Ask Lina

Which exhibitors should I see in before my next session? →

Which exhibits should I see	Who should I connect with
What should I attend	Plan my smartest route

Map Your Show®

How to Use AI In Your Trade Show

A Complete Guide for Event Organizers To Improve Event Experiences for Attendees and Exhibitors

Contents

Introduction

This guide is written specifically for event organizers who want to use AI as a growth lever. Whether you are planning your 2026 event strategy or looking to modernize an existing show, this guide will help you understand where AI fits, how to use it responsibly, how to make it effective for you, your exhibitors and your attendees.

AI is no longer being viewed as an experimental add-on for events. As the world becomes more adept at using AI in their working life, the expectations and demand of technology at special events increases. Attendees want intuitive guidance, exhibitors want more strategic support, and everyone is looking for methods to make better business decisions across the entire event lifecycle.

The value of AI is not found in automation for automation's sake. Its real power lies in how it enhances the experiences of the two audiences that matter most: attendees and exhibitors. When attendees can navigate events easily, discover relevant content, and get answers in real time, satisfaction increases and attendance grows. When exhibitors can identify the right prospects, have better conversations, and prove ROI, they are more likely to renew, upgrade, and invest more deeply in your event.

This guide is brought to you by Map Your Show (MYS), your event management technology partner.

3 Ways AI Will Change the Trade Show Industry in 2026

Don Kline
CEO, Sales at Map Your Show

How AI will transform the experiences of attendees, exhibitors, organizers at events

Artificial intelligence is no longer a future concept for the trade show industry. It's already shaping how planners, marketers, and attendees approach events. In 2026, AI at trade shows won't be a nice-to-have feature. It will be a core part of how large events deliver value to attendees, exhibitors, and organizers.

Using AI at events is not about replacing people or automating relationships. AI should be doing the opposite. When applied intentionally, AI removes friction, reduces guesswork, and provides better information so humans can focus on what they came to the show to do: build meaningful connections between buyers and sellers.

Technology and social media have made the in-person trade show experience more important than ever. AI will help attendees discover the right products and services, help exhibitors have better conversations, and help organizers protect and grow event revenue.

AI will fundamentally change the working experience for each stakeholder in the trade show industry in 2026 in three key ways:

1. **AI will make human connections more valuable**

2. **AI will make your event unique and personalized for every attendee**

3. **AI will directly increase trade show revenue**

With these in mind, I'll explain how they play out for the attendee, exhibitor -and finally- you the event organizer and share why you should be preparing now.

How AI Will Change Trade Shows for Attendees in 2026

For attendees, AI fundamentally changes how value is created at a trade show. Instead of navigating the event through trial and error, attendees will rely on AI to help them prioritize, personalize, and maximize every hour on site—turning a complex schedule into a guided experience built around their goals.

How AI Puts All Trade Show Data First

Large events can be overwhelming. Hundreds of sessions, limited time, and thousands of exhibitor's force attendees to make quick decisions without much context. This is where an AI assistant at large events becomes transformational.

By analyzing all the information available including, attendee profiles, stated interests, past behavior, and real-time activity, an AI assistant on your trade show mobile app or website can recommend:

- **Exhibitors and products that solve what their business needs**

- **Educational sessions aligned with the attendee's career goals or interests**

- **Networking opportunities with people they are most likely to benefit from meeting**

This level of personalization gives attendees the clarity to make confident decisions about how to spend their time.

How AI Assists Attendees With Useful Event Data

Attendees will increasingly interact and rely on AI-driven assistants during events rather than using search engines or scrolling through websites. An AI assistant will use their behavior to recommend exhibitors, sessions and products. With AI assistants curating the attendee experience, they will showcase more information about your event at the best time for the engaged attendee to use that information.

