

BIZBASH

INDUSTRY BIG



**HOW THE EVENTS INDUSTRY
IS INNOVATING AND ADAPTING
TO NEW DEMANDS**

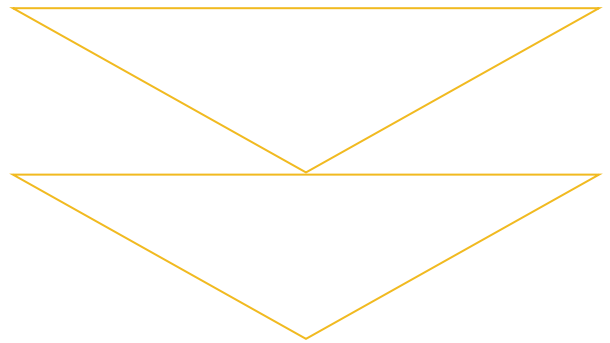
A report on the **BizBash Industry Innovators Summit**, featuring top minds covering the most pressing issues facing events professionals.

Having emerged from the worst of the pandemic, the events industry is set to step into the future. Planning ahead has never been more important. Fortunately, that's exactly what meetings and events professionals do for a living. As is often the case, those with the most forethought will be in the best position to navigate change.

Becki Winchel, the thought leadership and innovation director at **Spiro**, said it best: "Use innovation to move with waves of change, rather than be moved by them."

Winchel was among the presenters at BizBash's **Industry Innovators Summit** in October 2022. The two-part virtual event featured roundtable discussions and deep dives into myriad subject matters:

- ▶▶ **Food & beverage**
- ▶▶ **Event marketing**
- ▶▶ **Digital engagement**
- ▶▶ **Event tech advancements**
- ▶▶ **Supply chain and inflation challenges**
- ▶▶ **Navigating industry partnerships**



Months in the making, the Summit was the culmination of a joint effort from BizBash's editorial staffers and in-house event team. It's part of an annual tradition dating back to 2011 where editors dig beyond big industry names to tell the stories of event pros who are using innovation to push the boundaries of IRL- and URL-based experiences. These titans were featured in a print edition of the magazine and on BizBash.com.

Past and present honorees have culminated into a virtual type of **Hall of Fame** chock full of leading planners, producers, marketers, and suppliers. BizBash took the effort a step further this year with the inaugural Industry Innovators Summit. On Oct. 20 and 27, thought leaders reflected on the most recent difficult years (that are hopefully now in the rearview), and projected what's ahead.

In this e-book, we examine the revelations and observations shared by expert panelists over the course of the Industry Innovators Summit.



I. THOUGHT LEADERS



One of BizBash's annual missions is to identify and highlight event industry innovators who are creating change in real time. Naturally, these individuals might be among the most renowned or followed on social media, but the focus is on merit and accomplishments rather than just thinking big. These professionals are acting boldly to meet new demands and overcome challenges, and fall into the categories of experiential marketers, event planners, hoteliers, F&B specialists, and more.

For 2022, in an acknowledgment of the multiple dynamics in play as live events return, technology is further integrated, and a new generation of planners and attendees dictate different tastes, award winners were broken into five categories. The victors are listed below, with Summit speakers highlighted...

VENDORS & SUPPLIERS

Anthony Santiago

Pink Sparrow

Ariel Glassman

The Temple House & United Projection

Christine Traulich & Dori McDonald

RedBliss Design

Constance Panton

Bifties Gifts

Dawn Crothers

Something Vintage Rentals & Design

Evan Collier

ARCH Production & Design

Gregg Dukofsky

Interactive Entertainment Group

Linsay Moran

Unwrapit

Masha Berenboym

Artists Creating Entertainment

Mose James IV

OMG Booth

Paul Freedman

Rock the Bike

Raymond Thompson

Images by Lighting

EVENT PLANNERS, DESIGNERS, & PRODUCERS

Adam Rosen

University of Southern California

Bram Goldstein

BIG HQ

Deanna Nwosu

Industry consultant and speaker

Erika Kulovitz

akire productions

Jeff Consoletti

JLA

Kristin Banta

Kristin Banta Events, Inc.

