
THE BEST OF EXHIBITORLIVE 2026 REPORT

Actionable insights, key trends,
and strategic implications for
trade show and event marketing
professionals.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXHIBITORLIVE 2026 did not introduce a single disruptive trend, it confirmed a shift already underway. The industry is moving toward exhibit programs that are measurable, modular, and operationally disciplined. For brands, this represents a fundamental change: success is not defined by presence alone, but by performance, adaptability, and driving meaningful connection.

EXHIBITORLIVE 2026 KEY TRENDS:

- AI is now embedded in workflows, not just a concept
 - ROI accountability is the expectation
- Exhibit design is becoming more modular and reusable
 - Experiences prioritize engagement over spectacle

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1. EXHIBITORLIVE 2026 AUDIENCE SIGNALS

A more competitive environment:

41% new attendees → constant influx of new ideas and expectations

Mix of leaders + operators → strategy and execution both under scrutiny

The bar for performance is rising:

Attendees focused on improving programs, not just exploring new ideas.

There's a strong interest in technology, modular systems, and experience design.

Peers are actively evolving with a greater focus on:

- Measurement and ROI
- Scalable exhibit systems
- More engaging experiences

What This Means

You're not just competing on the show floor, you're competing against a rapidly advancing standard.



2. SCENES FROM THE SHOW FLOOR

From Sasquatch to Gasparilla Pirates, this EXHIBITORLIVE brought the fun while still delivering inspiration and meaning.



3. AI IS AN OPERATIONAL LAYER, NOT A GIMMICK

AI has moved beyond novelty and into practical application across the event lifecycle. From lead capture and enrichment to booth analytics and post-show follow-up, AI is enabling teams to operate faster and with greater precision.

Derse POV: The value of AI is not just in showcasing it; it is in embedding it. The most effective programs will use AI to reduce friction, improve decision-making, and elevate ROI accountability.



4. ROI ACCOUNTABILITY HAS REACHED A NEW STANDARD

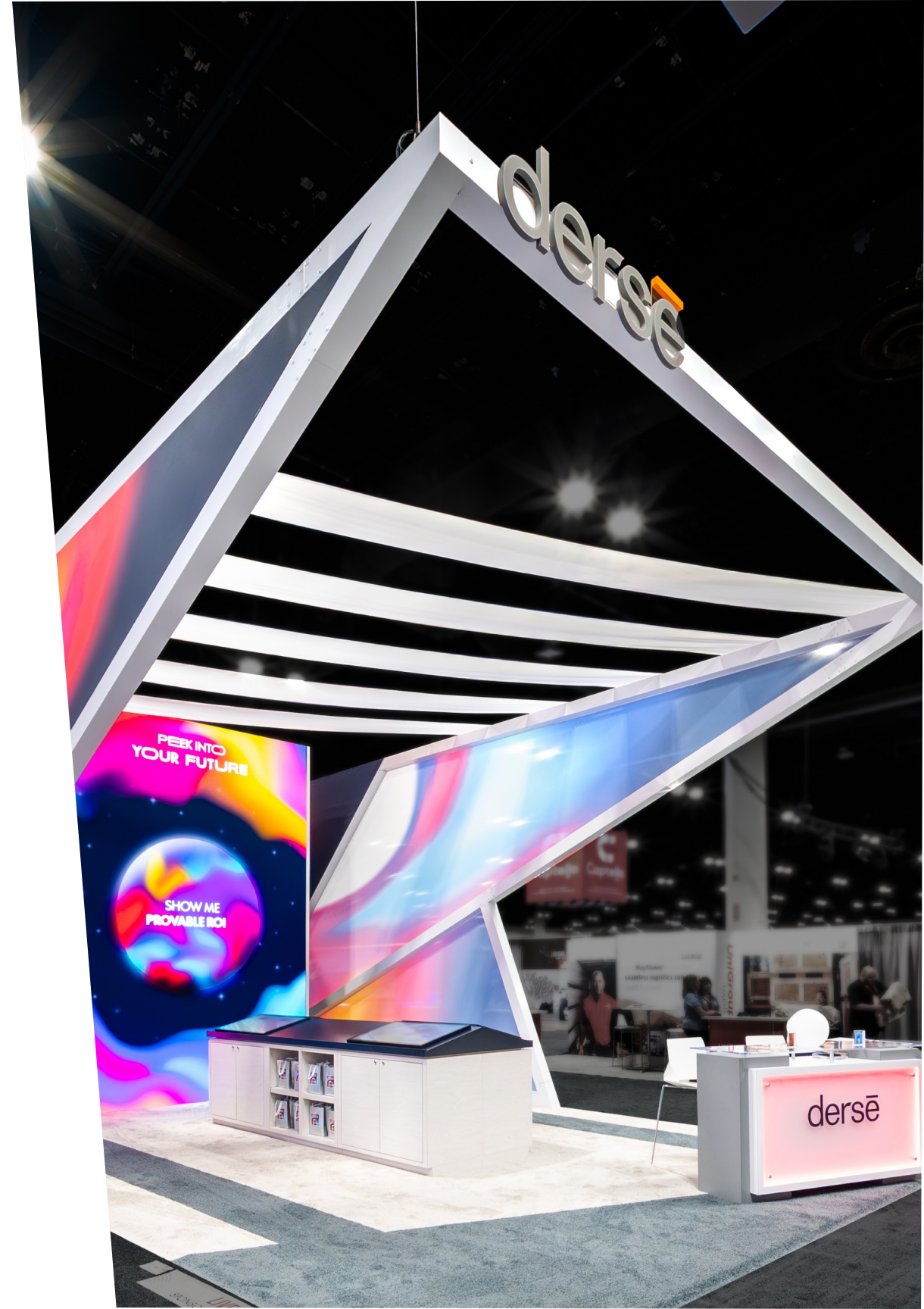
The conversation around measurement has matured significantly. Event teams are being asked to deliver more than lead volume, they must demonstrate engagement quality, pipeline impact, and business outcomes.

