



What Planners Really Want

The Five Trends & Truths
Shaping Events in 2026

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Introduction

There's nothing more human than celebration. At Eventective, that's why we've been in the business of celebration since 2003. Our mission is to help connect party people of all kinds and make everyday gatherings memorable.

Over the last two decades, we've seen it all: the cupcake craze, over-the-top gender reveal parties, and Pitbull-themed bachelorette nights, to name a few. But nothing could've prepared us for the 2020s. Socially distanced gatherings, virtual conferences, hybrid events, and courthouse weddings flipped the script, and the industry has been adapting ever since. And if the last few years have taught us anything, it's that people will always find a way to celebrate—it's human nature.

So, what's happening now, and what's next? Our research examines today's event landscape and aims to better serve our venue and vendor partners (that's you!). We surveyed 800+ recent and upcoming party planners to understand what's changed—and what's ahead—for parties, weddings, and meetings.

The following pages summarize our findings and provide actionable guidance to help you adapt to clients' changing expectations. We hope these insights help you understand today's event trends so you can make meaningful connections and increase bookings this year, and beyond.

Party on.

“Any reason is a good reason to celebrate, for celebration is the nature of our spirit.”

— GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR



Research Methodology

In late 2025, we partnered with PortMA, a marketing research and analytics firm, to survey adult U.S. residents who have either **1) rented an event venue within the last 12 months or 2) plan to rent an event venue within the next 12 months.**

Our main goal was to assess how everyday Americans are planning events so that venues and vendors can adjust their offerings to meet clients' needs.



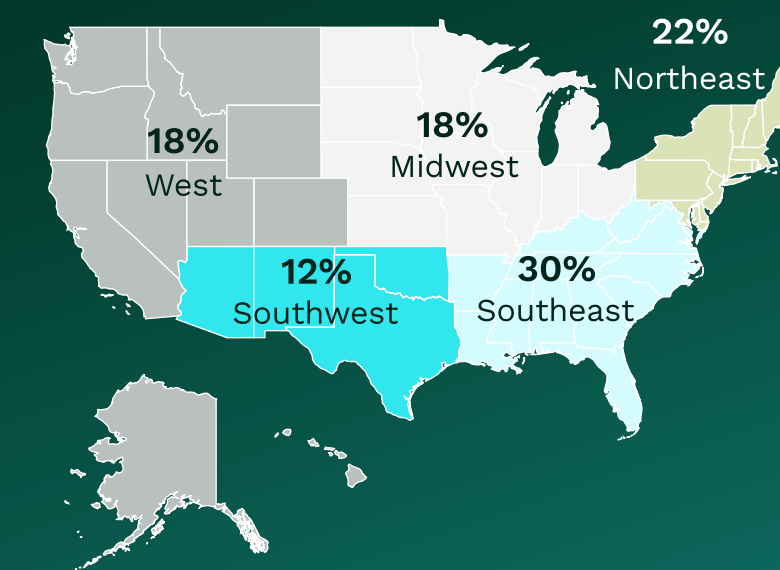
Special Note: We last conducted similar research in 2021 but did not sample our audience in the same fashion, so please use caution when interpreting any comparison. Also, in the following pages, the term **“planner”** refers to a survey respondent (an individual who has planned or is planning an event), **not a professional event planner.**

Who we surveyed

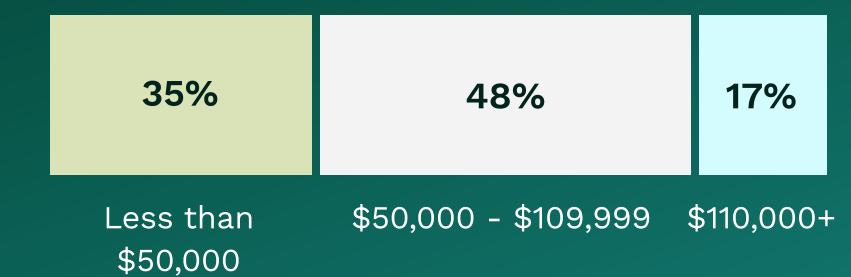
51% Rented an event venue within the last 12 months

49% Plan to rent an event venue in the next 12 months

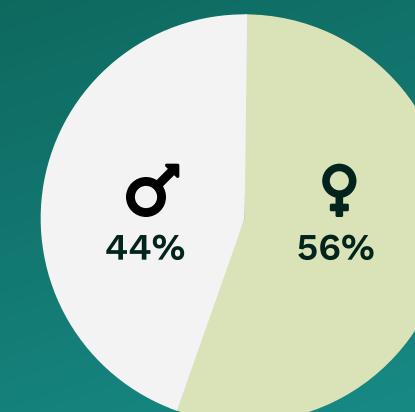
REGION



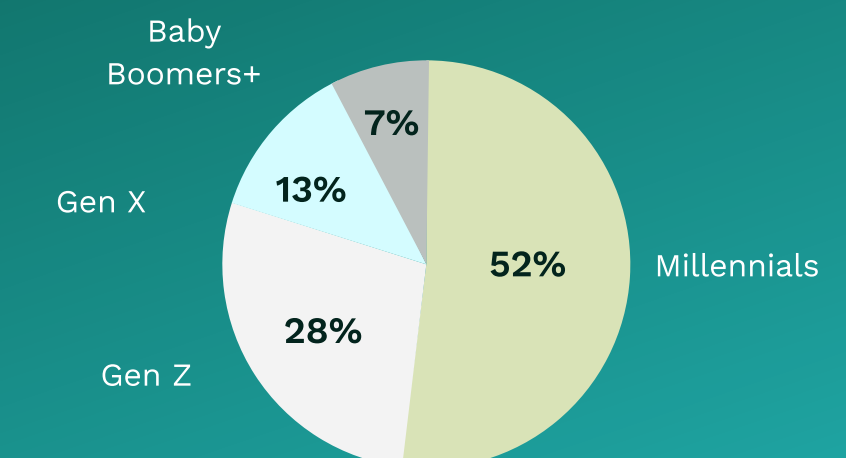
HOUSEHOLD INCOME



GENDER



AGE





Key Findings





The traditional wedding is getting a makeover

Who remembers the DIY heyday of the 2010s? Coupled with the aftermath of the Great Recession and the launch of Pinterest, the event industry took on a whole new look.

