

inVIsion

The business of experiential '26

Designing for trust

This report was written by humans. *Seriously.*



The business of experiential '26

Designing for trust

Contact us: info@iv.com

About us



About this report



Key findings



Additional learnings



Demographics



A little about us

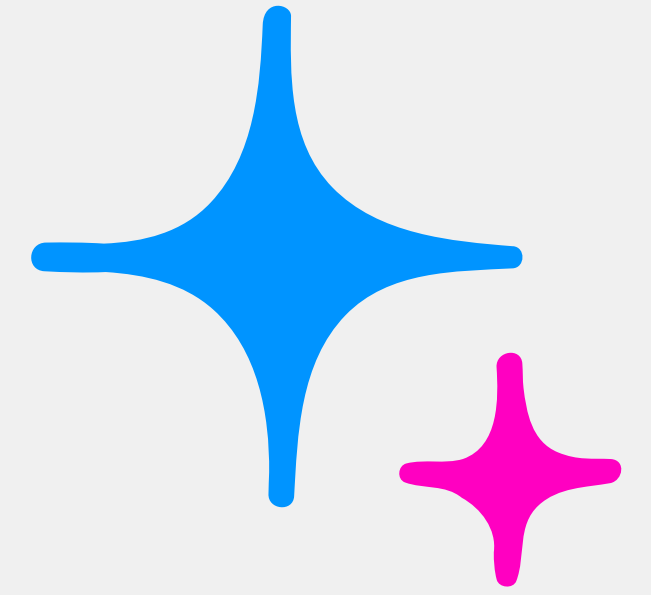


We're Invision,

an experiential marketing agency that specializes in creating killer brand experiences that make an impact, and we believe these experiences are important moments that can happen anywhere—whether onsite at an event, online, at the top of a billboard or in any other channel.

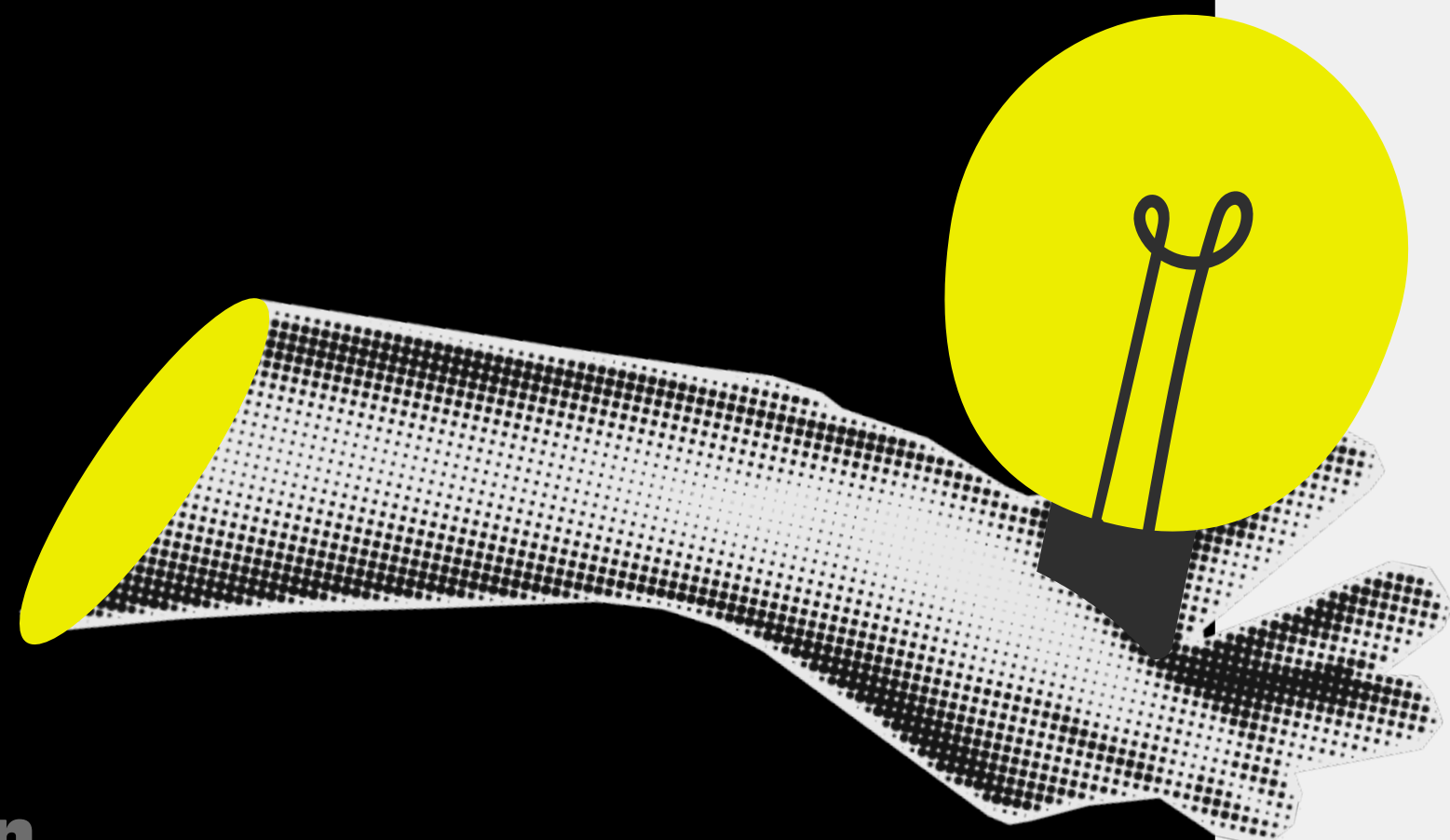
We know audiences are overwhelmed with other brands competing for their attention, so it takes a true expert to break through and make those moments an experience. That's where we come in—we help brands own every moment, wherever they take place.

To help our teams and clients own those moments, we launched our research and insights practice a few years ago to stay on top of shifting trends and consumer insights that help fuel the experiences we create. This annual report is a part of that effort.



About this report

Every year we launch a new survey for consumers, experiential event attendees and marketers hoping to uncover hidden truths that make our work better. Here's how we implemented this year's research:



Who we surveyed

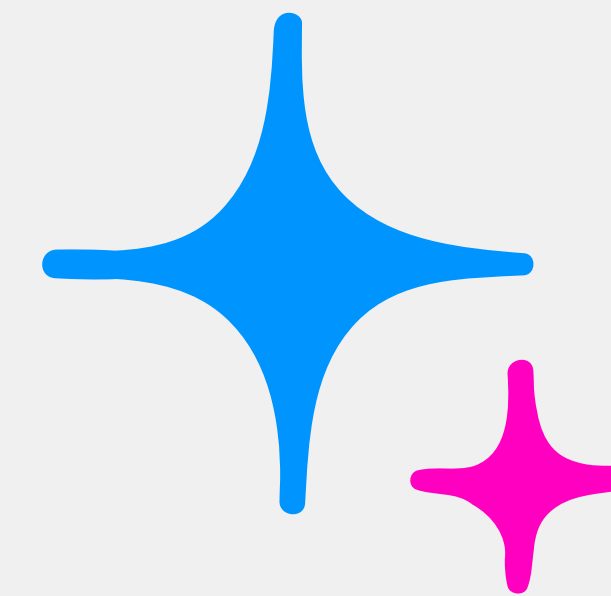
More than 1,000 U.S.-based B2B event attendees who had taken a wide variety of actions (from talking about their experience on social media to purchasing a product) after attending a B2B event.

How we surveyed

We worked with a leading panel company to source our attendees and surveyed them on a variety of topics related to the actions they took after attending events—from the role personalization plays in driving action to what makes keynotes stand out.

What we analyzed

While the overall results are of course important, we wanted to go a level deeper, so we spent some time segmenting the data to see what differences emerge across generations and job titles when it comes to moving audiences to action.



Our goal this year was simple:
find what actually drives
audiences to take action after
they leave a brand experience.

We wanted a blueprint marketers can use to plan
experiences—so the right tactics reach the right
audiences at the right time.

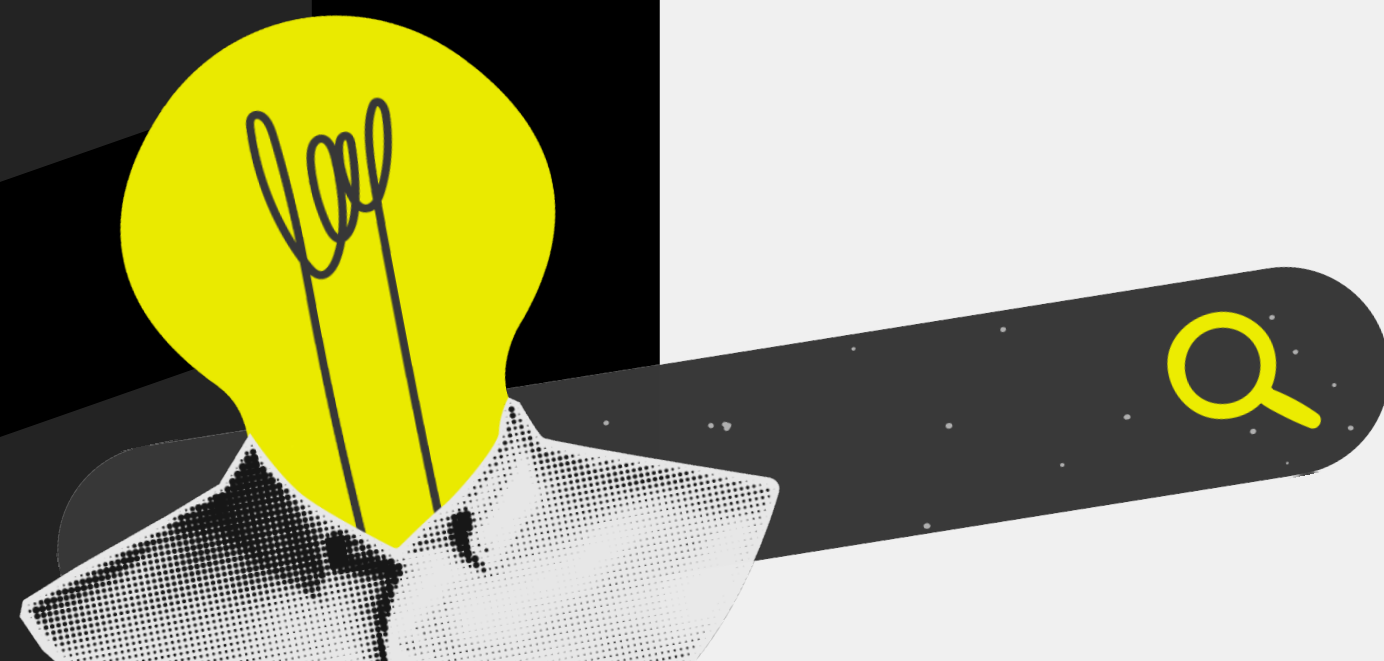
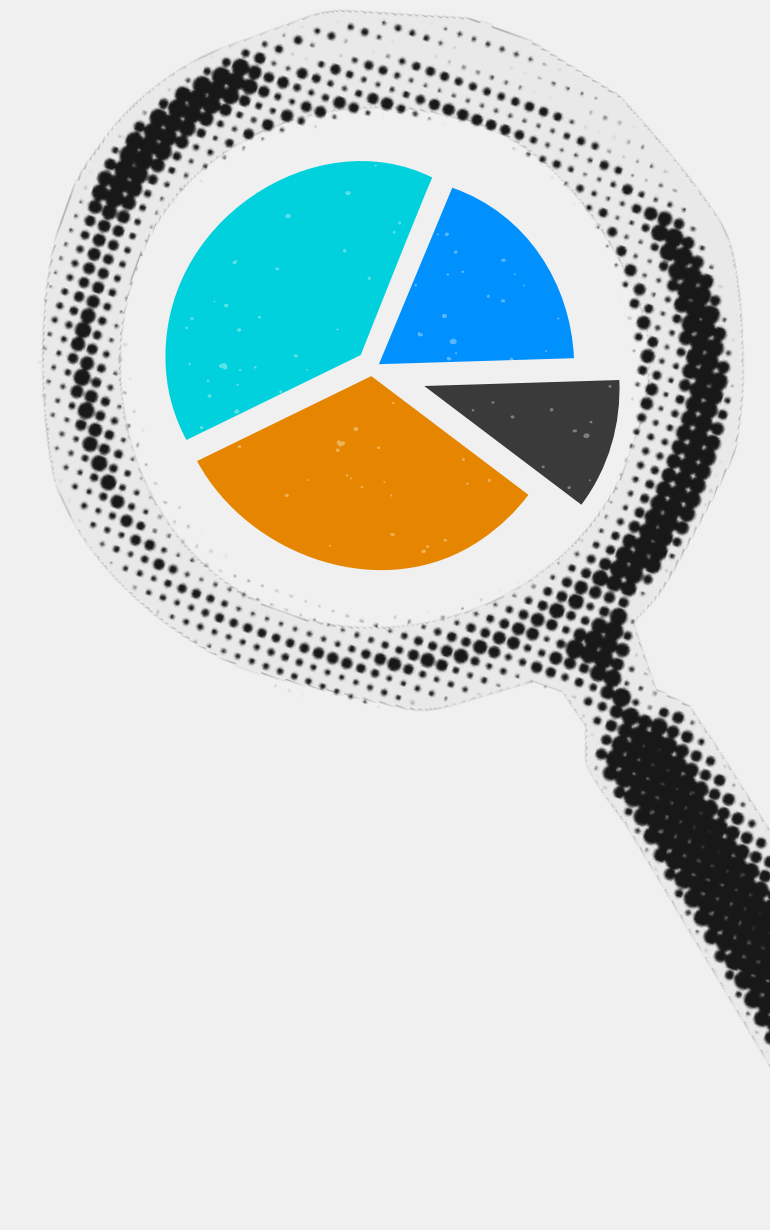
But when the data rolled in, we saw it wasn't the mix of
tactics that moves people.

It's the trust those touchpoints build that ultimately
determines whether your audience engages further.

We all know that

brand trust matters.

Where we fall short as experiential marketers is
bringing that focus down to the micro-level to each
individual touchpoint.



Every presentation.
Each promise made on stage.
Every piece of content in breakouts.
Every interactive activation.
Every interaction with a brand ambassador.
And everything in between.

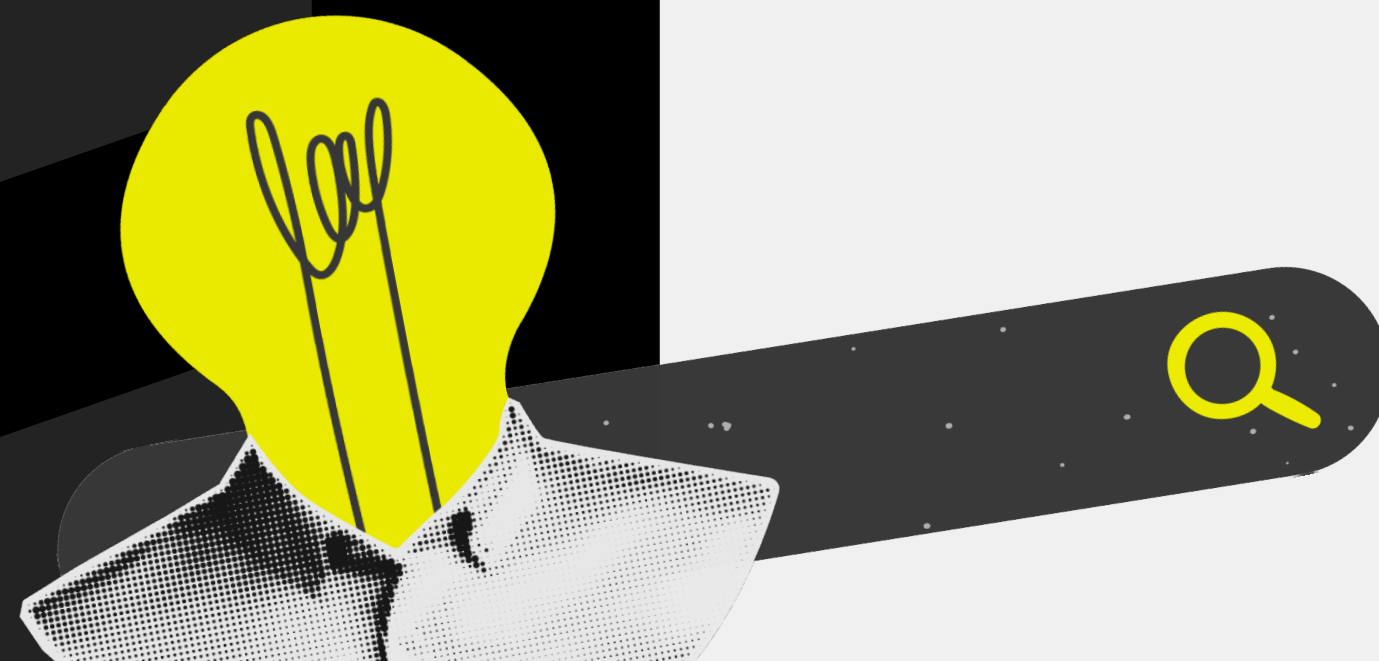
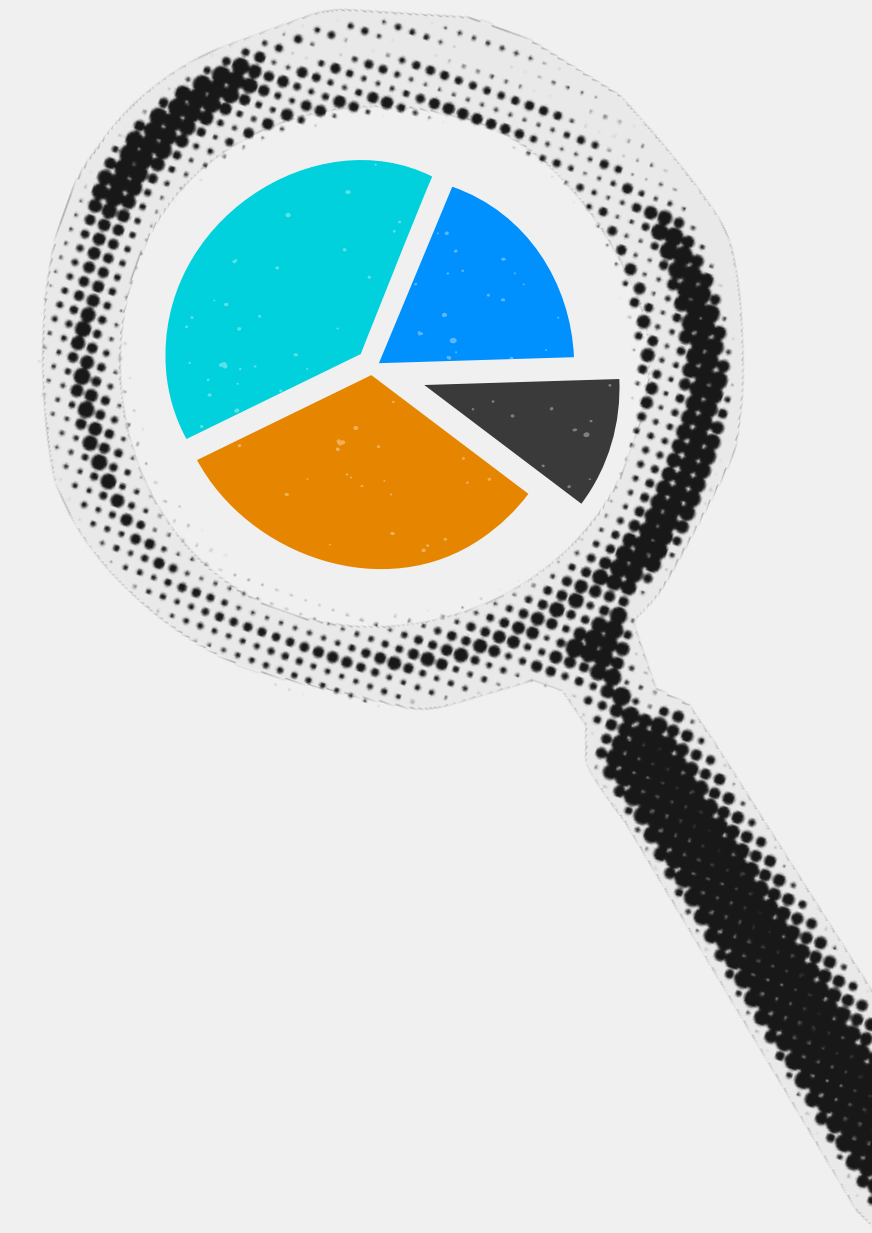
We must ask ourselves:

- ✓ Does this experience build trust?
- ✓ Is it in service of the attendee's needs, first and foremost?
- ✓ Is it true to who we are as a brand?
- ✓ Is it authentic and real?

Yes, we identified which elements of an experience drive action. But underneath all of it is the same one desire:

trust

Here's what else we found...



Key finding

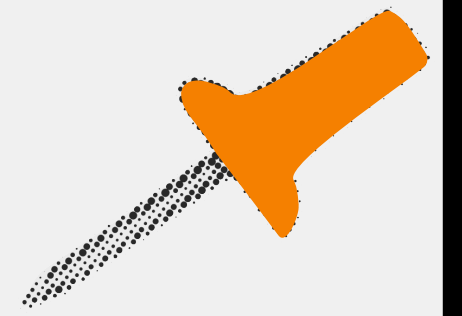


What people
are saying:

66

**We've got a great company
with great values and mission,
and at our events, there's no
ulterior motive behind it.
Just help people.**

—An experiential marketer



Trust

is what moves audiences
(and you can design for it).

Across the board, brand trust is the strongest predictor of post-event action, and it doesn't take much to erode it—overpromising and underdelivering or acting out of sync with your brand's values can chip away at trust fast. (Fig. 1. Fig. 2)



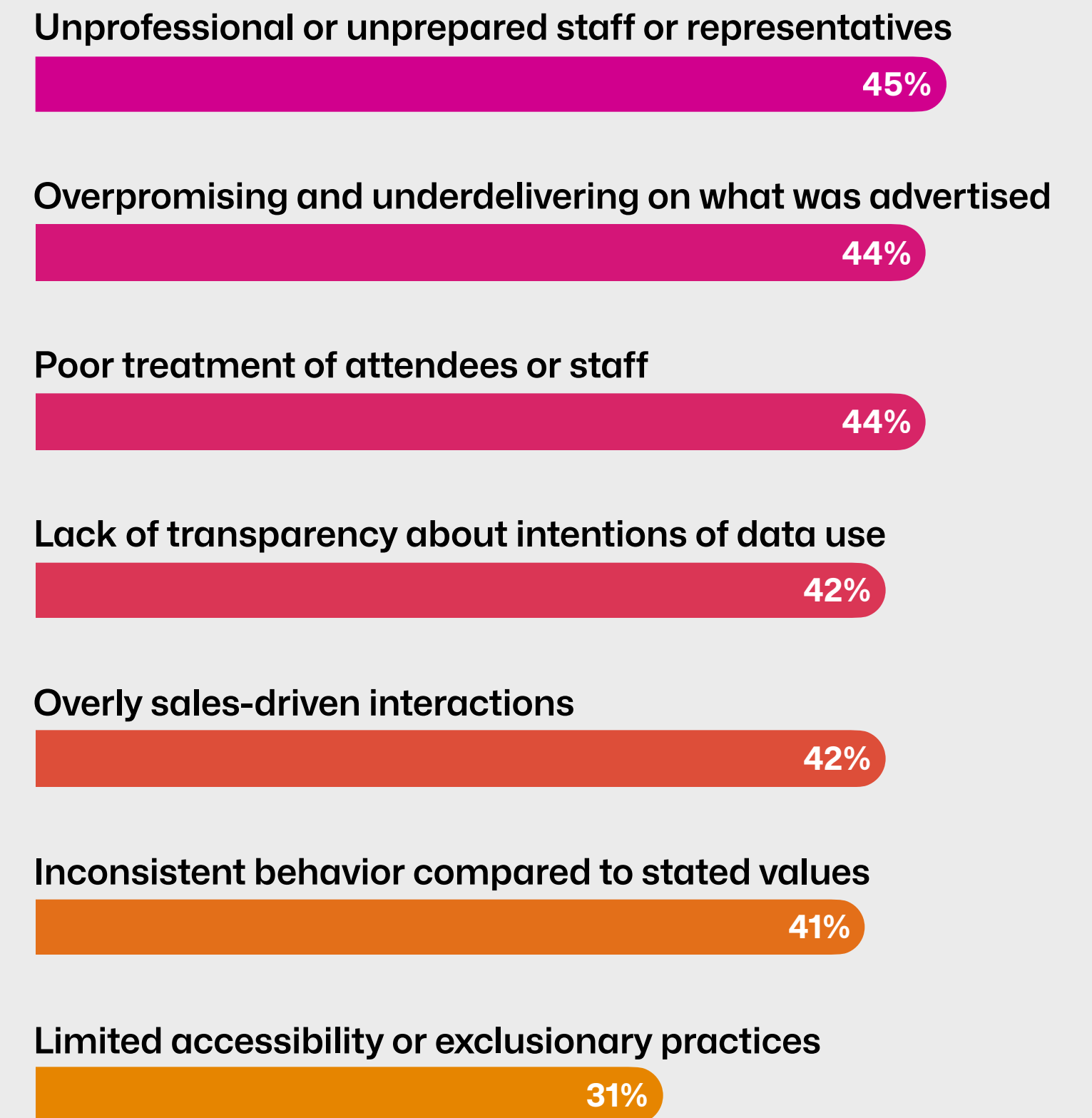
Fig. 1

Which of the following MOST often drives you to take meaningful action afterward?
(e.g., follow up, purchase, join a community)



Fig. 2

What erodes your trust in a brand at an event?
Select all that apply.



