



Delegate
DISPATCHES

Are the days of the showcase numbered?

DECEMBER 2023


The
Delegate Wranglers®

CUSTARD★
The Hospitality Marketing Experts

Putting showcases under the spotlight

It takes lots of time, dedication and budget to pull off a successful venue showcase – an event whereby you invite existing and prospective event planners to experience your venue’s hospitality and event spaces.

With many venues currently setting their budgets for the year ahead, CUSTARD – the hospitality marketing experts – and The Delegate Wranglers were keen to join forces to understand their importance for 2024.

“What an interesting and on-point survey. I did venue representation right up to lockdown. Showcases were an ongoing dilemma, admittedly sometimes ending up scrapping for a ‘rent-a-crowd’ to make up the numbers, which did nothing for the all-important ROI.”

Judith Rafferty,
Freelance Business Developer

Lesley Whyte, Senior Account Director, CUSTARD, said:

“By surveying both venues and buyers, we were keen to not only discover the current approaches being taken to hosting showcases but also glean crucial insight as to whether they’re hitting the mark for event planners.

“Based on 141 responses, it appears that while buyers are attending showcases and they remain a firm part of the venues’ marketing strategies, in their current guise they’re only hitting the mark for a fifth of planners. Venues are simply selling themselves short.

“In the year ahead it’s imperative for venues to understand their audience and make sure every element of their marketing spend delivers a strong return on investment. While showcases are great, they will only work when they sit within the marketing team as a strategic marketing tool as well as a sales driver.”



Neil Thompson, Founder & MD, The Delegate Wranglers, said:

“This insight is invaluable for venues as they hone their marketing strategies for 2024. With more scrutiny being placed on costs than ever, this research provides clear reinforcements and recommendations for venues to follow.

“Our research shows that event buyers are inundated with invitations, so it’s crucial to avoid a blanket approach. Whether that’s on the timing of the showcase, through to the various approaches to the format, understanding what it is that buyers are looking for will go a long way in shaping future strategies that deliver what is actually wanted.

“It’s essential that venues engage with their attendees. Yes, they want to see the property, but they also want to know about the amazing ways to use it etc. The days of just simply serving a glass of cava and a few canapés followed by a quick showround and then goodbyes, look to be over.”



HOW POPULAR ARE SHOWCASES?

Where are we now?



Most (87%) buyers attend showcases, with over three-quarters (78%) deeming them an essential part of their role to experience a venue's event spaces first-hand. With invitations being most popularly exchanged via email, event communities such as The Delegate Wranglers, colleagues, trade shows or via social media, the majority of buyers (64%) attend one showcase a month.

That's why they're a firm fixture in the majority (89%) of venues' sales and marketing event plans, with over half revealing they feel they're instrumental to demonstrating their venue's capabilities to buyers.

With each showcase generating an average return of nearly £94k in confirmed bookings, venues are typically dedicating 13% of their marketing spend annually. On average, venues host six a year at an estimated total annual cost of nearly £68k. And, in 2024, a third reveal they are planning to increase their budget further.



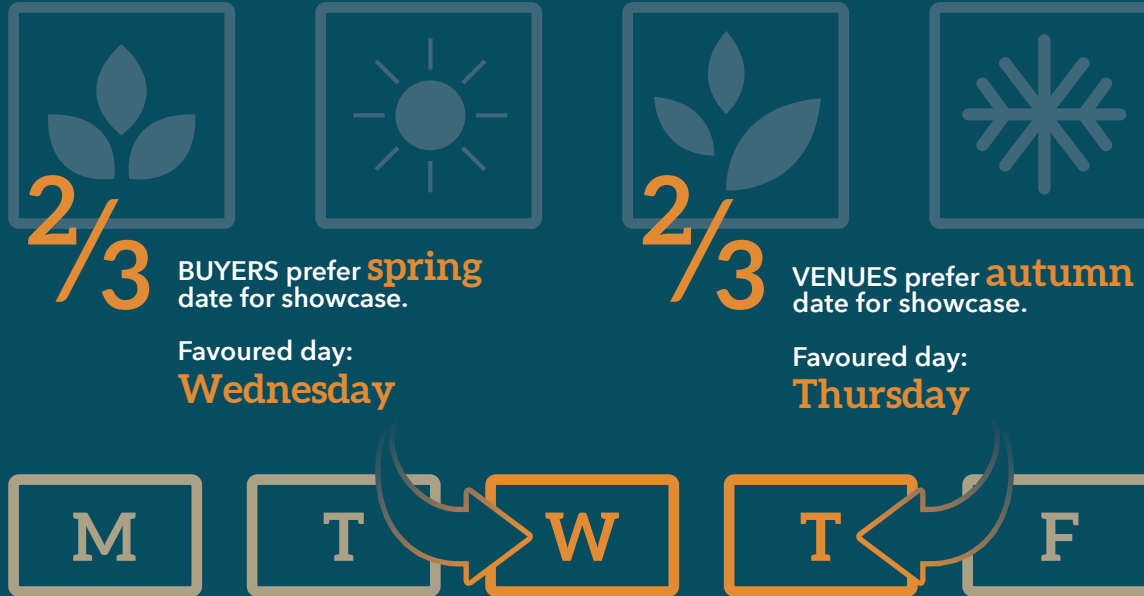
Yet, a fifth (21%) could be missing a trick as they admit to not setting any tangible objectives or deliverables, which could be seen as quite frivolous in a climate of rising costs - where budgets are being scrutinised.