For example, an attendee might ask:

- **"Which exhibitors specialize in this category?"**

- **"What's the fastest route to visit these booths between my sessions?"**

The AI assistant at a large event can instantly show where exhibitors they are seeking are located, recommend the most efficient path through the show floor, and even adapt

with attendees in real time if they are delayed or make unexpected changes. The AI Assistant will focus on helping them make the most of their limited time and improve their on-site experience by providing clarity to a complex day.

How AI Improves Attendee ROI at Large Events

Professionals often view event attendance as an investment in themselves or their business. While their return isn't always measured in direct revenue, it's measured in perceived value between the learning they experienced, useful connections they've made and the exhibitors they have met at the event.

In addition to helping attendees get the most from their show experience, AI helps attendees zero in on their specific goals for that trade show. This transforms AI from a convenience tool into a value multiplier for every attendee.

Whether the goal is career growth, industry insight, or business development, AI will help attendees achieve what they came for. When they leave feeling successful, they're far more likely to return and stay engaged with the event brand long after the event ends.

How AI Will Change Trade Shows for Exhibitors in 2026

For exhibitors, AI shifts the trade show model from attendee-based searching to active opportunity creation. Instead of relying on the attendee to find them, exhibitors can use AI to focus their time, resources, and conversations on the prospects that matter most.

How AI Drives Higher-Quality Booth Conversations Not Just More Traffic

Instead of hoping the right people find their booth, exhibitors can use AI to attract the right attendees leading to better conversations, clearer ROI and stronger pipelines.

AI can:

• **Guide high quality attendees to the exhibitors' booths**

• **Suggest meetings by matching attendee and exhibitor profiles**

• **Highlight products based on shared interests or buying signals**

For exhibitors, less generic booth traffic and more meaningful conversations. This shifts exhibitor's outcome expectations from quantity to quality—resulting conversions from prospect to customer, stronger ROI, and long-term exhibitor satisfaction.

How AI Delivers Real-Time Booth Performance and Lead Insights

Exhibitors won't need to wait until after the show to understand or act upon booth performance. AI will surface visitor data throughout the event, highlighting:

- **Which leads are the most important to focus on**

- **Overlapping areas of interest between the attendee and exhibitor**

- **What kind of follow-up message will resonate with the attendee**

AI can also assist with personalized follow-up messaging, informed by what attendees actually engaged with. Making the follow up outreach more relevant, timely and improves conversions.

How AI Helps Exhibitors Prove and Defend Trade Show ROI

With AI helping drive targeted traffic, schedule meetings, and prioritize follow-up, exhibitors leave events with quality prospects and stronger pipelines. Instead of relying on anecdotal success, they can see exactly how engagement on the show floor turned into real conversations and qualified opportunities.

This level of clarity makes trade show ROI easy to justify. When exhibitors understand what worked, who engaged, and what they are interested in, the value of the event becomes defensible and repeatable. That insight is one of the strongest drivers of rebooking decisions and long-term exhibitor loyalty. Your exhibitors need organized engagement data, information about interactions, and performance signals brought into a clear, exhibitor-friendly view in the same place that they interact with your event.

When exhibitors leave your trade show with a strong pipeline of qualified leads and clear insights on how to continue those conversations, your event becomes a vital channel for their business. They are more likely to rebook, invest in higher-value sponsorships, and bring additional team members because they can clearly justify the spend. Your show is no longer something they attend out of fear of missing out. It becomes a proven driver of business results.

How AI Will Change Trade Shows for Event Organizers in 2026

For event organizers, AI provides the tool that has been long sought. Giving a hyper-personalized experience to each attendee based on their needs. AI and AI Assistant are unique in their ability to process data and provide actionable output in real-time. As an organizer this can also provide visibility that has historically been difficult to see- let alone act upon- during live events.

How AI Helps Event Organizers Protect and Grow Trade Show Revenue

Behind the scenes is where AI becomes especially powerful for organizers. By analyzing engagement, booth traffic, meeting activity, and attendee interactions, AI can surface trends and risks that are easy to miss during live execution.

AI can identify exhibitors at risk of not returning—often before they realize it themselves—allowing organizers to step in early with support, visibility adjustments, or new opportunities that improve outcomes and protect revenue.

