



Survey Results: The Role of Trade Shows in 2022 Marketing & Sales Strategy

How to Find Customers in Today's Hybrid Working Environment

For industrial and manufacturing companies, most are working in a hybrid environment today and face a real unknown when planning for in-person events in late 2021 and 2022. Your company may be anxious to return to "normal," but are your customers? While personal travel is significantly up, business travel remains below pre-pandemic levels. Thanks to the efficiency of virtual meetings, permanent disruption likely amounts to 19% to 36% fewer business trips overall, according to the Wall Street Journal.

Many firms have reallocated sales and marketing budgets to capitalize on digital marketing tools. But in this changing environment, how are teams supposed to forge relationships – something that's usually done face to face? And what does all this mean for your trade show strategy? This summer we surveyed people across general industry and the photonics industry to find out. Take a look at the results.

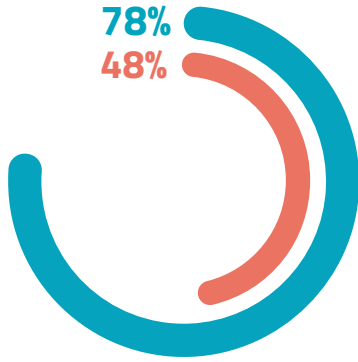
Photonics Industry Survey

- Even split between 100% office and 100% virtual, with 25% working in hybrid model
- 86% of facilities currently open to visitors
- 78% planning to attend in-person trade shows in 6-9 months with the vast majority attending Photonics West (80%)
- **Status quo:** While social media participation (69%) is important to networking, 88% of respondents plan to attend in-person events, noting a shift back to "business as usual." Companies are looking to further justify a shift to digital, while hoping that events and traditional channels will remain open and effective. Most indicated they'd do as many and the same events as prior.

Industrial Survey

- 74% of respondents were working either 100% remote or hybrid
- 71% of facilities are open to visitors
- 48% of respondents plan to attend in-person tradeshows in the next 6-9 months
- **Changing strategy:** May attend the same number of trade shows, but spending less; increasing investment in digital, virtual/hybrid, roadshows and regional. They're evaluating and reframing their approach .

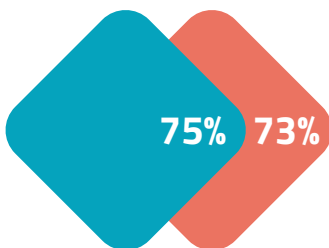
While we may wish for a swift return to normal, the survey data shows disparity in some key areas like attendance at in-person events. We'll dive into this in the sections below. Timelines and approaches to trade shows, even if the event schedule remains the same, deserve revisiting. Overall, it's worth checking in with your customers to see how their models and buying needs have changed.



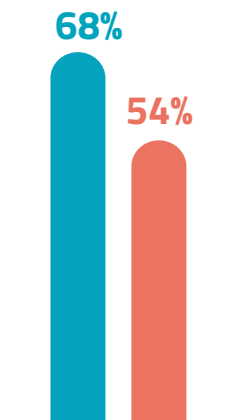
Plan to attend in-person trade shows in the next 6 - 9 months



Look to in-person events for networking



Get information from industry publications



Enjoy webinars if the topic is relevant

Are My Customers Attending Trade Shows?

Based on reports from convention-heavy cities like Orlando, Florida, in-person conferences are coming back. Your sales team may be ready to hit the show floor, but will your target customers be there? The survey's most striking data speaks directly to this question. The majority of **photonics industry** professionals plan to attend a show or conference in person compared to less than half of those in **general industry**.

Perhaps one of the largest photonics and photonics shows influences that high response, as over **80% of photonics people** plan to attend and exhibit at Photonics West in 2022. Either way, the data points to lingering hesitancy in show attendance late this year and into next.

Where Should We Network?

If customers aren't at shows, where does networking take place? The survey reveals an interesting divide. Once again, a vast majority of those in the **photonics industry** plan to use trade shows to network face to face, compared to just **62% of general industry**.

Social media channels, most notably LinkedIn, continue to prove their worth when it comes to networking. **68% of those in photonics** and **54% of industry professionals** plan to use social media to network. The data proves that developing a clear, consistent social media presence, both for the company and for the individual, is time well spent.

