



## KEY FINDING

Meetings and event professionals are planning more events with greater attendance and larger budgets.

### What It Means for You:

Group business is a huge opportunity, since all those events require even more meeting space and hotel rooms.



## KEY FINDING

Only 16% of planners say they are extremely certain of their venue when they begin the sourcing process.

### What It Means for You:

Most group business is available for the taking and can be earned by any venue with great marketing plans and a strong digital presence.



## KEY FINDING

The sourcing process continues to go digital. Planners increasingly rely on online tools such as search engines, venue websites, and reviews when searching for and choosing destinations and venues.

### What It Means for You:

Venues and destinations need to put their best foot forward online and use everything from paid marketing opportunities to social media to make sure planners can find them easily on both search engines and online sourcing platforms.



## KEY FINDING

Costs and discounts still mean a lot to planners when choosing a destination or venue — but they aren't everything.

### What It Means for You:

Even when the cost can't be cut significantly, hotels and venues can attract group business by improving their proposals, ensuring clear, accurate pricing and honest negotiations; offering and promoting unique experiences on the property and in the local area; giving planners more value with extra amenities; and enriching the venue's atmosphere to provide a standout experience



# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the largest and most in-depth edition of Cvent's annual Global Planner Sourcing Report.



*“Every event is treated as an individual experience, and each is special in its own way. At our recent speaker conference, the audience was perfect for our new, innovative engagement ideas — very responsive, hands-on, and overall very appreciative for the experience. They all registered as strangers and left as a big family.”*

— Social/Occasional Planner, U.S.

For our 2018 report, we surveyed **2,668 meeting and event planners across the U.S., Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia-Pacific** to equip our hotel, destination, and venue networks with insights that will help improve their client services and to provide a deeper understanding of the planner decision-making process. The survey was conducted in fall 2017.

This year's Global Planner Sourcing Report has **more than doubled in size from last year's study**.

We've gained a wealth of insight and feedback about how meeting and event planners source venues, what influences their decision-making, how their budgets have changed year-over-year, what goes into building a memorable experience for guests, and where venues and hotels are succeeding in providing great service and living up to expectations — and where they could improve.

The overall state of the industry worldwide is positive, with **budgets on the rise and a need for larger event spaces**. This presents hotels and venues with opportunities and challenges in equal measure.

To understand what really matters to global meeting and event planners, explore our findings and use this report to enhance the effectiveness of your sales, marketing, and event support teams for the seamless execution of compelling meetings and conferences.

# PLANNER PERSONA

Allow us to introduce you to our global meeting and event professionals.

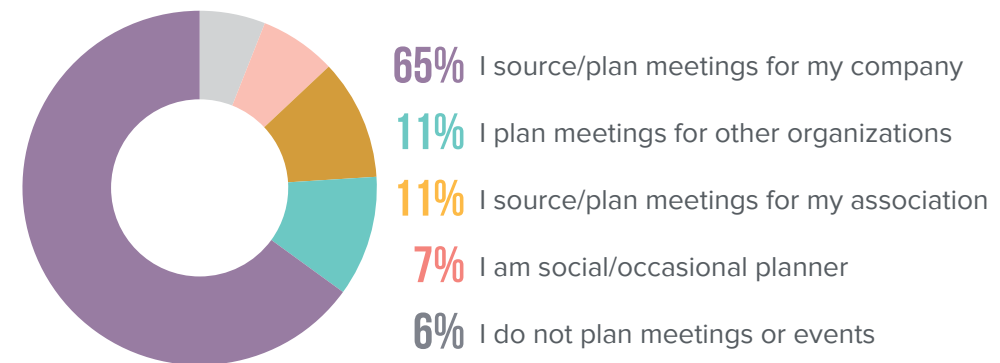
By enlarging our survey, we saw a significant rise in the number of in-house planners interviewed (65% vs. 59% for 2017's report). The majority of respondents live in North America (65%), with the other 35% split between EMEA (Europe, the Middle East, and Africa) and APAC (Asia-Pacific), plus Central and South America.

**Exactly half are Generation X** (between 35 and 52 years old), compared with 36% millennials (18 to 34 years old) and 10% baby boomers (53 to 64 years old). Only 1% are over 64 years old. The remaining 3% elected not to provide their age.

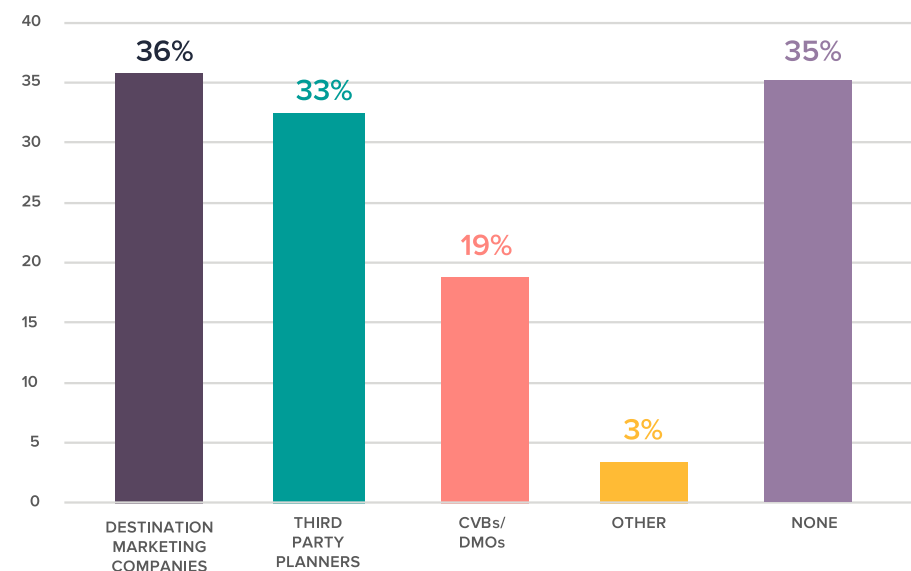
Unlike millennials, who have grown up using technology, **Generation X has had to adapt to the digital age**, particularly in the last several years as use of mobile devices has increased exponentially. Considering that and the better user experience on websites, it's not surprising that the majority of respondents (79%) still prefer to use a computer to source meeting and event venues. But according to web analytics company StatCounter, **internet use on mobile devices surpassed its use on desktop computers for the first time in 2016**. Our survey indicates that the events industry is seeing a similar trend, with **twice as many planners sourcing on smartphones and three times as many using tablets over last year**. With those numbers expected to grow even more, it is imperative that hotels, venues, and destinations optimize their websites and online presence for mobile to improve the planner experience.

When asked to select all the types of external agencies they use, **36% of our planners said they take advantage of destination marketing companies** (DMCs) and 33% hire third-party planners, while about the same number (35%) said they do all the work themselves.

## PLANNER BREAKDOWN BY TYPE



## EXTERNAL AGENCIES USED 2018 GLOBAL



This year's report has seen a **significant increase in planners organizing six to 10 offsite meetings** (28%, vs. 15% last year).

We've also seen a significant decrease in planners organizing just one or two offsite annual meetings (13%, compared with 26% in 2017's report). This may be partially explained by the drop in the number of association planners who contributed to this year's report.

