THE STUDIO CREATIVE

2026 GUIDE · PLANNING, PROFIT, SPEAKERS, SPONSORS, MARKETING

The Conference Planning Guide

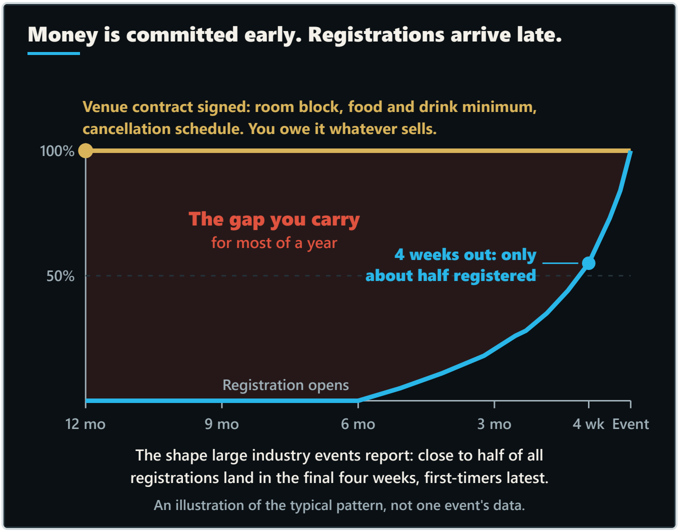
How to plan a conference that makes money: the timeline, the contract, the budget and break-even, speakers, sponsors, marketing for the late registration curve, the day itself, and what to do after.

By Jeff Schniers, founder of The Studio Creative. From the team that produces the Attorneys Resource Conference and partners on the Leadership Experience Tour.

The uncomfortable math of a conference

The venue contract, with its room block, its food and beverage minimum and its cancellation schedule, is signed nine to eighteen months before the event. At large industry events, close to half of all registrations arrive in the final four weeks. For most of a year you carry the whole promise, and your dashboard looks like it is failing until the month it isn't.

What is inside



The shape that sinks first-year conferences: the commitment is made at the top left, the money arrives at the bottom right. An illustration of the typical pattern.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read chapters 1 to 3 before you talk to a single venue. Take chapter 7 to the contract meeting. Hand chapter 13 and the checklist to whoever runs the day. Figures are starting points for a US conference of 150 to 1,000 people in 2026; your market, your audience and your venue will move them.

Purpose, audience and the one-page plan

A conference exists to move its attendees toward something they want. Decide what that is before anything else, because every later decision, from the venue to the agenda to the ticket price, is a way of delivering it.

What makes people come back

Attendee research keeps finding the same thing. The moments people remember are progress on the goal they came with, not the stage lights. The biggest share is meeting the right vendors and peers; then learning something useful; then meaningful connections. People who get that kind of moment are far more likely to return, and fewer than half say they did. Organizers, asked the same question, are far more confident than their attendees.

That gap is the opportunity. Design the event around what a good day looks like for one attendee, then make sure it happens on purpose: introductions, hosted tables, a place to talk, sessions with something to take back to work.

Who is in the room

- [ ] Job titles and seniority you want, and the ones you do not
- [ ] Why they come: learning, credit, buying, networking, status
- [ ] Who pays: themselves or their employer
- [ ] What else competes for the same two days
- [ ] Where they live and how far they will travel

The one-page plan

Write these down, on one page, and get them agreed by whoever signs the checks. It becomes the brief for every supplier and the test for every idea.

QUESTION	YOUR ANSWER
Who is it for?	
What will they leave with?	
Why this, not a webinar?	
How many people, realistically?	
Date window, with two alternates	
How does it pay for itself?	
What is the break-even?	
What does success look like?	
Who decides, and who approves?	

SUCCESS IS MORE THAN A HEAD COUNT

Set three measures before you start: attendance against break-even, sponsor renewals, and the share of attendees who say they will return. Those three predict year two better than any other numbers.

The business model and ticket pricing

Decide how the event pays for itself before you decide what it looks like. For a small or mid-sized conference in its first years, a sensible planning model looks like this.

Where the money comes from

STREAM	TYPICAL SHARE
Registration Tickets, workshops, add-ons	**60 to 80%**
Sponsorship and exhibitors Mature events push past 30%	**20 to 40%**
Everything else On-demand passes, recordings, certificates, paid receptions	**0 to 10%**

A planning model, not a statistic. Year one leans on registration because sponsors want proof.

Why conferences lose money

- ✕ Attendance overestimated, then locked into catering minimums and room blocks
- ✕ Sponsorship forecast like a fifth-year event
- ✕ Service charge and tax left out of the catering budget
- ✕ In-house AV quoted after the contract was signed
- ✕ Too many complimentary and discounted places
- ✕ Marketing started late, or spent early and gone by the final month
- ✕ Costs rising faster than ticket prices, year after year

Setting the ticket price

Start from what the day is worth to the person paying, and from what comparable events charge, then check it against your break-even. Then build a small ladder of prices, each with a real deadline:

TIER	COMMON PRACTICE
Earliest rate	25 to 30% off, short window, for your loyal base
Early rate	15 to 20% off; 20% is the most common
Standard	The price the event is built on
Late or on site	10 to 20% above standard
Group	10 to 20% off for three to five or more
Member	Non-member premium about the cost of joining
Virtual or on demand	30 to 50% of the in-person price

EARLY RATES ARE NOT THE ONLY LEVER

Research on large events suggests deep early discounts change behaviour less than planners hope. Many organizers now set the early deadline later, add a middle tier, and use targeted codes for first-timers, groups and students instead of one big discount.

Show the full price with every mandatory fee included. US rules on hidden fees now apply to live-event tickets, so check with counsel how they apply to yours. Not legal advice.

Break-even, with a worked example

The one formula to keep on the wall: fixed costs, less the sponsorship you have actually signed, divided by the average ticket you actually collect less what each attendee costs you.

A worked example

A one-day professional conference for about 300 people in a hotel in a secondary market. Illustrative figures: yours will differ.

