

3 Common Misconceptions About Virtual Events



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As the effects of COVID-19 continue to be felt around the world, companies are facing an overwhelming reality that evolves on a daily basis. Events and conferences are being cancelled, employees are working from home for the foreseeable future and learning how to conduct 'business as usual' continues to present unique challenges.

In a post-COVID world, a virtual event strategy will not be optional – the choice will be between an event that is 100% online, or a hybrid event with a digital complement to a physical event. We often hear from marketers and event planners that virtual events are intimidating – from selecting the right technology partner for a seamless technical production to delivering an experience that matches the energy and engagement of a physical conference. However, there's been a tremendous amount of progress in the space – set-up, speed, UX and audio/video quality – and with the right technology and creative planning, these events can be incredibly successful.

Here are the three most common myths about virtual events, debunked.

Myth #1 – Virtual events cannibalize physical event attendance.

Fact – Many marketers report that adding a virtual extension to their event has increased year-over-year physical event attendance just by exposing more attendees to the content/experience (with many of our clients reporting a 10%-30% increase in attendance). The reality is that online events are valuable tools to drive attendance for those who can't attend a physical event, allowing them to engage with the content in a digital format and enjoy the experience virtually. This also gives marketers the opportunity to extend their events to national or international attendees, and the ability to connect with new audiences.

Virtual events also provide the ability to share presentations, posters and papers more effectively. If an attendee misses a presentation during a physical event there is no way to go back and view it. This is not a limitation for virtual events. Participants can interact with content at their own pace – including outside of scheduled presentation times. Event content can also be made available for months following a conference so that attendees have time to re-engage and view materials that they may have missed.

Myth #2 – Meaningful engagement is limited with a virtual event.

Fact – There are many creative ways to drive engagement with a virtual audience, from traditional Q&A, chat and networking opportunities to badging and gamification. Even more exciting is that the touchpoints throughout the virtual event experience can be captured to truly understand how engaged the audience was. The ability to understand not only if the attendee joined the event, but what content they were interested in – from sessions attended to documents viewed or downloaded – is incredibly valuable data that can inform future marketing strategies.

Polls and surveys are also a great way to keep audiences engaged during presentation sessions and allow speakers to

pivot their content to address questions in real-time.

Myth #3 – You cannot monetize virtual events.

Fact – There are plenty of ways to monetize a virtual event. Just like physical events, virtual events can generate revenue through creative sponsorships. Participating sponsors also reap months of benefits following a virtual event, due to on-demand and post-event promotion. Virtual event spaces, booths and other locations within the environment are all opportunities for sponsorship.

Sponsorship options within virtual events can include:

- Preferred placement on event microsite or registration pages
- Online advertisements/banners
- Marketing email mentions
- Pre-roll video that runs at the start or end of each session
- Virtual lobby entrance
- Breakout sessions
- Networking lounge
- Games, trivia, prizes
- Speaking/keynote opportunities
- Virtual tradeshow booths

Bonus Fact: Virtual Events Are the New Normal

Most marketers agree that when it comes to events, there's no turning back to 'in-person only' events. A successful event marketing strategy needs to embrace online and virtual experiences, whether as a total replacement, or an augment to, physical events. As myths are debunked and marketers better understand the opportunities that virtual events present for their companies – from brand awareness to lead generation and customer engagement – the trend in virtual events is shifting

from a nice-to-have to our new normal.