Marc Wilson

The Style Marc Inc.

Melva LaJoy Legrand

LaJoy Plans

Monique Ruff-Bell

TED Conferences

Seán Doyle

Pinterest

Tara Melvin

Perfect Planning Events

EVENT TECH EXPERTS

David Nussbaum

Proto Inc.

Giovanna Graziosi Casimiro

Decentraland Foundation

Jennifer Brisman

VOW

Joe Schwinger

Stova, formerly MeetingPlay + Aventri + eventcore

Liz King Caruso

techsyntalk

Lola & Richard McClaney

ourBLOC

Maria Shelton

Ardian Group/Ardian Technologies

Nolan Ether

Webex Events

Saroosh Gull

Eventcombo

Todd Moritz

Opus Agency

Wei Li

Zoom

EXPERIENTIAL EXPERTS

Adam Sloyer & Lizz Torgovnick
Sequence Events

Aja Bradley-Kemp
Conversate Collective

Anika Grant
Idewild Experiential

Austin Johnston
AKJOHNSTON Group

Bianca Knop & Kelly Thorpe
Wildfire Experiential

Bruce Starr & Brian Feit
BMF

Cassandra Costello
MoonLab Productions

Elle Chan
Trademark Event Productions

Heath Hill
Lime Media

Jack Bedwani
New Moon

Jennifer de Fouchier
We Make Pop

Justin Lefkovitch
Mirrored Media

Liz Castelli, Adette Contreras & Erica Taylor Haskins
Tinsel

Miatta David Johnston & Massah David
MVD Inc.

CATERERS & F&B PROS

Adam Haverland
JW Marriott, Anaheim Resort

Adelee Cabrera
Elior North America

Alexa Babbin Winter
Pinch Food Design

Bill Hansen
Bill Hansen Hospitality Group

Fausto Pifferrer
Blue Elephant Events and Catering

Kashif Browne
Ridgewells Catering

Lauren Koeppe
Create Hospitality

Lucas Margulis
HIGH BAR Hospitality & Event Group

Robin Selden
Marcia Selden Catering

Thomas Whelan
Levy Convention Centers

Other leading minds lending advice and insight included Winchel; Amy Blackman, founder and Principal of **Fruition Co.**; and Muhammad Younas, founder and CEO of **vFairs**.

Discussion moderators from BizBash included chairman David Adler, managing editor Sarah Kloepple, and senior editor Shannon Thaler. Joining them were co-moderators Tricia Binder, co-Founder and president of **Muros**; Candice Davis, director of event programming & creative services at vFairs; and Amanda McKillip, senior vice president, event production at **Freeman**.

II. HOT TOPICS

Q eopolitical concerns, supply-chain difficulties, and rising inflation are three interconnected forces outside of the events industry that are nonetheless shaping how groups gather, build connections, and grow business.

“The very definition of an event and experience has changed to something not so constrained by time and channels,” said Amy Blackman, founder and principal of [Fruition Co.](#)

Just as the world never sits still, nor do meetings and events. The Industry Innovators Summit stressed that those open to change will adapt and thrive, while those stuck in the past and searching for “normal” will struggle.

“When we went back to in-person, we noticed things are not what they used to be,” said [Monique Ruff-Bell](#), head of conference at [TED Conferences](#).

And terms the industry has only recently become accustomed to—like virtual, hybrid, and IRL—could just as quickly be out-of-date. Winchel pointed to consumers as drivers of this change. The growing influence of millennials and Gen Z—who grew up in a world of tech and engagement much more advanced and intertwined into their daily lives than their older counterparts—will continue to shift how meetings and events evolve.

“The purpose of an event is to connect and sustain that connection,” noted Blackman. “People attend events, but they join communities.”

Younger generations are also prioritizing sustainability and social responsibility, observed Winchel. “We don’t just strive to live a sustainable lifestyle. We are starting to insist upon it,” she said.