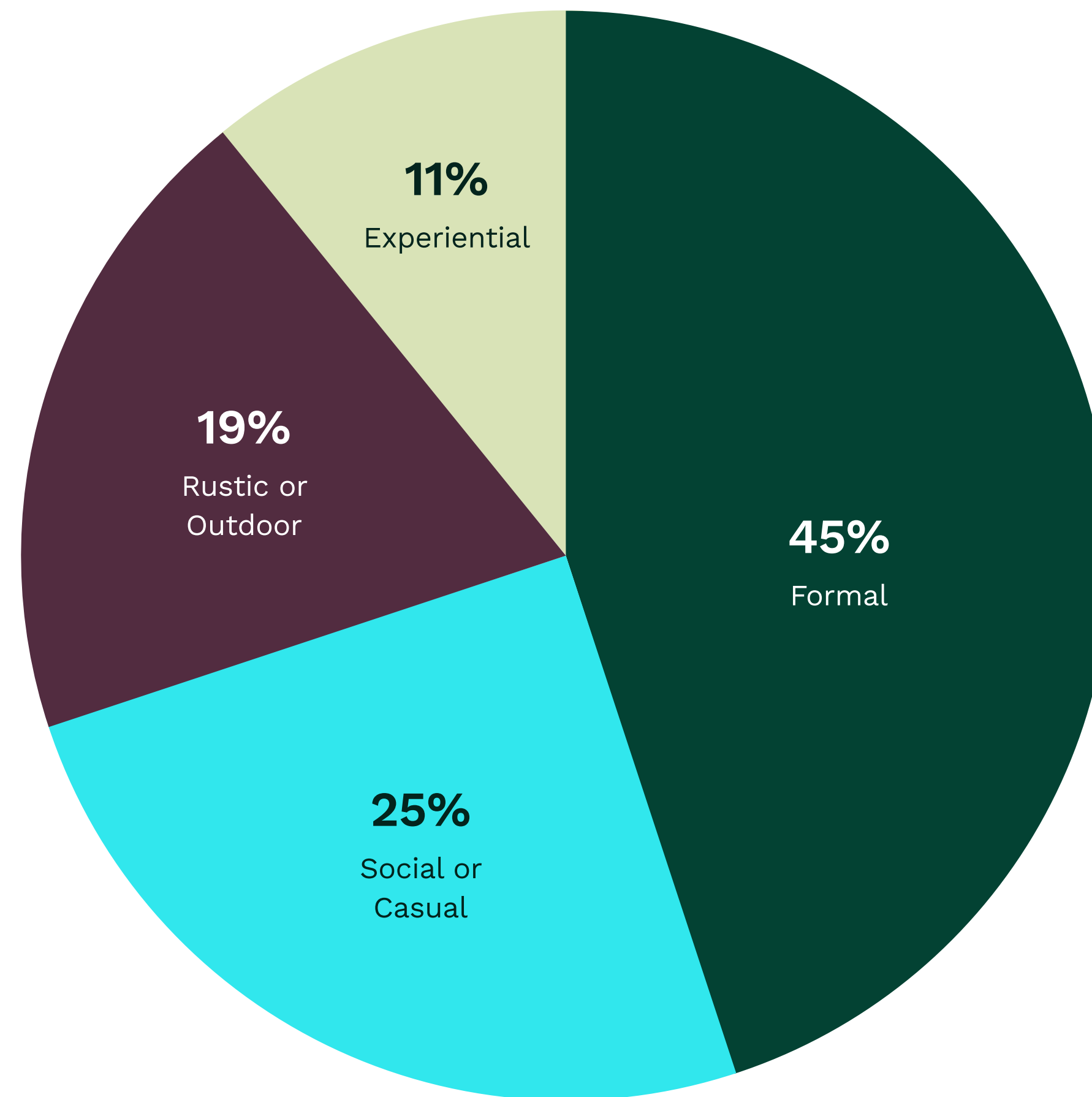
Thanks to the shortening trend cycle—and economic uncertainties—we’re predicting that many couples are similarly reconsidering how much of the traditional wedding experience they want and need.

This shift is likely the result of a combination of factors: tightening wallets, more mainstream acceptance of non-traditional marriage celebrations, and the fallout from the COVID pandemic, which forced people to experiment with different styles. Today’s couples seem less interested in maintaining the status quo and more interested in authentic gatherings that reflect their love story.