FIXED COST	AMOUNT
Meeting space	$0
Production: AV, staging, multi-camera capture	$28,000
Keynote fee and travel	$17,500
Breakout speaker honoraria	$4,000
Marketing	$12,000
Registration and event technology	$4,500
Staff and temporary help	$6,000
Signage and decor	$5,000
Insurance	$2,500
Contingency, 15%	$11,925
Total fixed	**$91,425**

Per attendee

ITEM	EACH
Catering at menu price Breakfast, lunch, two breaks, reception	$150
Service charge and tax Menu price x 1.35	$53
Badge, materials, platform fee	$12
Cost per attendee	**$215**

The average ticket

PRICE	SHARE	PRICE
Early rate	30%	$395
Standard rate	50%	$495
Group rate, 15% off	10%	$421
Complimentary	10%	$0
Average collected		**$408**

Break-even: 318 attendees. ($91,425 fixed, less $30,000 signed sponsorship) ÷ ($408 average ticket, less $215 per attendee). At the target of 300, this plan loses $3,353. The standard price is $495, and it still does not work.

What moves it

CHANGE	BREAK-EVEN	RESULT AT 300
The plan as it stands	318	−$3,353
Comps cut from 10% to 5%, the other 5% paying standard	282	+$4,073
Sponsorship up from $30,000 to $40,000	266	+$6,648
Standard rate up $50, early rate up $30	265	+$8,123
Catering menu down $20 a head	279	+$4,748
All four together	180	+$34,398

The timeline: 18 months to six

A comfortable backward plan for a conference of 300 to 1,000 people. A smaller regional event can compress the first two rows into about twelve months. Start late and you take what is left of every venue, keynote and sponsor budget.

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENS
18 to 15 months	Write the one-page plan. Build the budget and the break-even. Choose a date window with two alternates, checking holidays and competing events. Issue the venue request for proposals to a shortlist.
15 to 12 months	Site visits. Negotiate and sign the venue and hotel contract. Get leadership sign-off. Quote event cancellation insurance. Approach your first choice of keynote: the good ones book six to twelve months ahead.
12 to 9 months	Theme and program shape. Open the call for speakers. Set sponsor packages and prices, and finish the prospectus by about nine months out. Send a save the date to past attendees. Launch the website.
9 to 6 months	Sponsor outreach, timed so it lands while fall budgets are still being set. Close the call for speakers after four to eight weeks. Open registration with the early rate, commonly about six months out. Announce the keynote. Choose your production partner.

WHY THE FALL MATTERS

Many companies set next year's sponsorship and event budgets in the last quarter. Outreach from September to December reaches them while the money is still unallocated. In spring, you are asking for money already spent.

Before you issue a venue request

- [ ] Expected attendance, and your honest low case
- [ ] Dates, with alternates
- [ ] Room sets: general session, breakouts, meals, exhibits
- [ ] Sleeping rooms by night
- [ ] Catering pattern for each day
- [ ] AV and production needs, and whether you bring your own crew
- [ ] Your history, if you have one: past pickup and catering spend

Walking a venue before a conference broadcast. A site visit answers questions no floor plan can: where the power is, where the queue forms, what the room looks like on camera.

The timeline: six months to the month after

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENS
6 to 4 months	Publish the full agenda with speakers confirmed, about four months out. Speaker agreements signed. Sponsor early commitment deadline. Hotel block promoted with every registration. Apply for continuing education credit if you offer it.
4 to 2 months	Early rate closes, commonly ten to fifteen weeks out. Speaker clips and last year's highlight film go out. Draft the run of show. Lock the AV plan and floor plans. Choose menus.
60 to 31 days	**The prime sales window.** Your strongest marketing, timed to a real price deadline. Room block review dates: release rooms you will not fill while you still can without penalty.
30 to 21 days	Hotel cutoff, typically three to four weeks before arrival. Staffing plan and volunteer briefing. Signage to print. Slides requested from speakers.
Final 4 weeks	Close to half of all registrations arrive. Last-chance pricing. Rehearsals. Catering guarantee, usually about three days out, set on expected check-ins, not registrations.
The day before	Load in. Tech rehearsal for the general session. Test the stream at event time. Production meeting with venue, AV, registration and stream crew.
The event	Run of show. Capture everything. Announce next year's date from the stage.
Within 48 hours	Attendee survey. First social clips. Thank-you emails to speakers and sponsors.
Within 2 weeks	Sponsor reports with proof of every deliverable. Highlight film. Early rate for next year opens.
Within 30 days	Session recordings live. Debrief with numbers. Venue and dates for next year secured, ideally on a multi-year deal.

At the program position during a live conference broadcast. By the time the event starts, most of what matters on this page has already been decided.

The budget and the hidden costs

Costs per attendee are forecast to rise again in 2026, and most planners say catering comes in higher than they expected. Budget in shares first, then in dollars, and keep the contingency where you can see it.

Typical shares of a conference budget

CATEGORY	TYPICAL
Venue, food and beverage	35 to 45%
Audio, video and production	15 to 25%
Speakers	5 to 15%
Marketing	5 to 10%
Staff and temporary help	5 to 10%
Registration and technology	3 to 8%
Decor and signage	3 to 7%
Insurance	1 to 3%
Contingency, on top	10 to 20%

Typical ranges, not rules. Catering, production and speakers together shape most of what attendees experience, so protect those first.

CONTINGENCY

Hold 15 to 20% in year one and 10 to 15% once you have history. Keep it as its own line. Contingency hidden inside other lines gets spent by accident.

Cost per attendee

A one or two day professional conference in a hotel commonly lands somewhere between a few hundred and several hundred dollars per attendee per day, before travel. Large corporate events run far higher. Use your own quotes, not a benchmark, as soon as you have them.

