Ultimate Guide to Hosting a Successful Virtual Event 2021

EVENTX

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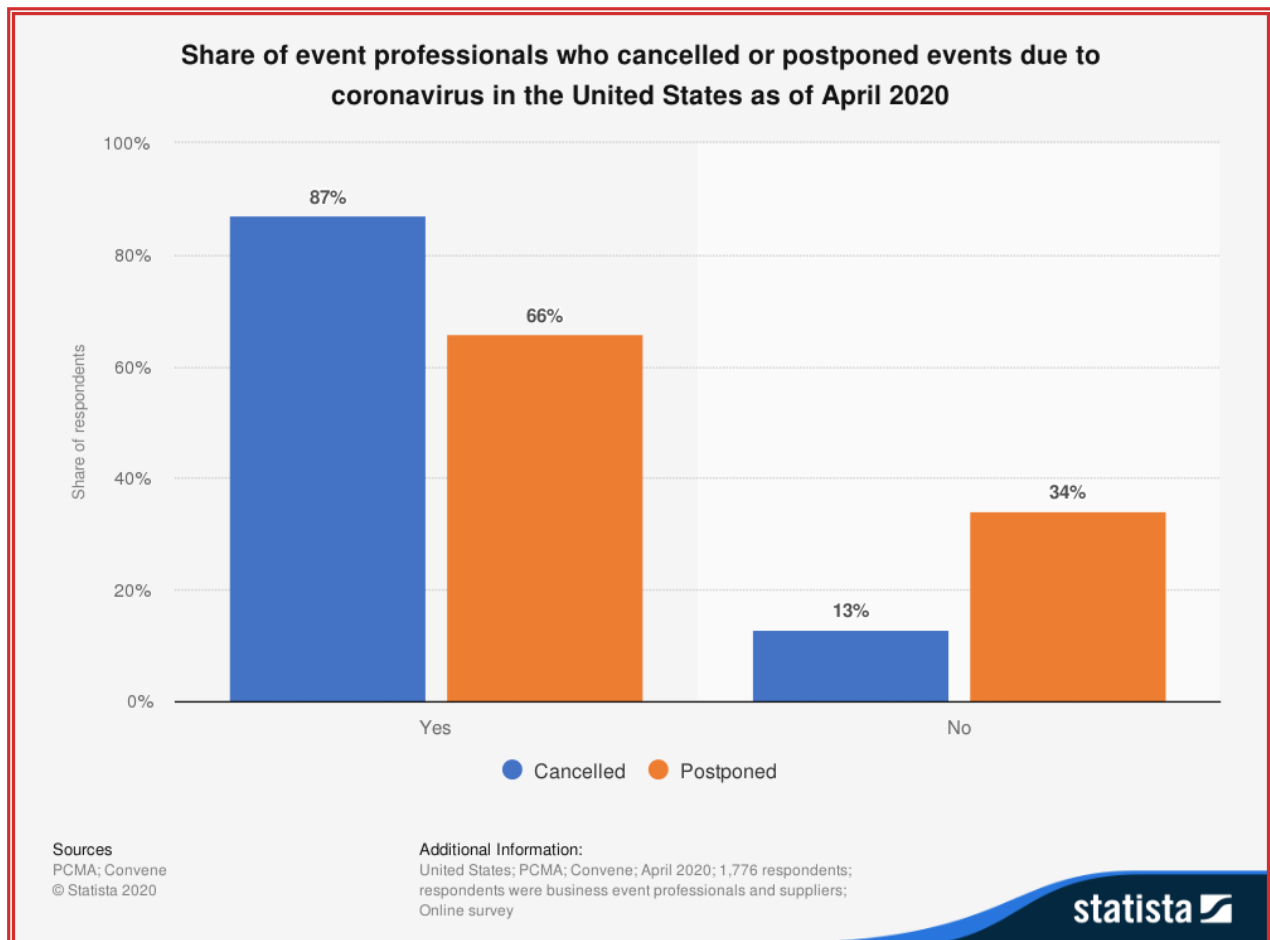"Technology makes events and meeting a better place for people to connect"