Derse POV: Exhibits must should perform like integrated marketing channels. This requires aligning strategy, experience design, and data capture from the outset, not as an afterthought.

5. MODULAR DESIGN IS REDEFINING EXHIBIT STRATEGY

The center of gravity is shifting toward modular, reconfigurable systems that scale across multiple events. Lightweight structures, backlit environments, and flexible architectures are becoming the norm.

Derse POV: Custom exhibits are evolving. The future lies in systems that balance brand expression with operational efficiency and long-term asset value. Trade show programs of complex scope should utilize a modular approach optimizing each deployment and investment.





The Derse Apothecary and Peek Into Your Future experiences featured scalable designs and customizable rental components. They demonstrate that higher efficiency doesn't mean compromising on creativity or impact. With the right strategic partner both are possible.

6. EXPERIENCE DESIGN IS MORE HUMAN THAN EVER

The most compelling environments focus less on visual spectacle and more on human engagement. Multi-sensory elements, hospitality-driven spaces, and interactive storytelling drove deeper connections.

Derse POV: The goal isn't to be seen; it is to be remembered. Designing for dwell time and meaningful interaction is critical to driving results. Your experience should be designed around the audience's interests and expectations.



AURA FARMING IRL

The Peek Into Your Future experience drove the “more human than ever” design philosophy home. Guests were invited to capture their aura with biometric photography. Gaining clarity into their professional and personal lives. Attendees left the experience with a deeper understanding of themselves and personalized mementos to remember their experience with Derse.



7. OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE IS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Executional challenges like freight, logistics, installation, and asset management are now front-of-mind for marketers.

Derse POV: Operational strategy must be integrated early. The most successful programs are those where logistics, design, and measurement are aligned from day one.



STRATEGIC INSIGHTS FOR MARKETERS

- Embed AI into workflows, not just messaging
 - Redefine KPIs to reflect business impact
- Invest in modular, scalable exhibit systems
 - Design for engagement and dwell time
 - Integrate operations into early planning

FINAL THOUGHTS

The winning exhibit program today is measurable like digital, flexible like retail, and memorable like hospitality. This is the new standard and best opportunity for brands looking to lead their category.

THANK YOU FOR AN AMAZING EXHIBITOR LIVE

The people of this industry are our inspiration to succeed on behalf of our clients. This would not be possible without professionals like you. We hope to see you at your next show!

