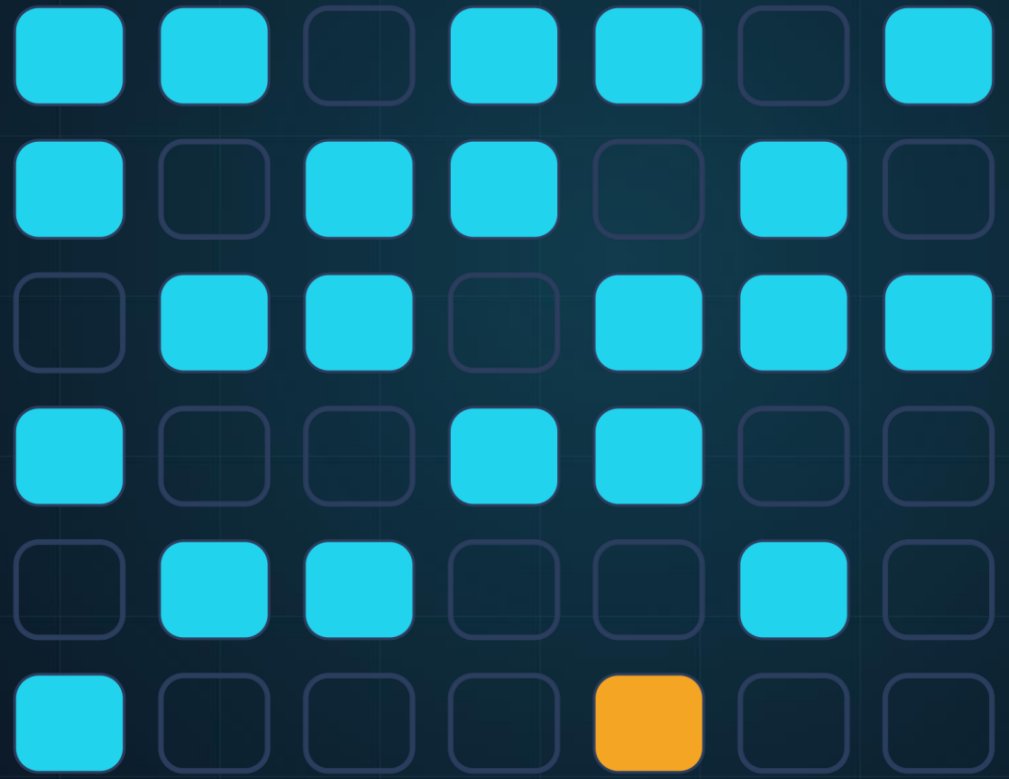
MGCI EVENT PRODUCTION TRAINING · OCT 29, 2026

Filling Seats



How to market your event so people actually show up

Christian Buckley with Sharon Weaver & Wes Preston

Microsoft MVP & Regional Director · CollabTalk · buckleyplanet.com

WHY THIS MATTERS

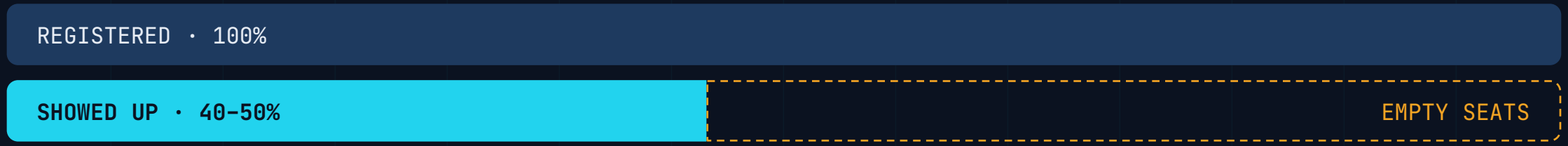
Community doesn’t just happen, it gets organized

Technology changes fast. Community is what keeps creating value long after the slides are forgotten.