58%
of consumers will buy or advocate for a brand with shared values

52%
believe businesses are not doing enough to protect the environment

Source: [Edelman Trust Barometer](#)

The bottom line: to see future success, technology, sustainability, and social responsibility must be top of mind. But how can professionals harness that yearning to belong while dealing with budget constraints? The actual answer extends beyond a two- to three-day in-person meeting to a year-round experience.

“Stop saying ‘IRL,’ it’s ARL—all real life,” said Blackman. “Time and place are up to the individual. It’s all relative.”

As we will explore, this trickles down to many more aspects of the industry.

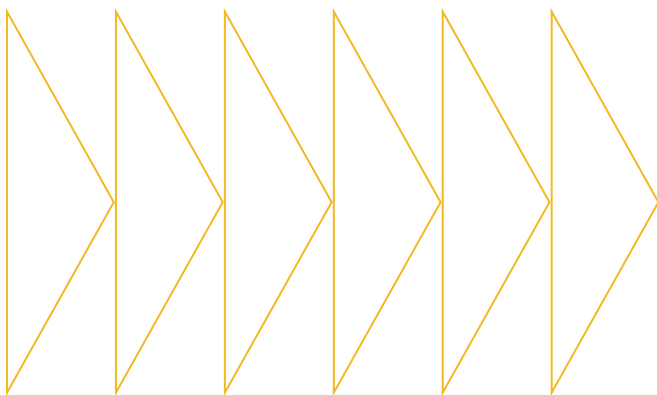
PRICE PAIN POINTS



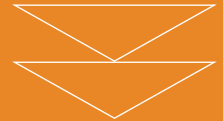
Forbes **reported** that the annual inflation rate rose to 4.7% in 2021, compared to a 1.2% rise in 2020. And it appears that prices are still rising, with everyday difficulties like affording groceries spilling over to associations, corporations, and other organizations.

Ruff-Bell said event planners are not simply choosing between what meals to serve (there will be much more on that subject later) but what staff they can afford. In an ideal world, a planner could tap into their connections to hire top-of-the-line vendors for floral arrangements, room decor, photography, and other necessities.

“When the rubber hits the road, you have to face reality with budgets and really get creative,” said **Deanna Nwosu**, an industry consultant and speaker with experience planning events for associations, corporations, and nonprofit organizations.



Solutions described by the pair of industry veterans include:

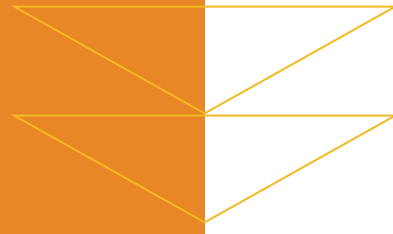


- ▶▶ **Paring down the number of ancillary events to a level a smaller staff can ensure excellence on**
- ▶▶ **Budgeting hourly rates and sessions for freelancers to contribute to the event**
- ▶▶ **Tapping into a staff’s hidden talents**
 - Is a team member a photographer on the side?
 - Does someone have DJ experience?
- ▶▶ **Approaching presenters delving into new topics about accepting discounted rates to test out their material with your audience**

Ruff-Bell cited the 80-20 rule when adapting. “You have to be able to take risks,” she said. “Eighty percent of the time it will work out beautifully. Twenty percent will be trash you learn from.”



BUILDING LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS



The strain of the pandemic remains today in the form of event vendors being forced to close and those that survived being forced to cut back on staff. Further complications include delayed shipments due to supply-chain challenges.

Dawn Crothers, creative director of the Washington, D.C.-based [Something Vintage Rentals & Design](#), said that guaranteeing an order of chairs will be delivered on time is not always possible. But rather than hiding that fact, she advised using transparency as the key to building trust.

“We never want to over-promise and under-deliver,” she said.