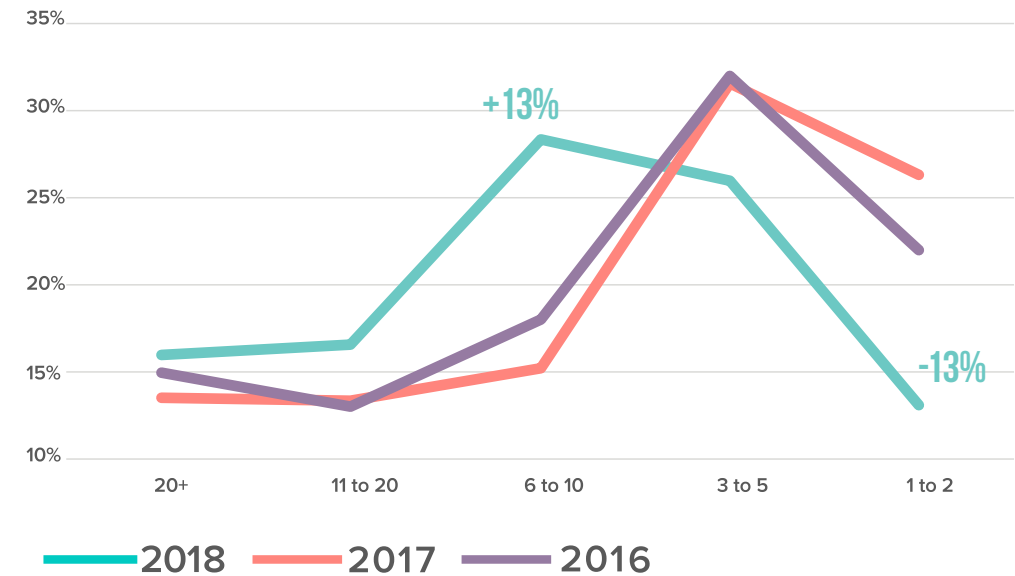
But the steady rises at the top end of the spectrum of annual events planned, together with a sharp decline in those who plan five or fewer, suggest that **meetings, conferences, and events have all grown in importance for companies worldwide.**

When corporate confidence in the economy is strong, meetings and events thrive. Companies invest in growth, strategy, training, and face-to-face marketing, and they communicate to their employees and customers more often. On the flip side, in times of global economic recession, the frequency of meetings and events declines as a direct result of tightened corporate spend.

However, the number of **countries in recession has hit a record low**, and most developed countries are recording moderate yet steady growth of about 2% GDP, according to market data firm Statista.

This is evidenced by increases of **8 percentage points in the number of seminars, 9 percentage points in the number of trade shows, and 3 percentage points in training events** year-over-year.

## NUMBER OF EVENTS PLANNED PER YEAR



*"Our conference of 300 people was at a new location this year, with a professional and helpful hotel staff and a big, bright room with a great view of the city. Everything worked like clockwork, the speakers were great and interactive, and the catering was amazing. And we could do so much more once we add an event app."*

— Corporate Planner, Australia

# THE EVENT LANDSCAPE

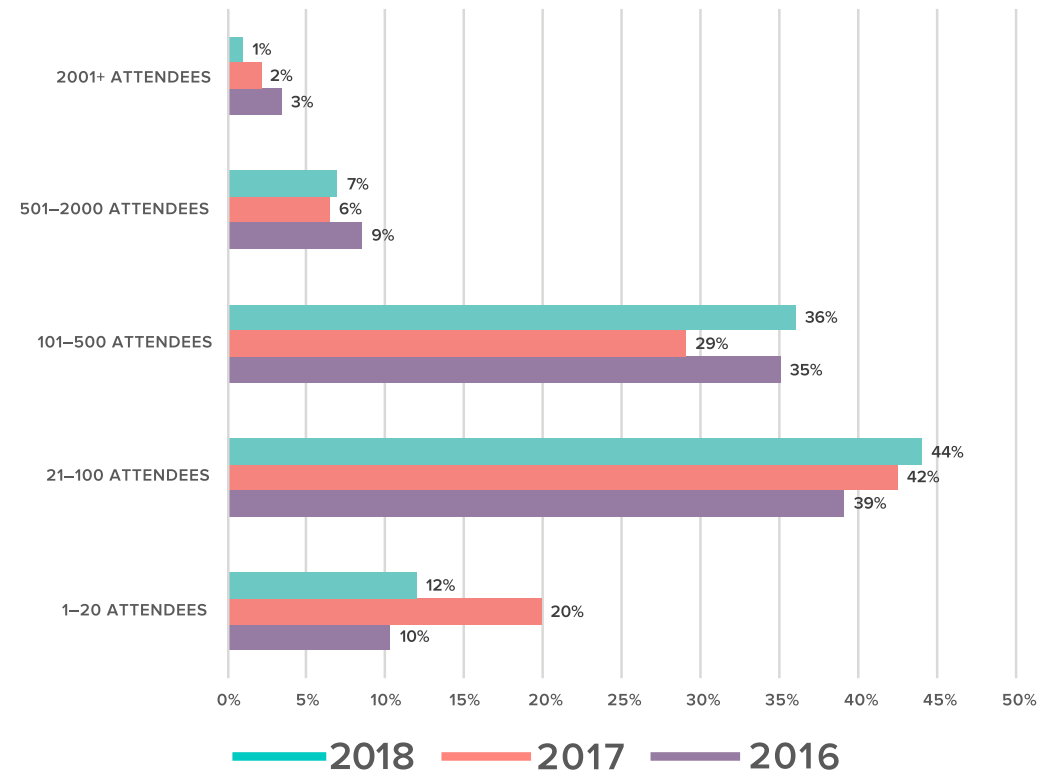
Worldwide business confidence is also reflected in the comparative year-over-year size of meetings, conferences, and events. Regional, smaller events of one to 20 attendees have decreased by half, while meetings of 21 to 100 attendees have declined by 3 percentage points.

By comparison, meetings for **101 to 500 attendees have returned to the levels recorded in 2016** (a jump of 6 percentage points from last year). Meetings of 501 to 2,000 attendees and those for more than 2,000 attendees have both increased as well (+3 and +1 percentage points, respectively).

In past years, North American planners recorded fewer annual events when compared with the rest of the world. These tended to be less frequent, much larger events — due to the logistics and cost of bringing people together more often from different states. In EMEA, however, customers and employees would come together more often in different destinations, but those meetings tended to be smaller and more regional.

This year's results show that businesses worldwide are now bringing people together more often and on a much larger scale — **59% report an increase in the number of attendees**, while only 12% report a decrease.

## HOW LARGE ARE MOST MEETINGS YOU PLAN?



*"In Denver, we were able to plan a few offsite events that were unique to the location: History Colorado Museum and a private rodeo. They were experiences that attendees typically wouldn't have been able to have on their own, and everyone loved the location of the hotel, as it was close to everything downtown."*

— Corporate Planner, U.S.

