

# NAB pulls plug on Las Vegas show; other conventions still coming

By [Richard N. Velotta](#) Las Vegas Review-Journal

September 15, 2021 - 7:14 am

The National Association of Broadcasters on Wednesday abruptly canceled [its October convention in Las Vegas](#), a decision that disappointed Southern Nevada tourism leaders but is unlikely to snowball into more cancellations, according to analysts.

The event, one of Las Vegas' top three annual trade show gatherings by attendance, historically has attracted 90,000 to 100,000 broadcasting professionals to the city for several days to celebrate radio, television and streamed content as well as provide educational seminars for engineers and other production personnel.

Chris Brown, executive vice president and managing director of global connections and events at the National Association of Broadcasters, announced on Twitter early Wednesday that the show was canceled. Brown said the COVID-19 pandemic and surge of the delta variant has “presented unexpected and insurmountable challenges for our global community.”

A spokesperson for the association said pre-registration for NAB had been strong and in line with what it expected. Most organizations meeting in Las Vegas have said they've been happy getting about half the turnout they normally get.

Wednesday's announcement marked the third time an NAB show had been scratched. The 2020 show [was one of the first big conventions to be canceled](#) when resorts and casinos shut down for 78 days.

The 2021 NAB show in April [was postponed to Oct. 9-13](#). Now, the show is scheduled to return April 23-27, 2022, and the association said it would soon announce a scaled-down virtual version of the show.

Jennifer Sizemore, chief communications officer for the Southern Nevada Health District, said the agency wasn't involved in NAB's decision to cancel the show.

"It was likely a decision made by the event organizer based on their own criteria," she said. "We do support any voluntary steps organizations are taking to slow the spread of COVID-19 at this time."

## **No other cancellations**

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority issued a brief statement on the cancellation.

“We deeply value our three-decade long partnership with NAB and will greatly miss seeing their exhibitors and attendees this fall,” said LVCVA President and CEO Steve Hill. “We eagerly await the show’s return in April.”

An LVCVA spokeswoman added that no other conventions or trade shows have canceled.

Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak said through a spokeswoman that he understood NAB’s decision.

“The governor continues to use all the resources available to encourage more Nevadans and visitors to get their COVID-19 vaccine and continues to work with public health officials on ways to make large events safer for workers and for attendees,” a statement from the governor said. “The governor looks forward to welcoming NAB back to the Silver State in April 2022.”

Analysts said Wednesday that while the cancellation doesn’t bode well for the meetings industry, there’s no indication that NAB’s action will lead to more convention cancellations.

## **‘Uncharted territory’**

“We are once again in uncharted territory,” said Amanda Belarmino, an assistant professor at the William F. Harrah College of Hospitality at UNLV. “With the choice of vaccine or mask mandates for Nevada conventions, the risk of the delta variant should be mitigated, however once again we must

manage the perception of our potential guests. This is not a good sign for the recovery, but the continued influx of leisure guests indicates that this may not be a prevailing concern for all travelers.”

Belarmino said that unlike in 2020, vaccines are widely available and effective, and that higher vaccination rates nationwide would ease anxieties and boost recovery.

Analyst Brendan Bussmann, director of government affairs for Las Vegas-based Global Market Advisors, wasn't surprised by NAB's decision.

“This will only further elongate our recovery as this is one of many conferences that are facing some tough decisions as attendees are choosing their travel carefully,” Bussmann said. “Meetings and conventions are one of the key components to our long-term recovery and getting back to normal.”

Bussmann said the decisions by the leadership of other trade shows has been helpful.

“Many of the upcoming shows are making the decision to mandate vaccines, including G2E and CES,” he said. “While this has helped with the current mask mandate per the governor's latest directive, it will still be some time before business is fully back in Las Vegas. Once this latest curveball gets cleared, there is no doubt in my mind that the pent up demand to do business face to face will come roaring back. ”

## Companies bowing out

Josh Swissman, founding partner of the Las Vegas-based Strategy Organization, said NAB likely bowed out when major exhibitor companies showed reluctance to attend.

“NAB show organizers themselves saw the writing on the wall when they had companies like Sony, Canon, Adobe and others pull out of attending the conference,” he said. “When the big attendees pull out like that, it obviously takes away a pretty big chunk of the base of constituents that would frequently attend a show like that.”

Swissman also said NAB is a show that relies heavily on international participation — and overseas airlift has been slow to return to Las Vegas.

“Historically, shows like NAB have a very big international contingent in terms of visitation and show attendance. All you need to do is look at the current McCarran airlift into and out of the city to know that international air travel is really almost nonexistent, and that goes even more so with destinations or countries like China, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea.

