



THE NEW FUTURE OF EVENTS

Our industry landscape has changed considerably due to COVID-19, prompting an inevitable new normal for conducting meetings and events. During this pandemic, we've partnered with associations and organizations taking their content online hosting virtual events in a number of formats. From our experience in this new reality, we compiled our thoughts for the future of events.



EVENT FORMAT

Meeting planners must now start the planning process by deciding what format is best. Going completely live is not yet an option for many groups, and we believe it will take another year to be back to full-scale live productions. Navigating both CDC and state guidelines and audience comfortability will drive this timeline. We expect virtual events to remain the standard through the end of 2020, with hybrid meetings taking over in 2021.

Virtual and hybrid meetings come with their share of advantages, and we are glad to see them gaining popularity while onsite meetings are on hold. Embracing industry innovation will lead to new opportunities and solutions such as:

- Reaching more attendees by minimized travel expenses
- Providing more and new content delivery options
- Connecting multiple individuals or locations (and time zones) into one event
- Reaching attendees who couldn't otherwise participate

A hybrid meeting can have many definitions depending on the design implemented. The most important consideration for determining the format is keeping two different audiences simultaneously engaged. In our opinion, the key to creating an in-person event that also translates well to the small screen is having a live emcee to keep home viewers engaged while onsite attendees are moving between sessions.

We also anticipate the rise of regional meetings: smaller scale events aimed at smaller, sometimes niche, audiences. In this environment, people want to stay closer to home; it also increases opportunities for meaningful engagement. Tap into your local chapters' resources, leadership team, and member base to help with planning and onsite support. Planners can have a few event "pods" spread across the country, perhaps with keynote speakers in each location, that are brought together digitally.



EVENT BUDGET

Budgets have turned upside down. Usual high-priced budget items like food and beverage and venue rentals will decline. Expect to spend most of your dollars on the event technology including the virtual or hybrid event production, platform, and on-demand content. In today’s world, the marrying of these pieces will greatly determine the success of your event. Ideally, you should find a single provider that can supply the onsite audio visual and content recording with the virtual platform for online attendees.

If you’re planning a hybrid event, it’s important to design your event with both the on-site attendee and virtual attendee in mind. Does the look and feel of your general session translate to the small screen? How are you keeping your virtual audience engaged during breaks and between sessions? We recommend a virtual emcee and sponsor videos to keep the at home viewers watching when there is nothing happening on the main stage or in break outs. Planning a hybrid event is like planning two separate, but connected events. Keep these elements in mind when designing your event and planning your budget.



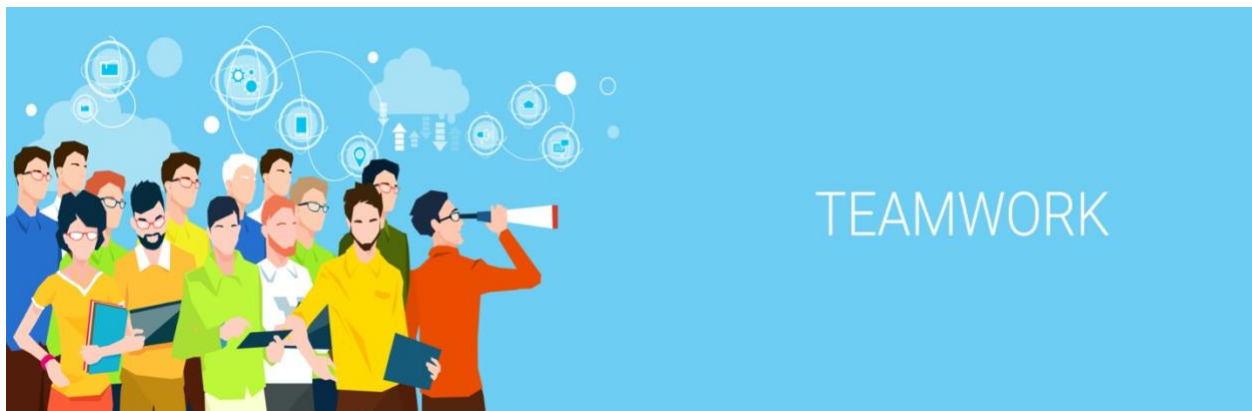
EVENT TEAM AND PARTNERS

Your team will have to adapt to the evolving event experience. We see the rise of new meeting specialties and certifications aimed specifically at managing virtual and hybrid events. It will be worked into existing planning curriculum, and familiarity with virtual events will become a criterion in many job interviews.

