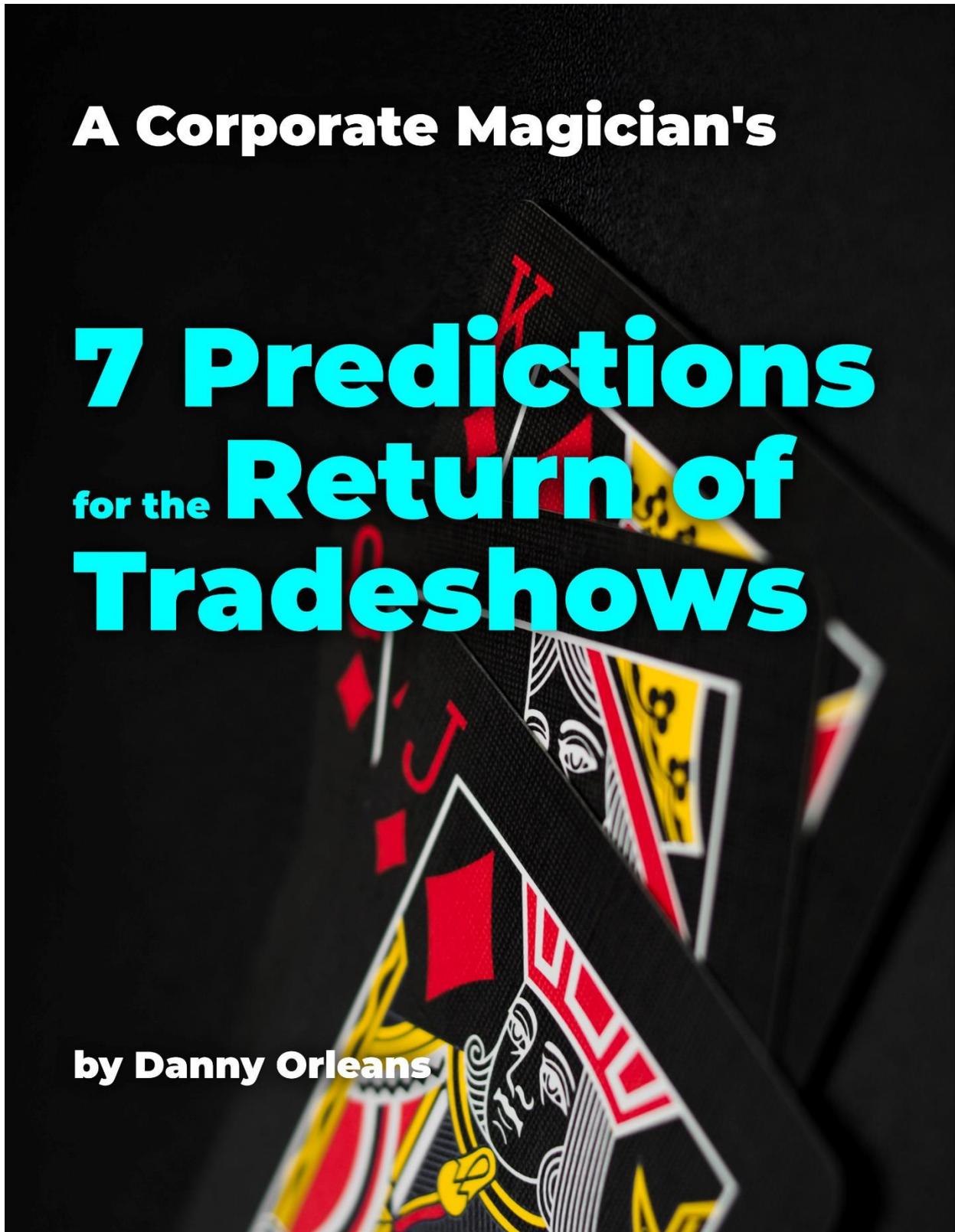


A Corporate Magician's

7 Predictions
for the **Return of**
Tradeshows

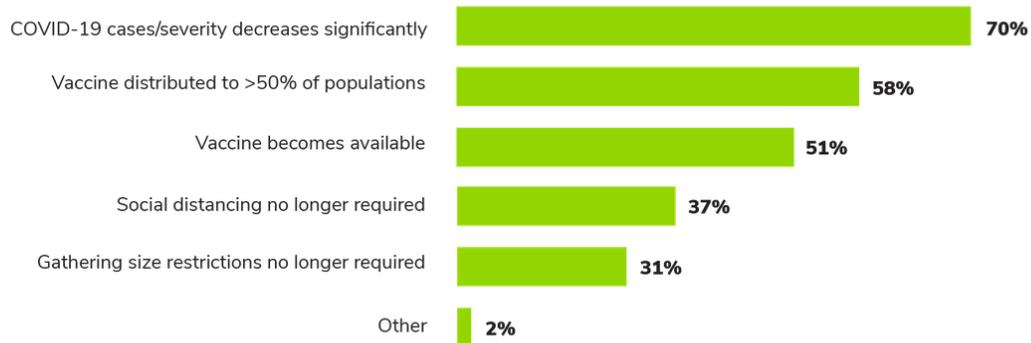
by Danny Orleans



7 PREDICTIONS FOR THE RETURN OF TRADE SHOWS

In the spring of 2020, Covid-19 hit impacted Trade Shows harder than most industries. Now, a year later, we are seeing optimism for the return of large, in-person events. Before I lay out my 7 predictions on when, where and how trade shows will be back, take a quick look at this [survey from the Innovatis Group](#) done last November. Which of the following factors would influence you to return to trade shows sooner?

Factors Allowing Sooner Return to In-Person Events.



Among Respondents Who Do NOT Feel Comfortable Attending In-Person Events Now (n=752)
Which of the following factors would cause you to reevaluate that timeline and start attending in-person events sooner? (Please select all that apply)

Prediction #1: Trade Shows will be Back before Summer Starts

Last Spring's wave of trade show postponements, cancellations and switching to virtual made it feel like in-person shows would never be back. Last spring, health experts told us that large gatherings would have to wait until 2022. Just six months ago, organizations were still hesitating to schedule shows. Now, as of mid-March, COVID-19 vaccinations are going into the arms of Americans at the rate of 2 million + per day. That will be the game changer. Some very small shows are already going forward for March and April in convention centers that are open for business.

