

Evolving Events Space

1. How do you define “hybrid events?”

The events industry is quickly evolving. Events are now being delivered through in-person and virtual channels - and these events are known as hybrid events. While a much-used term today, “hybrid” is likely just a temporary label as events move to just simply “events.” For example, the terms “smartphones” and “new media” became just “phones” and “media” after the initial phase of these innovations. Now events will follow that same trajectory.

2. How will events be positioned in the marketing mix going forward?

Given the robust data events now produce, they are more closely accepted and aligned within the broader marketing/communications mix. Events are no longer episodic. They are always-on experiences, which is more akin to the rest of the mix.

Marketers should build an event strategy that is continuous, with multiple touchpoints along the way. This includes pre- and post-event interaction and engagement and in-person event touchpoints to drive interest.

Tighter alignment of press release distribution announcing an event, including media snippets as an audience acquisition tactic, will increase. The ability to share video from in-person and virtual experiences across social media channels is here now, but not as widely employed as it will be going forward.

3. Do you have suggestions for securing buy-in from seasoned event planners to:

a) Treat virtual and in-person audiences with the same value?

Virtual audiences have proven to be just as important as in-person audiences. To relegate a virtual audience as secondary is not advised if you want to stay on the right side of history. Think of any other industry where in-person content was later amplified, and you will readily see the importance of both audiences.

b) Deliver an authentic and inclusive event regardless of how you join?

Authentic and inclusive events are critically important and differ between in-person and virtual channels, here are a couple of recommendations:

- The in-person and virtual audiences have different expectation of the experience; it is important to understand and design your event accordingly. While we are delivering a shared experience, the way in which we design and deliver that experience should be different. Think about your experience with live TV as it relates to content delivery. Find ways to engage the virtual audience with a regular cadence of asks for their engagement through polls, feedback into chat, and other means.
- Do not mimic an in-person event with an online version of that event. The virtual audience will not stay engaged and opportunity to drive unique value to that audience will be lost.

c) **Be concerned that availability of a virtual channel will cannibalize in-person event attendance?**

Studies by PCMA and other industry organizations verify the fact that virtual channels do not cannibalize strong in-person events. To the contrary, virtual channels amplify strong in-person events. Virtual audiences are proven to drive in-person attendance. Our data shows that approximately 30% of all virtual attendees that attend their first event, usually attend the next event in-person. The virtual channel enhances event accessibility (for those who are not able to attend in-person for various reasons like cost, work conflicts, local rules) and lets those audiences join.

What COVID-19 has done, however, is put a bright light on the value of in-person events which are weak from a design and experience standpoint. Those events are at risk sooner or later. COVID-19 accelerated that view.

4. **Aren't we seeing virtual event burnout and how does that affect the hybrid events going forward?**

Basic video conferencing provides the same look and feel - which contributes to burnout. Robust user experience is critical, including more robust, feature-rich platforms like Intrado Digital Media's.

Branding, a variety of engagement opportunities, interaction points through surveys, Q&A and other means are table stakes to a strong digital experience. Run of show, virtual hosts and moderators elevate the event type beyond a typical video conference or live stream.

All these tactics drive engagement and are applicable to both in-person and virtual channels.

Strong events, however, are magnets for more team attendance and groups who may have experienced the event through a virtual channel and now want more through the in-person attendance.

5. **How to select a virtual event technology to support a hybrid event?**

The selection criteria to consider in deciding on the right technology to employ is materially the same as it is for a purely virtual event. See our recent post, [How to Choose Your Virtual Event Platform](#).

In events with multiple channels of delivery, critical functionality in the technology is elimination of duplicity in the planning stages.

- One place to register as an attendee
- One place to ingest speaker content
- One place to measure performance
- One second screen solution to put both audiences in the same technology so they can collectively respond to polls, chat with each other, and otherwise interact.

With the category still in early stages of development, best practices around pricing and support are still formulating. That said, there will never be a singular answer, much like there has never been a singular answer around pricing, support in the execution of in-person only events.

