GUIDELINE ON HOW TO ORGANIZE

VIRTUAL AND HYBRID EVENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Many industry leaders, whether from the business or the public sector, base their work on events and the interaction those events provide, thus creating added value to the success of organizations worldwide. As technology is rapidly developing, companies' communication plans are inevitably incorporating strategic virtual events in their organizations' goals and objectives. Events represent a key element in companies' communication and business strategies for many reasons: they enable easier access to new clients and contacts; create direct connections with the stakeholders; boost interaction; generate audience, create an experience and contribute to brand development and promotion.

In the pre-pandemic world, no one could have imagined that physical events could be substituted by virtual events to such a great extent, nor that virtual events could provide a worthy experience and positive impact among the public. But, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations understood that they have to grasp the challenge and adapt to the new reality in order to "protect" their companies/ organizations. This new reality meant cancelling events, but for the vast majority of organizations it only meant that there is an urgent need for digital transformation.

After two years of living in the new "COVID-19 reality", it can be concluded that all types of events can be conducted virtually. We witness different types of virtual and hybrid events being successfully realized.

The main advantage of virtual events is that they are less time and budget-consuming than physical events, since they require no travel, accommodation, catering, nor space rent costs. Virtual events allow convening of diverse and larger audience since participants from all over the world are able to join from the convenience of their own location (including home).

The fact that quite some time has passed since the COVID-19 outbreak has raised the expectations and event organizers are now presumed to be even more skilled at meeting the needs of the well-educated clients in virtual events. However, organizing successful virtual and hybrid events still remains one of the most significant and challenging parts in today's business landscape. It is on us to transform our organizations in accordance with the needs of the digital society and capitalize on it.

This guideline offers practical tools and useful tips and tricks which will serve organizations to organize and conduct virtual and hybrid events in an effective, efficient and successful manner.

I.

BASICS FOR GOING VIRTUAL

1.1
ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS FOR GOING VIRTUAL

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been an increase in the number of virtual meetings which has introduced the need for organizational readiness for going virtual.

There has been a gradual development in the virtual event organization, ranging from small, everyday virtual meetings to huge conferences organized completely virtually. The key factor is creating an event that will meet each participant's expectations.

The first steps to be undertaken are the implementation of internal virtual events and practices within the company/organization. Each company/organization has a different palette of stakeholders, therefore there should be an individual selection of a concept, platform and organization for the particular event.

After defining what fits the audience best, the next step is to check the organizational readiness of the company's team. This would help organizers answer a very important question – whether the internal team is fully equipped and competent to handle the virtual event or whether there is a need to hire an external company to handle it.

> Practice your virtual event organization skills through organizing small, internal meetings, trainings, and events, before organizing an external event for your company/organization.
>
> Define all stakeholders that are a part of the organization of your virtual event and prepare every stakeholder accordingly (asses the team abilities, train them if needed. If hiring an external company – brief them on your audience expectations.)

No matter the type and size of the event it is of utmost importance to define the event's goals and objectives, to adapt the event and its content to the audience's needs and expectations, and finally to define the ideal participant experience. The target audience and their experience should be a top priority in the strategy of the event organizers and the guiding objective during the process.

> Prior to organizing a virtual event, make sure you take into consideration the following steps:
>
> ‣ Set a clear goal for the virtual event.
>
> ‣ Identify the participants' needs and expectations.
>
> ‣ Define the type of experience that you will provide for your audience (e.g. an interactive conference, a training with the focus on the trainer and less interaction etc.) and choose a platform accordingly.

1.2
TAILORING THE EVENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NEEDS OF THE TARGET AUDIENCE

The productive way of delivering virtual events requires high levels of interaction, adaptation to the specific audience, and finding an appropriate channel to convey the message.

In addition to defining of the event goal, it is priority to properly identify the participants' needs. For this purpose, it is necessary to maintain constant communication with the target audience or to establish one, especially if the audience for a particular event is new. The organizer maintains the communication by delivering information about the event to the existing audience (e.g. newsletters, PR statements, social media communication), all according to their preferences. When it comes to a new target audience, the organizer must discover the needs of the potential participants, in order to address them appropriately. An efficient approach is to conduct a needs assessment – when it is a more tailor-made event for a smaller group; or to introduce a detailed registration form in addition to collecting valuable information from social media analytics when dealing with a broader target group.

