

# Planning the Most Effective Virtual Investor and Shareholder Meeting

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Much of the conversation about moving to virtual events amid the COVID-19 pandemic has focused on trade shows, sales meetings and industry conferences.

But the pandemic has forced companies to rewrite how they approach investor and shareholder meetings as well. The changes over the past 16 months even prompted the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to provide guidance on conducting shareholder meetings amid the pandemic.

Many of these changes have been positive. According to a report from the Rutgers Center for Corporate Law and Governance, the Council of Institutional Investors and Society for Corporate Governance found companies using virtual shareholder meetings overall “reported a positive experience.” It also determined that costs for virtual events were lower than in-person and hybrid meetings.

The transition was a natural one in some ways since earnings calls were already “remote.” Extending this approach to investor days and annual meetings was a natural next step with many benefits for both the organizers and the participants.

Indeed, some companies experienced problems, whether it was technical glitches or trouble making the transition. To help moving forward, here are a few tips for planning the most effective virtual investor or shareholder meeting.

## **Engage early with attendees.**

Even though virtual events are more commonplace, some attendees may not be well-versed in joining virtual meetings. Communicating early and often about what to expect and how to participate will help attendees minimize any consternation they may be feeling about joining the meeting.

To help improve the process in the future, consider adding additional opportunities for participants to provide feedback about their experience, including post-event surveys.

We are all learning a new normal in how we conduct business moving forward. Be sure to take advantage of every opportunity to understand what works and where improvement is needed.

## **Take security seriously.**

The world today faces threats from every direction. Hackers and bad actors are ready to cause problems. But companies cannot afford to let them disrupt an event as important as an investor conference.

Companies can mitigate security concerns by employing proven approaches. Any solution must incorporate enterprise-grade security, including network security with password protection, login authentication and limited audience access when possible.

## **Understand what you need a platform to deliver.**

As a part of the planning process, consider the number of attendees and how they might engage with the event. For example, participants will need to ask questions in addition to viewing presentations, meaning some virtual meeting platforms may not be powerful enough.

Consider how best to share proxy information, disclosures and other legally required materials, whether in advance of a meeting or during the event itself.

Last but not least, consider the agenda. A virtual event may demand a run-of-show constructed differently to allow for a better flow of information while facilitating audience participation and ensuring all necessary information is addressed.

## **Improve the experience for the end-user.**

More than ever, audiences today are easily distracted, so the key to improving the experience for attendees is to make the event compelling.

As part of the planning, look for opportunities to shorten presentations and pepper them with brief video clips and testimonials where possible to bring the message to life. In addition, event planners should take advantage of the opportunity to include interactive sessions, such as “fireside chats” and question and answer sessions.

Virtual events are helping companies better engage with their audiences. They are using the medium to bring their stories to life in new and unique ways.

While a virtual setting may make the event look different, companies still need to conduct business. They cannot afford to forego the obligations to their shareholders and other stakeholders just because of a pandemic, and they must adhere to future guidance when planning meetings.

COVID has forced organizations to reevaluate how they conduct business, but moving to virtual shareholder and investor meetings shows that some of these changes are positive ones that will benefit organizations for years.



**About the Author:** *Lauren Weatherly is the SVP of marketing at global virtual events and meetings company PGI, [www.pgi.com](http://www.pgi.com), which is dedicated to making 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.*