How AI Interprets Event Data Beyond Traditional Metrics

For organizers, AI won't just interpret existing event data. It will create new data sets.

Beyond session attendance and booth visits, AI can surface:

- **Current attendee needs and interests not being addressed**

- **New categories that the event sales team should focus on**

- **Adjacent markets that could be added to the event**

- **Inform attendee acquisition campaigns**

- **And even more...**

These insights help organizers make smarter decisions during the event and plan future shows with greater confidence.

How AI Improves Exhibitor Retention and Event Growth

When AI helps attendees and exhibitors achieve their goals, the value of the event becomes tangible. More meetings, better connections, and clearer outcomes lead to higher satisfaction.

When outcomes are measurable and experiences feel intentional, satisfaction compounds across every stakeholder group. That satisfaction translates into:

- **Higher exhibitor retention**

- **Increased booth sales and sponsorship upgrades**

- **Attendees more likely to return year after year**

AI supports revenue growth by improving the experience and making the pipeline to sales flow better.

If AI is not yet part of your event improvement strategy, now is the time to act. Investing in digital infrastructure that supports better decisions, stronger relationships, and more resilient event revenue will compound in value as AI becomes more capable and human expertise grows alongside it.

Why AI at Trade Shows Is About Amplifying Human Connection

In 2026, AI used by trade shows will be less about novelty or utility, it will be about execution. AI will answer questions in the moment, guide attendees toward better decisions, help exhibitors clearly understand their ROI, and give organizers the insight they need to build stronger, more profitable events.

AI isn't changing why people attend trade shows, but it will change how they achieve the goals they arrive with. The most successful trade shows won't be the ones just using AI. They will be the events that use AI intentionally. When deployed well, AI becomes the ultimate assistant—anticipating needs, reducing friction, and support the human interactions that make in-person events valuable in the first place. Even better, the more AI is used the more it learns and improves day after day and year after year.

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AI in Events: How AI Strengthens Human Connections in the Events Industry

Jason Stookey
*VP of Business Development at Map Your Show*

It's a common question among event organizers, exhibitors, and marketers navigating the ongoing change in event and trade show technology platforms. With automation, machine learning, and predictive analytics reshaping industries across all sorts of sectors, many in the event space wonder: Will AI replace human interaction at events?

The answer: No. AI isn't replacing the human element of events and trade shows, but it is amplifying it. Some of the best event professionals are already using it to create more efficient, engaging, and personalized experiences.

AI in a Human-Centered Industry

Why is there so much resistance to change? With AI and events, it comes down to what they each do best.

B2B events offer face-to-face opportunities for building new connections. They're defined by in-person discovery, spontaneous interactions, and the kind of connection that simply can't be duplicated with a virtual environment. It's in the handshake after a product demo, the coffee line conversation that turns into a contract, or the post-session debrief where the real value is unlocked. Even something as simple as body language can be interpreted differently in the two environments (in-person vs online).
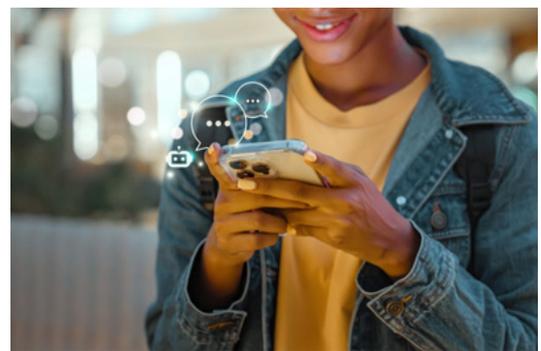
AI, by contrast, thrives when behavior is structured and predictable. It focuses on automation and efficiency. So, the worry of "will this technology impact the very heart and soul of the in-person experience?" is understandable.