> " You need to maintain constant and close communication with your event audience, which plays a crucial role in achieving proper audience needs' assessment, aligning/updating the event goal and content to fit the needs and attract the particular target audience.

The participants that are a part of virtual events are usually at different, dispersed locations meaning that while organizing a virtual event, the organization team must focus on the event structure in order to provide full attention and engagement throughout the whole event. It also requires special tailoring of the event time frame – a maximum duration of 3 hours. Shorter durations guarantee a more active audience engagement and usually ensure higher productivity. It is also advised to incorporate regular breaks in longer-lasting events and even introduce energizers to invigorate the audience.

> " You need to train the participants about the platform that is used for the event prior to the event. Every event should be as impactful as possible and create positive change for the participants.

1.3
TECHNOLOGY AS AN IMPORTANT PART OF VIRTUAL EVENTS EXPERIENCE

Since technology is of great importance in enabling better operational efficiency of virtual events it requires an appropriate amount of attention. The core of both virtual and hybrid events lies in technology – each event requires at least one device (desktop computer, laptop, tablet etc.) per user/participant, and a few of them for the organizational team. This indicates that when organizing a virtual or hybrid event of any kind the first checkbox on our checklist should be "Providing suitable technology". The suitable technology as a term may vary according to the different types of event – the virtual ones require a device and stable internet connection for login to a platform, while the hybrid events require in addition video, audio and streaming equipment (cameras, microphones, audio/video mixers etc.).

The use of appropriate technology contributes to:

- Increased level of personalization of the overall experience for the event's participants;

- Significantly improved quality of the event (e.g. using two cameras instead of one, when hosting a hybrid event);

- Simplified payment process and

- Raised productivity and ROI (Return of Investment).

" It is an imperative to choose adequate technology that will bring higher efficiency in the overall realization of virtual events.

Organizations/companies that use proper technology are reporting higher ROI and greater efficiency in organizing events, they are saving up time and reducing the use of resources.

2.
TYPES OF EVENTS

"Events are a way for organizations/companies to get easier access to new clients, consumers, members, or contacts, build upon their network, and elevate their own brand. They provide direct access to all stakeholders of the organization/company, strengthening their mutual interaction, generating focus on "the public" towards a previously defined purpose, and representing an experience as a whole.

With the latest technology developments, virtual events can offer nearly the same benefits as physical events, from content delivery to participants' engagement and networking.

2.1
PHYSICAL EVENTS

Events that are known as "normal" and common are ones that are organized with physical attendance or better known as physical events. They are defined as events that are organized in a particular space where all stakeholders who are invited are physically present, including host organizations, speakers, and technical and logistical support.

There is no other medium that expresses the nuances of communication better than physical events since the body language is best translated in person and the human factor contributes to the relationship-building experience. Many people attend events not just for the content, but for the opportunity to meet and interact with other attendees (and speakers) with similar interests.

The main disadvantages of physical events are:

- Physical events are costly in time, resources and money;

- Attendance is unpredictable and there are risks out of an event manager's control (e.g., weather, transportation means, world events);

- Data from a physical event is limited or costly to acquire;

- Attendees want event content (i.e., handouts and slide presentations), but distribution is challenging and costly;

- Measuring the success of a physical event is hard to standardize, making accurate ROI estimations difficult;

- In-person conferences, trade shows and field events are all dependent on market conditions.

2.2
VIRTUAL EVENTS

Picture 01: Virtual event

Source: https://revival-retroevents,com/ocean-histiry.opdf

Virtual events aren not a new concept, but when the global pandemic struck, organizations found themselves having to switch from physical events to virtual ones. At the beginning of 2020, virtual events were the only safe choice for the event organizers and marketing professionals to continue their working activities.

They were forced to adapt quickly and the adjustment was challenging.

As months passed virtual events became the norm. Even when physical events are an option, virtual events will remain a part of an organization's marketing mix. After all, there are numerous benefits to hosting virtual events.

