

topics

In this white paper you will discover how to:

develop an action plan

The needs of all stakeholders have changed - adapt.

choose length & format

Shape the virtual event to achieve the planned meeting goals.

go the extra mile

Avoid some common obstacles to a smooth experience.



changing direction

In the past few months, a lot of small meetings became webinars and a few societies staged their first virtual conferences. Online and in-person events have common elements, as well as many different strengths and weaknesses.

While restrictions remain in place, we will continue to explore the evolution of online meetings and demystify the notion of a virtual conference. Is it something as simple as a giant Zoom call, or does it entail more than that? Can simply renting a platform solve it all? And what is the purpose of event planners now?

Creating a virtual congress is as complex as staging a face-to-face one, and it needs a similar mix of essential features, including working with a professional conference organiser (PCO), selecting a (virtual) venue, and delivering a well-thought-out experience. This white paper is designed to guide associations in building compelling virtual experiences.

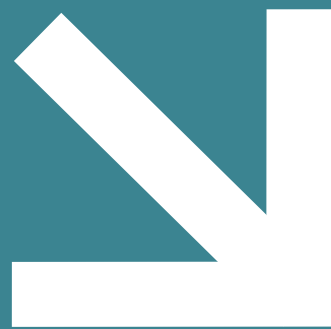


A hand in a tan sweater sleeve holds a black pen over a laptop keyboard and a spiral notebook. The background is a light, neutral color.

how to plan and deliver a virtual conference

With events evolving online, so have the needs of all stakeholders, especially those of participants and sponsors.

As an event owner, you are aware that any event strategy starts with identifying the goals and outcomes of the meeting. Once these are defined, consider the following:



time frame

Do the analysis

Consider competing conferences and clearly define the target audience - their geographic location matters when timing the live elements of the event. Review how these decisions affect sponsors too.

Plan, plan, and plan some more

Online is a different realm and so is the perception of time in it. Decide on the session duration and that of breaks. What will be the overall length of the event? Include calendar markings when releasing the schedule.

Ample hands-on time

Allow ample time to build the technical side of the virtual event (no matter if you start from scratch or are recreating an in-person meeting), followed by all the content creation. Involve sponsors early on too.

Timely virtual sessions

Virtual events demand more from speakers. You are more involved with their preparation, content capturing, and the production of their talk. Make sure they are aware of that and rehearse.

location | tech

Choosing a platform is like choosing a venue

Take this step with your event goal in mind. Inform your sponsors and exhibitors how the technology will enhance their exposure.

Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse some more

Do a million practice runs and be prepared for the worst-case scenarios.

Set the expectations

Sponsors and exhibitors want to know about their return on investment and engagement, while the delegates want to feel comfortable with the platform and understand where everything is positioned. Create guiding videos for everyone.

Battle screen fatigue

The screen-time for all of us has significantly increased. Plan for compact sessions and integrate physical breaks, such as yoga or guided meditation, for both delegates and sponsors.



preparation

It starts with the participant journey

Walk it yourself and make sure it is all clear and intuitive. Have a plan for the format and delivery of the content.

Be ready to engage

Prepare a portfolio of (tested!) engagement activities for your sponsors and exhibitors – from education to gamification.

Have a neat recording schedule

Finalise your program as soon as possible so that all content can be captured and scheduled for recording early on.

Educate lectors & moderators

Prepare all moderators and have clear instructions ready for speakers on how to be engaging when there is no audience in front of them.





delivery

Your (live) event days are a celebration

Use them to excite your delegates. Give supporters the needed recognition and drive traffic to the exhibition area on the platform.

What is on now?

Clearly mark the areas where on-demand lectures can be found and inform what is live now (and how it translates to the local time-zone). Debates and Q&A sessions should always be live. Pre-record all standard presentation sessions.

Real-time interaction is invaluable

Your audience should be well aware of where the action is taking place. Exhibitors have to know that they need to create a new strategy on attracting delegates to their virtual stands.

Connect with your community

Build a connection by communicating, listening, reflecting together with the delegates, sponsors, and exhibitors on social media and on the platform.



follow up

Online everything lasts longer

Don't stop communicating once the live event days are over: online everything lasts longer.

Continue to inform

Usually, you would announce your next event dates at this point, but if the virtual conference remains available for a few more months, make sure the target audience knows that they can continue learning and interacting.

Reshape the content

Develop a strategy to continue the most-interesting conversations that sparked during the event.

New post-event survey and reports

A post-live-event survey will help you learn what to improve for the next event and should it be in-person, virtual, or hybrid? Send out robust reports to sponsors and exhibitors, but following the necessary compliance laws and regulations.





it is all about the format

While drafting a virtual event strategy, consider the format which will work best to deliver the content and achieve the planned meeting goals.