Here's the key shift in perspective. AI isn't here to be a substitute for human connection, but it is here to support it. Just as lighting and sound amplify the emotion of a keynote stage, AI amplifies engagement by removing friction, surfacing new opportunities that may not have been previously available, simplifying time-consuming tasks, and enabling action.

Insider Tip

When exploring event management software vendors that harness the power of AI, consider how their tools can support, rather than replace, those important personal connections. Go for a solution that truly enhances personalization, steering clear of generic automation.
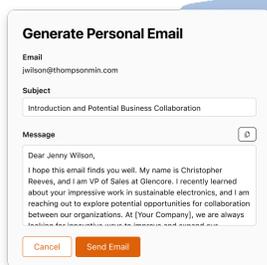
Before and During the Event: Smarter Targeting and Matchmaking

In the pre-event phase, AI is already transforming how we target, attract, and prepare participants.

For exhibitors, one of the biggest challenges has always been sorting through badge scans and business cards to find the leads that are truly valuable. AI is now able to handle the bulk of that legwork. Predictive lead scoring and intent tools analyze behavioral data and historical CRM records to identify high-priority contacts before the show even begins.

Smart networking platforms are also helping attendees and exhibitors connect more effectively. Instead of static filters or generic categories, AI reviews user behavior and preferences to generate highly relevant meeting recommendations. This means more productive conversations and less guesswork.

Organizers are benefiting, too. Generative AI enables them to send personalized marketing emails at scale, increasing open and registration rates. According to Demand Spring, "businesses that have integrated AI into their email marketing strategies have seen a 41% increase in click-through rates and a 20% rise in conversion rates."

AI is even being used to recommend sessions, demos, and networking opportunities based on attendee profiles. This helps attendees make more informed decisions about how to spend their time, leading to higher satisfaction and engagement levels.

Now for when the event begins, AI will quietly continue its support role, never interfering with human interaction but making it more effective.

One thing that AI is exceptional at is personalizing the on-site experience for attendees and exhibitors. A few pioneering shows, utilizing the right event management technology platforms, are leveraging this capability to tailor content recommendations or display booth-specific promotions based on a visitor's profile.

Insider Tip

Encourage attendees to complete their profiles with specific goals and interests. The more detailed the input, the more precise the networking results will be. Don't forget to train your team on how to use AI dashboards or lead capture tools before the event as well.

After the Event: Smarter Follow-Up and Clearer ROI

After the event ends, AI continues to deliver value by turning interactions into outcomes. This has long been a challenge in the industry. It's easy to see that conversations happened; it's harder to know which ones led to revenue.

With AI, that story becomes clearer. Personalized follow-ups can be generated automatically based on data from booth visits and session check-ins. These communications feel more relevant and timely, resulting in improved response rates.

AI can also help marketers and sales teams segment leads by buying readiness or interest. This lets teams prioritize who to reach out to first, improving conversion potential.

Event data also feeds into future planning. AI helps analyze what worked, what didn't, and what could be improved—from session popularity to booth engagement to audience sentiment. These insights inform decisions on everything from pricing strategy to floor plan design.

Resolution: Not Replacing the Human, Empowering Them with AI-Powered Event Technology

At the end of the day, events are, and always will be, about people. AI doesn't change that. What it changes is the environment around those interactions. It eliminates noise, speeds up decision-making, and gives us tools to connect more deeply and deliberately.

When used thoughtfully, AI frees people to do what they do best—read the room, listen actively, build trust, and respond with empathy. These are qualities no algorithm can replicate.

The goal isn't to make events more technical. It's to make them more human by clearing away the clutter that distracts us from meaningful interaction.

The Future of Events with AI

Looking ahead, the use of AI in events will only grow, and that's a good thing, provided we focus on purpose over novelty. The future of events is not driven by AI. It's AI-supported.

That's an important distinction. It reminds us that while technology may enhance how we gather, it's the human element that gives these gatherings purpose.

Final Thoughts

AI is not the enemy of human connection in the event world. It's one of its strongest allies.