A Change in Plans: What Future Planners Expect to Rent by Type

Our research on the most popular event venues reaffirmed this trend: **54% of planners rented a formal venue within the last 12 months** while only **45% of planners expect to rent a formal venue in the next 12 months.**

Conversely, experiential venues like boats, museums, and theaters are rising in popularity — **11% of future planners expect to rent an experiential venue while just 7% of past planners did.**



🔑 Venue Type Groups

Formal: Banquet/Event Hall, Ballroom, Hotel/Resort/Lodge, Country Club, Conference/Meeting, Estate/Mansion, Religious/Chapel

Rustic/Outdoor: Park/Garden, Barn/Farm/Ranch, B&B/Inn, Cabin/Campground

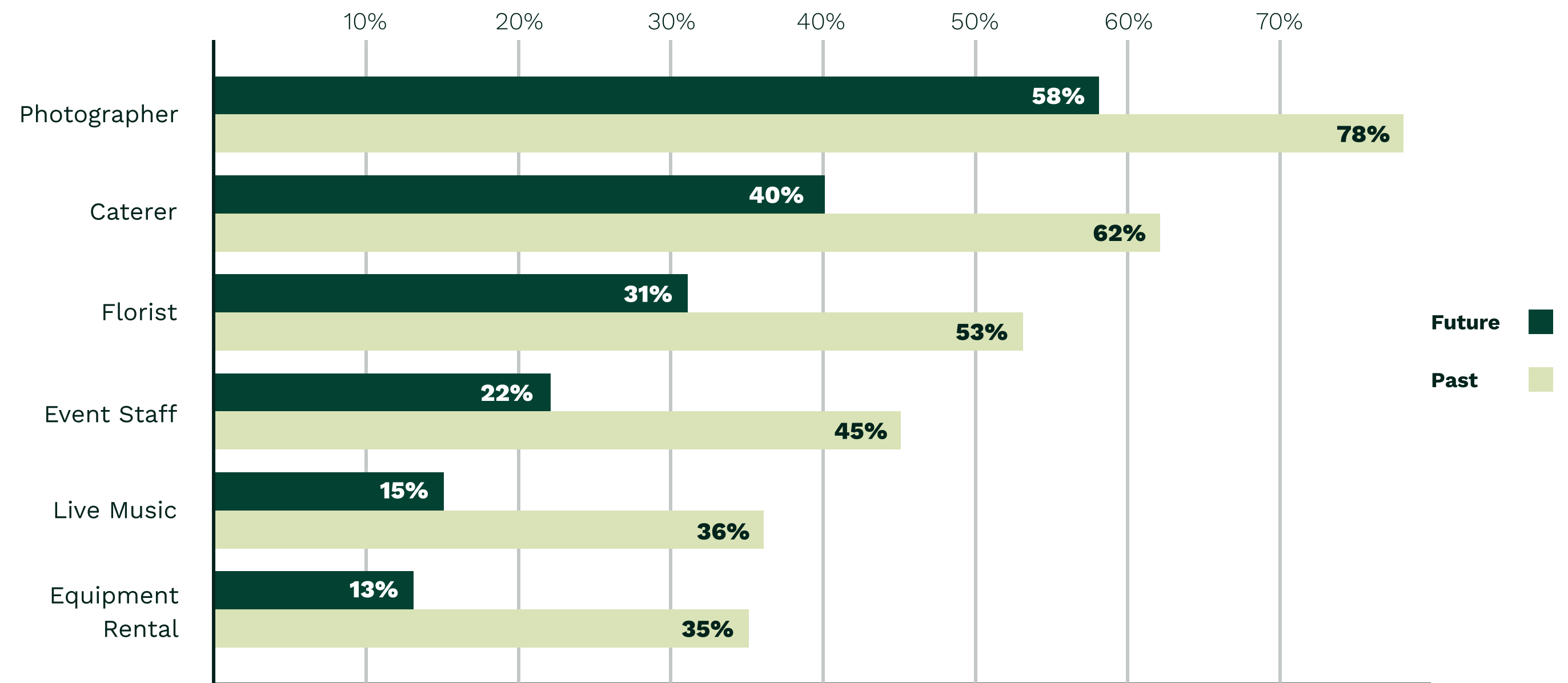
Social/Casual Restaurant/Bar/Pub, Community Center, Bowling/Fun Zone, Nightclub/Lounge, Retreat Center, School/University

Experiential: Boat/Yacht, Casino, Museum, Studio/Gallery, Theater/Auditorium, Winery/Vineyard, Sports Facility/Stadium, Zoo/Aquarium

Despite the decreased appetite for traditional weddings and formalities, today’s planners are increasingly interested in budget-friendly alternatives to traditional wedding planning methods and vendors. Instead of hiring professionals to capture, cater, or croon during their wedding, future planners are choosing to save their money and either do the task themselves or ditch it altogether.

Decor (29%), photography (21%), and event planning (20%) are the **top services to DIY** in lieu of hiring a professional.

A Change in Plans: Did Hire a Vendor (Past Planners) vs. Likely to Hire a Vendor (Future Planners)



How to adjust

Variety is the spice of life. Broaden your offerings to appeal to non-wedding event planners, budget-conscious planners, or those with non-traditional party plans.

How we can help

Eventective is the only platform that brings you all events—not just weddings—so you can branch out and stay booked. Your Eventective profile (your digital storefront) includes detailed [pricing information](#), so don't leave it blank! Provide as much information as possible and include a range of pricing packages to accommodate different budgets and help planners make informed decisions. You can edit this information any time so your profile is always up to date, and your prospects can find exactly what they're looking for.



We already know that today's wedding planners are more budget-conscious. But what does that mean for other types of events?

