How to Plan Events in a Hybrid World

Your Guide for Designing Engaging Experiences and Building Community
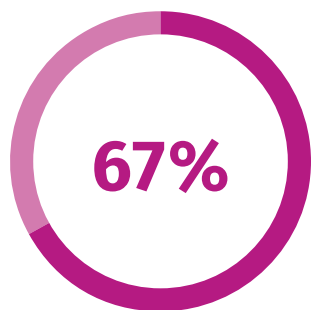
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Introduction

67%

According to a recent EventMB survey, 67% of event professionals plan to use hybrid as their go-to event format. But what does "hybrid" mean, exactly?

Hybrid events blend digital and in-person components. These experiences happen at the same time, or not at the same time. Hybrid events merge the success realized with both types of event channels – in-person and digital.

Harnessing the benefits of digital and in-person will allow associations, companies and organizations to engage their communities and let audiences attend events in the format they prefer.

People want to go back to in-person events. But they also want the flexibility to participate and access content through digital channels.

In this guide, we'll share tips for creating an unforgettable event experience that builds your brand and creates community engagement across in-person and digital channels.

This guide was developed specifically to serve the following roles in all industries.

Event planners

Marketers

Internal communicators

Public relations pros

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Define Your Event Strategy

Before you can build your event strategy, you must first define what hybrid means to you and how it affects year-round engagement with your community.

Answer these key questions to help guide your strategy:

➤ What type of events do I want to host?

➤ What type of in-person experiences do I want to host?

➤ Do I want the digital to fuel the in-person experience?

➤ Or the other way around? (In-person first or digital-first event)

➤ How do I want to connect the two experiences, if at all?

And for every one of those questions, always make sure the answer aligns with your business goals. This will ensure a solid strategy.

However, there is not a "one-size-fits-all approach" to events. Your event strategy will be unique based on your goals and the needs of your community.

As we mentioned in the introduction, hybrid events are an opportunity to take advantage of the benefits of both digital and in-person event channels. The following are two examples of how organizations are leading with both digital-first and in-person-first events to host successful experiences.

Digital-First Event Example: 2021 ASAE Annual Meeting

In 2020, the pandemic forced the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) to pivot its annual meeting to an entirely digital format. The result? The highest number of attendees in its 100-year history. For its 2021 event, ASAE retained the digital format and created live, in-person Community Pop-UP events working with Notified for the second year in a row.

"Oftentimes when we talk about hybrid, it's from the perspective of, 'Here's what we're going to do in order to provide an experience.'
And our perspective was really, let's make it as easy as possible for you to engage in a way that is relevant for you," said Robb Lee, Chief Strategy Officer at ASAE.

How Did the Event Work?
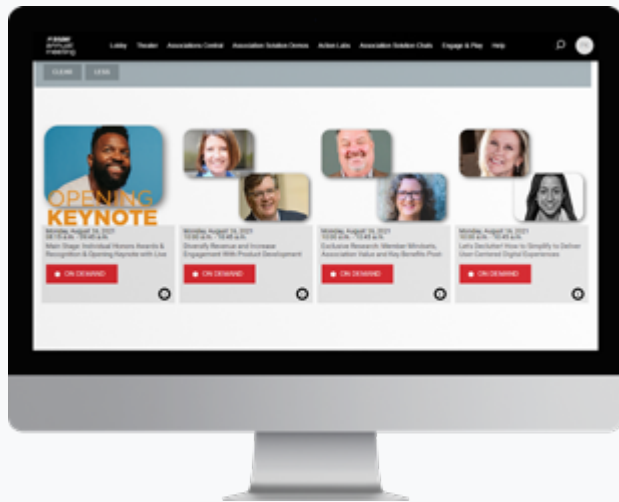
➤ To complement the digital format, ASAE added a series of live, in-person Community Pop-UP events in nine cities across the United States.

➤ The nine cities included: Washington, D.C., Charlotte, Dallas, Cleveland, Columbus, Atlanta, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach and San Juan, Puerto Rico. The Community Pop-UP in each city featured live streams of ASAE's keynotes, speaker sessions, networking opportunities and industry discussions.

➤ ASAE created a New Year's Eve-style check-in to show the digital audience what was happening at each Community Pop-UP. Each city had a dedicated lounge within the digital event platform, powered by Notified.

➤ This hub-and-spoke architecture helped market the event to a wider in-person audience and allowed attendees to customize the experience to their needs. ASAE sees this format as a path forward to creating greater engagement and flexibility for attendees.

In-Person-First Event Example: IMEX America 2021

IMEX America brings the world under one roof each year in Las Vegas. IMEX America's mission is to unite and advance the global meetings industry using education and innovation to help foster powerful connections with the right people.

When organizers first started working on the idea of bringing the event to a hybrid audience, they didn't know what international travel restrictions would look like and wanted to ensure the event felt inclusive to everyone, whether travel to the U.S. opened or not.

How Did the Event Work?

➤ IMEX America created a hybrid experience rooted in the in-person channel. Organizers hosted an in-person experience with exhibitors and sessions on the show floor in Las Vegas. A broadcast studio was provisioned exclusively for the digital audience.

➤ Along with the return to an in-person experience, IMEX created a program called "BuzzHub Live." A studio was set up on the show floor to broadcast exclusive content from the event to digital attendees for the first two days of the show – four hours of live programming per day.

➤ "BuzzHub Live" broadcast educational sessions, panel discussions and wellness activities. Roving reporters showcased some of the new features and faces at the show and explored the show's new venue, the Mandalay Bay resort.

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How to Build and Manage Your Event Portfolio

After you define what hybrid means to you, it's time to look at the new life cycle of events and determine how to best build your event experience.

The Always On event life cycle continuously engages your communities at a time and manner that suits their needs and expectations.

This life cycle features an event portfolio with a variety of event types – everything from a small, local get-together to intimate virtual sessions to large-scale trade shows that host thousands of attendees each year.

