

Communication at Tradeshows—Face-to-Face versus Online

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A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of Communication and Leadership Studies

School of Professional Studies

Gonzaga University

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Heather Crandall

Under the Mentorship of Dr. Josh Misner

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Communication and Leadership Studies

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By

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May 2014

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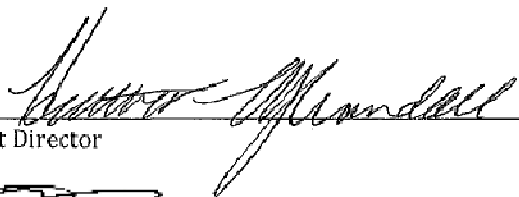
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## Abstract

The question is regularly posed within communication academia as to whether computer mediated communication (CMC) is a “richer” form of communication than face-to-face (FtF). Similarly, the necessity of meeting FtF with regard to business has been repeatedly called into question since the downturn of the economy in 2008-2009. One reason professionals gather FtF is for tradeshow.

This thesis looks at the quality of the communication that takes place at FtF tradeshow, and reveals attitudes and opinions with regard to the importance of the relationship-building and commerce that occurs in person and/or online. The results inform what we can and cannot accomplish in these different environments.

331 professionals who have worked in tradeshow as a planner, an exhibitor, an attendee, or an executive took an online survey designed to reveal how they felt about the relationship-building and commerce that occurs in the tradeshow environment. The questions were focused on whether FtF, CMC, or a combination of the two is the solution, exploring the value and necessity of tradeshow. Additionally, an autoethnography highlights some personal experiences, having served within each of the professional roles with regard to tradeshow.

The results showed the respondents felt that CMC is not a replacement for the FtF communication that occurs at tradeshow, but it is a useful supplement to the FtF experience. The autoethnography echoed these sentiments, in addition to echoing the short answers of many of the respondents.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **Importance of the Study**

The question is regularly posed in communication circles as to whether computer mediated communication (CMC) is a “richer” form of communication than face-to-face (FtF). Having worked in the tradeshow and meetings industry for more than ten years, the term “face-to-face” brings to mind the success achieved as a direct result of FtF communication. It is also a reminder of the turmoil the downturn in the economy caused the industry in 2009, when corporations began to wonder if it was necessary (and worth it) to continue meeting “face-to-face” (“USTA,”2010). There was, and still is, a mantra of “meetings mean business” within the industry, and it became obvious that this message—and proof of value—needed to be shared with the country.

Simply put, individuals do not have the same experiences in virtual or CMC environments as they do in person. While CMC is one effective way of “meeting,” and there is value in it, arguments can be made that CMC should be a supplement (and not a replacement) for FtF meetings, particularly in the context of tradeshows. This study explores this argument by surveying four different types of meeting industry professionals about their experiences and opinions regarding communication and tradeshows. An autoethnographic account of the firsthand experiences of the author is also presented. Using examples of having served in each of the professional categories surveyed, similar themes are brought to light between personal experiences and the survey responses.

## Statement of the Problem

The necessity of FtF meetings has been called into question by people and organizations across the country, including U.S. politicians (“USTA,”2010). For several years organizations have been trying to “save money” by reducing the amount of money being spent on travel and other costs associated with these FtF encounters. However, very little academic research has been done to study the importance of the communication in this context. A participant in this study contributed her opinion regarding this trend:

I work for a federal agency, so although tradeshows are a part of my work, networking and information dissemination to the public and partner agencies are the focus, rather than buying and selling. The current prevailing trend is to eliminate in-person meetings when it saves money. In my opinion, this does save money, but doesn't \*really\* increase the efficiency of communication or the ability to "do business". I make good, productive relationships online and on the phone, but I feel an added dimension of interpersonal satisfaction doing business face to face. I also believe that others are more willing to trust me more quickly when they have met me in person. Online takes longer to develop ease of relationship.

This study looks at the quality of the communication that takes place at FtF tradeshows, and uncovers the opinions of a pool of people who participate in them. It reveals attitudes and opinions with regard to the importance of the relationship-building and commerce that occurs in person and online. The results inform what we can and cannot accomplish in these different environments.



## Definitions of Terms Used

Several terms become inherent to those who use them, so it becomes necessary to define these terms.

Tradeshow- An exhibition for companies to showcase and demonstrate their new products and services. Generally trade shows are not open to the public and can only be attended by company representatives and members of the press (Entrepreneur, 2014).

Exhibition - A public display of products, works, or skills.

Meetings Industry - An industry comprised of meeting and event planners, suppliers of destinations, hotels, convention centers, furniture vendors, speakers, audio-visual production companies, caterers, exhibit hall decorators, and the labor to sell, run, and manage every piece of it all.

CMC - Computer Mediated Communication - The process of human communication using computers; text-based communication (Lengel, et al. 2009, p. 15).

FfT - Face-to-face - A rich medium of communication; spoken communication and a social presence (Lengel, et al. 2009, pp. 49-50).

Hosted buyer - An event planner or manager who is attending a tradeshow via the funding of suppliers / exhibitors, who commits to attending scheduled meetings with exhibitors in exchange.

Exhibitor - Individuals and companies who occupy a booth space at a tradeshow, with the intention of either selling or promoting their products or services.

Planner / Manager - The person who manages the planning and logistics of meetings and events, including tradeshows.

Attendee - Any person who is present at a tradeshow; often attendees are the buyers of the products and services exhibitors are selling or demonstrating, but they might be observers or press/media.

Executive - Individual responsible for the budgetary planning for tradeshow exhibiting or attendance.

Autoethnography - An author's description of having lived through an experience—keeping him or herself present in the text of a cultural context.

### **Organization of Remaining Chapters**

The remaining four chapters review other research studies, which relate back to this thesis, explain the scope and methodology used in the study, provide results of the study, and finally, provide a summary and conclusion. Chapter two explains philosophical assumptions and theoretical basis as they relate to communication in the context of tradeshows. It also contains a literature review – summarizing several studies as they pertain to the study in this thesis, and relates them back to the communication theories presented. Chapter three discusses the scope and methodology of the study. The methods being used for the study, the size of the study, and the reasons for the approach are covered. Additionally, the methods for collecting the data, how they will be analyzed, and ethical considerations of the study are covered. In chapter four, the study itself is discussed. The two methods used are summarized and then the results of the survey and the author's autoethnography are given in detail, with relation to the three research

questions. And, finally, chapter five explains the limitations of the study, further study recommendations, and final conclusions.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

The phenomenological tradition of communication is one where self and others are experienced through dialogue (Griffin, 2006). Edmund Husserl was the founder of phenomenology and central to this philosophy was intentionality (Husserl, 1931). The “lived experience” is an intentional accomplishment (Husserl, 1931). Psychologist Carl Rogers and philosopher Martin Buber were both phenomenologists and indicated each person comes to new understandings of self and others through their everyday experiences. Rogers (1961) stated “Neither the bible nor the prophets—neither Freud nor research—neither the revelations of God nor man—can take precedence over my own direct experience” (p. 24). It is the perspective from the person who is experiencing it, which lends itself well to the conversation of the values and differences of CMC versus FtF interpersonal communication within the context of tradeshows.

### **Theoretical Basis**

The debate regarding which form of communication is more “rich,” computer-mediated communication (CMC) or face-to-face (FtF) is not a new one. However, as the different modes of CMC continue growing in number, it continues to grow as a discussed and researched topic. Quite a bit of research has been done which focuses on the different modes of CMC using the key theory that relates to it, Walther’s (1992) social information processing theory (SIP). The other side of SIP is media richness theory, through which Trevino et al. (1987) contend that FtF is the richest form of media. This study explores these theories, and whether CMC, FtF, or a

combination of the two modes of communication is the solution. Through reviewing studies that address these questions, further support is created for the necessity of the study within this thesis.

With tradeshows there is so much more than sitting behind a computer. According to Wu et al. (2008), tradeshows are an important element of the “communication mix in the business marketplace” (p.398) in business-to-business marketing. Additionally, a study conducted by Goldberg et al., (2006) presented findings behind why physicians attend tradeshows when at medical conferences, where they learned that over half of them planned to buy one or more products that were being exhibited. Being able to meet with potential vendors and see their product demonstrations in person, running into contacts made in previous years in the exhibit hall, sharing a drink with a potential customer, or meeting an admired communication theorist in person for the first time are all experiences that require FtF presence. People do business with those they trust and the autoethnography portion of the study will demonstrate examples of this. Placing a face (in person) with a name is extremely important to solidifying a relationship (business or personal), which was illuminated by the participants in the Nardi et al. (2002) study within this review.

This demonstrates that people who attend tradeshows are there to build and manage relationships, and to acquire new vendors, partners, and customers. Each person who attends a tradeshow, regardless of his or her position, brings individual desires, aspirations, values, skills, and communication experience to their interactions. What does not change between CMC and FtF within the tradeshow context, is they are intentionally attending for one or more reasons, and they purposefully accomplish their goals through dialogue. This study investigates whether tradeshow participants feel they can accomplish the same relationship-building and commerce online as they do FtF and what their intentions are as they do so.

## **Literature Review**

This literature review of different studies looks at both the social information processing (SIP) and media richness theories. Ramirez and Zhang (2007) studied both online and offline communication in different modalities. Lee and Lee (2006) carried out a similar study, which looked at how the relationships created online translated to “social capital” offline. Each of these studies used the SIP theory as the foundation of their approaches. Cooper and Kahai (2003) carried out an experiment in which they used the core concepts of the media richness theory to study decision quality. Nardi (2005) combined studies that looked at instant messaging (IM) and FtF communication into a new paper, using media richness theory, in part, to explore how different business professionals prefer to communicate to achieve the best possible outcomes.

### **Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory**

Ramirez and Zhang (2007) used the theoretical approach of SIP theory (Walther, 1992), and the hyperpersonal perspective (Walther, 1996) that extends from it, to inform their study. The effect of modality switching on relational communication processes was explored through the theoretical perspectives, and competing hypotheses were proposed. Additionally, the study included an experiment in which different relational communication were examined at different time intervals. There is conflicting information from various researchers as to whether the Internet has had a positive or negative effect on people’s lives. Lee and Lee (2006) gave examples from both sides in their paper.

One side indicated online media use decreases sociability and FtF communication, and negatively effects social networks. Others argued the Internet improves relations between individuals with advanced technology, and actually strengthens social networks because they are

more connected, learning more about each other online than they might otherwise. This thesis explores how using CMC both before and after meetings has the ability to enhance personal relationships. Lee and Lee (2006) indicated that it is important to fully consider why people are using the Internet and they set out to understand the “why.”

Walther’s (1992) SIP theory argues that, given enough time and access, the same relationships and tasks that occur via FtF can be accomplished via CMC. While he concedes that all of the cues provided by FtF (eye contact, touch, body language, appearance, etc.) are not available through CMC, he does not believe that is detrimental to relational communication. Walther (personal communication, November 23, 2013) indicated verbal clues can be conveyed within the CMC context, and although the timeline is longer, there is no reason the same relationships and communication cannot be accomplished online.

Ramirez and Zhang (2007) explored how relational outcomes change when collaborative partnerships are shifted between CMC and FtF. It was their prediction that there would be both positive and negative effects on relationships when shifting from one modality—switching between CMC and FtF—to the other. This study supports the contention of this thesis that a mix of both CMC and FtF are of great benefit within the context of tradeshow.

In close relation to the Ramirez and Zhang (2007) study, researchers Lee and Lee (2006) asserted that people foster strong ties in online communities through CMC, which translates to increased social capital offline, or FtF. They set out to conduct a study to explore how online community use is integrated into social capital offline.

One of the first points Ramirez and Zhang (2007) made early on in their study was that people who initially developed very strong CMC relationships could have their impressions of

the person poorly affected, based on what is likely to be the “average” appearance of each other once they meet FtF. They went on to indicate it is probable that the FtF interactions complement the CMC interactions. Ultimately, they felt the research was inconsistent regarding whether the relational communication is enhanced or not within the different modes. In contrast, Lee and Lee (2006) explained that social capital is derived from being with people in a social structure that allows for FtF social relationships, which help them create a “competitive advantage to achieve their social goals” (p.6). Social capital only exists if it is shared, and that is done both online (CMC) and offline (FtF). This supports the prediction of this thesis that the communication that occurs FtF at tradeshow cannot be replaced by CMC, but that CMC is an appropriate supplement.

Because of the contradictory findings, Ramirez and Zhang (2007) examined “the effect of two factors underlying modality switching: its occurrence and timing” (p. 289). In the context of tradeshow, occurrence and timing is less of a factor—because people attend tradeshow FtF is at the core of what creates and strengthens relationships and generates commerce, however, the switching does occur. Attendees may have the opportunity to connect online via CMC before meeting FtF, and can then follow-up and keep in touch online following the tradeshow. Conversely, they might meet for the first time in the tradeshow environment, and then switch to CMC.

**Summary of these studies using SIP theory.** The Ramirez and Zhang (2007) study and its findings are complex, based on four different hypotheses, switching the modality and the timing of the meetings. As a high-level overview, the effects of switching modalities on the relational communication depended on the occurrence and timing. The CMC-only pairs reported greater levels of intimacy and social attraction than any of the other groups, which is supported



by the SIP theory contention that text-based interaction yields more positive outcomes when progression and time were not controlled or limited. Additionally, those who were switched from CMC to FtF had a higher rate of disillusionment, based on the expectations they built up through the CMC. The timing and directional shifts were crucial in the outcomes. The researchers disclosed that this study, having been controlled, could have had some effect on the outcome.

The Ramirez and Zhang (2007) study was somewhat counter to the premise of this thesis, but the context is different. These researchers believe that the best levels of communication can be achieved through CMC, without having to add FtF interaction. This thesis contends that within the context of tradeshows, communication occurs differently, and requires FtF communication. The nature of the “relationships” in the Ramirez and Zhang (2007) study is different from that of a company exhibiting on a tradeshow floor, or the associated networking opportunities that accompany such events.

For the research methodology used to answer their questions, Lee and Lee (2006) conducted an online survey of college students in a state university in New York. The goal was to “examine the relationships among online community use, media use, and social capital” (p. 13). Among the 344 students who received the survey, 327 participated, which included 133 online community users and 194 online community non-users. Logistic regression analysis was used as a statistical technique in an attempt to predict whether belonging to an online community would affect the outcome.

This study focused on one particular form of CMC – use of online communities. It further explored whether the social capital of users of online communities was affected or not.

The study concluded that online communities can enhance the ability of its members to communicate, but it is the FtF communication that is still necessary to “ensure the quality of community” (Lee & Lee, 2006, p. 25). This outcome is in line with the focus of this thesis that CMC is a great complement, but FtF might be necessary to achieve the desired outcomes of tradeshow.

Lee and Lee (2006) also pointed out some deficiencies of the study. It might have fallen short by treating the online community usage too narrowly, and using only college students could have made the pool too general. They also pointed out that effects of media use and social capital also vary based on the time spent and their various reasons for using the online communities. The final observation of the research was that a qualitative study that uses focus groups or interviews would be useful in supporting qualitative findings regarding different attitudes. One of the studies in the next section on media richness did just that—they interviewed business people and observed them at work to discover how they perceived CMC and FtF communication effects their business relationships and outcomes.

### **Using Media Richness Theory**

In contrast to the SIP theory, media richness asserts that CMC is too narrow to accomplish the depth of relational communication that is achieved through FtF (Trevino et al., 1987). Within media richness, types of communication are classified based upon the complexity of the message, and FtF is considered the richest level based on the ability to convey both verbal and non-verbal messages. People must select a channel of media by which to communicate, so it is important to choose a channel that is not only appropriate, but also convenient (Adrian & Downs, 2004). As Adrian and Downs (2004) indicated, “Media richness theory focuses on the

requirements of the communication task, while social information-processing theory focuses on the communication participants and their context” (p. 57). This difference supports the carefully adapted communication necessary to accomplish commerce and relationship-building within the context of tradeshow.

Cooper and Kahai (1999) conducted a study which they used again in 2003 to search for answers to different hypotheses. In 1999 they studied the effect of CMC on agreement and acceptance using social presence and SIP theories. In 2003 they used media richness to develop a model surrounding the impact of CMC systems on decision quality (p. 263). Particularly important to this discussion is Cooper and Kahai’s (2003) use of media richness in the second round of the study. The two factors in terms of decision quality they examined were cue multiplicity and feedback immediacy, looked at through the mediating factors of social perceptions, message clarity, and ability to evaluate others (p. 263).