For the remaining 79%, their deliverables include clear conversion targets or ratios, having the ideal buyer audience make up in attendance, leads added to the database as well as activities taking place to build relations while delivering the correct brand experience.



IT'S ALL ABOUT THE TIMING

The disconnect



Securing the right time and date for a showcase can often feel like a huge balancing act. It's the juggle of making sure the timing is appealing to buyers and doesn't clash or compete with any other industry events or celebrations, while ensuring you have the availability, time and resource to make it a great success.

Interestingly, there's a disconnect between venues and buyers. While September and the start of the autumn is a keen time among two-thirds of venues to host a showcase, in fact almost two-thirds of buyers actually prefer to venture out in the spring in February and March.

Similarly, the most popular day for three-quarters of venues to host is a Thursday, yet buyers are keener on a mid-week meet, opting for Wednesday as their favourite.

However, there is a clear consensus on timing. Unanimously, the optimum time to host and attend is from 5.30pm onwards, after the traditional working day is complete when buyers can fully focus on the event and opportunities being presented to them.

It's worth noting for the 13% of venues who are earlier risers and opt for a breakfast, there was no appetite among the responding buyers to commence their day attending a showcase.

WHAT BUYERS WANT (and don't want)

Don't sell yourself short

Typically, event venues have a 1 in 5 chance of securing that all-important RSVP from an event buyer, and even then, there's only a 68% chance of them turning up on the day. So, let's try and put the odds in our favour.

For almost all event buyers (93%), visiting a venue they've not visited before is the main reason to attend, so venues should consider who it is they're inviting in the first place. An innovative format shouldn't be ignored either, with more than half (54%) of event buyers looking for something that stands out amongst competing invitations.

Following the event, most attendees (79%) would like to hear from the venue within three days. And as a parting gift, over three quarters (77%) of event buyers welcome a souvenir to take away with them - currently 6 in 10 venues provide this.

Useful items that act as reminders of the space are always welcome, but 'swag bags' featuring typical throw-away items aren't desired - there are only so many pens a person can have.

EVENT BUYERS PET HATES:

- ✗ Not told what the format for the event will be in advance (70%)
- ✗ No opportunity to have a showround (65%)
- ✗ Not knowing who the venue staff are (44%)
- ✗ Not knowing if food will be available in advance (33%)
- ✗ No time dedicated to networking (33%)
- ✗ No opportunity to learn something (30%)



PERFECTING THE FORMAT

Think like a buyer



Event buyers' biggest pet hate when it comes to showcases is not being told the format of the event in advance, so nailing this (and communicating it!) will put a venue in good stead for strong attendance.

Most venues (74%) typically opt for a free-flowing networking event with drinks and nibbles, with just under half (46%) committing to themed showcases. But what do event buyers really want?

Preferences will naturally vary from one attendee to another dependent on their needs, however, buyers are calling for pre-qualifying questions when accepting invitations, including questions on what THEY want to see.