# THE EVENT LANDSCAPE

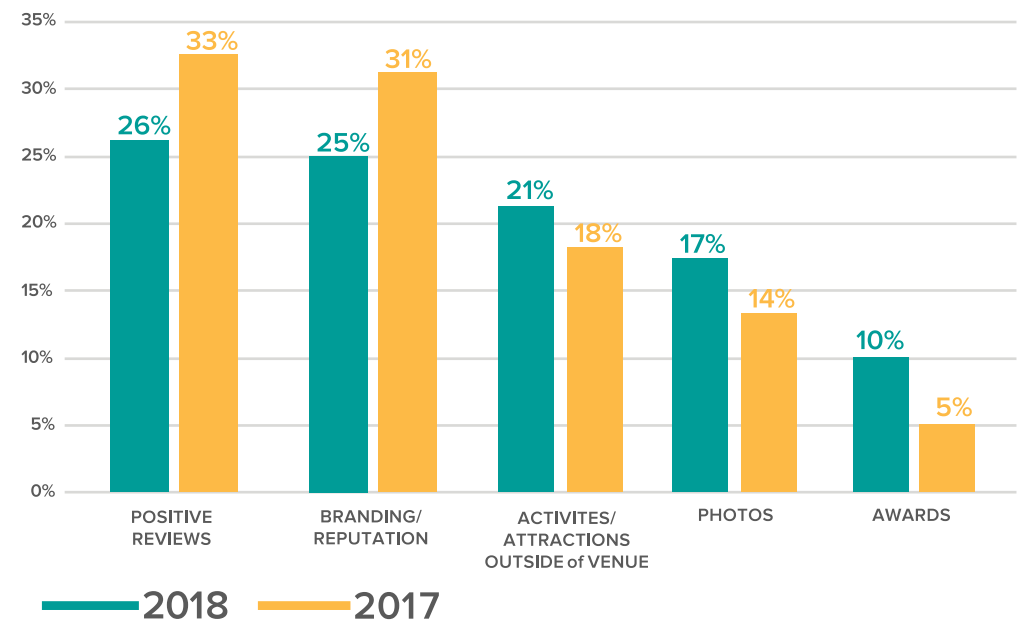
This trend, fueled by global economic confidence, affects not only meeting space requirements, but also the need for more hotel sleeping rooms, larger-scale catering, and more hospitality and offsite activity options.

In fact, when we compare planners' top three influences on destination choice year-over-year, **activities outside of the venue has steadily increased in importance** (21% compared with 18%). This is the first of many indications in our report that planners — as well as attendees — are seeking out unique experiences beyond the typical meeting, giving hotels and venues the chance to differentiate themselves.

The importance of being able to offer offsite activities explains why **more than half (56%) of global planners choose hotel chains over independent or boutique properties**, sports arenas, cultural venues, and other types of locations. There's a perception among planners that the larger hotel groups have the infrastructure and proximity and connections to local attractions to host more integrated, robust event programs for larger numbers of attendees.

Boutique and independent hotels, along with venues that categorize themselves as unique, need to raise their game to communicate their abilities to host complete attendee programs either in-house or in partnership with DMCs, convention bureaus, partner hotels, or agencies.

## TOP INFLUENCES ON DESTINATION CHOICE



*"I surprised my attendees with a trip to the Philadelphia Museum of Art steps, where I had a wonderful Rocky impersonator waiting to take photos with the group. I also took a group to a Texas Hill Country ranch for a teepee-building team exercise. They didn't know what they were getting into and jumped right in."*

— Corporate Planner, U.S.

With meetings and events growing in both size and frequency across the world, it would make sense to see concurrent budget growth.

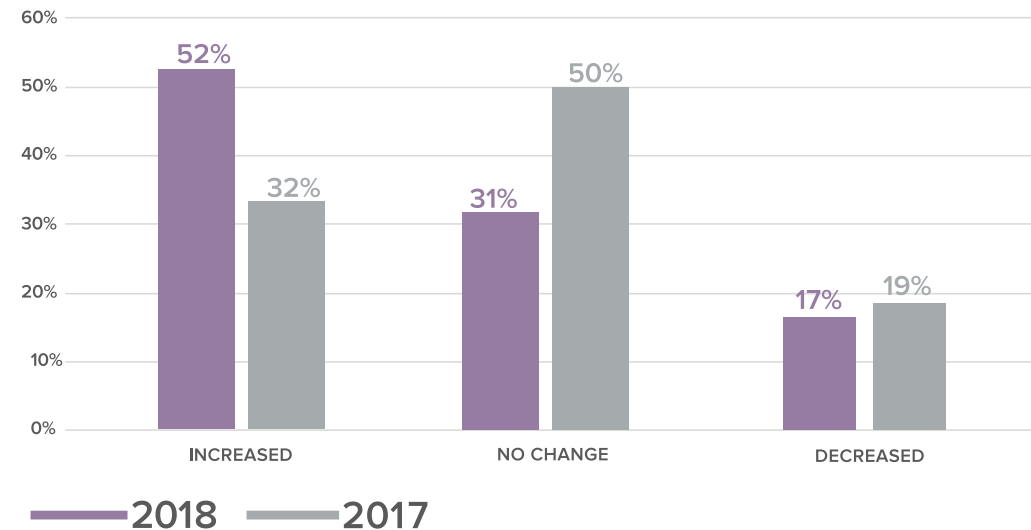
**Over half (52%) of respondents say their event budgets have indeed increased year-over-year**, compared with only 32% the year before.

This large increase is a further sign of global market confidence, as 50% of those surveyed for last year's Global Planner Sourcing Report told us that they'd seen no year-over-year change to their allotted spend (compared with only 31% for this year's study).

Companies were most likely waiting to gauge the economic impact of key global events such as the U.S. presidential election, Britain's decision to leave the European Union, and continued unrest in the Middle East. Little significant impact to the world's economy from key events so far has helped inspire global business confidence.

Rising confidence results in larger investment in meetings and events, as companies increasingly understand the power of live events and their vital role in achieving business goals. The face-to-face connections made at live events are important for marketing, sales, customer relationships, and brand loyalty.

## HOW HAS YOUR BUDGET CHANGED?



*"Price is normally a huge deciding factor, and we tend to have very specific ideas in mind. Venues often want to impose their own rules that don't suit us — for instance, using their catering company or In-house tech support."*

— Corporate Planner, U.K.



So what opportunities does growth in event spend present for both hotels and other venues?

