

The State of Conferences 2023:

A guide for comms pros

Since March 2020, virtual events had dominated calendars because they were the only viable and safe option. That changed in 2022, when an appetite and willingness returned to attend and send speakers to in-person gatherings. That will continue to be the case in 2023, according to this report presented by Sprooxy, in partnership with PRWeek. What is driving those decisions? Where will PR pros go and send their speakers? How much do in-person events impact key business metrics? The answers to these queries and so much more will be found on these pages.



The power of participation



Melanie Samba
Founder and CEO
Sproxxy

Most companies have already identified industry events — attending, sponsoring, even speaking at them — as a business-development strategy to build brand equity for their organizations. We know that almost every corporation globally has their executive spokesperson on a stage.

The past two years have clearly changed the game, bringing virtual options to the forefront. And while in-person events are back to near pre-pandemic “normalcy,” organizations now have more choices to make as to the kinds of events they prioritize.

Now that we’re deep into Q4 planning for 2023, with economic uncertainty impossible to ignore, we felt the time was right to find out how all aspects of events are being handled this year — and will be handled next year — by communicators and marketers. In doing so, we also sought to get a clear picture of your organizations’ and/or clients’ expectations on this front.

Have you seen and do you expect to see business-moving impact from such efforts? How do/will you measure success for your event participation? Seeking the answers to these queries and more was the impetus behind this first annual survey.

Seven out of eight respondents expect an increase in conference participation next year. The same

percentage of respondents anticipate the number of speaking engagements taken by their company’s/client’s spokesperson to increase in 2023. So, it was quite surprising — jarring, actually — that more than 90% of our respondent pool does not know how much money they’re spending on the conference line of work, though it is clear that most comms pros do indeed have at least some purview over this.

Enter Sproxxy, a centralized platform that transforms the current arduous process of booking and managing speakers at events and delivers a clear understanding of costs, business impact and the ROI of such engagements.

Conferences are vital to your business. They build credibility for your organization, manage your brand’s reputation, deliver targeted messages to your key stakeholders, and secure partnerships or investments. Whether asked about leaders speaking at events or simply having their brands represented at them, well more than 80% of respondents understand the importance, but still have much to discover to make the best decisions in this regard.

Our hope is that this report will both inspire and educate you and your teams not only on the importance of event participation, but the key role comms plays in helping their organizations and clients make the best decisions for 2023 and beyond.



Table of Contents

3

PART OF THE JOB

Working with spokesperson on speaking engagements is clearly a prominent purview for comms pros. We drill deep into the details of that responsibility.

4

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

A look into event/conference attendance and speaking trends from 2022 — in-person and virtual.

6

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

What are your event/conference plans for 2023 — and what is driving those decisions? Find out on this page.

7

THE IMPACT OF EVENTS — PART 1

This is all about the ROI of event participation and where various groups of professionals seek the most impact.

8

THE IMPACT OF EVENTS — PART 2

Revealing your broader — and specific — sentiments as it pertains to attending/having speakers at events, particular in-person gatherings.

Part of the job

The fact that comms pros have more responsibilities than ever before is well understood. Where does working with company/brand spokespeople on their speaking engagements fit into that? Our research found out:

Determining speaking engagements for spokespeople*



Booking the speaking engagements for spokespeople*



Preparing the spokespeople for their speaking engagements*



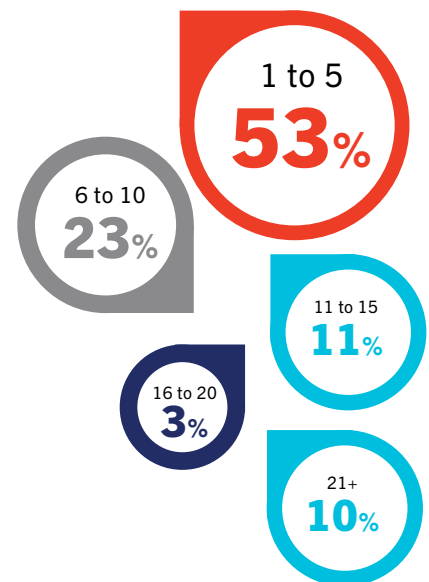
Gauging the ROI from conference participation — including attending, sponsoring, and arranging for speaker(s) to be on the agenda*



*These percentages indicate how many respondents said they do have that responsibility as part of their jobs.