“When you add those factors together, big companies pulling out of the show and the already very low, almost nonexistent international travel, I get it. I understand why they did what they did,” he said.

Organizers of some of the biggest events on the calendar said Wednesday their plans for Las Vegas haven't been daunted by NAB's decision to cancel.

The Global Gaming Expo, [scheduled Oct. 4-7 at the Venetian Expo](#), is a go according to show organizers.

"We understand that safety is top of mind, which is why we've implemented vaccine requirements and masking protocols for all show participants," said Meredith Pallante, vice president of global events for the sponsoring American Gaming Association.

"We're committed to providing a safe event, where everyone can feel confident conducting business, learning the latest industry trends, and reconnecting with friends and colleagues."

## **SEMA on board**

Chris Kersting, president and CEO of SEMA — the Specialty Equipment Market Association, an aftermarket automotive parts trade show — said his organization is continuing to [plan its event Nov. 2-5](#) and the NAB cancellation hasn't deterred it.

The [National Finals Rodeo](#), scheduled at the Thomas & Mack Center Dec. 2-11, also is a go.

Pat Christenson, president of Las Vegas Events, a rodeo sponsor, said NFR has the advantage of being late on the calendar so

representatives can watch and learn from other events and organizations.

“There will be an NFR in Las Vegas,” said Pat Christenson, president of Las Vegas Events, a rodeo sponsor. “If there are Raiders games and Golden Knights games, there will be an NFR.”

Christenson said he expects sponsors will make an announcement in the next few weeks about participant and fan requirements for attending what is considered the Super Bowl of rodeos.

CES, which annually kicks off Las Vegas’ convention season with the largest trade show of the year every January, [also is on the calendar](#) for the beginning of 2022, and it plans to move forward.

“CES is four months away,” a spokesperson for the sponsoring Consumer Technology Association said. “We are optimistic and recently announced that CES 2022 will require proof of COVID-19 vaccination to attend in-person. To date, over 1,100 companies have committed to exhibiting in Las Vegas, including the world’s best-known brands and startups from around the world.”

The news of NAB’s cancellation didn’t bother Nikhil Bhatt and Ajay Kumar, exhibitors at the [MINExpo 2021 tradeshow](#) at the Las Vegas Convention Center. The two are executives at rival companies, though on Wednesday afternoon they chit-chatted in the hallway outside of the central hall show floor, catching up from behind their blue medical masks.

It was encouraging to see many attendees wearing their masks while indoors, said Kumar, 61, with Garland, Texas-based Epiroc Drilling Solutions. He noted that Nevada's indoor mask requirement is different from his home state.

"I'm from Texas, he's from Florida," said Kumar, looking at Bhatt, "so these are the two states where there's huge controversies."

Bhatt is a 40-year-old Alachua, Florida, resident. He said his company, Sandvik Mining and Rock Solutions, required employees to be vaccinated if they wanted to attend MINExpo.

Data prove that vaccinated people are at lower risk than the unvaccinated, he said, adding that he's vaccinated.

"A lot of people didn't show up for this show, as well," Bhatt said.

Gonzalo Grajeda, 22, said he felt comfortable at the convention because he had worn his mask, practiced social distancing and regularly sanitized his hands. He said his Las Vegas Monorail car was "super crowded" while leaving the convention Monday afternoon, though the convention itself had lots of open space for people to avoid crowding.

Most people wore masks, said Grajeda, who has received one of two vaccination doses.

Grajeda, who works for Val-d'Or, Quebec, Canada-based Hydrotech Mining Inc., said he's noticed crowds of people gathering at night in Las Vegas but he's been following proper precautions.

"I can see why it got canceled," Grajeda said of the broadcasting tradeshow. "But still, it doesn't bother me."

Swissman said Las Vegas' well-known resilience will play a role in the city getting past the NAB cancellation.

"Vegas is a pretty resilient town and a pretty resilient destination, so I still feel confident that we will overcome but we have some work to do," Swissman said. "We're a town of fighters and we will continue to fight."

*The Review-Journal is owned by the family of Dr. Miriam Adelson, the majority shareholder of Las Vegas Sands Corp., which operates The Venetian.*

Contact Richard N. Velotta at [rvelotta@reviewjournal.com](mailto:rvelotta@reviewjournal.com) or 702-477-3893. Follow [@RickVelotta](https://twitter.com/RickVelotta) on Twitter. Review-Journal staff writer Mike Shoro contributed to this report.