Trust

is what moves audiences (and you can design for it).

Some nuance: senior leaders rank “values and actions inconsistency” as the top trust-breaker, and younger generations exhibit a growing desire to see brands taking a stand on current issues onstage. (Fig. 6, Fig. 7)

Fig. 6

In your C-suite/President role, what erodes your trust in a brand at an event?

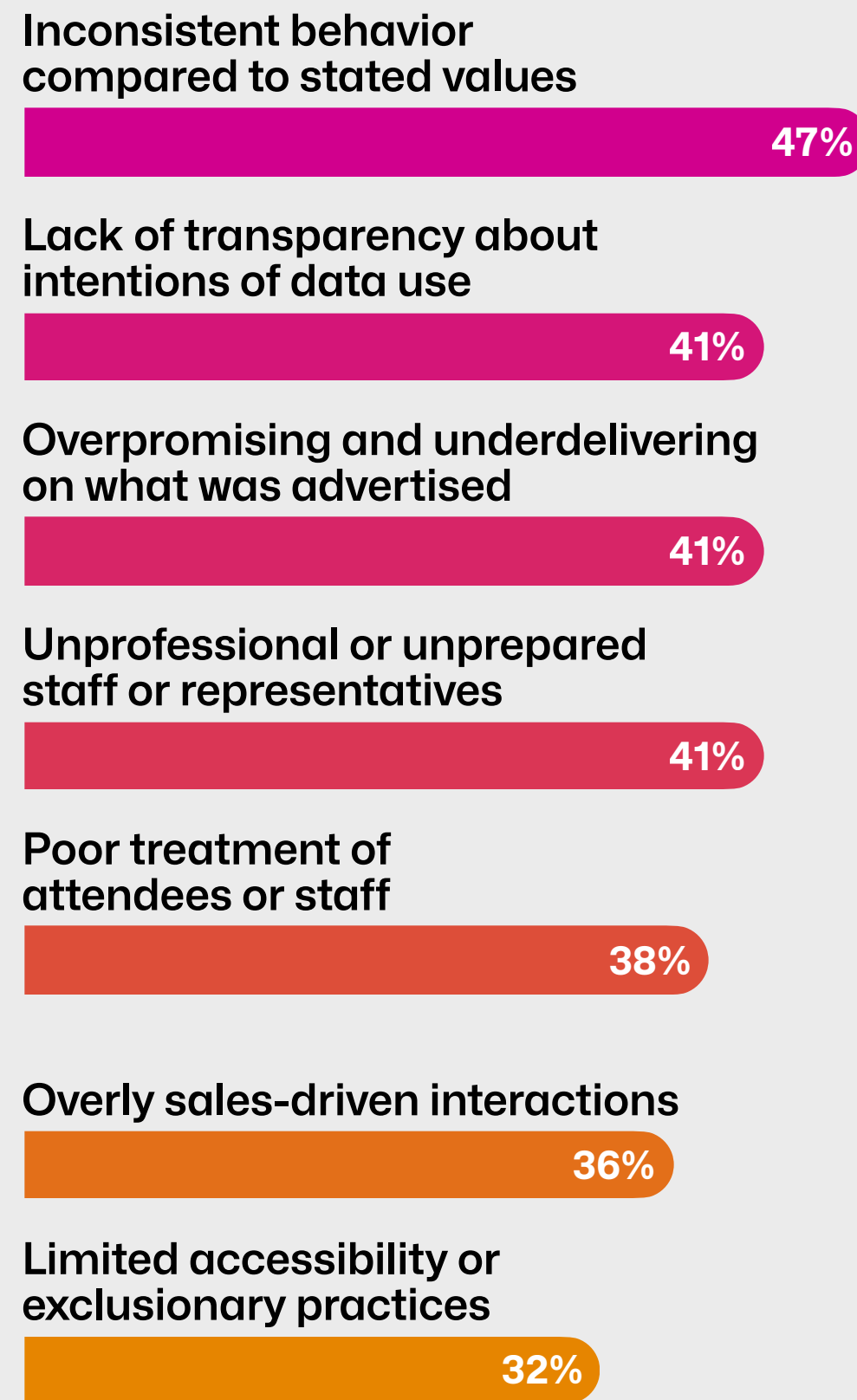
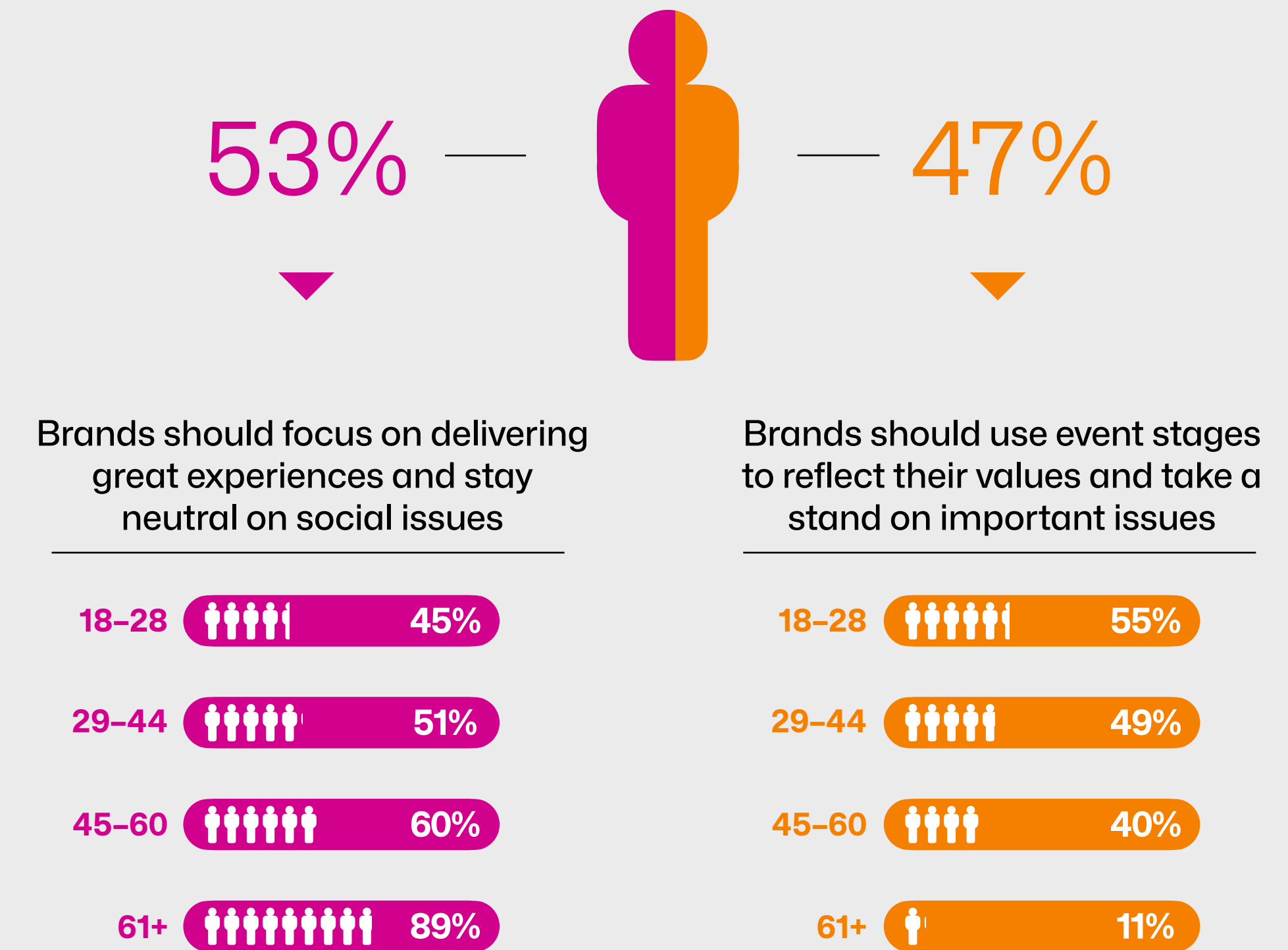


Fig. 7

Which statement best reflects your view when it comes to brands taking a public stance on social or political issues during an event?

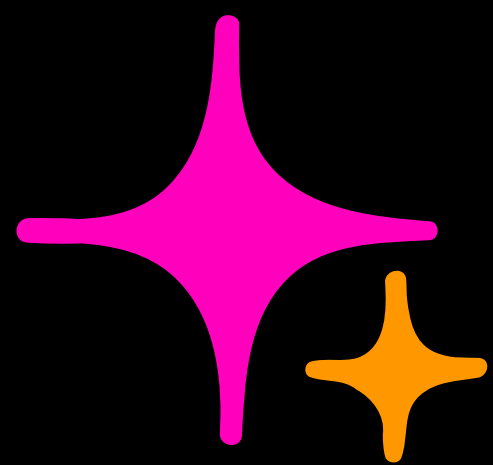
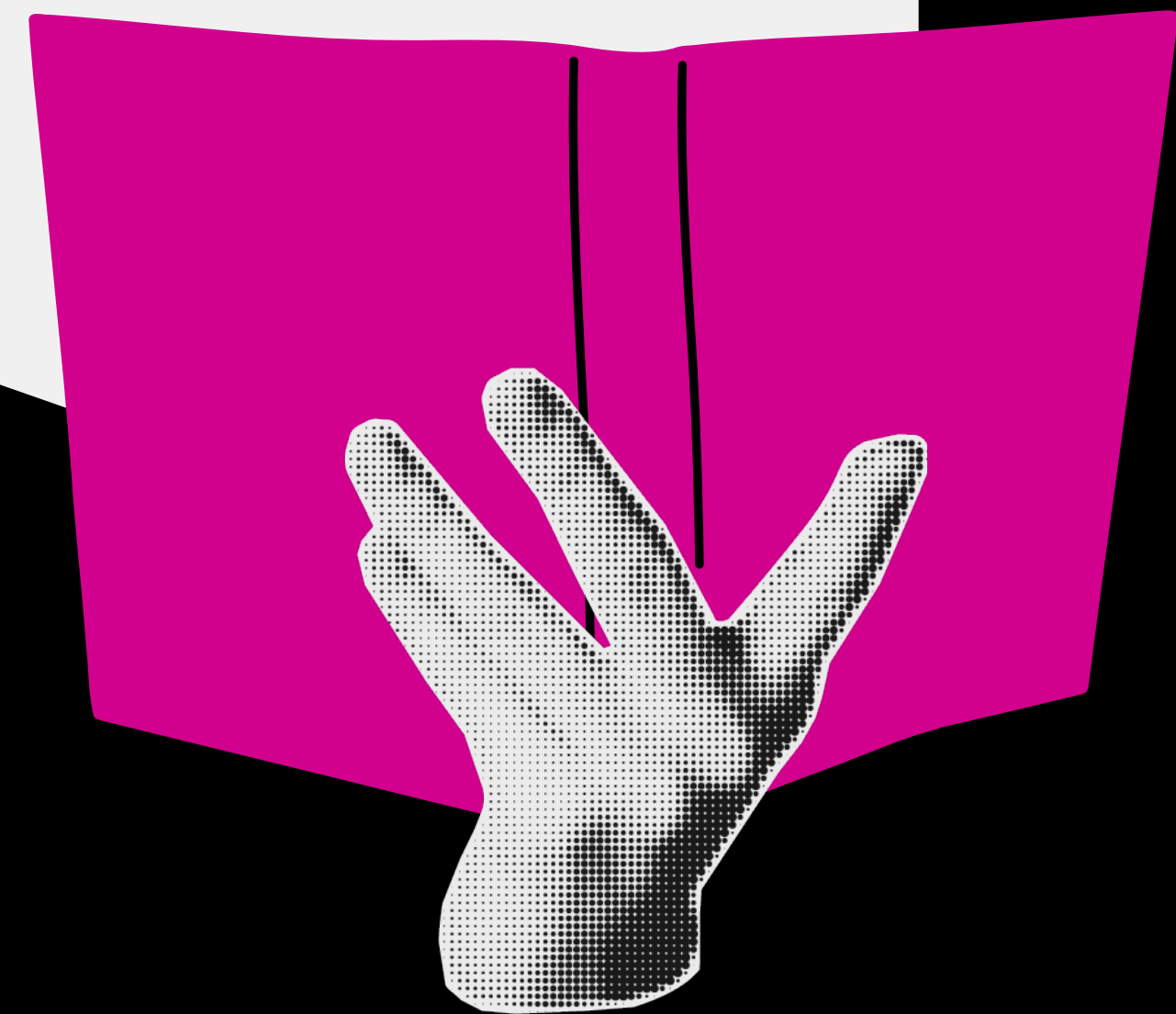
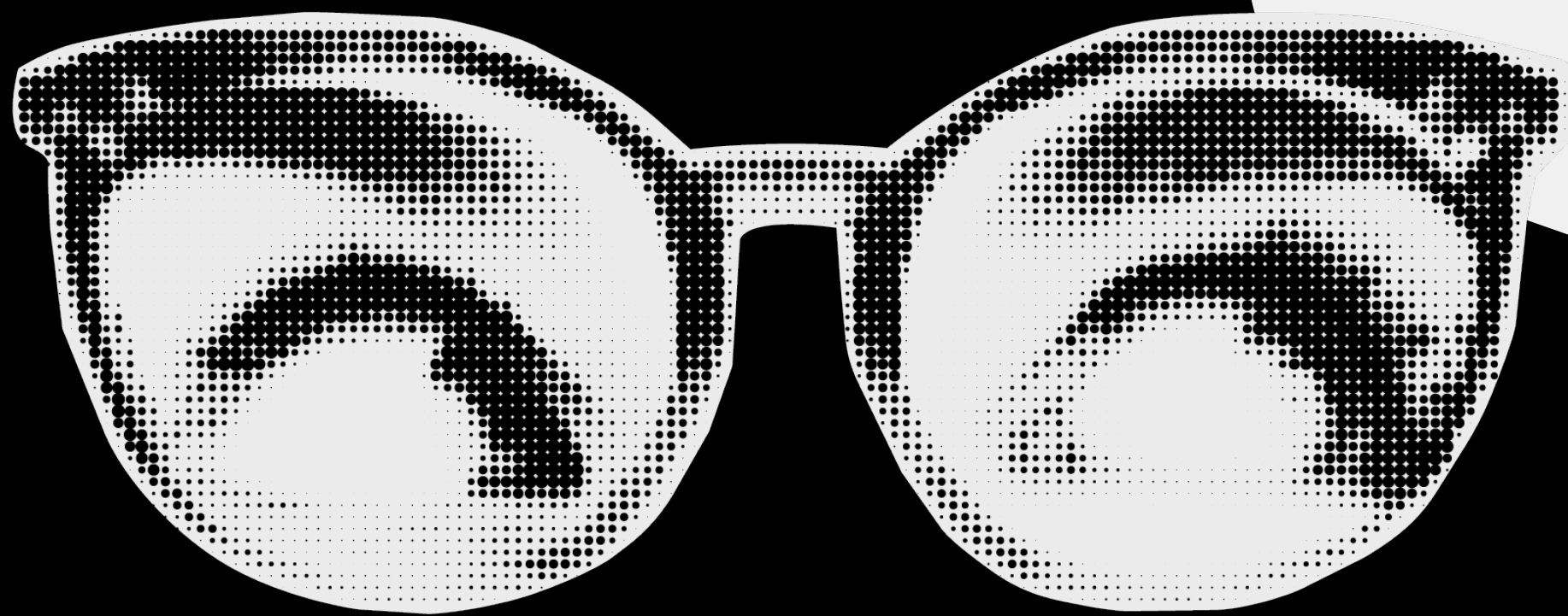
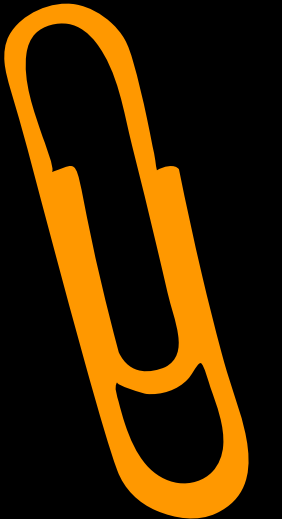


What to do now

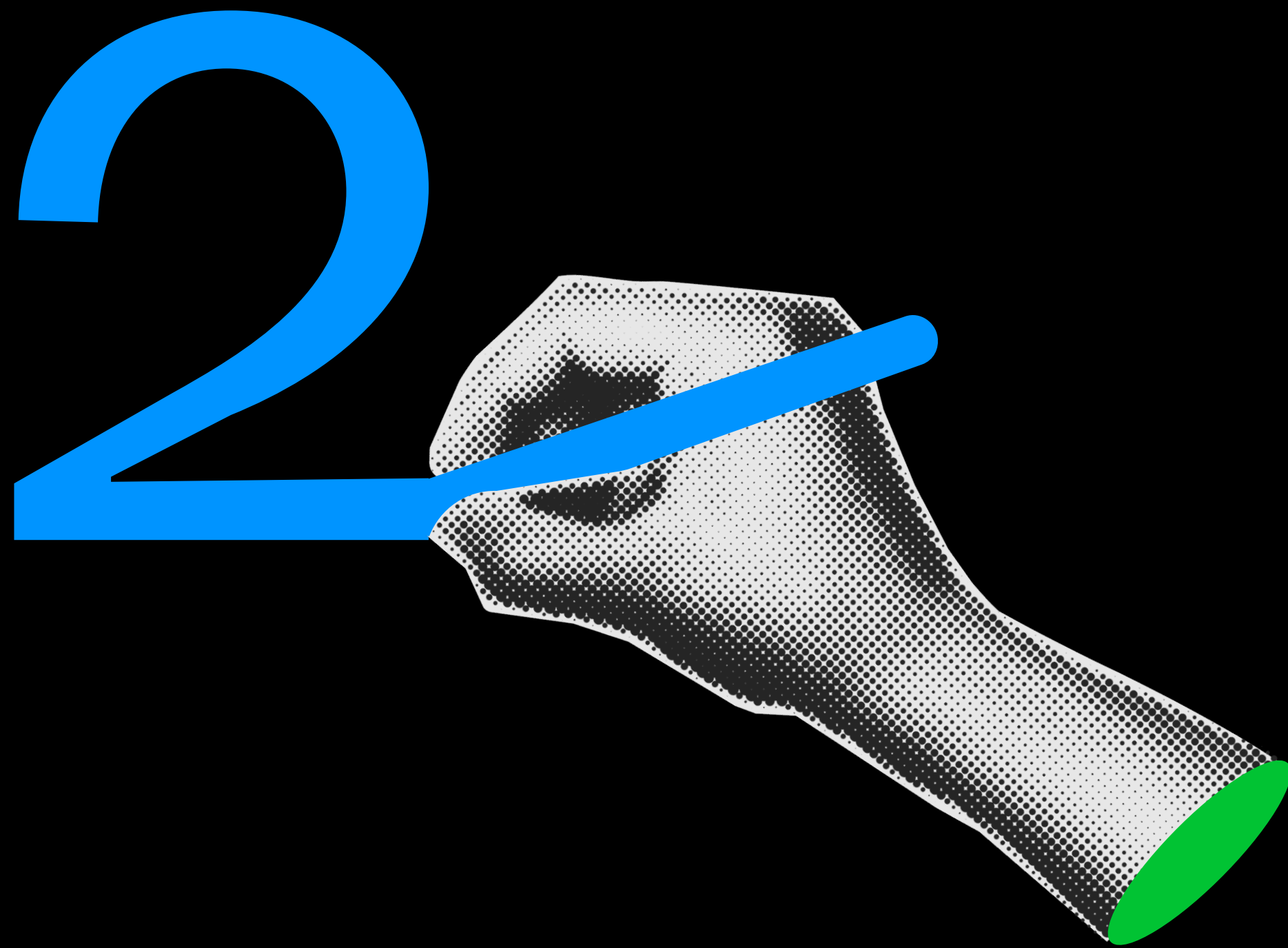
Ask yourself how each experience touchpoint is building trust with your audience and work back from there.

Live your values onsite, bake in “under-the-hood” demos that give audiences a behind-the-scenes look at your solutions, make time for as much expert Q&A and dialogue as you can, and don’t make “this will change your life” proclamations if that’s not actually true.

Your audience can see through it all.



Key finding

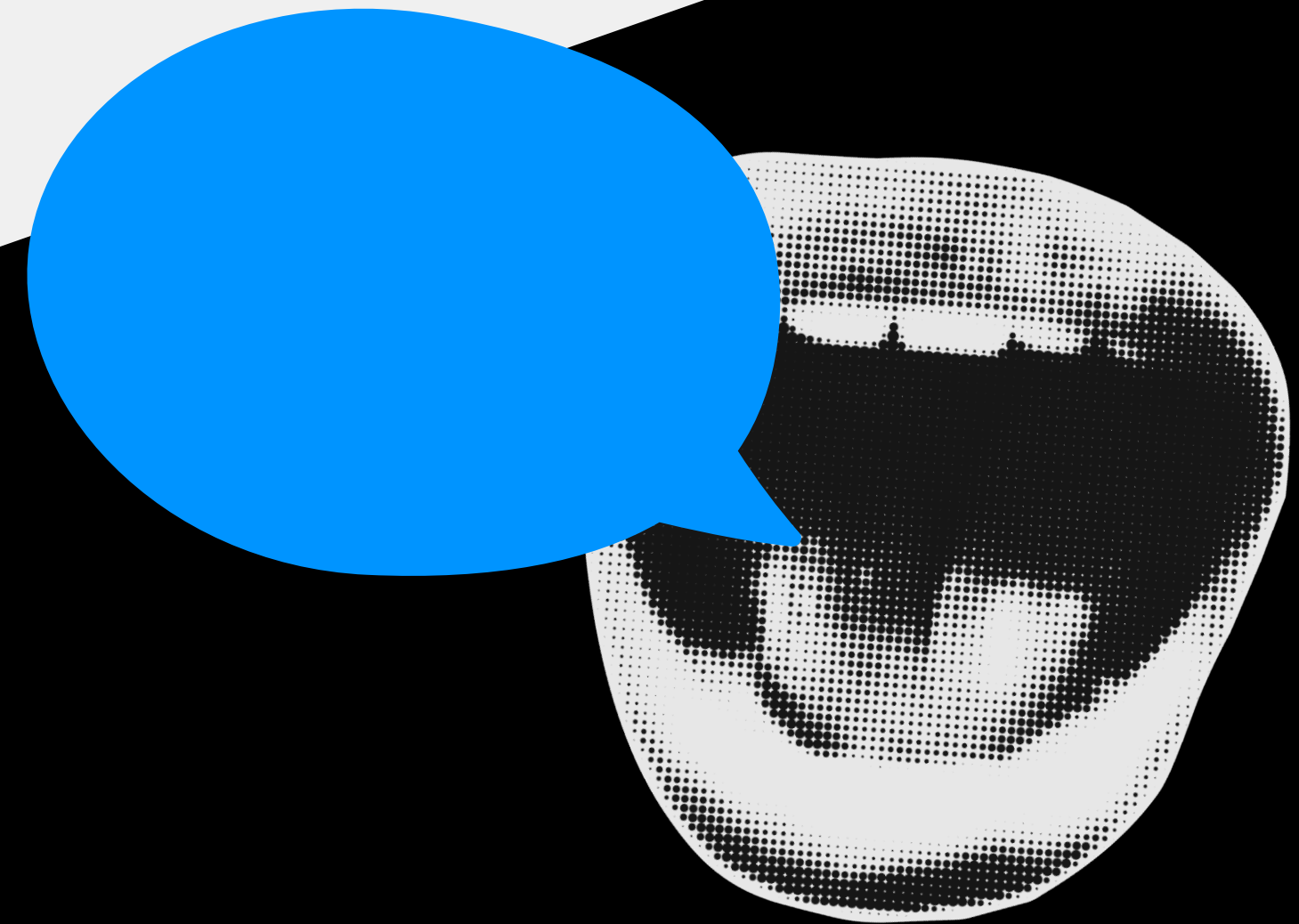
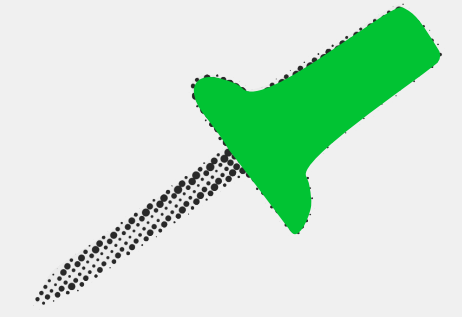


What people
are saying:

If a customer is at our event, we can follow them every step of the way—in a way that adds value for them.

By understanding everything they touch and where they spend their time, our teams can act immediately to provide them the information and experience they need.

—An experiential marketer



Personalization

pays, if you earn the data contract.