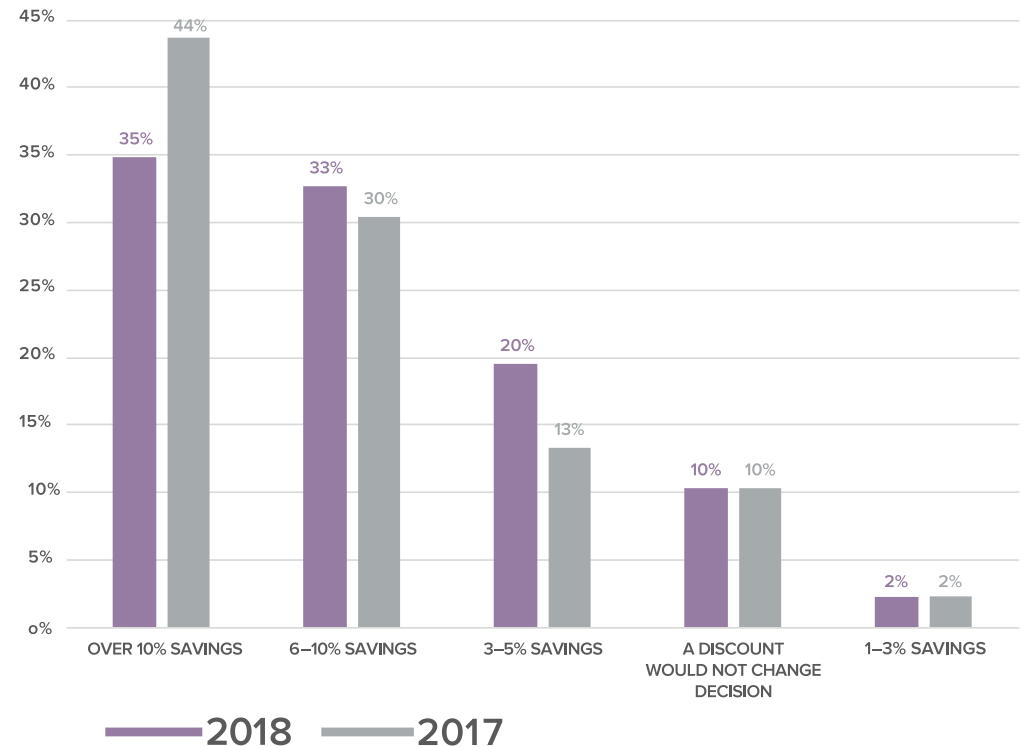
Properties that offer visible and competitive pricing will never fail to attract the greater share of business, as our respondents continue to lament hidden fees and changing costs.

Discounting maintains its power, too, even in a year of economic stability and rising budgets. **In fact, 90% of planners — the same as last year — said they would be willing to switch to their second-choice venue for a cost savings of at least 1%.**

*“My most memorable event was the state neurosurgical society meeting. After four years of planning the event, this year’s was remarkably stress-free and ran smoothly because of venue staff.”*

— Association Planner, U.S.

## SAVINGS LEVEL TO SWITCH TO SECOND CHOICE



With more in-house corporate planners surveyed for the 2018 report, office-based resources such as desktop and laptop computers are still preferred around the world.

However, the use of **smartphones and tablets to source venues has doubled and tripled**, respectively. This is due to workplace behavioral trends evolving in line with the expectations of millennials and Generation Z employees. As a result, technology is enabling all planners (in-house, third-party, and association) to be more flexible and work on the go.

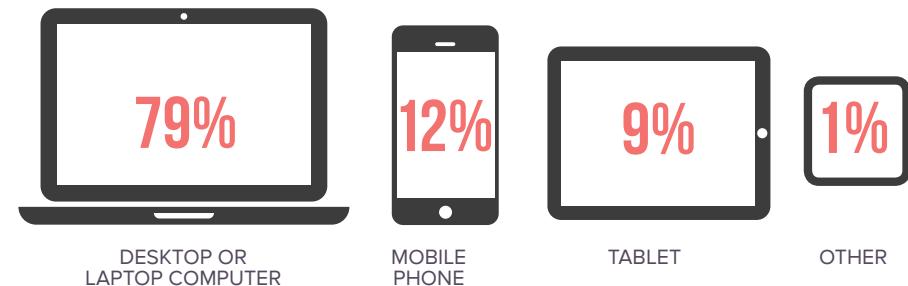
We certainly expect this trend to continue, so venues and hotels need to **optimize their mobile experience** and better integrate technology into their sales, marketing, and event support processes.

*“Researching venues takes up most of our time. In some countries, we have difficulty finding a venue that will cover almost all the standards of our meetings, in terms of capacity, location, and categorization.”*

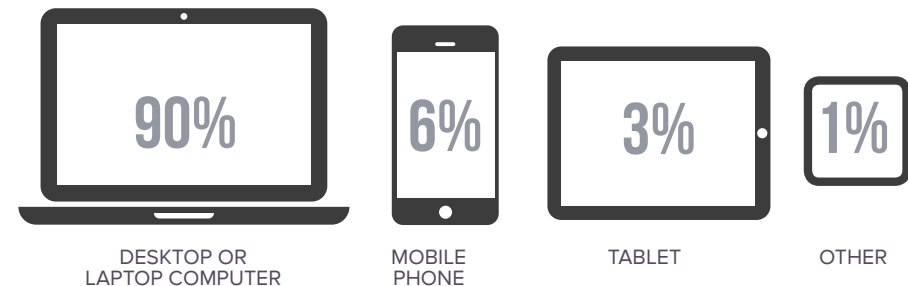
— Corporate Planner, Greece

## TYPICAL SOURCING DEVICE

2018



2017



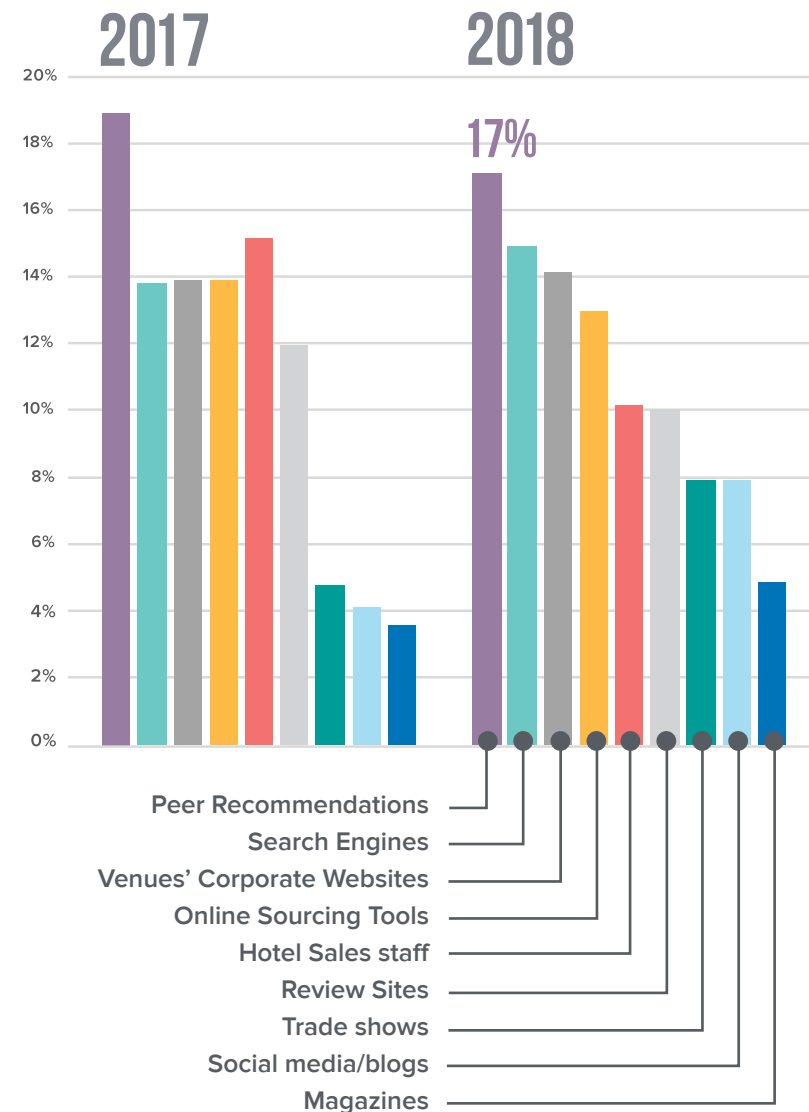
Regardless of whether planners use a computer or mobile device for sourcing, they are increasingly relying on internet resources during their decision-making. **Peer recommendations remain their most influential resource**, but search engines, venues' websites, and online sourcing tools are not far behind. In addition, social media showed the second-biggest growth in influence (3 percentage points) from last year's study.