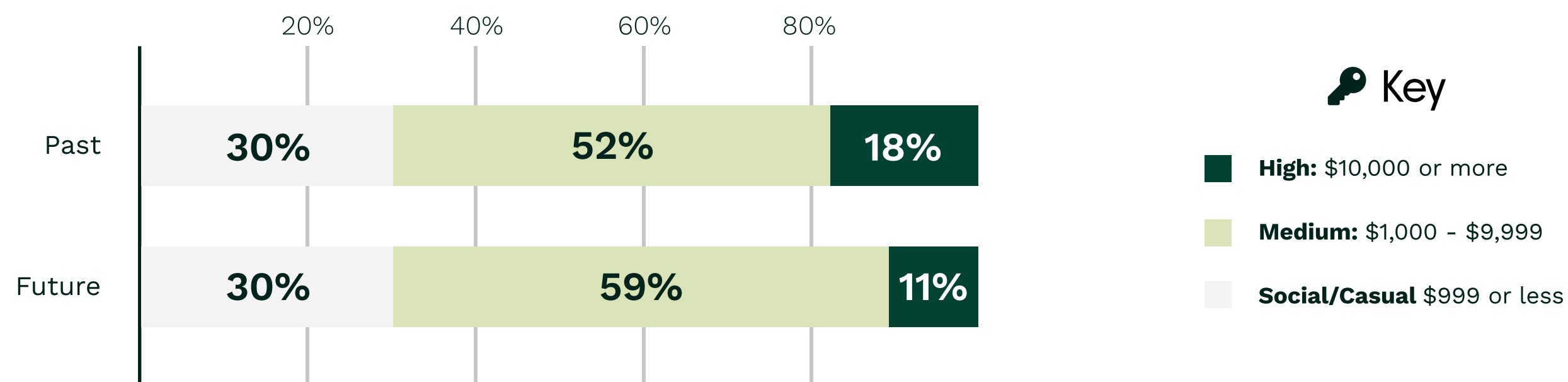
Across the board, event planners are decreasing their budgets. **While 18% of past planners spent more than \$10,000 on their events, just 11% of future planners expect to spend that much.**

The majority of future planners are working with a medium-sized budget ranging from \$1,000 to \$9,999.

Event budgets are tightening

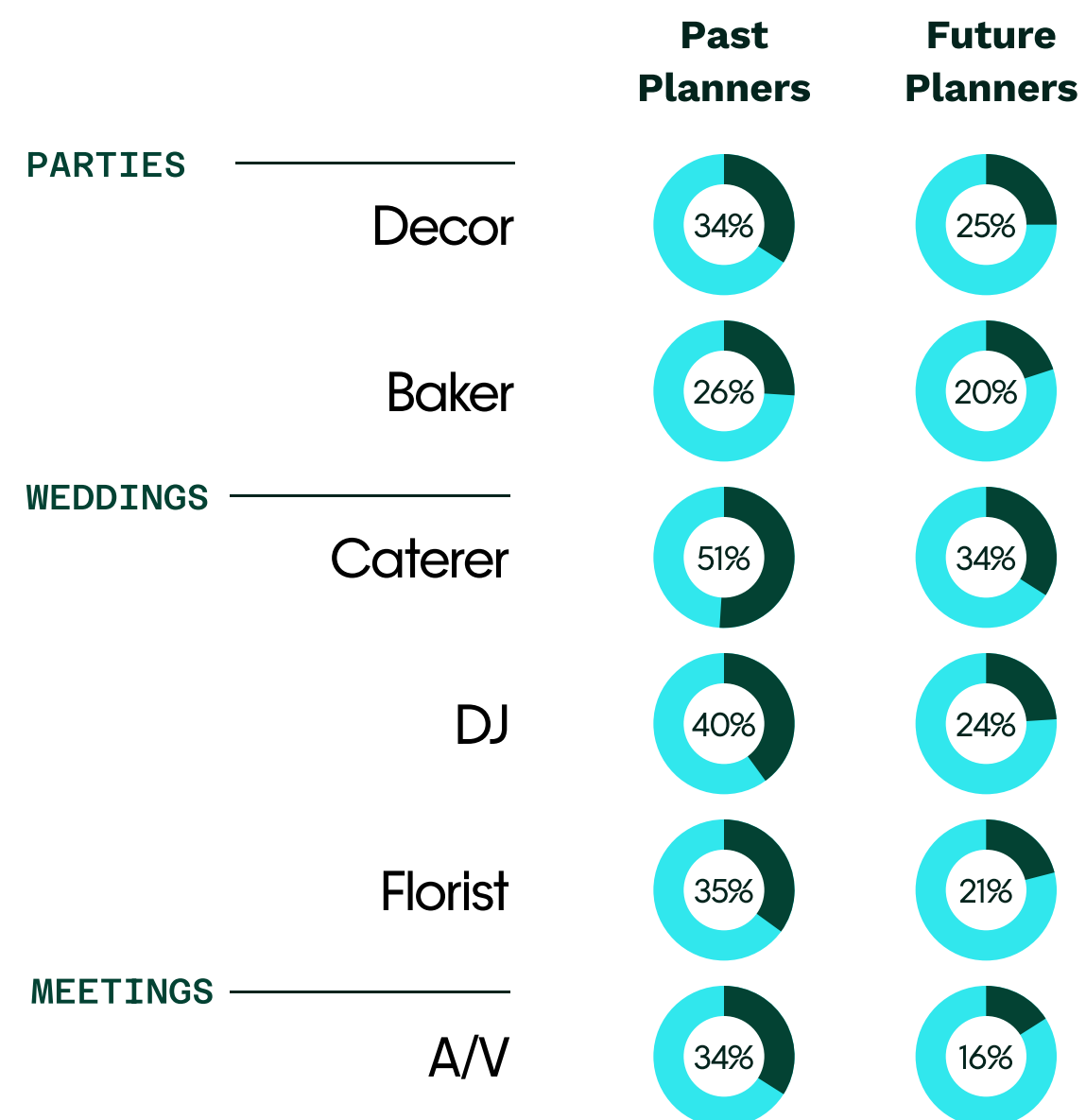


Past vs. Future: How Budgets Are Shifting



Past vs. Future: “Essential” Vendor Services

When comparing between planners who had an event in the last 12 months and those who will have one in the next 12 months, there were statistically significant declines in vendor services considered essential.