When done well, personalization is shown to significantly lift post-event action: 88% of Gen Z vs. 61% of Boomers say it increases their likelihood to act. (Fig. 8)

The highest-impact forms of onsite personalization are simple and tangible: attendees want tailored communications and time/effort savers. (Fig. 9)



Fig. 8

Percentage who say effective personalization increases their likelihood to take action after an event. (by age)

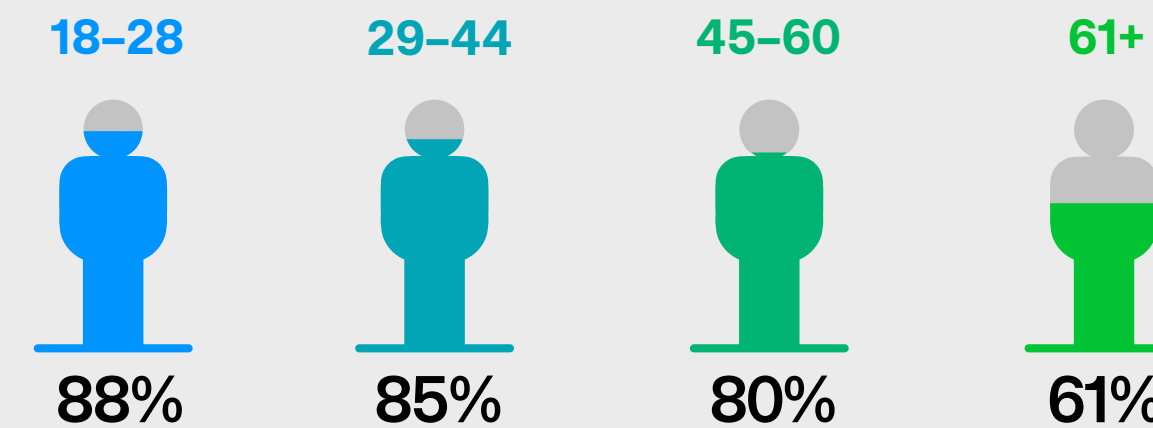
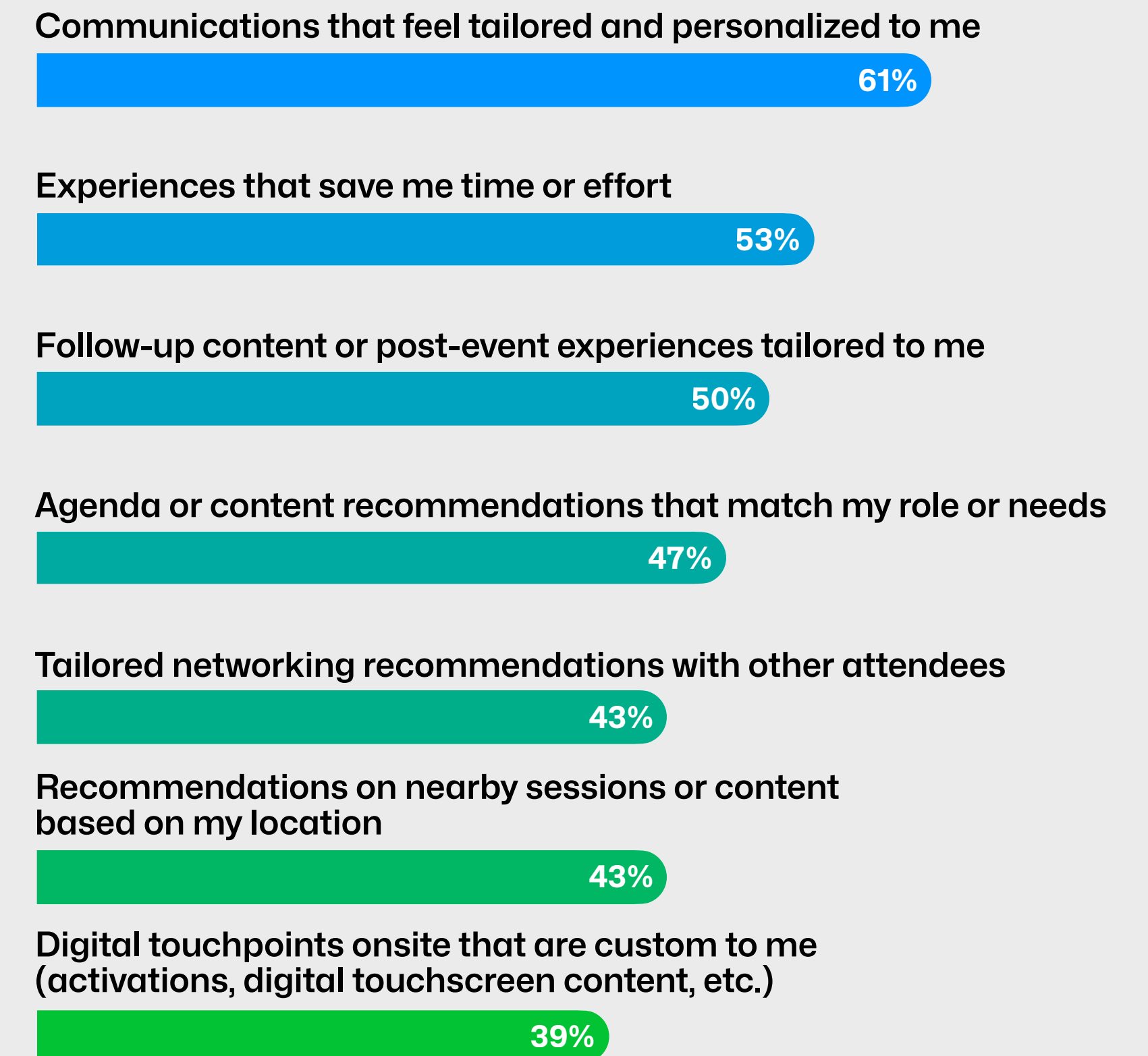


Fig. 9

When a brand gets personalization at an event "right," what does that usually mean to you? Select all that apply



Personalization

pays, if you earn the data contract.

But be warned. Willingness to share data is gated by privacy and security concerns that all ladder up to brand trust. People see personalization as invasive if it is anything manipulative or based on data attendees didn't knowingly provide. (Fig. 10, Fig. 11)



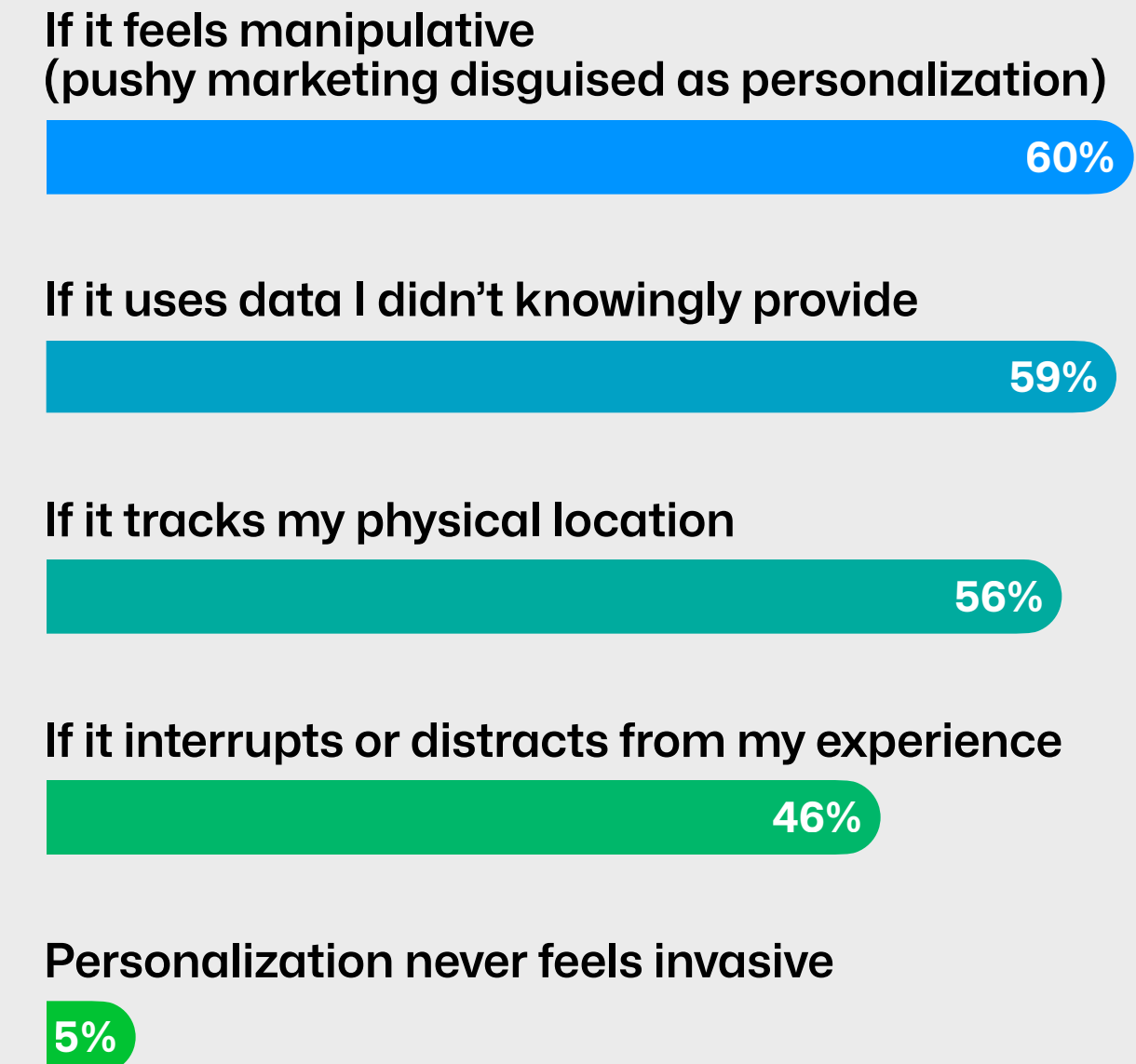
Fig. 10

What makes you less likely to share personal information with event organizers, if anything?
Select all that apply.



Fig. 11

At what point does personalization at an event start to feel invasive?
Select all that apply.



Personalization pays, if you earn the data contract.

Senior leaders expect valuable benefits when promised personalization, and younger cohorts want access, priority, and more relevant connections in exchange for providing more than basic registration data. (Fig. 12, Fig. 13)



Fig. 12

Who believes that sharing personal information with an event organizer should come with valuable benefits?

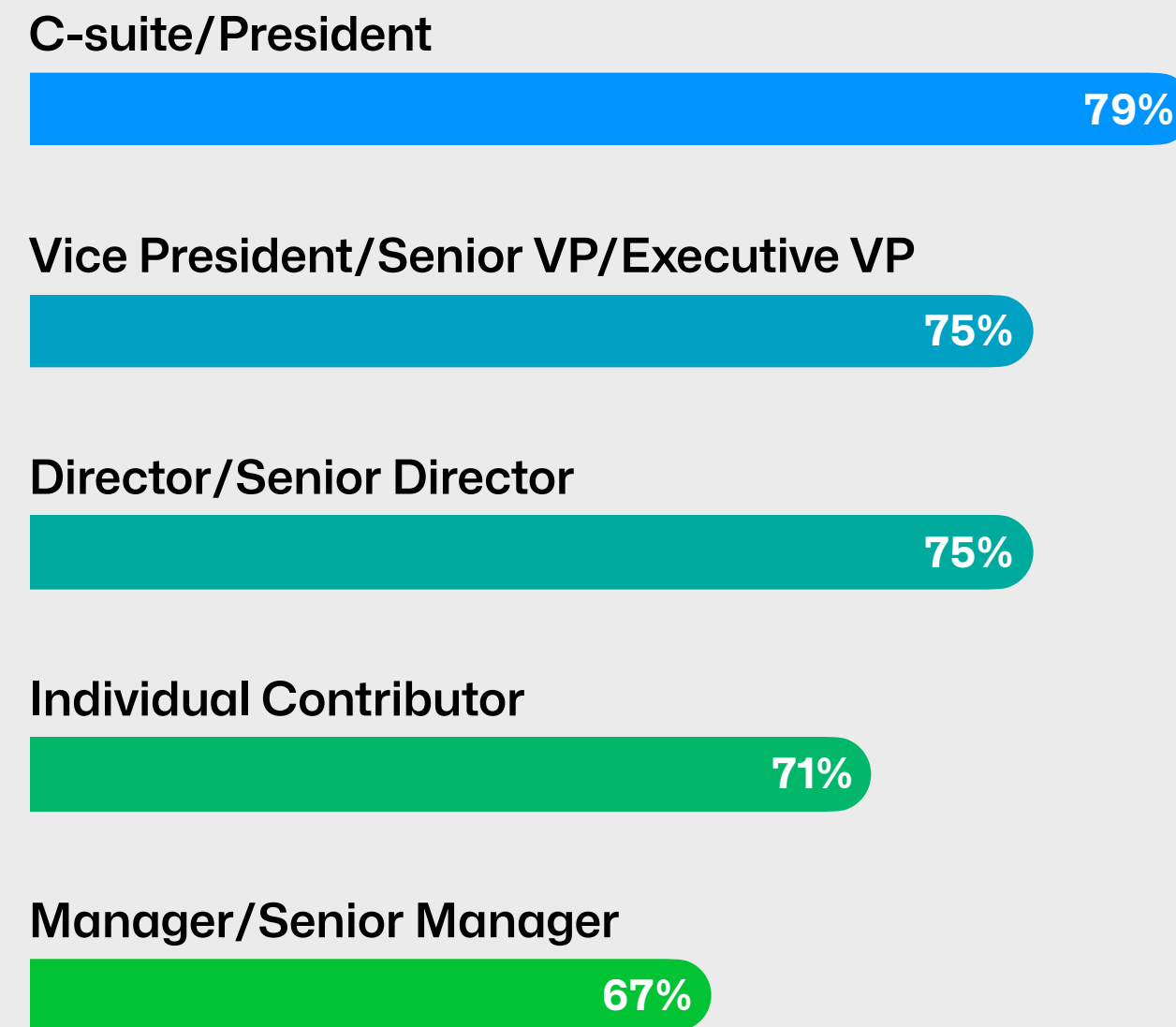
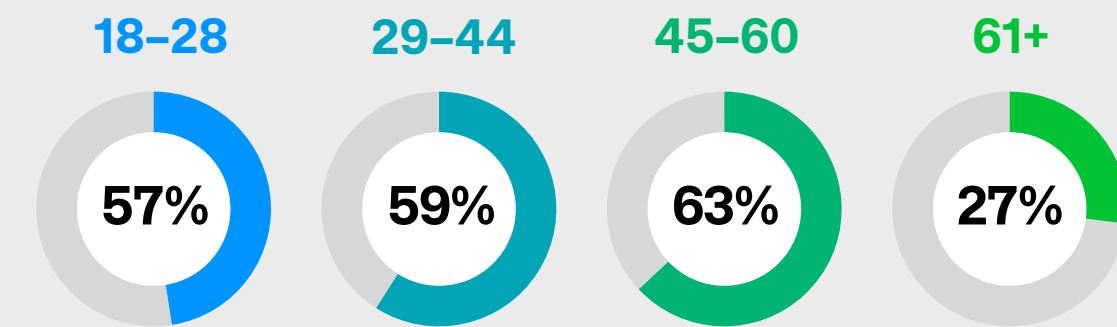


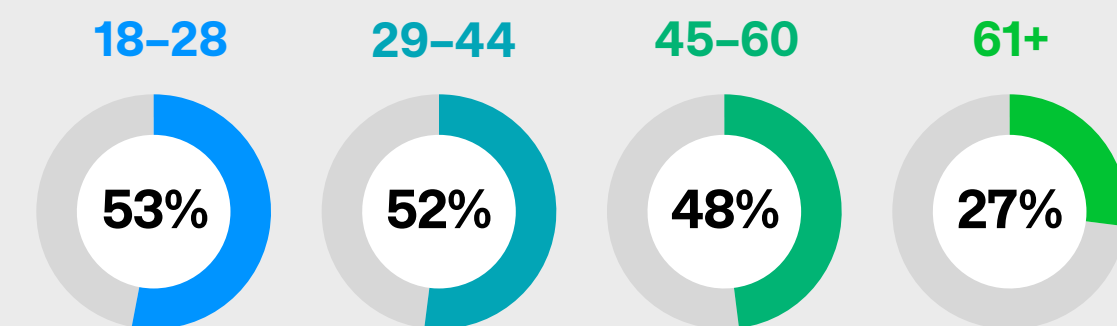
Fig. 13

Would you share more than basic registration data (name, role, location, industry, interests) in return for... (by age)

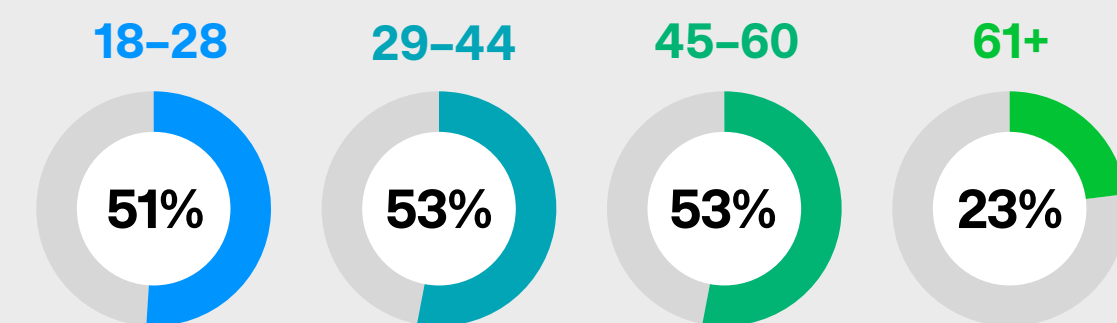
Access to exclusive areas or experiences



Priority access to high-demand sessions or demos

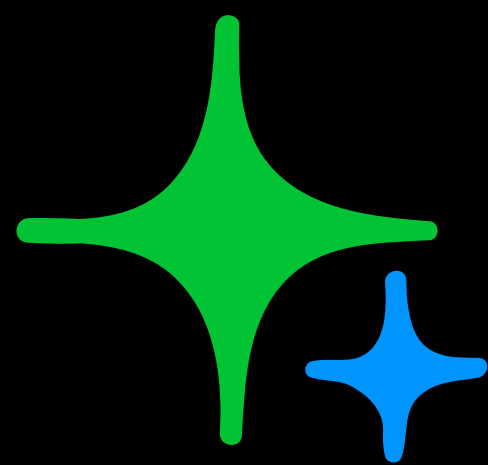
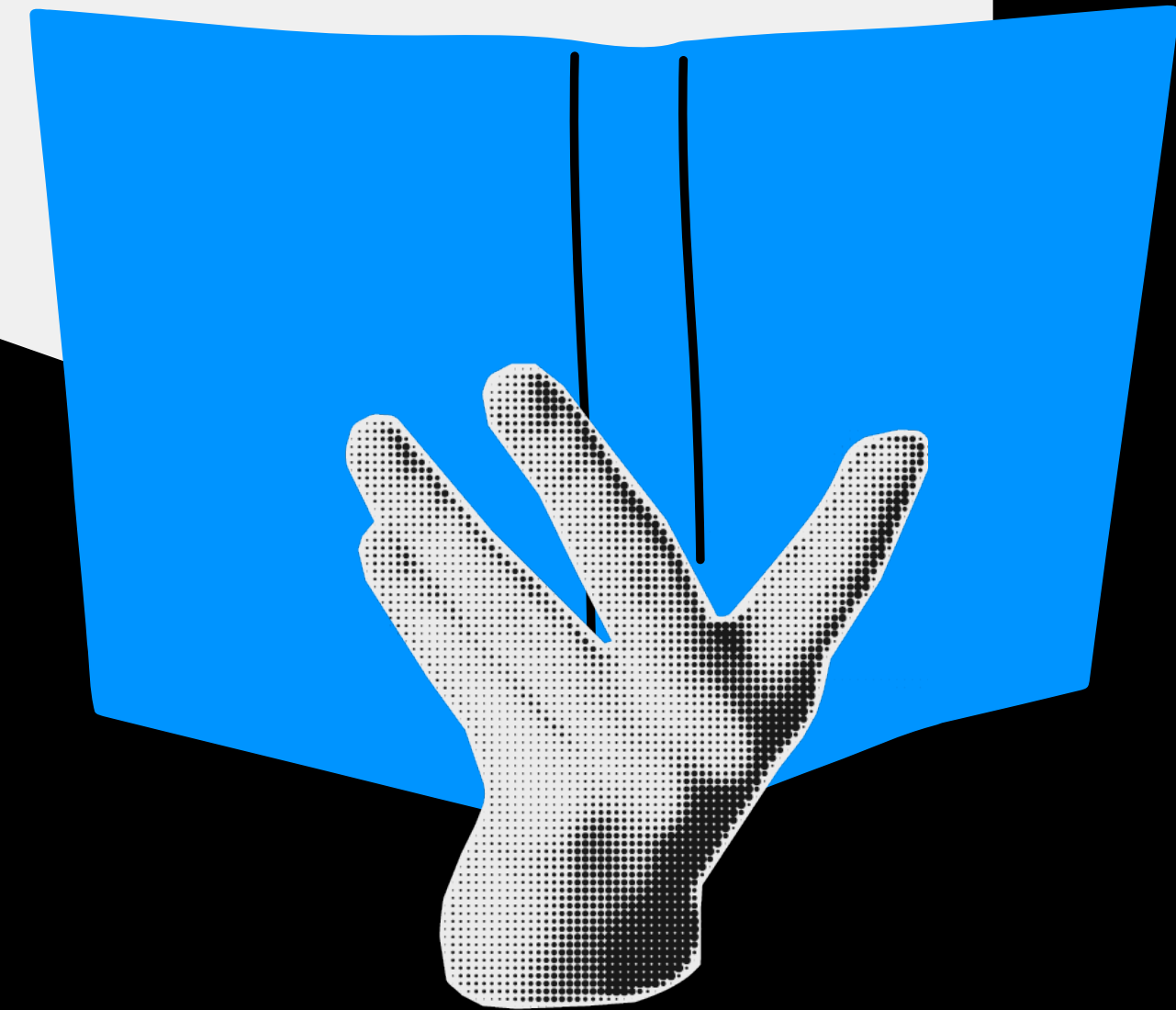
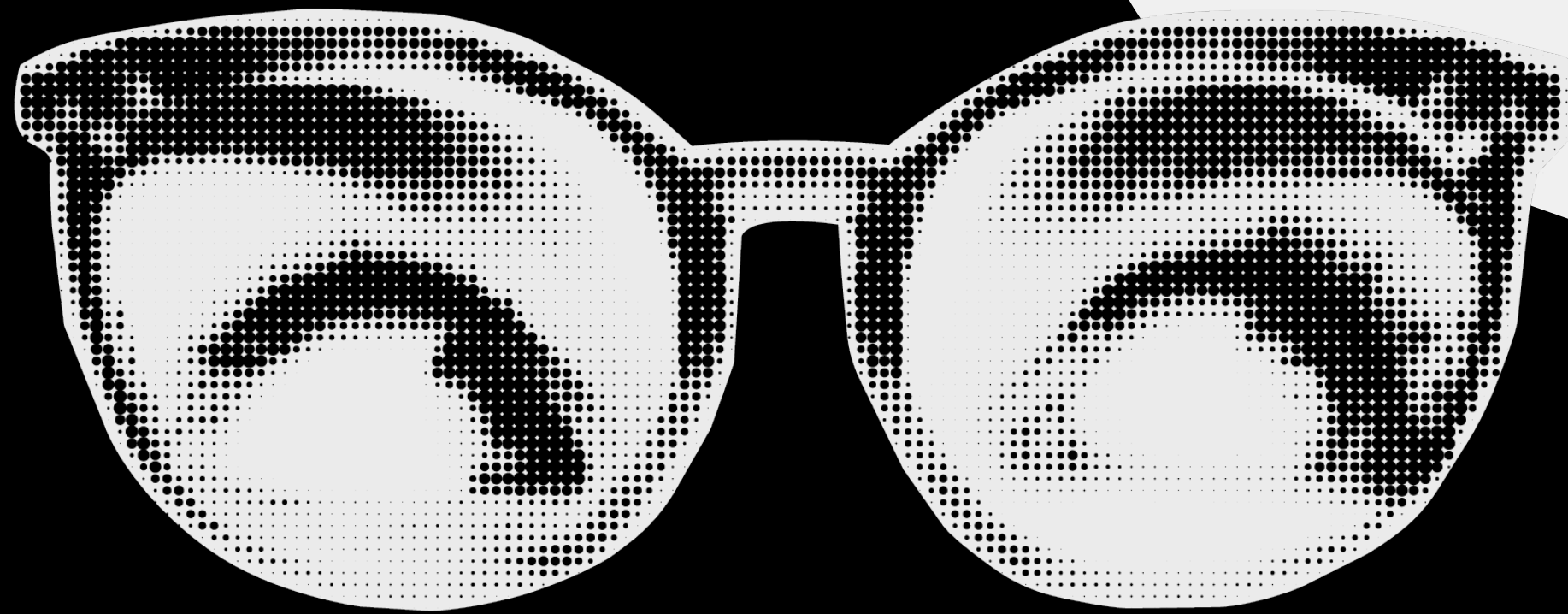


Deeper/more relevant networking connections

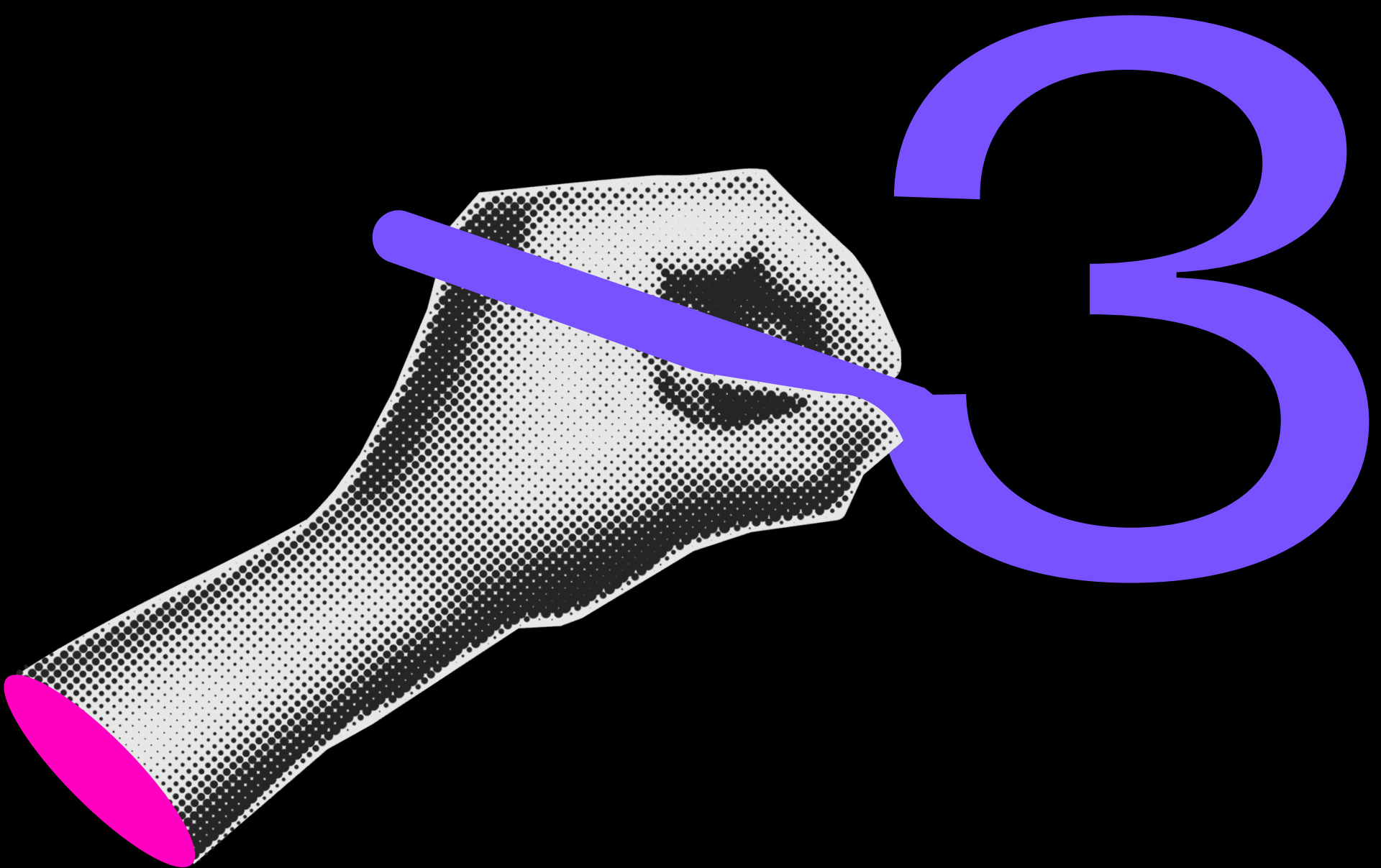


What to do now

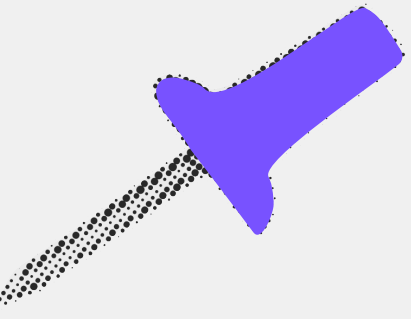

Be open and honest about how you plan to use attendee data and communicate what you will provide in return. Prioritize agenda and interest-based recs for executives, and nearby content + tailored networking for younger attendees, but understand that each cohort wants a little bit of everything when it comes to personalization.