Cooper and Kahai (1999) referred to opening a “black box” in both the 1999 and 2003 studies, inferring that there is a mystery that needs uncovering (or releasing from the box). In 1999 it was in reference to needing to know more about the path from CMC systems to agreement and acceptance (p. 184). In the 2003 experiment, they used four communication systems: two that enabled FtF communication and two that only enabled CMC (p. 271). The first FtF system was an “un-supported face-to-face meeting” in a room equipped with only a blackboard and the second was equipped with a “ShrEdit” document displayed on computer monitors; each person could see each other and the screens simultaneously. The first CMC system consisted of electronic conferencing where messages were exchanged between participants through the system, the responses were stored and accessible by all participants, and

the second system consisted only of e-mail. The participants could not see or hear each other using this CMC system; no records were maintained at all (pp. 271-272).

Nardi (2005) wrote a paper comparing two different studies she and others had conducted previously, comparing CMC and FtF interactions, and she used media richness as one of a few communication theories to inform her study. Nardi (2005) set out to study the “dimensions of connection in interpersonal communication” (p. 91). The prior studies she was involved with in regards to CMC and FtF each looked at communication from a different perspective—one study covered instant messaging (IM) and the other FtF communication. Interviews and observations were used as the foundational methods, and some segments from those results were shared within the paper (2005). There are specific references to both tradeshows and conferences, which support the need for the study encompassed within this thesis.

**Summary of these findings using media richness theory.** The Kahai and Cooper (2003) study used 11 hypotheses, many of which addressed socio-emotional communication and climate as they relate to affecting task-oriented communication, and whether richer media (such as FtF) and communication clarity affect decision quality. The fifth hypothesis, “Greater task-oriented communication leads to higher decision quality,” (p. 270) relates well to the tradeshow environment where exhibitors can demonstrate and attendees can often touch and feel the products on display. This not only gives the receiver a clearer understanding of message, but allows for immediate feedback for both parties. An experiment was conducted to test each of the hypotheses.

Each group had to perform two tasks during the study pertaining to substance abuse and student housing (p. 274). The groups solved one problem via FtF one day and the other with

CMC on another day. The students were monetarily incentivized based upon their quality output in a timely fashion, but separate incentives were provided—one was based on group work and the other was an individual incentive, which was of greater value. This was deemed a “mixed motive” by Kahai and Cooper (1999). The “reward scheme was implemented to ensure that participants approached their tasks seriously and cared about the quality of their output as well as the time that they spent” (p.279). Every group and task was performed synchronously. In terms of the data collection, only 25 percent of each meeting was coded due to time and expense.

In the case of the substance abuse issue, 10 of the 11 hypotheses were supported by the data collected during the experiment. FtF communication proved to be more effective in exchanging more information (responses back-and-forth to each other), and the non-verbal communication also played a part in the discussions or group work. It is worth noting that the use of verbal equivalents and emoticons were used less than one percent of the time in the CMC conditions (p. 285). Participants were able to successfully detect deception in group members better than their expertise, which is known because of the “positive relationship between their perceived ability to detect deception and decision quality” (p. 285).

In the case of the housing issue, the data also suggest “successful manipulation of media richness” (p. 285). Once again, the non-verbal communication cues made the FtF conditions more successful. Fewer hypotheses were supported in this portion of the study—just eight out of the 11 were supported. It did not appear that task-oriented communication lead to more thorough consideration, which would then increase decision quality. The participants had less expertise in this area, which showed in their interactions because they were less likely to introduce a new idea. This was also reflected in the issue of deception shown in the drug abuse study—there was no issue with identifying deception for the housing issue because there was none.

It is clear that CMC can alter communication outcomes and processes, so continued study is needed to help organizations understand how they can make it work for them when FtF is not an option. This study provides support for media richness theory and its premise that cue multiplicity and feedback immediacy impact decision quality. Kahai and Cooper (2003) went on to provide insights for managers based on their study. They indicate that managers will be “more effective and efficient when richer media are used for more equivocal tasks” (p. 289). In other words, where there can be several different meanings, using the richest form of media (FtF) will help to increase the decision quality. This second look at their original laboratory experiment helped to get more insight into the “black box” that holds the unknown path to how CMC affects decision quality. The Nardi (2005) paper included information about how management needs to use FtF communication to be totally effective. Through her paper, which summarized two studies, she provided further insight into media richness and how business people perceive how CMC and FtF communication affect their success.

Nardi, et al. conducted studies on IM in the workplace (2000) and FtF communication (2002) in personal social networks in the workplace. She summarized these studies within this paper, including how they relate to each other, and cited communication theories that relate to how business people communicate. Using “ethnographic investigations” (p. 92), they conducted open-ended interviews, the data of which resulted in the observed participating in activities that established feelings of connectedness with others in order to have continued interactions. This feeling of connection they experienced resulted in openness to interacting with others. This resulted mostly through body contact (touch) and exchanges that were informal in nature. In the introduction, Nardi (2005) stated, “This paper distinguishes between communicative activity that

establishes feelings of connection that ready people for further interaction with each other, and communicative activity in which information is exchanged” (p.92).

Nardi (2005) proposed that these activities between people established a “field of connection” (p.92) – connections that motivate people to continue to communicate. This connection includes feelings of affinity, commitment, and attention, each of which must continue to be stimulated to continue their exchange of information. This paper summarizes the work the participants did to create and sustain these connections and argues that this work is essential to communication. Much like the focus of this thesis, Nardi (2005) indicated this has not been a focus of other CMC research and set out to interview business people within their work environments.

In the IM portion of the study, 20 participants from a wide variety of industries and professions were observed and interviewed in their workplace environments. They were asked about how using IM compared to other methods of CMC and FtF, and what they felt its advantages and disadvantages were. The first example given was an executive named Rick who kept his “buddy list” open in IM so he could “feel a sense of connection with co-workers” (p. 93). He “watched” his co-workers physical activity—the system made the sound of a door opening or closing when people signed in or out—and he indicated it made him feel closer to the people he worked with. Nardi (2003) noted from Baumeister and Leary (1995) that the “activity of connecting to others, then often (not always) engenders mutual satisfaction” (p. 93). Rick was trying to maintain a social bond with them. The IM study indicated many people also used it to set up a FtF meeting, so using this form of CMC tended to serve as a complement to FtF. They felt “closer” to their IM buddies, even if they weren’t communicating.

In cooperation with the IM study, a netWORK study was conducted with 22 people from 12 different organizations (Nardi et al., 2002). This 2002 study was conducted using in-depth observation and audiotaped interviews within the participant's workplaces. They were also asked about the different methods of communication they used—CMC, FtF, fax, and Federal Express. The emphasis here was their “personal social networks and the work needed to create and maintain them (hence netWORK),” (p. 94). Both the IM study and the netWORK study participants were about 50% male and 50% female, of Anglo-American or Asian-American descent, and lived in either the San Francisco bay area or New Jersey.

Both the IM study and the netWORK studies used empirical evidence to study the three dimensions of connection—affinity, commitment, and attention (p. 98). Affinity was defined in the context of these studies as that which is achieved through “social bonding,” which could include touch, eating and drinking, sharing experience in a common space, and informal conversation (p. 99). The netWORK study included an interview of a PR specialist named Carl who explained how he was able to introduce a (very important) journalist to the CEO of a company at a networking event. Carl had difficulty getting “in” with journalists, so this FtF “high-touch introduction” situation enabled him to gain “social capital” with the journalist (p. 100). The affinity of the exchanges between those involved with this scenario was seen by Carl as a catalyst for making future CMC easier with the journalist, which is in line with the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate that FtF communication is essential, and CMC is a great accompaniment. In his interview, Carl said, “You can never cultivate these relationships without physically engaging people as part of it. You need to... physically see and physically engage people in order to renew relationships” (p. 107).



Another example was given with respect to an interview with a network engineer regarding why he attends a conference three times per year. Nardi (2005) made it a point to mention the importance of this conference being held three times per year—these engineers had CMC as a hallmark of what they did for a living, but found it essential to have FtF time with others in their industry. They “valued getting to know one another, and staying in touch, as crucial for the work of keeping the Internet going” (p.105). When the engineer was interviewed, he had on a t-shirt that read, “The Internet Works Because We Drink Beer” (p.105), which drove home the fact that socialization over “beer” is a necessity for the work they do. This example falls right in line with the topic of this thesis, in terms of the relationship-building that happens at tradeshow. It also speaks to “social capital” that Lee and Lee (2006) indicated in their study is improved through CMC leading to FtF.

Nardi (2003) covered different aspects of communication in her paper, one of which was capturing someone’s attention. Before being able to communicate, it was crucial to get the other person’s attention. To capture this attention one would do so by “either attaining attention through eye contact in a face to face setting and/or sometimes negotiating availability through a verbal exchange for further conversation,” (p. 117). This speaks directly to the point in this thesis that CMC can complement FtF, particularly to reduce uncertainty, per Berger’s theory. Nardi’s (2005) paper pointed to the use of “eye contact (gaze)” and “negotiating ability” to capture attention. With regard to this kind of attention getting, a producer-manager at a media company named Ashley was one of the study participants who mentioned the importance of being able to look people in the eye when speaking to them (p. 117).

Ashley: And there's also you know, face to face, which – we're all human beings. That's the best way to interact with people is to look them in the eye and talk to them, and, you can't do that over the telephone as easily. Certainly not email. Email! (p. 117)

There were many dimensions of CMC and FtF covered in the Nardi et al. (2000 & 2002) studies. The netWORK study (2002) particularly demonstrated the importance of the body in FtF communication. Relational communication is intensified in FtF and the bandwidth of media in CMC doesn't include uses of the body (non-verbal cues) that are so important to communication (p. 121). There was a vagueness in the way that eye-contact (gaze), touch, and the mere presence of bodies in the same location were characterized in both the IM and netWORK interviews of the Nardi et al. studies. Nardi (2005) was supported by Argyle (1969) in indicating that this vagueness is good. "For touch to wear its semantics on its sleeve and declare a specific intent would hinder the work of connection, as Argyle argued" (p. 122). It is this vagueness that allowed people to connect regularly without worrying about "potentially difficult issues of intimacy or status" (p. 122). With this FtF connection, one must exist on common ground where one must do the work of communicating, which involves showing up, shaking a hand, having a beer—this allows for less work taking people further than they might go if only communicating through CMC. This supports the part of the SIP theory that indicates CMC is time-prohibitive, and directly supports the content of this thesis in terms of tradeshows being a location where FtF communication can be accomplished in a unique way. This was also supported by the survey conducted for this thesis where respondents indicated some of what is accomplished at tradeshows might be able to be accomplished online, but the tradeshow environment allows for expediency.

## **Convergence - Tying the Studies Together**

In their study to try and prove that CMC can prevail over FtF when timing isn't a challenge, Ramirez and Zhang (2007) ultimately conceded that relational communication is likely better when FtF. Looking at the modality switching within the many stages of the study, it did indicate the people who met FtF and then had a relationship online prevailed better than those who met via CMC and then FtF. The Kahai and Cooper (1999) study was similar in that they observed groups that only worked FtF and then only via CMC. There was no modality-switching in the Kahai and Cooper (1999) study, but they both used task-oriented communication to inform their studies. Ramirez and Zhang (2007) used it to explore in which situations the participants would have more affinity towards each other.

Affinity is one of the key points within the Nardi (2005) paper, which also relates to the Lee and Lee (2006) study. Lee and Lee focused solely on online communities with regard to CMC, and set out to discover if a good relationship via CMC lead to greater social capital when FtF. They discovered, as did Nardi et al. (2002), that FtF is necessary to achieve desired outcomes, including the activities that promote social bonding. Nardi (2005) indicated affinity is what happens when people have connected, which can happen through CMC, but ultimately most of the forms of social bonding cannot be done online (touching, eating and drinking, sharing an experience in a common space, and informal conversation). Social capital is resultant of relations with others in a social structure, which each of these authors would agree is bolstered by communication that occurs FtF.

The study within this thesis inquires how individuals communicate (or not) through CMC means both before and after a tradeshow. The question of affinity is raised with regard to how

business people choose vendors—speaking to both the relationship-building and commerce that occurs at tradeshows. No literature has been found which has studied FtF in the context of tradeshows specifically. Nardi's (2005) paper indicated a very close relationship to this thesis topic, including an interviewee who mentioned specifically that he and his industry colleagues attend three conferences per year (tradeshows typically accompany conferences) because drinking beer together makes them better at their jobs. This appears to be because of the conversations that occur over the beers, but this amplifies the point that the social context is much different when FtF than when communicating via CMC.

### **Rationale**

Conventions, conferences, meetings, and tradeshows are held for a variety of reasons. The study of this thesis focuses specifically on the relationship-building and commerce that occurs at tradeshows in particular—where both buyers and sellers have the chance to speak face-to-face (FtF) in social and professional environments to exchange ideas, and discuss the potential of working together.

Daft and Lengel (1984) posited that people prefer to use the “richest” form of communication in order to best understand each other. Within media richness, “a communication technology is determined by (1) its bandwidth or ability to transmit multiple cues, (2) its ability to give immediate feedback, (3) its ability to support the use of natural or conversational language, and (4) its personal focus,” (Lengel et al. 2009, p. 49). This study explores whether those who plan and attend tradeshows do so because of the “richness,” as it relates to this theory.

Meetings mean different things for everyone. First-time meetings, as Berger explained with his uncertainty reduction theory, leave everyone with a level of uncertainty. At the heart of uncertainty reduction theory is the concept that it is normal to have doubts about initial meetings (or “encounters”) with people, but human communication can be used to gain knowledge and understanding about the other person in order to reduce that uncertainty (Griffin, 2009, p. 126). Berger’s focus on this predictability came from Shannon and Weaver’s information theory, in addition to Fritz Heider’s view of people as intuitive psychologists (Griffin, 2009, p. 126).

It is through the opportunity to attend industry meetings such as the National Communication Association’s annual convention where one has the ability to build relationships with fellow students and researchers, explore new companies to work with on the tradeshow floor, and form bonds that can continue on beyond the FtF encounters via CMC. For professionals who work in the tradeshow industry, it is a part of the job to regularly build relationships with people they have never met before. Through the use of CMC, however, that uncertainty can be reduced because it enables professionals to reach out to those people in advance of the tradeshow whom they would like to meet in person. This makes it possible for both parties to get a certain comfort level before being FtF. Berger’s theory is also consistent with Walther’s SIP theory because people will become closer if they end up both liking the image of the other that they have formed (Griffin, 2009, p. 139). One might call that “chemistry.”

“Chemistry” does not only exist within romantic relationships, but within business relationships also. Everyone does not always get along with everyone and two people (or more) who have that chemistry will work well together. It is possible to build rapport with that person through CMC and over the phone, but often times it is not until a FtF meeting that it will be

known for sure whether you will work well together or not. Walther was correct in saying that similar affinities can be accomplished over time through CMC, however, the opportunities for FtF time during a meeting or tradeshow far outweigh the value of using CMC exclusively. Walther (2013) explained that it is the time you have to wait for a response from the other person—up to four times longer than you would if you were FtF—that makes the difference between the two (personal communication, November 23, 2013).

### **Research Questions**

RQ1) In what ways is the relationship-building that occurs FtF at tradeshows a “richer” form of communication versus CMC?

RQ2) Can the commerce that occurs at tradeshows be equally replaced by CMC?

RQ3) Is a mix of CMC and FtF communication, with regard to tradeshows, beneficial to individuals professionally?

## CHAPTER 3: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

### **Scope of the Study**

Neuman (2009) indicated that exploratory and descriptive research blur together in practice (p. 38). From the perspective of this study, the experience of FtF communication in the context of tradeshows is one for which there is no academic research, which warrants using CMC to explore its value. Additionally, descriptive research “presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting, or relationship” (Neuman, 2009, p. 38) – each of these come into view within the FtF environment of tradeshows. Survey research is used to gather information from a large group of people in a relatively short period of time, which makes it ideal for this study (Neuman, 2009, p. 49). Additionally, those surveyed will be located all over the country, so an online format is essential. Information will be culled from the survey, which addresses several different types of professionals (planners, attendees, exhibitors, and executives who control budgets), exploring two different reasons for attending trade shows—the commerce and relationship-building.