Rather than diluting the in-person experience, AI allows us to double down on what makes it special. By helping us prepare more effectively, listen more attentively, and follow up more efficiently, AI makes each moment at an event more impactful.

As professionals working at the intersection of technology and live experiences, our mission is clear. We must adopt these tools with care, creativity, and intention, always prioritizing people's needs.

In a time when distractions are constant and attention is scarce, the ability to make every conversation count is invaluable. With smart event management technology that utilizes AI, such as Map Your Show, we can do exactly that.

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Do This, Not That: How Trade Show Planners Should Use AI

Ben Dunlap

VP of Sales at Map Your Show

Trade shows have always been about one thing: **human connection**. Having thoughtful industry conversations, making new discoveries, and forging new relationships on the show floor is the mission of every person present at your trade show. However, the challenge everyone faces is feeling overwhelmed or missing out on key connections or opportunities because there are too many things to see and do and only so much time.

AI should be used at trade shows to give attendees and exhibitors confidence. Confidence they are in the right place, talking to the right people, and spending their time in ways that move them closer to their goals. When AI is embedded directly into the attendee and exhibitor experience—rather than layered on as a separate tool—it helps remove uncertainty, friction, and guesswork. People show up more prepared, more focused, and more willing to engage.

The Right Way to Use AI: Creating Space for Better Human Interaction

The real goal of AI at events is to create space, time, and mental bandwidth for people to connect more meaningfully. When attendees aren't overwhelmed by options or unsure where to go next, they feel confident making decisions. Personalized recommendations, proximity-aware guidance, and tailored agendas help attendees spend less time navigating and more time engaging.

When exhibitors aren't guessing whether their investment is paying off, they engage more strategically. Real engagement signals—beyond simple badge scans—give exhibitors clarity on attendee intent, meeting quality, and follow-up priorities.

Thoughtful AI helps:

- **An attendee who feels overwhelmed feel oriented and purposeful**

- **An attendee confidently discover relevant exhibitors, sessions, and people aligned to their goals**

- **An exhibitor who feels uncertain feel prepared and in control**

- **An exhibitor prioritize high-value conversations and book more meaningful meetings**

- **An organizer replace guesswork with clarity and insight**

That confidence changes behavior on the show floor.

The Wrong Way to Use AI: Automation That Distances People

As AI becomes more common at trade shows, the risk isn't that events become too advanced—it's that they become impersonal or ignored altogether. When AI feels generic, intrusive, or disconnected from real attendee and exhibitor goals, people disengage.

AI should never short-circuit human interaction or automate it away. Used poorly, it adds noise. Used well, it removes obstacles. The difference is whether AI understands your event ecosystem—your floor plan, your exhibitors, your sessions, and your audience behavior—or whether it's operating without context.

The challenge for organizers is how to use AI the right way. How do you deploy AI thoughtfully, so it enhances everyone's experience instead of getting in the way or being completely ignored?

Since AI is still a new and evolving tool, it's easy to use improperly—especially when applying technology to complex and inherently human-driven events. This is why

"AI isn't here to be a substitute for human connection. It's here to support it. Just as lighting and sound amplify the emotion of a keynote stage, AI amplifies engagement by removing friction, simplifying time-consuming tasks, and enabling action."

Jason Stookey, VP of Business Development at Map Your Show

adoption, trust, and usefulness matter more than novelty.

So instead of providing prompt templates for ChatGPT, this guide is centered around strategies to maximize the usefulness and adoption of an AI Assistant being deployed at a trade show and make your AI-incorporated event shine.

DON'T: Let AI Write Speaker Bios, Session Descriptions, or Exhibitor Profiles

Generative AI can make content creation faster, but speed without strategy creates problems. Many organizers and exhibitors use AI-generated bios or descriptions as a shortcut, without considering search behavior, attendee queries, or how AI assistants surface results.

Generic, AI-written profiles often lack:

- **Industry-specific language**

- **Clear value propositions**

- **The keywords attendees use when searching**

When this happens, even the most advanced AI assistants can't confidently surface or recommend the right booths, products, or sessions—because the signals simply aren't there.