Experience Design

6. What are some of the emerging best practices for blending different audience types and sizes?

Effectively engaging both your in-person and virtual audiences can be a challenge without proven expertise. We have refined our approach over more than a decade to help you deliver an outstanding event:

Fundamental tactics - Start with these fundamental event tactics to create the foundation of a multi-channel event:

- Environment Design:
 - Create a rich, interactive, branded singular virtual destination
 - Select a 2D or 3D option to make your brand shine and offer a robust user experience
- Production:
 - Have onsite support and A/V production to deliver broadcast-quality content
 - Take a multi-location approach to bring sites together into a single experience – pop ups and meetups
- Content:
 - Create a mix of live and on-demand content that is easy for viewers to find
 - Offer a variety of content: welcome video, keynotes, panels, and breakouts
- Engagement:
 - Enable 1:1 video chat, Q&A, matchmaking, and more to engage your audience
 - Robust brand and content capabilities to support your exhibitors and sponsors

Exceptional tactics – Deliver an exceptional experience and take your multi-channel event to the next level with:

- **Second Screen:**
 - Bridge the gap between in-person and virtual audiences. Combine Q&A and polling to encourage deeper cross channel participation – example: source all questions from the in-person and virtual audiences, in a single location.
- **Matchmaking:**
 - Provide attendees, exhibitors, and sponsors with highly targeted recommendations to connect with and meet other people who are aligned with their professional goals and interests.
- **EventTV:**
 - Share onsite experience with the virtual audience via news desks or roving reporters
- **Social for Events:**
 - Engage your audience on social media through the amplify board to share audience posts
 - Stream your keynote on social channels such as YouTube and Facebook Live
- **Entertainment:**
 - Consider hosting awards show, concerts, happy hours, and wrap ups

Events with hundreds of sessions have an opportunity to redesign content delivery and idea exchange through more front loaded/pre-event content consumption. This in-person experience is geared toward a structured conversation or exchange vs. consuming content in breakout sessions as it's historically done. This approach provides in-person and remote audiences with rich opportunities to expand on the value of content they can consume in advance of in-person events.

7. We are leveraging the Intrado Virtual Event platform to create year-round engagement for our community. In a hybrid environment, how do you design an effective program?

First, thank you!

The virtual channel lets you create an always-on experience and an opportunity to extend event engagement and fuel your community before, during, and after the live events.

- **Pre-Event** – Connect with your audience and build anticipation ahead of the event. Consider “micro-events” with agenda reveals, highlights, performances and scheduled networking opportunities.

- **Live** – Blend the best of the in-person and virtual engagement to continue the experience you’ve already started. Make the in-person time more meaningful and personalized for your attendees by getting to know them before they arrive. Consider creating content that maintains relevance over time.
- **Post-Event** – Keep the conversation going by offering some of the content on demand and refreshing content when needed. Program ongoing webinars across topics and live Q&As with the keynote speakers after the event. Design the program to allow attendees to connect with one another within the environment.

Watch our recent webinar [*Hybrid Events: Tactics to Blend the In-Person and Digital Experience*](#) for more tips.

8. How do you conduct an event where all presenters are in one room, with an in-person audience, but is also streamed live? Is it the "TED Talk" model where the in-person audience is prioritized, or the "SNL" model where the virtual audience is prioritized?

The question on audience prioritization is really a design question instead of a technology question. It all depends on the business objectives of the event.

Prioritization of the audience is a function of the event business model. Most of SNL’s revenue is monetized on the broadcast audience. Historically, the TED Conference and TED Talk revenue is from the in-person audience. It's typically best to prioritize the audience that drives your business model.

Event Delivery & Engagement

9. How can you then ensure virtual attendees still feel like they are part of the experience?

While designing an immersive experience for both the in-person and virtual audience is key to event success, the experience won’t be identical for both audiences. Tailor your content and programming across channels and consider a curated or VIP experience for virtual attendees. Here are a few tips:

- After streaming the keynote, run different tracks in the virtual environment.
- Plan a “behind-the-scenes” opportunity for the virtual audience.
- Give the virtual audience a more intimate Q&A with a keynote speaker.
- Purposefully reference the virtual audience from the in-person stage regularly.