Neuman (2009) explained that qualitative research is used to describe that which is social, within its typical context, and it looks at the interpretations or meanings within the setting of what is being studied. The context of FtF, specifically in terms of tradeshows, is the focus of this thesis, so that area of social significance in particular is being studied (p.175). In the case of this research, therefore, qualitatively studying tradeshow attendees from four different angles is an appropriate approach. There are quantitative measurements that can be made to “prove” the value of trade shows from a fiscal impact perspective, but time and budget did not allow for a new study of that type to be done.

An online survey that addresses the relationship-building and commerce that occurs at tradeshow was distributed by e-mail to the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) members (11,000 members), personal messages were sent to individuals through e-mail and the LinkedIn messaging system, the survey link was posted throughout various social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn), and respondents were encouraged to share the survey with their colleagues and industry contacts. The intention was to target individuals who are associated with marketing and live events. The goal was to get input from 200 exhibiting companies, 200 planners or managers of tradeshow, 200 tradeshow attendees at-large, and 100 marketing executives (responsible for tradeshow budgets).

### **Methodology of the Study**

The initial means of research for this study was an online survey. As Rubin, et al. (2010) explained, a survey seeks to uncover attitudes, opinions, and behaviors, whether past or future (p. 218). The survey results describe opinions or behaviors in relation to the research questions posed in this proposal (p. 219). The depth and breadth of the survey for this study covers several different types of meeting participants, ranging from the person who plans the meetings, to the marketing executive who approves the budgets for holding such events. Most of the questions use a Likert scale, with some yes or no questions, and the opportunity to give expanded opinions. The survey questions (see Appendix A) were developed to address the relationship-building and commerce that occurs at tradeshow from the perspectives of the various respondents.

Additionally, personal experience with the subject matter makes communication as autoethnography an additional appropriate method in response to the presented research questions. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) indicated autoethnography is “a form of writing that



unites ethnographic and autobiographical materials, and aims at keeping the author present in the text. Relates the life experiences, viewpoints, and beliefs of the author to the issues studied” (Kindle for iPad, Loc 6497). In Shepherd et al. (2006), Bochner and Ellis indicated through a recorded conversation (translated for the book) how autoethnography personalizes a person’s experience (p. 113). It is through this poetic storytelling that a communicator is able to turn experiences into stories that theorize experience (p. 116). Ellis indicated poignantly, “One of the main uses of autoethnography is to allow another person’s world of experience to inspire reflection on your own” (p. 119).

The combination of online survey, which was distributed to the previously listed organizations via the Web and e-mail, has provided results from a cross-section of people who participate in tradeshow in different ways, along with personal experience having served in each of the roles within the meetings and events industry. The results of these two methods answer the three questions posed in this proposal, highlighting the value of FtF communication within the context of tradeshow.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Just as important as implementing a research method is the collection and analysis of the results. Neuman (2009) suggested that three items must be included in the measurement process: “a construct, a measure, and the ability to recognize what we are looking for” (p. 201). A high-percentage of agreement on one end or the other of the Likert scale (strongly agree or strongly disagree) of the survey questions indicates how the majority of the people surveyed feel about the three different aspects of FtF meetings and how CMC works as a complement to these environments. The survey data was compiled online using Survey Monkey, which has a tool that

provides the ability to create graphs and visual keys with the results. Additionally, “Skip logic” was used. “Skip logic is a feature that changes what question or page a respondent sees next based on how they answer the current question” (“Skip Logic,” 2013). This enabled the respondents to only see the questions intended for them. Each response had the potential of seven points, so the average totals of each answer were combined to understand the total number within each type of question category. For example, each question that relates to a preference of FtF communication versus CMC was totaled and that number is out of the total possible. This illuminates the attitudes of the respondents for the different research questions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study was primarily designed to collect data which demonstrates the value of FtF meetings, so the ethical considerations are few. One of the ethical considerations is “informed consent” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, Kindle for iPad, loc. 1616). Per informed consent, all participants were made aware of the reason for the study, being conducted by a current graduate student and meeting industry veteran, and sought to study the value of tradeshows being held FtF. In addition, the study indicated why the particular pools of people were selected for the survey. By virtue of the fact that the participants took the survey, their participation was voluntary and without coercion, which Neuman (2009) informed is a fundamental ethical principle (p. 149).

The other ethical consideration is the “basic rule of responsibility towards others” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, Kindle for iPad, loc. 1605). Eriksson and Kovalainen explained that accuracy, thoroughness, and integrity throughout the entire process from planning, to

gathering, and presenting the findings are all important to not only those participants of the study, but also to the scientific community at-large.

## CHAPTER 4: THE STUDY

### **Introduction**

There are research studies within business and marketing regarding how companies sell, and included within that scope is the use of tradeshows in business. However, it appears little research has been done to study communication within the context of tradeshows. This thesis includes two methods through which to study communication with regard to tradeshows. A survey was distributed to study the impression of those involved with the tradeshow industry regarding the value of face-to-face and online communication within this context. In addition to the survey, the author of this thesis presents an autoethnographical perspective of her experiences in several roles within tradeshows, and relates that experience back to the survey responses.

The survey was split into two sections—one addressed relationship-building and the other addressed commerce that occurs within tradeshow environments. All respondents took the first section on relationship-building and only the tradeshow exhibitors and marketing executives took the second section on commerce. At the end of the first section, the final question asked which professional category they belonged to, and then Skip logic was used to either go to the next section (commerce) or skip to the final question of whether they had anything additional they wanted to share.

### **Results of the Survey**

The survey was taken by 331 people—58% of whom were women, and 42% were men. The age range was 18-75 (or older) years-of-age, with the 35-54 age groups making up about 66% of the respondents. Various online channels were used to distribute the survey, but almost half of the responses came through the social media channel LinkedIn.com. Through LinkedIn,

the survey was posted within various groups and then personal messages were sent to 400 individuals, requesting their participation in the survey. The International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) agreed to include it in their electronic newsletter with a distribution of 11,000 people, but only four responses were received through that channel. Facebook and “From a friend” rounded out the bulk of the other responses, with 21-23% each.

The majority of the survey used a seven-point Likert scale, using strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree or disagree, somewhat agree, agree, and strongly agree. In addition, there were a few opportunities to give comments, and some yes or no and percentage questions were posed. These responses are included in Appendix A and Appendix B.

RQ1) In what ways is the relationship-building that occurs FtF at tradeshows a “richer” form of communication versus CMC?

The results of the relationship-building portion of the survey indicated the respondents preferred FtF communication at tradeshows versus online, with the 10 questions about FtF preferences receiving 58.66 points out of 70. The questions that asked if respondents preferred CMC or felt that it was an equal or better substitute for FtF received lower scores on the scale. Of the five questions that focused on whether they preferred CMC over FtF, the score was 17.89 out of 35, putting it just above the “Neither agree or disagree” average of four points per response. These results are in line with the media richness theory, indicating that FtF is perceived as the richest form of communication.

In response to the “any additional information you’d like to share” question at the end of the survey, several respondents expanded on what FtF meant to them and their professions. The following is a sampling of those responses.

- Regularly attending relevant tradeshows (at least one or two per year) is very important to staying up to date and in contact with your profession.
- Nothing can take the place of a face-to-face meeting.
- In my experience, face time is the most valuable for networking, even if it is brief. Trade shows are an excellent opportunity to network and meet prospective clients, as well as to learn about current ideas and trends in industry.
- Trade shows and in person meetings increase close rates by 75%.
- The growth in my career is directly due to being at face to face events and has raised my career path to new levels because of tradeshow face to face meeting.
- In my belief, nothing beats a face to face meeting. I am certified in Neuro-Linguistics and like to read people's body language when communicating with them.
- As the world becomes more & more digital or virtual, real face to face human interaction becomes more precious & valuable than ever. Trade Shows are a key avenue for human contact & interaction.

RQ2) Can the commerce that occurs at tradeshows be equally replaced by CMC?

About 49% of the respondents were either exhibitors or marketing executives, and they responded to the Commerce section of the survey. When asked if their organization depends on sales acquired through tradeshows to sustain their business, 62% indicated they did not and 38% indicated they did. Almost the same exact percentage indicated they measure sales conversions from the leads acquired at these shows. Similarly, the company's percentage of revenue that comes from tradeshow sales indicated 63% have 0-19% of their sales that come out of tradeshows. 24% indicated revenue between 20-40% of sales comes from tradeshows. This indicates that these companies (24%) rely on less than half of their revenue coming from these

shows. The disparity here might be between the perception of the exhibitor (often a sales person) working the shows and the reality of what the executive knows to be true. There was an additional question along these lines at the end of the Likert scale section of the survey, which asked if they could accomplish the same level of sales without attending tradeshows. About 22% indicated they somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with that statement. 59% strongly disagreed, disagreed, or somewhat disagreed that they could achieve the same level of sales without FtF tradeshows. Given the strong response to not relying on sales achieved through tradeshows, this percentage of disagreement is surprising.

In response to the “any additional information you’d like to share” question at the end of the survey, 51 exhibitor and executive respondents expanded on how they perceived commerce within their organizations with regard to tradeshows. The following is a sampling of those responses (all of which can be found in Appendix B).

- The only reason we don’t measure conversions is that our systems don’t allow it to be done cleanly. Also, because we are B to B and sell into large accounts that have multiple purchasers within the account, it’s not easy to track the “influencers” vs. the decision makers. It’s a major failing of our organization to not have the systems in process to be able to do this.
- The tradeshows are about networking and also finding out what your competition is doing at the show and presenting. It’s also about meeting other clients and vendors to build a contact for future events.
- Attendance at some Tradeshows is often more for political benefit (supporting the board of the organization) or to avoid being noticed as the “missing” vendor.

- Trade shows are important and useful but not critical. They do accelerate the rate at which we can meet decision makers.
- Often times our primary purpose in attending trade shows is to build more new vendor opportunities and network with existing vendor partners.

RQ3) Is a mix of CMC and FtF communication, with regard to tradeshow, beneficial to individuals professionally?

Two questions were asked with regard to CMC being a sufficient supplement to FtF tradeshow. Together, they scored 11.24 out of 14 points. 85% somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that being able to connect with other attendees online before and after tradeshow enhanced the FtF experience for them. 83% responded they somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that it was beneficial to their professional life to be able to connect with other attendees online before and after a tradeshow.

In response to the “any additional information you’d like to share” question at the end of the survey, here is a sampling of responses that relate back to this question of a mix of CMC and FtF.

- Perfect example of the value of meeting face-to-face... I probably wouldn’t have completed this survey if I hadn’t met you in person. However, the online communication has only facilitated the feeling that I know you a little more than a random person (since you keep people informed about your moves, etc.).
- The increase of on-line networking serves to enhance the face to face connects made. Maintaining both advances a mutually beneficial partnership.



- The majority of my business is done on-line and over the phone but the personal interaction is always a positive benefit of trade shows.
- There is a lot that can be accomplished through webinars, video calling, phone calls, etc. But NOTHING replaces face to face interactions and relationship building! Tradeshow have been an essential part of my professional life.
- Social media engagement around exhibitors and their news has been really effective to send out before a show starts to better educate people.
- I like to see and get to know how someone treats OTHER people when I am around them to see what they are like, especially those the person I am potentially doing business with who they aren't trying to sell anything to, or those they have authority over. It tells me more about a person to see how they treat people they think they don't have to treat well. That is more than I can find out online. The optimal situation is a blend between the face to face meeting and additional re-enforcement online as well.

When asked what other sales channels companies use to drive revenue, respondents were able to select each answer that applied to them; about 68% indicated online/e-commerce, 56% indicated cold-calling, and 62% selected other. If "other" was selected, respondents had the option in the next question to be specific about what those channels were. The following is a sampling of the most commonly mentioned channels from the list of 88 responses (detailed in Appendix B).

- Sales and account management (19 indicated this)
- Events / Face-to-Face meetings (non-tradeshow) (18 indicated this)
- Referrals (14 indicated this)

- Advertising (8 indicated this)
- Partner agreements (7 indicated this)
- Direct mail / postal mailings, brochures / snail mail (7 indicated this)
- Social media and content marketing (3 indicated this)

## **Discussion**

The results of the two parts of the survey were somewhat counter to each other. More than 68% of respondents disagreed that they could learn just as much from meeting with people online as they could FtF. If given the choice between attending a meeting online versus FtF, 91% selected somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree that they would prefer FtF. Overall, the respondents felt the FtF relationship-building that occurs at tradeshow cannot be replaced by online communication. In the commerce part of the survey, the results skewed towards the actual sales that come from a tradeshow as not being that significant to their bottom-line.

The short answers to the final survey question served to support the thoughts and feelings behind the survey answers. The respondent who indicated, “Trade shows are important and useful but not critical. They do accelerate the rate at which we can meet decision makers,” is in agreement with Walther that everything done at a tradeshow can be accomplished online, but not in a way that is financially preferable (personal communication, November 23, 2013). Additionally, 91% of respondents selected somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree to the question of whether tradeshow are an efficient way to meet with potential vendors, prospects, partners, or clients.

This brings about the question of what is being accomplished with relationship-building. Many of the respondents indicated nothing can replace the FtF encounters. It is possible the

difference here is between the buyers and sellers. Sales people tend to be more fearless and will go about their business through any avenue that is available to them (under the influence of having to meet fiscal goals). Buyers, however, want to work with people they trust and that trust is established or confirmed through FtF encounters, as one respondent indicated – “There's just nothing like seeing the person you are working with, meeting for the first time, or considering a business/friendship relationship.” This was further indicated by the responses to the question indicating they are more likely to trust someone they have met in person, which 93% indicated they somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with. Another respondent included the following in a reply, with regard to trust: “I also believe that others are more willing to trust me more quickly when they have met me in person. Online takes longer to develop ease of relationship.” One respondent (a tradeshow attendee), who somewhat disagreed with the trust question in the survey, countered the other perspectives with the following, “Meeting face to face does not increase trust - it increases confidence in the impression a person has of the new contact.”

As the autoethnography method indicates in the next section, relationship-building within tradeshow and other FtF meeting environments was crucial to her professionally on several levels, including successful sales efforts. Some of the survey respondents’ perspectives were echoed in her personal experiences within each professional category surveyed.

### **Autoethnography – the Author’s Experience**

Given my personal experience having served in different roles within the context of tradeshows, using autoethnography as a method for research is appropriate. According to Marechal (2010), “Autoethnography is a form or method of research that involves self-

observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing,” (p. 43). This culture of tradeshow is something I have been a part of in one form or another since 1999. The survey presented in this thesis was taken by four categories of professionals: marketing executives, tradeshow exhibitors, show planners or managers, and attendees—each role I have held in my career. This autoethnography will explore each of those different roles, while showing a reflective analysis of how it relates to the thesis overall.

**Marketing executive.** While serving as the marketing communications manager for a software company in 1999, part of my role was to manage the budget and logistics for the most important tradeshow the company attended each year. Our software was integrated within a much larger, enterprise-wide software system and this tradeshow was put on by the company that produced that system. Each of the attendees already had the enterprise-system and it was our hope to get them to purchase our software module that fit within the system they already used. About 55% of the total marketing budget for the year was spent on this one show, so the expectations were high for sales as a result of our efforts there.

My boss indicated they had not done a good job in the past of following up on leads, so I approached the project with that in mind. The layout of the booth was created to maximize the traffic, we rented a lead-gathering system in which we could include notes for each individual who came through, giveaways were only given to people who let us scan their badge (for lead retrieval), and intense follow-up was carried out after the show. Because of the cost of our software system and the long sales cycle, it would only take one-to-two sales for this show to have been “worth it,” but it could have been months before we knew if a sale came out of this tradeshow. We left the show with more leads and detailed information on the leads than they had in the past. Within the first two months we had three large sales from contacts made at the

tradeshow, and at that time there were at least six others that were still considered “hot,” with expectations to close those deals also. It’s impossible to know for sure whether they would have bought from us, were it not for meeting these prospects face-to-face at the tradeshow, but we do know it happened more quickly because they had not been in our pipeline prior to the show.