SUPPORTING THE STARS

When asked how many company/brand spokespeople they currently work with in at least some capacity to determine speaking engagements, our overall respondents indicated:



Note: PR agency respondents work with more spokespeople than their counterparts in-house. 27% of them work with 6 to 10 (18% in-house do), 17% with 11 to 15 (10% in-house do) and 13% with 21+ (10% in-house do).

Those who focus on comms/PR similarly work with more spokespeople than their marketing counterparts. 25% of them work with 6 to 10 (14% or marketers do), 12% with 11 to 15 (8% of marketers do) and 12% with 21+ (8% of marketers do).

CONCLUSION

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of respondents play an active role in determining speaking engagements for spokespeople, with PR agency pros doing so the most at 82%. And more than three-quarters (77%) prepare spokespeople for such engagements, with PR agency pros doing so the most at 81%.

A lower percentage overall, but still well more than half, book the speaking engagements (56%) and gauge the ROI of conference participation (57%). And while PR agency pros (64%) outpace in-house pros (57%) in terms of booking, more in-house pros (65%) gauge ROI than their agency counterparts (54%).

Overall, though, it is clear that speaking engagements are a part of the majority of our respondents' purview.

Where have you been?

Numerous queries in our survey asked respondents to share with us what they've done this year (as well as broader sentiments) in terms of both speaking engagements and conference attendance (in-person and virtual). Below we reveal the discoveries.

By year's end, how many overall speaking engagements do you anticipate your company's/client's spokespeople having taken part in during 2022?

IN-PERSON AND VIRTUAL

● 0 ● 1 to 3 ● 4 to 6 ● 7 to 10 ● 11+

OVERALL



PR AGENCY

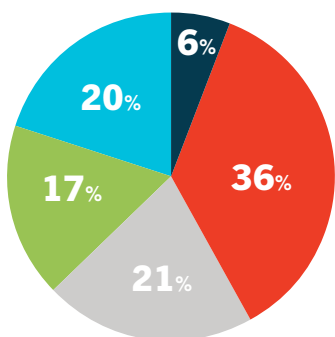


IN-HOUSE

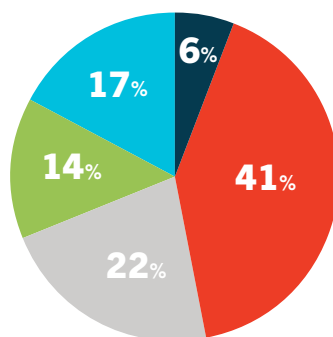


JUST IN-PERSON

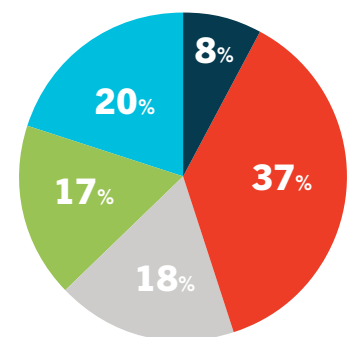
● 0 ● 1 to 3 ● 4 to 6 ● 7 to 10 ● 11+



OVERALL



PR AGENCY

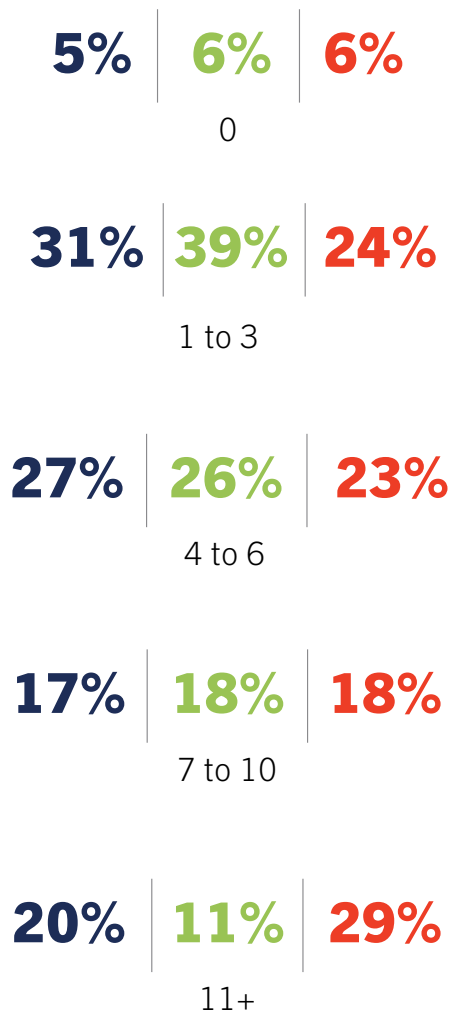


IN-HOUSE

Where have you been? *(cont'd.)*

By year's end, how many in-person conferences will at least one person from your organization have attended during 2022?