> **Every seat is a person who decided your event was worth an evening.**

THE TWO NUMBERS YOU MANAGE

The real number is who shows up



40–50%

of RSVPs show up for free events (70–85% with a fee)

Meetup Blog · undated

~37%

median no-show, small free events (~28% for all free events)

PheedLoop · 1,070+ events

57%

of online registrants attend, counting on-demand viewers

ON24 · vendor data, B2B webinars

CHAT → What's your typical show rate?

THE GAPS

Five reasons seats stay empty

01

A vague “why attend”

“It’ll be a great time” isn’t a reason

02

Organizers promoting alone

Your reach stops at your own network

03

Logos with no faces

People come to see people

04

One post, then silence

An announcement is not a campaign

05

Stuck in the same bubble

Same channels, same people, every time

THE GAPS

The post-COVID passive problem

Many user groups never made it back from online-only. The ones that did had to give people a reason to leave the couch.

THE OLD MODEL

Sit and watch

Sit through a lecture, then watch someone else build something.

vs

WHAT BRINGS PEOPLE BACK

Build it yourself

Hands-on labs, practical expertise, and time to actually meet the people around you.

If the experience is passive, the next invitation is easy to ignore.

WHAT OTHER ORGANIZERS OBSERVE

Different communities, the same lessons

The invitation starts the event

Priya Parker · The Art of Gathering

Repeat attendance is the real metric

David Spinks · CMX

Welcome first-timers personally

Carrie Melissa Jones · CMJ Group

Design something atypical

Seth Godin

Direct contact raises turnout

Ben Weger · Meetup

Lightweight formats, more voices

Rosie Sherry · Rosieland

Borrow other groups' stages

David Giard · Detroit Day of Azure

Show the real feel of the day

Haroon Mota · Muslim Hikers

THE FRAMEWORK

Three levers and a loop

01

Promise

A concrete reason to show up

02

People

Others amplify your reach

03

Persistence

Cadence turns RSVPs into seats

04 · LOOP

Proof

The recap sells the next one

The recap from each event becomes the promise of the next one

LEVER 01 · PROMISE

Write the one-line “why attend” first

BEFORE

~~Learn about AI~~

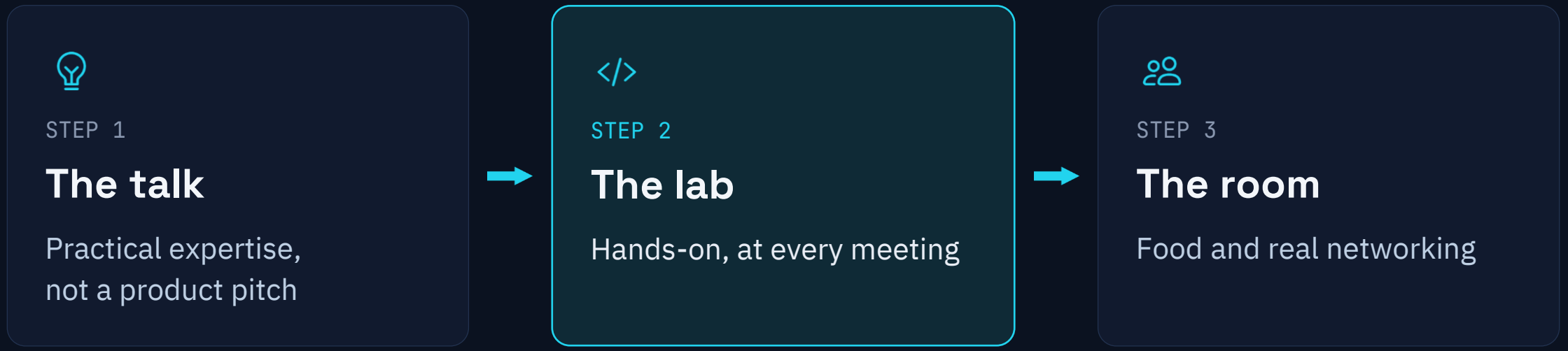
AFTER

Discover 3 ways small businesses are using AI to save time and cut costs

- ✓ List 3–4 concrete takeaways
- ✓ Name who it’s for
- ✓ Then write the promo

LEVER 01 · PROMISE

Design a format people will leave home for



#DALLASMAC

Come curious. Leave capable.