It's really all about safety—real and perceived.

Once people are protected by the vaccine, they will feel safe attending large scale events. So, I'm predicting that small and mid-size trade shows scheduled for the end of Q2 and all of Q3 will not cancel. As restrictions are lifted by state and local governments, and as people return to their office, they'll feel safe traveling and attending conventions.



March 10, 2020 in Las Vegas. The day before COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic, your author, Danny Orleans was drawing traffic to the ExxonMobil booth at ConExpo.

Prediction #1: Corporate Travel Bans will be Lifted Sooner than Originally Thought

Last fall, in the pre-vaccine world, many companies banned travel saying that it wouldn't be approved until Q3 of 2021. As of mid-March we're seeing an increase in travel as people's comfort level with air transportation increases. I predict that corporate travel bans will be lifted during Q2 which will make it possible for folks to attend trade shows.

Prediction #2: What to Expect on the Trade Show Floor

As trade shows return, interactions on the trade show floor will be different. We'll see contactless registrations, staggered entries for specific groups, temperature taking, mask mandates as well as social distancing signs on the show floor.



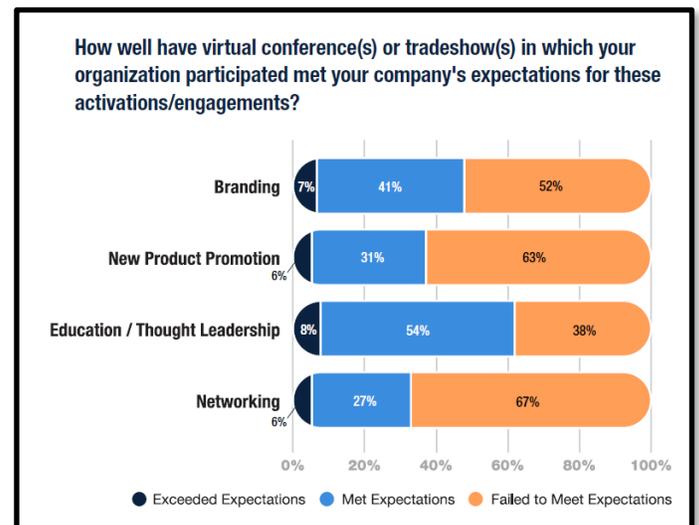
Buffets in the exhibit hall? Probably not.