Virtual events offer a broad spectrum of activities: webinars, meetings, trainings, workshops, presentations, conferences, fairs and many more types of events.

Since virtual events became very popular, platforms for organization of virtual events developed to the extent that they can now fully and seamlessly replace physical events. Virtual events simplify the process of organizing because an event platform for organizing a virtual event can provide the organizers of the event, the speakers, the participants and all others to be interactively communicating at all times in a virtual setting.

Virtual events are held for the same reasons as for physical events — for example, to promote and deliver the organization/company's message, to increase sales and revenue, for training purposes, or to build loyalty and value. That doesn't mean all virtual events are identical, however.

Different types of virtual events offer different levels of interaction with their respective participants. In that sense, webinars are qualified as a more passive type of event. In contrast, other types of events that last longer offer different opportunities for

interaction – between participants, between the participants and the speakers, and between the speakers themselves.

There are several main advantages of virtual events:

- Getting the event to reach a wider audience;
- Increasing the visibility of the brand;
- Enabling unlimited access to participants to the content of the event;
- Enabling digital 1 on 1 interaction;
- Decreasing the expenses for the event.

Two main types of virtual events that have unique and important roles in the integrated marketing plan of the organizations are Webinars and Virtual Conferences.

2.2.1 WEBINARS

These events are one-time, short-lived, or packaged as part of a series and they typically last between 60 and 90 minutes. They rely on video conferencing tools that allow Q&A, chat, direct participation, ability to present live or a pre-recorded video, and usually, an option to access the webinar recording on-demand after it ends.

Webinars are one of the most "attractive" options for organizing virtual events, and they differ from the rest types of virtual events in a couple of ways. Webinars are a type of event that refer to one topic and the participants attend only one session. Similar types of virtual events that focus exclusively on one topic and represent a one-time event are meetings, trainings/workshops, conferences or fairs that were usually organized with physical attendance.

Organizers can choose to charge for a webinar if the content is considered high-value (such as training) or offer it for free if it's a thought leadership or brand introduction presentation. Webinars have always been held virtually, so the concept is well-known and widely utilized.

2.2.2 VIRTUAL CONFERENCES

These are more complex virtual events and have usually multi-day, longer agendas that can include keynotes, breakout sessions, exhibitors, sponsors, and more. Virtual conferences have multiple sessions and can utilize community engagement tools to get attendees involved and interacting with each other. Virtual conferences are usually live streamed and allow attendees to interact and engage with presenters and other attendees in real-time.

" Running a fully virtual conference, training or trade show means taking a creative approach to how you run a physical event. The following steps need to be considered:

▸ Organize sponsors and partners and decide how to split up the different targets during a virtual conference.

▸ Consider how to break up your event's content into separate experiences. Separate content hubs, targeted landing pages can also connect audiences with topics and tracks by industry, position or interest.

▸ Plan ahead and use simulative features as often as you can. Have your speakers/presenters record their presentations in advance, before the event actually runs. Having addresses of the speakers recorded in advance, can help in promotional purposes and can serve as plan B if last-minute cancellations or other unpredictable issues arise.

▸ To add another layer of engagement for the virtual audiences, gamify events and presentations by offering contests and rewards for attending specific presentations. Gamification represents the application of typical elements of game playing to the virtual events in order to increase engagement.

▸ Once your event is over, push it to on-demand. Virtual events are a great way of providing attendees with the opportunity to view every session.

" Creating a great virtual event and experience evolves around aligning a lot of moving elements. Some of the most important steps for publishing successful virtual events are:

▸ Identify the needs of the participants so that the relevant parts of the event experience can be prioritized and the content curated accordingly.

▸ Determine the optimal size of the audience, and with that, the appropriate volume of content in order to achieve the greatest value.

▸ Coordinate with the team of the organization for the target audience Communication with the public, communication within the team and between teams, which will establish mutual cooperation.

▸ Prepare speakers for a successful virtual event by providing recourses, tools, tactics, and the necessary trial time.

▸ Keep the participants interested by setting expectations, setting time for Q&A, promoting 1-on-1 connections between and during sessions, and creating the ability to view the material at any time after the event.