How to adjust

Assume that every prospective client is shopping around and searching for the best deal. Don't shy away from the pricing conversation; be upfront and transparent. You'll build trust and book more events.

How we can help

From the first contact to the final contract, Eventective helps you stay transparent every step of the way. [Pricing information](#) is listed at the top of each Eventective profile for a reason—it's one of the most important considerations for planners. Planners can request pricing and fill out a detailed inquiry form based on the type of event they plan to host. Additionally, [our custom contracts tool](#) allows you to add a list of billable items for a full cost breakdown.

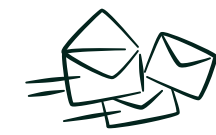


Gen Z has entered the chat

Millennials have been planning events since the late 2000s. **While they still make up 52% of today's event planning demographic, Gen Z has reached adulthood and now accounts for 28% of event planners.**

The last time we ran this survey, they represented 8% of respondents, and many of them were still in college or high school.

Now, these digital natives are starting to plan weddings, milestone birthday parties, and baby showers—and they have their own expectations.



Quick Communication

The majority of every generation we surveyed expects venues or vendors to reply within 1-2 days of an initial inquiry. Gen Z, however, has higher expectations: **16% of survey respondents expect to hear back from businesses within the hour of their submission.** This generation grew up with the internet and is accustomed to instant gratification and automatic replies. Adjust accordingly.



Aesthetic Experiences

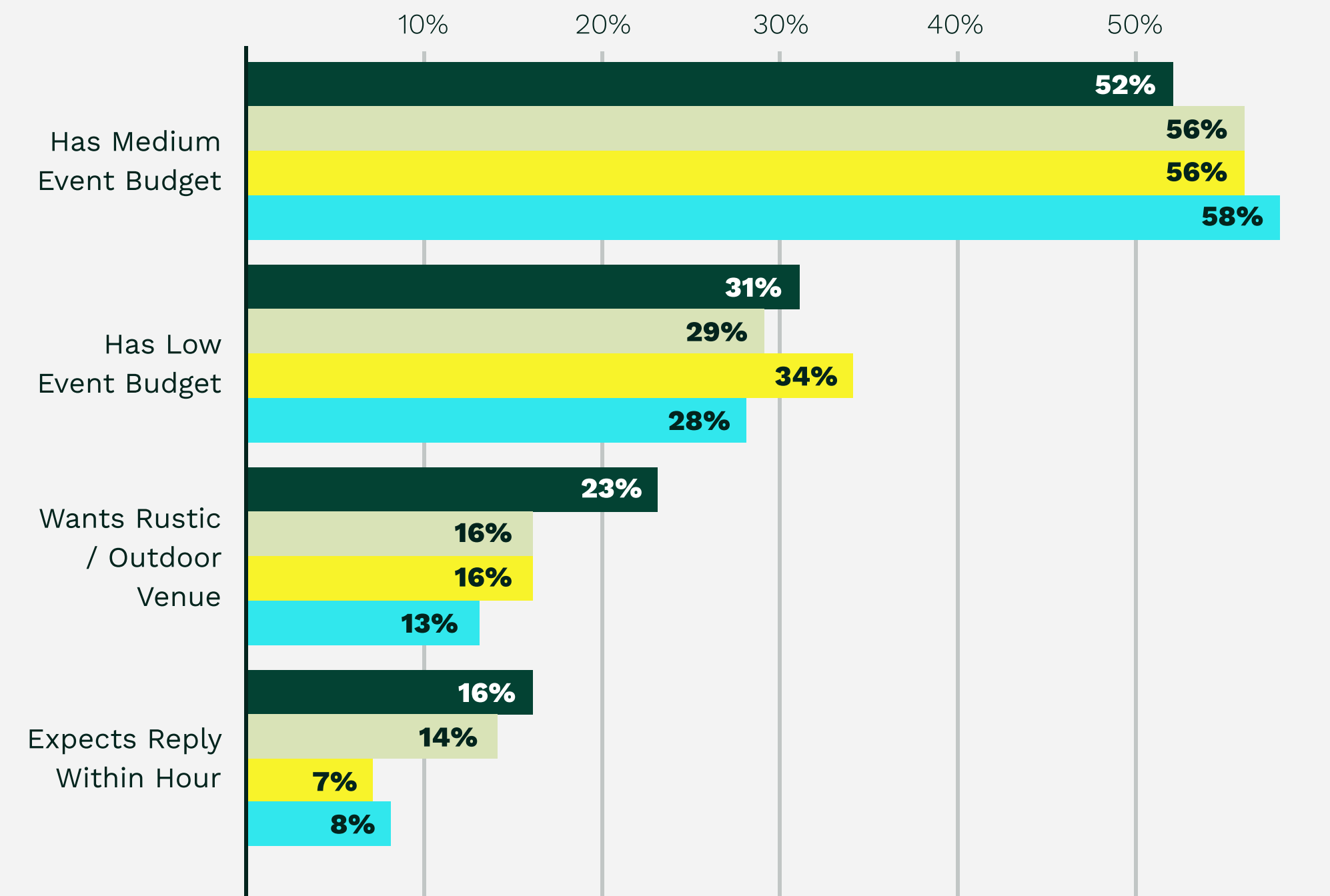
Formal event venues continue to be the most common venue type across generations. Casual venues like restaurants, community centers, and bowling alleys ranked second in popularity for every generation except for Gen Z. **23% of Centennials prefer a rustic or outdoor event venue compared to 16% of Millennials and 13% of Baby Boomers.**



Budget-Friendly Festivities

Gen Z is the youngest event planning demographic. In the early stages of their careers and with less disposable income, the majority of Gen Z planners have an event budget of \$10,000 or less.