To further foster those industry relationships, Gregg Dukofsky, founder of [Interactive Entertainment Group](#), said the secret is collaboration, citing that when his company is able to brainstorm alongside clients at the beginning of the planning process, it facilitates solutions.

However, the current reality is that vendors—although accustomed to short lead times—are being given even smaller windows to provide the services that are key to turning events into experiences. To combat the challenge, Dukofsky has added more business hubs to cut down on travel time and costs.

Masha Berenboym, founder and owner of Los Angeles-based [Artists Creating Entertainment](#), reminded planners and potential partners that as professionals in the meeting and event industry, we’re all in this together. And although it seems simple enough, she encouraged the following, no matter the ever-present challenges and stress:

- ▶▶ **Honesty**
- ▶▶ **Kindness**
- ▶▶ **Openness to new ideas**



FOOD & BEVERAGE: GOING GREEN



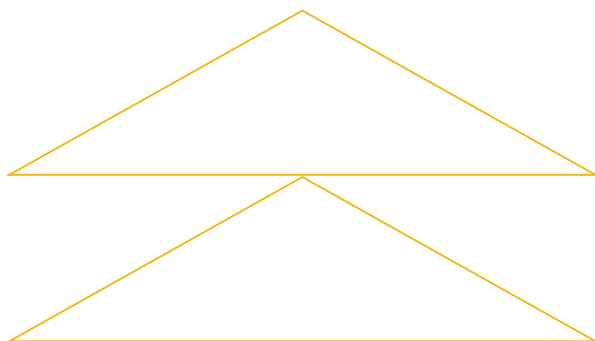
Interestingly enough, food and beverage options will be one of the most tell-tale aspects of a successfully sustainable soiree. However, meeting and event planners will need to weigh a growing demand for plant-based options featuring locally sourced ingredients with the higher costs associated with both.

“It’s totally more expensive,” reiterated Robin Selden, managing partner and executive chef of [Marcia Selden Catering](#) and [Naked Fig Catering](#), the latter of which specializes in vegan food.

Statistics show that **25% more Americans** receive a greater amount of their protein from plant-based options, including quinoa and lentils, than did so in spring 2020.

And during the Industry Innovators Summit, catering experts agreed that the pandemic hastened a change in diet because consumers had to branch out when options became limited. Kashif Browne, executive chef of the Bethesda, Md.-based [Ridgewells Catering](#), said digging into plant-based dishes has proven to be healthier too. It’s also demonstrated the creativity of professional chefs and the value of investing in new meal options. “You get what you pay for,” he said.

The cherry on top? Eco-friendly meals are another way to demonstrate inclusion to an audience previously underserved at conferences and meetings. “You’re not just getting mock chicken anymore,” said Thomas Whelan, assistant general manager of [Levy Restaurants](#) in Boston. “These are hearty and full meals,” he added, noting the inherent additional opportunity to showcase the work of women- and minority-owned businesses.



TECHNOLOGY'S ROLE

Generally speaking, events have gone from almost exclusively in-person, to nearly all virtual in 2020, to back to face-to-face. And there's no telling if this is the last pendulum swing—but through all the back and forth, event technology has remained an integral part of the process.

Zoom, for example, is now as ubiquitous as other large communication services customers have used for decades.

Wei Li, head of Zoom events, said the genius of her company's signature platform is its simplicity. "People shouldn't be intimidated using [technology]," she said. "Zoom made the product easy to use. That's why it is so successful."

David Nussbaum, CEO of [Proto Inc.](#), added that virtual solutions such as Zoom—as well as all-digital events—have come to resonate with audiences because of their eco-friendly nature and have thus become a part of a larger conversation in the industry about social impact. He also pointed to his company, Proto Inc., which creates holographic versions of individuals so that they can appear at multiple conferences and events per week without boarding an airplane. (Another win for being green!)

But beyond sustainability, Dr. Giovanna Graziosi Casimiro, community and events producer of [Decentraland Foundation](#), pointed out just how much innovations like the metaverse and NFTs have expanded their reach in ways only previously imagined. "We're getting used to global events for brands most of the time," she said.