**Tradeshow exhibitor.** While working as a marketing executive, I was also an exhibitor, and I have served in an exhibitor role several times since. The tradeshow where I made the most contacts and a great impact for my company was held in San Diego in 2008. I was working in sales for an audio-visual company at the time. Our ideal clients were associations and companies that held conferences, conventions, and tradeshows and were in need of audio-visual production within these environments. This particular tradeshow was being held for association executives—the decision-makers within associations (each of which hold an annual meeting or convention). I made connections at our tradeshow booth, but the best results came within the social environments after the show floor was closed.

Downtown San Diego is walkable and most of the attendees’ hotels, restaurants, and nightlife were within a square mile of the convention center—an area called the Gaslamp Quarter. The organization threw parties for networking purposes each night, and everyone would then head into Gaslamp Quarter afterward. It was within these social environments that I built the most significant relationships as an exhibitor. People like to do business with people they like and trust, and it was through this show that I realized I was a relationship-sales person. It was because of this show that I got the opportunity to bid on six different projects—and only two of them were a result of someone coming to the booth during tradeshow hours. However, it was because I was there, present, and actively communicating with attendees in all of the environments provided that I was successful.

**Tradeshow planner or manager.** As a vendor-partner for one of the largest business travel associations, my company provided audio-visual equipment for exhibitors on the show floor. While we were hired to provide equipment and labor for all of the breakout education sessions, serving the exhibitors needs was also within our purview, and accounted for 40% of the revenue my company collected for the entire show. My company served in this capacity for each of my clients because a tradeshow often accompanies conferences or conventions where education is provided and, therefore, audio-visual equipment is needed.

The largest show in terms of volume that I provided these audio-visual services for was one of the largest technology users' conferences held in the United States. It was a show I was told was "impossible to get a chance at" because it was so difficult to "get to" the show managers. However, all it took to get the *opportunity* was sitting with this client at the final luncheon of a conference we were all attending, having been introduced to them by another industry friend. It did take more than that to win the business, but this reinforces the point of how important face-to-face communication is—I would not have had the opportunity if not for that encounter. Throughout that luncheon we developed a rapport, and when it came time for them to send out their request for proposal (RFP), they included me. Knowing how valuable face-time would be at this conference I arranged for many of these meetings in advance, including this lunch, with industry friends who offered to connect me to others. That is not to say every encounter at the show was this successful, but it is because I prepared and used tools available to me that I was able to maximize the opportunities.

**Attendee.** Over the past eight years I have attended about 40 conferences and conventions, most of which included a tradeshow component. Many of these shows I attended as a sales person, to meet prospects and build relationships with fellow industry people.

However, for many of them over the last three years I have been there as an attendee who was in search of education, relationship-building (networking), and as a potential buyer on the tradeshow floor, in search of new software products or a PhD program.

I attended the National Communication Association (NCA) annual convention in November of 2013 as a student in search of education, relationship-building, job prospects, and PhD program information. Because of attending that conference I had the opportunity to meet other online Gonzaga students face-to-face, in addition to a professor I had never met in person. I attended the presentation of a paper given by two of my fellow classmates, which would not have otherwise been possible (there was no online option), supporting them, and being inspired by them. After attending a pre-conference session, I walked out chatting with one of my table-mates, and we decided to grab a drink in the bar. Over that drink, he introduced me to his boss—the Dean of the Department of Communication for a community college—who is now a potential employer. That succession of events would not have occurred in that way if I had not been present and face-to-face with them at this conference.

The best result of attending this conference face-to-face came in the form of ideas and conversations I had with communication scholars and students throughout the week. The most notable of those people was theorist and communication professor, Dr. Joseph B. Walther. I saw there was a paper being presented, which he had contributed to, so I went to that session. After the session was over, I introduced myself, explained the idea of my thesis (I had not started the proposal process yet), that I intended to use his social information processing theory, and asked if I could buy him coffee to talk through it before the conference was over. He agreed and what resulted from this meeting the following morning was not surprising, but very interesting. He stands firm that “anything that is done face-to-face can be accomplished in the online

environment—it just takes longer” (personal communication, November 23, 2013). The conversation could be compared to a ping-pong match—quite a bit of back-and-forth. His repeated question throughout was “Why?” and, ultimately, my answer to the question “why can’t you accomplish the same relationship-building online as you can face-to-face?” was “I’m not sure, and that’s why I think it should be studied.”

Dr. Walther conceded it could be looked at as a financial question—how much money can companies save by communicating face-to-face, and accomplishing more in a shorter period of time? My final question to him, as he left 25-minutes late to his next appointment, was “So, why are you here?” His response was “Because it’s easier.” I do agree with him that meeting face-to-face at a tradeshow or conference is easier, as well as much more enjoyable. As a follow-up to that conversation, I sent him an email to thank him, and let him know I would be quoting him in my thesis. Several months later I have not received a response to that email. The tricky thing is I do not know if he received it, which is part of the problem with relying on technology for all of our communication. This also supports the point of this thesis, and my personal experiences, that CMC is a proper complement to face-to-face communication, but not a replacement.

**Summary.** With each of the above examples, the fact that they occurred face-to-face is the consistent theme. It should be indicated, however, that CMC also played a role. While working in sales and as an attendee and an exhibitor, I always looked at who was going to be attending, and created my “wish list” of who I hoped to see and get time with. In many cases I reached out to them in advance of the show, indicating I hoped we had the chance to meet in person, and often times planned meetings with them during the show. More often than not, having communicated with them online first helped to ease the pressure of that first encounter—



our uncertainty was reduced. I also then used CMC to follow-up with them afterwards. I would connect with them on LinkedIn, and then keep in touch periodically through email, always letting them know I was still out there, without being a “pushy” sales person.

When selling audio-visual production services, my boss realized quickly that this face-to-face environment is where I thrived. I realize not everyone is this way, but it was that relationship-building I did face-to-face, in addition to all of the pre-work and follow-up that truly made me successful. I was drawn to Charles Berger’s uncertainty reduction theory when I first read about it because it reinforced what I was doing—I was reaching out to people I wanted to meet at these tradeshow and meetings, therefore reducing the uncertainty I would feel once on-site. I also researched the individuals and their shows in an effort to make our first encounter more personable. When interviewing for another job later on, the interviewers were fascinated at the success I had in such a short period of time using this method of selling. Their employees did not work this way, but I knew many of them could be coached to do so. A couple of the survey respondents echoed the need for preparation before a tradeshow—to just show up would limit the potential for success.

Ultimately, 80% of the RFPs I received while working in sales came from these face-to-face encounters at tradeshow and other conference environments. 90% of my sales came from those encounters, which accounted for \$2.25 million of the \$2.5 million I had in sales my last year in that role. As the media richness theory informs, FtF is the richest form of communication and tradeshow are an environment in which that richness flourishes. Like Dr. Walther said, it “was easier,” and I believe the majority of people want to go about business and communication in a way that is “easier.” This method of selling might not be for everyone, just as telemarketing is not right for every sales person. However, it is the relationship-building that occurs in these

tradeshow environments that fosters professional relationships and future potential sales. It might have taken two years to get an opportunity to bid on someone's business, but the fact that I maintained these relationships both online and FtF showed how important those relationships were.

### **Summary Discussion**

The survey was intended to uncover attitudes about communication within the context of tradeshow environments in a variety of professional contexts. The results were not overwhelmingly in favor of FtF being the only way in which to accomplish relationship-building and commerce, but the same feelings and responses cannot be accomplished exclusively online. It also strongly indicated that CMC is a good supplement to FtF encounters. The commerce that occurs within tradeshow appears to be less of a factor than the actual face-time that is accomplished within these environments.

The autoethnography provided detailed examples of how FtF business experiences have positively influenced the researcher's career through several different professional roles. Survey respondents echoed several of the points made, including the short answer provided by a planner who shared, "The growth in my career is directly due to being at face to face events and has raised my career path to new levels because of tradeshow face to face meeting." An exhibitor respondent had a suggestion similar to what the researcher did when working in sales:

Trade show attendance needs to be well thought through before the show. Meetings need to be planned for and participants need to be prepped for each meeting. Do not let your company waste time, money and opportunity by going to a Tradeshow unprepared. Showing hardware is secondary.

It was because the researcher was prepared and motivated to maximize her time in the FtF encounters that she was so successful and this is an opportunity that is afforded every individual in the meetings industry—regardless of the position they hold. It is equally important for a buyer to do pre-work before a show to maximize the time on the floor; this sentiment was also expressed by the survey results. It is efficient if approached properly.

The survey and the autoethnography both served to provide support for the media richness theory. The majority of the survey respondents and the researcher each have had positive professional experiences because of the “rich” form of communication that being FtF affords. Further research opportunities have also been uncovered with regard to shifts in tradeshow environments, and with regard to the actual commerce that occurs.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are a few limitations that were discovered with this study. Of interest to include within this thesis was the positive economic impact tradeshows have on the country's economy. However, time and space limitations prevented that from being possible. Initially, the study was about relationship-building and commerce within the context of the umbrella of "meetings," which would have included conferences, conventions, seminars, meetings, and tradeshows, but time and space limitations also prevented this, so the scope was narrowed to tradeshows.

**Commerce.** It appears the questioning worked out well with regard to relationship-building and how CMC plays a role as a good complement to FtF tradeshow participation. There seemed to be a difference, however, between what exhibitors believed to be true and what executives indicated is the reality in terms of the commerce. Four different surveys distributed to each category might have helped to hone in more closely on exact attitudes with regard to commerce and expectations.

**Participation.** The associations most involved with the tradeshow industry are very interested in the results of the study, but they were not willing to distribute the survey to their members for participation. The top reason cited was because they get countless requests to survey their members, and they do not want to "fatigue" their membership. As a result, they have made it a policy to not allow other groups or individuals to survey their membership.

An exhibition industry association agreed to include the survey in their bi-weekly electronic newsletter, along with an introduction regarding the background of the study. With 11,000 individuals receiving the newsletter and study information, the anticipation was at least

200 people would respond, but only four did—less than one half of one percent. Additionally, a very large tradeshow, IMEX, that has had great success since bringing their show to America a few years ago, agreed to host a blog post on their Web site—the post explained the study and included a link to the survey. However, the woman who agreed to this was ill for several days and did not get it posted in time, so that avenue was closed. As a result, there were fewer than 50% of the responses that were hoped for at the onset of this thesis. A good sampling was still acquired, but more responses were preferred.

**Category Restrictions.** Respondents to the survey were required to select which professional category with which they were most associated. Several respondents indicated they felt “limited” by only being able to select one category, as indicated by this comment:

For the category that I fall into, I wish I had the option of clicking multiple buttons. I am all of them. We are a small company of 70 employees that generates a large amount of sales and revenue. I am a one person show when it comes to all aspects of Marketing.

Because the respondents were asked an additional set of questions about commerce if they were in the exhibitor or executive category, this was felt to be necessary. The study might have benefited from all respondents being asked about some elements of the commerce that occurs at tradeshow.

In response to the survey question that asked if they had anything else to share, one person shared the following, “Additionally you could have asked if you have reduced the number of tradeshow you attend or participate in and by how many. Does your company send fewer people.” These questions seemed out of the scope of this particular study, but could be included in further study recommendations.

## Recommendations for Further Study

There are some associations within the meetings and events space that have moved towards a “hosted buyer” environment as either a replacement for the traditional tradeshow, or as a way to manage their tradeshows. There are two key elements to this setup. Those buyers who want to attend a tradeshow are able to do so without sparing any expense, and in return, they have to agree to attend a set amount of scheduled meetings each day of the show. The cost is often higher to the supplier who is paying the hosting expenses, but with a greater chance of meeting with the right buyers, suppliers are very interested in this setup. Sometimes, as is the case with IMEX, they still have a traditional tradeshow floor setup, with each company having to also purchase booth space and the meetings are held there. The intention is that the suppliers know they have guaranteed meetings arranged with targeted buyers, and the buyers do not have to roam the tradeshow floor, potentially getting caught-up with vendors with whom they have no intention of working. The efficacy of this method of executing a tradeshow, and the communication that occurs within this context should be studied. One respondent to this study mentioned hosted buyer in the following statement:

It will be interesting to learn how people feel...and it would be interesting since so many trade shows in the meetings industry are going to hosted buyer if that has any impact if anyone says. Hosted buyer is a totally different dynamic w/o a 'show floor' often.

Personal interviews or a field study at a show that uses the hosted buyer method would be an interesting way to uncover whether this is a more effective method than the traditional approach. Attendees who are not “hosted” at these types of hosted buyer shows notice it is more difficult to have social conversations with both the buyers and the exhibitors on the tradeshow

floor. Having so many scheduled appointments appears to be a challenging feat, but seems to potentially be more effective in terms of maximizing the time spent for the participants. There are also networking opportunities both on the show floor “after hours” and in the evenings, so those opportunities are also there for additional relationship-building with industry friends and associates over the course of the shows.

Additionally, further study regarding whether organizations have reduced the number of tradeshows, and/or, how many people they send, would also be beneficial. To take that a step further, including within that scope whether this has had an effect on their sales would also be interesting to investigate. Including individuals within that study who attend both traditional and “hosted” shows—from both the buyer and exhibitor perspective—would be especially valuable in uncovering the value proposition of the hosted buyer programs.

## **Conclusions**

Face-to-face communication is an essential part of daily life. When introduced into the conversation of professional life, it takes on a new dimension. And as CMC continues to grow and evolve, so will the use of it. How communication takes place within the context of tradeshows has also evolved, but one thing remains important to those involved with them—face-to-face remains the most effective and efficient mode of communication within these environments. CMC then serves as a supplement to developing and fostering relationships for the professionals who were surveyed.

Commerce is at the heart of why tradeshows are held—companies display products and services and sales people are on-hand to demonstrate and speak with prospects. Despite this, a high-percentage of the survey respondents indicated they do not rely on the commerce at

tradeshows to reach their sales goals. While direct revenue to the bottom-line might not be significant, the visibility and marketing that accompany tradeshow attendance are still key reasons companies attend, in addition to the relationship-building. Relationship-building would seem to be a means to an end, so it is possible there should have been some additional questions included with regard to *why* the relationship-building is important. Is it so they can become friends, or sell to them later, or ask them for a job?

As the autoethnography demonstrated, face-to-face communication and developing relationships in these environments led to increased sales, which led to an improved career, but it also fulfilled her personally. Returning to the shows and seeing and spending time with the same people met previously made the tradeshow experience that much more fulfilling. While these relationships are also nurtured in online environments between shows or networking events, it is the affinity that is created and developed face-to-face that remains at the core of successful communication. The tradeshow, and meetings industry in general, would be well-served by more academic research being conducted to explore different facets of successful communication within these environments. If the economic impact to the country could also be tied-in, that would be of even greater interest and benefit to the industry at-large.



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## Appendix A

This survey is being taken by the following categories of professionals. We understand you might fall into more than one category, but please select the category you consider to be your primary role in terms of tradeshows. The demographic information collected is anecdotal, and is not believed to have an influence over the responses.

- A. Tradeshow Exhibitor (supplier or vendor with a product to sell)
- B. Tradeshow Attendee (buyer, potential buyer, or observer)
- C. Meeting/Show Planner (logistical responsibility for any or all parts of the show)
- D. Marketing Professional (executive-level, responsible for budgets)

Please complete the entire questionnaire, which is intended to bring to light the experiences of both computer mediated communication (CMC) and face-to-face (FtF), communication within the context of tradeshows. Your participation is voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential. Only your title or group category (as listed above) will be tied to your answers—rest assure that neither your name, nor your organization will be associated with the findings. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to, and are free to stop taking the survey at any time.

Please read each question carefully and rate your level of agreement with each statement by selecting the number that most closely represents your opinion or experience.

For attendees and planners, this survey should take 5-minutes to complete. For exhibitors and executives, this survey should take 8-10 minutes to complete.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Date:

Geographic Location:

Professional Category (from the list above):

Participant's Age:

Participant's Sex (Male or Female):

## **SURVEY**

### **RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING (all respondents)**

Using the following scale, indicate which of the following most closely relates to the statements below.

#### **Level of Agreement**

1 – Strongly disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Somewhat disagree

4 – Neither agree or disagree

5 – Somewhat agree

6 – Agree

7 – Strongly agree

- I appreciate the ability to connect with other attendees online before and after a tradeshow.
- Being able to connect with other attendees online before and after a tradeshow enhances the in-person experience for me.

