



MEETINGS OUTLOOK™



Projected business conditions over the next year are the second highest “favorable” result in the history of Meetings Outlook. Projected live attendance is the most favorable it’s ever been. All the while, the promise of engaging with people face to face appears to be driving recovery.

2022 SPRING EDITION



AN EVOLVING Meetings Landscape



By Elaine Pofeldt

Optimism and excitement for in-person gatherings is holding strong and growing across multiple important metrics. While respondents believe that the value proposition of meeting in person has been fundamentally altered by the pandemic, networking opportunities may well be the biggest driving factor for event success this year.

Giovanni Marsico, founder and CEO of Archangel Academy in Toronto, a community of mission-driven entrepreneurs, normally runs the Archangel Summit every September. The fundraiser supports a variety of charities and provides microloans to entrepreneurs making a positive impact.

This September, he plans to hold the first Archangel Summit since 2019.

“People are flying in from all over the place,” he says. “Right now, there’s a huge demand for in-person stuff. People just miss being around each other.”

To make sure everyone is comfortable being under one roof, Marsico is offering badges in green, yellow and red. Green means they are fine with being hugged, yellow means they prefer social distance and red means they don’t want to be hugged.

“My assumption is the majority will be green,” he says.

As Marsico has found, optimism and excitement for in-person gatherings have picked up steam in recent months. Although 56% of respondents to MPI’s latest Meetings Outlook survey believe the pandemic has fundamentally altered the value proposition of in-person meetings, overall projected business conditions were the second-most-favorable in the history of the survey, only slightly exceeded by results for summer 2021. The majority of respondents projected business to be more than 10% better in the coming year.

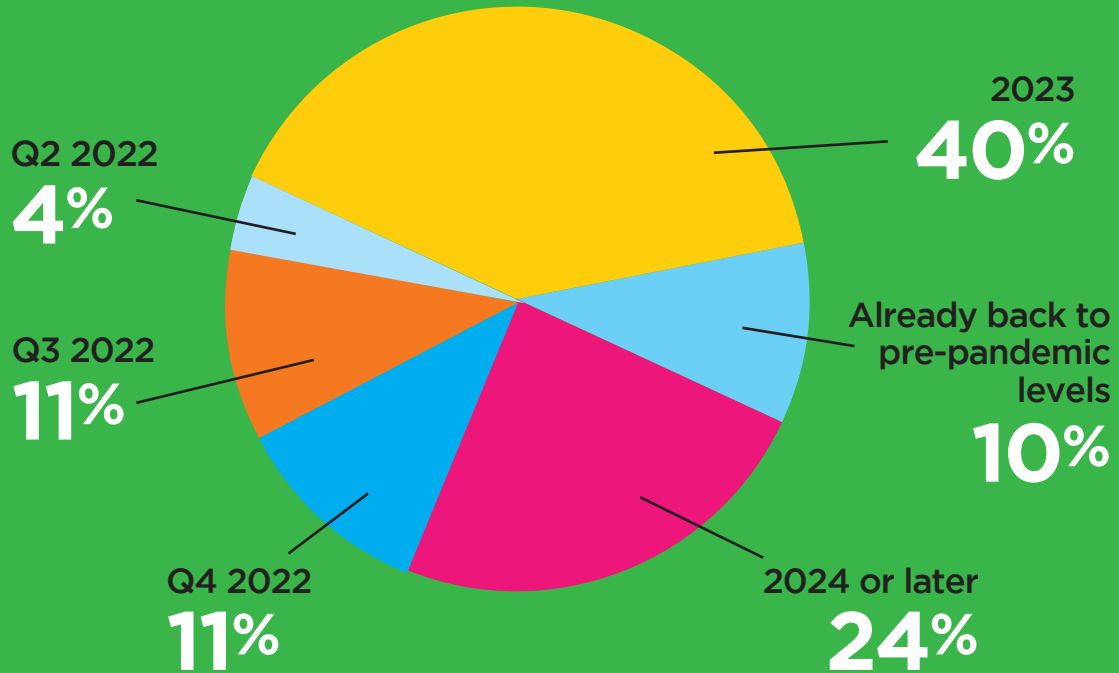
Back to business...in person

Projected live attendance is the most favorable it has ever been in the survey’s history. The majority of respondents expect budgets to increase over the next year, with 45% anticipating budget growth of more than 5%. Meanwhile, employment trends have been stable, with a slight increase in hiring.