When it comes to creating your event portfolio, you need to think of each event in three phases:

1 — **2** — **3**

Pre-Event   **Live Event**   **Post-Event**

Here are examples of how it can work:

Pre-Event:
Build Anticipation With Your Community

- Foster community connection with networking sessions and/or influencer-led talks
- Conduct speaker interviews
- Get your community involved by asking them what they want to see in upcoming events
- Create competition by splitting your audience into teams
- Share agenda details
- Send a press release to announce your event
- Use social media to understand which topics are trending with your audience

Live Event:
Surprise and Delight Your Audience

- Share live content and programming
- Foster active community engagement
- Personalize the attendee experience
- Amp up the competition with live leaderboards
- Leverage matchmaking and networking opportunities

Post-Event:
Fuel Your Community Engagement

- Share attendee and speaker interviews
- Post session highlights to social media
- Distribute surveys and collect testimonials
- Share the on-demand replay
- Repurpose event content across other channels
- Plan a webcast series
- Promote upcoming events in your event portfolio

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Pre-Event
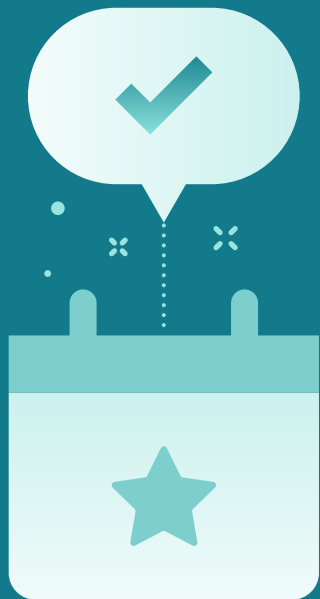
How to Design Your Event Experience

After you have a firm understanding of your internal and external environment, it's time to identify your business goals and objectives. Everything in an event strategy should contribute to those goals in some way.

Objective setting narrows your focus to determine what types of experiences you want to create for your audience.
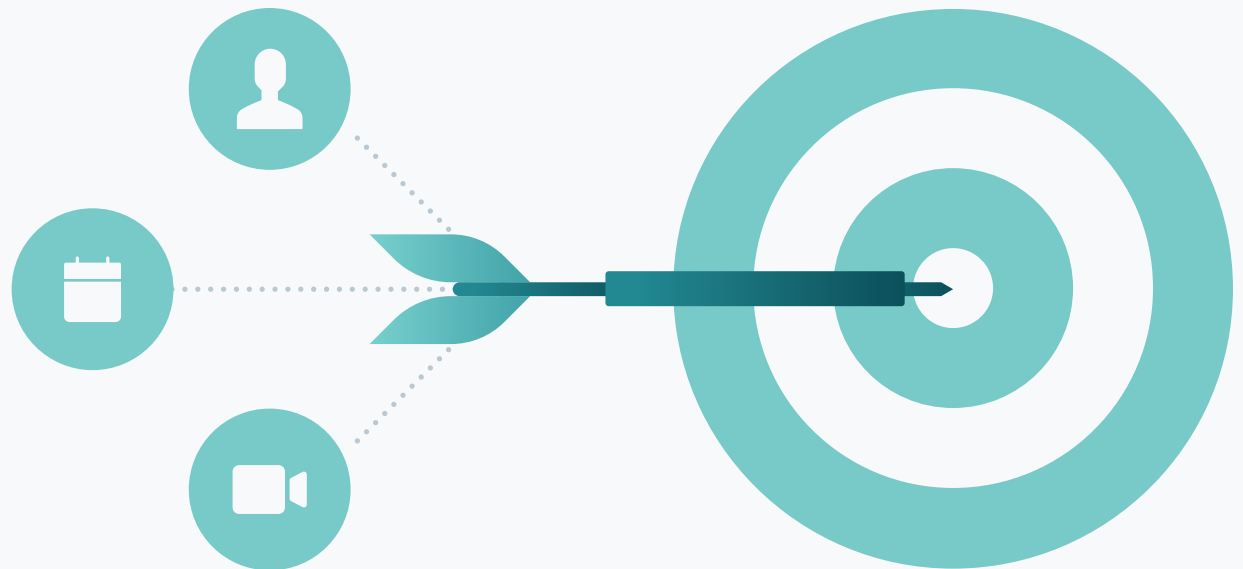
It's also important to remember that your audience values the flexibility to attend either in-person or digitally. Keep reading to learn the key considerations you must take into account as you begin to design your events.

Here are key pre-event considerations for both the in-person channel:

In-Person Design:
Considerations Checklist

- ✔ **Safety.** Guests need to abide by local public health regulations.
- ✔ **Seating.** Be thoughtful about how all your participants will sit to facilitate engagement and influence room layout.
- ✔ **Lighting.** With cameras capturing and broadcasting your message, production lighting is more important than ever – similar to what you see in television studios or live cable events.
- ✔ **Décor/backdrop.** What overall look and feel do you want to convey? Casual? More polished?
- ✔ **Noise management.** Manage as much ambient sound as you can. Focused attention with no distractions is the goal here.
- ✔ **Range of control.** Which aspects of your environment are in your control and which are not?

In-Person Design:
Questions to Ask Checklist

- ✔ How many remote versus in-person attendees and presenters will I have?
- ✔ Will my audience be global or much smaller?
- ✔ How will the participant experience change based on their environment?
- ✔ What solutions or design choices can help maximize the various experiences?
- ✔ Will they see and hear content simultaneously? Or will I have more than one session occurring at once?
- ✔ Will my in-person guests need to change seating or rooms at any point?
- ✔ Will I need to enhance lighting or décor on-site to make the event more impactful on camera?
- ✔ Are there other locations on-site that will display my video content?

Digital Experience

When considering the look and feel of the digital experience, one question to address is whether to have a 2D design vs. a 3D environment.
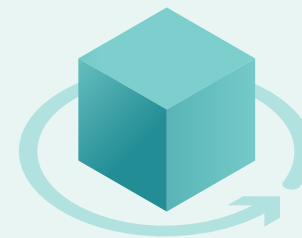
Here's the difference:

2D Environment	3D Environment
Based on a flat grid layout using simple buttons and labels, similar to a web page. This design option is more mobile friendly, a bit more content forward and can typically look like an extension of your organization's website.	Uses angles, texture and depth to give users the feeling they are in a three-dimensional space. A 3D environment may also use visually rich photography to make users feel like they are walking through a convention center, an outdoor veranda or an elaborate exhibit hall. This design option is focused more on the visual experience with content integrated within it.

Some digital event platforms offer "3D-like" experiences: The event areas render with the depth of 3D but aren't truly immersive. Users are not able to travel through an immersive experience like they would in 3D video games.

Digital Design: Checklists

Digital Design:
Considerations Checklist

- ✓ **2D vs. 3D.** Decide whether to have a "flat" (2D) experience or a 3D experience.
- ✓ **Color.** Use your brand colors in the digital environment.
- ✓ **Brand elements.** Ensure that the use of your brand and logo adheres to corporate branding guidelines.
- ✓ **Décor/feel.** What overall look and feel do you want to convey? Casual? More polished?
- ✓ **Interactivity and video.** Decide whether to include interactive graphics and video in your event experience.
- ✓ **Customization.** Which aspects of your environment are in your control and which will you let exhibitors customize?