Key finding



What people
are saying:



**We want attendees to learn.
We want them to understand our brand.
We want more brand champions.
We want them to dive deep into the product.
So, getting hands-on is huge and we are
expanding on hands-on content
during all events.**

—An experiential marketer



Getting Hands-on + peer proof beats flash.

From a tactical perspective, the moments most likely to spark action are trials, demos, and peer-to-peer conversations. (Fig. 14)

Older audiences are most influenced by seeing and testing products for themselves, while younger audiences increasingly respond more to unexpected, interactive activations and immersive design. (Fig. 15)



Fig. 14

Think about the last time you took action after an event. Which of these elements most influenced your decision to take that action?

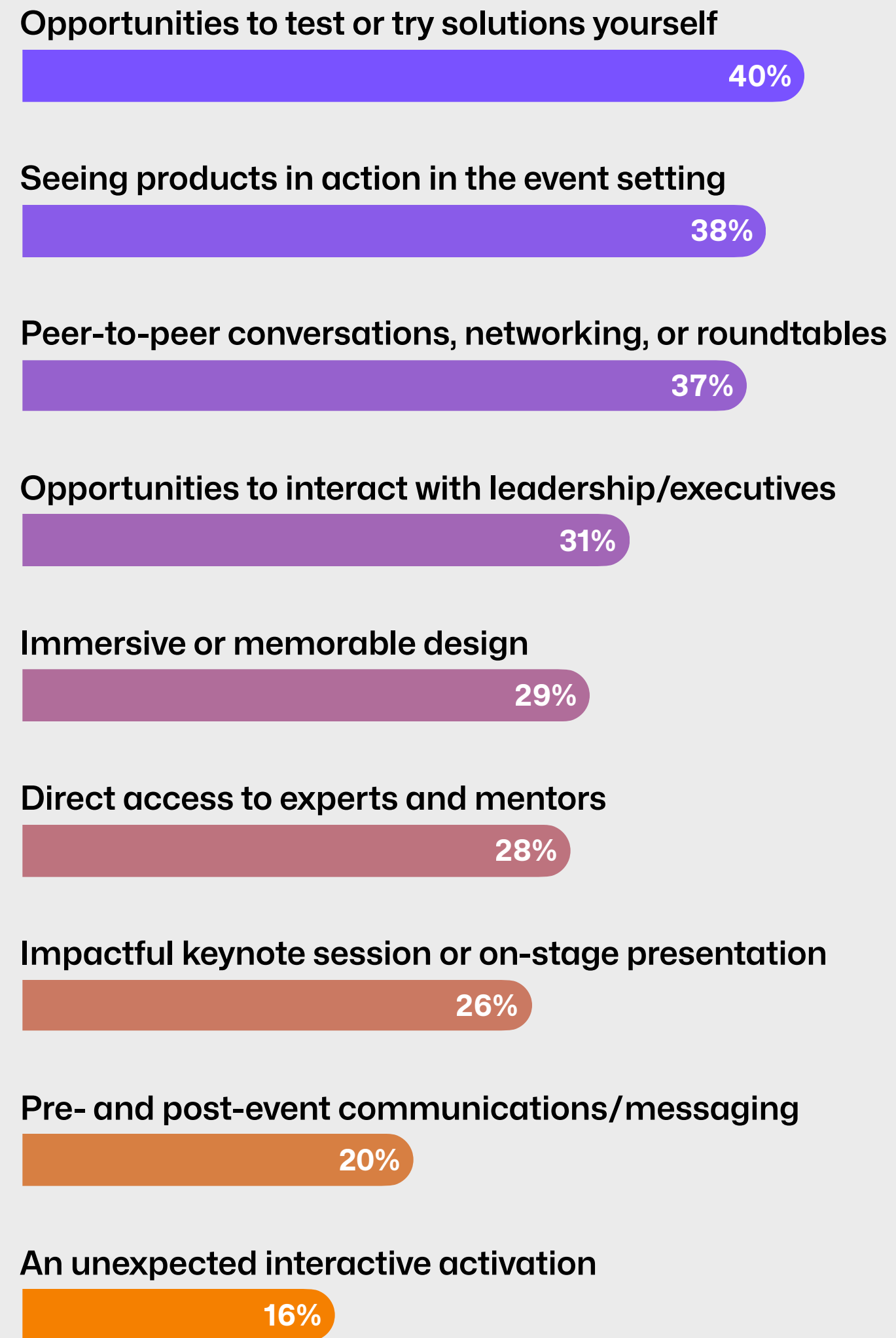
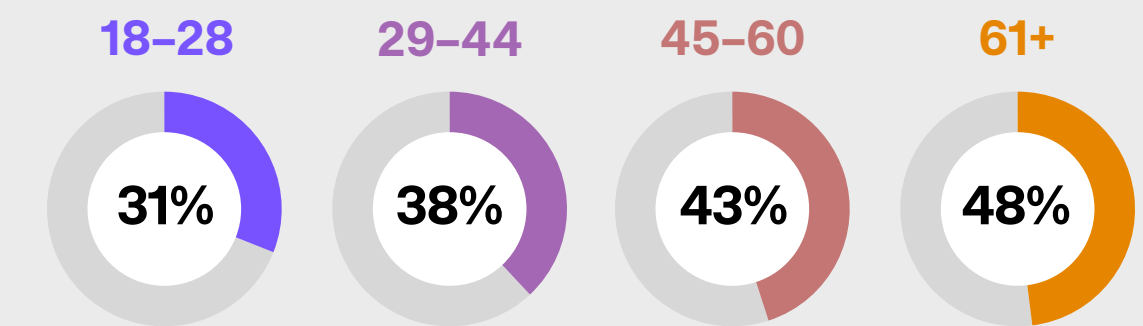


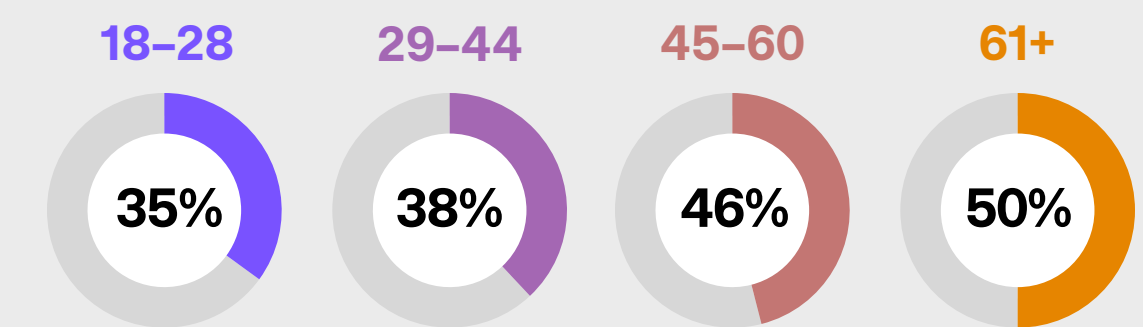
Fig. 15

Most influenced decisions. (by age)

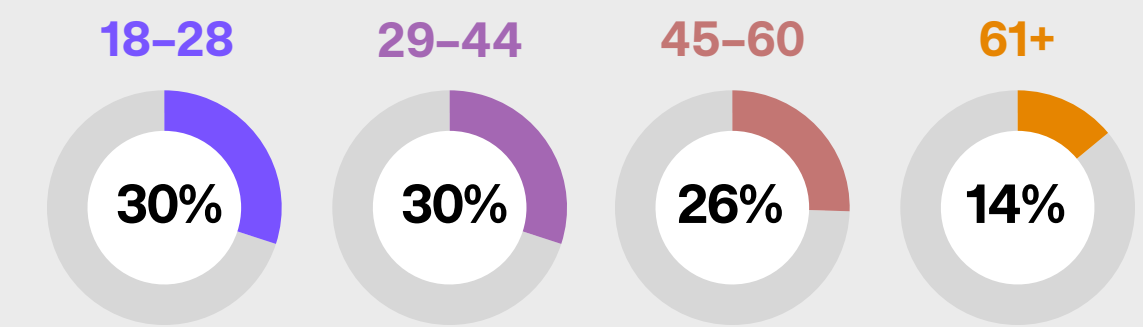
Seeing products in action in the event setting



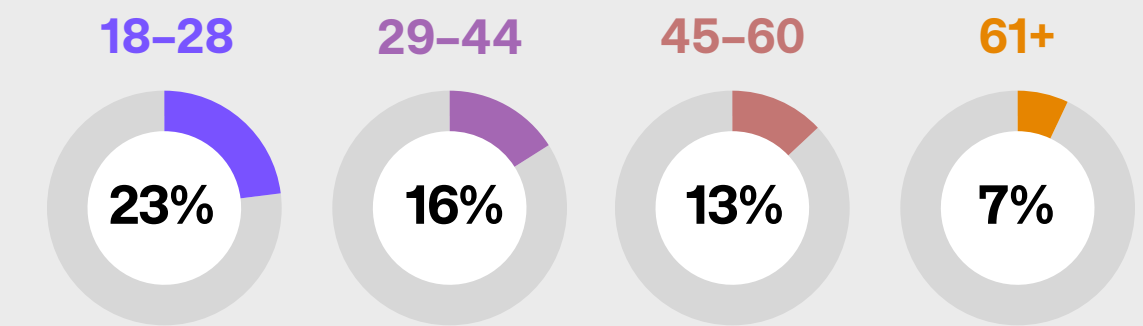
Opportunities to test or try solutions yourself



Immersive or memorable design



An unexpected interactive activation



Getting Hands-on + peer proof beats flash.

Across the board, giving people a chance to connect with knowledgeable reps—and ask real, complex questions—is one of the strongest drivers of brand connection. (Fig. 16)

Especially for the C-suite, that face-to-face expertise matters. (Fig. 17)



Fig. 16

Which aspects of the overall event experience make you feel most connected to the brand?

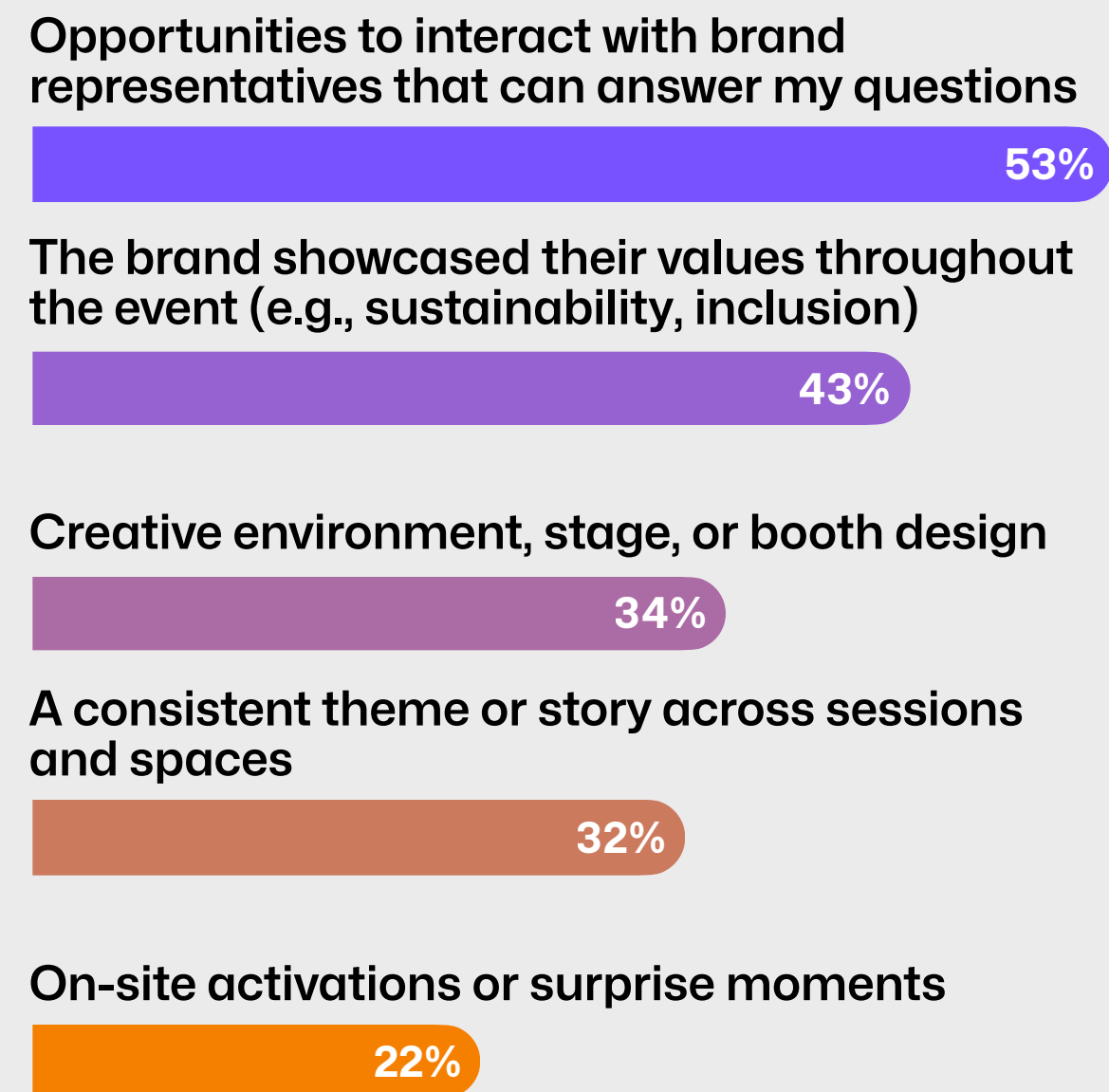
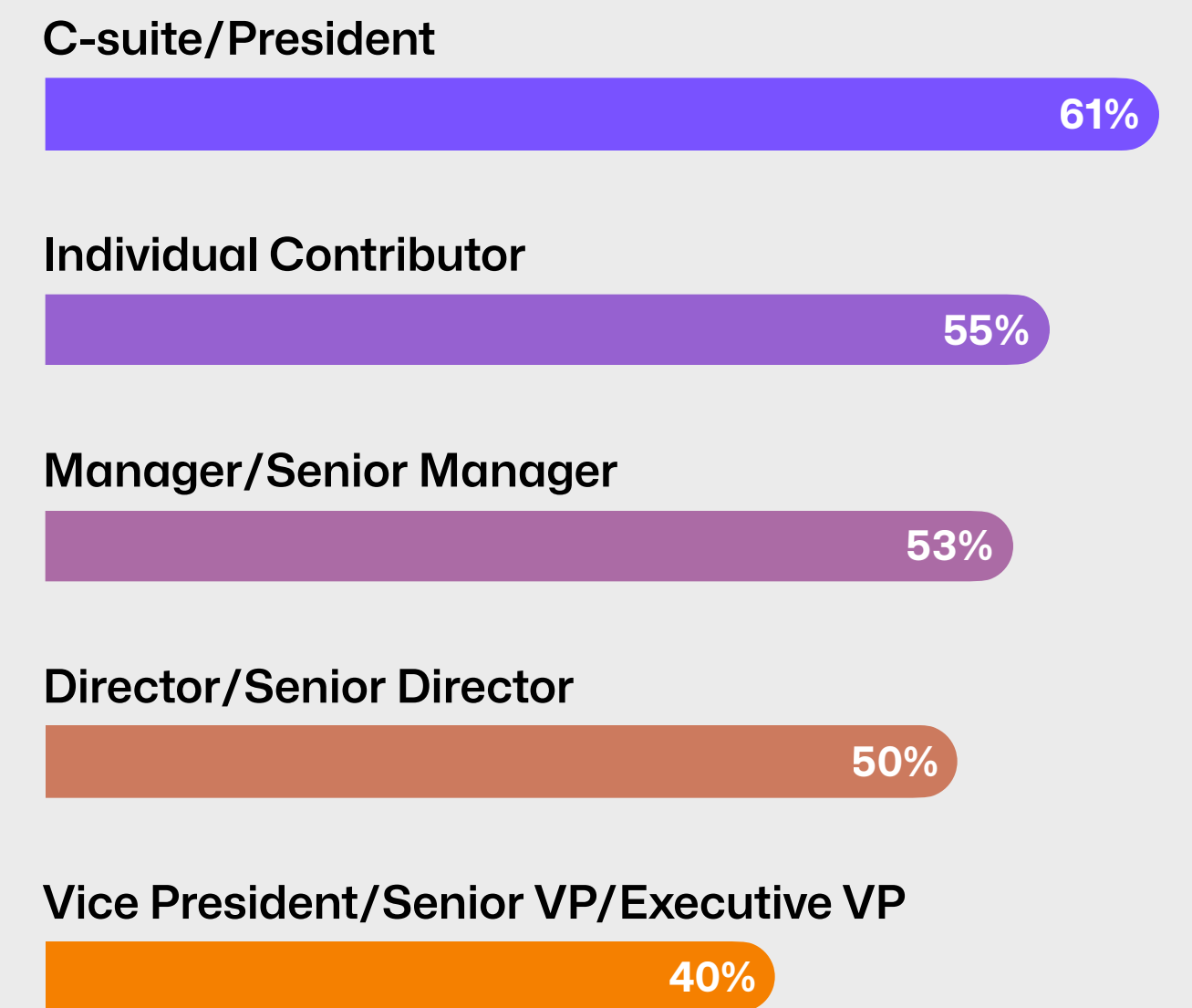


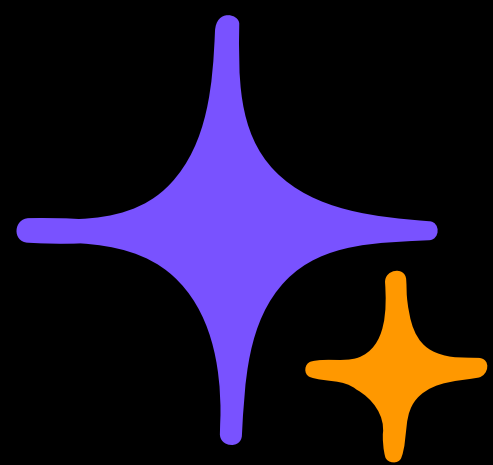
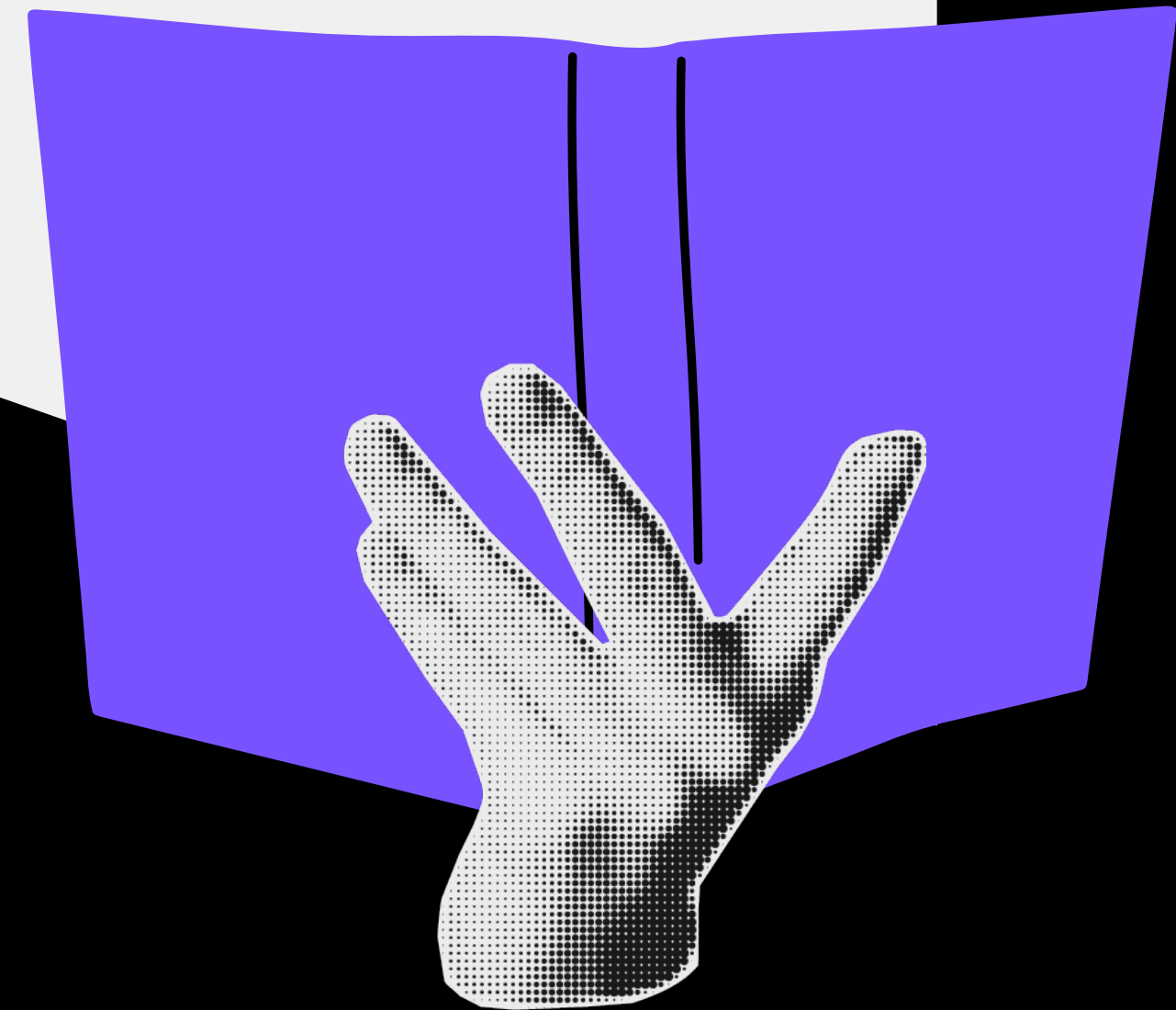
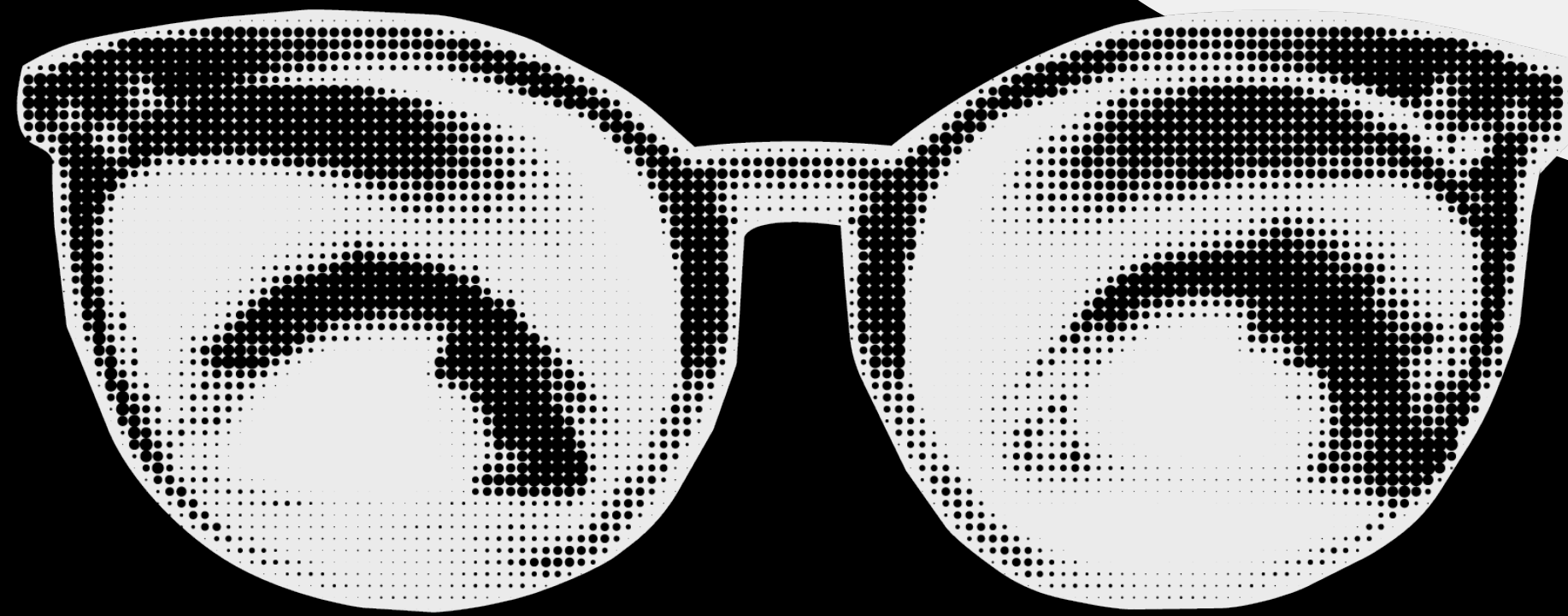
Fig. 17

Who feels most connected to brands that give them opportunities to question brand representatives?