The costs nobody quotes you up front

COST	WHAT TO EXPECT
Service charge On all catering	Commonly 22 to 26%, often kept by the hotel rather than paid to staff, with sales tax frequently charged on top of it
Catering menu prices	Hotel banquet meals run from about $75 to over $200 a person before fees, varying widely by market
In-house AV	Venue AV partners often pay the venue a large commission, which is built into your price
Outside AV fees	Patch fees per room per day, or surcharges on outside equipment
Power	A dedicated power drop for production can cost hundreds of dollars each
Rigging	Hanging anything from the ceiling is charged per point, often by a venue-exclusive rigger
Internet	Dedicated bandwidth for streaming can run to thousands, and guest wifi is not enough
Union labor	At some venues, set-up work must use union trades with minimum calls
Accessibility	Interpreters and live captioning are the organizer's cost
Attrition and minimums	Owed if you fall short, whatever sold (chapter 7)

THE RULE FOR CATERING

Budget every catering line at menu price times 1.3 to 1.4. It is the most common surprise on a conference invoice.

Choosing a venue

The right room is the one that fits your plan, your audience and your budget, and signs a contract you can live with if attendance disappoints. Ask for a floor plan with the stage, screens, cameras and tech table drawn in: they take a tenth to a fifth of the room.

Space per person

ROOM SET	SQ FT EACH
Theater Rows of chairs	**6 to 8**
Classroom Tables facing the stage	**14 to 18**
Rounds Tables of 8 to 10	**10 to 12**
Crescent rounds Nobody with their back to the stage	**More than rounds**
Reception, standing	**6 to 8**

Industry rules of thumb before staging, screens and production.

Leverage you have

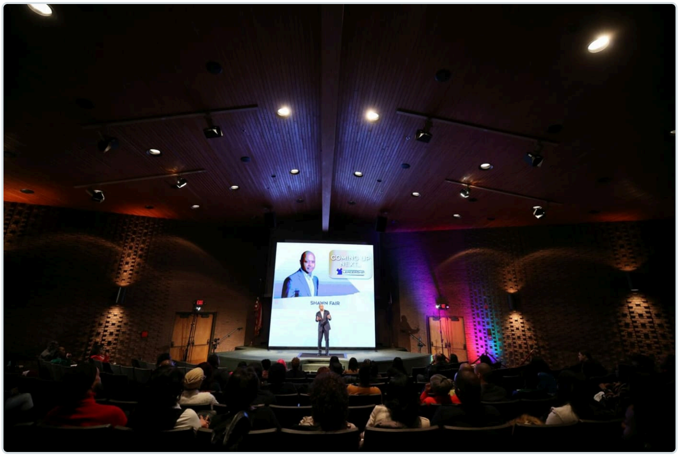
- [ ] Flexible dates: offer two or three options
- [ ] The venue's quiet periods and shoulder seasons
- [ ] Days of the week the property struggles to fill
- [ ] A multi-year commitment
- [ ] Your history: past room pickup and catering spend
- [ ] A formal sourcing process, not informal calls

NON-RATE CONCESSIONS ADD UP

The concessions beyond the room rate, from free wifi to reduced service charges, often match or beat the value of the rate discount itself. Ask for all of them at once.

The site visit checklist

- [ ] Ceiling height for screens, and pillars that block sight lines
- [ ] Load-in path, dock and hours
- [ ] Power locations and capacity for production
- [ ] A wired internet drop in the main room; test the real upload speed at the time of day you will use it
- [ ] Air walls and sound bleed between breakout rooms
- [ ] Walking time between general session and breakouts
- [ ] Where the registration queue will form, and how big it gets
- [ ] A green room near the stage
- [ ] Storage for materials and shipping
- [ ] Accessible routes, restrooms, parking and seating
- [ ] Other groups in the building on your dates
- [ ] Planned renovation or construction
- [ ] Mobile phone coverage in every room
- [ ] Exits and posted capacities
- [ ] A catering tasting, and who your venue contact is on the day



A speaker on a dark auditorium stage at the Leadership Experience Tour. A beautiful room to sit in, and one that needs more light on the speaker to look this good on camera.

The hotel contract

The contract decides your downside before marketing decides your upside. The clauses that matter most, what is common, and what to ask for. Have someone who negotiates hotel contracts for a living read yours before you sign. This is general guidance, not legal advice.

CLAUSE	WHAT IS COMMON	WHAT TO ASK FOR
Room block attrition	No penalty if you fill 80% of the rooms you reserved; below that you pay the difference	70% for a first event; measured over the whole stay, not night by night; damages as the hotel's lost profit, not lost revenue; credit for rooms it resells; credit for attendees who booked outside the block; review dates to release rooms
Food and beverage minimum	Meeting rooms waived in exchange for a set catering spend; miss it and you may pay the shortfall and the room rental	A minimum set on your low case; every banquet function counted toward it, including sponsor-paid ones; a sliding scale
Cancellation	A rising scale, commonly about a fifth of expected revenue at nine months, two fifths at six, two thirds at three, and up to all of it in the final month	Damages as lost profit, less anything resold; a reduction if you rebook the same property; the right to cancel if the hotel changes brand or management
Force majeure	Recently tightened; courts tend to require that the event be impossible, not just expensive	"Illegal, impossible or commercially impracticable"; named events such as travel advisories, public health orders, severe weather and strikes; an attendance-based trigger if you can get one; and event cancellation insurance, bought early
Double charging	Attrition and cancellation can both be claimed on the same rooms	A line saying they cannot
AV exclusivity	In-house AV required, or fees for outside crews	The right to bring your own production company, with any fees capped, agreed before signing

Concessions worth asking for

- [ ] Meeting room rental waived or reduced
- [ ] Complimentary rooms: one per 50 room nights is standard, one per 40 is a common ask
- [ ] Free wifi in meeting and guest rooms
- [ ] A reduced service charge or a discount on catering
- [ ] AV discount, or waived fees for your own crew
- [ ] Reception space at no charge
- [ ] Group rate honored three days either side, with no resort fees
- [ ] An allowance for signage and rigging

Protect your pickup

- [ ] Put the hotel booking link inside the registration confirmation
- [ ] Audit clause: count attendees who booked elsewhere
- [ ] Lowest-rate clause: the hotel cannot undercut your block online
- [ ] Watch pickup weekly and release rooms at each review date

Speakers: finding and booking them

Attendees value real subject experts more than celebrity, and organizers routinely overspend on the famous name. One strong keynote, and a program of practitioners your audience already respects, is usually the better event and the better budget.