Digital Design:
Questions to Ask Checklist

- ✓ What are the primary show areas to activate? (E.g., Auditorium, Lobby, Lounge, etc.)
- ✓ Will common areas carry marquee messaging or banner ads?
- ✓ Do we create a "flat" 2D experience or a 3D-like experience?
- ✓ To what extent will exhibitors be able to customize their booths?
- ✓ Will we record a video-based welcome message for the show lobby?
- ✓ Do we place any default resources in attendees' briefcases?

How to Select Your Event Team

Your event team should ideally have a role with you in event design. Some team members will focus on the digital experience, while others the in-person experience. The important thing to understand, however, is that you are building a single, holistic team.

The key roles we typically see:

Event Lead
The person with ultimate responsibility for the success of the event. Manages all aspects across all teams. They're the "CEO of the event."

Strategic Planning Lead
The person who assists the Event Lead with defining the strategy and goals of the event. The Strategic Planning Lead must ensure a smooth handoff of the strategy to the Production Lead.

Primary Production Lead
The person responsible for the delivery and execution of the event. The "COO of the event." Under this person might exist team members who oversee consultants, agencies and presenters.

- **Production Lead, In-Person Channel.** Manages a team under the direction of the Primary Production Lead, with a focus on the in-person channel.
- **Production Lead, Digital Channel.** Manages a team under the direction of the Primary Production Lead, with a focus on the digital channel.

Content Lead
The person responsible for the event's content, including session details, tracks, programs, schedule, brochures and related promotional material.

Marketing and Communications Lead
The person responsible for overseeing all marketing and communications to internal team members, sponsors, attendees, speakers and media. Team members handling social media marketing report to this lead.

Reporting and Analytics Lead
The person responsible for ensuring the right data capture is in place (i.e., before the event), and analysis and reporting against that data. Works closely with the Strategic Planning Lead to deliver an analysis to the Event Lead on event performance.

Sponsorship Lead
The person responsible for selling sponsorships and owning sponsor relationships.

Event Registration

The "if you build it, they will come" approach with events never works. You need a solid strategy to market your event to your target audience.

In addition, once your marketing and advertising delivers users to your event landing page, you must maximize your conversion rate.

Registration and Ticketing System

The "menu options" for experiencing your event need to be captured and managed in your event's registration and ticketing system. When you design these options, keep these questions in mind:

- ✔ In-person-only option
- ✔ Digital-only option
- ✔ Hybrid option (for someone who attends in-person but wants the flexibility to attend some of the digital sessions)
- ✔ The number and types of package tiers (e.g., entry level, all access, VIP, etc.)
- ✔ The cost of each package tier
- ✔ How to present these options to potential attendees

Sample registration options include:

Exhibit Pass

➤ **Access to in-person event and show floor, including:**
- Exhibit floor
- Keynote addresses
- Breakout sessions
- Select conference programming

Digital Registration

➤ **Access to the digital experience, including:**
- Digital event environment
- Booths
- Breakout rooms and 1:1 video chat
- Matchmaking
- Networking lounge
- Keynote addresses
- Streaming conference programming

Hybrid Attendee

➤ **Access to in-person event and show floor, including**
- Exhibit floor
- Keynote addresses
- Breakout sessions
- Select conference programming

➤ **Access to the digital experience, including:**
- Digital event environment
- Booths
- Breakout rooms and 1:1 video chat
- Matchmaking
- Networking lounge
- Keynote addresses
- Streaming conference programming

Monetization and Sponsorships

Ahead of your event, you must strive to understand the needs of sponsors and develop packages that fulfill those needs. Develop sponsorship opportunities unique to the in-person and digital channels. At the same time, find creative ways for sponsorships to "cross over" from one channel to the other, creating integrated sponsorship opportunities.

Tips

1. **Create tiered packages.** Include a variety of features and options at different price points. A tier of packages allows your top sponsors to receive all the benefits they'd like, while providing first-time sponsors with a lower entry point.

2. **Create integrated packages that span in-person and digital channels.** For example, if a sponsorship package includes physical signage at the in-person channel, extend that to include digital signage (e.g., auditorium banner, lobby banner, marquee messages) in the digital channel.

3. **Create a clear delineation between package tiers.** Ensure sponsors see a clear difference in value from one tier to the next. If the $15,000 sponsor package looks too close to the $10,000 sponsor package, it becomes too easy to select the $10,000 option. Be sure there's a clear reason for a sponsor to step up from the $10,000 package to the $15,000 option.

4. **Use a small set of packages.** Less choice makes things easier for sponsors and your sales team.

5. **Use scarcity to your advantage.** Make a single Platinum sponsor package available to encourage your sponsors to "one up" each other in their bid to secure that package. In doing so, you will create a sense of urgency around the selling process.

Sample Sponsorship Packages: Digital

Titanium Sponsor Package
$50,000

➤ Three-minute speaking opportunity at beginning of webcast to promote product or service and introduce session
➤ Nine content tabs in the digital booth, to organize documents in links
➤ 50 documents and links, with five pre-populated in the attendees' briefcases
➤ Thought leadership webinar featuring speakers from the sponsor company
➤ Reporting on all booth activity as well as activity in any sponsored areas
➤ Featured placement in the Exhibit Hall
➤ One in-show email sent at the time of sponsor's choice to all connected attendees
➤ Logo and website link on all email communications, promotional pages and registration pages
➤ 15 ads (linkable to spaces, tooltips and schedulable) throughout the event
➤ Lead gen – Full registrant details: live and on-demand

Platinum Sponsor Package
$30,000

➤ Seven content tabs in the digital booth, to organize documents in links
➤ 25 documents and links, with two pre-populated in the attendees' briefcases
➤ Sponsorship of a panel discussion webinar (e.g., not exclusive to the sponsor)
➤ Reporting on all booth activity as well as activity in any sponsored areas
➤ Featured placement in the Exhibit Hall
➤ 10 ads (linkable to spaces with tooltips) throughout the event
➤ Lead gen – Full registrant details: live and on-demand

Sample Sponsorship Packages: In-Person

Titanium Sponsor Package
$100,000

- Peninsula Exhibit Booth, 30' x 30'
- Contact details for all registered delegates
- Exclusive 30-minute talk (by a designated company representative) during Day One lunch
- Exclusive sponsorship of Day One cocktail hour, hosted in Exhibit Hall
- Exclusive sponsor signage at conference venue entrance
- Complimentary conference passes for 25 team members or clients
- Branded swag bag and lanyard (provided to all attendees)
- Badge scanner for 10 exhibit staff

Platinum Sponsor Package
$65,000

- Linear Booth, 20' x 20'
- Contact details for all registered delegates
- Complimentary conference passes for 15 team members or clients
- Badge scanner for five exhibit staff
- Nonexclusive 15-minute talk (by a designated company representative) during Day 2 breakfast