- I attend tradeshow because of the networking that occurs on the tradeshow floor.
- I attend tradeshow because of the networking that occurs in social settings outside of the tradeshow floor.
- I attend tradeshow because it is an efficient way to meet with potential vendors, prospects, partners, or clients.
- I attend tradeshow as a required part of my job.
- Making potential business contacts (people whom I might buy from or sell to) at tradeshow is an efficient use of my time for the amount of money spent.
- I have conducted business with at least one person because of meeting them FtF at a tradeshow (either buyer or seller).
- I have at least one friend because of meeting them FtF at a tradeshow.
- Meeting someone in person is important to me if I'm going to do business with him or her.
- I'm more likely to trust someone I have met in person.
- I have made a large purchasing / contract decision with a vendor whom I have never met in person.
- I'm comfortable doing business exclusively online and over the phone.
- If given the choice of attending a meeting online, vs. FtF, I would prefer to attend FtF.
- I am able to learn just as much from meeting with people online as I am through FtF encounters.
- The connections I make with industry contacts in online environments are just as good as those I make at FtF meetings.

- My employer believes communicating with partners, clients, and prospects online is a better use of time and money than doing so in person.

**COMMERCE (for marketing executives & tradeshow exhibitors only)**

- Does your organization depend on sales acquired through tradeshow to sustain your business?

Yes  No

- Do you measure sales conversions from leads acquired at the shows you attend?

Yes  No

- The percentage of your organization's revenue that comes from tradeshow sales is:

0-19%  20-40%  41-60%  61-80%  81-100%

- What other channels do you use to drive revenue for your organization?

Cold calling  Online/E-commerce  Other

If other, please indicate what: \_\_\_\_\_

- If you were told upon arriving on the show floor of your "biggest" show that it was the last tradeshow your organization would ever attend, would you do anything differently?

Yes  No

- If you answered yes, please indicate what you would do:

\_\_\_\_\_

(Fill in the blank - anecdotal information, which may show significance)

**Level of Agreement**

1 – Strongly disagree



2 – Disagree

3 – Somewhat disagree

4 – Neither agree or disagree

5 – Somewhat agree

6 – Agree

7 – Strongly agree

- My team prepares for tradeshow in advance, such as performing research regarding who will be in attendance, set up meetings in advance, etc.
- We measure success of tradeshow based on the *potential* of conversions (lead count when leaving the show).
- We are methodical in how we follow-up with leads after the tradeshow we attend.
- We measure success of tradeshow by how many leads we convert into sales.
- We do a profit/loss analysis of the expenses of the show against sales conversions.
- We select which tradeshow we are going to exhibit at based on who will be in attendance (potential buyers, clients, partners).
- We select which tradeshow we are going to exhibit at based on past successes.
- We could accomplish the same level of sales without attending tradeshow.

Thank you for your participation in this survey! The results of the survey, and accompanying thesis, will be available in the June-July timeframe.

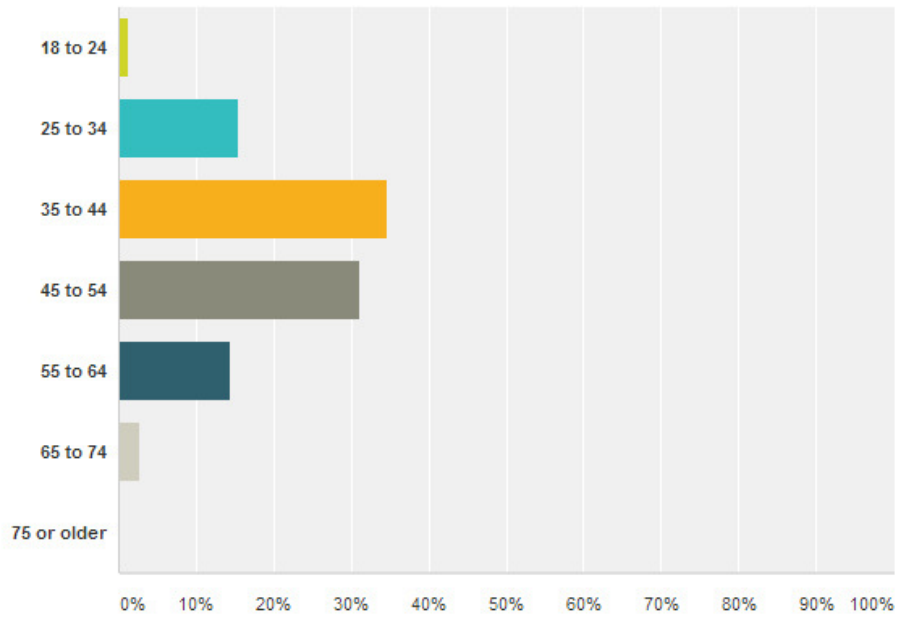
## Responses

Relationship-Building (all respondents)

Q1

### What is your age?

Answered: 331 Skipped: 0

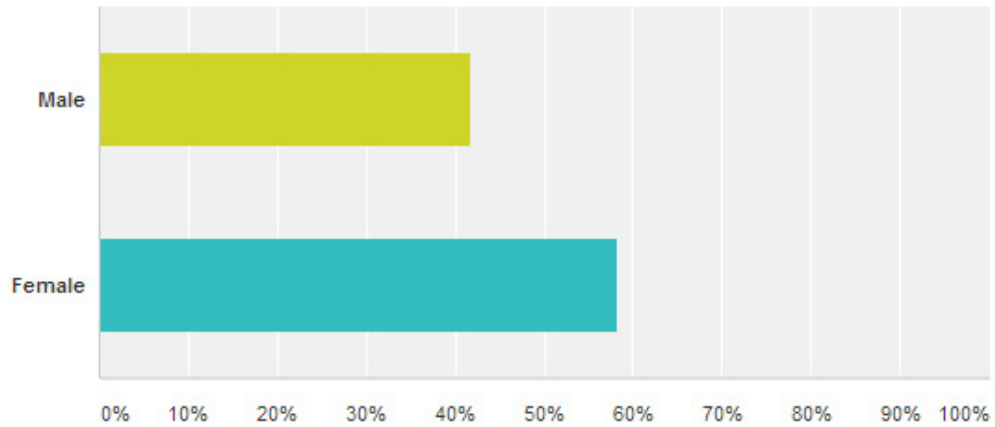


Answer Choices	Responses
18 to 24	1.21% 4
25 to 34	15.41% 51
35 to 44	34.74% 115
45 to 54	31.12% 103
55 to 64	14.50% 48
65 to 74	2.72% 9
75 or older	0.30% 1
<b>Total</b>	<b>331</b>

Q2

## Are you male or female?

Answered: 331 Skipped: 0



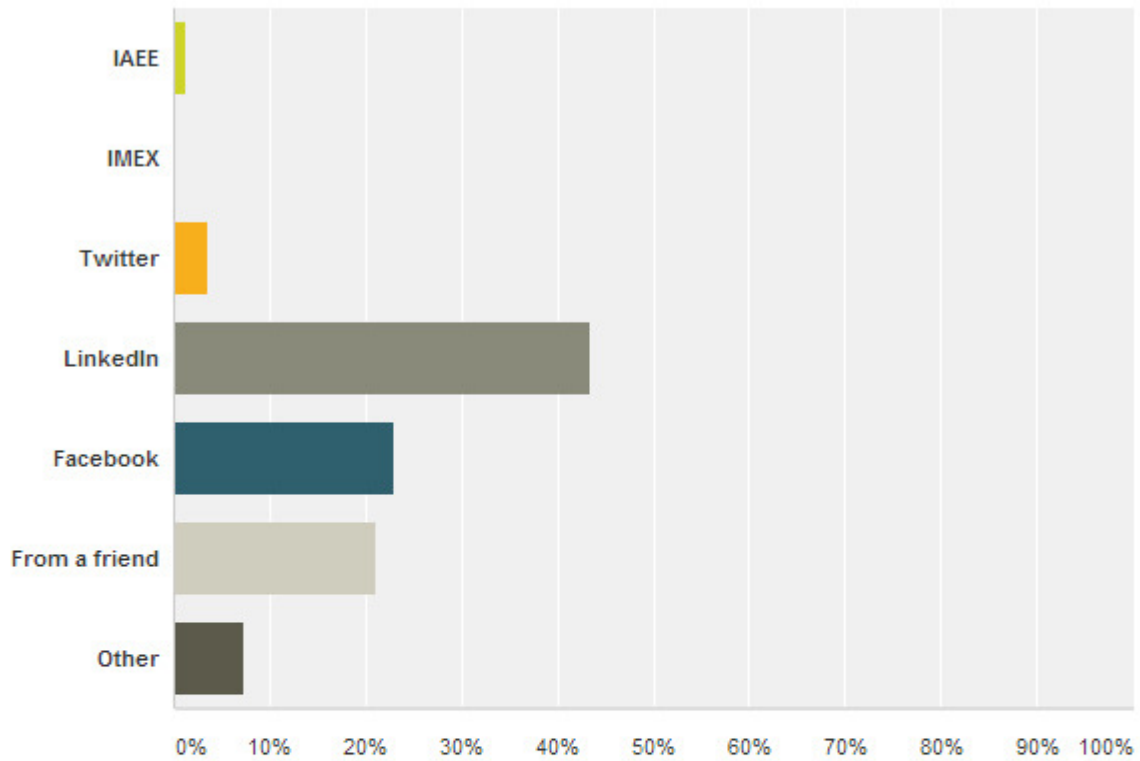
Answer Choices	Responses
Male	41.69% 138
Female	58.31% 193
Total	331

Q3 Geography Question; did not collect properly.

Q4

## How did you receive access to this survey?

Answered: 331 Skipped: 0

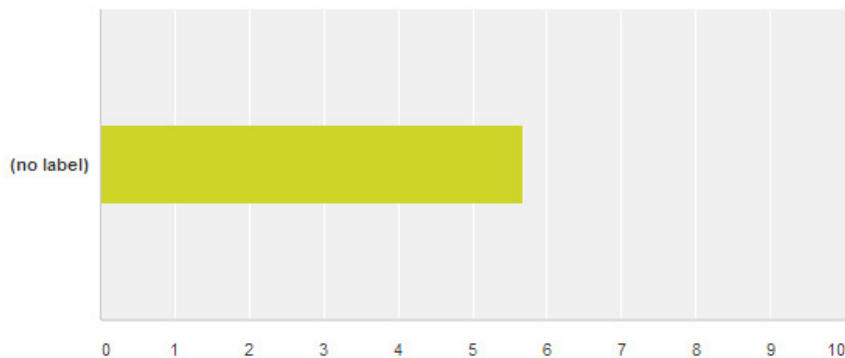


Answer Choices	Responses
IAEE	1.21% 4
IMEX	0.30% 1
Twitter	3.63% 12
LinkedIn	43.50% 144
Facebook	22.96% 76
From a friend	21.15% 70
Other	7.25% 24

Q5

**Being able to connect with other attendees online before and after a tradeshow enhances the in-person experience for me.**

Answered: 309 Skipped: 22

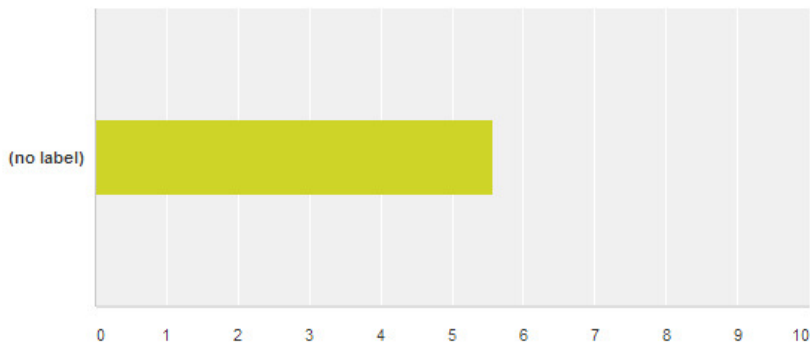


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	1.62% 5	1.62% 5	1.29% 4	10.03% 31	22.33% 69	34.95% 108	28.16% 87	309	5.67

Q6

**I attend tradeshows because of the networking that occurs in social settings outside of the tradeshow floor.**

Answered: 307 Skipped: 24

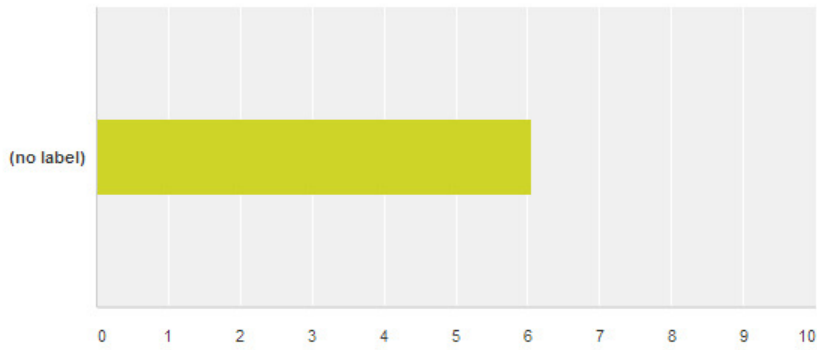


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	1.63% 5	2.28% 7	4.23% 13	8.79% 27	18.57% 57	41.37% 127	23.13% 71	307	5.57

Q7

I attend tradeshow because it is an efficient way to meet with potential vendors, prospects, partners, or clients.

Answered: 308 Skipped: 23

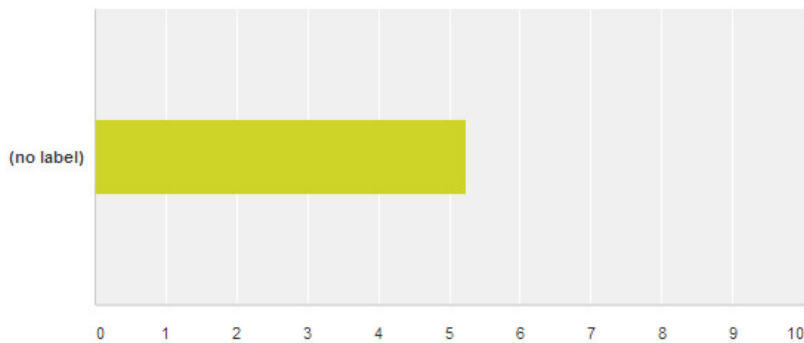


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	1.30% 4	1.30% 4	1.95% 6	4.22% 13	9.09% 28	42.21% 130	39.94% 123	308	6.05

Q8

I attend tradeshow as a required part of my job.

