

Virtual (Digital) Event Production Tips Sheet

Virtual events are a whole new playbook for event producers. Here are some of our top tips for producing digital events.



THE PLATFORM

What To Do

- Use a robust and sophisticated virtual event platform.
- Do your research to find the platform that is the best fit for the type of event you are hosting virtually. Every platform comes with its pros and cons.
- Choose a platform with a solid approach to customer service (you will have lots of questions and will need tech support as you build your event on the platform).

What **Not** To Do

- Use Zoom or treat the event like a webinar.

PRO TIP

Not all platforms are created equal! The price points (i.e. user fees) vary widely, as do the features offered by each platform provider. Make sure you are paying for only the features (i.e. bells and whistles) that you actually need and want.



PRODUCTION STYLE & CHOOSING YOUR EVENT TEAM

What To Do

- Produce it like a TV Show. The production value must be high.
- Hire the right people - There is a completely different skillset for virtual events that will be required by your events team.
- Assign a Quarterback. You need one person who understands the vision and design of the event (from soup to nuts) who can lead the others.
- Set-up a production studio where your entire event production team can huddle up and work together to produce the event.

What **Not** To Do

- DIY it.
- Scrimp on audiovisual technicians, graphic designers or producers. You need this expertise!



PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT & EXPERIENCE

What To Do

- Give event participants early access to the platform (i.e. at least one week in advance). Allow your event attendees to play around and explore and familiarize themselves with the layout of the platform and the functionality.
- Make it a friction-less experience – use music and visuals on the event platform to liven up the atmosphere and create a buzz similar to an in-person event.
- Offer great content! Good programming will help to keep people engaged on the platform.
- Use polling as an interactive activity to keep people involved.
- Allow event attendees to consume content via side chats in small groups together on the platform.
- Schedule breaks in the programming to allow for organic interactions on the platform (or time where people can step away from their screen).
- Offer a help desk or concierge service where event attendees can ask questions in real time and have a live person (who is part of your event team) respond.
- Offer a high-value experience.
- Offer Q & A sessions with your live speakers or allow participants to submit questions well in advance and have presenters who have pre-recorded address them live.
- Encourage use of a 2nd device on the platform.

What **Not** To Do

- Let event participants troubleshoot any issues or questions during the event on their own. You wouldn't do it at a live, in-person event, so you definitely don't want to let customer service take a backseat at a virtual one.
- Make people feel isolated or alone on the platform.

PRO TIP

Get creative with interactive sessions, games, and contests to mimic a video game-like experience!



CONTENT & SCHEDULING

What To Do

- Decide on the balance of live and pre-recorded (on demand) content that you will offer.
- Offer a variety of snack-sized pieces of content. The maximum recommended length of any one activity or session is 45 minutes in a virtual environment.
- Factor in time zones of your participants when setting start and end times of sessions and activities.
- Polish up your content. Edit pre-recorded videos, use customized graphics or backdrops, add lower thirds, go for a Picture-in-Picture (a broadcast) look, apply your event brand to each piece of content you curate for your virtual event. Make your pre-recorded content look as realistic as possible.
- Test & Rehearse with your speakers and presenters in advance of the event.
- Repurpose, re-use and redeploy content after the event (via social media, on your event website, via podcasts, in a newsletter, etc.).

What **Not** To Do

- Do everything live.
- Do everything pre-recorded.
- Schedule sessions/activities that require an attendee to sit for 60+ minutes.
- Assume that participants are willing to spend 6-8 hours per day to consume content the way they would at an in-person event.
- Use the content once and forget about it.
- Create a webinar-like culture whereby people sign-up for the event, but don't show up.

PRO TIP

Sprinkle shorter and longer pieces of content into your event schedule to allow participants to experience as much as possible in short bursts without becoming tired or bored. Attention spans online are short, so a high velocity experience is needed!



PRICING

What To Do

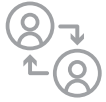
- Scale the pricing of the virtual event against the price typically paid for in-person attendance.
- For attendees who previously paid for the in-person event, consider ways to add extra value (to avoid refunding a portion of the fees already paid).
- Offer tiered pricing (different price points for different levels of access to the virtual event) and group tickets.