What to do now

Put your products in people's hands so they can see them in action, lean in and enhance the peer-to-peer exchange, and staff the experience with experts empowered to go deep on tough questions.



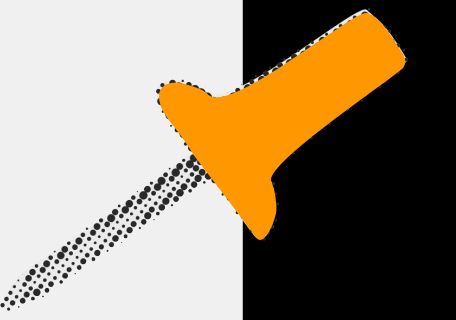
✦ ✦ Key finding



What people
are saying:

The feedback that we're getting from all of our customers, whether it's the C-suite or down into the user level, is 'help me connect with people that either I can learn something different from or I can look at something from a different perspective' and help me better find people to answer my questions.

—An experiential marketer



Networking

is shifting from serendipity to designed community.

Audiences are looking for networking and community—and it even helps build trust with your brand—but their preferred method is starting to shift.

The formats that most reliably get people to engage with one another are topic and role-based sessions and small-group roundtables where people can have longer, more meaningful conversations. (Fig. 18)

The generational cross-tabs tell an even more nuanced story.

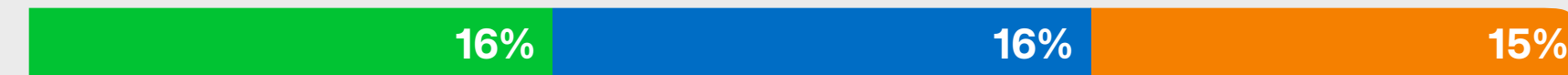


Fig. 18

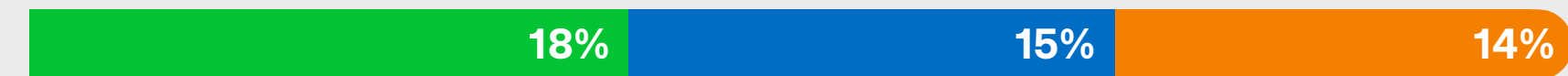
Types of networking formats that are most effective in driving engagement with others after an event. Rank up to three, with 1 being the most effective.

● 1st ● 2nd ● 3rd

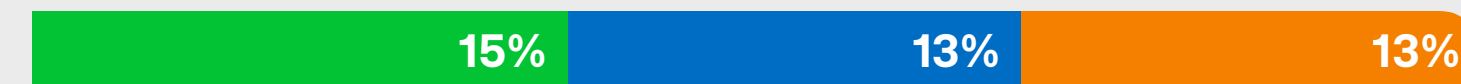
Topic or role-based networking sessions



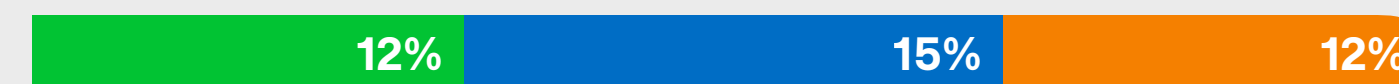
Small group roundtables or discussions



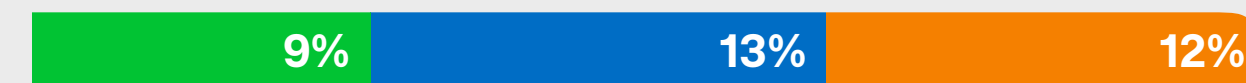
Large social events (mixers, parties)



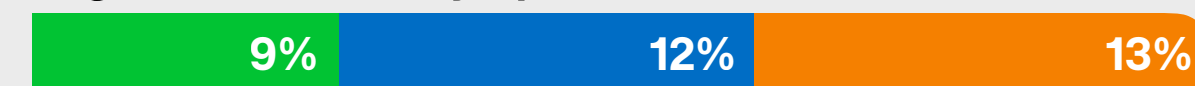
Hosted meals or table talks



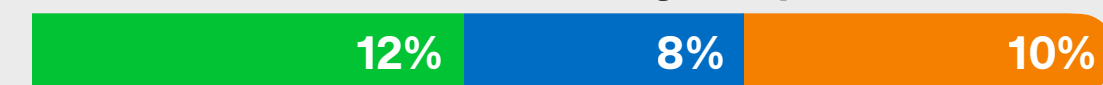
Informal spaces (coffee breaks, lounges, etc.)



Digital community spaces



One-on-one matchmaking or speed networking



Gamified networking activities



Networking

is shifting from serendipity to designed community.

Gen Z now ranks digital community spaces as a top-three networking tactic and leans into gamified networking. (Fig. 19, Fig. 20)

Younger attendees, in general, are increasingly drawn to curated introductions. (Fig. 21)

So how do we keep that momentum going once the event wraps? By making it effortless to stay connected—through simple digital touchpoints and more structured follow-ups. Because what really builds lasting community isn't just the event itself—it's the collaborative conversations that continue after it's over. (Fig. 22)



Fig. 19

Types of networking formats that are most effective in engaging with others after an event. (top three by age group)

	18-28	29-44	45-60	61+
1st	Topic or role-based networking sessions	Topic or role-based networking sessions	Small group roundtables or discussions	Small group roundtables or discussions
2nd	Large social events	Small group roundtables or discussions	Topic or role-based networking sessions	Informal spaces
3rd	Digital community spaces	Large social events	Large social events	Hosted meals or table talks

Fig. 20

Gamified networking activities. (by age)

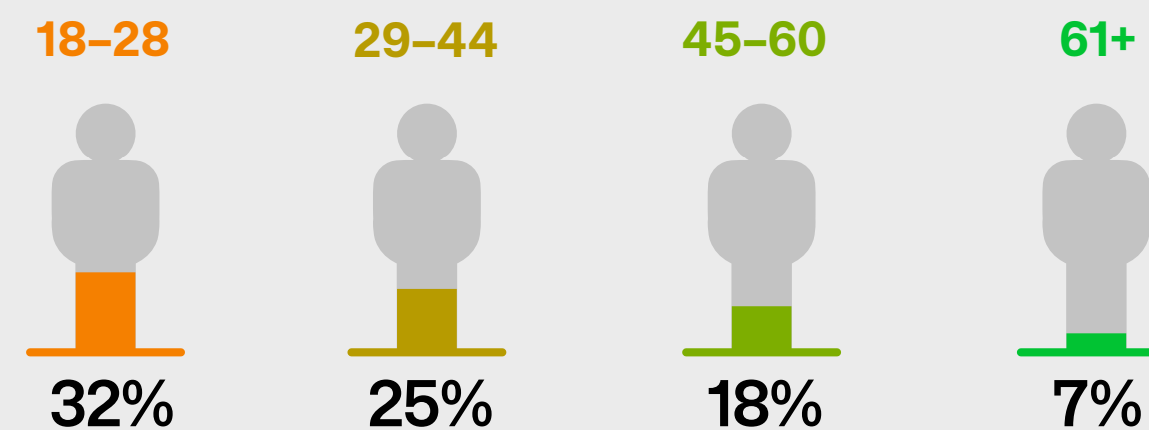


Fig. 21

Curated or facilitated introductions led attendees to take a meaningful action post-event. (by age)

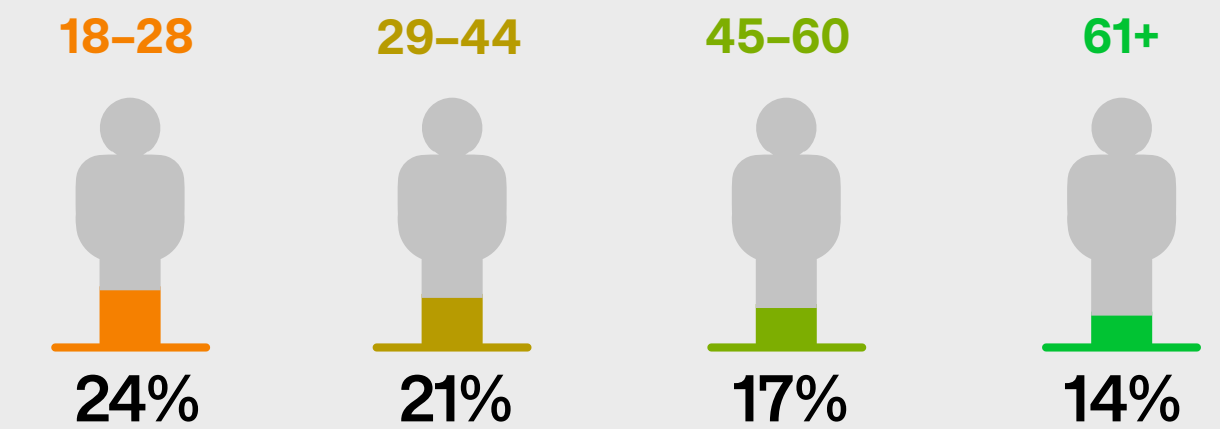


Fig. 22

What helps you keep momentum with new connections after an event? Select all that apply

Easy ways to stay in touch digitally (apps, LinkedIn groups, etc.)



Shared interests that create a reason to reconnect



Clear relevance to my work or business challenges



Multiple opportunities to interact with the same people during the event

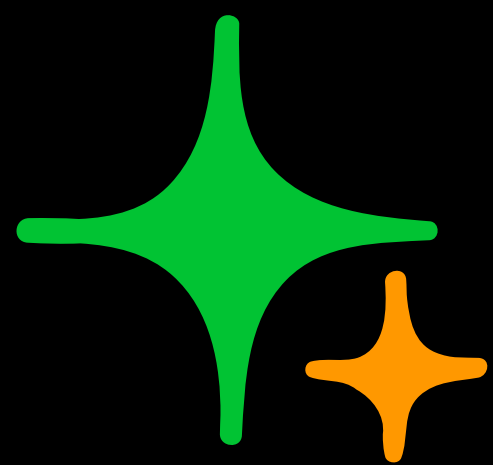
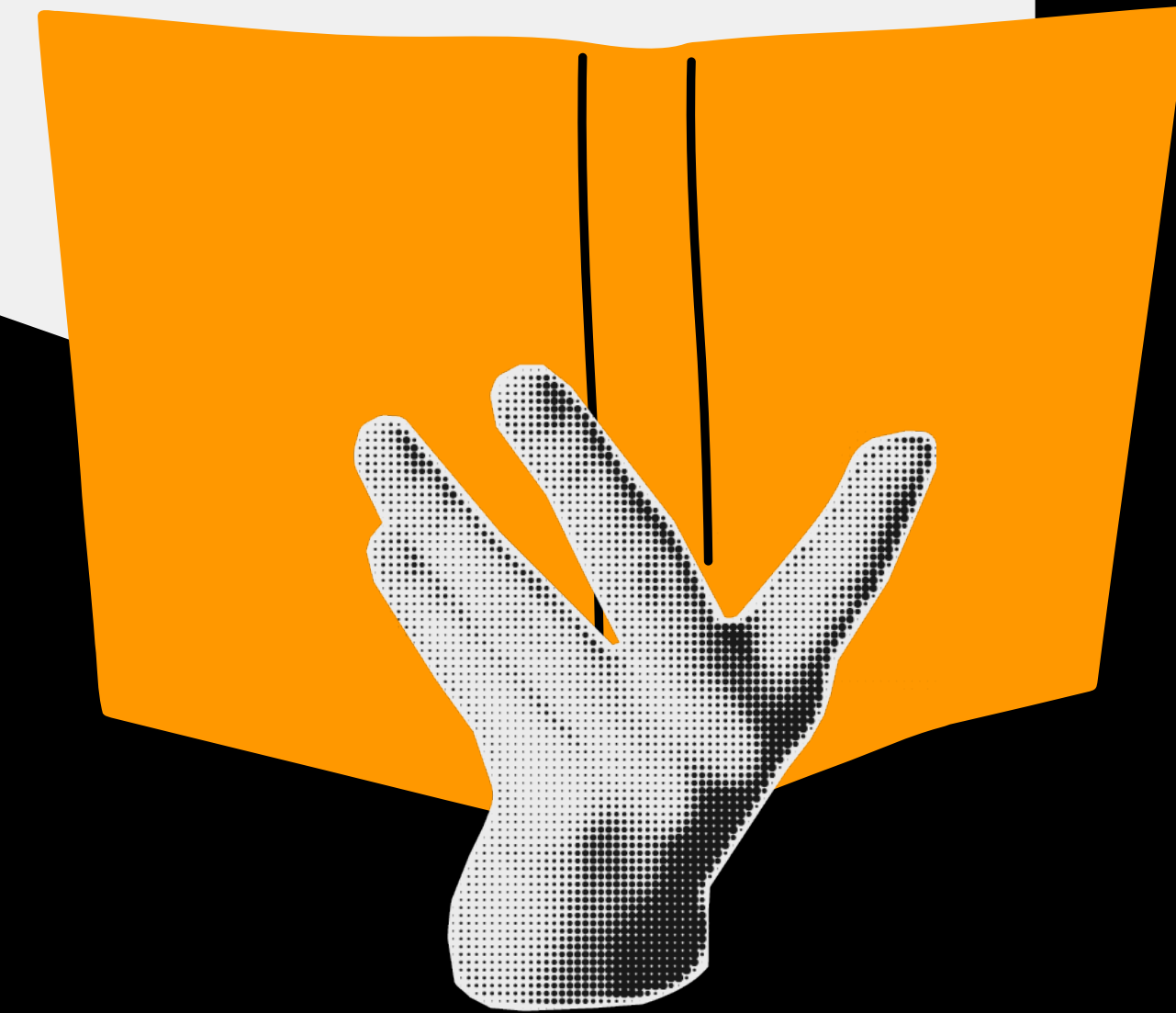
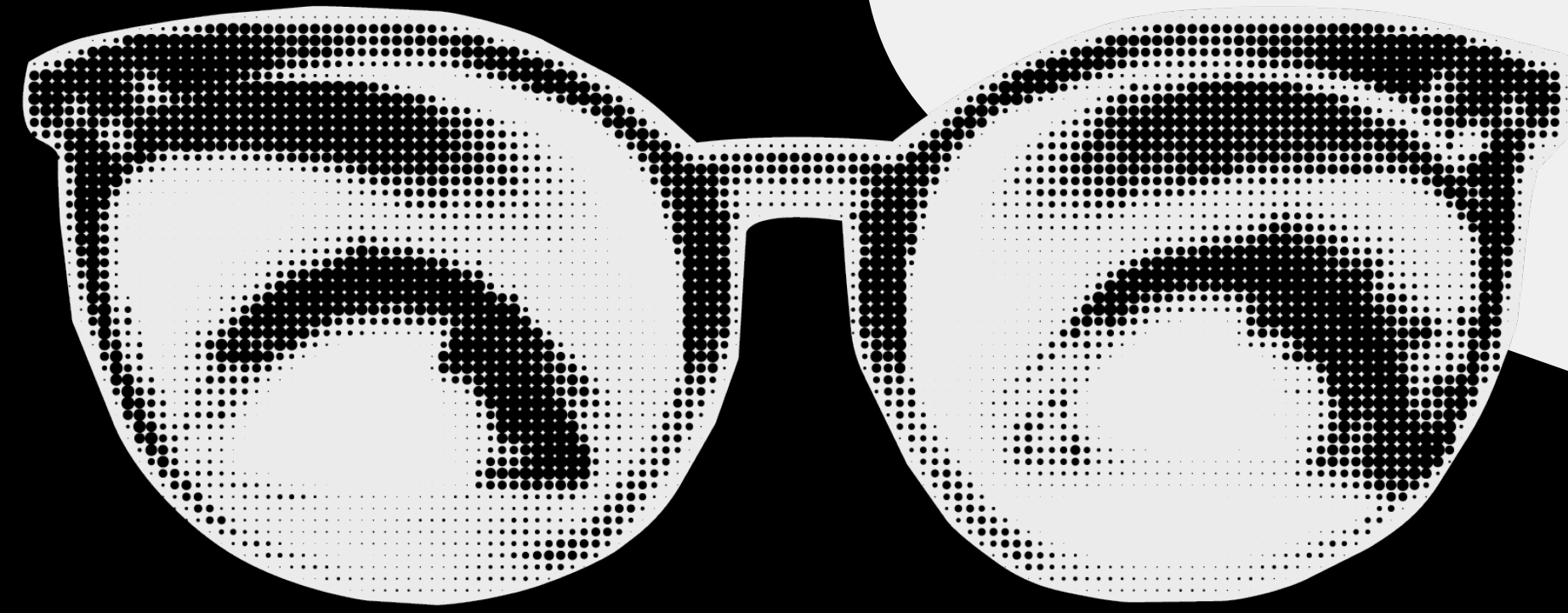


A structured follow-up from the organizer or host brand

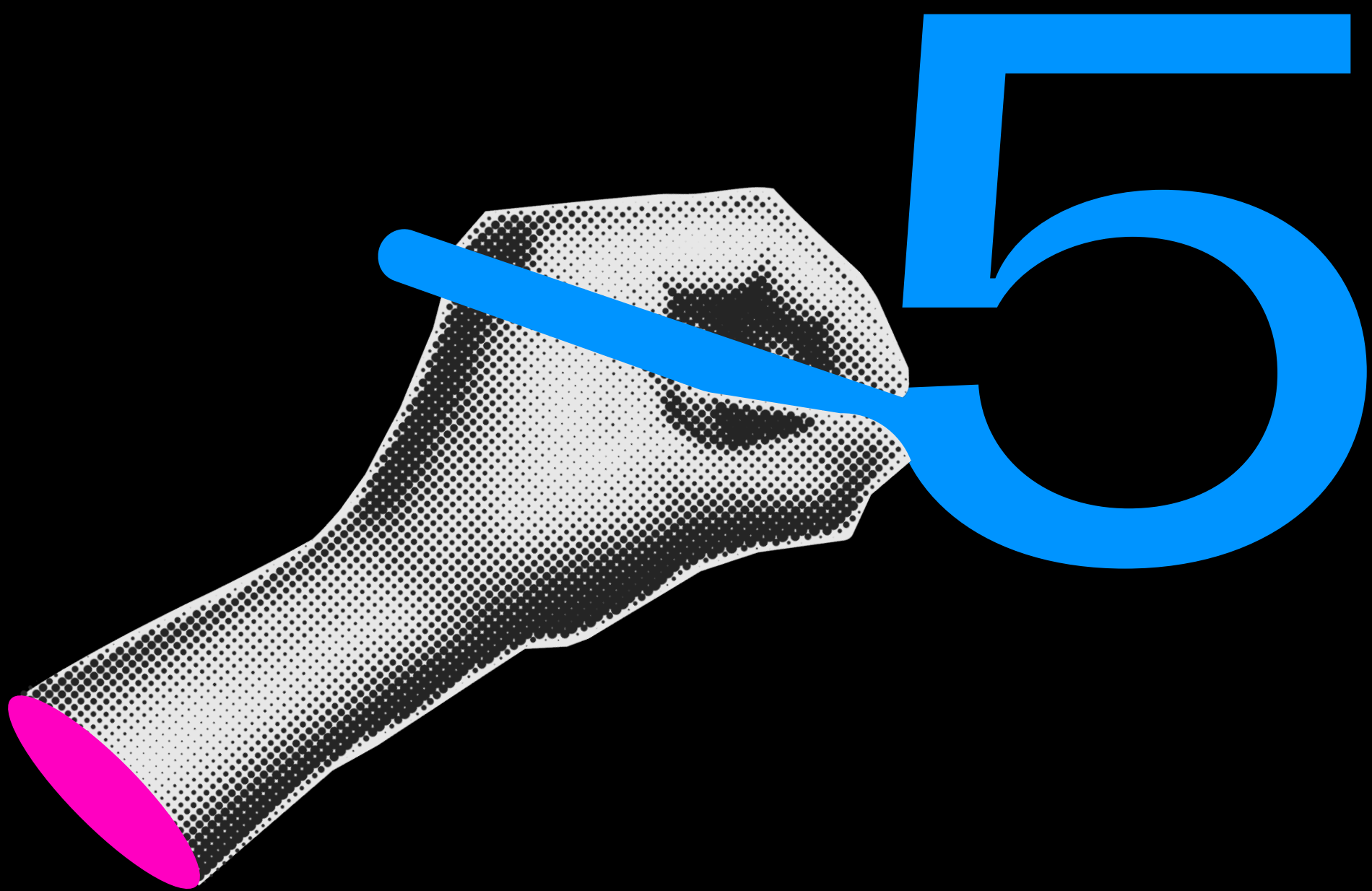


What to do now

Segment networking by career level, interest, and common problems, add light gamification for younger cohorts, and pre-wire post-event connection opportunities (shared interest groups, digital community, and calendarized follow-ups) so attendees can keep the conversation going long after the event wraps.



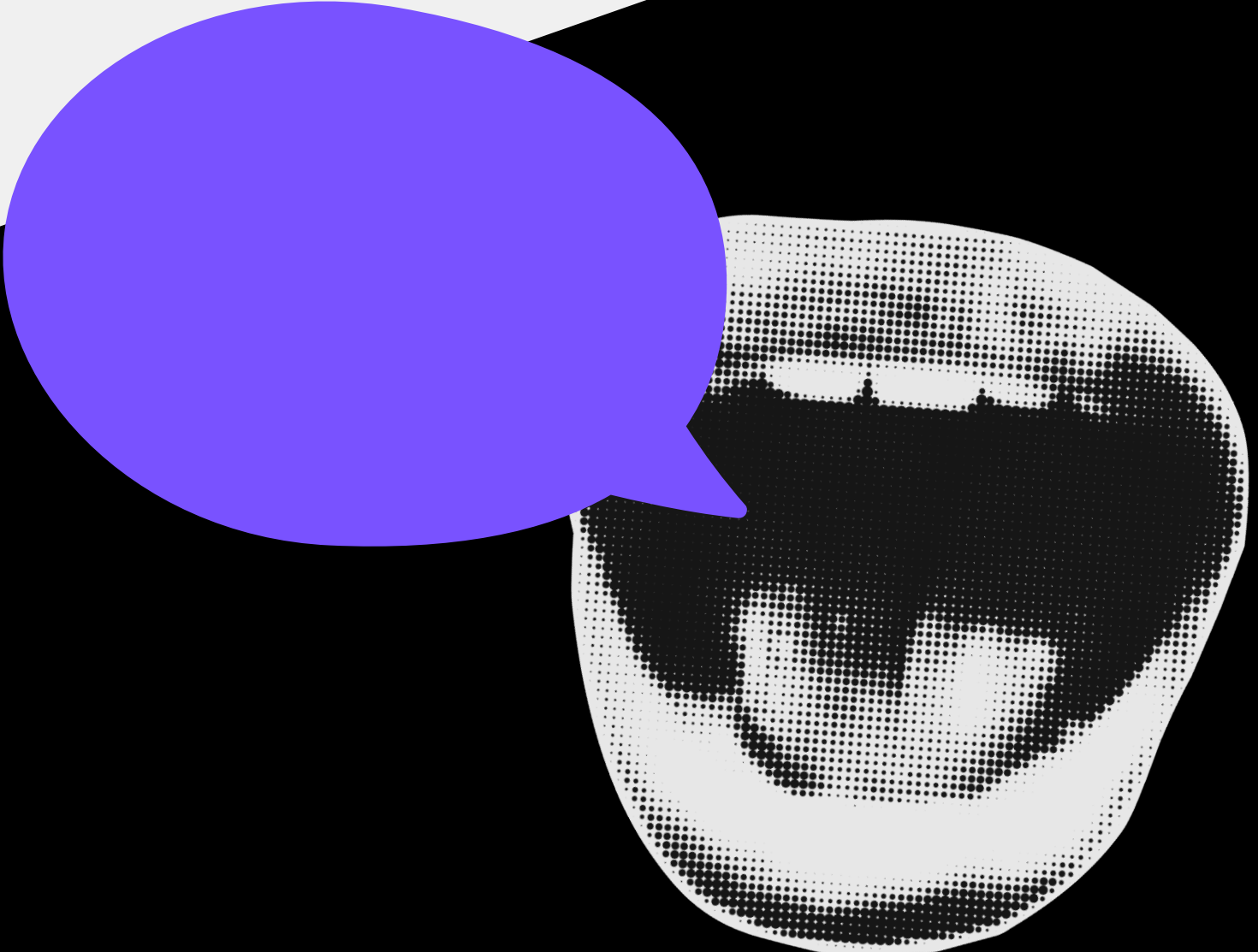
Key finding



What people
are saying:

**“The keynote felt so rehearsed
and at the end I didn’t even
know what to do with it.”**

–Event attendee



Authenticity +

specifics win on the main stage.