How Gen Z Compares to Other Generations



Medium Budget: \$1,000-\$9,999

Low Budget: Less than \$1,000

Rustic/Outdoor Venue Types: Park/Garden, Barn/Farm/Ranch, B&B/Inn, Cabin/Campground

■ Gen Z

■ Millennials

■ Gen X

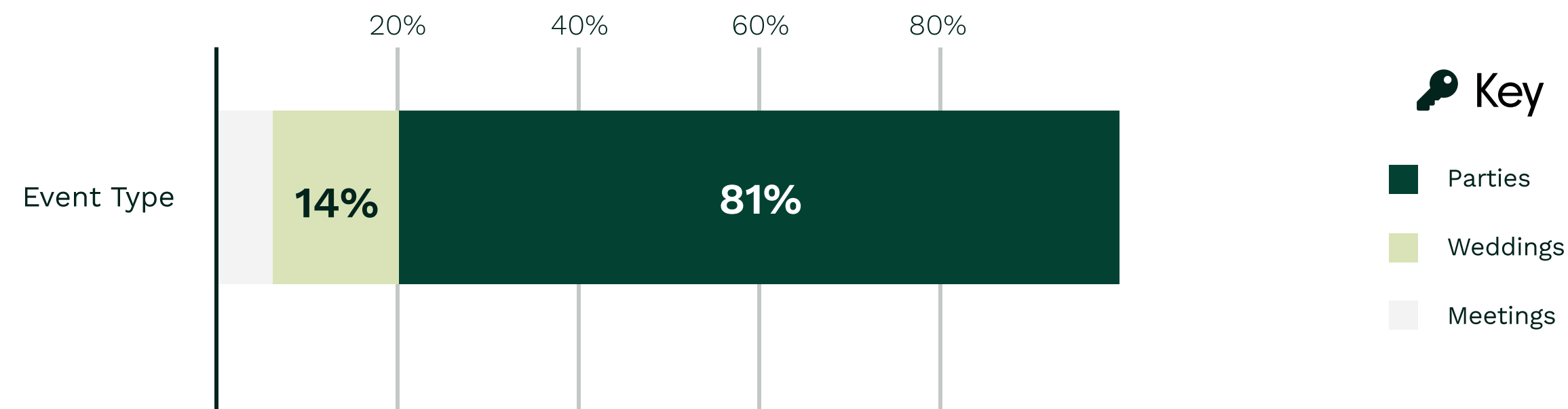
■ Baby Boomers+



Just like every other generation, Gen Z has a distinct set of norms, customs, and expectations to which you will need to adapt.

Before you go all in on marketing your venue or services to their preferences, spend time understanding what matters most to them and think about how you can adapt your offerings to their needs.

What types of events is Gen Z planning?



How to adjust

Time is of the essence! Don't underestimate the power of a quick reply and quality customer service. While most planners don't need to hear back right away, you'll never pay a price for responding as soon as possible. On the flip side, the longer you wait to reply, the more you risk your prospect moving forward with a different venue or vendors.

How we can help

Use [our message templates](#) to simplify client communication with pre-built responses to frequently asked questions and inquiry types. Plus, you can turn on profile notifications to make sure you never miss a message again! Get notified the minute your business receives an inquiry on Eventective and respond instantly from your phone, laptop, or desktop.





**Planners want
information before a
conversation**

First impressions are everything, especially online. You might have the best event business in real life, but without a detailed description, eye-catching photos, or social proof, you'll get lost in the internet abyss.

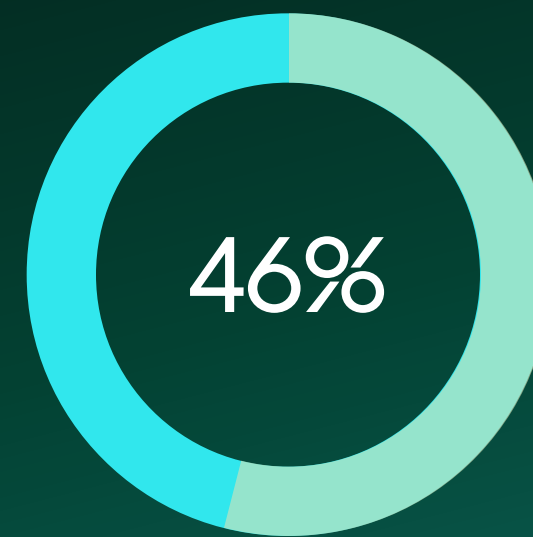
When we last surveyed our audience in 2021, transparency and ease of access to information was a top priority for planners; the same rings true today.

Planners want to know if a venue or vendor is available, how much it costs, and what it looks like before they inquire for more information.