7 WAYS TO MAINTAIN AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Muhammad Younas, CEO of vFairs, shared these tips for keeping attendees actively following events and presentations:

1. Begin before the event (book appointments, let people see exhibitors/ attendees and explore the space, etc.)
2. Set the vibe with visuals
3. Plan for attendees to join in the middle of a session
4. Incorporate wellness
5. Give networking some structure
6. Consider adding entertainment
7. Gamify with intent (sponsored scavenger hunt, photo contest, trivia, etc.)

BREAKING THROUGH THE NOISE

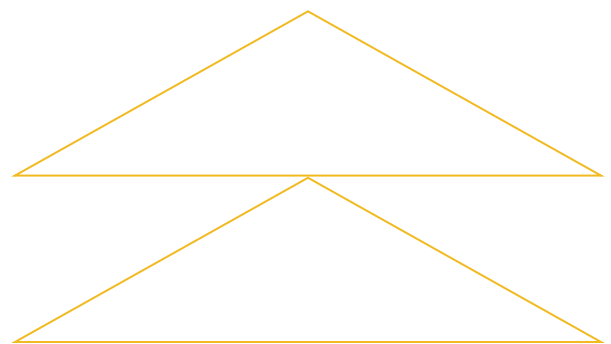


The rush to capture an event base's attention comes at a time when there are a plethora of competing interests, including other events, social media, and news media. To combat audiences increasingly shortened attention spans, leading experiential marketers with global experience agreed that truth in advertising piques curiosity best, particularly in regards to matching your community's value system.

MoonLab Productions' CEO and founder **Cassandra Michler** shared that she places a priority on women's empowerment, sustainability, wellness, DEI efforts, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). As an example, Michler pointed to Instacart, which built a reusable trade show booth to be used over multiple events instead of functioning as the traditional one-time-use, tear-down booth.

Aja Bradley-Kemp, founder of **Conversate Collective**, tapped into CSR by discovering a common bond among a community of women of color with curly hair. The movement was then built into a festival with hair styling companies in attendance to support greater education and to build greater camaraderie around women who feel insecure about wearing their natural, curly hair.

Justin Lefkovitch, founder and CEO of **Mirrored Media**, pointed further to the impact of immersive experiences by noting just how educational they can be.



III. CONCLUSION



With events so interconnected with the economy and world affairs, the 2022 Industry Innovators Summit underscored that nothing is in a silo anymore. It's clear that the world is fundamentally changing, and the virtual event drove home how industry professionals must stay in touch with their communities to resonate. Sustainability and eco-friendly activations will continue to be top of mind as planners aim

to make the most with fewer resources. Thus, quality over quantity is a trend the industry can look forward to, with perhaps fewer but more impactful gatherings taking place to maximize moments. Looking toward a “norma” resembling 2019 appears futile. Rather, innovators agreed that watching trends and acting on them is the key to sustained success. We may not know what the future holds, but it's fair to say BizBash's industry innovators will shape what's to come.

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

The inaugural BizBash Industry innovators Summit and this accompanying piece would not be possible without the participation of valuable partners. These include:



vFAIRS

Don't Just Plan Events. Host Epic Experiences with vFairs.

vFairs is an award-winning virtual, hybrid, and mobile events platform. Our event technology empowers companies worldwide to host immersive, ROI-driven events, and achieve incredible results. The platform features a virtual event platform and mobile app; each offering immersive virtual venues, advanced networking, world-renowned customer service, and a vast array of features that help you host unforgettable events.



The global experience agency for the NEW NOW™

Spiro creates brand experiences that are anyTHERE and everyTHERE—adding service agility, strategic foresight, innovation, and intelligence to the legacy of excellence that comes from being part of the GES Collective.



We do more than events. We help clients achieve goals.

Freeman is a global leader in events, and we are on a mission to redefine live for a new era. Whether it's an intimate VIP event, product launch, or half-time performance, we deliver moments that build connections, drive business, and surprise and delight.