● OVERALL ● PR AGENCY ● IN-HOUSE



ANNUAL ATTRACTIONS

We listed six major annual events and asked respondents to prioritize, based on their experience, the two they would have their brands attend...

- South by Southwest (SXSW): **49%**
- World Economic Forum: **34%**
- CES: **30%**
- Advertising Week: **26%**
- Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity: **15%**
- NAB Show: **10%**

SXSW was the clear top choice overall. However, even among specific groups, the annual March gathering in Austin, Texas, performed even more strongly in some than others. The below percentages indicate those who placed it among their top two:

- PR AGENCY: **62%**
- IN-HOUSE: **42%**
- NONPROFIT: **43%**
- COMMS/PR: **51%**
- MARKETING: **42%**

Note: While SXSW topped every list, the event chosen second differed among groups. PR agency (29%) and marketing (36%) respondents chose CES second; In-house (39%) and comms/PR respondents chose the World Economic Forum second; while nonprofit respondents (37%) chose Advertising Week second.

CONCLUSION

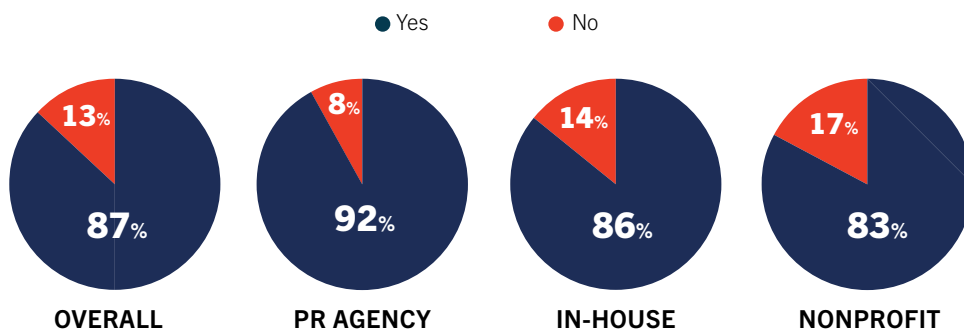
Whether in-person or virtual, it does appear that in-house teams will have had more spokespeople at events this year than their agency colleagues (36% versus 28% saying 11+ for both in-person and virtual events).

The discrepancy is even larger — notably so — as it pertains to having at least one person from the organization attend an in-person conference by year's end (29% of in-house respondents saying 11+, while only 11% of PR agency pros saying so).

Where are you going?

After two years of virtual events being the only option for most, 2022 saw the return of in-person industry gatherings. What does that mean for 2023 plans? See what our respondents say:

Do you anticipate the number of overall speaking engagements taken by your company's/clients' spokespeople to increase in 2023?



Do you anticipate the number of in-person conferences that at least one person from your organization will attend to increase in 2023?



DETERMINING FACTORS

On the left, we reveal respondents' expectations as to whether or not the number of events to which their companies will send speakers will increase in 2023. What are the factors that will help them determine the events they choose? We found out.

Respondents were asked to rank all five options. The scores below are on a scale of 1-5. A score of 5 would indicate that every respondent selected that option as their top one.

OVERALL

- The event's objective, theme and agenda: **4.4**
- The makeup of the audience: **3.6**
- The other participating speakers: **2.5**
- The size of the audience: **2.5**
- Location of conference: **1.9**

Note: The top two choices, as well as the bottom choice, were exactly the same in all groups of respondents, as well as the overall pool, with basically the same scores for all three. The only differentiation among groups is NONPROFIT and MARKETING respondents placing "the size of the audience" ahead of "the other participating speakers."

CONCLUSION

Seven-eighths. That amount overwhelmingly underscores our respondents' intent to send both more speakers and more general attendees to events in 2023 than this year. And events' objectives, themes and agenda will be the predominant factor when they choose the events at which they will participate, with audience makeup a distant, but still strong second.