Where speakers come from

1. **A call for speakers**
   Open it six to nine months out for a larger event, three to four for a regional one. Keep it open four to eight weeks. At least two reviewers per submission, with a simple score sheet.
2. **Your own evaluations**
   The best-rated sessions from past events, and the attendees who asked the best questions.
3. **Who your audience follows**
   Practitioners, authors, podcast hosts and LinkedIn voices in your field.
4. **Speaker bureaus**
   For paid keynotes. Useful, fast, and priced accordingly.
5. **Sponsors' experts**
   Only with a cap and clear labelling, so the program stays credible and nothing reads as a sales pitch.

Vetting

- [ ] Watch full-length footage of a real talk, not just the highlight reel
- [ ] Ask for session evaluations from past events
- [ ] Call an organizer who booked them for a similar audience
- [ ] Check they will tailor the talk to your room

What speakers cost in 2026

SPEAKER	TYPICAL FEE
Local or emerging expert	$1,500 to $7,500
Established professional speaker	$5,000 to $25,000
Bestselling author or executive	$15,000 to $30,000
Celebrity	$75,000 and up
Breakout speaker	Unpaid to $2,500

Starting points from 2026 bureau guides, before travel, hotel and ground transport. Hot topics command a premium. Breakout speakers at professional conferences commonly receive free registration and an honorarium rather than a fee: say what you offer in the call for speakers.

Two guests on a branded Leadership Experience Tour interview set. A speaker who sits for an interview between sessions gives you content for months.

> **MIX**
> Fewer, longer, better sessions beat a packed grid. Leave room in the program for the conversations attendees came to have (chapter 11).

Speakers: agreements, care and promotion

What every speaker agreement covers

Even unpaid speakers should sign one. Most problems on the day and after it trace back to something nobody wrote down.

- [ ] Fee, honorarium and payment schedule
- [ ] Travel policy: who books, what class, what is covered
- [ ] Session length, format and room
- [ ] Slide deadline, commonly two to three weeks out, and the template
- [ ] Audio visual needs by a fixed date
- [ ] The right to record, stream and reuse the session, including clips for marketing and sale on demand
- [ ] Use of their name, photo and likeness in promotion
- [ ] What they will do to promote the event
- [ ] Continuing education requirements: learning objectives, conflict disclosures
- [ ] Cancellation and substitution
- [ ] Code of conduct and accessibility: captioned videos, described visuals

THE RECORDING LINE
Without the right to record and reuse in writing, you cannot sell session recordings, cut clips or build next year's highlight film from this year's stage. Put it in every agreement, before anyone steps on stage.

Looking after speakers on the day

- [ ] Check-in an hour before their session
- [ ] A tech check in their room
- [ ] A green room near the stage, with water and a monitor showing the stage
- [ ] A room host with time cards
- [ ] Every deck on a backup show laptop
- [ ] Handheld and lapel microphones, and someone who knows which is whose

When a speaker cannot come

Flight disruption is the risk planners name most often. Keep two or three vetted alternates for key slots, a plan to bring a stranded speaker in by video, and ask each keynote for a short recorded segment you can use in an emergency.

Every speaker is a marketing channel

Their audience is the cheapest source of registrations you have. Give each speaker a share kit:

- [ ] Graphics sized for LinkedIn, Instagram and email
- [ ] Two or three ready-to-post captions
- [ ] A short video clip of them, for their own feed
- [ ] A personal link or code, so you can see what they sold
- [ ] A page on your site about their session that previews well when shared

A speaker holding a microphone with a branded Leadership Experience Tour mic flag, which puts the event's name in every frame.

Sponsorship: what sponsors actually buy

Sponsors have stopped paying for exposure on its own. More now value a hosted dinner, a roundtable or an invitation-only session over a booth, and lead quality tops the list of how they judge the return. Sell them outcomes they can report upstairs.

What sponsors want, in order

1. **Qualified leads**
   People with a real need, not a pile of badge scans.
2. **Meetings**
   Time with the right job titles, arranged before the event.
3. **A role in the content**
   A session, a panel seat, a hosted table, a named segment.
4. **Data**
   Who came, what they attended, what they said, what was seen online.
5. **Visibility**
   Still wanted, but no longer enough on its own.

Building the menu

- [ ] Three tiers at most, with the top about three to four times the bottom, not ten
- [ ] Every item defined: exactly what they get and when
- [ ] Single items a first-year sponsor can say yes to
- [ ] Limited quantities, so scarcity is real
- [ ] A first-year rate that does not set the price forever

An example menu

Starting points for a professional audience of about 300. Senior, specialist or regulated audiences, such as lawyers, doctors and HR leaders, justify more. Price to your audience, not to a template.

PACKAGE OR ITEM	STARTING POINT
Presenting sponsor Named with the event, a general session moment, hosted dinner, attendee list with consent	**$10,000 to $15,000**
Program partner A track or session, panel seat, logo on the recordings	**$4,000 to $7,000**
Exhibitor Table, two passes, listing, lead retrieval	**$1,500 to $3,000**
Reception	**$4,000 to $6,000**
Session recordings, "presented by"	**$2,500 to $4,000**
Highlight film sponsor	**$2,000 to $3,500**
Coffee, wifi or charging	**$1,500 to $2,500**
Hosted roundtable	**$1,000 to $2,000**
Lanyards or badges	**$1,000 to $2,000**

FORECAST YEAR ONE HONESTLY

Without a track record, model roughly a third of your sponsor pipeline closing. It is far easier to celebrate a surprise than to cover a hole.