Sample Sponsorship Packages: Hybrid

Platinum Sponsor Package
$35,000

- Facilitate a breakout session
- Banner advertisement on digital event platform
- Tech demo kiosk included
- Tech demo staff
- Quarterly co-branded newsletters to sponsor's audiences
- Increased branding at in-person event
- Managed "virtual" wine tasting
- 60-second midprogram commercial
- Priority lunch seating
- Included in pre-event publicity
- In-person self-introductions

- Digital engagement:
  - Weeklong matchmaking
  - 60-second video self-introductions
  - Roster sent in advance with attendee photographs and contact information
  - Contact list in Excel file
- Digital presence:
  - Company profile on digital event platform
  - Logo, description and link on website
  - Post-event analytics report
- Access to in-person and digital attendee list

Tips for Engaging Sponsor Booth Visitors

Across both digital and in-person experiences, your booth staff should be encouraged to take the following actions:

1. **Welcome visitors.** Greet visitors by name (e.g., "Welcome to the booth, Jane!") as soon as they arrive: the timelier the better.
2. **Ask questions.** Ask visitors about the event. Questions can include, "What brings you to our booth today?" and "What's been your favorite session so far?" The goal is to engage visitors in conversations in a non-salesy way.
3. **Promote your in-booth resources.** Staff should highlight your in-booth resources (e.g., white papers, videos, price sheets, product collateral, etc.).
4. **Mention your prize giveaway (if applicable).** It's common for exhibitors to provide prize giveaways, with winners announced in the booth's group chat. Mention the prize details, including the time of the drawing. Staff should share prize giveaway details throughout the day.
5. **Demo stations.** Engage attendees with opportunities to experience your product and/or service.

Engaging Booth Visitors Checklist

- ✔ Select the right team members for in-person and digital booth staffing.
- ✔ Identify the team members responsible for populating and setting up the in-person and digital booths.
- ✔ Develop and distribute the booth staffing schedule.
- ✔ Ask each booth staffer to confirm their time slots.
- ✔ Train team members on booth staffing strategy and etiquette.
- ✔ Spread the word: Market your presence to drive attendees to visit your booths.

Acquiring Your Audience

1 **Before your event, the first step in audience acquisition is to get foundational elements in place:**

➤ **Event page including registration.** Feature the event's agenda, abstract and speaker list. Include social icons to encourage visitors to share the event with their followers.

➤ **Integrate registration into your marketing automation and CRM system if appropriate.** Leverage these platform integrations to ensure all of your data is in one place for better segmentation, scoring, qualification and sales follow-up.

➤ **Feature the event on your homepage.** Prominently feature the event page on your website, including the hero/marquee area of your homepage. Also consider placing a fixed promotion above your site's main navigation using a tool such as Hello Bar.

➤ **Create shareable copy, graphics and videos.** Write canned social media posts that employees, customers and partners can copy/paste to share with their followers with trackable links for each.

➤ **Consider a gamification program among your sponsors.** Enable your sponsors with a promotional kit and encourage them to share the event with their networks. You can incentivize them with additional leads for the sponsor that acquires the most registrants or a discount on their sponsorship.

2 **Next, schedule your pre-event promotions:**

➤ **Email blasts.** Email is the number one driver of pre-event registrations. Test different subject lines and times to identify the best open, click-through and registration rates.

➤ **Social media.** Schedule multiple posts across your social channels (e.g., Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram). Define a hashtag for your event and include it in all social media posts. Include images or videos to attract attention. Also consider promoting the event in relevant LinkedIn Groups.

➤ **Blog posts.** Write blog posts to promote the event. Interview speakers and highlight exhibitors. Use this channel to drive interest around the event.

➤ **Press release.** Publish a press release to announce the event. Mention key sessions and speakers. Include the event registration link in the press release.

➤ **Search engine marketing (SEM), also known as paid search.** Allocate a portion of your budget to pay-per-click (PPC) advertising. Your PPC ads on Google and Bing will drive targeted visitors to your event's landing page.

➤ **Paid media/industry partnerships.** Team up with associations or partners with a membership base that fits your audience profile. Leverage digital programs such as sponsored newsletters, display ads, email blasts, etc. to get in front of them.

3   **Build a Program for Pre-Event Engagement:**

➤ **The more buzz you create about your upcoming event, the more registrations you will generate.** In addition, as you grow the number of registrations, continued buzz increases the likelihood that those registered will attend.

➤ **Think of pre-event engagement as the "event before the event."** In some ways, the event before the event is just as important as the event itself.

Activities to consider:

➤ Share micro-events (like webinars and short talks).

➤ Conduct speaker interviews.

➤ Create scheduled networking opportunities.

➤ Distribute surveys and polls.

➤ Encourage game participation.

➤ Share new agenda details.

Bonus: Checklist for Success

Use this checklist to ensure you have everything you need to create a solid promotional plan when acquiring an audience for your corporate video programs, webcasts and online events.

- ✔ Who is your target audience?
- ✔ Why will they tune in?
- ✔ What content types do they prefer?
- ✔ What channels are they on?

- ✔ What value are you providing?
- ✔ Do you have a budget outline?
- ✔ What are your success criteria?
- ✔ What are your goals/objectives?

- ✔ Did you include all relevant channels?
- ✔ Have you selected key influencers?
- ✔ Do you have a content strategy?
- ✔ Did you pick a date?

Speaker Management

New content management applications make it easier than ever to oversee a smooth speaker-management process. Here are a few best practices:

Prepare your team
Everyone on your team should understand their role in the speaker-management process. Make sure your internal process runs smoothly to prevent delays that further compress demands on speakers. If you are using a content management platform, you can assign members of your team to different roles.

Automate everything you can
Send out reminders as a necessary part of speaker management. As much as you hope your speakers will remember their deadlines, sometimes they need some gentle prodding! Use systems that let you automate those prompts to keep your speakers on task. Some automation systems let you schedule reminders by deadline or periodically (such as once a week to every person who has not submitted their bio).

Stagger information requests
Once you've notified the speaker that his or her abstract has been accepted, it's time to gather a more complete profile and session data. With some event-management systems, speakers can access their sessions and supply new or updated information. They can edit session details, review the audio-visual setup, upload headshots, make requests and add complementary resources, such as slide decks, PDFs and videos.

Keep speakers informed
Speakers have enough to worry about with their presentations. Ease the pressure on them through freshly updated information about the conference. Document and share in-person logistical details in pre-event briefing packets. With a content management system, speakers can consult the website for facts on session time slot, room location and number of registered attendees.

Anticipate delays
At the end of the day, even the best-laid plans can go awry. If you anticipate some amount of last-minute shuffling, you will be better prepared to handle late content while maintaining positive relationships with your speakers.

Run of Show and Content Plan

Right before the event, create a run of show document and share it with everyone who needs to know. Be sure to include break times to allow attendees to check email, stretch and post something wonderful about your event on their social networks.