This means that hotels need to closely monitor every aspect of their digital presence to make sure they are visible and discoverable. Tools such as search-engine optimization, paid marketing opportunities, and social media strategies will become only more important as digital resources continue to grow their authority.

*"I physically go to experience shortlisted hotels. First impressions last, and venues don't seem prepared to use this research phase as a true marketing investment opportunity. Few will invite me to experience the venue at no cost. I'm comfortable paying but don't think one should."*

— Corporate Planner, South Africa

## TOP INFLUENCES ON SOURCING DECISIONS



By analyzing the overall sourcing experience, venues and hotels can again see the importance of maintaining an excellent reputation and a strong digital presence.

**With 71% of global planners extremely or very certain of their event budget** when they begin sourcing, venues need to prioritize clear and accurate pricing quotes with no hidden charges.

Planners' greatest uncertainty — and hotels' greatest opportunity — is in their venue choice: Only 16% are sure of it at the start of the sourcing process. That opens the door for hotels and venues that can be found online easily and provide planners with all the information they need.

*“We’ve struggled to find available venues for the size of our conference, which requires accessibility and free parking. We are limited in our pursuit for comparison venues.”*

— Social/Occasional Planner, U.S.

*“Hotels ‘drop the ball’ quite often during negotiations by not sending all the details. They’ll give you a quote, but then once negotiations start, ‘hidden’ costs come out.”*

— Corporate Planner, U.S.

## WHEN YOU BEGIN SOURCING YOUR EVENT, HOW CERTAIN ARE YOU OF...

THE DATE OF YOUR EVENT



THE DESTINATION OF YOUR EVENT



THE BUDGET OF YOUR EVENT



EVENT AGENDA



EVENT VENUE



EXTREMELY CERTAIN

VERY CERTAIN

SOMEWHAT CERTAIN

NOT CERTAIN

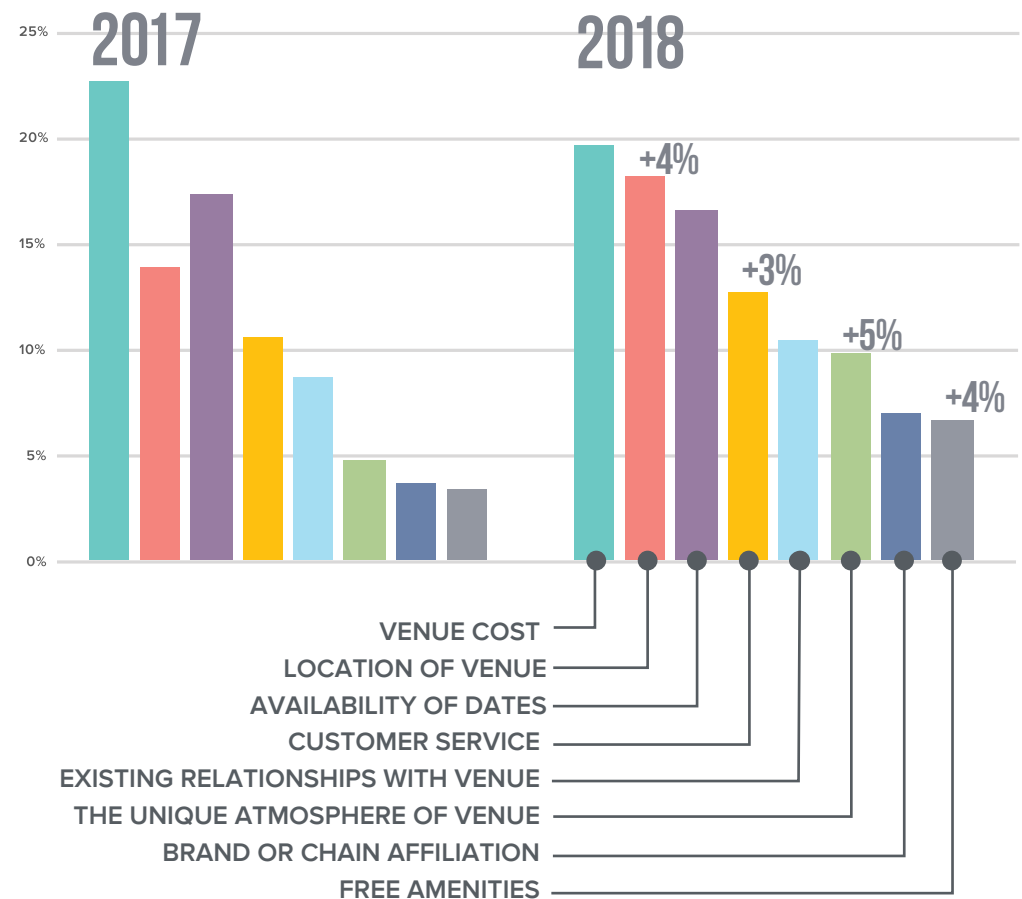
Hotels have more chances than ever to sway planners' decisions by understanding what influences their booking decisions. Unsurprisingly, cost remains the top factor, but it may not simply be a case of remaining competitive. Global planners tell us that when they consider cost, they factor in how **transparent the pricing is**, how **accurate the quotes are**, how **quickly quotes are received**, and whether honest negotiation is an option.

Influencers rising most sharply year-over-year include **location** (+4 percentage points) — another sign of the increased desire for activities outside the venue — as well as **customer service** (+3 percentage points), **atmosphere** (+5 percentage points), **brand affiliation** (+3 percentage points), and **free amenities** such as Wi-Fi and leisure facilities for event attendees (+4 percentage points).

The latter provides an opportunity when hotels are not able to offer deep discounts; including extra amenities in an event package can help give planners the value they're looking for without actually lowering the final cost.

In addition, the increases in the importance of customer service and atmosphere show hotels where they should concentrate to set themselves apart, since those factors are among the easiest to improve.

## MOST IMPORTANT FEATURES INFLUENCING BOOKING DECISION



Planners' interest in atmosphere also proves the significance of the event experience for attendees, which is constantly evolving as trends in technology and generational expectations change.