— SUM WONG
CO-FOUNDER & CEO

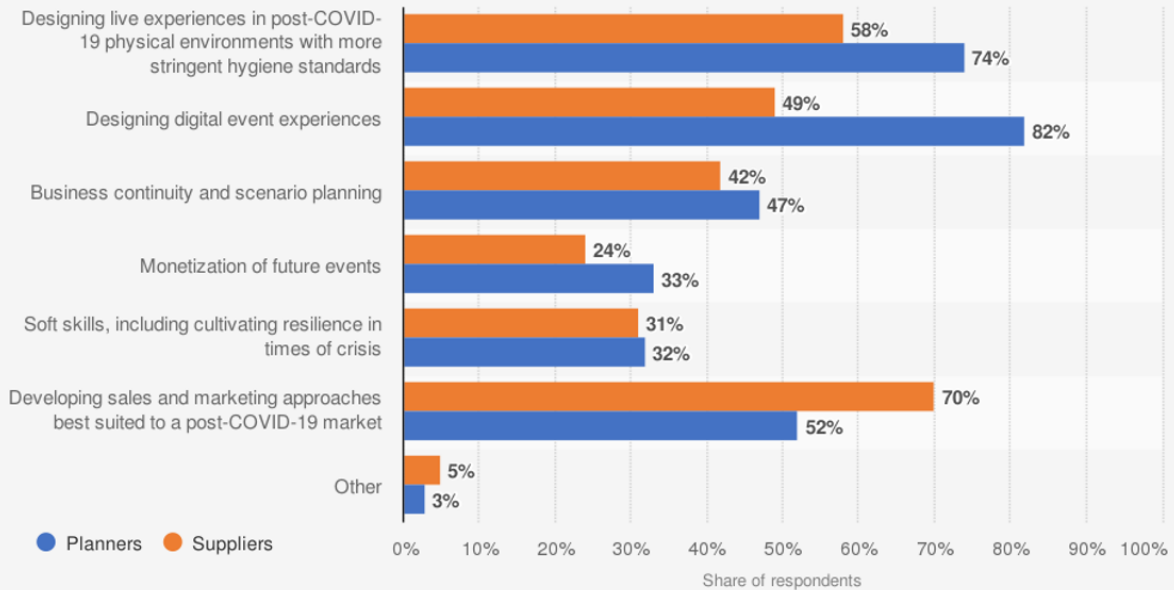## "What do you do when meeting in-person is simply not an option?"

Due to the unprecedented circumstances brought about by coronavirus, the whole event industry has been forced to put on pause. Events of all sizes, including physical exhibitions, seminars, conferences and trade shows, are being cancelled or postponed.

According to the results of a survey conducted in April 2020 among event professionals and their suppliers in the US, it was found that due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, 87 percent of respondents had to cancel their planned events and 66 percent postponed them. The source reported that there were not a lot of events cancelled in February, but cancellation increased between March and June. The reasons for cancellations included social distancing and travel bans, but also the fear of putting participants at risk.

Share of event professionals who cancelled or postponed events due to coronavirus in the United States as of April 2020

Share of respondents

- Yes: Cancelled 87%, Postponed 66%
- No: Cancelled 13%, Postponed 34%

● Cancelled ● Postponed

Sources
PCMA; Convene
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Additional Information:
United States; PCMA; Convene; April 2020; 1,776 respondents;
respondents were business event professionals and suppliers;
Online survey