RETURNING TO NORMALCY

Most notably, and most promising, 10% of respondents claim their business is already back to levels they've not seen since 2019. On the other hand, 64% of respondents don't expect business to reach that level until 2023 or later.

When do you anticipate your business levels will be completely back to pre-pandemic levels?



*“Everyone is talking **about wanting to be in person** and making demands of associations to host in person, but I still think there is a hesitancy.”*

TERRY CUNNINGHAM

MPI Toronto Chapter

Respondents reported that a desire for networking opportunities may be the biggest driving factor for event success this year. Asked which elements will impact attendance most, respondents cited networking receptions (65%) and “ability to have spontaneous conversations” (63%).

As Diamond Michael Scott, an influencer who has

ventured back into speaking in Denver, his local area, put it, “I do want to take advantage of the moment. There’s a vibe and energy around people getting back out there, building connection and community.”

In this business environment, 10% of respondents said their business is already back to pre-pandemic levels. However, there is still a lot of progress to be made: most

MARKET LANDSCAPE

Respondents are saying, the most in recent memory, that we're now in a seller's market.

	Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Winter 2021/2022	Spring 2022
Buyer's Market	44%	43%	41%	33%
Balanced Market	18%	19%	17%	19%
Seller's Market	38%	38%	42%	49%

respondents (64%) expect to get back to that level by 2023 or later.

Terry Cunningham (MPI Toronto Chapter) is seeing business pick up at her company Precision Event Management & Production. She is working on three events at the moment: a 300-person conference with a trade show in May; a 150-person event with a small trade show in June and a 150-to-200-person event in September. All are being held by smaller not-for-profit associations at hotels in the region.

For the June event, 95 people have registered so far, with 38 opting for in-person tickets and the rest virtual.

"Everyone is talking about wanting to be in person and making demands of associations to host in person, but I still think there is a hesitancy," Cunningham says.

At Big Zephyr Music in Phoenix, owner William Babin's business, which provides entertainment by his band, The Big Zephyr, slowed dramatically during the pandemic, with the closure of live venues and slow-down of in-person corporate meetings. But that has

HIRING CHALLENGES

Employment trends are stable with a slight increase in hiring; fewer respondents expressed difficulty finding suitable staff, compared to the previous quarter. This is a potentially important shift in trajectory for this topic.

Are you finding it difficult to fill job vacancies at your organization?

	Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Winter 2021/2022	Spring 2022
Yes	29%	37%	60%	54%
No	49%	41%	28%	35%
Unsure	22%	22%	12%	12%



*“Last year was flat. We may have done one or two non-wedding meetings the entire year. This year, **our calendar is getting blown up** on Mondays through Thursdays.”*

JOHN HOBELMAN

MPI Indiana Chapter

changed in 2022.

“December was pretty dry, but we had a really busy January, February and March,” Babin (MPI Arizona Sunbelt Chapter) says.

About half of the band’s gigs since January have been postponed engagements that were cancelled during the

pandemic.