The impact of events - Part 1

From specific tactical matters to broader factors, survey respondents revealed just how important events are to their brands as a whole, as well as to their roles as communicators. We share their feedback over the next two pages.

CONFERENCE ROI

We presented respondents with 18 different metrics by which the ROI of attending conferences could be gauged. We asked them to choose the five most relevant to their brands. The results are here:

(Note: Percentages reveal how many respondents placed that option among their top five)

OVERALL

- Audience reach **64%**
- Earned media placement **54%**
- Social media engagement **43%**
- Strategic partnerships secured **43%**
- Website traffic **41%**

PR AGENCY

- Earned media placement **66%**
- Audience reach **62%**
- Social media engagement **43%**
- Website traffic **40%**
- Social media shares/mentions **37%**
- Strategic partnerships secured **37%**

IN-HOUSE

- Audience reach **63%**
- Earned media placement **48%**
- Strategic partnerships secured **44%**
- Social media engagement **36%**
- Website traffic **35%**

NONPROFIT

- Audience reach **68%**
- Social media engagement **56%**
- Website traffic **54%**
- Earned media placement **50%**
- Strategic partnerships secured **49%**

COMMS/PR

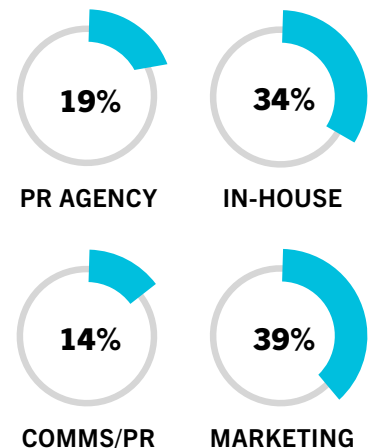
- Audience reach **70%**
- Earned media placement **63%**
- Social media engagement **48%**
- Website traffic **41%**
- Social media shares/mentions **37%**

MARKETING

- Audience reach **55%**
- Strategic partnerships secured **53%**
- Earned media placement **46%**
- Website traffic **42%**
- Product sales **39%**

SELLING OPPORTUNITY?

“Product sales” was one of the 18 metrics we offered respondents. While it only made the top five among one group (marketing), the discrepancies in its importance to different respondent groups is still noteworthy. The following percentages indicate how many respondents (from four distinct groups) placed it among their top five:



Note: The huge gap between PR agency and in-house pros is telling, especially in an era during which PR/comms' impact on bottom-line, business-moving results is being discussed more than ever. The same holds true for the even larger chasm between comms/PR and marketing executives.

CONCLUSION

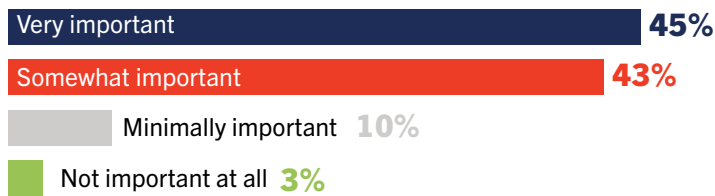
Audience reach is clearly the key metric by which ROI of conference participation is gauged, with five of the six groups placing it in their top five more than any other option. **Earned media placement** also ranks well, being the first or second choice among four of the six groups (and placing third in another). Meanwhile, our in-house comms and marketing respondents certainly see relevance in **strategic partnerships secured**, while **social media engagement** rates well with our PR agency and comms/PR respondents.

The impact of events - Part 2

On the previous page, we drilled deep into the ROI of conference participation. On this page, we look at broader sentiments as it pertains to attending/having speakers at events, particularly in-person.

How important is it for you and the comms team to attend in-person events?

OVERALL

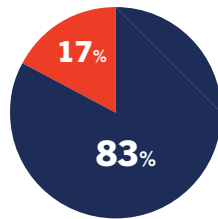


Note: The numbers are very similar among all groups, as well, with all of them indicating the importance of event attendance at either 88% or 89%.

DIFFERENCE OF OPINION

While sentiments regarding the other matters on this page were essentially similar among all groups, they notably differ when asked ...

Do you believe that participation at in-person conferences has greater potential to impact the business than virtual conferences?



Note: The numbers are very similar among all groups, as well, ranging from 81% to 86% saying YES (with NONPROFITS coming in lowest at 81%).