Answered: 307 Skipped: 24

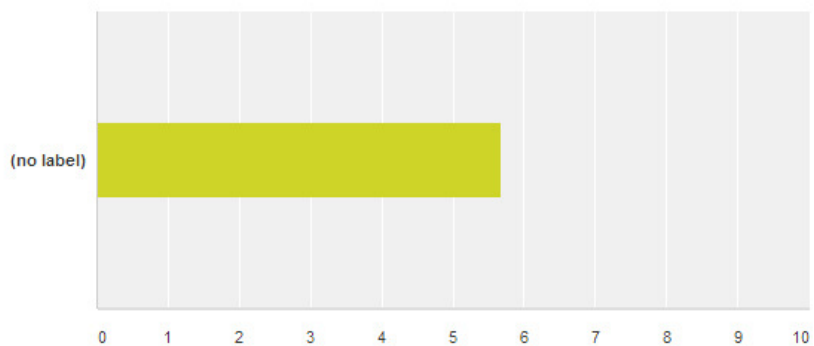


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	2.93% 9	5.86% 18	1.63% 5	19.22% 59	18.24% 56	28.66% 88	23.45% 72	307	5.24

Q9

**Making potential business contacts (people whom I might buy from or sell to) at tradeshows is an efficient use of my time for the amount of money spent.**

Answered: 307 Skipped: 24

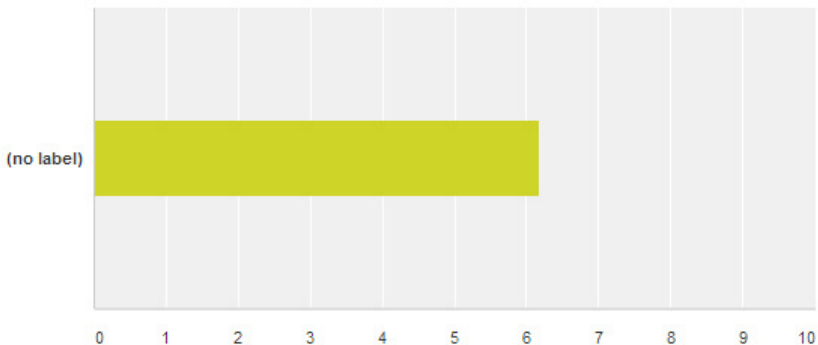


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	0.98% 3	0.98% 3	3.58% 11	7.82% 24	20.85% 64	42.35% 130	23.45% 72	307	5.67

Q10

**I have conducted business with at least one person because of meeting them face-to-face at a tradeshow (either buyer or seller).**

Answered: 308 Skipped: 23

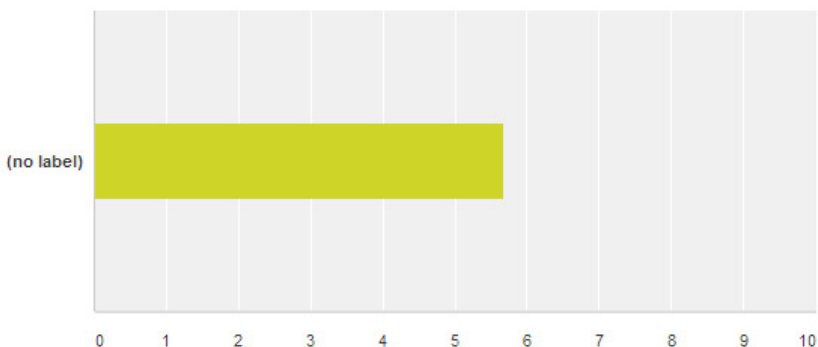


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	1.95% 6	0.32% 1	0.97% 3	4.55% 14	8.44% 26	34.74% 107	49.03% 151	308	6.18

Q11

**I have at least one friend because of meeting them face-to-face at a tradeshow.**

Answered: 308 Skipped: 23



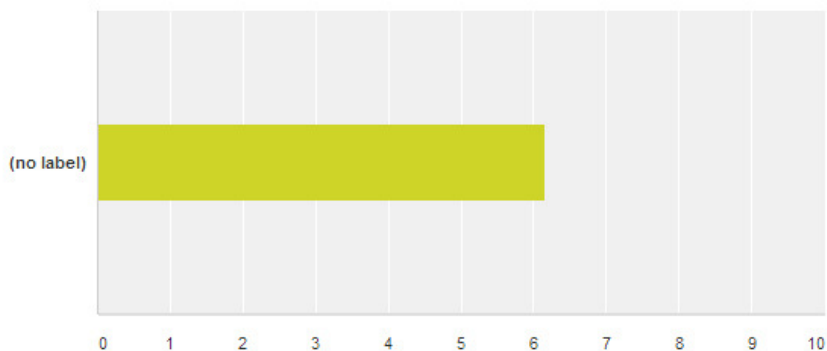
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	4.55% 14	4.87% 15	1.95% 6	8.77% 27	8.44% 26	30.84% 95	40.58% 125	308	5.67



Q12

**Meeting someone in person is important to me if I'm going to do business with him or her.**

Answered: 307 Skipped: 24

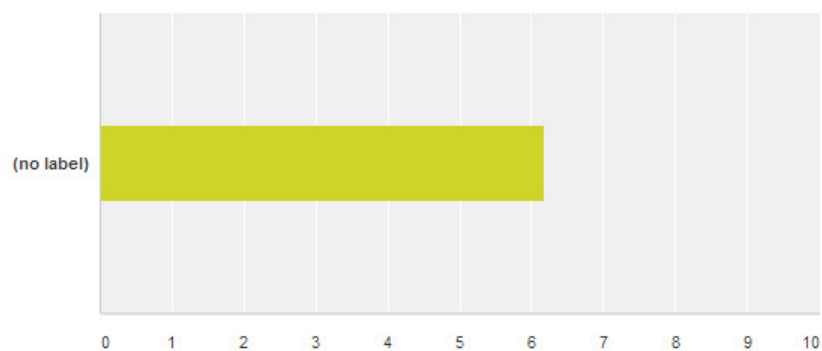


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	0.33% 1	0.98% 3	1.30% 4	4.23% 13	14.66% 45	31.27% 96	47.23% 145	307	6.15

Q13

**I'm more likely to trust someone I have met in person.**

Answered: 308 Skipped: 23

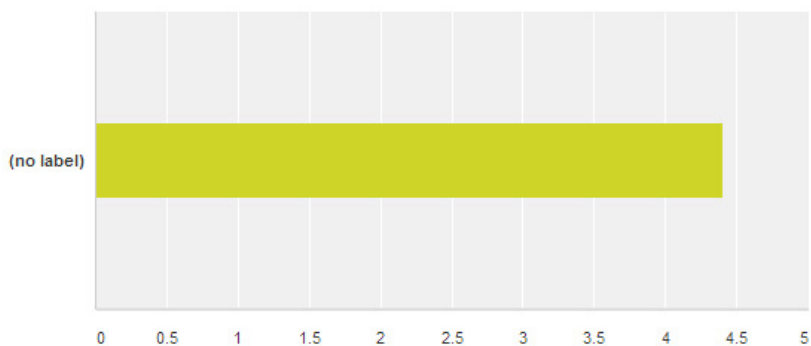


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	0.32% 1	0.00% 0	1.62% 5	5.19% 16	12.66% 39	34.09% 105	46.10% 142	308	6.17

Q14

**I have made a large purchasing / contract decision with a vendor whom I have never met in person.**

Answered: 308 Skipped: 23

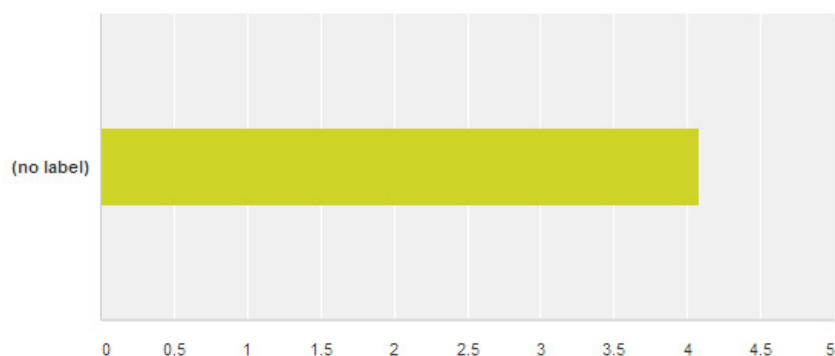


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	9.09% 28	19.81% 61	6.17% 19	9.42% 29	12.66% 39	26.95% 83	15.91% 49	308	4.41

Q15

**I'm comfortable doing business exclusively online and over the phone.**

Answered: 307 Skipped: 24

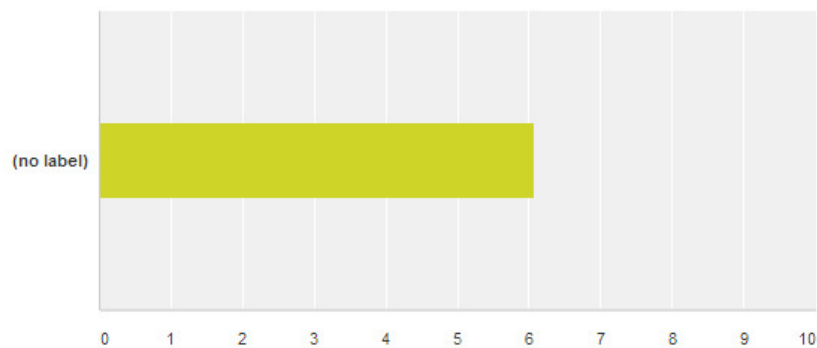


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	6.84% 21	14.66% 45	20.20% 62	7.82% 24	28.34% 87	16.94% 52	5.21% 16	307	4.08

Q16

If given the choice of attending a meeting online, vs. face-to-face, I would prefer to attend face-to-face.

Answered: 308 Skipped: 23

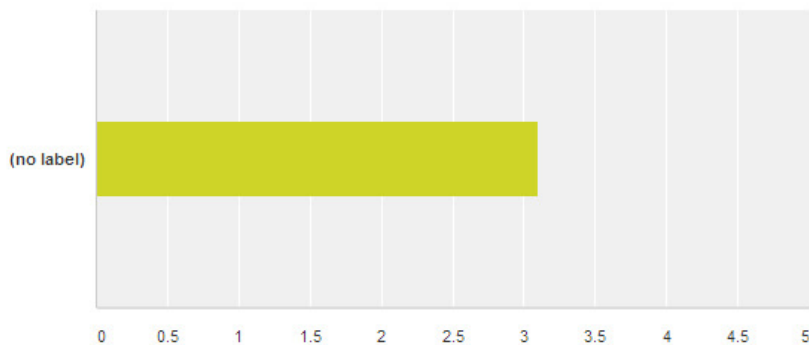


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	0.32% 1	0.00% 0	2.92% 9	5.84% 18	11.04% 34	39.29% 121	40.58% 125	308	6.07

Q17

I am able to learn just as much from meeting with people online as I am through face-to-face encounters.

Answered: 308 Skipped: 23

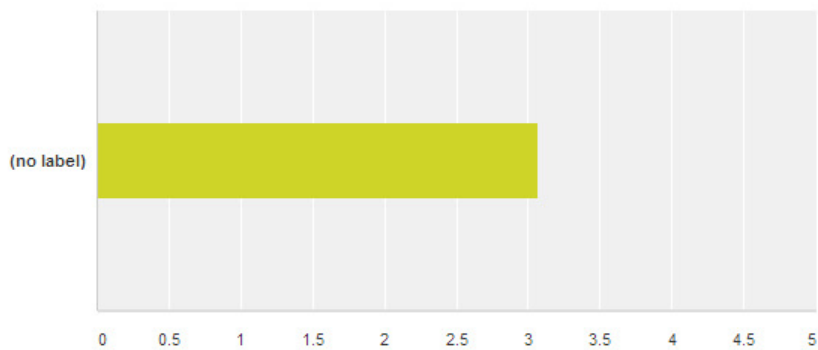


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	11.69% 36	26.62% 82	29.22% 90	9.74% 30	17.86% 55	4.55% 14	0.32% 1	308	3.10

Q18

**The connections I make with industry contacts in online environments are just as good as those I make at face-to-face meetings.**

Answered: 307 Skipped: 24

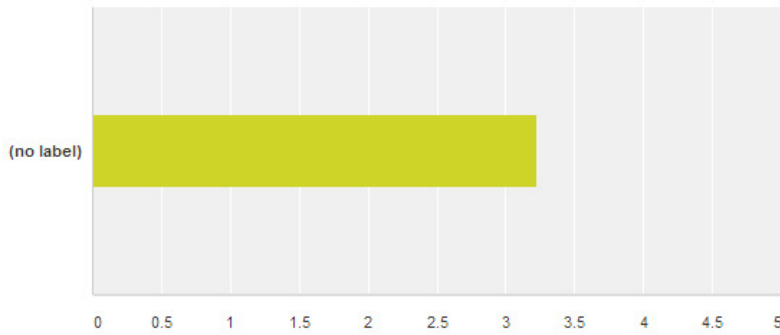


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	8.79% 27	31.60% 97	28.99% 89	11.40% 35	13.68% 42	4.56% 14	0.98% 3	307	3.07

Q19

**My employer believes communicating with partners, clients, and prospects online is a better use of time and money than doing so in person.**

Answered: 306 Skipped: 25

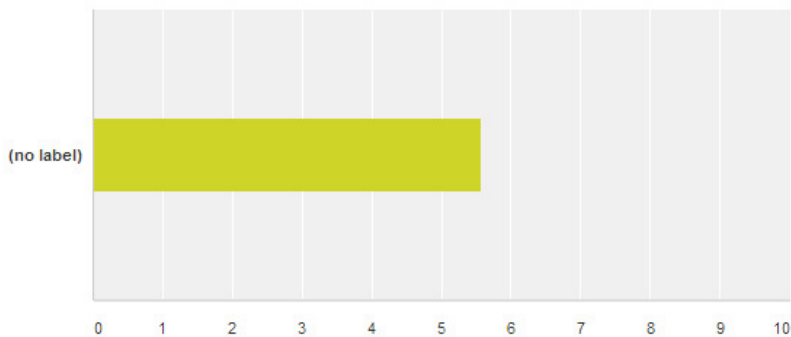


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	11.11% 34	26.14% 80	16.01% 49	31.37% 96	8.82% 27	4.25% 13	2.29% 7	306	3.23

Q20

**The ability to connect with other attendees online before and after a tradeshow is beneficial to my professional life.**

Answered: 307 Skipped: 24

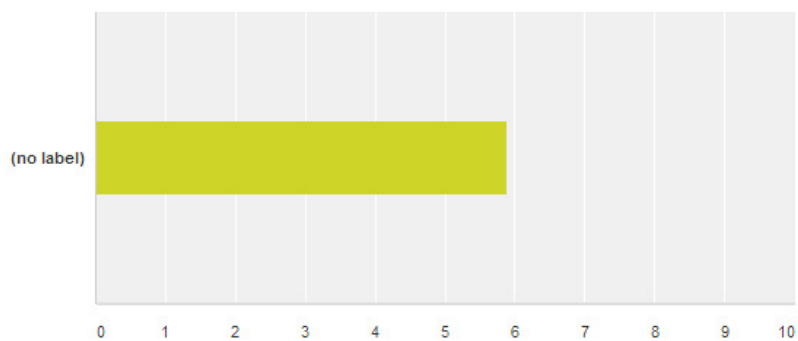


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	0.65% 2	1.30% 4	1.95% 6	13.36% 41	21.82% 67	41.37% 127	19.54% 60	307	5.57

Q21

### Networking that occurs on the tradeshow floor is beneficial to my professional life.

Answered: 309 Skipped: 22

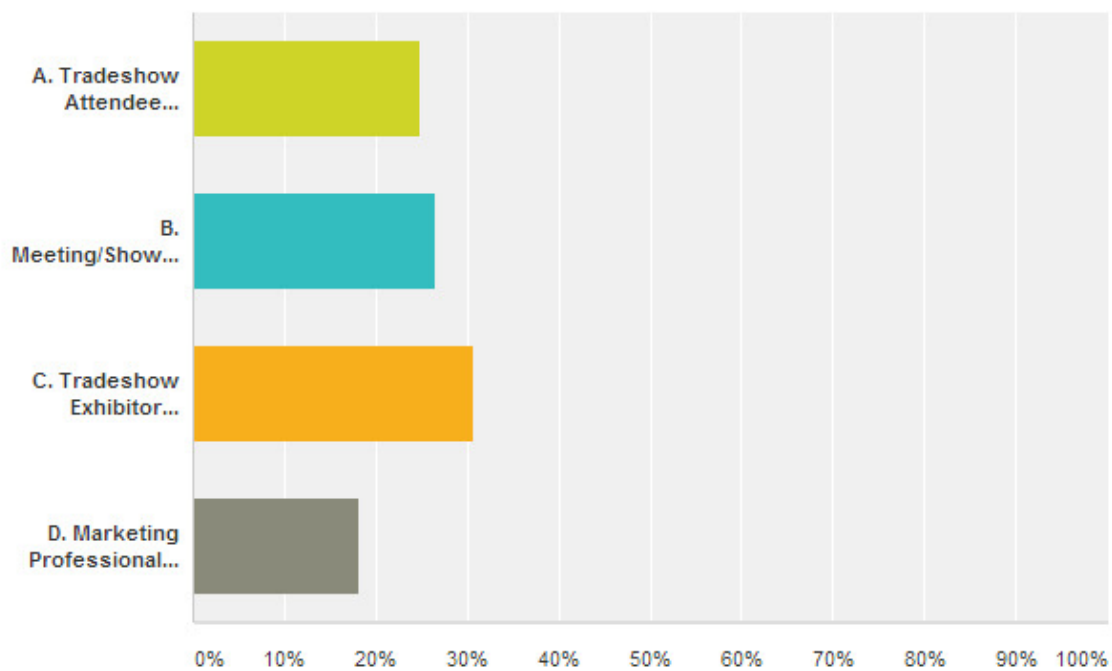


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	0.97% 3	0.65% 2	0.65% 2	7.12% 22	17.48% 54	42.72% 132	30.42% 94	309	5.89

Q22

## Professional Category:

Answered: 310 Skipped: 21



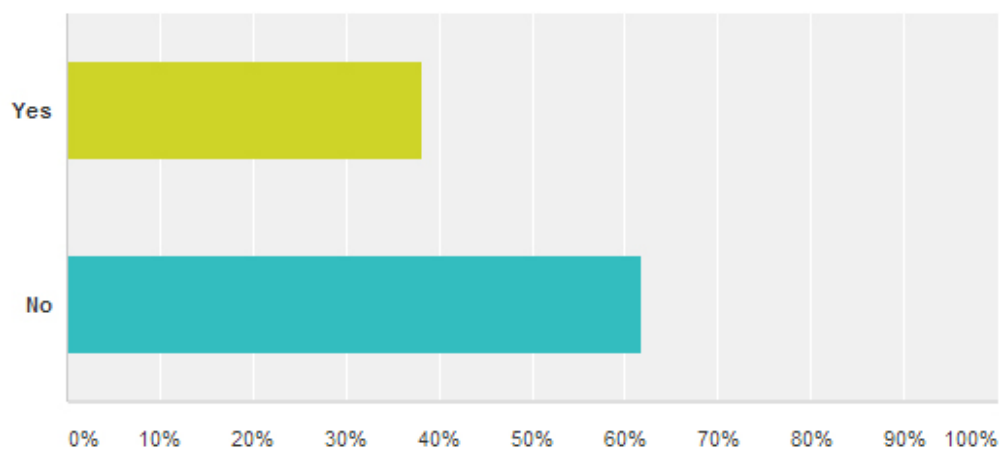
Answer Choices	Responses
▼ A. Tradeshow Attendee (buyer, potential buyer, or observer)	24.84% 77
▼ B. Meeting/Show Planner (logistical responsibility for any or all parts of the show)	26.45% 82
▼ C. Tradeshow Exhibitor (supplier/vendor with a product to sell)	30.65% 95
▼ D. Marketing Professional (executive-level, responsible for budgets)	18.06% 56
Total	310

Commerce Section (only tradeshow exhibitors and marketing executives).