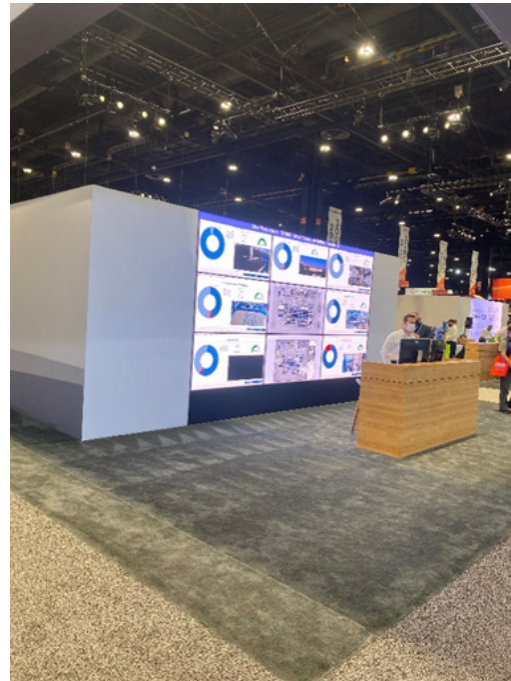
Where Do My Prospects Get Information?

Of those we surveyed, publications still rule as the main source of information. Technical audiences look to well-established, highly trusted sources like Photonics Media, Laser Focus World, and IEEE Spectrum for product releases, application papers, and industry news.

Many sales and marketing teams have embraced live and pre-recorded webinars as a way to attract and educate both current and prospective customers. Some companies host their own webinars or partner with an industry-wide organization to help spread the word. Here at Launch Team, we often register for a webinar and watch the on-demand recording later, either as a group or on our own time.

According to the data, webinars will continue their popularity, but only if the topic addresses a pain point. Attendance has dropped from an **average of 50% of registrations to 20%**, but on-demand webinars remain effective. This shift further limits opportunity for live engagement.

At FABTECH in Chicago this September, industrial attendees and exhibitors had their first trade show experience in 18 months. What was it like? Who did it well? In-person attendance, by casual observation, felt slightly lighter, but exhibitors were pleased with the booth traffic and quality of leads. FABTECH organizers were committed to a safe, inclusive experience, with hybrid streaming content and pre-recorded educational sessions. As much of the show is capital equipment, exhibitors were faced with a costly decision: live equipment demo or video? Those who brought robotics and laser cutting equipment drew the best crowds, but one stand-out, Trumpf, compromised to great success: live demos on large panel video screens with smaller tooling displays to offer a tactile experience. Their entry featured a dashboard monitoring equipment performance to demonstrate ROI.



"Hybrid" booth design with live video demos and Q&A on equipment back at headquarters.

Booth design practices changed throughout the show—primarily for safety and comfort. Bar counters stood between exhibitors and attendees to make the lack of the handshake more natural.

Refine Your Digital Marketing Strategy

The value of trade shows has been changing gradually over the last 5 years pre-pandemic. Lead generation has shifted to digital marketing, and trade shows, while still tremendously valuable, serve a different purpose: to engage with prospects, build trust, grow existing accounts, and understand market needs. There isn't, and shouldn't be, a return to business as usual. Shift your goals and consider where trade shows and live events fit in your sales process.

It's also a good time to hedge your bets. Reduce the risk of trade show cancellation or low attendance by leveraging your activities for other marketing channels. Your technical presentation can be valuable gated content to generate leads online. Shift some of the spend on your physical booth to developing a product video you can use in the booth, online or go live on social media! QR codes - a novelty 10 years ago - now save money and make your marketing more sustainable.

Quick Takeaways

- **Check in with your customers and ask open-ended questions.** How have their needs and purchasing process changed? How do they want to engage with your company?
- **Plan for hybrid**—if you're exhibiting live, it allows for a quick pivot, and any investment in video can be leveraged in digital marketing. Develop an online version of your exhibit for those who cannot attend or in case the in-person show shifts to a virtual or hybrid model at the last minute. Your "booth" can be a landing page on your website that targets your personas and delivers the products and services relevant to them in a visually appealing way.
- **Back up your planning time**—supply chains and lead times are particularly challenging in the trade show industry. Download the tradeshow guide: <https://www.launchteaminc.com/tradeshow-marketing-guide-technical>
- **Start your marketing strategy on a blank sheet**—break away from status quo by taking a fresh approach. Check your foundation (CRM, branding, positioning, messaging, customer personas, web functionality), and experiment with new digital channels. <https://www.launchteaminc.com/marketing>

2022 is a good year to have a plan A, B and C to meet your goals.

Need help?

[Request a consult at launchteaminc.com/contact](https://www.launchteaminc.com/contact)