Here's an example run of show for a hybrid event:

Time (ET)	Track	Session Title	Speakers	Crew	Live Stream	Notes
8:00-8:15am	Main Stage	Show Opening/Welcome From Hosts	Jodi Campbel, John Truitt	Keynote Stage 1	✓	
8:15-8:30am	N/A	** BREAK **				
8:30-9:30am	Tech	The Future of Edge Computing	Samantha Johnson	Tech Stage 2	✓	
8:30-9:30am	Mobile	The Future of 5G Networks	Joe Judy	Mobile Stage 1	✓	
9:45-10:15am	Tech	Edge Computing Breakout Session	Samantha Johnson	Streaming 3	✓	Online Only
9:45-10:15am	Mobile	Future of 5G Breakout Session	Joe Judy	Streaming 1	✓	Online Only
10:15-11:00am	N/A	** BREAK **				
11:00-12:00pm	Main Stage	Keynote: Cryptocurrency Cloud	Lauren Holmes	Keynote Stage 1	✓	
12:00-12:15pm	N/A	** BREAK **				
12:15-12:45pm	Tech	Managing IoT at Scale	Fred Simpson	Tech Stage 2	✓	
12:15-12:45pm	Mobile	The Wireless Carrier of the Future	Joanna Myers	Mobile Stage 1	✓	

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Live Event

Content and Programming

Asking your audience for their input to help guide the content and programming for your live event creates a high likelihood for success. After all, you're giving them what they want! Discover what interests them and build your program and agenda around those interests.

In addition to online polls, surveys, calls with key constituents and focus groups, you can use a mix of other resources to understand what is on their minds:

➤ Inventory top pages and blog posts on your website using Google Analytics

➤ Review social media analytics to determine the topics receiving the highest engagement rate

➤ Use data from PPC campaigns to understand the content and offers seeing the highest conversion rates

➤ Review email marketing metrics (e.g., open rate, click-through rate) to identify the topics in your emails garnering the most interest

➤ Use social listening tools to follow the conversation happening around specific topics, including the sentiment of those conversations

➤ Meet with Sales, Customer Support and Customer Success teams to determine the top questions or challenges from customers

Content and Programming Checklist:

Content:
Considerations Checklist

- ✓ **Theme/branding.** Unify the in-person and digital experience with shared themes/branding.
- ✓ **Storytelling methods.** Provide a clear beginning, middle and end to your content and overall event.
- ✓ **In-person creative content.** Look for areas on-site to share your video feed or repurpose digital assets.
- ✓ **Digital creative content.** Upload helpful resources for both in-person and remote guests.
- ✓ **Content specs for different mediums.** Remember that you need to test your content on a variety of screen sizes.
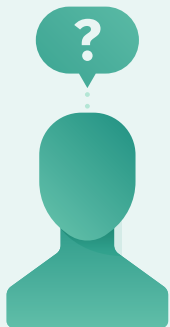
Creating a Shared Experience:
Questions to Ask Checklist

- ✓ Will all attendees see and hear content simultaneously? Or will I have more than one session occurring at once?
- ✓ What assets do I already have that I can repurpose?
- ✓ Does my content provide a clear beginning, middle and end?
- ✓ Will each participant – in-person attendee, digital attendee, in-person presenter and digital presenter – be able to access the content in the same way?

Exclusive Programming and Experiences

While it's important to find the connecting points between the in-person and digital experiences, you also want to identify programming and experiences that are exclusive to each.

Consider a professional sports game that's broadcast live on TV. It has a set of shared experiences (e.g., the game itself) and other experiences that are unique to each audience.

For example, the in-person experience might have a tailgating party before the game, something the TV audience doesn't benefit from. The TV audience, on the other hand, can engage with each other across social media and digital forums from the comfort of their home.

Here are a few ideas to get your creative juices flowing:

Exclusive to the Digital Audience:	1. Online Q&A with the keynote speaker. 2. A series of live webinars catered to the online audience and not available to the in-person audience. 3. "Behind the scenes" or backstage videos featuring speakers and influencers.
Exclusive to the In-Person Audience:	1. Photo booth that allows an attendee to enter, take a photo and leave a quote. 2. The photo and quote are combined, then shared on social media. 3. Book signing with the keynote speaker. The first 100 to arrive receive a free, signed book. 4. Networking session in a lounge set up with free phone charging stations.

Audience Engagement

It's time to change the way we think of audiences. In the past, we'd talk about the in-person audience and the digital audience separately. In reality, "audiences" should be singular, not plural. **There is really just one audience.**

That audience will engage in shared experiences across multiple touchpoints over time.

Your job is to build the "connective tissue" that creates a seamless experience across touchpoints for different audiences (e.g., in-person and digital) to engage with one another.

Consider these tactics to build that connective tissue for a shared experience:

Social media
Establish an event hashtag on Twitter and invite attendees to use it when tweeting. Twitter hashtags bridge the gap across in-person and digital experiences.

On-site mobile apps
Make mobile apps available to in-person attendees so in-person users engage with online attendees across the globe.

Digital hosts and TV-like programming
Deploy digital hosts and roving reporters who bring a taste of the experience to the digital audience throughout the in-person event.

Consider influencers
Influencers create a buzz just by showing up. Attendees want to know where they're going and what they're saying. And guess what? Influencers love the attention! Publish your influencers' journeys. Let attendees know what sessions they'll join (both digital and in-person). Have a roving reporter interview them between sessions. Make it interactive. Field questions from eventgoers. Have the reporter ask influencers for a response and then publish the Q&A.

Engagement Opportunities

Attendee-to-attendee matchmaking

Powered by artificial intelligence, matchmaking provides attendees, exhibitors and sponsors with highly targeted recommendations to connect with and meet other people aligned with their professional goals and interests.

1:1 video chat

Users can enable their webcams and engage in 1:1 video chats with one another. This feature can also be used for booth staff to engage with booth visitors.

Brainstorming sessions

Attendees have the power to host their own mini-meetings and create and join brainstorming sessions that can be added to the event agenda.

Expert meetings

Think of an "Ask Me Anything" (AMA) session that features your celebrity keynote speaker. A moderated chat session enables the speaker to engage with the audience via text-based chat. Audience members submit questions and comments. On the back end, a moderator views comments and questions and decides whether to approve or reject each one. The speaker can then post responses and comments publicly or privately.

Sponsor meetings

Sponsor booths are an easy way for sponsors to connect with attendees. Attendees can visit these booths, request meetings, and download brochures, videos, and other material. One of the biggest advantages of digital is that every touch point between sponsor and attendee can be noted resulting in more data and a better understanding of the booth's success.