For larger groups with full event calendars, we expect to see the creation of new positions. Perhaps a Digital Event Strategist, who focuses on translating content and existing resources into a purely digital format. Give junior team members the development opportunity to learn basic code and become intimately familiar with the virtual platform you've selected.

Equally important is your external team, as you'll partner with audio visual companies closer than you have before. While they still stay behind the scenes, the aptitude and experience of your AV provider can make or break your event. It's a whole new set of logistics, and it must work in near perfect harmony to give your audience a flawless show.

For example, you choose a hybrid meeting as your event format. You have an emcee on a virtual stage, being broadcast live from a remote location. Your three keynote speakers are spread out across the country, speaking in front of a small live audience including overflow rooms, and streaming live to hundreds of viewers online. You have pre-recorded panels followed by live Q&A segments. Your AV team should act as a Project Manager; coordinating your live timeline of events, working closely with the emcee, speakers, and your event team to ensure both live and virtual audiences have a great experience.

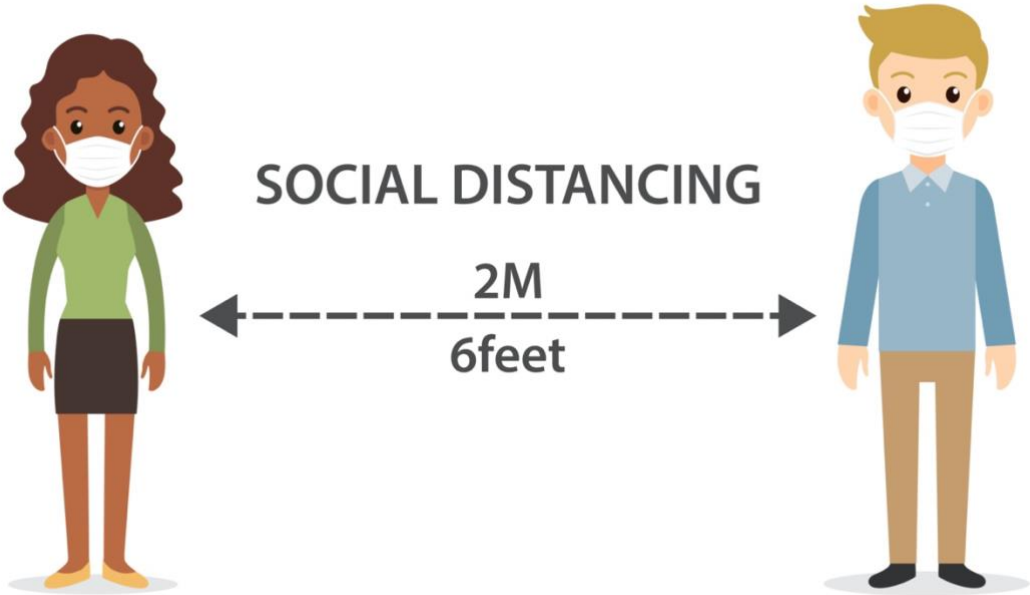


EVENT SAFETY AND SECURITY

No surprise that the safety and security of attendees has become the number one priority for event planners. This plays out for both onsite and virtual audiences, each facing different safety and security guidelines.

For live events to make any real comeback, audiences must feel safe traveling to and attending your event. Review the CDC, state, and venue safety protocols and make sure they fit with your attendee needs. The biggest piece is constant communication with attendees, highlighting the steps you take to keep them healthy and safe. You'll need to show social distancing measures, temperature stations at entrances, sanitation stations throughout the venue, and a commitment to sanitizing commonly frequented areas. This is another area to get sponsors involved with items like branded masks and hand sanitizers. You should also work with your internal legal and compliance team to see what waivers and/or disclosures should be put in place.

For your online audience, you need to think about the safety and reliability of your virtual platform. What redundancies are in place if the internet goes down? If there's a power outage? If your videoconferencing platform stops working? You'll need to make sure your providers have a plan to mitigate the chances of a poor event experience. In terms of online safety, your provider should have a solution to keep unwanted guests out of your conference. Typically, this includes encrypted passwords and the virtual provider monitoring for any outside attacks.