Presenters doing demonstrations will be masked and trade show "theaters" will have fewer chairs that will be spaced out. Efforts will be made by trade show organizations to show that it is possible to hold large meetings while keeping everyone safe.

Prediction #3: Hybrid Trade Shows are here to stay

The shift from in-person to virtual trade shows during the pandemic proved a couple of things. First, it was possible to have large scale meetings of tens of thousands of attendees online. Although novel and well-attended in the spring, by the fall, research indicated that both exhibitors and attendees were frustrated by the platforms and lack of ability to communicate effectively within a virtual setting.

Tradeshologic.com, a trade show management firm conducted a [Virtual Event Satisfaction Survey](#). Virtual exhibit halls were poorly attended. Conversations and networking were difficult and, in most cases, failed to meet expectations. However online lectures, keynotes and educational sessions met or exceeded expectations for most participants.



So, going forward, I predict that conventions will be a hybrid of the in-person and virtual experience. This will give attendees with limited funds or limited time an opportunity to drop in on specific sessions virtually. The sponsoring organizations benefit as well. They'll be able to boost attendance and revenues. Win-win!

Prediction #4: Vaccine Passports

Wouldn't you feel safer at a large conference knowing that everyone was vaccinated? That's why I'm predicting that some meetings—especially in the Health Care industry—will require a Vaccine Passport in order to register for a conference. As of March 2021, the current administration is stating that by the end of May, everyone in the U.S. will have had an opportunity to get a vaccine. Requiring vaccines will not only make attendees feel safe, but also it will increase attendance—and it will encourage vaccine hesitators to get a vaccine. Win-win-win.



Prediction #5: Revenge Attendance

Last spring, after the lockdown eased in China, a luxury store reopened and had record sales. Apparently, after a couple of months stuck at home, people opened their doors and their wallets in celebration. Thus, the phrase “revenge buying” was created.

According to the [Heart+Mind Strategies Survey](#) of January, 2021, on the impact of coronavirus on attitudes towards large exhibitions, 91% of convention goers yearn for face-to-face conventions. So, I predict that once people begin returning to the office, they'll soon feel safe traveling, hoteling, and walking on the trade show floor. And they'll have an increased desire to celebrate the in-person experience. This emotional state will bring people back in droves to conventions, eager to partake in their industry.

Prediction #6: Size Matters

People's decision to attend trade shows will be impacted by several factors. One perception of safety will be based on conference size. As trade shows go forward, tiny conferences with 500 – 1000 attendees are more likely to be attended than the huge conferences normally having 20,000 – 50,000 attendees or more. Therefore, we might see regional conferences set record attendances whereas the national conferences will experience a downturn in attendance, especially if held in April or May.

Prediction #7: Geographic Factors

The return of conventions will be unbalanced geographically. A convention center's ability to open and hold trade shows is dictated by municipal and state officials. So, events in Orlando, Dallas and Las Vegas will take place months before events in New York City, Chicago and Los Angeles. You'll also see many shows scheduled for spring have moved from closed states to venues located in states that are “open for business.”



Preparing for the Return of Trade Shows

Exhibitors need to go beyond the typical trade show preparations for exhibiting in 2021. Consider these action items as you and your team plan for face-to-face trade shows.

1. Check in with vendors early in your planning stages. There will be a deluge of shows all happening at the same time as convention centers open up. You want to check availability and how they are implementing the current CDC guidelines to make sure they are in keeping with your company's policy.
2. Check in with the trade show association or sponsoring organization to find out if there are any Covid-19 restrictions or safety regulations so you will be ready.
3. Train your staff to read the cues of trade show attendees. You want them to feel comfortable in your booth. Social distancing, handshaking and masking rules may change between now and the dates of your show. But people's attitudes may not. So, respect attendees' choices and create an environment that creates conversation and learning.

It will take many months before human interactions return to pre-pandemic normalcy. But if you attend as many trade shows as I do, you will see measurable behavior change from month to month. People are social animals that crave human contact. Although we will always remember how the Coronavirus impacted our industry, we will soon be heading to conventions where we can gather together again.



Prediction for the near future: *Here's how people will gather again at trade shows to watch my in-booth presentations.* **Gartner Conference March 2016, Dallas**

Corporate Magician Danny Orleans incorporates exhibitors' marketing messages into his magic presentations at trade shows. He performs at over 75 trade shows and corporate events every year, even during covid where he performed online at virtual meetings and events. www.corporatemagicltd.com