Gamification

Use game design techniques to drive participation, engagement and loyalty with an audience. In all walks of life, we strive for reward, status, achievement, self-expression, competition and altruism. Game mechanics are used in digital event platforms to drive engagement around these desires. Game mechanics include points, levels, challenges, digital goods, leaderboards, gifting and charity.

In-Person Engagement Opportunities

At in-person events, people naturally meet, connect and engage with one another in common areas (e.g., the line at the registration desk, at tables during lunch, etc.).

At the same time, event planners can intentionally design activities and experiences to create further engagement.

"Birds of a feather" lunches
Assign topics to certain tables at lunch, then invite people interested in that topic to gather there. For example, attendees would choose the "Internet of Things (IoT)" table if they were interested in chatting with others about that topic.

Scheduled "tweetups"
Invite Twitter users to meet in-person at the event (e.g., a cocktail hour at a local bar). Non-Twitter users would be welcome to attend too. Invite attendees to share photos on Twitter using the event hashtag.

Matchmaking
Using details associated with an attendee's profile, provide a matchmaking feature that suggests people to meet at the event. This feature would be provided on the event website or in the event's mobile app. The website or app could facilitate the introduction and coordinate the in-person meetup.

Event Production

High-quality video broadcasts at your in-person experience are critical. Returning to our professional sports analogy, what would fans think if they turned on the TV to see fuzzy pictures or a blank screen? Broadcast-quality content can engage digital attendees and make them want to experience the in-person channel next year.

Tips and Best Practices for Event Production

Organizing an event or live broadcast can be stressful. Unless your team is comfortable with the equipment, A/V, setup and delivery of live video broadcasts, it helps to outsource this service to a reliable partner or vendor.

A team of expert A/V, video and streaming media professionals will put you at ease with their full-service production offerings. Services to consider:

1. **On-site production.** On-location capturing, live streaming, recording and encoding from your physical event. Capture keynote sessions, breakouts and event highlights in a news desk format, roving reporter style attendee interviews, sponsor spotlights and more.

2. **Full-service studio.** An in-person studio is equipped with the latest audio, video, lighting and green screen equipment. Studios provide engineering support to capture and stream live or pre-recorded content.

3. **Video syndication.** Syndicate your content and deliver it live or on demand to Facebook Live, YouTube Live or any other streaming location your audience spends time on. Drive audience acquisition to your event or place your videos in front of your social networks.

Tips for Engaging Session Delivery

Consider using the following production sets and tips to ensure an engaging session delivery:

A "behind the scenes" production set

A television talk show set

A satellite stage where an in-person host can speak to the digital audience

Multiple camera views

Show camera angles of the in-person audience

Provide photo cutouts of remote participants at the in-person experience

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Post-Event

How to Fuel Community Engagement

Keeping your community engaged after your event is crucial. Start your post-event engagement as soon as the event is over. Follow up with an email to attendees.

Let them know where they can find session recaps and event highlights. Show them how to continue the conversation with their peers.

However, to effectively fuel long-term community engagement throughout the year, look at your own objectives and analyze event engagement data to understand what resonates among your community, so you drive the most business value.

Measuring Success: Getting Tactical With Data and Insights

Every engagement within your event provides meaningful data to measure, helping you increase value for your customers, maximize return on investment (ROI) and increase sales and marketing effectiveness.

Event Success Checklist

To analyze and assess the success of your event, begin by answering questions like these:

- ✅ Did the event meet its target ROI?

- ✅ Did the event's technology platforms and tools support business objectives well enough?

- ✅ Did the event support audience needs and wants in ways that will build and strengthen our relationships with our community?

- ✅ Do event statistics help us understand in-person vs. digital attendee performance and behavior?

- ✅ What programs, tactics or techniques worked so well in this program that we should try them in other events?

- ✅ What is the long-term impact of the event on relationships with clients, members, thought leaders, sponsors and prospects?

- ✅ What did we learn about digital attendees and in-person attendees that will drive future revenue and even provide insight on new revenue streams?

While event technology collects data in a way that you can garner valuable insights for everyone, the process of measuring success can devolve without a clear set of agreed-upon, overarching objectives from which to begin your dive into data.

Whether you are planning a new event, or the next iteration of a flagship event, gathering stakeholders in an exercise to define and prioritize your strategic objectives will be key to how effectively you can measure outcomes – and to how you may decide to pivot and adapt.

Managing cost is always a priority. For example, maintaining your cost per acquisition contributes to a better bottom line and is a data point that informs how efficient and effective your event marketing investment has been.

➤ **Achieve a high level of audience engagement and satisfaction as another high-priority objective.** Use technology to poll attendees to identify top of mind issues, needs and concerns that can be addressed through program design for your digital event. Then track session attendance; follow social posts and hashtags; monitor asset and search activity and content views; and capture attendee evaluations to measure your success at creating a program that meets audience needs.

➤ **Gain a better understanding of your audience or an audience segment.** Build opportunities to gather and measure data that will help you get to know them better. For example, if you have gaps in your CRM around job title, areas of responsibility or expertise, budget oversight, or even what keeps your members, readers, platform users, etc. up at night, take advantage of their heightened engagement around your event to gather data that can help you fill the gap.

➤ **Polls, surveys and gamification support your information-gathering mission** in ways that will make participants happy to share more information about themselves in exchange for a memorable experience.

Here are other aspects of your event you can look to measure and analyze:

Registration and login
The registration and login function are touchpoints for gathering information that supports business objectives, like name, mobile phone number, etc. After completing the registration and login function, you can add functionality that promotes the event and connectivity.

Social mentions
Monitor the social activity of your prospects and registrants. Create an event hashtag and watch it move across the ether.

Content views, including date and time viewed
This is an exceptionally useful view of your event. Knowing when attendees access your content and which assets are the most popular provides information you can use during the event to get them even more engaged, as well as data that can help inform planning subsequent events.

Survey responses and metrics
Perhaps the most valuable insights you can garner are those you get directly from the mouths (or devices) of your audience. The survey (even if it's only a survey of one question) is a tool you can deploy at the end of one event when you begin planning its next iteration and continue using throughout its planning, promotion, and deployment.

CPE, testing, badges and certification metrics
Many times, continuing education credits are a bonus of event attendance. Understand where your audience is submitting your event for CPE credit. At a minimum, it can offer a clue to find your audience on LinkedIn, association sites, etc. If you are a nonprofit or certifying body, it can tell you who your competition may be for certifications or where you can leverage a strategic partnership.

Recommendation activity
By tracking referrals and recommendations, you gather information over time on what percentage of your audience population typically generates referral participation. Personally thank your most enthusiastic referrers with a personal outreach, an appropriate gift (e.g., some swag or a discount on membership or the next event?), participation in an exclusive event.