NEWSFLASH: When it comes to messaging on stage, nothing matters more than how truthful and authentic your message feels to the audience. (Fig. 23)

Messages that move people to act have a few things in common: they're backed by credible data, they're simple and relevant, and they show exactly how to apply the learning. (Fig. 24)



Fig. 23

When you hear a brand's message at an event, which qualities most make it feel credible and trustworthy? Select up to three.



Fig. 24

When you hear a brand's message at an event, how much more likely are you to take action if the message...



Authenticity +

specifics win on the main stage.

Younger audiences connect more with personal stories and cultural relevance, while Gen X and older attendees tune out the jargon and marketing-speak. (Fig. 25, Fig. 26, Fig. 28)

The quickest way to kill a keynote: being too scripted, too long, or too salesy. (Fig. 27)



Fig. 25

How much more likely are you to take action when a brand's event message includes real customer and peer stories. (by age)

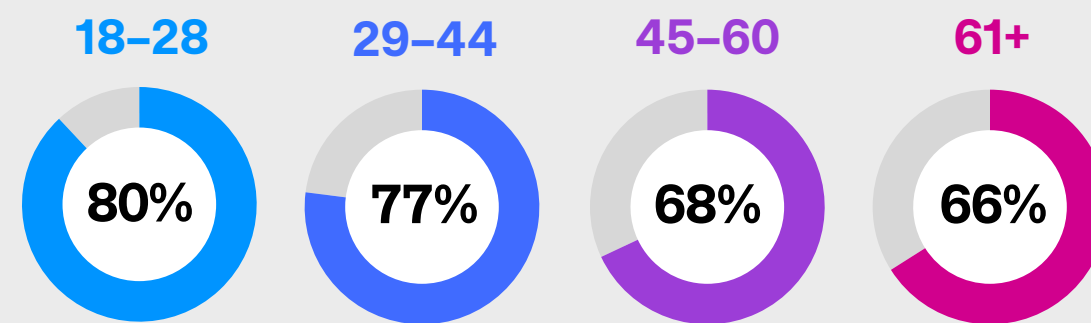


Fig. 26

How much more likely are you to take action when an event message connects to a social or cultural issue you care about? (by age)

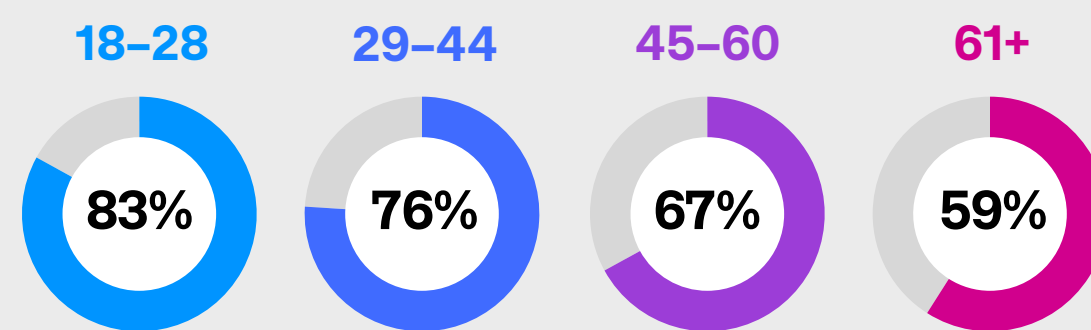


Fig. 27

What usually makes a keynote less impactful or easy to tune out?

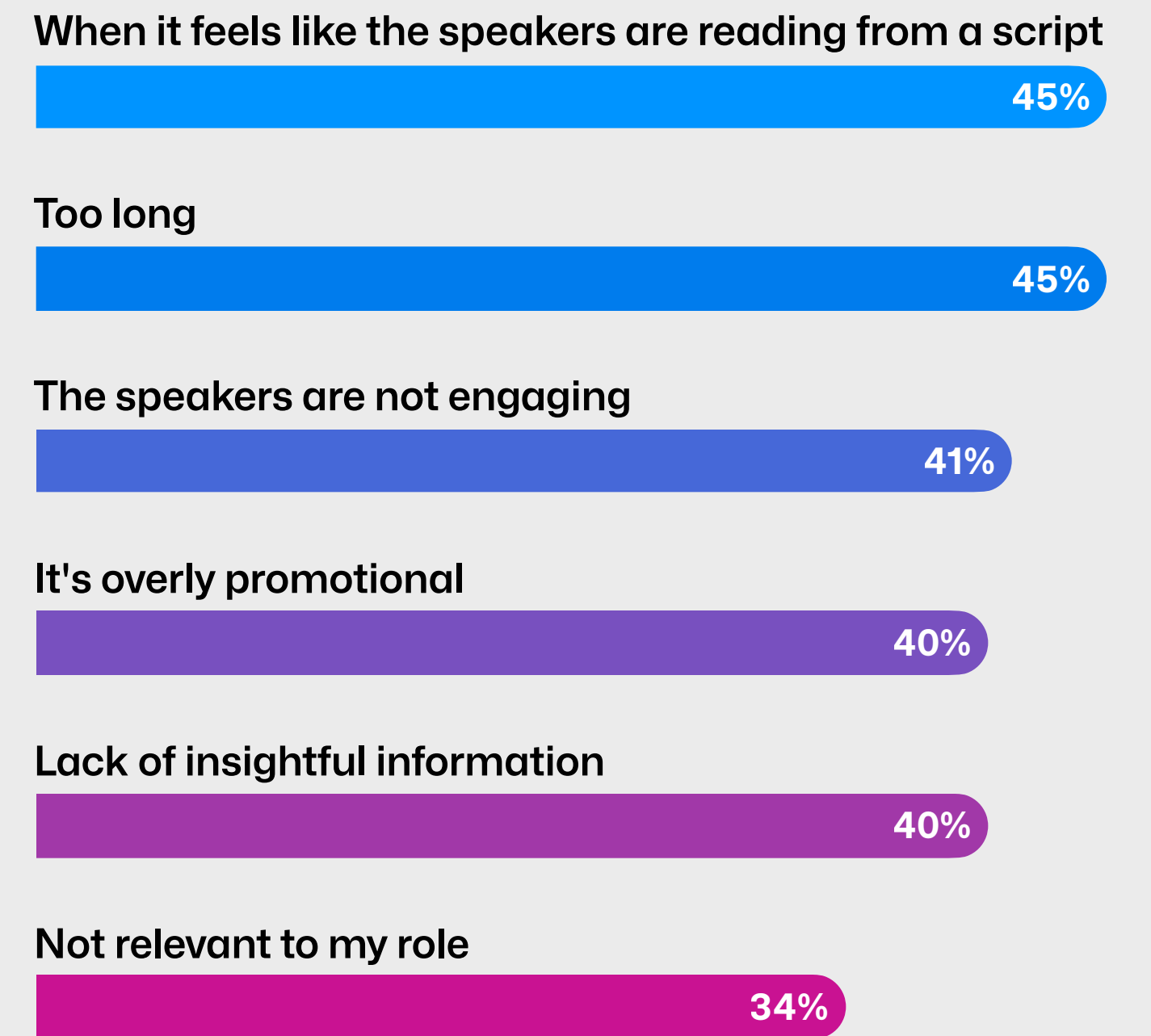
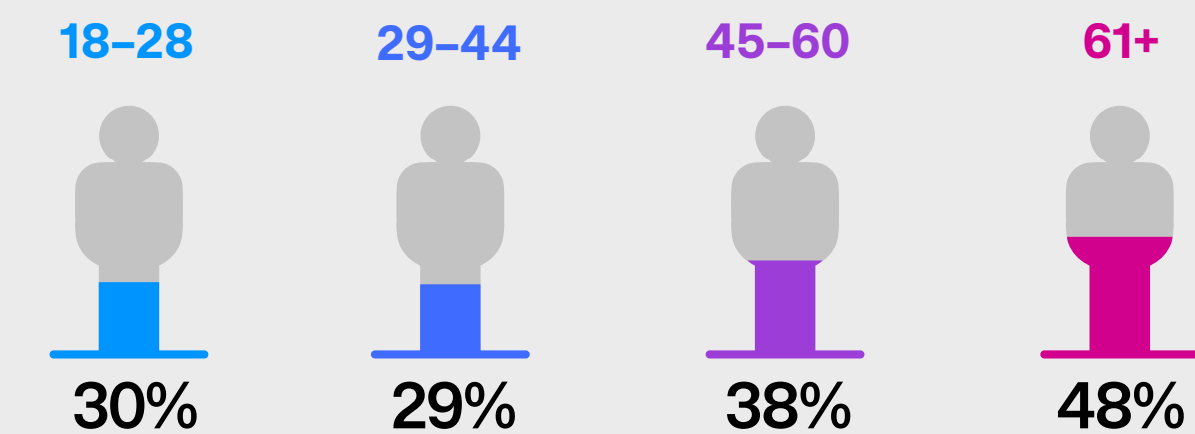


Fig. 28

Too much jargon or marketing-speak makes attendees tune out or distrust a brand's message at an event (by age)



Authenticity +

specifics win on the main stage.

The surest way to elevate one: practical takeaways, credible data, and dynamic delivery, plus a touch of production value and storytelling that keeps things human. Speaker trust plays a huge role, too. (Fig. 29, Fig. 30)

Audiences overall lean slightly toward respected practitioners with messy slides (yes, you heard that right) over polished executives with a PR-approved script. (Fig. 31)



Fig. 29

When thinking about keynotes, which aspects make them most impactful for you? *Select up to three.*

Clear, practical takeaways I can apply to my work

40%

Backed by credible data or proof points

38%

Delivered in a dynamic, engaging style (not just reading slides)

36%

The content feels more like a conversation than a presentation

34%

Compelling storytelling

31%

Inspiring vision of the future and big ideas

29%

Incorporates visuals, media, or production that enhance the message

29%

Delivered by a well-known or respected speaker

26%

Fig. 30

How much more likely are you to take action after a keynote that...

gives you concrete solutions for your role

74%

features a respected leader or expert you admire

68%

delivers a big, inspiring vision for the future

67%

shares a story you can retell to others

66%

connects to broader social/cultural issues you care about

64%

Fig. 31

Who do you trust more on stage?

47%

A polished executive with a PR-approved script



53%

A respected practitioner with messy slides

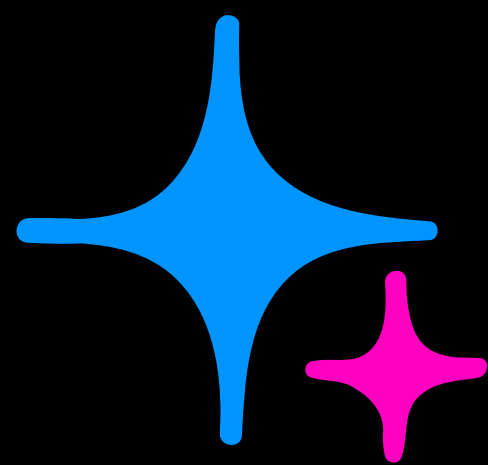
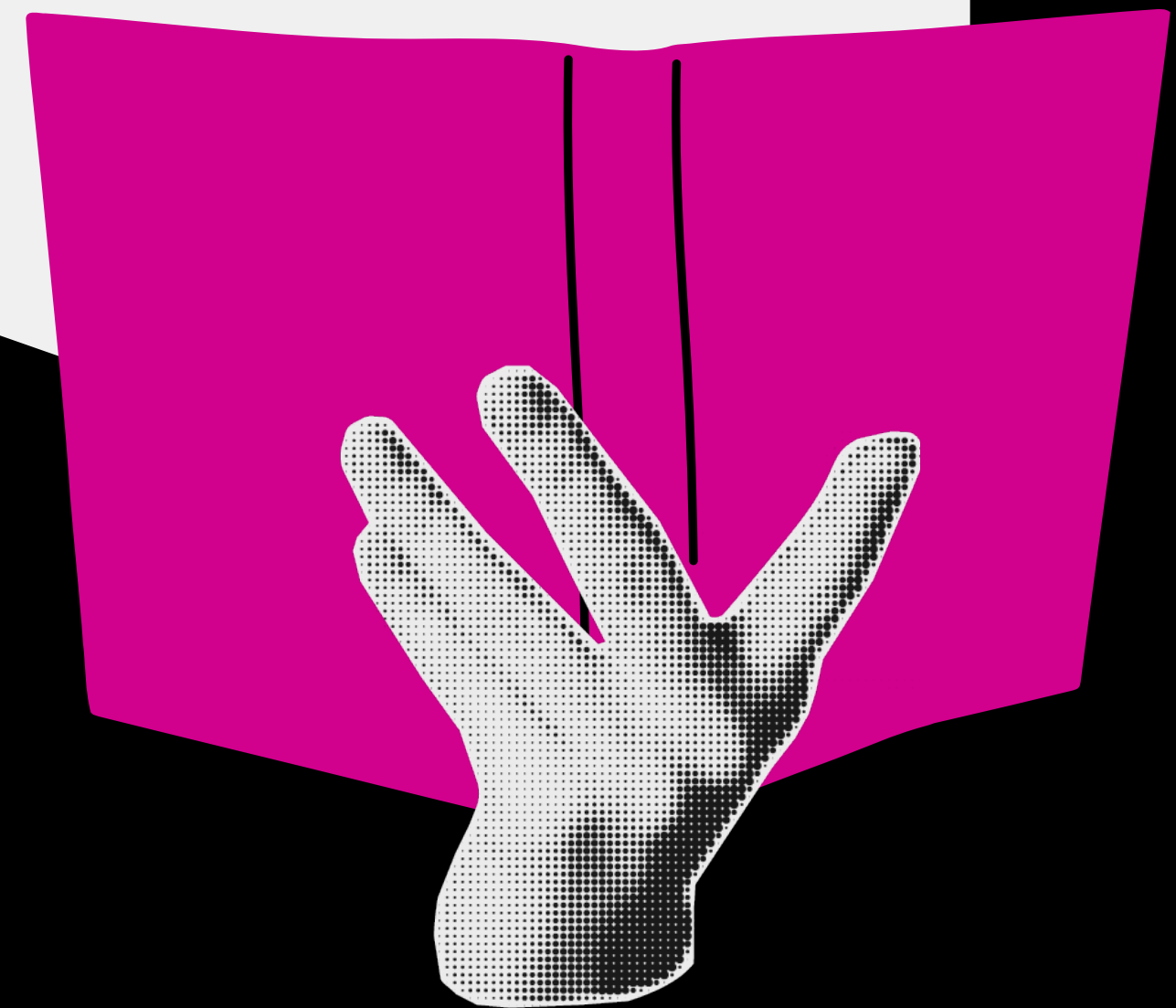
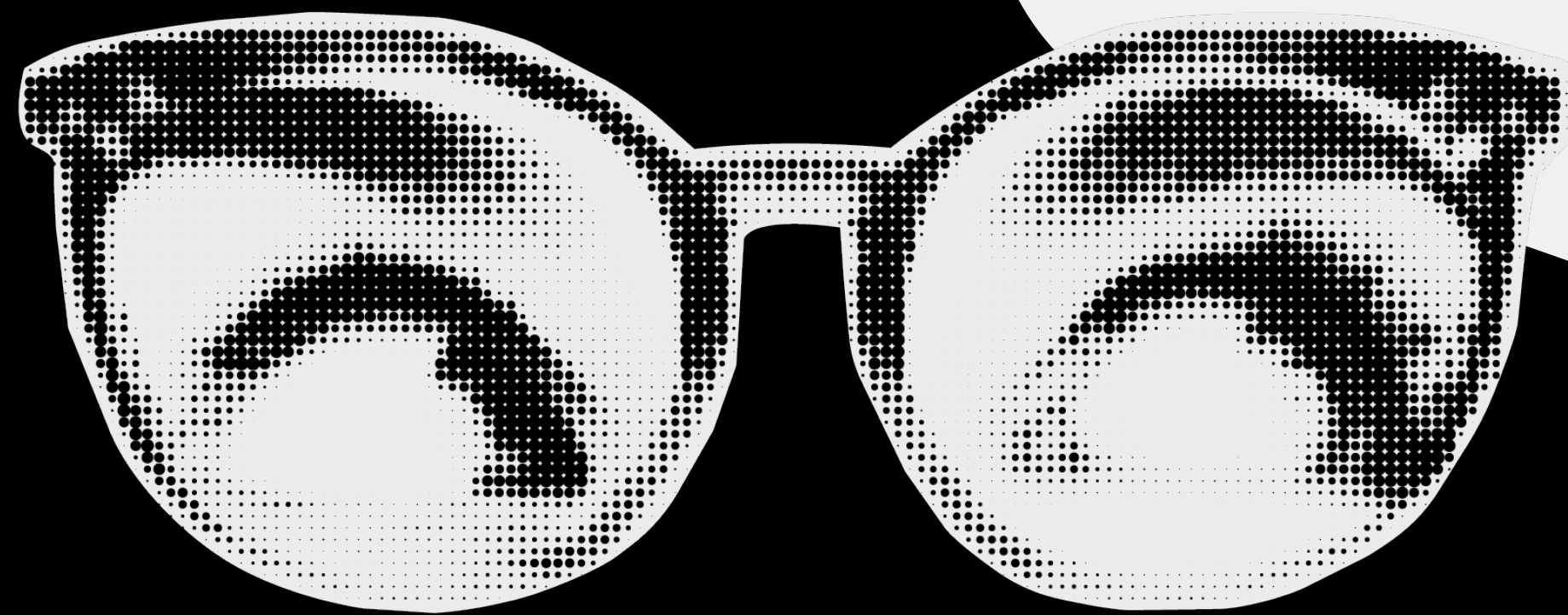


What to do now

When it's time to decide who you want delivering your most important messages, find the people most trusted by your audience.

Optimize for brevity and role relevance, bring respected experts and a clear "how to use this right now" approach to your content.

Across attendee surveys, audiences say they hear high-level messaging onstage without a clear path to implement what they learn... tell audiences what they can do as soon as they leave the room.



In summary

Forget chasing the next shiny object.

AI, immersive tech, and personalization are all tools, but

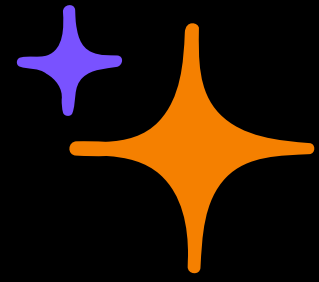


trust
is the foundation.

Now is the time to bring it into every touchpoint of your experiences.

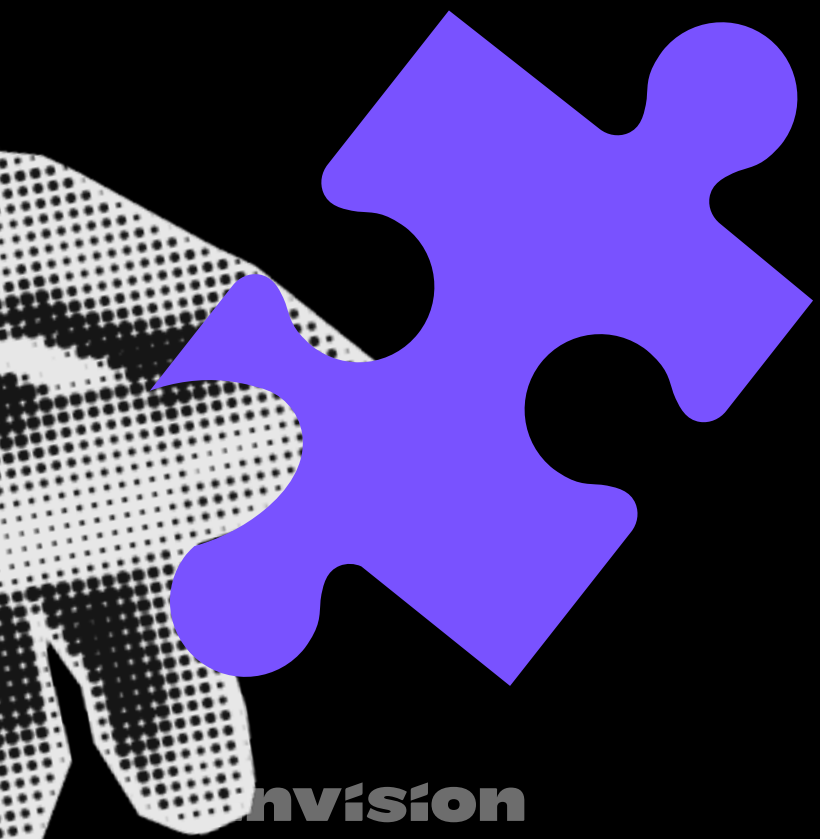
Every promise, presentation, and post-event follow-up either builds or breaks it.

When brands lead with honesty and empathy, audiences don't just listen, they act.



Additional learnings

Alongside the key insights in this report, we asked a wider set of questions. Some added depth to the themes upfront. Others uncovered perspectives that didn't quite fit—but still mattered. This section captures that thinking.



When it comes to acting after an event, attendees are highly influenced by how much they trust the brand. (Fig. 32)

Brand trust is significantly more impactful in driving Gen X and younger attendees to take action post-event compared to Baby Boomers. (Fig. 33)

Fig. 32

How much does trust in a brand influence your likelihood to take action after an event (e.g., follow up, purchase, join a community)

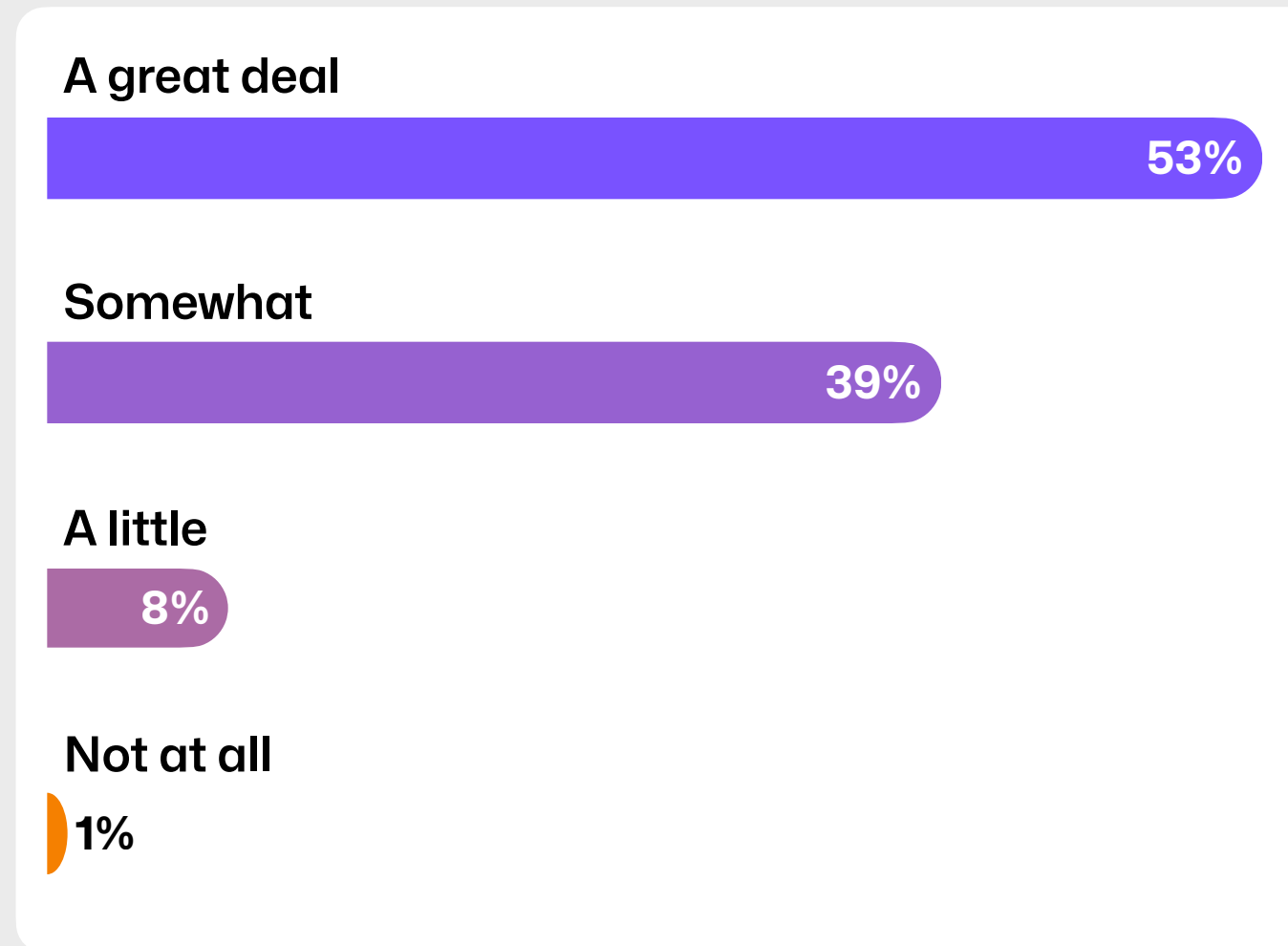
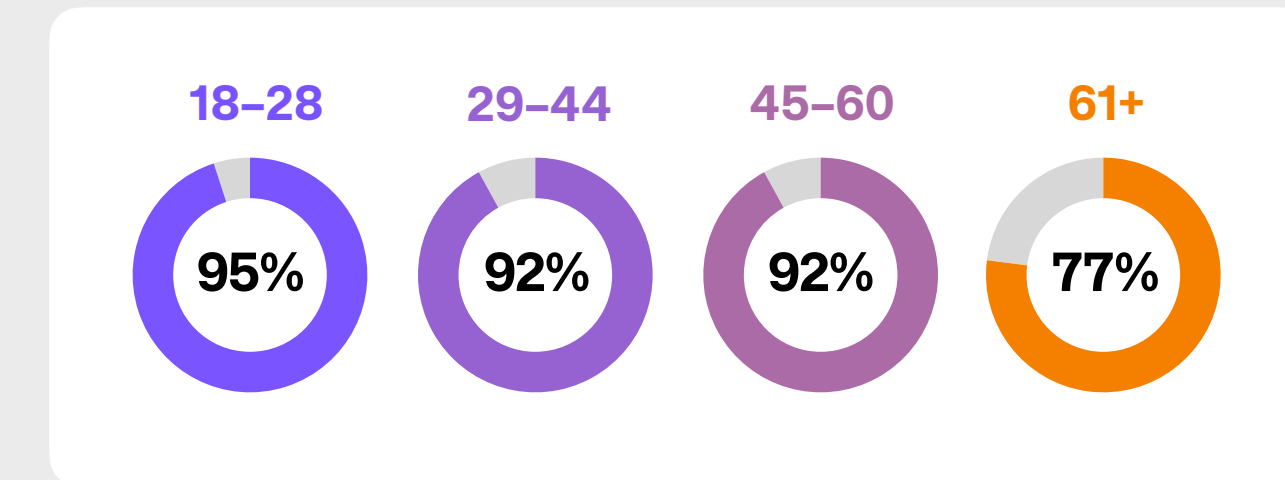


Fig. 33

ANSWERS: A great deal + Somewhat (by age)



Takeaway

Build trust with your audience—it's not a novel idea, but the data shows how impactful trust (or lack thereof) can be—especially as younger attendees begin to make up more and more of the workforce.