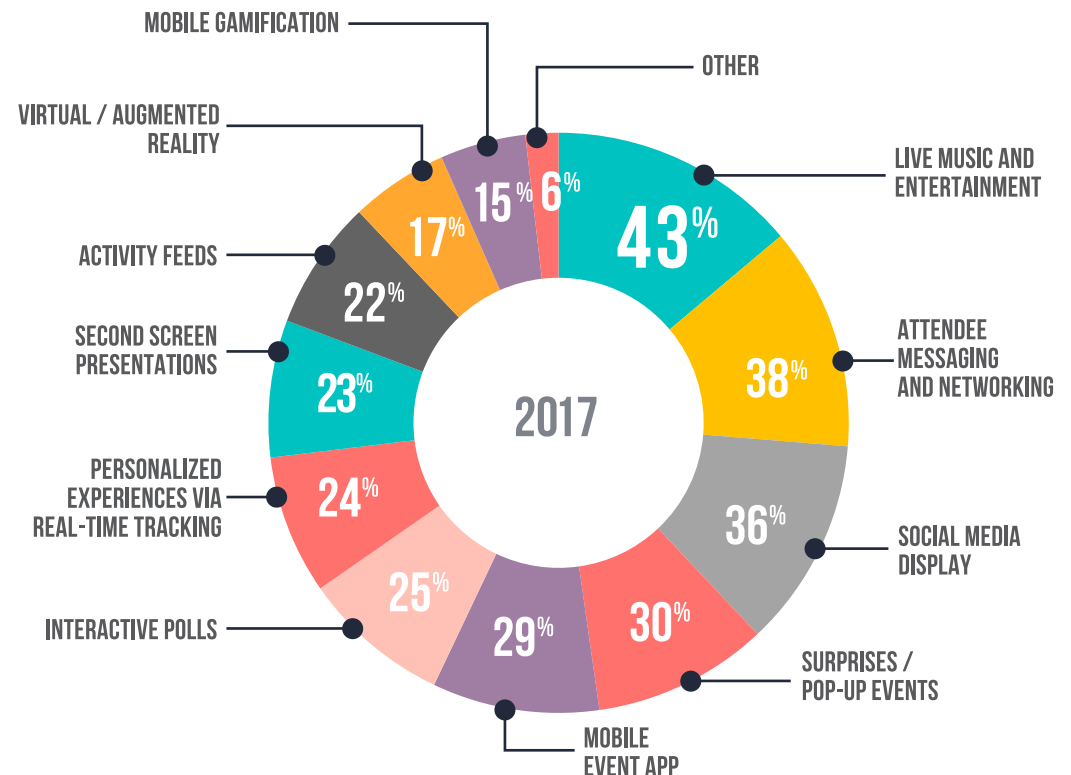
The importance of integrating social media displays has grown steadily over the past few years, and for the second year in a row, it ranks as the **third-most-used strategy for creating memorable experiences**.

Despite maintaining its position, however, the **use of social media displays has dropped by 6 percentage points**. This may reflect the growing popularity of more visual social channels such as Instagram and Snapchat, over text-based platforms such as Twitter, which is often used to gauge attendee feedback and manage onstage question-and-answer sessions.

*"We're planning an event where we're improving attendee interaction by having a social media wall, one-on-one appointments that can be booked via our mobile app, a live stream to the networking area of the plenary room, and interactive voting and Q&A from the app, as well as live broadcasting online as a webinar."*

— Corporate Planner, U.K.

## STRATEGIES FOR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES



Over the next few years, we expect to see **mobile event apps replace integrated social media displays** as the preferred method for connecting with other attendees, providing feedback, and asking speaker questions in real time. For the 2018 Global Planner Sourcing Report, the importance of the event mobile app increased by 2 percentage points, compared with last year's study.

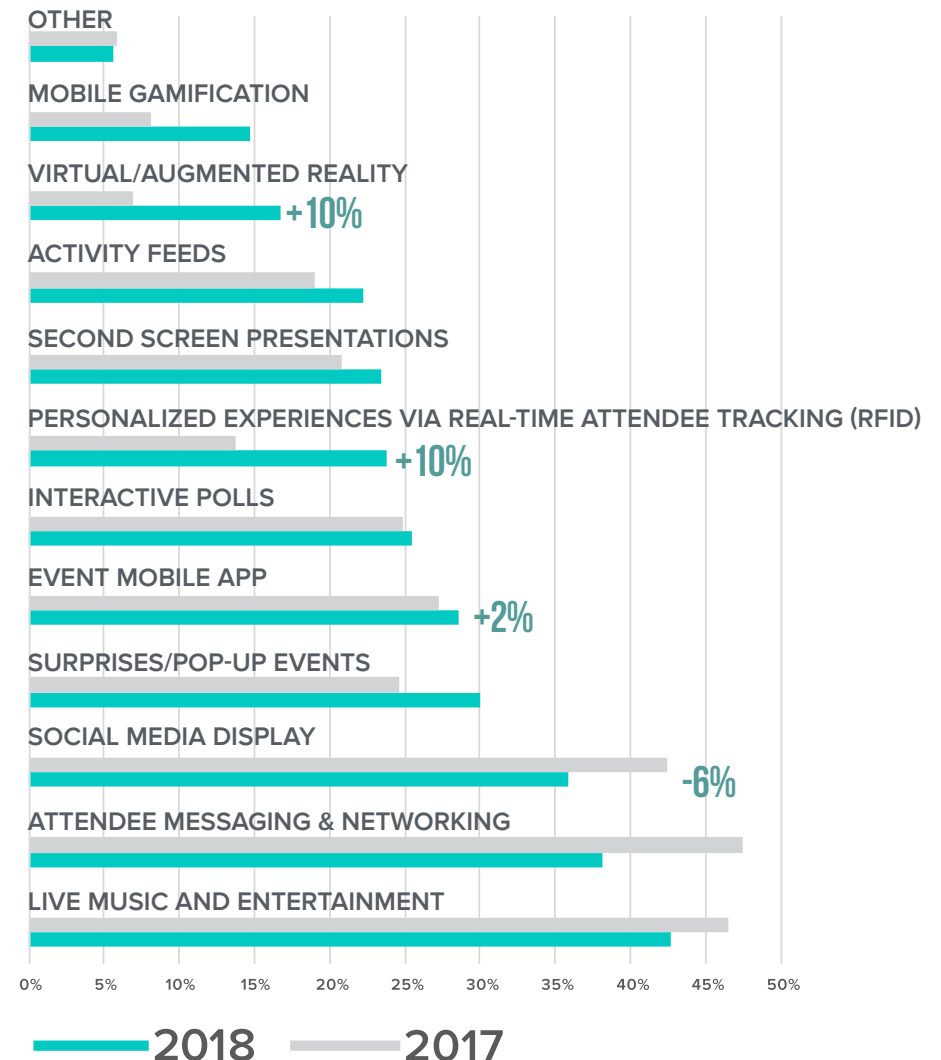
Hotels and venues should also continue to monitor the demand for virtual and augmented reality and personalized experiences via real-time RFID tracking, each of which saw a **sharp increase of 10 percentage points this year**. The trends over the next five years will be key as those technologies mature and enter the mainstream. The increased use of RFID technology, in particular, shows a shift in the way planners operate, as they need to have access to more reporting and data to prove their events' return on investment and have meaningful conversations with their executives.