statista

Leading job skills in the events industry required due to the coronavirus outbreak according to industry professionals in the United States as of April 2020
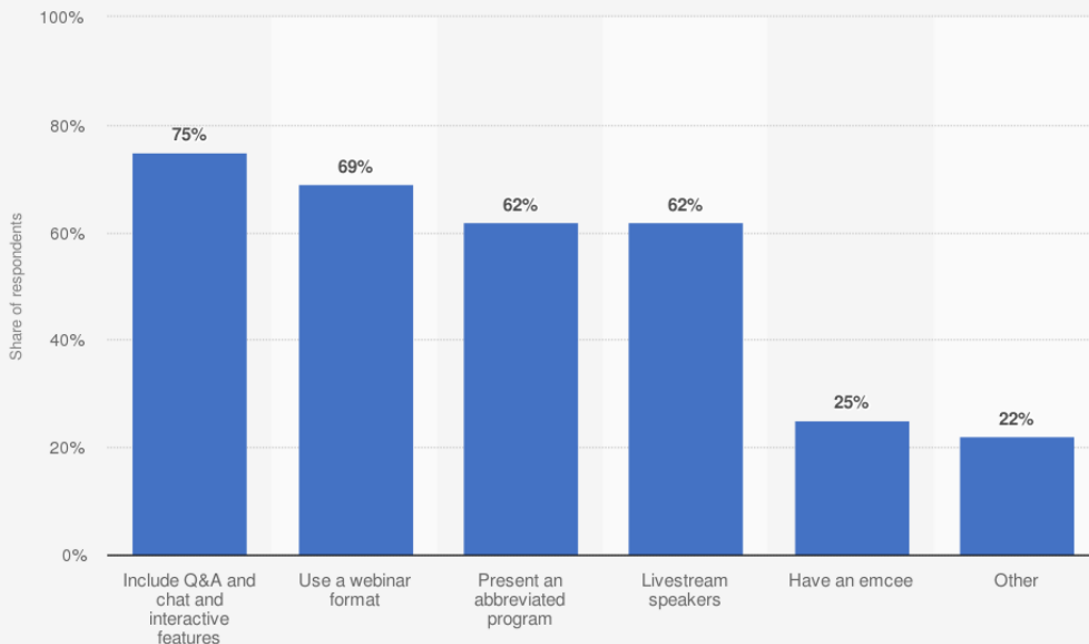
Skill	Suppliers	Planners
Designing live experiences in post-COVID-19 physical environments with more stringent hygiene standards	58%	74%
Designing digital event experiences	49%	82%
Business continuity and scenario planning	42%	47%
Monetization of future events	24%	33%
Soft skills, including cultivating resilience in times of crisis	31%	32%
Developing sales and marketing approaches best suited to a post-COVID-19 market	70%	52%
Other	5%	3%

● Planners ● Suppliers

Share of respondents (0% – 100%)

Event marketers from big firms are turning to digital delivery — particularly for large conferences and summits. The survey also found that the majority of planners believed that designing digital events is a highly anticipated skill among professionals in the industry nowadays.

Virtual events are nothing new. Yet, in order to pull off a virtual event that is every bit as exciting as your in-person plan, a change in strategic thinking and the right partners for content and technology is essential. This means that the way you engage and connect with the audience, from content to tone of voice, will have to be changed in a totally different way.

From the bar chart below, for the companies who had moved at least portions of their physical events to a virtual platform (and some did it completely), 69 percent decided to use a webinar format instead of face-to-face, while 62 percent live streamed their speakers. Above all, They were most concerned about the interactive elements in the virtual events.

In the following sections, EventX is going to compare the strategic planning of physical events and virtual events from different perspectives, as well as sharing the best practice when going virtual. To help you with your virtual solution shopping, we will also suggest the tools available to host virtual events.

Leading ways event professionals adjusted to virtual events due to coronavirus in the United States as of April 2020

Method	Share of respondents
Include Q&A and chat and interactive features	75%
Use a webinar format	69%
Present an abbreviated program	62%
Livestream speakers	62%
Have an emcee	25%
Other	22%

VIRTUAL EVENTS KNOW-HOW

PHYSICAL EVENT PLANNING VS VIRTUAL EVENT PLANNING

Many event organisers have already moved their physical event online during the pandemic period. In-person and virtual events have their own advantages and disadvantages. Here we have listed out all the pros and cons of physical and virtual events to help you make the best decisions for event planning.

■ **Budget**

Physical event

Organisers need to spend money on renting the venue, ordering food and other necessities for attendees. Besides, they may also need to hire different people to operate the whole event, such as event staff for onsite check in, event company to set up the venue or guest speakers who we need to pay travel expenses for.

Virtual event

Since event organisers can e-meet attendees online, venues and food are unnecessary. This minimizes manual work and offsets the technical costs. It is also more cost effective to host events online without time and space limitation. Event organisers can decide to host events whenever they want.

■ **Demography**

Physical event

Due to border restrictions and the different time zones, organizers can only target local people for physical events. Moreover, the event budget will affect the audience size. If organisers want more attendees to join, they need to pay more for a bigger venue. For organisers with a limited budget, the event scale will have to be smaller.