DO THIS INSTEAD: Teach Exhibitors and Speakers How AI Finds and Displays Them

Explain to exhibitors and speakers that the content they submit isn't just for humans. It's being crawled by your AI assistant and the large language models that power search, recommendations, and matchmaking.

Provide guidance that helps them succeed:

- **Share examples of strong vs. weak descriptions**

- **Highlight key phrases attendees actually search for**

- **Explain that AI won't recommend booths or sessions if those signals are missing**

- **Show them how to refine content so it aligns with attendee intent and discovery behavior**

When exhibitors understand that better content leads to better visibility, AI becomes a trusted driver of booth traffic and meaningful engagement—not a black box.

DON'T: Let Attendees Arrive Without Knowing About Your AI Assistant

Don't make the mistake of unveiling your AI Assistant at the same moment attendees pick up their badges. By then, attention is split and habits are already forming.

DO THIS INSTEAD: Introduce Your AI Before the Show and Encourage Better Input

Through email, notifications, or show-preparedness guides, communicate early how your AI Assistant will help attendees plan, navigate, and connect. Encourage them to complete their profiles ahead of time so recommendations, matches, and agendas can be truly personalized.

Tell them to include:

- **Specific goals**

- **Topics of interest**

- **Who they want to meet**

- **What success looks like for them**

The more intentional the input, the more precise the paths, recommendations, and connections AI can deliver—especially once attendees are onsite.

DON'T: Rely on a Basic Chatbot With Scripted Answers

Not all AI is created equal. A simple chatbot that answers basic FAQs but breaks down with real questions quickly frustrates users and erodes trust.

Attendees don't ask simple questions at large events. They ask contextual ones:

- **"Which vendors specialize in this solution and are near my next session?"**

- **"Who should I meet based on my role and goals?"**

A scripted bot can't handle that complexity.

DO THIS INSTEAD: Use a True AI Trained on Your Event

True AI assistance at large events is trained on your specific show landscape. It understands:

- **Your exhibitor categories**

- **Your floor plan**

- **Your session content**

- **Your audience behavior**

This allows AI to deliver recommendations that factor in relevance, proximity, intent, and timing. To help attendees optimize their onsite experience and exhibitors connect with the right prospects.

DON'T: Upload Static Reports and Ask AI to "Figure It Out"

Uploading basic performance reports into a generic AI tool after the show leads to disconnected insights and missed opportunities.

DO THIS INSTEAD: Use AI for Real-Time Event Insights

When AI is integrated into your event ecosystem, it captures insights before, during, and after the show. That includes:

- **Common attendee questions**

- **Foot traffic patterns and paths**

- **Exhibitor engagement trends**

- **Signals explaining why something performed well**

These real-time insights allow organizers to adjust, optimize, and confidently prove value—rather than relying on anecdotes or post-show surveys alone.

AI Works Best When It's Treated as a Strategy, Not a Shortcut

As the saying goes, you get out what you put in, and AI is no exception. When AI is used the right way, trade shows become more human and less robotic.

Many people see AI as a productivity tool. We believe its true power is in building confidence, improving decision-making, and connecting the right people at the right time.

We've invested heavily in building intuitive AI solutions designed specifically for the event industry. All with the goals of reducing friction, unifying engagement, and delivering clarity across attendees, exhibitors, and organizers.

New MYS Connected: AI-Powered Personalization for Every Attendee

Deliver a truly personalized event experience with AI. Guide attendees to the right exhibitors, sessions, and connections before, during, and after the event.

Turn event data into meaningful interactions, increase attendee engagement, improve exhibitor ROI. Fully integrated into the Map Your Show platform, MYS Connected helps event organizers provide greater event value with intuitive use of AI.