However, there will always be a high demand for networking opportunities and live entertainment, which switched places in the top two ranks of the most important strategies for creating memorable experiences this year. As one corporate planner said, "Live music and entertainment offer greater attendee value."

*"We had an augmented-reality experience to explain atopic dermatitis (a common form of eczema). The technology connected a sales and marketing force with the patient disease state on another level. The client loved it so much, they requested a permanent install at their headquarters."*

— Third-Party Planner, U.S.

## STRATEGIES FOR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES



# AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Key feedback from last year's report showed that **North American hotels respond to RFPs slower than in other parts of the world**, and that may still ring true. Meanwhile, many planners again say that venues outside North America don't provide answers to every question asked.

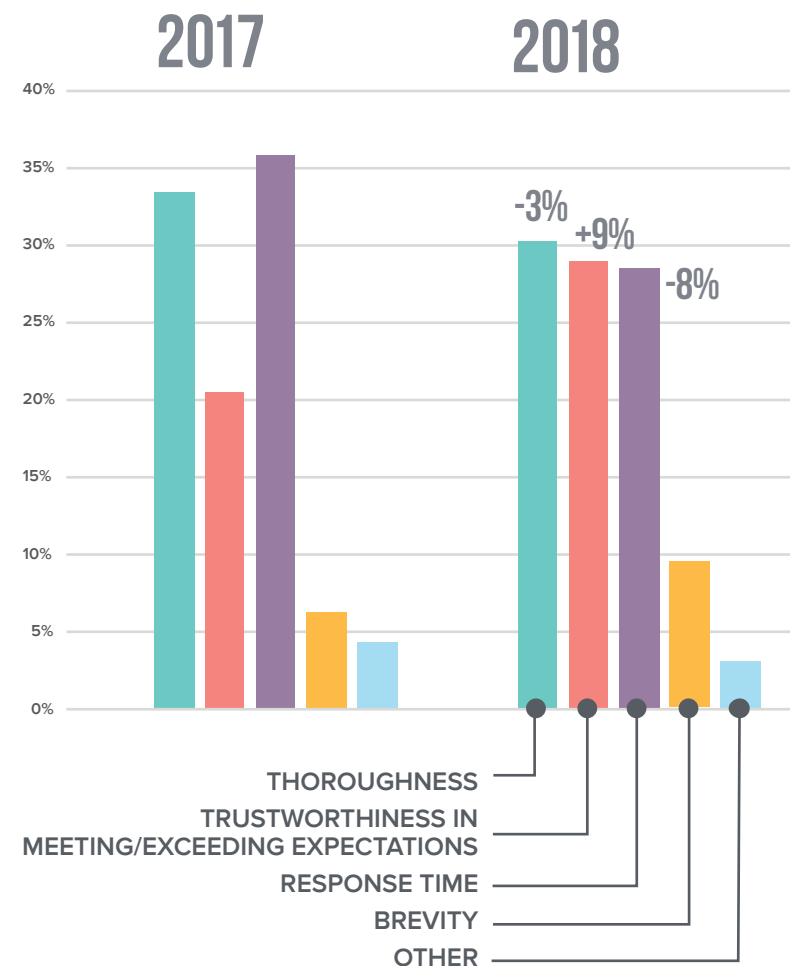
Overall, though, worldwide improvements in speed and thoroughness have been made, reflected by drops of **8 percentage points in complaints about response times** and **3 percentage points in thoroughness complaints**. These two common global issues can be further improved through investment in training and talent to ensure timely, thorough, and accurate responses, making room to win more business.

The largest increase in planner concerns, however, was trustworthiness in meeting and exceeding expectations, which jumped **9 percentage points year-over-year**. This indicates that while venues have made strides to improve their professionalism, there needs to be further work to earn planners' full trust. Efforts to boost transparency, responsiveness, and customer service will likely lead to improvements in this area as well.

*"When a venue provides incomplete information, making me spend extra time trying to obtain all the details needed to make the decision, it makes me think that they'll be unreliable if I book a meeting with them."*

— Corporate Planner, U.S.

## WHAT COULD HOTELS MOST IMPROVE WHEN RESPONDING TO YOUR RFP?





# AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

When looking at the entire sourcing process, **negotiating and researching venues** remain the two areas that planners find the most difficult. Declines in these percentages (-3 and -4 percentage points, respectively) suggest that improvements have been made from previous years, but there is still much that can be done.

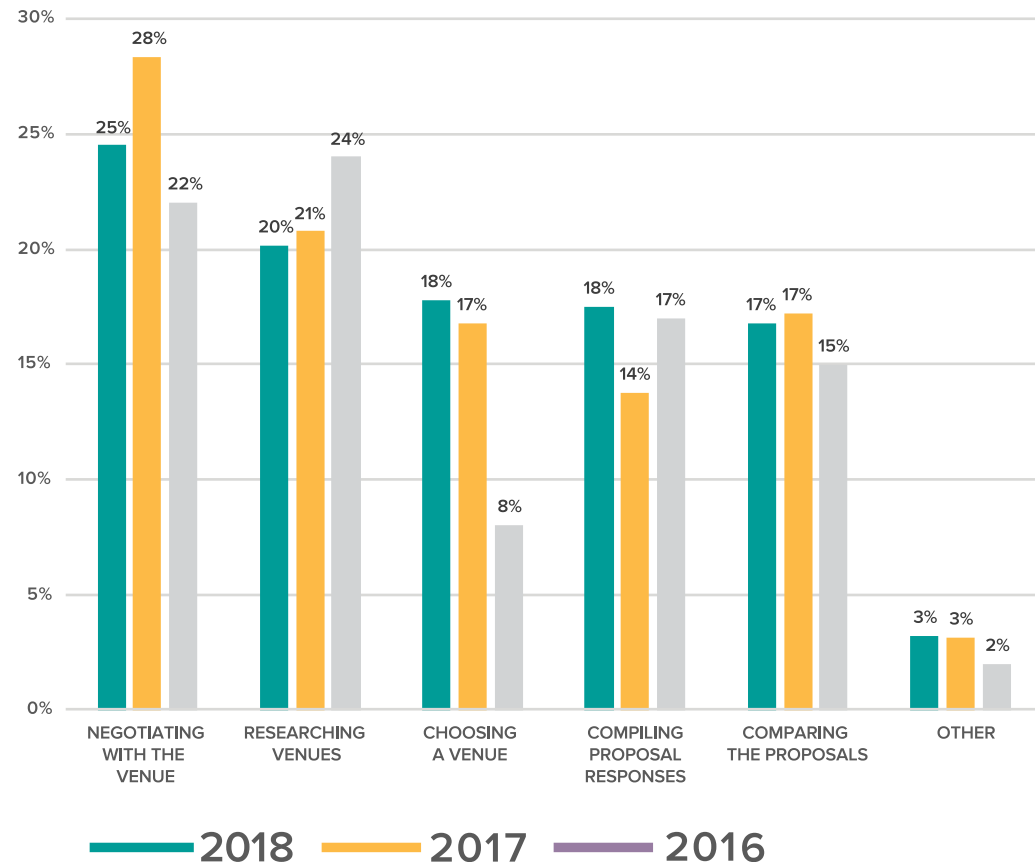
Hospitality professionals can further aid these processes by training sales staff to provide clear and detailed answers to all fielded questions, setting targets for faster response times, and ensuring transparent and accurate pricing.