Any gesture of appreciation goes a long way in recognizing their contribution to the success of your digital event. If your platform permits, assign a Net Promoter Score (NPS).

Unique and total attendees within a specific time frame
This is a basic measure to discern your overall event population and enable reporting on instances of attendance across the program.

Reinforce Your Content

After you measure the success of your event, it's time to reinforce your content.

Digital experiences give us the opportunity to create robust engagement and build communities. Your event is more than just a moment in time – it's part of a process of building community for years to come. When you refocus your lens on community building, you extend the life cycle of your event into a continuum of touchpoints.

To help reinforce your content and create community, consider the following after your event:

➤ What were the most valuable pieces of content created for the event?

➤ What were the most memorable experiences that received the best feedback?

➤ What didn't work well in terms of engagement?

With all this great content at your disposal, the possibilities are endless.

After your event concludes, you can now repurpose the content that performed well into a nearly never-ending stream of engagement opportunities. You can:

➤ Share session clips on social media or create a YouTube miniseries.

➤ Share screenshots and testimonials.

➤ Use post-event polls and surveys to dictate new content creation.

➤ Direct audiences to the on-demand environment.

➤ Use insights from your event to plan future, stand-alone webinars.

Plan a Webcast Series

As we mentioned previously, your event strategy is about more than just a single moment in time – it's part of a process of building community for years to come. Between your tentpole events, what better way to keep your community engaged than by planning a series of short webcasts? They allow your community to stay engaged from the comfort of their homes.
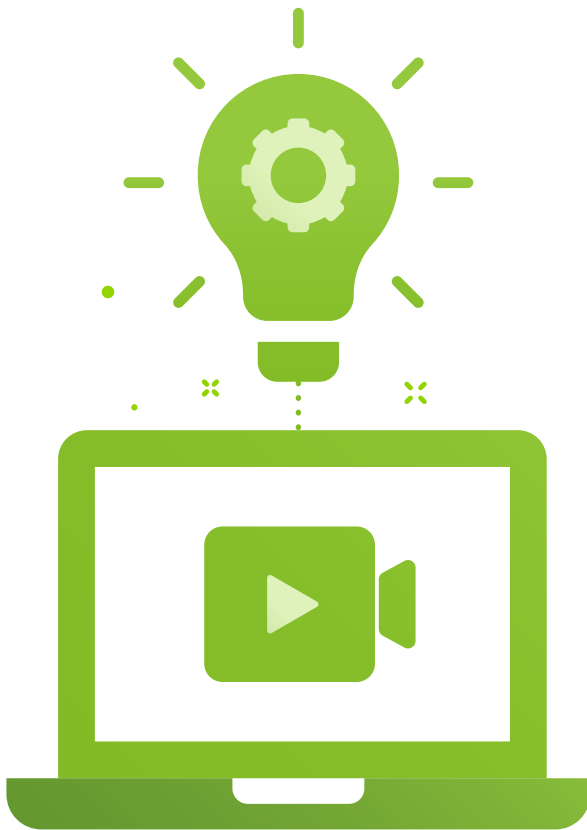
Why Should You Plan a Webcast Series With Your Community?

1 More and more people are attending webcasts and staying engaged longer. According to Notified client webcast data in 2021, the average viewing duration of a webcast increased from 29% to 67% for live webcasts and from 28% to 60% for on-demand webcasts. Communities are seeking a two-way dialogue with participants and hosts, and we expect this trend to increase in importance moving forward.

2 People are more open to connecting digitally. You know how it goes at in-person events: People like to hang with their own crowd. That sometimes makes it harder to network for the 25-40% of the population who are introverts. But digital connection removes a lot of those barriers. We've also found that there's less small talk. People dive right into the heart of the matter.

3 Webcasts let you create compelling experiences with your audience. Through video and audio engagement, you can reimagine conventional formats to build something unforgettable. Don't be afraid to try something different!

Bonus Tip
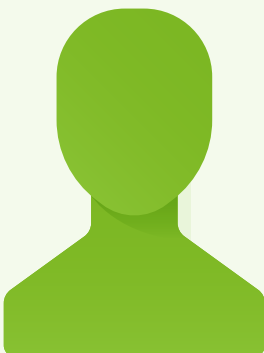
Rethink the Standard Webcast Format

One creative webcast planner hosted a panel discussion webcast in the theme of the Food Network show *Chopped* (a cooking competition).

Each panelist (i.e., contestant) appeared on video from their kitchen. They answered questions posed to the panel while simultaneously preparing a meal from their kitchen. Near the conclusion of the panel discussion, each contestant showed their creation to the camera and attendees voted to decide on the winner.

This webcast drew raves from the audience, who flooded the chat area with excited compliments. The audience also took to social media to sing the webcast's praises. This type of outside-the-box thinking is one way to rethink the standard webcast format.