Depending on the event length – be it a single-day event or a multiple-day conference – there is a considerable effect on the following factors:



available budget

If it was an in-person meeting?

Think of it as having the funds to book one hall for a day VS a whole conference centre. Have you decided who will create the experience beyond the platform? First, select a PCO, and together decide on the best technology to support the desired outcome.

1. There will be fewer and simpler platforms.
2. Any add-on will be costly.

low budget

high budget

1. There will be a better variety of platforms to choose from.
2. The complexity and tools available will open more opportunities in terms of content delivery.



diverse content

If it was an in-person meeting?

For a one-day event, you will do a couple of sessions only, less networking, and will be limited on creating special events, unlike a full conference taking place over a few days.

1. You will be able to do it live or with pre-recorded sessions.
2. Breakout rooms can be created for short discussions.
3. Interactivity will be limited, and it will be difficult and expensive to add any other products (for example e-Posters).

1-day event

conference

1. The content can be pre-recorded, or live, or a mix of the two.
2. There can be various products combined for added delegate interaction and engagement.
3. Include elements such as e-Posters and sponsored symposia.



industry visibility

If it was an in-person meeting?

For a one-day in-person event the sponsors will be less engaged, and their value will be in a few logo displays – the same goes for virtual events. Large conferences will naturally offer more exposure to sponsors.

1. The only way to acknowledge sponsors is with logo integration and special mentions.
2. Reports will be limited.

1-day event

conference

1. Sponsors can have their logo on the login screen.
2. Graphic advertisements and sponsored videos can be integrated.
3. All supporters can be acknowledged at the footer of the platform.
4. A virtual exhibition can be a part of the event, including various engaging activities to secure new leads - focus on its design and delivery.
5. Availability of robust reports.

interaction & networking

If it was an in-person meeting?

Single-day events have some networking opportunities, however, they cannot compare to all the special events taking place at a large congress.

1-day event

1. Availability of chats, Q&A, and polls.
2. Active breaks.

conference

1. Various types of special sessions can be created during the live event days.
2. All types of chats and even call functions.
3. A digital briefcase to collect materials, handouts, and resources shared by supporters and presenters.
4. Social media wall integration can be added, and more.



society branding

If it was an in-person meeting?

You would do a minimum branding for a single-day event taking place in one hall, compared to a conference branding, requiring a full marketing plan and activities before, during, and after the event.

1. A custom landing page can be created, however, during the sessions the branding will be minimal, depending on the platform.

1-day event

conference

1. Design a complete marketing plan similar to that of an in-person event.
2. Brand your conference platform, including a meeting lobby design with a welcome video.

long-term value

If it was an in-person meeting?

While a recording crew will be needed at an in-person conference, at virtual events content capturing is easy to implement no matter the event size.

1. Sessions can be easily recorded and uploaded on the organisation's website for future use.

1-day event

conference

1. The whole event experience can remain open for late registrations up to a few months.
2. Once the given period has passed, the content can be utilised in the association's e-Library.



limitless access

If it was an in-person meeting?

Travelling and proximity are often deciding factors for attendees of in-person events. However, virtual ones break these barriers easily and open new opportunities for post-event monetisation.

1. It is harder to re-sell one-day event content.
2. One business model suggests having exclusive access for free to the event, without the option for on-demand viewing after the meeting is over.
3. Or create the option to view the event live, with on-demand access at a minimal price.

1-day event

conference

1. Post-event access to the full experience remains viable for months after the event.
2. After this second open period, all content can be broken down to e-Library modules.





going
the

The best way to make a winning event is by going the extra mile for your participants, no matter if it is live or virtual.

extra
mile

Put yourself in their shoes, especially if you are pivoting to virtual, and avoid these common obstacles to a smooth experience:



Mastering the experience

Choose a user-friendly platform, but also construct the experience - from the program outline, all the way to the speaker slides. Attention to detail has to be even greater than for in-person events.

Infusing energy

Your moderators and speakers set the tone of the meeting, so spend the time to prepare them to deliver impactful and engaging sessions.

Smoothing technical issues

Instruct your delegates, sponsors, and speakers how to use the platform with short and easy to follow videos. This will ensure they feel confident with the technology, reporting fewer issues. For live events always test in advance and have an IT team available to resolve any problems.





wrapping up

Designing a virtual event strategy is not that different from an in-person meeting, yet presents its own challenges.

Start with the event goals and objectives, which will guide you through the right format to deliver the event. Often times, each factor that will determine your in-person event plays a similar role when it comes to an online experience too. Work with your stakeholders, follow the guidance of a professional conference organiser, and then going the extra mile will be simple. This is the way to build the foundations of a stand-out virtual event.

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EMPOWERING KNOWLEDGE

Experience advanced virtual education
and networking. Anytime. Anywhere.

We offer the full solution and service as
well as the technology.



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