Planners reported that the **largest increase in difficulty occurred while compiling proposals**. Many cited the wide range of proposal formats and insufficient information as major struggles. Hotels and venues need to make sure their proposals include all the requested information to avoid frustrating back-and-forth conversations. Also, the use of online sourcing platforms can help on both sides of the process: They help hotels send faster, more complete proposals, and they standardize responses so planners can compare more easily.

*“Most venues want your business, so they will be quite accommodating. I want to be certain upfront that the excellence in the quality of service is going to continue throughout the planning stage and the days of the event — not just during our initial ‘dating’ stage.”*

— Corporate Planner, U.S.

## MOST DIFFICULT SOURCING STAGE



# AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The professionalism and responsiveness of sales staff is still the No. 1 reason a planner won't return to a hotel or venue (45%), while cost has overtaken bad experiences in the overall booking process as the second-biggest reason not to return.

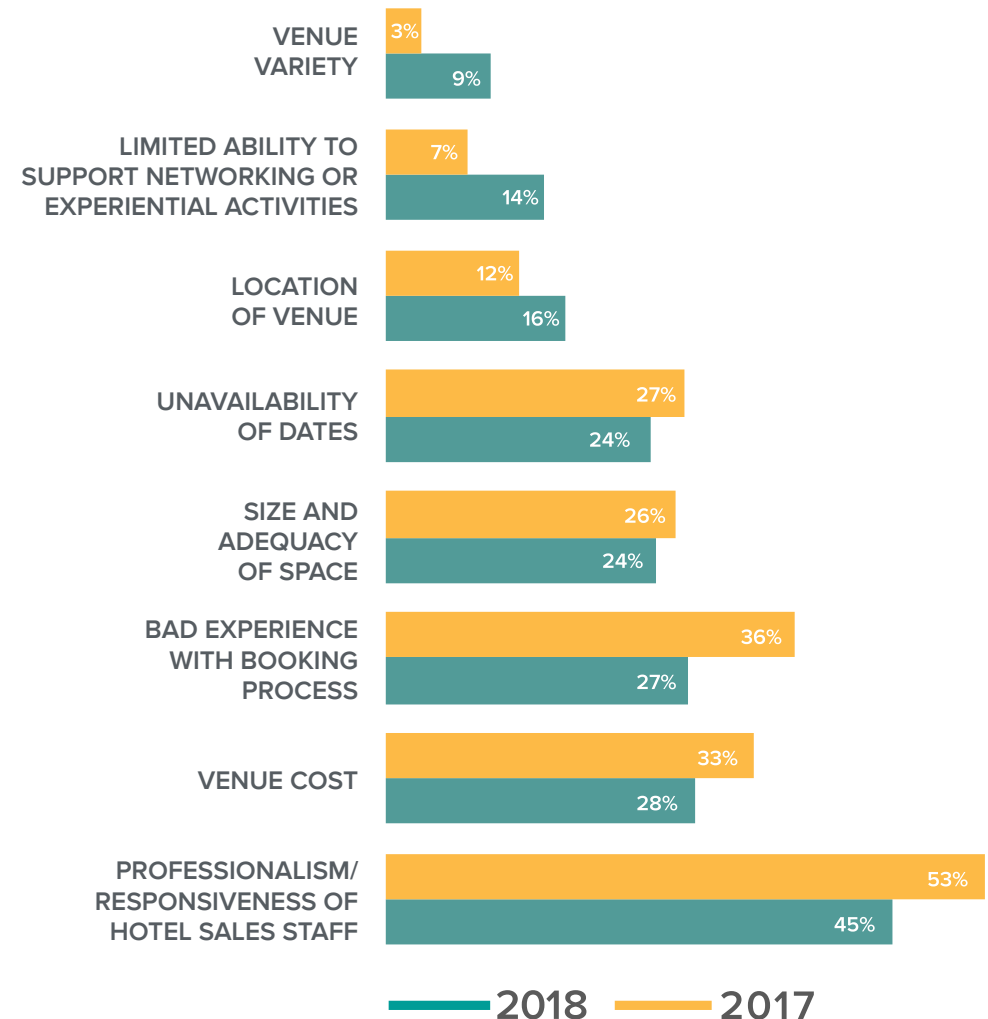
However, each of these top three reasons has **shown significant percentage-point drops**, again indicating that improvements are being made. Continued refinements in these key areas of client relationship management will enhance perception and increase the likelihood of peer-to-peer recommendations.

Since last year, more planners have become concerned about venues' limited **ability to support networking or experiential activities**, which saw the greatest increase (+7 percentage points) as a reason not to return. This is yet more evidence that planners want to create well-rounded, integrated agendas. While hotel sales staffs don't have control over a property's location — and therefore can't change the nearby attractions and activities — they can certainly add and promote unique experiences and activities onsite.

*"In the past, I've had times when an agreed price was changed on me at the last second, and I was forced to renegotiate. Ever since, I've always been nervous when it comes to negotiating with various venues."*

— Third-Party Planner, U.S.

## TOP FACTORS PREVENTING RETURN TO VENUE



## WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE EVENT YOU PLANNED IN THE PAST YEAR, AND WHY?

*“A B2B event for a big tech consumer brand with 500 participants from EMEA in Ibiza, Spain. We compromised by choosing a beautiful location, even though the venue was not a ‘business-style’ hotel and the conference rooms were not ideal. A lot of creativity made it work wonderfully, and the feedback from the participants was the best I’ve ever had on the three years I managed this event for this company.”*

— Third-Party Planner, U.K.

*“The last Christmas party was amazing for so many reasons: great venue, the theme worked, great food, music, and everyone loved it. I never plan the same thing twice, though, so this year has to be even better.”*

— Social/Occasional Planner, U.K.

“A CUSTOMER APPRECIATION EVENT AND AWARDS CEREMONY AT THE GRAMMY MUSEUM IN LOS ANGELES. WE DOUBLED ATTENDANCE FROM OUR GOAL, THE VENUE WAS SPECTACULAR, THE FOOD SUPERB, AND THE OVERALL EXPERIENCE WAS TOP-NOTCH.”

— Corporate Planner, U.S.

*“Our annual Giving Academy conference. We expected an attendance of 40 to 50 and ended up attracting almost 80 guests. Our event marketing strategies are starting to be more effective!”*

— Corporate Planner, U.S.

“OUR NATIONAL SALES MEETING. IT WAS OUR LARGEST ONE YET, WITH OVER 425 ATTENDEES. WE USED AN INTERACTIVE SCREEN WITH A LIVE NEWS FEED OF ATTENDEE TWEETS. IT WAS THE FIRST MEETING WHERE WE REALLY WENT OVER-THE-TOP.”

— Corporate Planner, U.S.



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