Sponsorship: selling, delivering, renewing

The prospectus

- [ ] Who attends: job titles, industries, buying power, numbers
- [ ] Last year's attendance, photos and a short highlight film
- [ ] The menu, with exactly what each item delivers
- [ ] Deadlines for each item and for artwork
- [ ] Testimonials from past sponsors
- [ ] Last year's results for sponsors, if you have them

THE BEST PITCH IS LAST YEAR ON CAMERA
A two-minute highlight film showing a full room, engaged people and a sponsor's name in use does more for renewals and new sponsors than any page in the prospectus. If this is year one, film it this year so you have it next.

The sales calendar

WHEN	STEP
9 months	Prospectus finished
8 to 6 months	Outreach, aimed at the fall budget cycle
6 to 4 months	Early commitment discount, commonly 10 to 15%
3 months	Artwork and deliverables confirmed
On site	Renewal offered for next year
2 weeks after	Sponsor report delivered

Delivering every promise

Keep one sheet per sponsor listing every deliverable, who owns it, and a photo proving it happened. Sponsors do not forget a missing banner, and they rarely say so. They just do not come back.

The sponsor report

- [ ] Photos of every deliverable
- [ ] Leads and contacts, within days
- [ ] Session attendance and stream and recording views
- [ ] Social and email reach where they were named
- [ ] What attendees said about them in the survey
- [ ] Next year's offer, with first right of refusal

Renewal

Strong events aim to keep at least seven in ten sponsors. Only a minority of first-time exhibitors at trade shows come back for a second year, so the first year's experience is the whole sale. Ask for next year on site, while the sponsor is still watching the traffic at their table.

Common mistakes

- ✗ Selling exposure with no data behind it
- ✗ Ten tiers nobody can tell apart
- ✗ Outreach after budgets are spent
- ✗ Promising attendance you cannot prove
- ✗ No report, so no renewal
- ✗ Sponsored sessions that feel like a sales pitch

Marketing for the late registration curve

At large industry events, close to half of registrations arrive in the final four weeks, over a quarter in the last two, and a real slice on site. First-time attendees are about twice as likely to register late as returning ones. The prime window is 60 to 31 days out.

What that means for you

- [ ] A dashboard well under half of goal at 90 days can be normal. Do not panic-spend.
- [ ] Your contract decisions, catering and rooms, are made before most revenue arrives. Size them on your low case.
- [ ] Keep a fifth to a third of the marketing budget for the final six weeks.
- [ ] Returning attendees commit early; first-timers need proof. Market to each differently.
- [ ] Most conferences keep only about a third of attendees from one year to the next, so most of next year's audience has never been.

WATCH THE RIGHT NUMBER

Compare this year's registrations to last year's at the same number of days out, not to the goal. The curve, not the total, tells you whether you are on track.

The marketing calendar

WEEKS OUT	FOCUS
52 to 40	Save the date to past attendees, speakers and sponsors
40 to 26	Website live, call for speakers, keynote teased
26 to 20	Registration opens: past attendees first, earliest rate
20 to 12	Speaker announcements, one a week; early rate deadline
12 to 9	Agenda complete; group rates to companies; partner associations
9 to 4	The prime window: highlight film, speaker clips, testimonials, paid social, a real price deadline
4 to 2	Last-chance pricing; hotel cutoff reminders; speakers and sponsors share
2 to 0	Final call; what you will miss; logistics for the registered
After	Recordings, thank-yous, next year's date and returning rate

Attendees networking on the conference floor at the Attorneys Resource Conference. A first-timer decides from pictures like this one whether the room is worth the trip.

Channels, video and the registration page

Channels, in order of cost

1. **Your own list and past attendees**
   Email remains the top channel for conference registrations. Segment returning attendees from everyone else.
2. **Speakers and sponsors**
   Share kits and tracked links. Advocacy is usually the cheapest registration you will buy.
3. **Partners**
   Associations, chambers and publications in your field, swapped for a discount or a table.
4. **Groups and referrals**
   Group rates for teams; a reason for attendees to bring a colleague.
5. **Paid social**
   LinkedIn for professional audiences, with retargeting of site visitors. The most expensive registration, so spend it last and measure it closely.

The email rhythm

- [ ] One strong reason per email: a speaker, a session, a deadline
- [ ] Price deadlines announced a week ahead, then the day before
- [ ] A separate track for people who started registering and stopped: within a day, then again
- [ ] Plain, personal emails from the organizer often beat designed ones

The video plan

First-timers are the late, hard-to-convince part of your audience, and they cannot picture an event they have never been to. Video is how you show them.

PIECE	USE
Highlight film, 2 to 3 min	Website, email, prospectus, the first thing a first-timer sees
Speaker clips, 30 to 60 sec	One per announcement, and for the speaker's own feed
Attendee testimonials	Short, specific, filmed on the day
Vertical clips	LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok; framed for vertical on the day
Sponsor film	For renewals and new sponsor pitches

The registration page

- [ ] One clear button
- [ ] The full price, fees included, up front
- [ ] The highlight film near the top
- [ ] Agenda and speakers with photos
- [ ] Logos, testimonials and last year's numbers
- [ ] Credit hours stated clearly, if offered
- [ ] Hotel and travel details
- [ ] Three steps or fewer on a phone
- [ ] Group registration
- [ ] Refund and transfer policy

The program and the attendee

Event platforms are seeing people attend fewer sessions every year, and a real share of checked-in attendees go to none at all, while booked one-to-one meetings keep climbing. Most conferences are overprogrammed. Build for the conversations people came for.

Designing the day

- [ ] Fewer, better sessions; cut the weakest third
- [ ] Breaks of 30 minutes, not 15, near the coffee and the sponsors
- [ ] Hosted tables at lunch by topic or role
- [ ] A proper place to talk that is not a corridor
- [ ] Meeting scheduling for attendees and sponsors
- [ ] A first-timer welcome, with someone to meet
- [ ] An energy plan: the strongest session after lunch, not before it
- [ ] A closing moment worth staying for, with next year's date announced

Continuing education credit

For many professionals credit is the reason to attend. Apply to each accrediting body well ahead: requirements differ by state and profession. Build attendance verification in from the start, and for streamed or on-demand credit expect verification codes or checkpoints. Tie certificates to the evaluation form, which also lifts your survey response.

