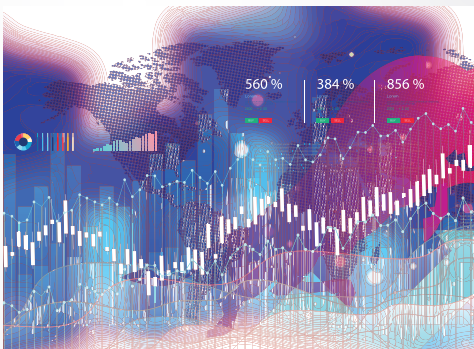




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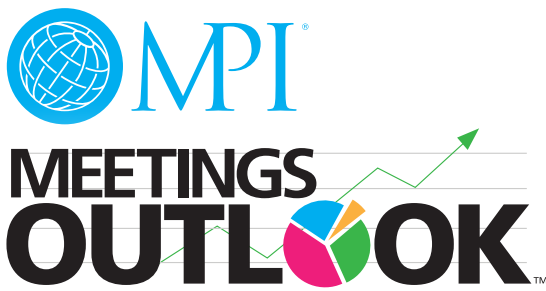
Projections for meeting and event business for the year ahead are strong with 78% of respondents expecting favorable conditions—the largest percentage seen in more than a year. Optimism remains strong across numerous important metrics.

2024 Q4 EDITION

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Staying ready for the **UNEXPECTED**



By Elaine Pofeldt

Against the backdrop of a sustainably strong event business landscape, event professionals share safety and security concerns—most notably, extreme weather—and how they’re managing through that.

Staying ready for the unexpected is a major part of Ysiad Ferreiras’ work in planning and hosting large-scale educational events and meetings. He is CEO of Fullmind, an organization that connects certified teachers to classrooms that have vacancies via livestream.

“Navigating unexpected challenges—whether they stem from technological glitches, weather disruptions or societal shifts—has become an integral part of our operational strategy,” Ferreiras says.

Ferreiras is one of many meeting professionals who are focusing on safety and security at meetings and events at a time when meetings are getting fuller than they used to be.

As MPI’s Q4 2024 Meetings Outlook survey found, 78% of respondents project favorable conditions in the

year to come—the largest percentage in more than a year. In keeping with the trend of optimism for the event business in 2025, 71% of respondents shared favorable budget projections and 75% of respondents expect positive live attendance. Additionally, the percentage of respondents indicating growth in full-time hiring has ticked up for three consecutive quarters.

But with the improving business climate has come a renewed focus on keeping attendees safe and staying ready with a Plan B, C, D and E in case any contingencies arise.

Leslie James (MPI Potomac Chapter), events and program manager, Eno Center for Transportation, reflects the current mood. James finds that travel interruptions are one of the most significant trends and is building a cushion into events to allow for the unexpected.

“For meeting planners organizing major events, it’s critically important to have a contingency or pivot plan in place. They need to think through possible scenarios to ensure preparedness.”

MICHAEL SCOTT

keynote Speaker based in Fort Collins, Colo.

“The way my company is adapting is shifting program start and end times/days to allow for a get-situated day in case of delays,” he said in his survey response.

Similar approaches were shared by event pros in The Meeting Professional’s October travel-themed coverage as well as in MPI’s EVENTalks podcast for that month, suggesting growing adoption of such time allotments.

A multi-layered approach

With a majority (56%) of respondents more concerned with safety and security than they were one year ago, meeting professionals are looking at those important aspects from almost every angle as they strive to keep their events running smoothly. At the top of the list of concerns is natural disasters and severe weather, cited by 48% of respondents. (See the full list of event safety and security concerns at the end of this report.)

“We’re dealing with unprecedented factors affecting the world right now,” says Michael Scott, a keynote speaker based in Fort Collins, Colo. “For meeting plan-

ners organizing major events, it’s critically important to have a contingency or pivot plan in place. They need to think through possible scenarios to ensure preparedness.”

Scott believes meeting professionals can play a big role in preventing disruptions at meetings via a proactive approach.

“Take security, for example,” Scott says. “We live in a time in which, unfortunately, acts of violence can happen. Planners need to consider that there could be some kind of security breach or an unexpected event, and meeting professionals must think through these scenarios and have contingency plans in place. This should be a proactive part of their planning, integrated from day one, to ensure they’ve covered as many bases as possible.”