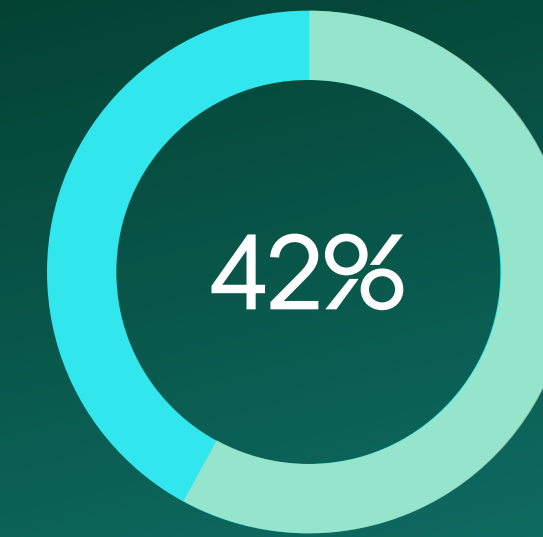
34% of survey respondents also consider client reviews and testimonials in the early evaluation phase. Just like most consumers won't make a purchase without reading reviews first, planners want to know that past clients had a pleasant experience before renting a venue or booking a vendor.

Top priorities when evaluating venues / vendors

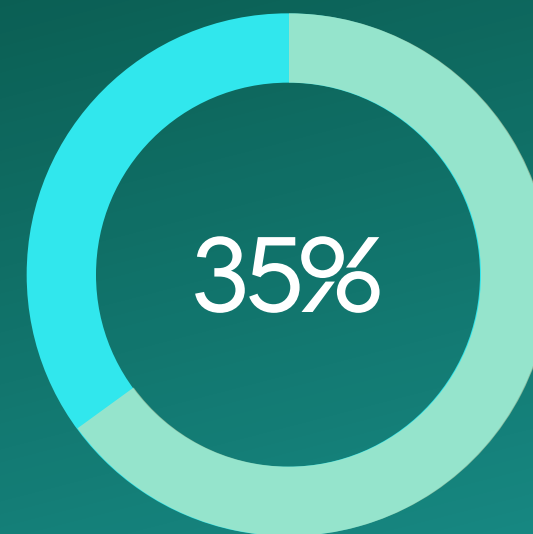
AVAILABILITY



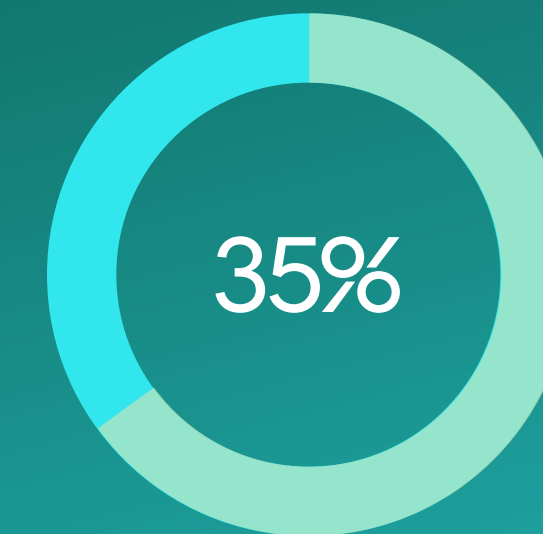
PRICE QUOTES



PHOTOS / VIDEOS



ESTIMATE COSTS



How to adjust

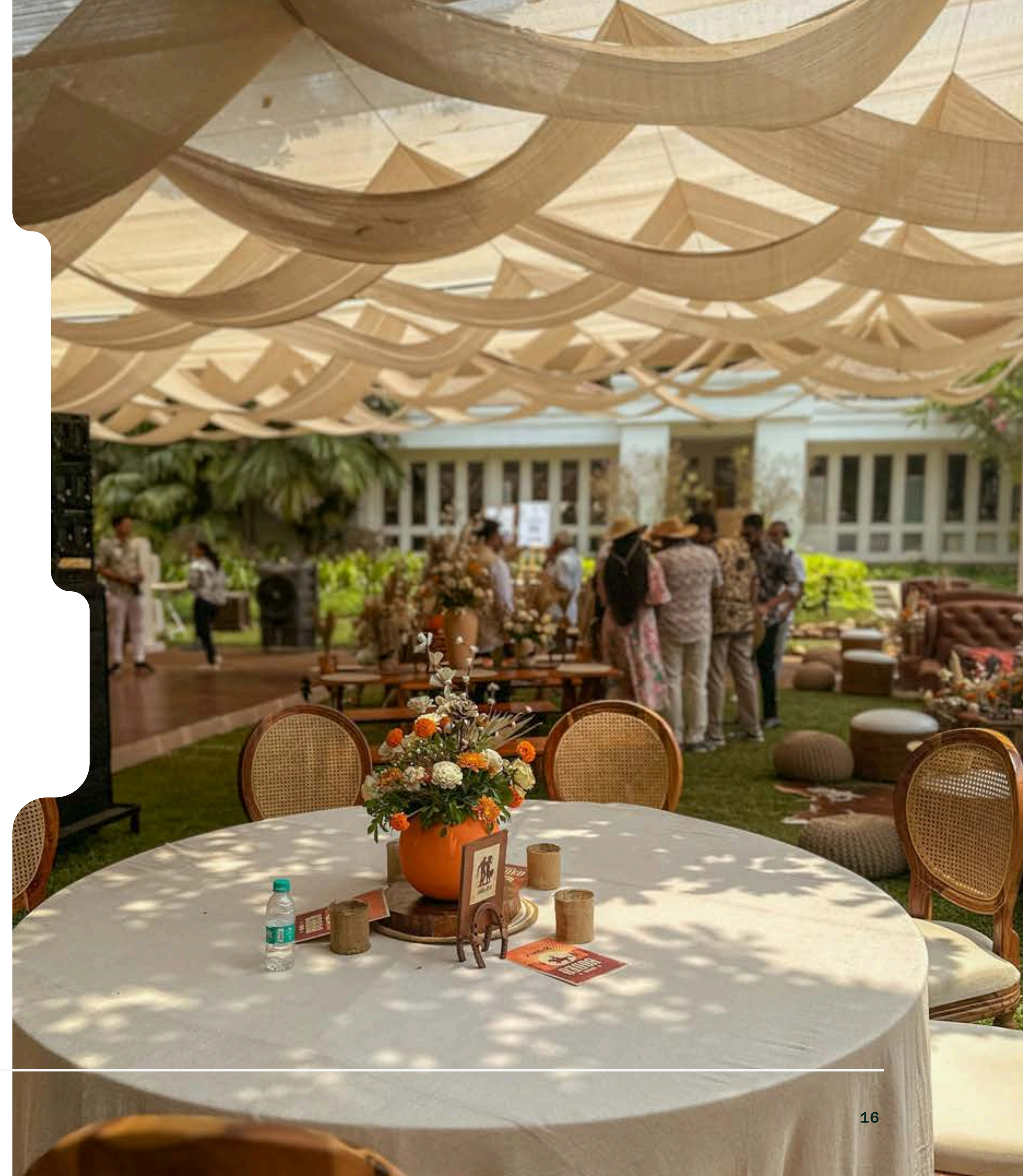


Your online persona can make or break your business. Event planners are forming a first impression of your business based on whatever information they find online before they ever pick up a phone or dash off an email. Don't let someone else tell your story—do what you can to control the narrative across your website, social media profiles, Google Business and Eventective profiles.

How we can help

Your [Eventective profile](#) is a one-stop shop for key business information. In addition to the pricing information we discussed earlier, you can (and should!) add an availability calendar to your profile. Block off which days you're booked or closed so planners can instantly see when you're available. Photos and videos are a must—they'll set you apart on our listing pages and increase traffic to your profile. Lastly, recommendations can go a long way towards building trust and a positive reputation. Ask past clients to share their positive experiences on your Eventective profile. Not sure where to begin?

Visit our [Support Site](#) for a rundown of the top things to include in your profile.



Just like everyone else, we feel compelled to cover AI. Artificial intelligence has become a hot topic since ChatGPT's debut in late 2022, with some headlines marketing it as a “must-have” solution for every industry. But the reality is more nuanced, especially in the events space.

Our research reveals that rather than fully embracing or rejecting AI, planners are using it thoughtfully, turning to it for specific purposes and tasks. **36% of survey respondents used or expect to use AI within the next 12 months while 64% are not using AI at all.**

An AI-dominated planning experience is still on the horizon



Those using AI primarily use it during the early stages of event planning for idea generation and initial research. They begin their venue and vendor search using tools like ChatGPT for quick answers and guidance before reaching out to anyone.

Regardless of whether planners use or do not use AI, there is a general consensus that it can be a helpful—but not necessary—tool for event planning.

Top reasons **36%** of planners are using AI

- ✓ Helps with research and inspiration
- ✓ Saves valuable time
- ✓ Useful for comparing multiple options

Top reasons **64%** of planners are *not* using AI