WHAT EVENT BUYERS ARE SAYING:

- ✓ Introduce the event team, suppliers and those involved in event operations
- ✓ Embrace technology to show buyers how event spaces have been used previously
- ✓ Provide a full show round of the venue, not just a brief overview
- ✓ Make it memorable, make it an experience
- ✓ Don't make them a tick box exercise - quality over quantity
- ✓ Venues should be open about not just what works, but what doesn't work - manage expectation and build trust



For venues **47** is the optimum number of guests in attendance and for buyers it is **59**



74% venues opt for free-flowing networking event with drinks and nibbles

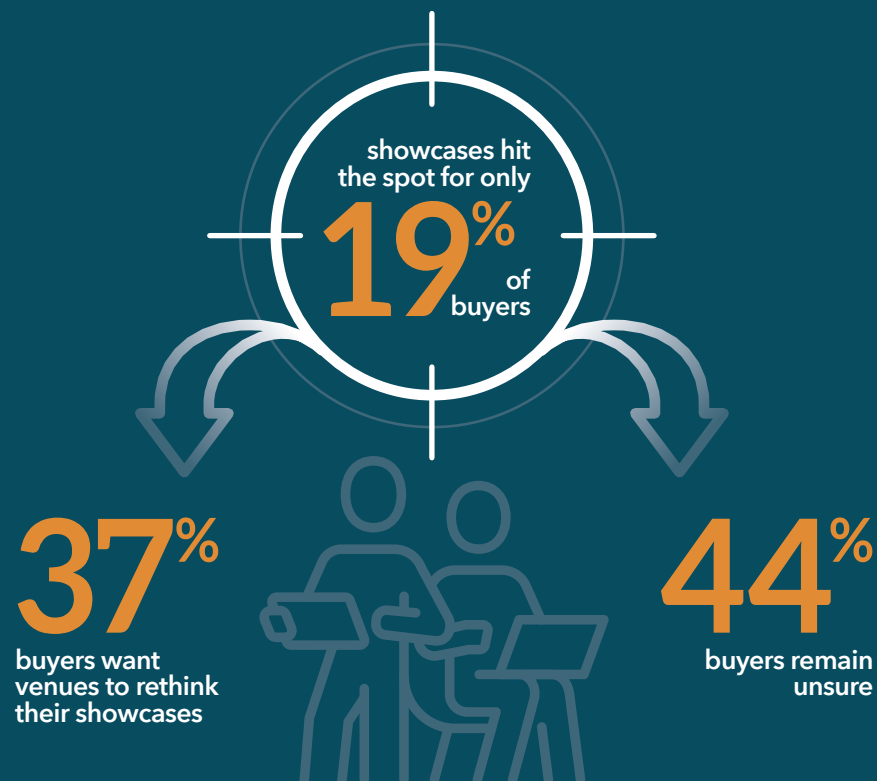
46% commit to themed showcases



SO, WHAT NOW?

Concerningly, showcases are only hitting the spot for a fifth of buyers (19%). In their current guise, over one-third (37%) are keen for venues to rethink their approaches while 44% remain unsure. Ultimately, this means more work needs to be done to directly meet the buyers' needs and deliver the all-important return on investment.

So, let's recap on what venues should be doing to evolve their approach and maintain appetites for attendance in 2024 and beyond.



A RECAP

- Event buyers typically accept one out of five showcase invitations received each month, so make sure you think outside of the box to stand out from the crowd
- Showcases accounts for 13% of a venues' annual marketing spend on average, so don't sell yourself short when it comes to investment
- Set clear objectives and deliverables for your showcases, such as attendance targets, conversion targets, quality of attendees, leads added to the database as well as activities to build relations while delivering the correct brand experience
- Don't over-invite. This can be tricky with a third of acceptances expected to drop out, but buyers expect around 60 guests to be in attendance. Quality over quantity, as is the case for almost all (97%) venues
- 5:30pm onwards is the most popular time for a showcase to take place, with buyers expected to attend for 3-4 hours.
- Follow up with your guests within three days of the showcase taking place
- Provide guests with a parting souvenir as a sweetener - but remember, the less "tut" the better
- Events communities such as The Delegate Wranglers and social media promotion are big sources of attendance, so don't forget to promote publicly - you may wish to vet attendees in this case!
- Ensure attendees are aware of the format for the event in advance
- Provide attendees with the opportunity for a showround - even better, ask what it is they're interested in finding out about before the showcase has begun



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