OVERALL

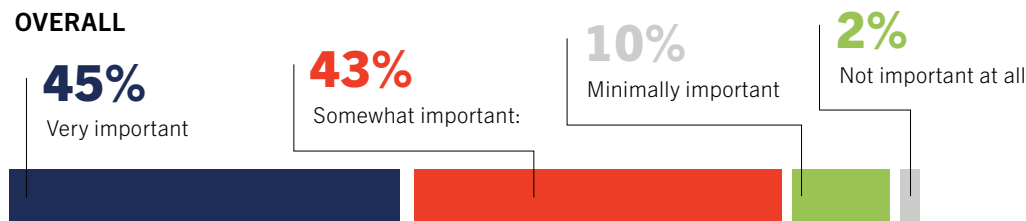
Based on your experience, do you believe speaking engagements at conferences have the potential to materially impact your business?

OVERALL

- Very much so: 39%
- Somewhat: 47%
- Minimally: 13%
- Not at all: 1%

How important is it for your company's leadership and spokespeople to speak at in-person events?

OVERALL



Note: The numbers are relatively similar among all groups (ranging from 44% to 47% saying "very important"), with the exception of nonprofits (only 38% say "very important" among those respondents)

The following percentages reveal how many respondents among specific groups said "very much so" when asked the above question:

- PR AGENCY: 35%
- IN-HOUSE: 45%
- NONPROFIT: 34%
- COMMS/PR: 37%
- MARKETING: 44%

CONCLUSION

Attending in-person events. Speaking at in-person events. Recognizing the business impact of participating at in-person events as compared to virtual ones. The vast majority of our respondents share similar sentiments about them all. Differences come to light, however, when it comes to the business impact of the speaking engagement. All groups see the potential business impact, but in-house and marketing pros seem to value them more than PR agencies and comms/PR pros do.

METHODOLOGY

PRWeek partnered with Sproxxy on this survey, which was sent via email to U.S.-based senior-level communications and marketing practitioners.

A total of 338 professionals completed the online survey, conducted by PRWeek, between August 3 and September 2, 2022. Results have a margin of plus or minus three percentage points.

SPROXXY

ABOUT SPROXXY

Sproxxy's (speaker + proxy) enterprise platform solution transforms the current arduous manual process of booking and managing speakers for events.

Speaking engagements are a vital component to business development and enterprise sales, leading to executives speaking at multiple events per year. Managing this process of discovery and securing engagements is expensive, manually driven and lacks any true analytics or understanding of ROI. Through the Sproxxy platform, users are able to pitch high-value speaking opportunities, manage the speaker workflow, and get a clear understanding of business impact and the ROI of such engagements.

To learn more, visit www.sproxxy.com.

PRWeek

ABOUT PRWEEK

PRWeek epitomizes the modern business publishing brand, spanning online, print, events, and social media, incorporating a paid-for content strategy and gated website. Launched in November 1998, it is the essential title for PR pros.

PRWeek reflects an industry playing a more pivotal role than ever, not only in the marketing strategies of companies, brands, and organizations, but also within boardrooms and in the C-suite.

In the transparent world epitomized by social media, corporate reputation is crucial. Executives need timely, authoritative, insightful content to navigate this landscape — that's where PRWeek comes in.

Breaking news, analysis, and opinion fuels PRWeek's content. And the brand extends into the iconic PRWeek Awards, annual conferences, roundtables, webcasts, and virtual forums.

For more, visit prweek.com.

ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS

Broken down by type of organization for which they work: PR agency – 32%; In-house – 68% (Corporation: 44%; Nonprofit: 24%).

By title, the largest groups of respondents represented: Manager (30%); director (22%); agency CEO/president/managing partner (12%); VP (8%); SVP and senior director (7% each).

By gender, respondents were 68% female; 31% male; 1% preferred not to say.

Numerous industry sectors were represented in the respondent pool, with the four largest being: Healthcare/pharma (19%); Tech/internet (14%); Industrial/manufacturing and financial services (7% each).

By company size, respondents work at organization with the following number of employees: 501 and more (36%); 11-100 (31%); 1-10 (15%); 101-250 (13%); and 251-500 (5%).



Accelerate Innovation

Target, Pitch, Collaborate and Measure
thought leadership at Industry Events.

**Sproxxy quantifies conference
activity** and provides clear
metrics of business impact.

SPROXXY[®]

Be among the first to experience the benefits of Sproxxy. www.sproxxy.com