Getting personalization “right” can look different across attendee groups.

Diving deeper into our key finding #2, we learned that the most effective forms of personalization vary by age. Younger attendees place more value on nearby session or content recommendations and tailored networking recommendations and digital touchpoints. Older attendees show more interest in agenda and content recommendations aligned with their needs; they are also more averse to digital touchpoints. (Fig. 34)

Executive leadership is much more concerned with agenda or need-based content recommendations than the average attendee. (Fig. 35)



Takeaway

Design for your audience—different attendee groups prioritize different forms of personalization.

Fig. 34

When a brand gets personalization at an event “right,” what does that usually mean to you? (by age)

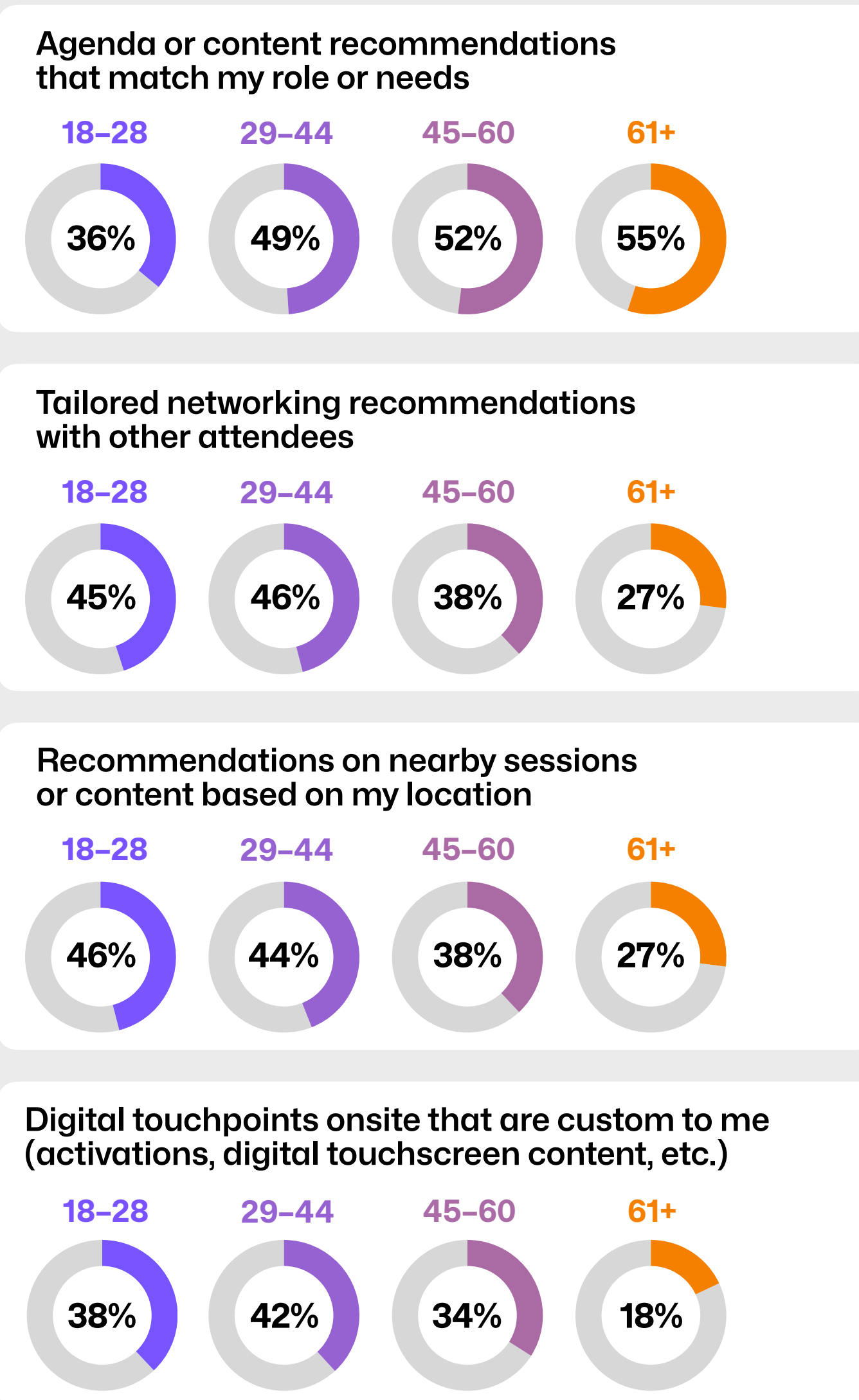
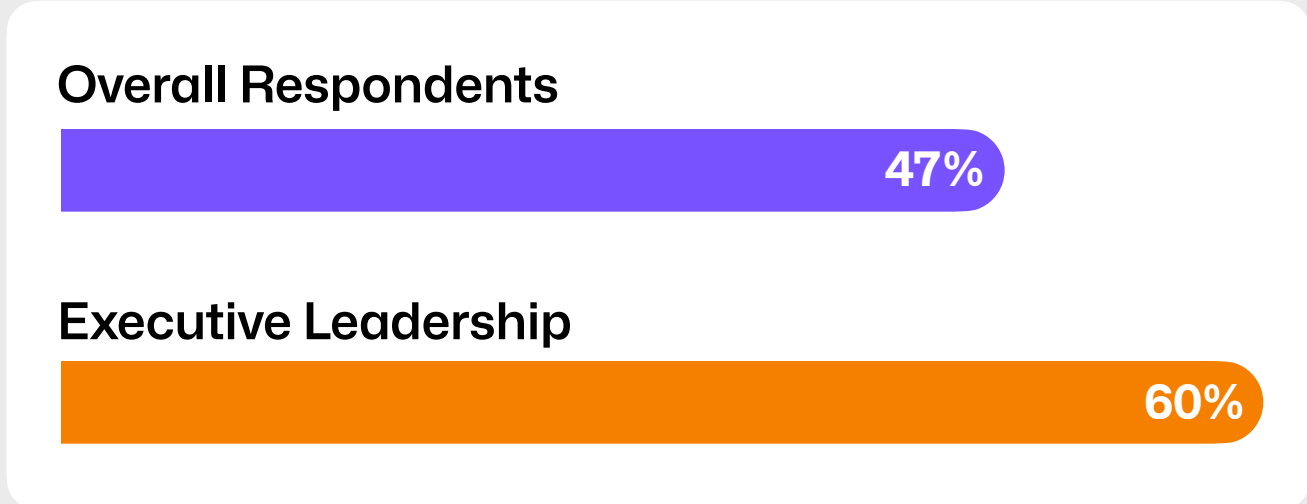


Fig. 35

ANSWER: Agenda or content recommendations that match my role or needs (by role)



Barriers to sharing information vary across attendee groups.

Individual contributors are significantly more likely to feel sharing information for personalization is not worth the effort and are more likely to fear irrelevant follow-up, compared to the C-suite. (Fig. 36)

Older generations are significantly more concerned about privacy and security, compared to Gen Z and Millennials. On the other hand, there is a growing belief that personalization doesn't improve the experience, or sharing personal data isn't worth the effort—with about one-third of Gen Z citing these factors as barriers. (Fig. 37)

Fig. 36

Deep dive: What makes you less likely to share personal information with event organizers? (by role)

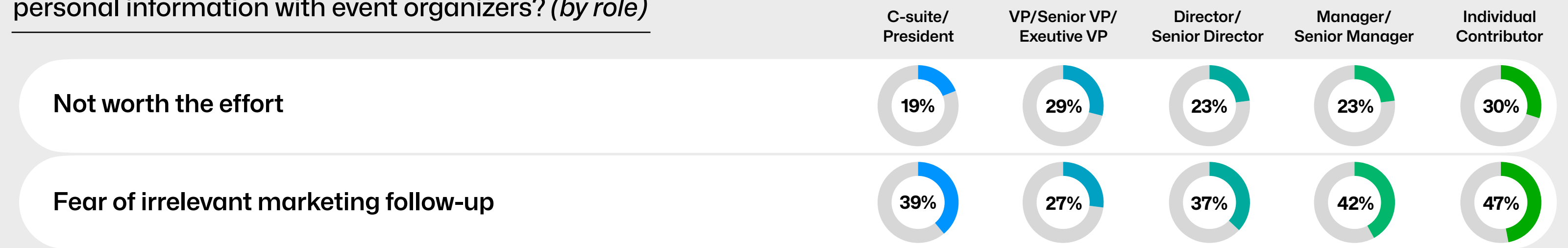
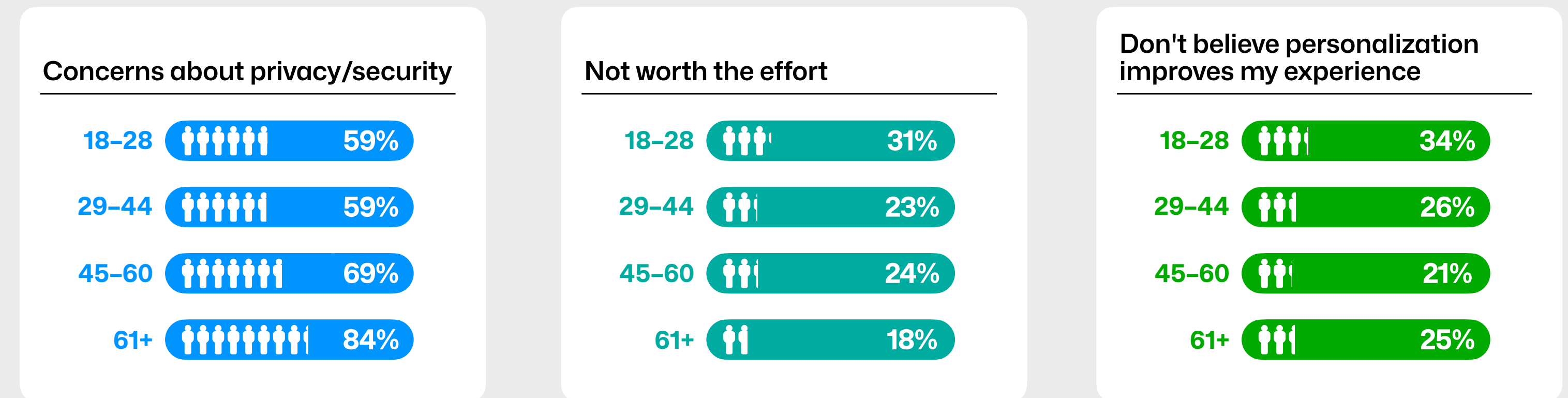


Fig. 37

Deep dive: What makes you less likely to share personal information with event organizers? (by age)



Takeaway

Don't collect information just to collect it—make sure it is worth it to attendees to provide that data.



Individual contributors can be harder to reach via brand messaging—simple and credible messaging has the strongest impact on this cohort.

Senior professionals are typically more driven to action by brand messaging compared to individual contributors, especially when the message contains personal stories of customers or peers, explores future possibilities, or is specific on how to apply the key learnings in their role. (Fig. 38)

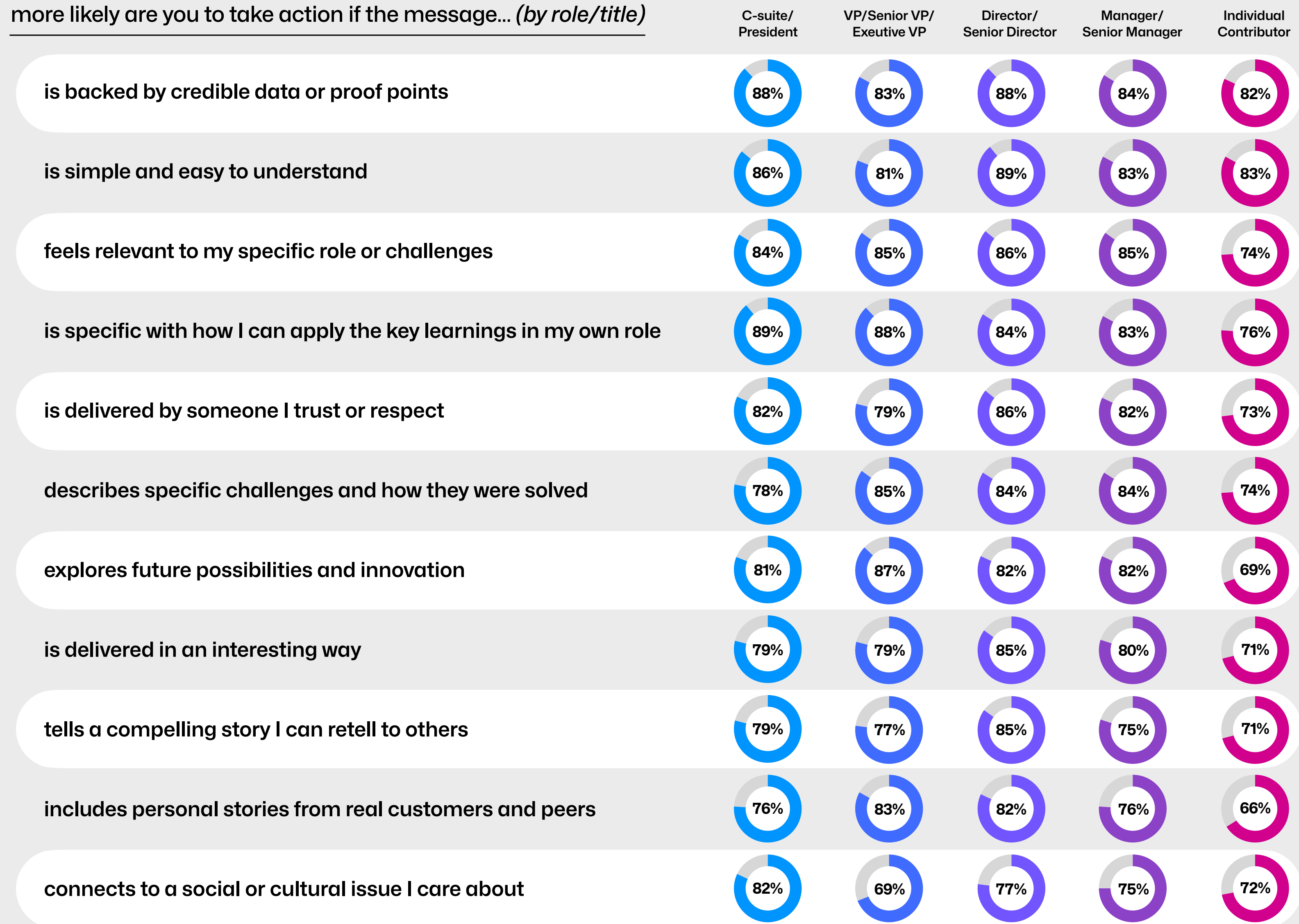


Takeaway

Ensure messaging is appropriately tuned—audiences that are more senior in their careers are more likely to act based on brand messaging.

Fig. 38

When you hear a brand's message at an event, how much more likely are you to take action if the message... (by role/title)



Different roles respond differently to various elements of keynotes.

VPs, SVPs, EVPs, and the C-suite tend to be more influenced by respected leaders or experts they admire taking the stage, while directors, managers, and individual contributors are more propelled to action when concrete solutions for their roles are shared. (Fig. 39)

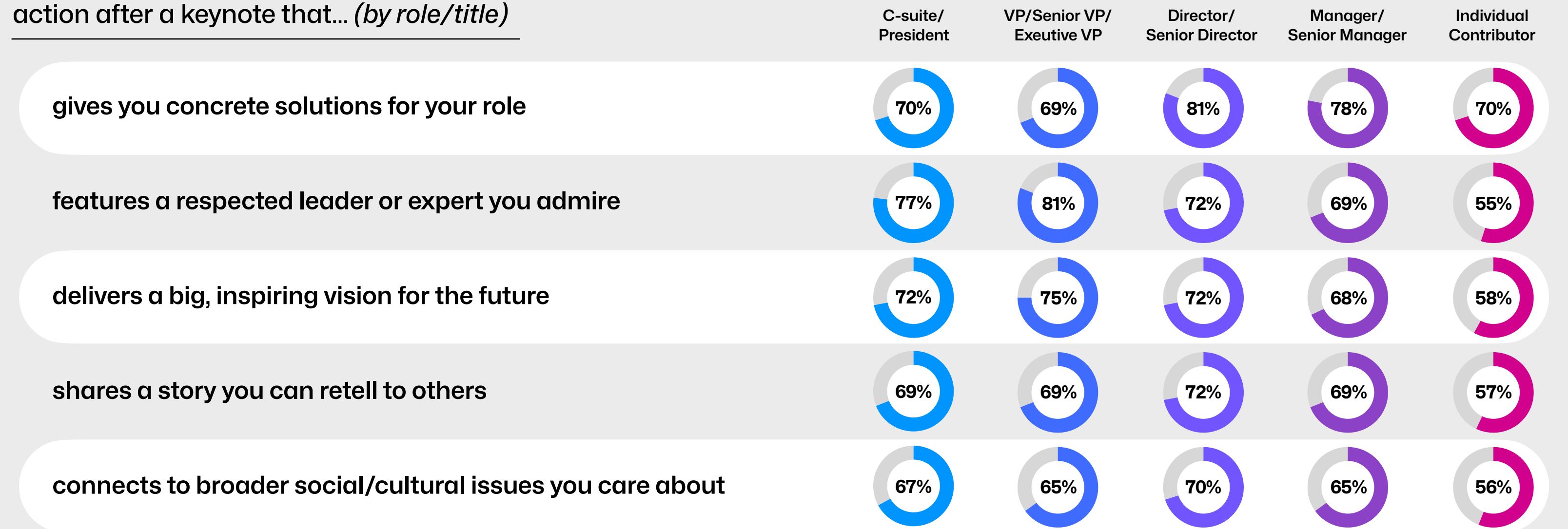


Takeaway

- Make sure to consider who makes up your audience when designing keynotes—a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't actually fit.
- Have reasonable expectations for keynote impact—a keynote at an event for individual contributors isn't likely to drive the same level of action as one at an invite-only C-suite retreat.

Fig. 39

How much more likely are you to take action after a keynote that... (by role/title)



Attendees have a largely positive view towards Artificial Intelligence being used in events.

Younger audiences are more positive towards AI-generated event content compared to those who are older.

Individual contributors are notably less favorable and more negative towards AI-generated event content, compared to those who have more senior roles.



Takeaways

- There is an appetite for AI to be used intelligently in events, and that appetite is only growing.
- As “AI-native” attendees enter the workforce, the brands that implement AI tactfully in their event programs will stand above those who can’t hit the mark.

Fig. 40

If you learned a brand’s event content (e.g., keynote script, video, or design) was partly AI-generated, how would that affect your perception of the event?

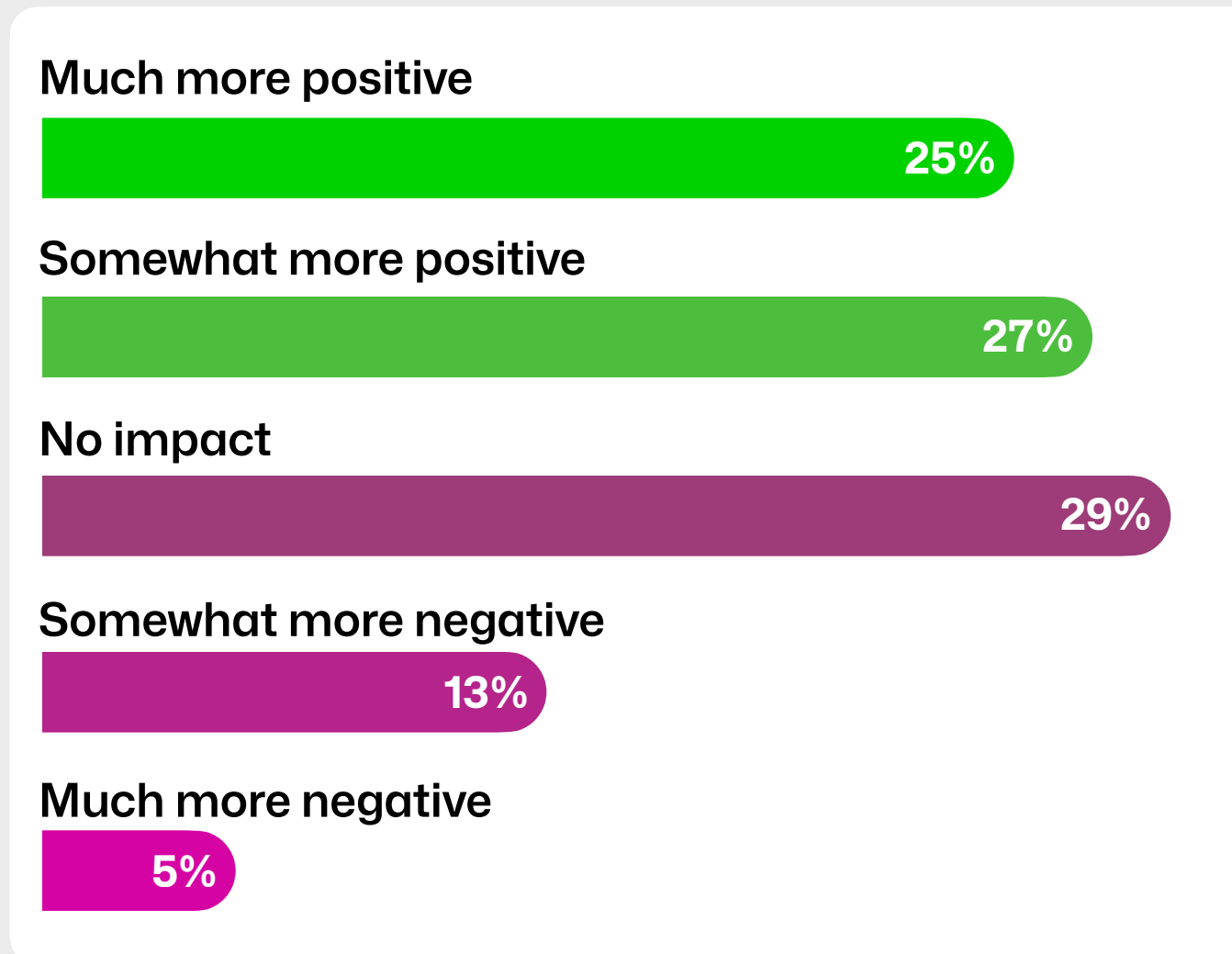


Fig. 41

If you learned a brand’s event content (e.g., keynote script, video, or design) was partly AI-generated, how would that affect your perception of the event? (by age)