- Speak to the virtual audience directly from a dedicated spot on the stage where the in-person audience knows is for quick engagement with a virtual audience.
- Broadcast a reporter that covers the event on a roving basis with live and on-demand feeds to the virtual audience. Embed live Q&A into those touchpoints.
- Setup multiple camera views of the stage and include a camera angle of in-person audience.
- Set up a news desk where the news are highlighted for the virtual audience

10. How do we provide virtual attendees the opportunity to engage with in-person attendees?

Technology provides a bridge between virtual and in-person attendees in a variety of ways. Best-in-class platforms like Intrado Digital Media's give each attendee access to each other through proprietary and integrated solutions. The second screen application allows in-person attendees to join in the virtual conversation. Matchmaking, video and text chat, poll responses, and other engagement techniques are all utilized to create a bridge between these audiences.

11. How would you describe an effective hybrid networking experience?

An effective hybrid networking experience can be best described as rich in engagement between virtual attendees and in-person attendees - within and across these channels. Level of effectiveness is a relative term, but with effective engagement targets that you establish at the front end of your event design process, your events performance in relation to those targets will determine how effective your event is.

12. In a hybrid model, how do you approach taking questions from both an in-person audience and virtual?

Consider including an onsite news desk where a single moderator asks questions posed by in-person and virtual attendees. The second screen application can also be leveraged to source all questions from the in-person and virtual audiences, in a single location.

13. What are you doing to make the virtual/hybrid events accessible to the deaf and blind?

Accessibility has always been a critically important functionality at Intrado Digital Media. We serve thousands of the world's most respected and responsible brands. It is important to note that there are many other disabilities beyond deafness and blindness that limit event participation – like physical, mental, and chronic illness – making virtual the only way to attend an event. Our Virtual

Event platform is equipped with captioning and multi-language tools to address certain accessibility issues. This will remain at the front of the category as the most accessible platform available today.

Sponsorship & Monetization

14. Do you have any tips on making the most of a hybrid event for sponsors and exhibitors?

Sponsors primary objective is to create value, drive brand awareness and generate leads whether it comes from the in-person or virtual channels. The opportunities for cross-channel sponsorship and exhibit participation are plentiful.

Tips for event planners:

- Create tiered sponsorship packages that blend the best options to increase value to sponsors. We like to say if it's customizable, it's monetizable.
- Create a clear delineation between package tiers. In the virtual space, there is a wealth of digital inventory to monetize – matchmaking, session tracks, badging/gamification, networking lounges, exhibit booths, welcome messaging, and video throughout the event.
- Add a virtual exhibit hall to enable sponsors to connect with the virtual audience.
- Consider a post-event engagement tactics to extend the value for sponsors beyond the live days.

Tips for sponsors and exhibitors:

- Choose the right sponsorship package that gives you access to the in-person and virtual audiences.
- Engage with in-person and virtual booth visitors. Check out our [*Top 10 Tips for More Engaging Sponsor Booth*](#).
- Make it easy for your audience to engage with you and your brand
- Calculate your sponsorship ROI.

For more tips, check out our blog post [*How to Make the Most of Virtual Events Sponsorship*](#)

Event Budgeting

15. How do you advise budgeting for hybrid events?

Events are a much more significant and valuable asset when multiple channels are employed. Much like any of other asset that grows, it takes a bit of incremental investment to build, maintain and grow that asset. And that investment is far less than the value created. We need take a growth mindset as

we evolve our events into multi-channel experiences.

16. Before 2020, we looked at the possibility of holding hybrid events but found the cost to be prohibitive. How do you plan to address this and how do you see the market changing to allow this option to be more affordable to groups like non-profits?

It's important to look at the entire value equation. If an in-person-only event has 1,000 attendees, and an event with multiple delivery channels has 1,000 in-person attendees and 5,000 virtual attendees, then the value of that event is measurably larger. Your event is now more significant, and thus can be leveraged through a broader sponsorship program. You will have a bigger audience to drive incremental revenue than you would've had with an in-person only event, much like sports did after television came into the industry. That industry exploded, and the in-person event revenue and audiences grew all the way through.

That said, certain costs continue to decline. A good example is bandwidth and video capturing techniques. In other words, last year's costs analysis might not be accurate for this year's events.

The events industry is going to grow exponentially on the back of newly activated digital channels as in-person event delivery comes back.