Virtual event

Online events are more feasible for international events because an online platform can support a large group of attendees and stay live 24/7 online. Virtual events are accessible by any electronic devices, therefore no matter where the attendee comes from, they can also join the event conveniently.
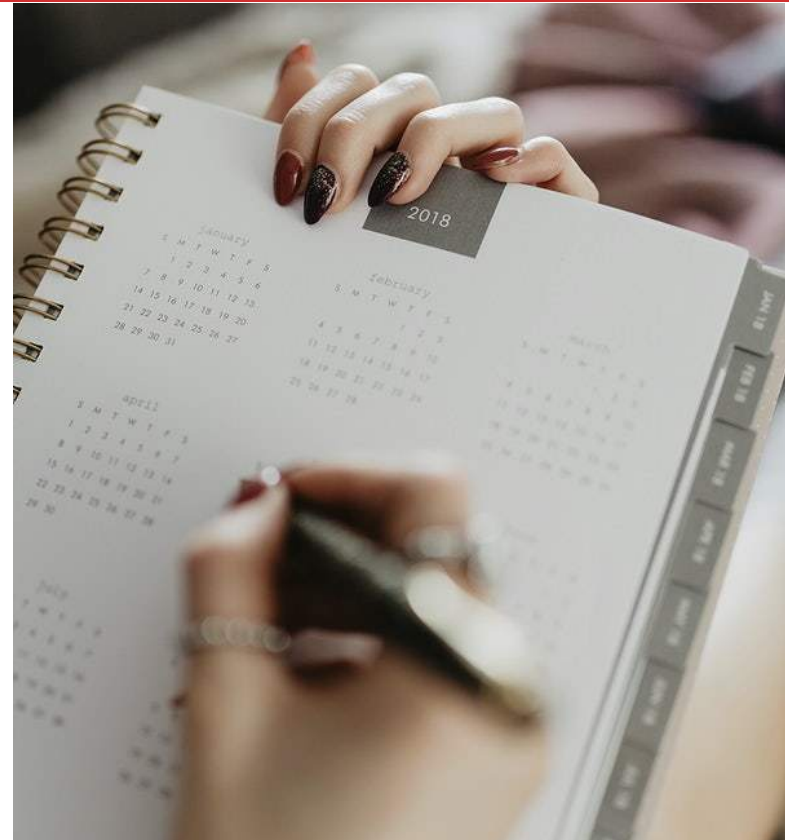
■ **Content**

Physical event

Agenda planning for in-person events is easier. It takes people to a more focused environment with fewer distractions. As long as attendees are informed, entertained and fed, event hosts can keep them engaged for a very long time. Just to remember, no matter you are hosting in-person or virtual events, set your agenda as early as possible so your attendees will know what to expect.

Virtual event

When building your agenda, you need to consider the time zone difference of your audiences. Make sure to factor in enough breaks for people to eat, check in with work, kids catering etc. Studies show that 90 minutes is about the maximum amount of time someone can participate in a virtual event without a break. Another key factor to consider when building your virtual agenda is whether to live stream all of your content and sessions. And to decide which content to pre-record, to play it either at a dedicated time with live Q&A in the chat room, or making it available strictly on-demand.

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■ **In-event Engagement**

Physical event

Organisers meet attendees face to face. Attendees can talk to each other physically and get real-time reaction and body language immediately. Organisers can have good ole handshakes and eye-contact with attendees.

Virtual event

It is difficult to grab people's attention in virtual events since we have more and more distractions at home now. To let attendees fully engage in virtual events, event organizers can interact with their attendees with multiple tools, such as video call, chat box, polling and Q&A section etc.

■ **Data collection**

Physical event

Most physical events will collect check in data during the event and survey after the event. For a physical event, it is difficult to collect data without technical support. Event organisers may need the staff to collect data manually, and it will take a long time for the staff to enter data to the database.

Virtual event

With a virtual events platform system, organisers are able to track and collect attendees' data and provide extremely useful data insights that help to nurture hot leads. It can help organisers to monitor the onsite check-in performance, booth visits time and duration, and even export the chat record or video recording after the event.

	Physical event	**Virtual event**
Budget	Venue, staff, costs associated to travel, food, hotels, and entertainment	Cost on setting up the virtual platform. Big speakers usually charge less
Demography	Local	International, boundaryless
Content	Content distribution is easier. Breakout sessions and multiple content options are held at the same time	Marketing content to the segments that get the best response and decide how to provide content
Engagement	In-person communication, handshakes, eye-contact, and happy hours	E-meet attendee online via video call, chat box
Data collection	Need manual work or outsourcing technical support	Automatically collected through platform system; can check onsite performance

Summary of the different between physical and virtual event.