Stress-Free Event Planning for Attendees

Powered by artificial intelligence and behavioral data, MYS Connected lets attendees personalize their planner to easily find sessions, products, suppliers, and connections. Attendees can build their own agenda or, with the help of MYS Connected's AI Assistant "Ask Lina", fill open time slots for a stress-free, personalized event experience.
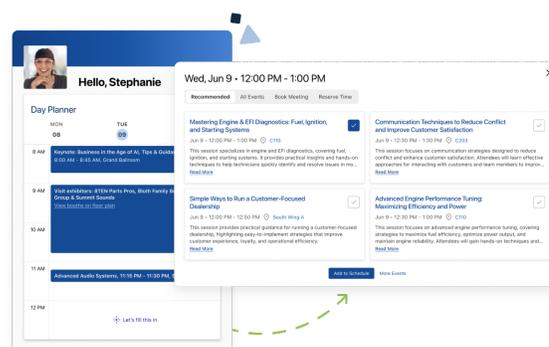
"Ask Lina", the Agentic AI Assistant

The "Ask Lina", AI assistant makes event planning effortless, allowing attendees to discover relevant exhibitors, products, and sessions.

Available online and in the MYS Mobile App, "Ask Lina" learns and adapts to each attendee's interactions throughout the
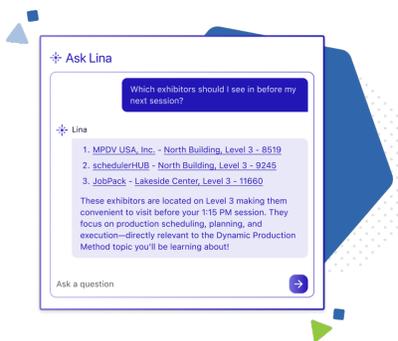
show to provide high-quality, more specific results and recommendations over time, helping attendees quickly find the right sessions, exhibitors, products, and networking opportunities.

Smart Networking

Our AI Assistant makes networking smarter by delivering context-aware matches with an explanation about why they matter.

Smart matchmaking directs attendees toward the contacts and exhibitors most aligned with their preferences, behavior and objectives. Whether it's finding suppliers, clients, or industry peers, MYS Connected ensures meaningful and highly relevant connections for attendees and exhibitors.
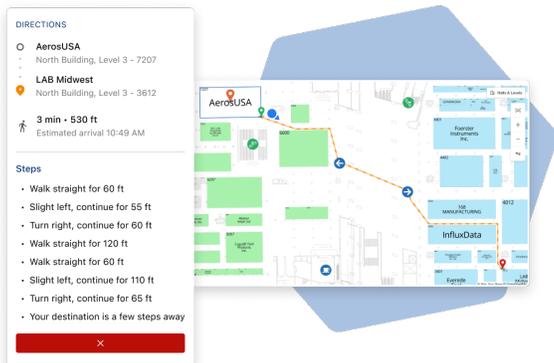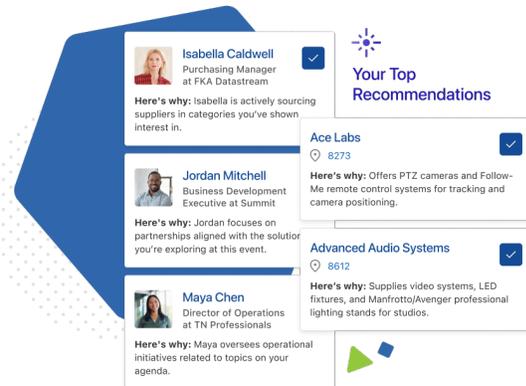
Walkable Directions

With MYS Connected, our Attendee View Floor Plan lets you guide attendees through the event venue using turn-by-turn directions. The Floor Plan allows users to navigate the show from one location point to a desired destination, providing walkable directions, travel time, and estimated arrival.

Built into the MYS Platform

MYS Connected integrates multiple data sources across your event, and on the MYS platform, to help attendees plan efficiently. Discover more features and benefits of adding MYS Connected to your Map Your Show event technology solutions.

Contact Us

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