What **Not** To Do

- Position the virtual edition of your event as a discounted experience.

PRO TIP

If you're successfully providing entertainment, learning, networking, engagement, etc. at your virtual event, you are providing VALUE and therefore, you must charge a fair price for your event.



PARTICIPANT COMMUNICATION

What To Do

- Plan for a lot of pre-event communication with attendees (i.e. onboarding). They need to know what to expect on the day of the event because their participation will be VERY different from a live, in-person event.
- Produce an explainer video or tutorial on how to navigate the platform.
- Communicate the tech requirements (i.e. supported browsers, bandwidth, internet speed, etc.) to participants in advance.

What **Not** To Do

- Assume that event attendees understand how to fully participate in your virtual event and have the technology available to them at home or office.

PRO TIP

A participant's experience at the virtual event will depend heavily on his/her technology at home or office. A glitchy internet connection, atypical computer configurations, or firewalls, can have a big impact on whether or not an event attendee will be able to experience all aspects of the event. Communicating the requirements in advance (and asking participants to test them prior to event day) will avoid technical problems on the day-of.



EVENT MARKETING

What To Do

- Expand your marketing reach beyond your typical audience (anyone anywhere can attend your virtual event + you are no longer limited by the size of the venue).
- Create micro-tribes (small groups of people who are brand loyal and will act as brand ambassadors for the event helping to attract new attendees).



BUDGET

What To Do

- Budget to spend a big chunk of your event budget on event technology and technical event support services.
- Budget up to 50% less sponsorship revenue for a virtual event compared to a live, in-person one. Most sponsors are still having trouble wrapping their heads around the ROI in the digital space and it will take some time for brands to fully embrace sponsorship of virtual events.

PRO TIP

The production costs of virtual events are NOT less than in-person ones (the event expenses are just allocated differently). An easy rule of thumb is to take your typical food and beverage budget for an in-person event and allocate that same amount (or more) to the event technology budget line.



EVENT SPONSORSHIP

What To Do

- Offer sponsors the opportunity to sponsor specific sessions or activities on the platform and profile these pieces of content as 'featured'.
- Share your attendee list with sponsors and permit sponsors to engage with event attendees before, during, and after the event (via newsletters, emails, push notifications on the platform, etc.).
- Provide product placements for sponsors (i.e. in an interview, for example).
- Show videos of sponsor reps or brand CEOs welcoming attendees or conveying a specific brand message.
- Offer advertising on the platform – digital ads, videos, etc.
- Run sponsor promotions on the platform – coupons, gifting, prizing, etc.
- Use gamification to connect event attendees with sponsors.
- Set-up a digital event swag bag.

What **Not** To Do

- Use your in-person event sponsorship strategy in the virtual space.

PRO TIP

The asset mix in a digital environment may not be the same as the in-person event, so any pre-existing sponsorship agreements will need to be adjusted. Working with your sponsors to bring their activation to life in the virtual space will set the stage for a continued partnership when you resume your live in-person event. Keep in mind that your virtual audience could be up to 10x larger than your usual in-person one, so you are potentially providing more value to your sponsors.



METRICS & ANALYTICS

What To Do

- Analyze every measurable analytic and metric available on the platform to help improve the experience in the future.
- Ask attendees for post-event feedback.
- Measure leads attributable to sponsor or exhibitor interactions during the event.

What **Not** To Do

- Make assumptions about the success of your virtual event.
- Do not skip the in-depth post-event debrief exercise.

PRO TIP

Gather as much data post-event as possible.

Special Considerations for Hybrid Events

Because hybrid events are literally a combination of both an in-person live event and a virtual one, there are some special considerations that are unique to hybrid events.

Here are a few tips for producing a hybrid event:

- Have an event host or emcee who represents the in-person audience and another one who represents the virtual audience at home.
- Find ways to connect the event participants who are there in real life with the virtual attendees.
- Be careful not to cannibalize participation (i.e. make the virtual experience so attractive or so cost-effective that no one wants to attend in-person, or vice-versa).
- Offer shared content for both types of event attendees, but ensure that it feels like two unique experiences.
- Make sure your virtual audience doesn't feel like a 2nd class citizen compared to the in-person one. Consider offering something to the virtual attendees that the in-person audience doesn't have access to.