Accessibility

Under US disability law, organizers are expected to provide what people need to take part, and the cost falls on the organizer. Plan it rather than improvise it:

- [ ] An accommodations question on the registration form
- [ ] Sign language interpreters and live captioning when requested, booked early
- [ ] Space at the front for interpreters, and slides sent to them in advance
- [ ] Captions on at least one screen and on every recording
- [ ] Accessible routes, seating, restrooms and parking checked on the site visit
- [ ] Speakers asked to caption videos and describe visuals

General guidance, not legal advice.

Two guests recording a podcast episode at the Attorneys Resource Conference. A quiet corner with microphones turns hallway conversations into content.

Production, video and streaming

Production is usually the second biggest line in a conference budget, and it decides two things: how the room feels on the day, and what you have to show for the event afterwards. Plan both from the first budget, not the week before.

Room sound and screens

- [ ] A clean audio feed from the sound board for every recording and stream
- [ ] A separate mix for the stream, built for headphones
- [ ] Handheld and lapel microphones, labelled
- [ ] A confidence monitor and a clock for speakers
- [ ] A backup show laptop with every deck
- [ ] Stage lit for camera, not only for the room

Record, stream or both

IF YOU NEED	CHOOSE
Content for the months after	Record every session, edit later
A remote audience, live	Stream the general sessions
Both	Stream, and record every camera separately

DOES STREAMING HURT ATTENDANCE?
The broad view in the industry is that it does not, and can build demand, because a stream cannot deliver the meetings and conversations people travel for. Stream the keynotes, keep workshops and networking in person, and delay on-demand access for non-attendees by a month or two.

The connection

Most failed streams fail on the internet, not the cameras. Ask for a wired line that is not shared with guest wifi, with upload speed at least double the stream's bitrate: a 1080p stream needs about 10 Mbps, so plan for 20 or more, and more again for several cameras. Test it at the time of day the event runs, and carry a bonded cellular backup.

The capture plan

- [ ] Every session recorded, with slides
- [ ] A highlight film, cut within days
- [ ] Speaker reels: a reason for speakers to come back and to share
- [ ] Interviews with speakers and attendees between sessions
- [ ] Testimonials for next year's marketing
- [ ] Vertical clips framed on the day
- [ ] Crowd and room shots that prove the room was full

A multiview monitor showing four live camera feeds from a Leadership Experience Tour interview set.

Our free camera planner at thestudiocreative.com/live-events draws your room with every camera on it.

Running the day

The run of show

Minute by minute: walk-in music, videos, speaker introductions, microphone assignments, lighting changes, sponsor mentions, announcements, stream start and stop, and hard end times. Share it with the venue, the AV team, registration, the stage manager and the stream crew, and hold a production meeting the night before.

Staffing

ROLE	RULE OF THUMB
Registration, paying at the desk	1 per 50 to 75 arrivals an hour
Badge pickup, pre-registered	1 per 150 to 200
Wayfinding and crowd	1 per 300 to 500
Breakout rooms	1 host per room
Team leads	1 per 20 to 25 staff
Overall	About 1 per 50 attendees

Registration flow

- [ ] QR codes emailed two days before
- [ ] Self-service badge printing
- [ ] Separate lines for problems, speakers and sponsors
- [ ] Open 60 to 90 minutes before the first session
- [ ] Room for a third of attendees to arrive in the half hour before the keynote
- [ ] An offline copy of the attendee list

What goes wrong, and the plan

PROBLEM	PLAN
Queue at the keynote	Open early, self-print, more staff for the first hour
Wifi collapses	A separate wired line for production; guest wifi sized for two devices each
Keynote missing	A vetted alternate, or the recorded segment
Wrong slides	One show laptop, decks checked the day before
Sessions overrun	Room hosts with time cards, buffers in the schedule
Audio feedback	A sound check with every speaker
Catering short or late	Guarantee on expected check-ins, a banquet captain on call
Power loss	Battery backup on critical production gear
Medical emergency	Know the venue's first aid and AED; an action plan and contact tree
Sponsor item forgotten	The fulfilment sheet, checked each morning

ONE PERSON WHO CAN DECIDE

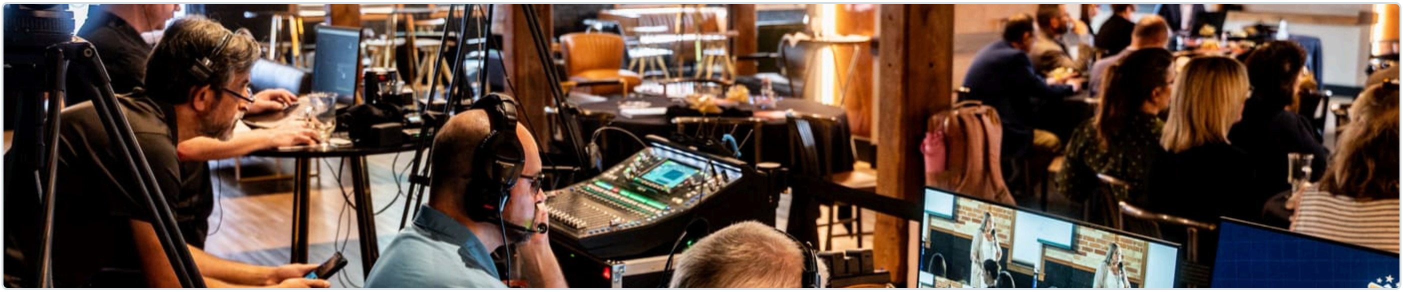
Name one person on your side who can make a decision in thirty seconds, and tell every supplier who it is. Most problems on the day are small until nobody can decide.

A crew working a row of monitors and a camera at the back of a conference room.

The twenty problems, and the fixes: 1 to 10

The problems that catch first and second-year conferences most often, why they happen, and how to prevent each one.