Note: The number of “skipped” is taking in the other half of the respondents who were excluded from this section.

### Does your organization depend on sales acquired through tradeshows to sustain your business?

Answered: 144 Skipped: 187



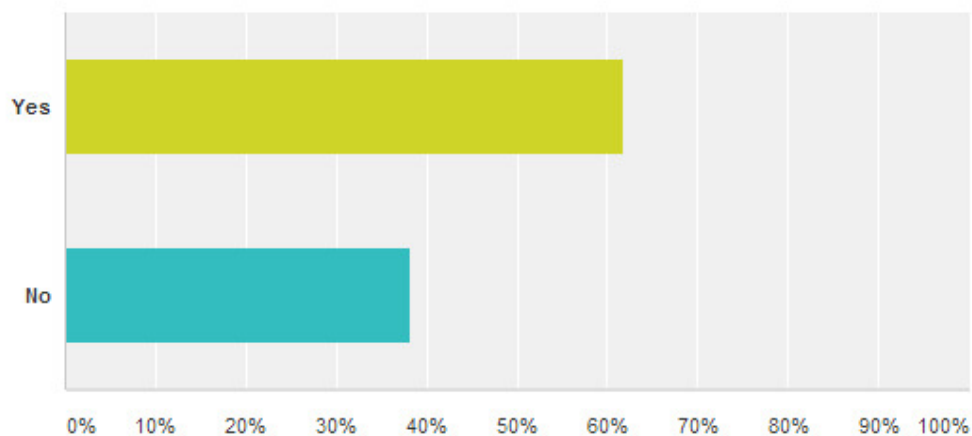
Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	38.19% 55
No	61.81% 89
Total	144



Q24

## Do you measure sales conversions from leads acquired at the shows you attend?

Answered: 144 Skipped: 187

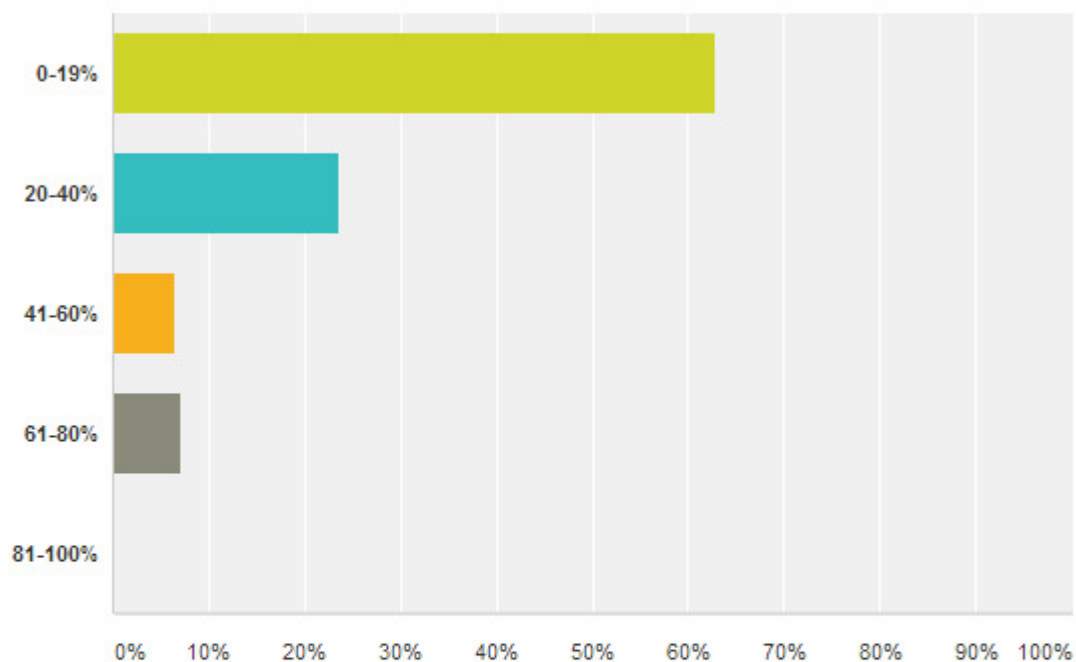


Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	61.81% 89
No	38.19% 55
Total	144

Q25

### What percentage of your organization's revenue do you think comes from tradeshow sales:

Answered: 140 Skipped: 191

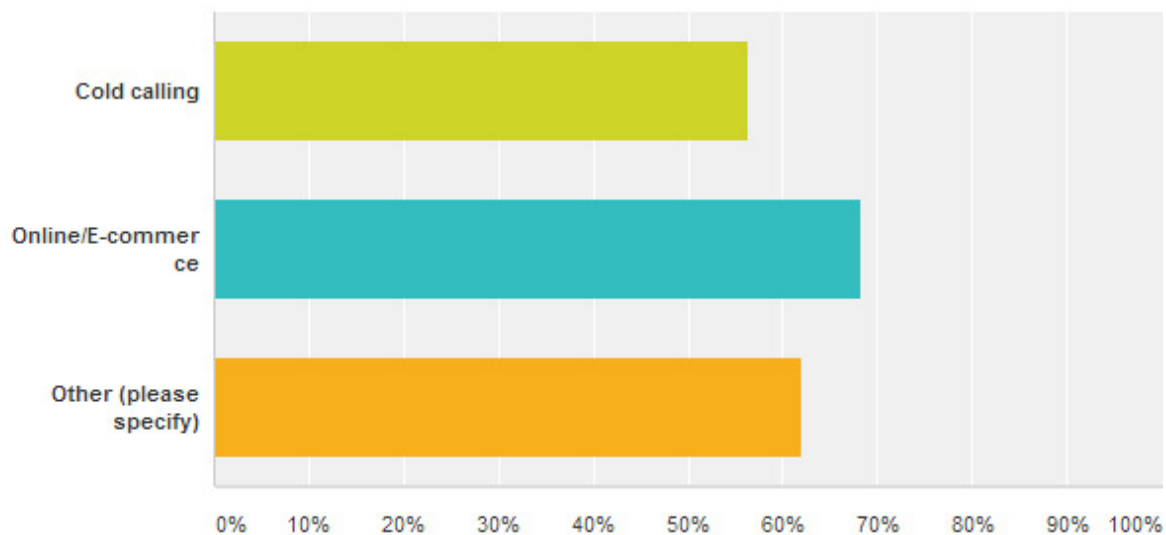


Answer Choices	Responses
0-19%	62.86% 88
20-40%	23.57% 33
41-60%	6.43% 9
61-80%	7.14% 10
81-100%	0.00% 0
Total	140

Q26

## What other channels do you use to drive revenue for your organization?

Answered: 142 Skipped: 189



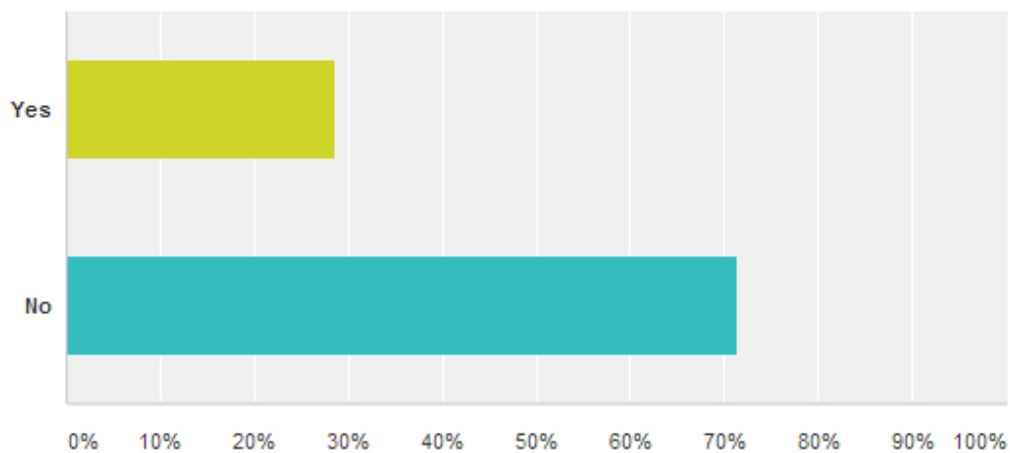
Answer Choices	Responses
▼ Cold calling	56.34% 80
▼ Online/E-commerce	68.31% 97
▼ Other (please specify)	<b>Responses</b> 61.97% 88
Total Respondents: 142	

“Other” responses included in Appendix B.

Q27

**If you were told upon arriving on the show floor of your “biggest” show that it was the last tradeshow your organization would ever attend, would you do anything differently?**

Answered: 140 Skipped: 191



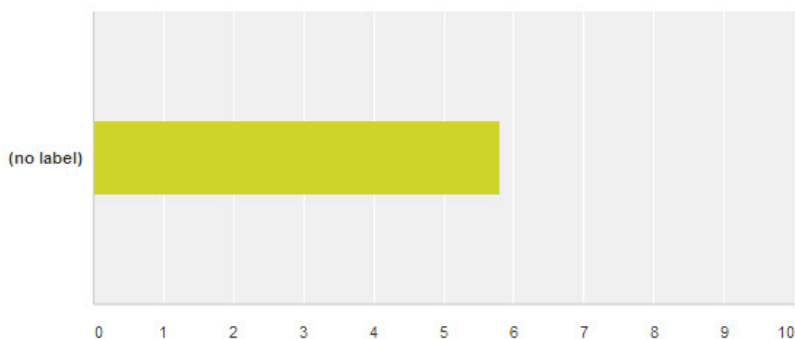
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	28.57%	40
No	71.43%	100
Total		140

Q28 – See appendix B

Q29

**My team prepares for tradeshows in advance, such as performing research regarding who will be in attendance, setting up meetings in advance, etc.**

Answered: 143 Skipped: 188

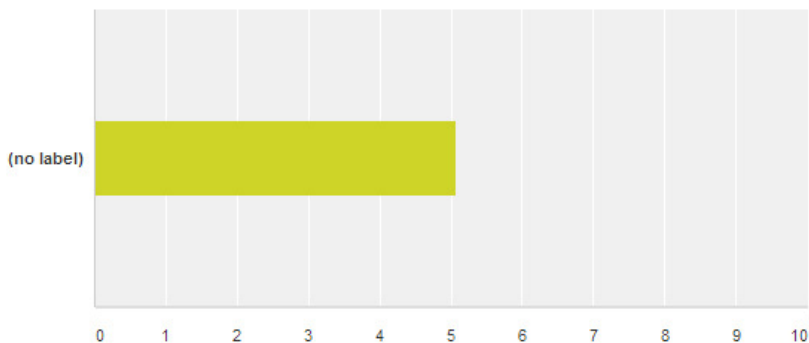


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	0.00% 0	1.40% 2	2.10% 3	5.59% 8	20.98% 30	44.76% 64	25.17% 36	143	5.81

Q30

**We measure success of tradeshows based on the potential of conversions (lead count when leaving the show).**

Answered: 141 Skipped: 190

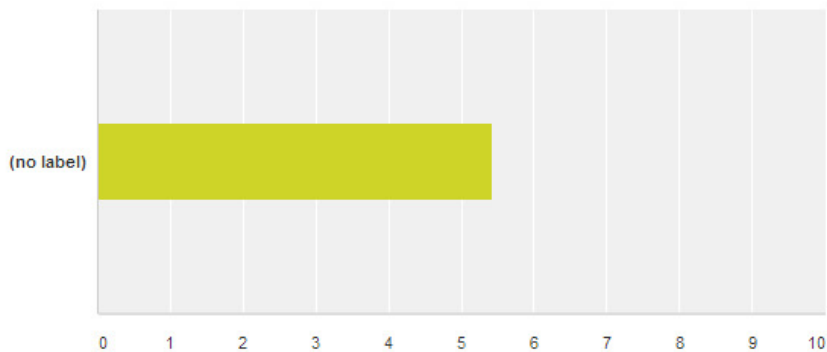


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	0.71% 1	5.67% 8	4.96% 7	16.31% 23	30.50% 43	30.50% 43	11.35% 16	141	5.07

Q31

**We are methodical in how we follow-up with leads after the tradeshows we attend.**

Answered: 143 Skipped: 188

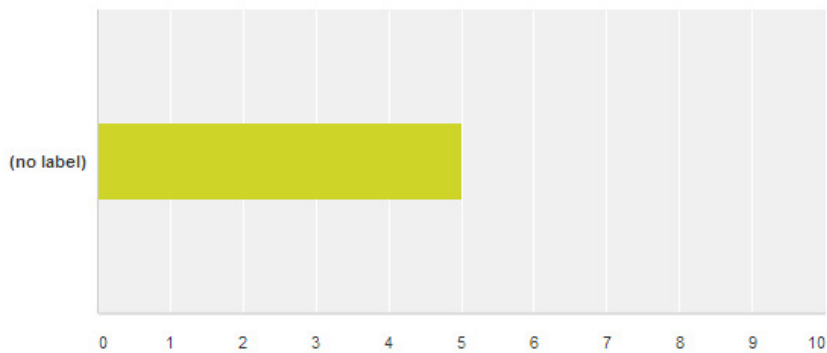


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	0.00% 0	2.80% 4	6.29% 9	9.09% 13	27.27% 39	36.36% 52	18.18% 26	143	5.43

Q32

**We measure success of tradeshows by how many leads we convert into sales.**

Answered: 142 Skipped: 189

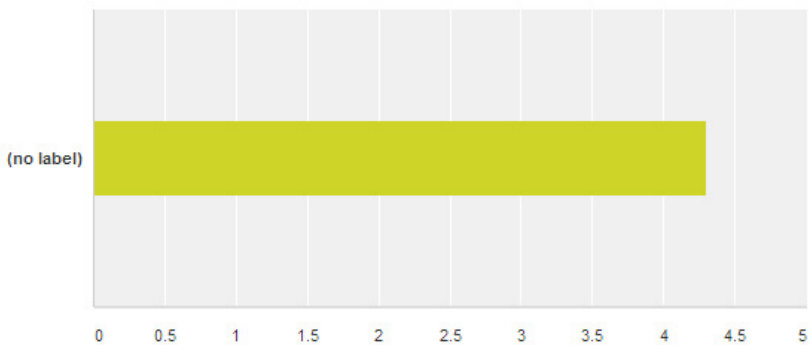


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	0.00% 0	8.45% 12	7.75% 11	13.38% 19	29.58% 42	26.06% 37	14.79% 21	142	5.01