VIRTUAL EVENTS KNOW-HOW

INTRODUCTION OF DIFFERENT VIRTUAL EVENT FEATURES

1. Virtual Networking Event

Connection is the key in every networking event. It is important for organisers to provide an event space where every speaker and audience can e-meet each other and have an in-depth conversation regarding specific topics. Event organiser should provide individual rooms or tables for business meet-ups or discussion groups besides the main stage. Besides, the event may need to provide virtual business cards, video call and chat box features.

Key features of different events:

Virtual business matching event

- ☐ Support attendee list on the platform so that attendees can view each others' profiles and find the right person to chat with.
- ☐ Chat box that supports both 1on1 communication and group discussion, so that they can have further discussion and exchange contact information privately.

Virtual career fair

- ☐ Set up a job board to let attendees search for open positions and companies.
- ☐ A bookmark feature that allows attendees to bookmark their favourite jobs.
- ☐ Allow employers to have instant interviews with attendees through video call function.
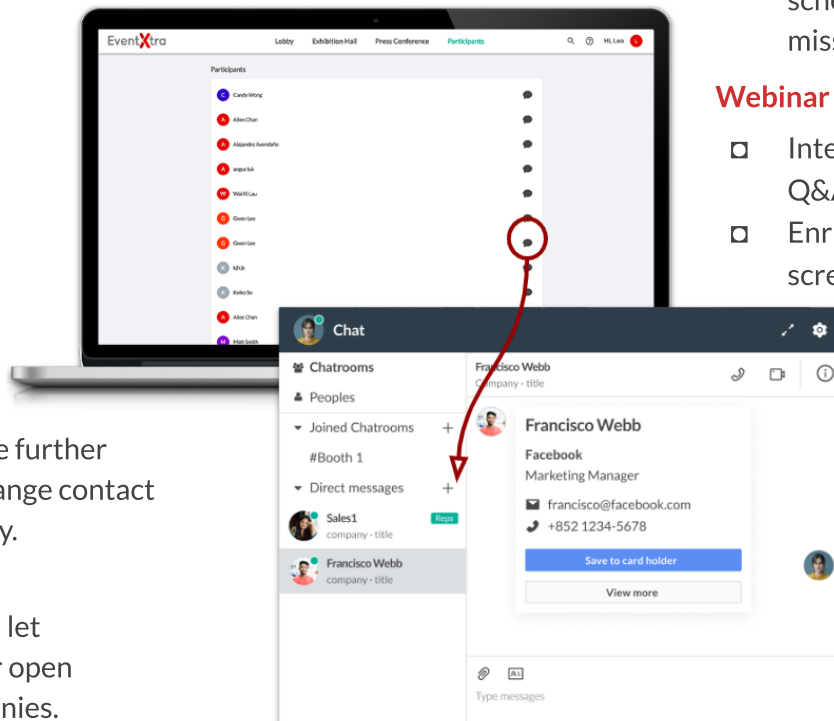
2. Webinar Event

For webinar, speakers or panelists may need to share specific topics with audiences who are aiming for market insights or contents that they are interested in. Therefore, features like screen-sharing, chatting, Q&A and polling are necessary for the event to allow speaker-audience interaction and discussion during the webinar.

Type of webinar event:

Virtual conference

- ☐ Provide event agenda and schedule so attendees will not miss any sessions.

Webinar

- ☐ Interact with attendees with Q&A and polling sections.
- ☐ Enrich presentation with screen-sharing function which allow speakers to share videos or PowerPoints.

3. Virtual Booth and Expo

For virtual exhibitions, exhibitors have to set up virtual booths to showcase their products and also to gain brand exposure in the event. The platform needs to support multiple files upload, such as pdf, mp4, jpeg etc. There are also some platforms which can support virtual reality booths that offer immersive and interactive event experiences.

Key features in different booths:

Virtual exhibition

- ☐ Allow exhibitors to place their banners or videos in the lobby for brand exposure.
- ☐ Customize booths with brand element.
- ☐ Support image and video upload to let potential buyers learn about products and services.
- ☐ Allow exhibitors to livestream during the event.

Virtual trade show

- ☐ Allow attendees to download files including brochures, product photos, discount coupons and presentation PowerPoint.
- ☐ Book a meeting or immediately chat with booth representatives online.