EVENT METRICS

While metrics have always played a role in event strategy, you'll need to rely more heavily on them than before. Previously, you could physically see how many people attended sessions or which speakers were discussed during networking events, giving you immediate feedback on your content. In today's world, you'll need to work with your platform provider to glean the digital footprint of all your online attendees.

Platform providers should be collecting data on your audience – do viewers stay on for the entire session? Did you see a decline in audience towards the end of the event? What is your engagement rate in the chat rooms? How often are users needing technical assistance? This information will become important for the direction and build of your future virtual events.



SPONSORS AND EXHIBITORS

There are still the traditional sponsor avenues like exhibitor booths and logo branding in high traffic areas, and in a virtual setting, exhibitors can extend their reach. While you do lose some connection without face-to-face meetings, exhibitors have the opportunity to have meaningful interactions with more attendees; every attendee who visits the exhibit hall will be able to see all the booths, not just the ones they happen to walk by. With chat and video conferencing features, exhibitors can speak to a higher volume of attendees and staff the booth with as many people needed to meet demand. With matchmaking and tagging features, identifying qualified leads becomes easier.

As a meeting planner, this is also the area you can flex your creative muscle. There are plenty unique and different ways to incorporate sponsors throughout your virtual or hybrid event. Sponsors can hold small networking sessions where they host a mixology or cooking class; they can choose to send all the ingredients needed or token items like the cookbook of the chef or custom branded glasses. Put together grab bags for attendees to receive in advance of the event with sponsor branded materials like headphones and mouse pads. Work with your platform provider to stage a scavenger hunt throughout the virtual platform with sponsor related items. You can provide clues to your attendees throughout the sessions each day or in marketing email blasts before the event kicks off.

While originally thought to be a challenging part of an online experience, exhibitors and sponsors will find their marketing dollars can take them farther and reach a wider audience. Working on designing creative and complete sponsorship packages will ensure additional revenue opportunities for your event.



EVENT CONTENT

Content is (still) king. In a virtual world, the content is the reason your audience is tuning in. Shoot big for speakers; with most sessions being recorded from home, big name speakers have more availability. Opt for shorter session length to keep your attendees engaged.

Speakers and their content also need to adapt to the new event format. Presenters no longer have the benefit of a captive audience and should assume the listeners will most likely be multi-tasking. As such, the use and reliance of slides are much more important. They'll need to be visually stimulating and more text-heavy, so if a listener tunes back in during the middle of a slide, they can still get the information they need. Presenters should also be more animated; smiling, engaging voices will go along way. Ideally, your production company will provide speaker coaching on both technical and quality components.

Think carefully about the event schedule – it's going to be harder to keep your audience's attention at the computer for eight hours. Instead, release your content in chunks over the duration of your event. Mix up the formatting as well; have roundtables follow the keynote speaker, then host panel discussions with live Q&A. It's recommended to build in a number of breaks throughout the day to give your audience dedicated time to check email (instead of doing it during the presentation). Hold sessions after typical working hours to gain additional viewers.

Where applicable, you'll want to pre-record as many of your speakers and sessions as possible, which can still be pushed "live" to attendees. This drastically decreases the chances of technical errors and having your audience drop off before the show even starts.



OUR FINAL THOUGHTS

What was once a scary and unknown time for many planners has now become a new checklist for events. With a few adjustments on the planning side, meeting planners can translate their entire event calendars into a series of online engagements. Virtual and hybrid meetings offer many benefits to the audience and speakers and allow organizations to continue to serve their member base.

About Image Audiovisuals

Image Audiovisuals is one of the leading providers of staging technology, comprehensive production services for live and virtual events, and AV integration. ImageAV won the Best of Colorado Business Choice Awards for 2020 and was a finalist the previous three years. ImageAV is consistently named to the Top 100 Women Owned Business and 250 Privately Owned Companies in Colorado. Completing more than 2,500 projects and events annually, ImageAV delivers value and customer service across all its divisions.

For more details, visit www.imageav.com

About e-Attend™

The e-Attend™ proprietary technology platforms were developed as part of a growing suite of services to accommodate live, hybrid and virtual events nationwide. The Virtual Experience platform was developed based on feedback from meeting planners and with technical and creative expertise needed to execute a flawless production to any type of audience.

For more details, visit www.e-Attend.com