Q33

**We typically do profit/loss analyses of the expenses of the shows we attend against sales conversions.**

Answered: 142 Skipped: 189

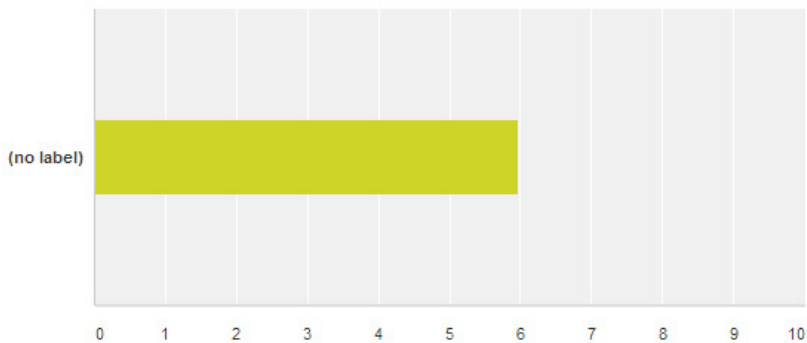


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	3.52% 5	16.90% 24	12.68% 18	20.42% 29	14.79% 21	22.54% 32	9.15% 13	142	4.30

Q34

**We select which tradeshow we are going to exhibit at based on who will be in attendance (potential buyers, clients, partners).**

Answered: 142 Skipped: 189

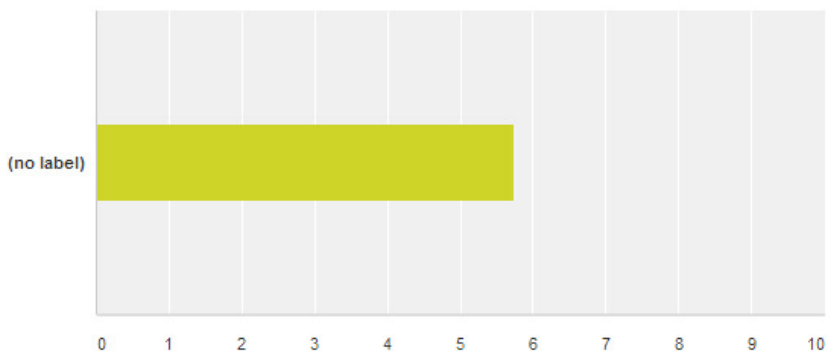


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	0.70% 1	2.82% 4	0.00% 0	5.63% 8	11.97% 17	43.66% 62	35.21% 50	142	5.97

Q35

**We select which tradeshow we are going to exhibit at based on past successes.**

Answered: 143 Skipped: 188

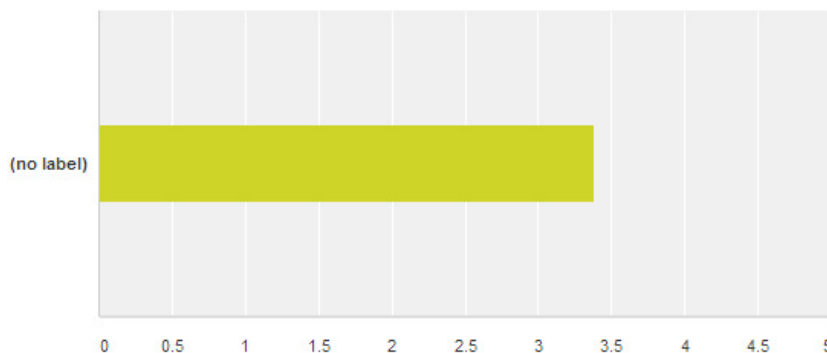


	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	0.70% 1	2.80% 4	0.70% 1	4.20% 6	21.68% 31	48.95% 70	20.98% 30	143	5.74

Q36

**We could accomplish the same level of sales without attending tradeshow.**

Answered: 143 Skipped: 188



	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	4.20% 6	25.17% 36	29.37% 42	18.88% 27	16.78% 24	3.50% 5	2.10% 3	143	3.38



## Appendix B

Question 26, Short Answer: What other channels do you use to drive revenue for your organization?

- Sales
- Scheduled appointments
- Referrals from existing customers and cross-selling
- Events (non-tradeshows)
- FTF meetings (non-tradeshows)
- Referrals
- Field sales; Field events; Inside sales
- Face to face meetings/appts, marketing, PR, warm calls
- Classified Listings
- Direct Mail
- Good reputation, client referrals
- distribution
- Networking and referrals
- Local networking and professional events
- Channel Partner agreements
- Advertising, direct mail, promotions, word of mouth
- Wholesale distribution
- Advertising
- Face to face direct sales
- Networking events
- Sales blitzes, training leads to sales
- readerboard service, third party representation
- referrals
- Face to face networking
- Rental of mail lists
- word of mouth inbound leads
- referral
- Direct contact
- Sales calls, events, partnerships
- Total Account Management- once the connection is made learn as much about account as possible and make the connection to sales!
- Established customers and client events
- Direct sales force
- referral
- Field sales
- re-sellers
- research, advertising, media
- Strategic sales and account management
- direct mail
- postal mailings, brochures
- referrals
- Established relationships
- Magazine ads; partnerships with other pet-related companies
- demand gen campaigns, direct sales, channel sales
- print advertising, FB, networking events
- Social media and content marketing
- Industry marketing and referral
- Referrals
- Social selling
- networking
- referrals
- direct referral from current customers
- Print ads
- Networking/customer referrals
- Other vendor referrals
- not for public release
- referrals
- Referrals
- Networking with existing clients and vendors
- Snail Mail
- Face to face, phone
- Referrals
- Retail, Managed Account Sales
- Retail, partner distribution
- Up selling with a current customer base
- Attending conferences that do not have a trade show component. Hosting exclusive client events. Entertainment.
- Advertising, factory training, host conventions
- Direct mail/sales blitzes
- events
- Digital Marketing

- advertising
- F2F workshops, referral partnerships
- Networking, word of mouth
- Personal referrals
- Word of mouth
- conferences (no exhibits)
- co-marketing with partners
- Entertaining clients locally
- marketing
- Professional Organizations, Networking/Referrals
- Sales calls, hosting in market events
- Networks of professionals, direct mail, traditional media
- Local Sales Representation
- Referral. Personal visits to existing and potential customers. Direct contact.
- other non-trade show sales events
- Room Tax collection
- Marketing/advertising

Question 28 – If the answer to question 27 was “Yes,” respondents could indicate how in response to question 28. [Note: all responses to this question were left exactly as entered in the survey.]

- Exchange more business contact info
- Meet with as many people as possible.
- Be more vigilant in meeting people
- Be more intentional about making more & better contacts. Be less passive
- Survey attendees of the impact of not attending, try to understand business justification
- If this was an internal decision, I would want to ensure that we were telling the right story or showing the right value as to why the show made sense for our business.
- take more risks
- show your best products
- Do more research on the attendee list
- Be sure to attend all sessions and other networking opportunities
- If my budget was being cut for tradeshow, or we just weren't going to attend any more, I would try to get approval to go bigger to draw a bigger ROI - hoping to use that ROI to

convince my organization to keep exhibiting.

- Focus on lead generation and conversions; then develop recommendation to reset expectations with management.
- I would probably invest more money into some kind of promotion at the event.
- Spend more money on advertising and sponsorships.
- Make it a bigger spectacle, event
- I would, and have, transitioned to a client direct program.
- I would network more, attend education sessions if possible, try to interact with anyone that I can to really show how many sales are made b/c of face-to-face events.
- I would make that a great story to tell my booth visitors
- Start campaigning with upper management to rethink this strategy and keep trade show participation in future marketing plans.
- Do more to identify the “right” customer for our business and seek them out during the tradeshow.
- More research into attendees, make sure there was a pre/during/post show marketing plan
- Set higher goals and objectives.
- Work it hard enough to make an impactful impression
- make stronger / more memorable in-person connects so that we can remain connected online (virtually) more effectively.
- **DISTRIBUTE RESUMES**
- Make sure I met more people
- Make as many face to face contacts as possible before and after show hours.

- Hit every vendor.
- We would try to dig deeper into our conversations with prospective customers to find out more details about each specific person so that we can customize our follow-ups with them more.
- I would argue with the organization that they were making a mistake.
- I would arrange more meetings with individuals and be more aggressive in my approach to create long lasting relationship that would go beyond tradeshow.
- meet as many people as possible
- I would push to have our team bring the experience to a new level, engaging every possible prospect and body in the building. Generating as much talk about our company as possible.
- Make sure its impactful and leaves a lasting impression (bigger budget)
- Set up with a hosted buyer program and target more specific planners.
- Improve display - better lighting
- Let my contacts know, ensure we leave on good terms with the organizer
- Fight to ensure that we would be able to return to that show and others!
- I would increase my budget for that singular event.
- Cross over all limitations- do an awesome booth, great giveaways, larger size booth, etc.

Question 37: Please feel free to share any other information you'd like that was not covered in the survey questions. [Note: Grammar and spelling corrections were made throughout the responses to this question to ensure the intention was expressed.]

- I find that plotting out my expo time and booths that I want to visit to be more effective than just walking up and down the aisles. While online relationships are important to

screen and interview potential vendors, my organization has recently implemented a “no unsolicited demonstrations policy.” Meaning, if a vendor wants to plan a 15-minute appointment with us and we are not in the market for that product, we do not take the call or face to face.

- The only reason we don’t measure conversions is that our systems don’t allow it to be done cleanly. Also, because we are B to B and sell into large accounts that have multiple purchasers within the account, it’s not easy to track the “influencers” vs. the decision makers. It’s a major failing of our organization to not have the systems in process to be able to do this.
- The tradeshow are about networking and also finding out what your competition is doing at the show and presenting. It’s also about meeting other clients and vendors to build a contact for future events.
- Regularly attending relevant tradeshow (at least one or two per year) is very important to staying up to date and in contact with your profession.
- I believe attending trade shows has value. But just like any other product you must choose wisely where to spend your money.
- Trade shows attendance needs to be well thought through before the show. Meetings need to be planned for and participants need to be prepped for each meeting. Do not let your company waste time, money and opportunity by going to a Tradeshow unprepared. Showing hardware is secondary.
- Attendance at some Tradeshow is often more for political benefit (supporting the board of the organization) or to avoid being noticed as the “missing” vendor.
- As with any survey, there are some ambiguous questions/answer choices, but I wish

you all the best!

- I am with a non-profit, so we have no actual revenue at tradeshow - we are selling memberships when we attend; some answers might not apply.
- The value of tradeshow is dependent on your capacity, focus, and objectives. Many times attending the networking events has the highest value.
- Nothing can take the place of a face-to-face meeting.
- Perfect example of the value of meeting face-to-face... I probably wouldn't have completed this survey if I hadn't met you in person. However, the online communication has only facilitated the feeling that I know you a little more than a random person (since you keep people informed about your moves, etc.).
- Meeting face to face does not increase trust - it increases confidence in the impression a person has of the new contact.
- In my experience, face time is the most valuable for networking, even if it is brief. Trade shows are an excellent opportunity to network and meet prospective clients, as well as to learn about current ideas and trends in industry.
- Trade shows and in person meetings increase close rates by 75%
- The increase of on-line networking serves to enhance the face to face connections made. Maintaining both advances a mutually beneficial partnership.
- There's just nothing like seeing the person you are working with, meeting for the first time, or considering a business/friendship relationship.
- Additionally, you could have asked if you have reduced the number of tradeshow you attend or participate in and by how many. Does your company send fewer people.
- The majority of my business is done on-line and over the phone, but the personal

interaction is always a positive benefit of trade shows.

- Some of my answers are based on travel. I believe based on 20-years of experience that there is a work life balance that needs to be achieved...If all the meetings/tradeshows, etc. were taking place in the same town, then my answers would be different. I took the survey focused that it's another multiple days away from family when I'm already a heavy traveler.
- The growth in my career is directly due to being at face to face events and has raised my career path to new levels because of tradeshow face to face meeting.
- There is a lot that can be accomplished through webinars, video calling, phone calls, etc., but NOTHING replaces face to face interactions and relationship building!  
Tradeshows have been an essential part of my professional life.
- Over the past ten years I have been subjected to attempts by trade shows to create virtual social environments, not to mention Apps. I think response would be better if these producers used existing social media outlets. I realize that they are trying to capture data, but I have to believe the data they are getting is compromised because so many of us refuse to join another social thing.
- Social media engagement around exhibitors and their news has been really effective to send out before a show starts to better educate people.
- I like to see and get to know how someone treats OTHER people when I am around them to see what they are like, especially those the person I am potentially doing business with who they aren't trying to sell anything to, or those they have authority over. It tells me more about a person to see how they treat people they think they don't have to treat well. That is more than I can find out online. The optimal situation is a

blend between the face to face meeting and additional re-enforcement online as well.

- Trade shows are important and useful, but not critical. They do accelerate the rate at which we can meet decision makers.
- I work for a federal agency, so although trade shows are a part of my work, networking and information dissemination to the public and partner agencies are the focus, rather than buying and selling. The current prevailing trend is to eliminate in-person meetings when it saves money. In my opinion, this does save money, but doesn't \*really\* reduce the efficiency of communication or the ability to “do business.” I make good, productive relationships online and on the phone, but I feel an added dimension of interpersonal satisfaction doing business face to face. I also believe that others are more willing to trust me more quickly when they have met me in person. Online takes longer to develop ease of relationship.
- We sell a niche business product rather than to the general public. Answers may be segued by this fact.
- As a corporate trade show manager, all shows I attend as a vendor, but in a planner capacity. I am responsible for execution of our exhibit presence, but also any sponsorships we participate in outside of the booth. I am also responsible for planning receptions/dinners/meetings that are held in conjunction with trade shows, but are not part of the official conference.
- In my belief, nothing beats a face to face meeting. I am certified in Neuro-Linguistics and like to read people’s body language when communicating with them.
- Some of my answers could have been n/a because my company supports large clients who employ the best practices you’re asking about such as measuring leads, tracking



sales conversions, etc. I assist and support these efforts, but they do not apply to my sales and revenues.

- Often times our primary purpose in attending trade shows is to build more new vendor opportunities and network with existing vendor partners.
- We notice that Buyers don't come prepared to trade shows with current RFP's like they did in the past.
- Each conference/trade show has its own "vibe." We have attended a lot for our industry (real estate) and even held some of our own. This event (SMMW) was quite different. The emphasis placed on networking was very much electric and I believe part of what made it unique.
- I think SMMW is a unique event that's tough to compare to other industry trade shows, mainly because of the inherent nature of our industry and the people who are in it, no matter their role.
- It will be interesting to learn how people feel...and it would be interesting since so many trade shows in the meetings industry are going to hosted buyer if that has any impact (if anyone says). Hosted buyer is a totally different dynamic often w/o a "show floor."
- As the world becomes more & more digital or virtual, real face to face human interaction becomes more precious & valuable than ever. Trade Shows are a key avenue for human contact & interaction.
- I represent an economic development agency. Our "product" is our region, attempting to bring new business to our area. As such, that would reflect some of the "results" of a show questions and answers.

- For the category that I fall into, I wish I had the option of clicking multiple buttons. I am all of them. We are a small company of 70 employees that generates a large amount of sales and revenue. I am a one person show when it comes to all aspects of Marketing.
- Our company is all about face to face contact to maintain and build new customer relationships.
- Trade shows provide a tactile experience that no other medium delivers. The ability to approach a market place as a non-attendee or a researcher based attendee is not available in any other medium. The attendee can decide what level of participation they want to engage that market place. The freedom surrounding a market place allows for efficient, thoughtful, and valuable commerce to occur before during and after the marketplace.
- Please take a look at [www.pitchandmatch.com](http://www.pitchandmatch.com). I believe in the right mix of online and face to face. Connecting, collaborating, selling (simple things) and servicing online. Strategic decision making and selling face-to-face.