

Boosting Attendance and Engagement at Virtual Meetings and Events

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We can all agree that after a year of adjusting to the “New Normal,” virtual gatherings are a part of the meeting landscape and here to stay. Audiences have set the bar for a successful event higher than they did at the outset of the pandemic.

While the number of virtual events grew significantly in 2020, and the number is likely to increase moving forward, in 2021, it’s no longer enough to try and take credit for simply staging a virtual event.

They are now expected, so the incumbency is on organizers to plan these events in a way that makes them compelling and unique. In addition, amid the ongoing pandemic, our lives are as chaotic as ever, so any meeting or event that appears on the calendar must have purpose and add value.

Even as the world claws out from more than a year of quarantines and lockdowns, virtual meetings and events will be with us for the foreseeable future. Here are three ways to make them more appealing to maximize attendance and audience engagement.

1) Allow the audience to participate.

The most obvious potential downside to a virtual event is the lack of opportunity to build off the energy in the room. That goes for speakers and participants alike.

Attendees can feel the energy at a successful event, but it’s

not always as palpable online, so organizers must find a way to bring the audience into the event at every turn possible. Events cannot afford to be static affairs; they must be interactive.

Interactions can be small. They could come in the form of roundtable discussions, breakout sessions with smaller groups, chat rooms or real-time polls and surveys to help steer the direction of an event.

The more attendees feel like they are driving the discussion, the more they will engage with the content, and the more they will take away. They'll also be more likely to continue to connect with the organization after an event wraps.

2) Speakers must be personable.

In this brave new world, it's not just about finding the smartest – or even the best-known person – to speak at an event. Speakers must be engaging, someone with a compelling message that people want to hear.

Some companies rely on celebrities for sales meetings or trade shows. If an organization engages a celebrity speaker to give a keynote, but they turn out to give a drab presentation, people will tune out.

Often, it's the lesser-known speaker, such as an "industry celebrity," with a more compelling story who is the best option for an event. They have the power to motivate attendees and bring a company's value proposition to life.

3) It must be professional from start to finish.

Arguably more than ever before, events are an extension of a company, so every aspect of the gathering must look the part. As a result, content must match an organization's overall

objectives and deliver against attendees' expectations.

Given how many personal interactions have been diminished amid the pandemic, a virtual event provides one of the few touchpoints customers may have with an organization, and attendees will give an organization credit for gatherings they deem beneficial and valuable. Companies have continuing opportunities to re-envision every aspect of their meetings and events to ensure the highest possible attendance and engagement.



About the Author: *Lauren Weatherly is the SVP of marketing at global virtual meetings and events company PGI, www.pgi.com, which is dedicated to making meetings and online events simple to join and secure to use so people connect wherever they are. She is responsible for developing and leading a results-focused global marketing strategy to drive growth and build brand recognition for the company.*