You might not be familiar with Chopped or the idea might not fit your audience. But here are other concepts you might apply to your next webcast:
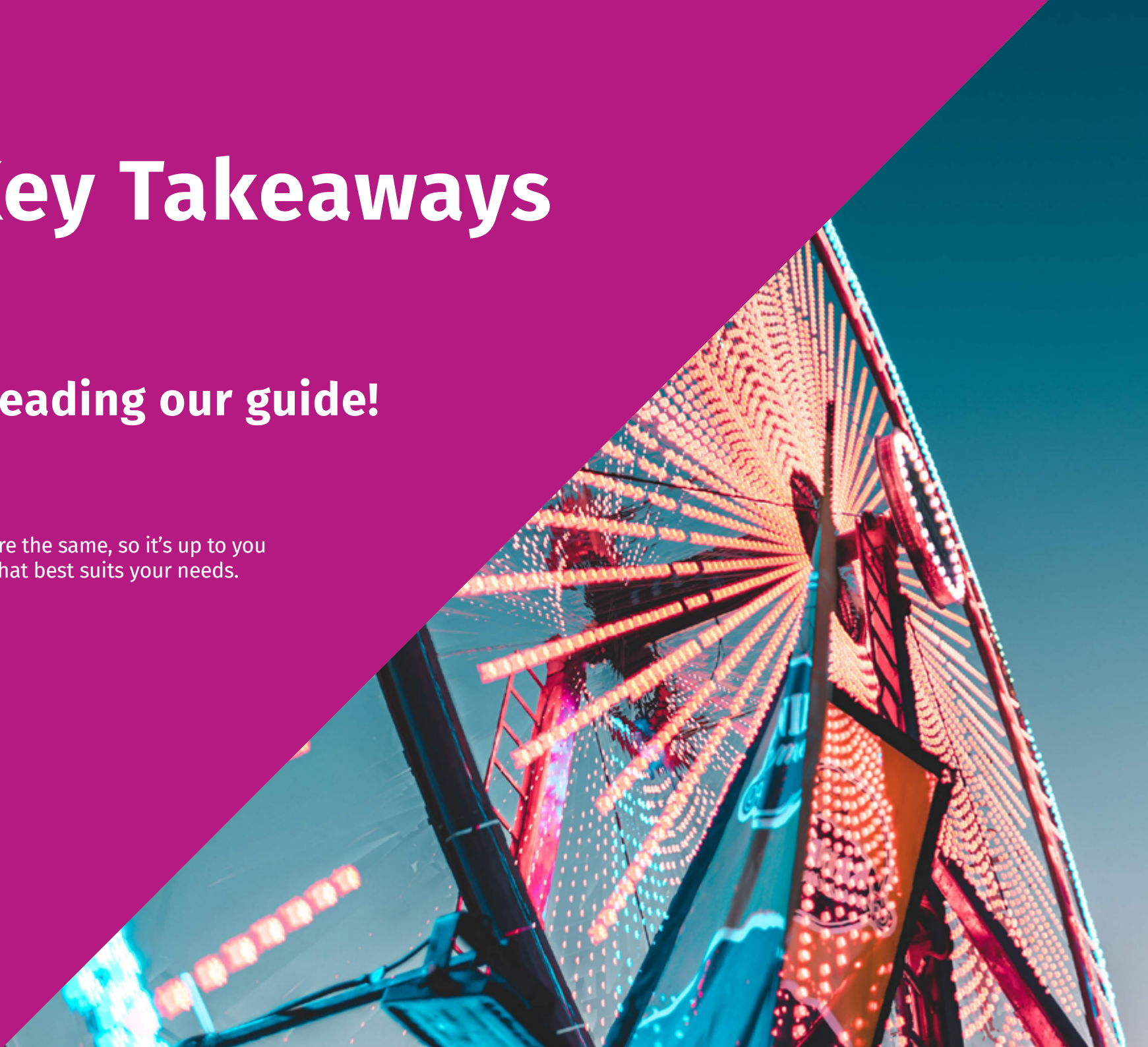
• *Pardon the Interruption* (ESPN)
• *Face the Nation* (CBS News)
• *Saturday Night Live* (NBC)
• *Survivor* (CBS)
• *The Masked Singer* (FOX)
• *America's Got Talent* (NBC)

7 Key Takeaways

Thanks for reading our guide!

Remember: No two events are the same, so it's up to you to create an event strategy that best suits your needs.
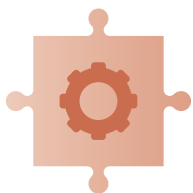
Define Your Event Strategy

Before you can build your event strategy, you must first define what "hybrid" means to you and how it affects year-round engagement with your community. Answer key questions, such as:

"What type of events do I want to host?" and "What type of in-person experiences do I want to host?" Also ask how you can connect the two experiences, if at all.

How to Build and Manage Your Event Portfolio

Look at the new life cycle of events and determine how to best build your event experience. The Always On event life cycle continuously engages your communities at a time and manner that suits their needs and expectations. This life cycle features an event portfolio with a variety of event types – everything from a small, local get-together or an intimate virtual session to significant trade shows that host thousands of attendees each year.

How to Design Your Event Experience

Identify your business goals and objectives. Everything in an events strategy should contribute to those goals in some way. Objective setting narrows your focus to determine what types of experiences you want to create for your audience. It's also important to remember that your audience values the flexibility to attend either in-person or digitally.

How to Select Your Event Team

Your event team should all play a role in event design. Some team members will focus on the digital experience, while others the in-person experience. The important thing to understand, however, is that you are building a single, holistic team. Key roles on the team include the Event Lead, Strategic Planning Lead and Primary Production Lead.

Monetization and Sponsorships

Ahead of your event, you must strive to understand the needs of sponsors and develop packages that fulfill those needs. Develop sponsorship opportunities unique to the in-person and digital channels. Find creative ways for sponsorships to "cross over" from one channel to the other, creating integrated sponsorship opportunities.

Acquiring Your Audience

Before your event, the first step in audience acquisition is to get foundational elements in place. These include the event page (with registration), the integration of registration with marketing automation and CRM, and the creation of shareable copy, graphics and videos.

Content and Programming

Asking your audience for their input to help guide the content and programming for your live event creates a high likelihood of success. Discover what interests them and build your program and agenda around those interests. In addition to online polls, surveys, calls with key constituents and focus groups, you can use a mix of other resources to understand what is on their minds.

Audience Engagement During the Event

Remember our plea: "There is really just one audience." That audience will engage in shared experiences across multiple touchpoints over time. Your job is to build the "connective tissue" that creates a seamless experience across touchpoints for different audiences (e.g., in-person and digital) to engage with one another.

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To analyze and assess the success of your event, begin by answering questions like, "Did the event meet its target ROI?" and "Did the event's technology platforms and tools support business objectives well enough?"

Reinforce Your Content

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Why Hybrid Events?

Extended Reach

Very few events ever get their entire audience to be there. Most have thousands of people that would like their content but will never get to attend whether it is due to budget, time or the logistics of having to fly internationally. A hybrid model can offer that flexibility to more potential attendees whereas hosting an in-person only event, could be a barrier for a lot of people that would stop them from attending.

Budgets

Attendee and sponsor budgets may not allow for in-person attendance anymore. Since there is still a level of uncertainty around the future of events, many event organizers are looking for innovative ways to help keep planning flexible in case a fully in-person event is not feasible.

Comfort

What event planners have noticed is that audience members are being more selective with the number of events they attend in-person every year. One thing to take into consideration is that since the pandemic, there is a good majority of people who have become more comfortable attending digital experiences to an in-person one. And now that we see that digital experiences can be effective, some people are actively choosing to attend an event online rather than in-person.

Evergreen Content

Another great addition to hosting a hybrid event is that event organizers are able to extend the life of their content far beyond the live event. A digital experience offers many measurable data points that can sometimes be hard to track at an in-person event. We can capture each touch point an attendee takes during an event and see where and when they are most likely to engage. Events help streamline the content journey and build an event that is specifically tailored to your audience's needs.

About Notified

Notified is the world's only communications cloud for events, public relations, and investor relations to drive meaningful insights and outcomes.

Notified Event Cloud lets you create unforgettable experiences to build brand and community engagement. It's the world's most comprehensive end-to-end event technology and related services to power the creation and management of events.

Notified PR Cloud helps you optimize brand value, increase earned media, and drive meaningful business impact. Reach global audiences, monitor brand sentiment, send GlobeNewswire press releases, and measure success.

Notified IR Cloud lets you manage stakeholder communications and regulatory requirements to maximize shareholder value. Tell your investment story with high-impact, multichannel solutions – earnings announcements, press releases, webcasting, virtual events, and IR websites.

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