LEVER 02 · PEOPLE

Give speakers and sponsors a share kit

share-kit/

- Pre-written posts
- Images and hashtags
- 30-second speaker video
- Registration link

One post per session

Name the speaker in each one, so every speaker reshares their own.

Daniel Glenn, MVP · SPS Nashville

40–50%

Partner list overlap in my ISV days. Every co-promotion reached a big pool of new people through a trusted intro.

Experience, not a benchmark

LEVER 02 · PEOPLE

Step outside the tech bubble

REFRAME THE TOPIC

~~Microsoft 365 Governance~~

Digital tools for small business growth

- Make attending easy: directions, parking, accessibility, hybrid where you can
- Show up for partners year-round, not only when you need promotion

WHERE TO PROMOTE

Meetup for discovery, LinkedIn for visibility

Meetup

DISCOVERY ENGINE

- Keyword-rich titles and a regular schedule feed topic emails and search
- Message first-timers personally before the event

+20% RSVPs from Meetup's redesigned iOS Explore page

Meetup's own data · 2024

LinkedIn

WHERE PROS ALREADY ARE

- Create a LinkedIn Event and have speakers post personally
- Try an audio event for a lighter format

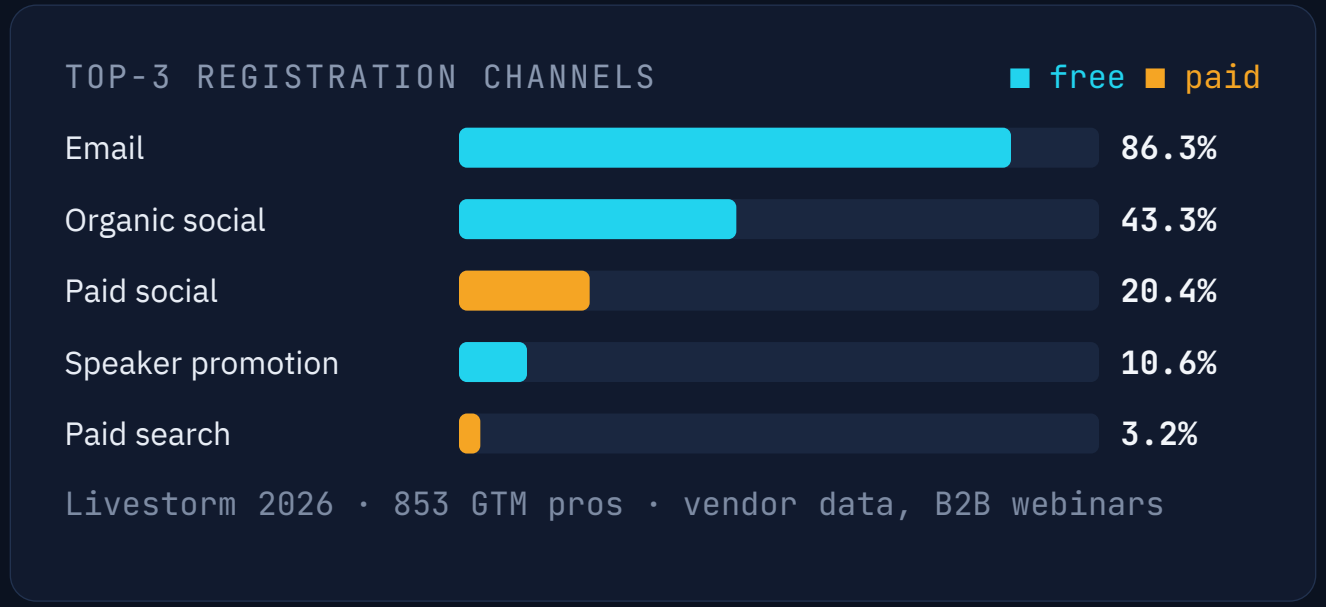
4.4× more registrations with Event Ads (31× more viewers)

LinkedIn internal pilot · 2023–24

WHERE TO PROMOTE

Free vs paid promotion

No independent study shows that paid ads fill seats at free community events. The closest data comes from vendors.