Virtual car show

- ☐ 3D exhibition to showcase their car, allow attendees to view the whole product in 3D, instead of just clicking through screens and videos.
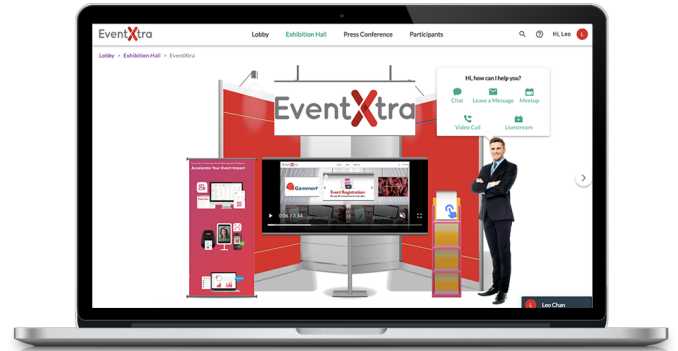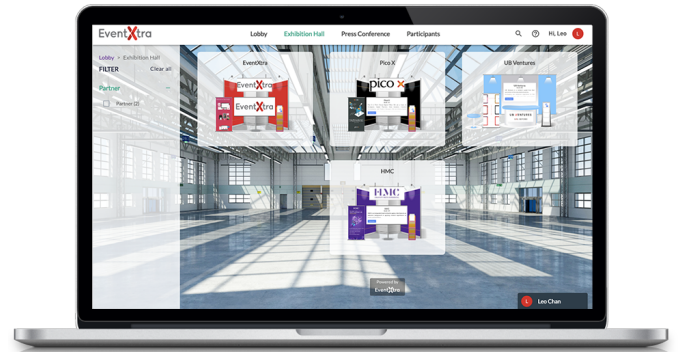
DYNAMIC VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

TREND FORECASTING
HYBRID EVENT WILL BE THE NEW NORMAL

WHY HYBRID EVENTS ARE GAINING POPULARITY

Nothing compares to face-to-face interactions. We believe that in-person event's popularity will rebound once this pandemic is over. However, this crisis has also taught us that event professionals and their suppliers who employ digital approaches to personalize every attendee's experience will earn a better return from their events.
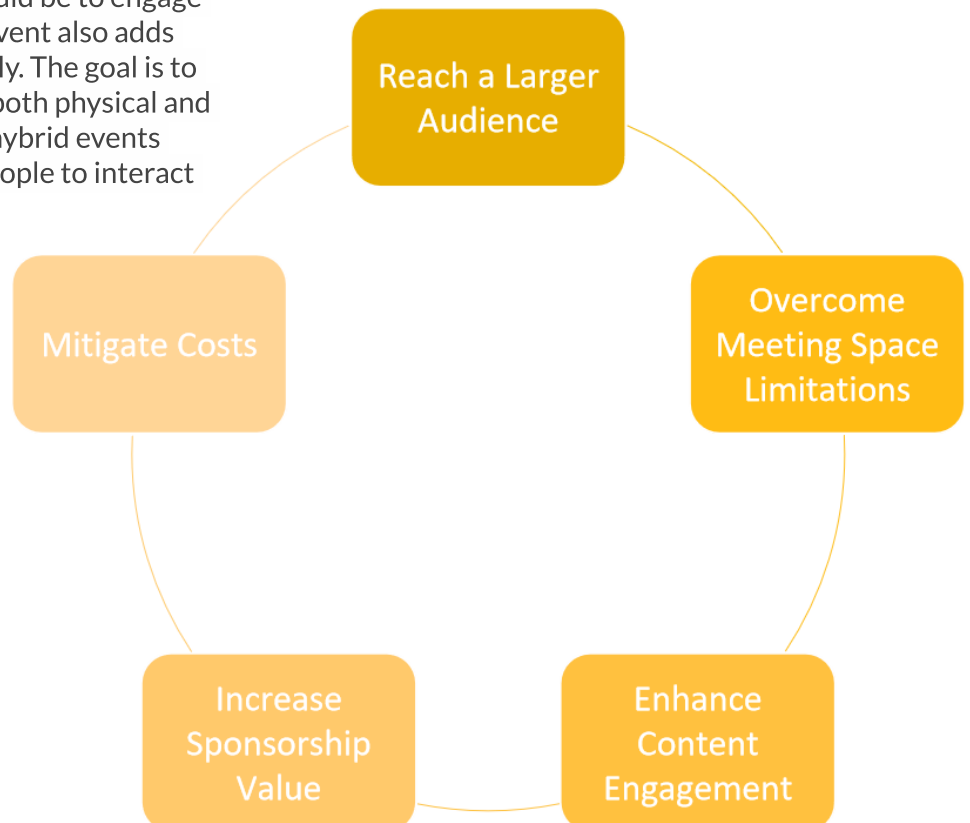
Hybrid events are the future trend.