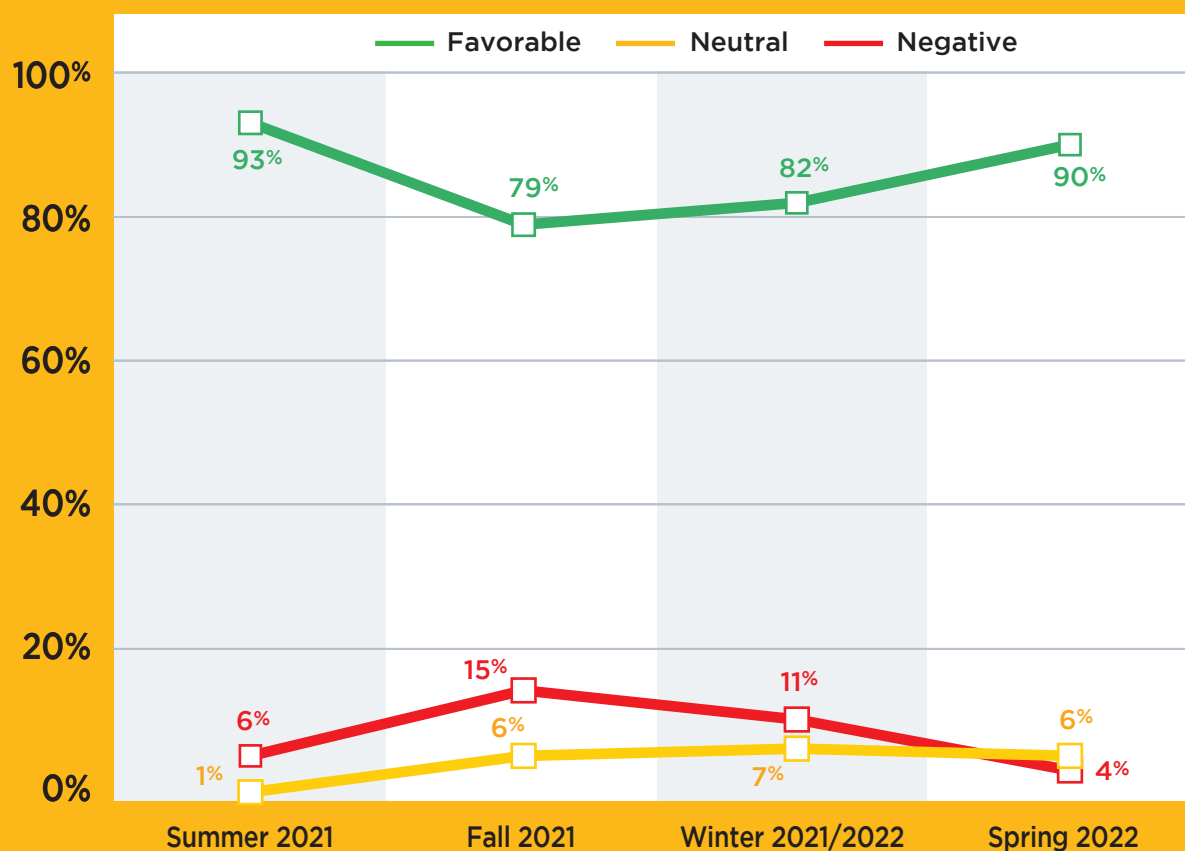
“Maybe I had signed a contract before March of 2020, and it was for an event late 2020 or early 2021,” he says. “They all got rescheduled.”

What’s ahead remains to be seen.

“It used to be people would plan a year in advance,” he

BUSINESS CONDITIONS

Projected business conditions over the next year: second-highest “favorable” result we’ve had in the history of Meetings Outlook—only slightly surpassed by summer 2021 results. In fact, the majority of respondents anticipate business will be more than 10% better in the coming year.





ATTENDANCE FORECASTS

Projected live attendance is the most favorable it's ever been (85%) in the Meetings Outlook survey. A majority of respondents also believe in-person attendance will increase more than 10% over the next year.

Projected Live Attendance

	Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Winter 2021/2022	Spring 2022
Positive	77%	64%	75%	85%
Flat	4%	5%	6%	6%
Negative	19%	30%	18%	9%

Projected Virtual Attendance

	Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Winter 2021/2022	Spring 2022
Positive	36%	41%	32%	26%
Flat	16%	22%	26%	22%
Negative	47%	36%	38%	50%

says. "Now it's five or six weeks."