> *"I haven't noticed an increase in attendance due to paying Facebook."*
>
> Daniel Glenn, MVP · SPS Nashville, 2016

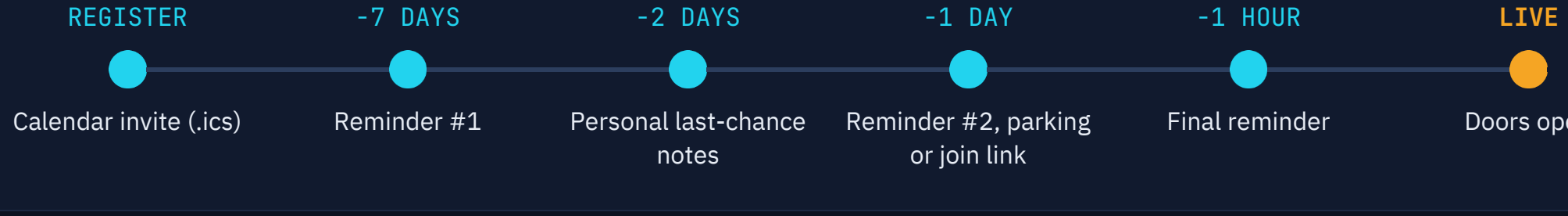
LEVER 03 · PERSISTENCE

Turn RSVPs into attendees

49.7% registered in the final 7 days

15.3% registered on the day itself

Livestorm · 7.06M registrations · vendor data, B2B webinars



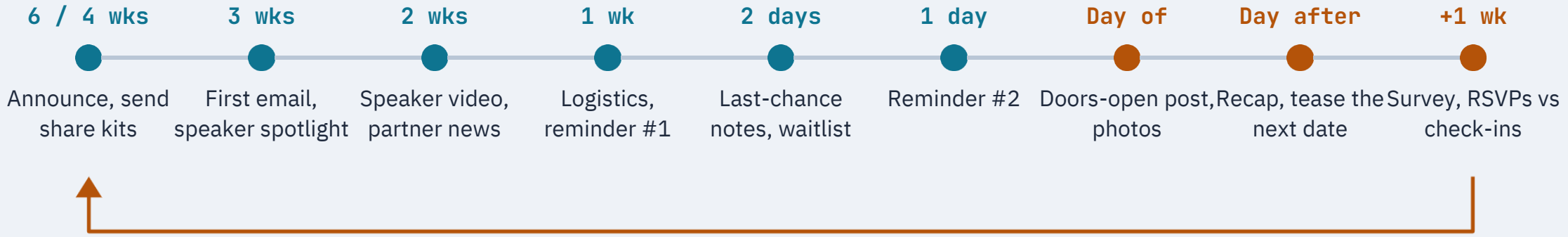
Keep registration open until start time

Overbook from your own show rate, and open a waitlist

CHAT → Which reminder worked best for you?

RHYTHM · THE HANDOUT

A promotion rhythm you can repeat



Proof loops back: the recap becomes the next event's promise

LinkedIn	Meetup, Facebook	Email	Community calendars
visibility	reach	conversions	discovery

Full checklist in the handout

PICK ONE LEVER FOR YOUR NEXT EVENT

Communicate smarter, not louder

Christian Buckley

buckleyplanet.com · @buckleyplanet

Scan to connect on LinkedIn

OFFICE HOURS · IN CHAT

Who’s your most underused amplifier: speakers, sponsors, past attendees, or a local partner?

OFFICE HOURS · IN CHAT

Rewrite your next event’s title as a “why attend” line, right now.