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	PREVENT IT
1. Starting too late	The best venues, dates and keynotes are gone, and sponsor budgets are spent	Start 12 to 18 months out; sponsor outreach before the fall
2. A room block signed on hope	Attrition is owed whether or not people come	Size the block on your low case; whole-stay attrition; resale credit; review dates
3. Menu prices in the budget	Service charge and tax arrive on the invoice	Budget catering at menu price times 1.3 to 1.4
4. Too many comps and discounts	The rack rate looks healthy, the average ticket does not	Break-even on the average ticket; cap comps; charge for speakers' guests
5. A sponsor forecast like year five	No track record, no proof, no relationships	Model a third of the pipeline; sell single items; film this year for next
6. AV surprises	Exclusivity and fees nobody negotiated	Settle outside production rights and fees before signing; itemized quotes
7. Speaker cancellations	Travel, illness, no agreement	Agreements, vetted alternates, recorded segments
8. Panic at the registration curve	Half the registrations come in the final month	Compare to last year at the same point; hold budget for the final six weeks
9. One big early discount as the only lever	It pulls forward buyers who would have come anyway	A middle tier, targeted codes, group rates
10. An overstuffed program	Sessions nobody attends, no time to talk	Fewer, better sessions; longer breaks; hosted tables



The production area at the Attorneys Resource Conference 2026. Several of these problems end at this table: audio, streaming, and whether anything was captured at all.

The twenty problems, and the fixes: 11 to 20

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	PREVENT IT
11. Spectacle over substance	Organizers remember the show; attendees remember progress on their goals	Design for one attendee's good day: meetings, learning, connections
12. Poor sound and a weak stream	Room sound is not built for recording, and wifi is shared	A clean board feed, a separate stream mix, a wired line and a backup
13. Nothing captured	Video treated as a souvenir, cut from the budget	Record every session; plan the highlight film, clips and testimonials from day one
14. No continuing education plan	Accreditation needs applying for in advance	Apply early, per state and profession; build attendance tracking in
15. Accessibility left to chance	Nobody asked, nobody booked	Ask on the registration form; book interpreters and captioning early
16. Weak contract protection	Force majeure read quickly, no insurance	Negotiate named events and impracticability; buy cancellation cover early
17. No data	No check-in or session data, no survey	Scan badges at sessions; survey within a day; report to sponsors
18. No follow-up	The team is exhausted and moves on	A post-event plan written before the event: survey, thank-yous, reports, content
19. Next year's date not announced	Nobody had the venue confirmed	Hold next year's dates before this year's event; announce them from the stage
20. Registration friction and hidden fees	Long forms, surprise charges at checkout	All-in pricing, three steps on a phone, follow-up on unfinished registrations

THE PATTERN

Almost every one of these is decided months before the event, in a contract, a budget line or a plan nobody wrote. The day itself rarely sinks a conference. The year before it does.

FREE EVENTS ARE DIFFERENT

Up to half of people registered for a free event may not come, against roughly one in ten for paid ones. Set catering guarantees on expected check-ins, and consider a small refundable deposit for free places.

After the event

Most conferences keep only about a third of their attendees from one year to the next. Next year's event starts at this year's closing session, and the first two weeks after it decide how much of the room you have to win again.

Within 48 hours

- [ ] Attendee survey, five to ten questions, sent within a day while response is still high
- [ ] Thank-you notes to speakers, sponsors, staff and volunteers
- [ ] The first social clips, while people are still talking about it
- [ ] Next year's returning attendee rate opened

Within two weeks

- [ ] Sponsor reports, with photos and numbers
- [ ] Highlight film published
- [ ] Debrief with the whole team, while it is fresh
- [ ] Budget against actual, line by line

Within 30 days

- [ ] Session recordings live, with captions
- [ ] An on-demand pass on sale to people who did not come
- [ ] Venue and dates secured for next year, ideally on a multi-year deal using this year's pickup as leverage
- [ ] A one-page summary for leadership: attendance, revenue, sponsor renewals, return intent

SURVEY RESPONSE

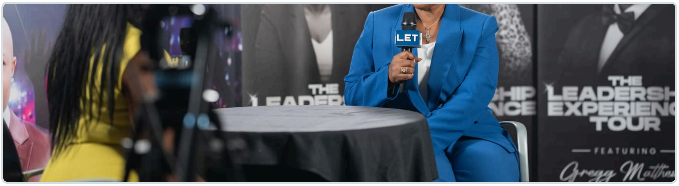
Response rates for conferences are often in the low teens to twenties by email, much higher when collected on the spot, and they fall off sharply after a few weeks. Tie credit certificates to the evaluation and response goes up.

The content plan

ASSET	WHEN	USED FOR
Social clips	48 hours	Keeping the event alive while people talk about it
Highlight film	1 to 2 weeks	Next year's registration page and prospectus
Speaker reels	2 to 3 weeks	Thanking speakers, who then share them
Session recordings	2 to 4 weeks	On-demand pass, member benefit, credit product
Short session cuts	Monthly	12 to 15 minute chapters, watched more than full sessions
Podcast episodes	Monthly	Audio from sessions and interviews
Articles and quote cards	Monthly	From transcripts, all year

PUBLISH FAST

Most replay viewing happens in the first couple of weeks. A recording released two months later mostly goes unwatched.



An interview set at the Leadership Experience Tour. Each conversation filmed here becomes a clip that sells the next date.

Ten ways to widen the margin

A conference makes money in a narrow band between what it commits to and what it collects. These are the levers that move it, roughly in order of how much they are usually worth.