- ✗ Prefer traditional planning methods
- ✗ Want a human touch
- ✗ Don't find it helpful for event planning



How to adjust

The events industry is relationship-driven. Today's planners still value personal connection and interaction above AI-generated fluff. Be sure to optimize your client touchpoints (like your Eventective profile and your message templates!) before you go all in on AI. If you do use AI, use it to automate repetitive tasks—not to replace human connections.

How we can help

Your AI FAQ assistant awaits! Soon you'll be able to use our AI tool to generate FAQs based on the most common questions you receive in your Eventective Inbox. Review the AI-generated answers, edit and add more details, then publish them to your Eventective profile. It's another tool that saves you time and gives planners the answers they need. Win-win!





Summary

As competition continues to grow in the event industry, it's more important than ever to have your finger on the pulse of what's trending.

From non-traditional weddings to tightening budgets, generational preferences, transparency, and technological advancements, planners are reimagining what parties, weddings, and meetings look like in the late 2020's—and they're using digital tools to make the most informed decisions.

Events may not always look the same, but their reason for existence—celebration—still rings true. Stay agile, listen to your clients, and don't be afraid to try something new to stand out from the crowd and connect with today's planners.

Eventective is here to help! If you haven't already claimed your courtesy profile, visit eventective.com and select **List Your Business** to get started for free.

Already have a profile? We'd love to help you optimize your listing to book more events and win more business. **Contact your Account Manager** or email sales@eventective.com to start the conversation.



About Us

Eventective is an all-in-one planning platform that helps people in the U.S. and Canada pair up with event businesses to pull off the perfect plan. Our marketplace connects millions of planners with more than 100,000 local pros, from milestone venues to specialized vendors. For our event professionals, we provide easy-to-use tools to find clients, manage bookings, and take payments so they can focus on the event, not the paperwork. Since 2003, Eventective has made celebrating more accessible and more affordable for everyone.

About PortMA, Our Research Partner

Portland Marketing Analytics (PortMA) is a leading data analytics firm specializing in measuring Experiential Marketing ROI. For more than 15 years, PortMA has helped agencies, brands, and event organizers translate consumer engagement into measurable business outcomes. Through white-labeled reporting, benchmarks, and statistical modeling, PortMA turns event data into actionable insights. Learn more at www.portma.com

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