends 2026: The Pulse Report," a survey of association sponsorship teams, 2026. No sample size in the public material read. www.showcare.com/event-sponsorship-trends-2026/
21. Associations Now, "AI Readiness: An Operations Perspective on Data, Process, and People," contributed by the director of CRM and analytics at a medical specialty society, April 22, 2026. associationsnow.com/2026/04/22/ai-readiness-an-operations-perspective-on-data-process-and-people/
22. Practitioner comments from public Reddit communities (r/tradeshows, r/Automate, r/salesforce, r/Nonprofit_Marketing), read in full in September 2026. Quoted verbatim; posters identified by role only.
23. Cvent Community, Open Forum, "Removing Duplicate Records," April 13 to 15, 2026. community.cvent.com/discussion/removing-duplicate-records
24. Skift Meetings, "AI & the Future of Events" report and monthly Event Tech & AI roundups, 2026. meetings.skift.com/reports/ai-the-future-of-events/

AI That Actually Works. Event Data Pro, Research & Insights. Data as of November 14, 2026. Copyright 2026 Event Data Pro. Quotations and statistics remain the property of their publishers and are cited under fair use for commentary and research.

Appendix: chart data

Figure 1. What trade show organizers who use AI use it for (percent of AI users)

TASK	VALUE
Marketing	67
Feedback collection and analysis	46
Support and customer service	41
Design and graphics	41

Trade Show Executive, Lippman Connects and EVOLIO Marketing, 2026. Sample size not stated in the published summary.

Figure 2. Use against payoff, and content against data (percent)

MEASURE AND SOURCE	FIRST VALUE	SECOND VALUE
Use AI for content, and say it pays off. Forrester Consulting for Cvent, June 2026	Use it: 59	Paying off: 37
Associations: content, and data. ASAE, March 2026	Content: 87.5	Data: 44.3
Planners: content, and data analysis. Spark and Gevme, via PCMA, Dec 2024, n = 92	Content: 46	Data analysis: 35

The Forrester Consulting figures are preliminary and the release does not say whether the 37 percent is of all respondents or of AI users.

Figure 3. What teams say about their own data (percent)

QUESTION	VALUE	SOURCE AND POPULATION
Disconnected tools limit visibility	71	Forrester Consulting for Cvent, June 2026
Data quality blocks AI personalization	63	Forrester, 400+ event decision-makers, Q1 2026
Rely on disconnected systems	57	Cvent, 1,000+ marketers, 2026
Struggle with data quality	56	Cvent, 1,000+ marketers, 2026
Operational data limited or incomplete	55	Momentus, venue professionals, March 2026
Data for decisions a top challenge	47.7	Naylor, 665 association professionals, 2026

Six different questions asked of different populations. Shown together for direction only.

Figure 6. Biggest concerns about AI, Momentus, March 2026 (percent)

CONCERN	VALUE
Security and data privacy	62
Trust in AI-generated decisions	57
Integration with existing workflows	46
Change management and team adoption	46
Cost or unclear return	40
Reliability in live environments	36
Lack of time or resources	34
Do not know where to start	28

Venue and event management professionals in more than 20 countries; no sample size on the public page. Figures 4 and 5 are tables in the text.