A hybrid event is the combination of a live in-person event and virtual online components. With the right technology, you can sync the content and engagement features so that both live and online attendees can have a similar experience. Depending on the set-up and cost, virtual attendees should be able to hear the presenter, view the presentation slides, and even see the presenter in real-time via live streaming video. In most cases, in-person and virtual attendees can participate in the same session concurrently.

While all of your events have individual goals, an overarching goal for all hybrid events should be to engage as many attendees as possible. A hybrid event also adds value with the flexibility to engage virtually. The goal is to make the experience equally riveting for both physical and virtual audience groups. Beyond border, hybrid events provide the opportunity for even more people to interact with your content and your brand.

"Hybrid events are perfect for organizers who look for greater reach and higher flexibility."

Now that your event is hybrid, you no longer need to worry about the physical limitation in terms of the event scale and audience geography. It will sit in the audience's mind for a longer period as you can do multi touch online and repurposed content opportunities throughout the year. Hybrid events also add value on registration revenue and sponsor revenue. Your sponsors have the opportunity to double the exposure they had before. Hosting part of your event in a digital environment creates new opportunities for brand awareness and lead generation. By offering your sponsors more value, your event will attract more sponsorship dollars and even more sponsors.

- Reach a Larger Audience
- Overcome Meeting Space Limitations
- Enhance Content Engagement
- Increase Sponsorship Value
- Mitigate Costs

TREND FORECASTING
HYBRID EVENT WILL BE THE NEW NORMAL

5 BEST PRACTICES FOR ORGANISERS

Extra Preparation and Rehearsals

- ❏ The hybrid event information such as slides, videos and PDFs has to be loaded onto the web streaming portal and **tested in advance**.
- ❏ The exact requirements will depend on the system and provider but make sure you understand fully the deadlines and complexities and how much flexibility (if any) there is for changes.
- ❏ Speakers should be able to talk through and understand the technology with the event planner and technicians. Ideally there should be time for a short rehearsal.
- ❏ Have a short briefing with speakers on how to come across well on **camera.**
- ❏ **A dry run is a must** to ensure technology works properly and speakers can be seen and heard clearly. Be aware of the sound and ensure presentation visuals can load without a hitch.

Timing the Event

- ❏ Have a **stream rewatch session** with the speakers available for personal interaction.
- ❏ Break down your target audience by time zones and consider their normal work days.
- ❏ Set a timed schedule for strong engagement.
- ❏ Make recordings available afterwards for attendees who missed the sessions.
- ❏ **Schedule breaks that are long enough** for audiences to have meetings/discussions in between livestream sessions.

Leverage the Social Influence

- ❏ Create a dedicated **Event Hashtag.**
- ❏ Encourage speakers, exhibitors, sponsors and participants to use the branded hashtag throughout the event across different channels.
- ❏ Filters, badges and geo-tagging can be some fun ways to engage audiences on social media.

Engagement Deepens with Networking

- ❏ The virtual event platform should include feedback loops, Q&As and chat rooms.
- ❏ Inclusion of social media hashtags, video feed from pop-up venue and even live chat to take the conversation across channels.
- ❏ Have a team monitor the submissions, field questions and get them to the speakers promptly.
- ❏ Assign **online moderators** for chat room to post opinions and encourage input.
- ❏ Speakers are advised to encourage assimilation of information and personal connection.

Capture Relevant Virtual Experience Analytics

Testing and iteration are key components to your continued success. Measurement of in-event metrics, e.g. engagement points, speaker approval, onsite conversion, sponsor touch points, etc. should be taken. **The most ideal way is to operationally connect your virtual tools to your event platform.** This allows for better continuity and higher operational efficiency when designing a hybrid event and it keeps all your data in one place.

A good hybrid event platform can collect data from all of your applications, from registration process to the statistics on your landing pages, into one master data set. Event organizers and exhibitors will be able to view the aggregated data and create actionable reports that give the complete story on your hybrid event performance.

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