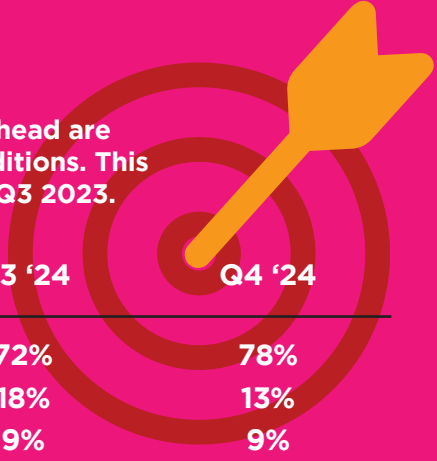
Preparing for anything, everything

Many meeting professionals are diving into the task, aware of how essential crisis preparedness is to the success of their events.

For Christopher Falvey, co-founder of Unique NOLA

BUSINESS CONDITIONS

Projections for meeting and event business for the year ahead are strong with 78% of respondents expecting favorable conditions. This is the largest percentage seen in Meetings Outlook since Q3 2023.



	Q1 '24	Q2 '24	Q3 '24	Q4 '24
Favorable	76%	68%	72%	78%
Neutral	19%	16%	18%	13%
Negative	6%	16%	9%	9%

Tours, a ghost and history tour company in New Orleans, a big part of being proactive is staying on top of weather reports. The tour company focuses half of its business on private events.

“Our walking tours are all outdoors, so weather is a major issue,” he says. “Top that off with the fact that New Orleans is a hurricane-prone city, and we deal with this every year.”

He often finds himself in the position of explaining what outcomes to expect from hurricanes being announced in the news.

“The one good thing about hurricanes is that you do often have a week or more to figure out if a threat is real,” he says. “It is very common for a city to be in the crosshairs of a hurricane [up to] 10 days out, and have it move far off track to become no threat at all.”

Fullmind’s Ferreiras, whose company works with more than 200 school districts, has to keep many things in mind in his crisis preparedness—and the potential solutions he has in his back pocket often rely on technology.

Finding that technological hiccups are “inevitable,” he has made sure his company invests in robust backup systems and conducts multiple test-runs before any major event.

“I recall an occasion when our primary video conferencing platform experienced a global outage minutes before a nationwide webinar,” Ferreiras says. “Thanks to our backup systems, we seamlessly switched to an alternative platform, and participants experienced minimal disruption. Anticipating such issues allows us to maintain continuity and trust with our audience.”

Weather unpredictability, similarly, “is a constant concern, especially when coordinating events across diverse regions,” he says. To stay prepared, the company develops contingency plans that include shifting from in-person to virtual formats on short notice.

“For instance, when a sudden hurricane threatened our annual educators’ conference last year, we transitioned the entire event online within 48 hours,” he says. “This not only ensured the safety of our attendees but also opened up the event to a wider audience who couldn’t have participated otherwise.”

Meanwhile, his team also considers the potential for civil unrest—a concern for many meeting professionals during a tense U.S. presidential election year.

“Civil unrest can pose significant risks to the safety and accessibility of our events,” Ferreiras says. “We actively monitor socio-political climates and have protocols to adjust plans as needed. During periods of heightened tension last year, we opted to move several in-person workshops to virtual settings. This not only safeguarded our participants but also demonstrated our commitment to adaptability and responsibility.”

Although all of this prep work might seem overwhelming, Ferreiras and his team have uncovered new opportunities to make their value known when navigating challenges.

“Beyond conventional strategies, we explore innovative solutions like hybrid event models and interactive virtual experiences,” Ferreiras says. “We once transformed a canceled in-person seminar into a virtual reality event, providing an immersive experience that exceeded participant expectations. Such approaches not only address immediate challenges but

MARKET LANDSCAPE

While highly dependent on location and industry, by and large, respondents are still experiencing a seller’s market, though many report a buyer’s market or balanced market.

	Q1 ‘24	Q2 ‘24	Q3 ‘24	Q4 ‘24
Buyer’s market	21%	25%	31%	26%
Balanced market	20%	18%	26%	25%
Seller’s market	58%	57%	43%	48%

also enrich the overall value we offer.”