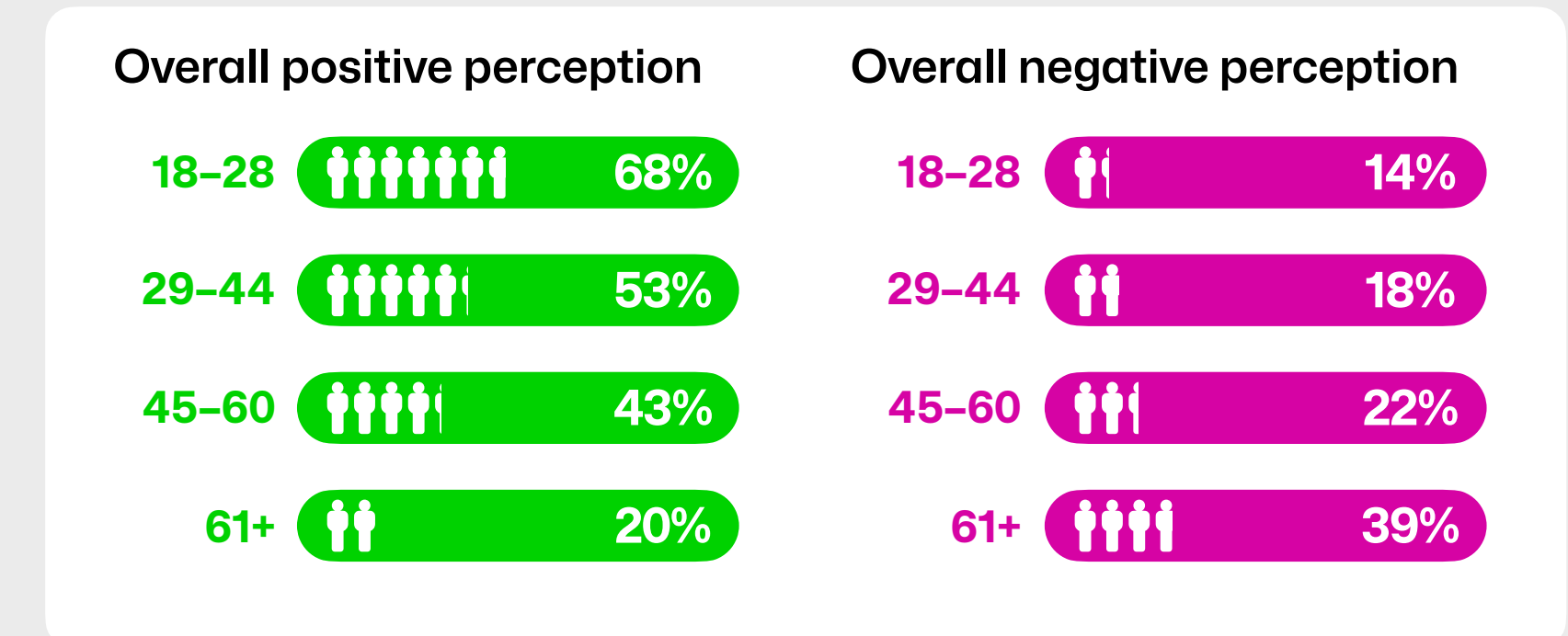
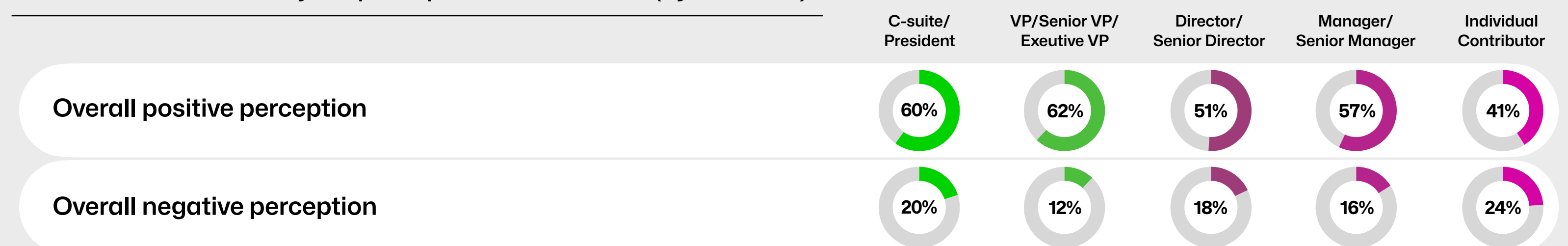
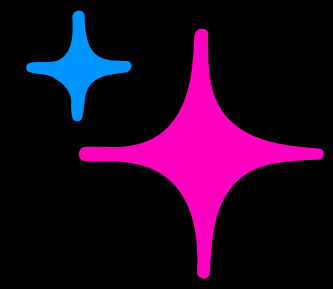


Fig. 42

...how would that affect your perception of the event? (by role/title)

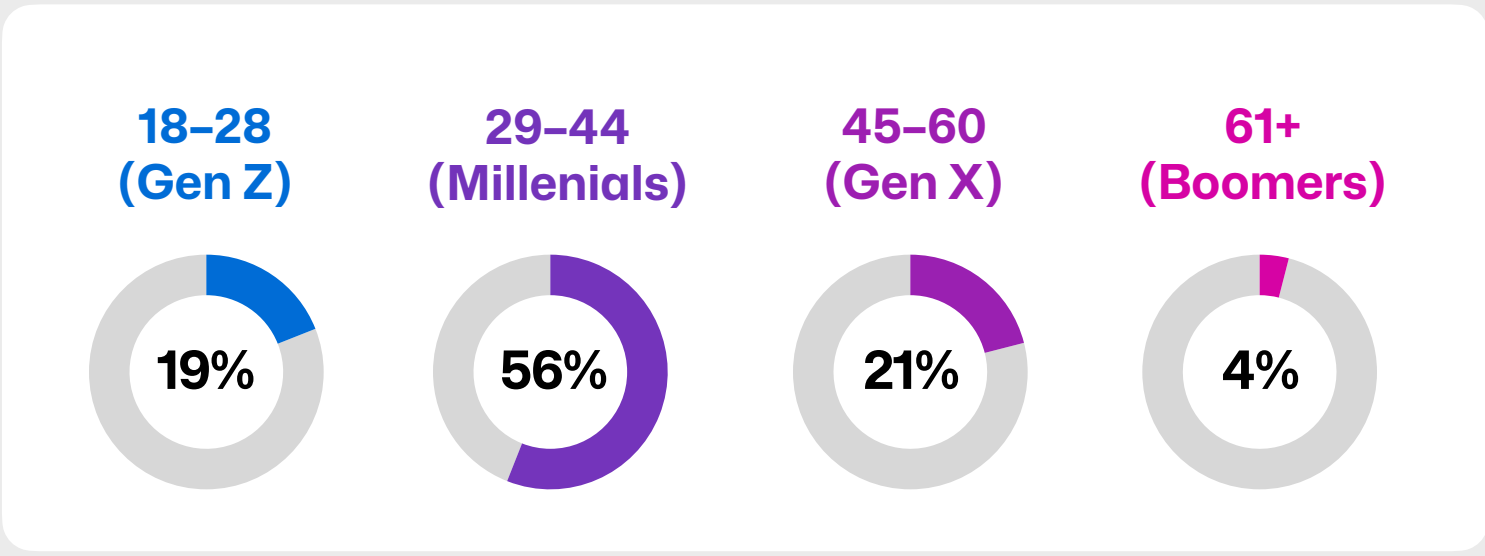




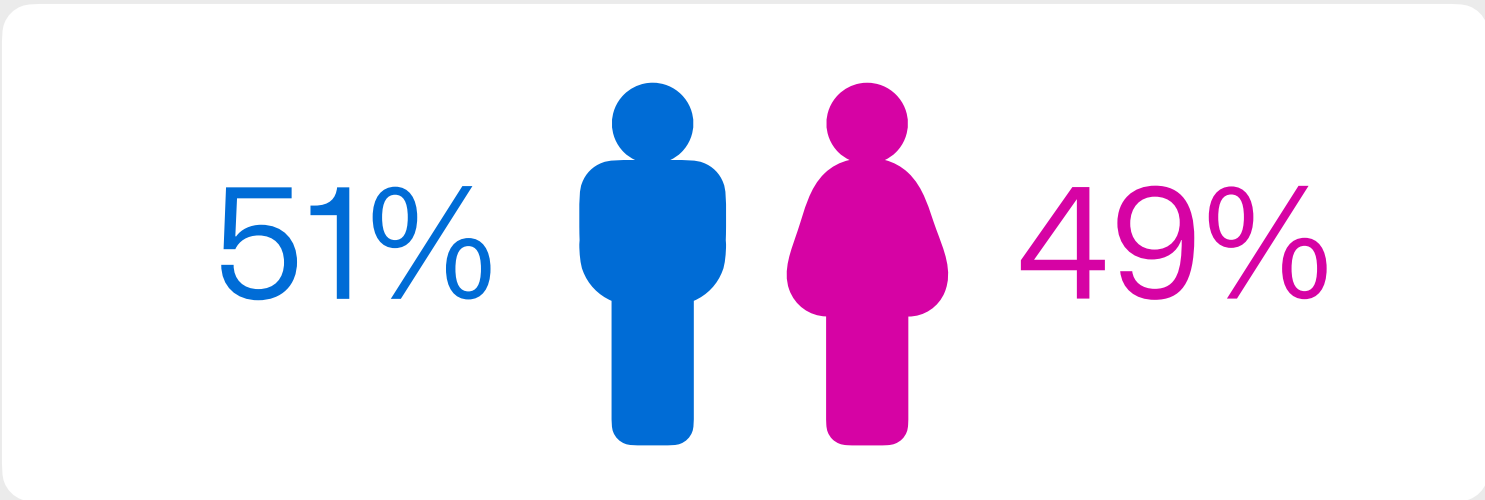
Demographics



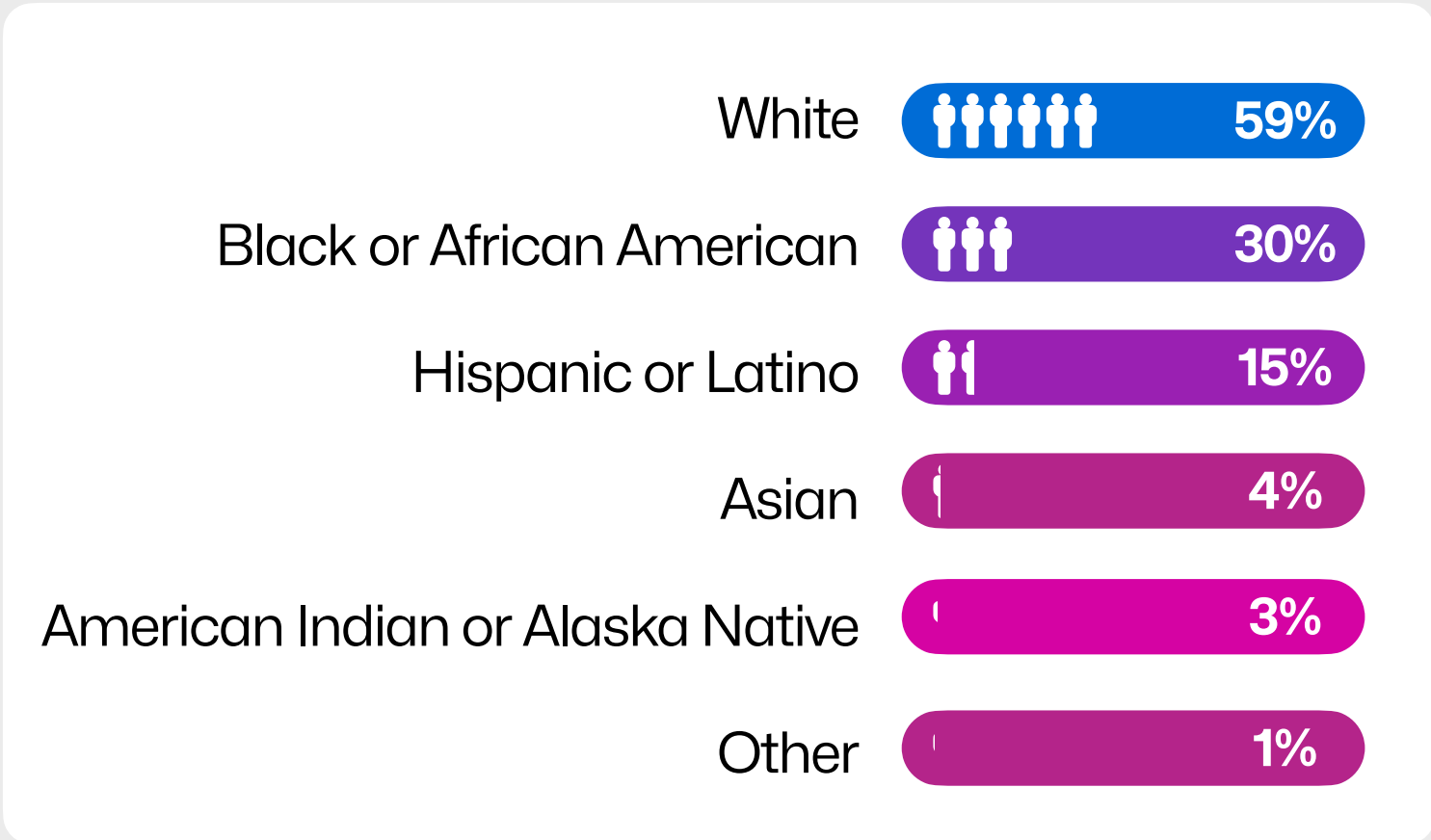
Age



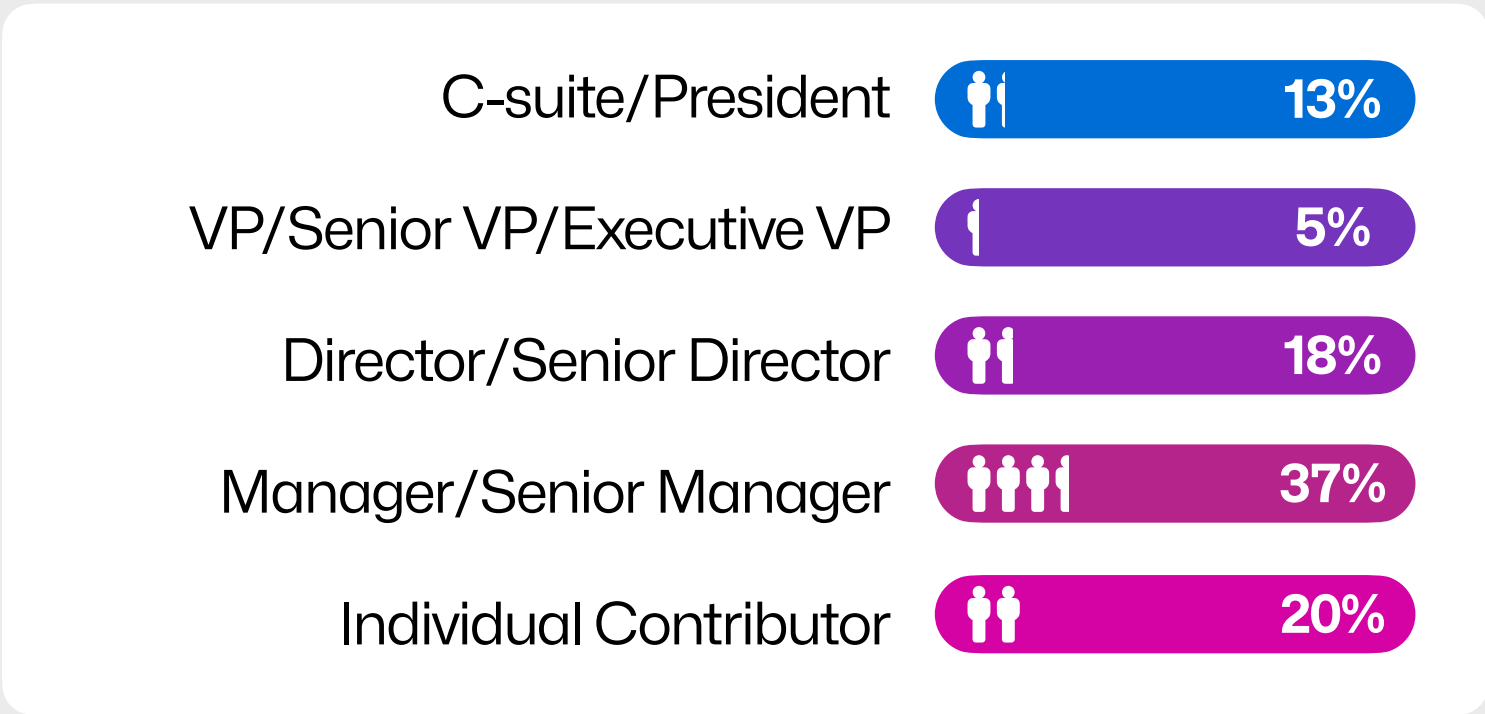
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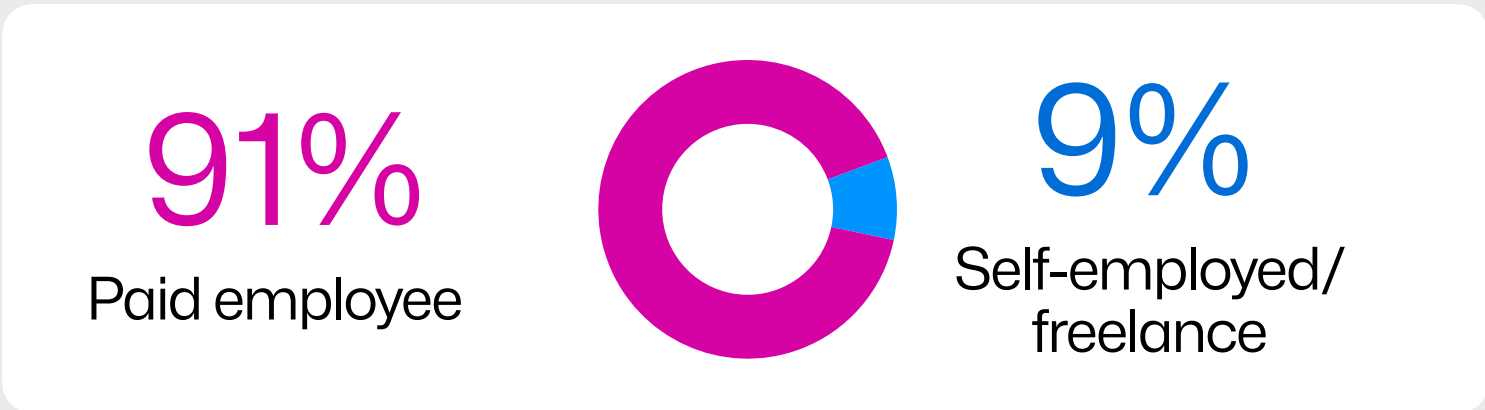
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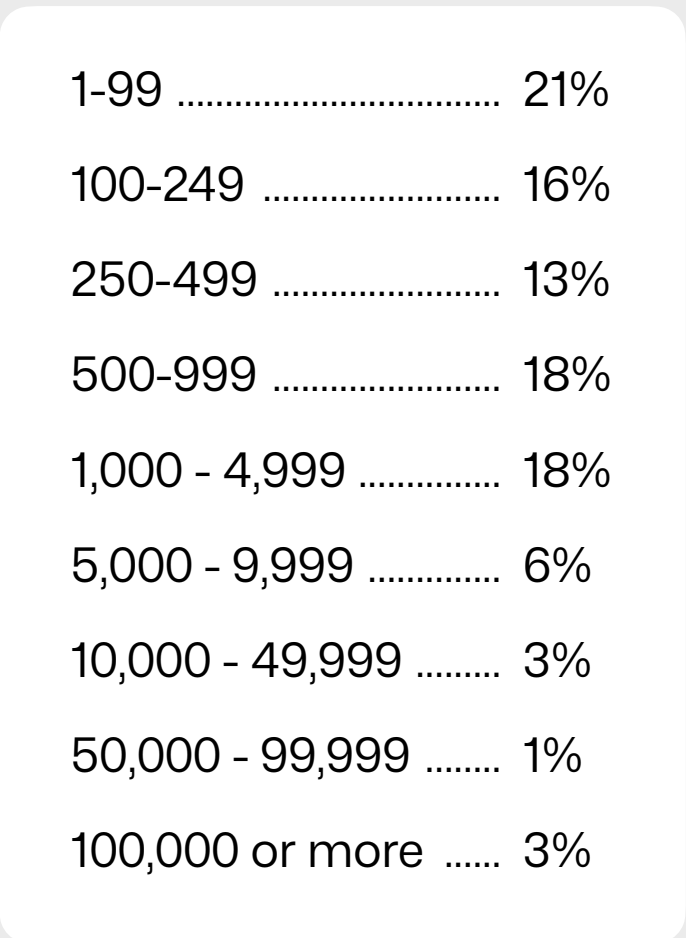
Job Title



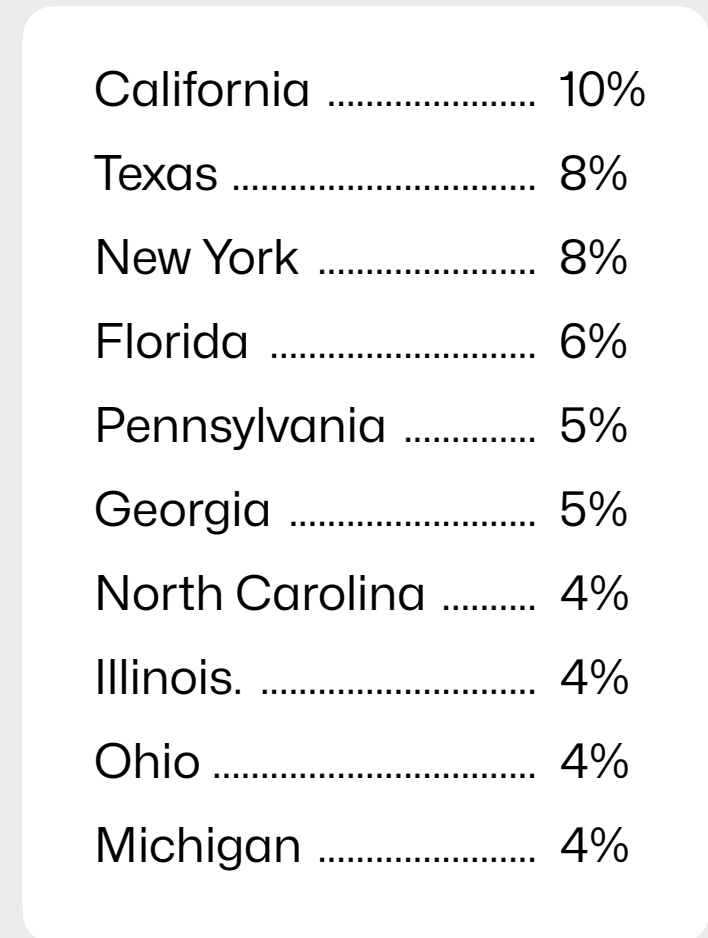
Employment



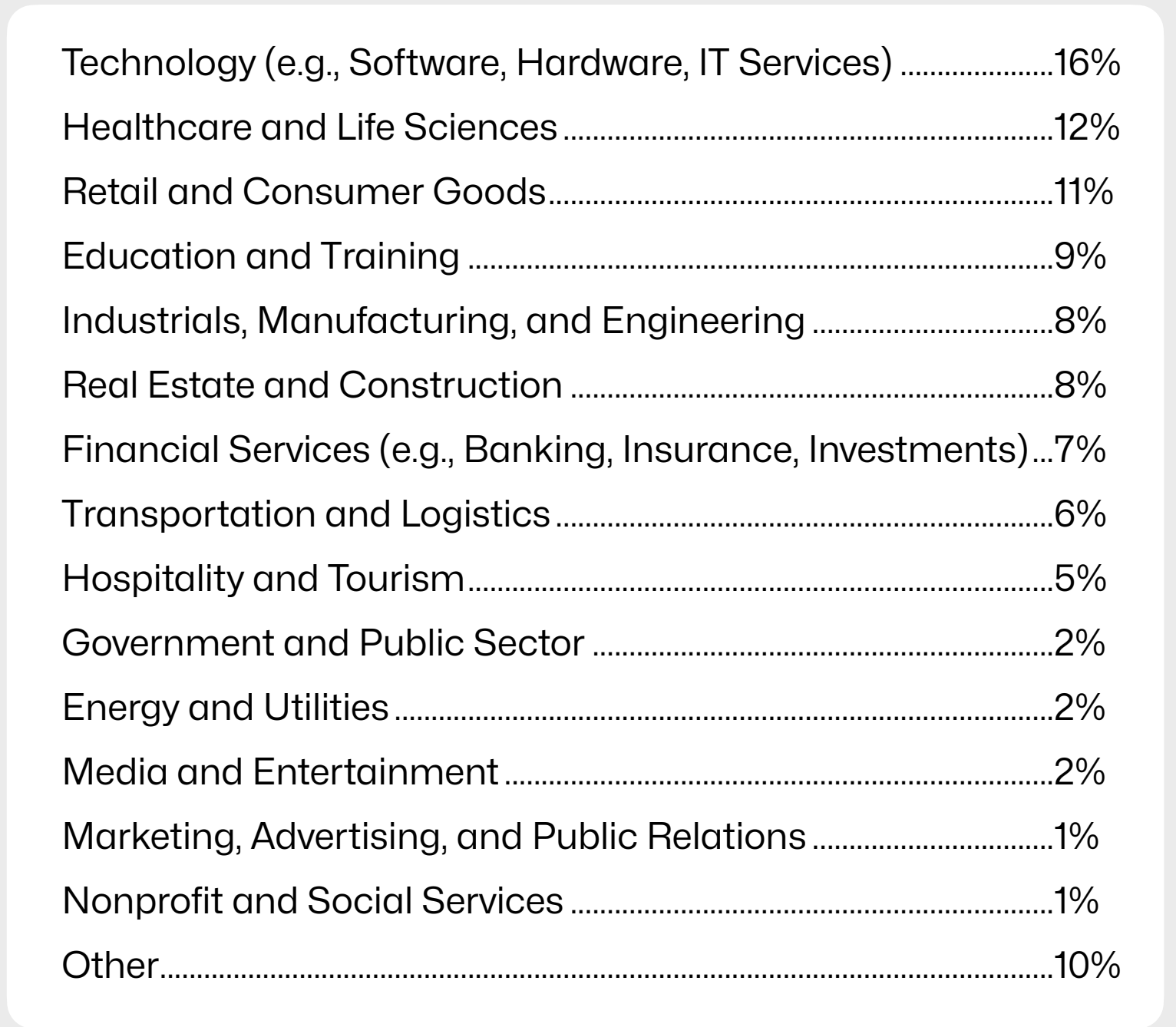
Number of Employees



Top 10 States



Industry



Department



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