Kathy Goughenour, organizer of The Virtual Expert Event in Dallas this April, says the event attracted 70 in-person attendees and 36 virtual ones. In-person attendance was consistent with what it was two years ago; she previously had no virtual attendees. There was also a shift in the dropout rate from 20% to 3%.

"All of them went virtual," she says.

Goughenour, whose business Expert VA Training helps virtual assistants build their practices, found that many of the attendees were emotional when they got together.

"It was the networking, and, quite honestly, just the connection with other human beings again," she says. "There were lots of tears and laughter. Everyone has felt so isolated. They weren't sad tears."

To make the sure the virtual attendees got a lot out of the gathering, Goughenour brought in a professional to engage them. One successful addition was a Google Jamboard, a collaborative digital whiteboard, where the

remote attendees could add their questions and comments. The team member working with them posed questions to the group.

Goughenour is planning to hold the event next year, though she isn't marketing it yet, the way she normally would.

"Based on everything I've experienced during COVID and even right now, people aren't willing to make plans a year in advance yet, like they used to be," she says. "They are OK with six months out."

New and better options

Some meeting professionals are finding that new capabilities they picked up during the past two years have fueled business growth in 2022. Take John Hobelman (MPI Indiana Chapter), general manager of Neidhammer Weddings & Events in Indianapolis.

"Last year was flat," Hobelman says. "We may have done one or two non-wedding meetings the entire year.

“It’s been really nice to get back to in-person events where you can feel that energy from other, abundant visionary leaders on a global level.”

JUSTIN BREEN

BrEpic Communications

This year, our calendar is getting blown up on Mondays through Thursdays.”

Eli Lilly, headquartered in Indianapolis, has been a frequent source of business, with the pace of its meetings outstripping the available space.

Neidhammer Weddings’ decision to master hybrid events has helped. The company, which owns its own 150-person venue, learned how to livestream events when a patron requested to do this at a wedding so distant family members could join.

Hobelman took a leap of faith and invested in the gear. After the event went smoothly, Neidhammer Weddings began offering a hybrid option to both wedding and corporate clients.

“They are intrigued and comforted by the idea of having technology that is available to use, whether or not they intend to use it at their actual event,” he says.

The company is now marketing its ability to introduce hybrid events on 24-to-48-hour notice. At one recent event for cardiothoracic professionals from a medical school, the keynote had a last-minute family emergency. Hobelman’s team brought her to the meeting on Zoom and set up cameras so she could see the audience members. They provided microphones to allow for better audio on the Q&A session and Black Magic technology to integrate the video feed and sync it to the audio. The client was delighted.

“They were blown away at the availability and options we were able to give to them,” Hobelman says.

Hobelman and his team have also helped clients get more out of meetings they were already planning by using the company’s new capabilities. It recently worked with

a large electric company that was offering a training program for continuing education.

“In previous years, it was incredibly expensive to bring in the trainers,” he says.

He suggested recording the event so the company could use the content in future training.

“It cost them less than \$1,000,” he says. “It was a way of multiplying their investment in the training.”

Pablo Fernandez, founder of The Secret Table in San Diego, which holds experiential team-building events, started doing in-person events in 2021.

“Around that time, everything really started to open up here locally,” he says.

In the past six months, he has hosted two international retreats for entrepreneurs: one in Guatemala and one in Morocco. He also attended a 100-person, five-day retreat outside of Mexico City in April. He’s found that the draw of in-person networking has been similar.

“It’s a combination of catharsis and absolute relief at being able to do it again; people feeling like they are dropping back into being themselves,” he says.

Justin Breen, founder and CEO of BrEpic Communications in Chicago, held a launch party for a new business he started, BrEpic Network, for about 80 people in September 2021 at a yacht club in Chicago. He required everyone to be vaccinated and didn’t know what to expect. Although some invitees couldn’t attend because of the vaccine requirement, many traveled, with some coming from California, Indiana, Florida, Canada and Mexico.

“It’s been really nice to get back to in-person events where you can feel that energy from other, abundant visionary leaders on a global level,” he says. ■



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