1. **Keep more of last year's room**
   Retention is the cheapest growth there is. Next year's date on stage, a returning rate that week, and content all year.
2. **Raise the average ticket, not the rack rate**
   Cap comps, tighten discounts, charge for guests. The worked example on page 5 shows how much this moves.
3. **Negotiate the contract as hard as you sell**
   Attrition, minimums, service charges and concessions are worth more than most marketing wins.
4. **Sell sponsors products, not logos**
   Defined items with data behind them sell faster and renew.
5. **Sell the recordings**
   An on-demand pass for people who could not come, a bundle for those who did, and credit certificates where your audience needs them.
6. **Add paid extras**
   Pre-conference workshops, VIP dinners and small-group sessions, priced separately. Late registrants tend to spend more on extras.
7. **Cut sessions nobody attends**
   Fewer rooms means less production, fewer honoraria and a better program.
8. **Commit for more than one year**
   Multi-year venue deals win bigger concessions and lock in rates while costs rise.
9. **Spend marketing when it works**
   Hold budget for the prime window and the final six weeks, where registrations actually come from.
10. **Film it for next year**
    One shoot feeds next year's registration page, prospectus and social feed. It is the asset that keeps paying.

> **A REALISTIC TARGET**
> Professional and association conferences often aim for a margin of 20 to 30 percent over direct costs, and many planners report more tickets sold on thinner margins as costs rise. Know your number before year one and measure against it every year.

How we do it: ARC and the Leadership Experience Tour

We do not only film conferences. We produce one, and we partner on another, so the advice in this guide comes from the organizer's side of the table as well as from behind the cameras.

The Attorneys Resource Conference

The Studio Creative produces the Attorneys Resource Conference in Grand Rapids end to end: the brand, the promotional campaign, the registration funnel, the multi-camera production, a reel for every speaker, and the year-round content that grows the next one.

Two pieces went out during the conference itself, built around interviews we shot with speakers between sessions, so attendees saw the event they were sitting in. The organizers then used the same films to sell the following year: the room, the speakers and the energy, on camera, months before anyone had to decide.

Underneath it, our CRM Connect system handles the part most events lose money on: registrations, speaker submissions and sponsor enquiries are answered straight away and tracked through to the sale.

- [ ] Full event production and multi-camera capture
- [ ] Brand identity and promotional campaigns
- [ ] Registration, speaker and sponsor funnels
- [ ] Speaker reels for every presenter
- [ ] A podcast recorded on site
- [ ] Year-round social and email content

The production area at the Attorneys Resource Conference 2026.

The Leadership Experience Tour

We partner on Shawn Fair's Leadership Experience Tour. We built its website, made its commercial, and run its live multi-camera broadcasts and interview sets, down to branded mic flags that put the tour's name in every frame.

Four live camera feeds from a Leadership Experience Tour interview set on one multiview monitor.

WHAT IT TAUGHT US

The video is not the souvenir. It is next year's marketing, the proof for sponsors and a product you can sell. Plan for it in the first budget, not the week before.

The master checklist

12 to 18 months

- [ ] One-page plan agreed
- [ ] Budget and break-even
- [ ] Date window and alternates
- [ ] Venue shortlist and requests
- [ ] Site visits
- [ ] Contract negotiated and signed
- [ ] Insurance quoted
- [ ] Keynote approached

9 to 12 months

- [ ] Program shape
- [ ] Call for speakers open
- [ ] Sponsor menu and prospectus
- [ ] Save the date sent
- [ ] Website live
- [ ] Production partner chosen

6 to 9 months

- [ ] Sponsor outreach
- [ ] Speakers selected
- [ ] Registration open
- [ ] Keynote announced
- [ ] Continuing education applied for

3 to 6 months

- [ ] Full agenda live
- [ ] Speaker agreements signed
- [ ] Share kits sent to speakers
- [ ] Hotel pickup reviewed weekly
- [ ] Early rate deadline
- [ ] Highlight film and clips out
- [ ] Accessibility requests booked

1 to 3 months

- [ ] Prime window campaign
- [ ] Room block review dates used
- [ ] Run of show drafted
- [ ] AV plan and floor plans locked
- [ ] Menus chosen
- [ ] Signage designed
- [ ] Hotel cutoff

Final 4 weeks

- [ ] Last-chance pricing
- [ ] Slides collected
- [ ] Staff and volunteer briefing
- [ ] Catering guarantee on check-ins
- [ ] Stream tested at event time
- [ ] Sponsor fulfilment sheet ready

The day before

- [ ] Load in
- [ ] Tech rehearsal
- [ ] Production meeting
- [ ] Registration set and tested
- [ ] Offline attendee list

The day

- [ ] Registration open early
- [ ] Every session recording
- [ ] Interviews and testimonials filmed
- [ ] Sponsor deliverables photographed
- [ ] Next year's date announced

After

- [ ] Survey within a day
- [ ] Thank-yous sent
- [ ] Clips within 48 hours
- [ ] Sponsor reports within two weeks
- [ ] Highlight film
- [ ] Recordings and on-demand pass
- [ ] Debrief and actuals
- [ ] Next year's venue secured

Glossary

Attrition
The share of a hotel room block you can leave unfilled without paying a penalty.

Average net ticket
What you actually collect per registration after discounts and complimentary places.

Break-even
The number of attendees at which revenue covers costs.

Cutoff
The date after which the hotel releases unbooked rooms in your block.

Food and beverage minimum
The catering spend you promise the venue, usually in exchange for meeting space.

Force majeure
The clause that excuses both sides when events beyond anyone's control make the event impossible.

Guarantee
The final catering headcount you commit to, usually about three days before.

Pickup
How many rooms in your block attendees actually booked.

Prospectus
The document that sells sponsorship: audience, packages, prices and deadlines.

Run of show
The minute by minute schedule used by everyone working the event.

Service charge
The percentage added to catering bills, often kept by the venue, often taxed.

Sizzle or highlight film
A short film of the event that sells the next one.

More free tools from The Studio Creative

Camera planner
A floor plan of every camera your room needs.
thestudiocreative.com/live-events

Cost estimator
What event coverage and live streaming cost.
thestudiocreative.com/estimate

Free guides
Including the 2026 Video Production Rate Guide.
thestudiocreative.com/resources

THE STUDIO CREATIVE

Planning a conference?
We produce conferences end to end, from the brand and the registration funnel to multi-camera production, live streaming and the content that sells next year. Tell us about your event and a producer replies, usually the same business day, whether or not you hire us.

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