Technology, flexible planning

Max Shak, founder and CEO of Nerdigital.com, a provider of digital marketing solutions based in Toronto and Wyoming, also takes a multi-pronged approach to crisis preparedness.

“I’ve learned that preparing for the unexpected is just as important as the event planning itself, especially in today’s world where disruptions—from severe weather and tech failures to social unrest—are increasingly common,” Shak says. “Hosting digital and hybrid events, I’ve had to adopt a proactive approach to risk management that combines technology with flexible planning.”

One key to his planning is technological redundancy.

“We ensure there’s a backup for every critical component, whether it’s internet connectivity, power sources or streaming platforms,” he says. “For example, during a recent virtual event, we had simultaneous streams running across two platforms, so if one failed, attendees would experience minimal disruption. We also work with vendors that guarantee real-time support, so issues are addressed instantly by specialists who can bring the system back online.”

As to weather-related disruptions, the company closely monitors forecasts up until the event day. It often opts to work with venues that have robust contingency plans, such as indoor alternatives for outdoor setups.

“For virtual or hybrid events, we also ensure that

speakers and key personnel have access to mobile hotspots and backup locations if their connectivity is compromised by weather issues,” he adds.

To make sure attendees are safe, particularly at in-person events, his company is careful to vet locations with a strong track record of security and work closely with local officials for any advance warning of potential disruptions, he says.

“For situations with the potential for civil unrest, we prepare clear protocols and flexible options for attendees, including rescheduling or pivoting to a fully virtual setup if needed,” he says. “This helps us reassure our participants that their well-being is a priority, regardless of circumstances.”

The key, according to Shak, is resiliency and making sure his team can pivot effectively.

“Perhaps the biggest lesson we’ve learned is that flexibility and communication are crucial,” he says. “Having clear contingency plans and regular communication channels means attendees and stakeholders know what to expect, even if circumstances change. This might mean updating attendees via SMS or a mobile app in real-time, so they feel informed and can adapt accordingly. Being prepared is essential, but building trust through transparency and responsive communication is what truly reassures participants.”

Communication is key

Putting the right communication strategies in place to navigate disasters has been

BUDGET PROJECTIONS

Favorable budget projections continue to be cited by most respondents.

	Q1 '24	Q2 '24	Q3 '24	Q4 '24
Favorable	72%	66%	72%	71%
Flat	17%	19%	16%	21%
Negative	11%	15%	12%	8%



important to Chris Dukich, founder of Display NOW, a SaaS company in Boston that transforms screens into visual marketing tools. The company works closely with event organizers to provide digital displays and communications at conferences and events.

“This collaboration has given me valuable insight into the preparation needed to address unexpected events effectively,” he says. “We always make sure to have robust communication systems in anticipation of large events.”

In case clients are taken by surprise due to civil interference or bad weather, he and his team offer built-in emergency messages and the ability to change what is on the screens.

“This way people can be warned and those organizing the event are able to maintain order and ensure

people’s well-being,” he says.

For some planners, finding new ways to control communication channels has also been important. Helena Escalante, a consultant in the New York City area, was involved in running a series of online webinars open to the public when a rogue participant began posting offensive comments in the chat.

“We quickly acted by expelling them from Zoom and blocking them,” she says.

But when the problem resurfaced several weeks later, the organizers decided to close the chat, which was visible to all participants, and rely on the Q&A feature instead.

“The benefit of this setup is that it allows us to regulate what’s visible to attendees, displaying only the questions we choose to answer,” Escalante says. “Now,

ATTENDANCE FORECASTS

Live attendance expectations remain very positive while virtual attendance expectations continue, overall, to be fairly stable.

Projected Live Attendance

	Q1 '24	Q2 '24	Q3 '24	Q4 '24
Positive	76%	71%	76%	75%
Flat	11%	19%	13%	16%
Negative	13%	11%	11%	9%

Projected Virtual Attendance

	Q1 '24	Q2 '24	Q3 '24	Q4 '24
Positive	18%	23%	22%	22%
Flat	33%	31%	34%	39%
Negative	49%	46%	44%	38%



even if someone submits something inappropriate, only the host and panelists can see it. This helps maintain a comfortable experience for the audience.”

While it would be nice to live in a world where such

measures are not necessary, as Escalante and other planners have found, it’s better to accept the possibility that things sometimes go wrong—and put measures in place to be prepared.





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