▸ Set value for visitors –by providing content, topic and benefit that they expect or desire (only visitors get the so-called takeaway – free content, discount…)

2.3
HYBRID EVENTS

Hybrid events represent a bridge between a live and virtual event. The goal for hybrid events is to adapt to the participants' desires, including getting closer to the experience of the familiar physical event while being able to generate a larger audience. These types of events manage to transfer the personalized experience, activate and include the audience that watches the event via the internet or online channels.

Various ways of including the audience behind the screen include: asking the online audience questions, creating separate breakout rooms, conversation and networking, as well as allowing access to content (for both virtual and hybrid events). By including all the tools of hybrid events, the organizers of physical events have the opportunity to increase the number of participants very quickly, and efficiently provide a different experience for them.

Hybrid events are in many aspects the best of both worlds. Some of the participants are able to attend face-to-face while others are "brought in virtually", thus adding to the benefit of the overall interaction. Allowing attendees to participate from wherever they are in the world – either in-person or virtual - offers flexibility and convenience, and allows the organizer to expand the impact regardless of geography.

The main advantages of hybrid events are:

- The opportunity to reach a larger number of participants getting them to attend;

- The opportunity for an easier and more efficient recruiting of speakers/trainers, creating content and sessions for the event;

- The opportunity to use the best characteristics of live and fully virtual events;

- Decreased expenses for organization of the event;

- Easier adapting to variable circumstances in the organization and planning;

- Offers potential to be used as a method for cost reduction in case there is no time or if there is a need to decrease travel expenses for the entire pool of attendees.

Picture 02: Hybrid Event

Source: https://www.pcma.org/how-planners-are-customizing-hybrid-events/

Like any event, physical or in-person, planning a successful hybrid event should start by defining what aims it strives to achieve.

2.4
LIVE – HYBRID – VIRTUAL – COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF EVENTS

Factors defining the type of event to be organized:

- **Time** – amount of time at your disposal to organize and prepare the event.

- **Budget** – even though more efficient, physical events are significantly more expensive. Virtual and hybrid events offer approximately 10 times lower costs for organizing.

- **Technology** – bad experience or lack of knowledge can make the organizer think twice about organizing a virtual event. Technology is still perceived as unknown or potentially dangerous.

Visually summed up overview of the specifications of the different types of events, pointing out their strengths and weaknesses:

	Physical events	Virtual Events	Hybrid Events
Most efficient communication and transmitting messages	◼ (tactical)		
Potential for swift resolving of emergencies and reactin to problems		◼ (tactical)	
Reduced expenses		◼ (tactical)	◼ (tactical)
More efficient and amplified collaboration	◼ (tactical)		
Wider audience reach			◼ (tactical)
Flexibility and impact			◼ (tactical)
Conveying complex information	◼ (tactical)		
Decreased travel costs		◼ (tactical)	◼ (tactical)
Impact	◼ (tactical)		
Obtaining sponsorships	◼ (tactical)		◼ (tactical)
Flexibility for participants to join whenever they like		◼ (strategic)	◼ (strategic)
Discussing important, sensitive topics and problems	◼ (strategic)		◼ (strategic)
Self – motivation		◼ (strategic)	◼ (strategic)
Pair/group work	◼ (strategic)		
Networking	◼ (strategic)		◼ (strategic)
Encouraging team work	◼ (strategic)		
Shortage of resources and experience		◼ (strategic)	◼ (strategic)
Possible glimpse and interruptions		◼ (strategic)	
Longer events	◼ (strategic)		
Technical simplicity	◼ (strategic)		
Fast and easy to plan		◼ (strategic)	◼ (strategic)
Easier to attend		◼ (strategic)	◼ (strategic)
Opportunity to re-watch – video recordng		◼ (strategic)	◼ (strategic)

◼ Tactical characteristics
◼ Strategic characteristics

3.
ORGANIZING VIRTUAL EVENTS

Most often, the process of organizing a virtual event lasts 4 to 6 weeks, but there are a few exceptions:

- If the event that is being prepared has been organized before (e.g. a training that is conducted monthly for different groups), only a promotional campaign should be planned and implemented. This could be an appreciable advantage since less time is needed. Most often, it takes 3 weeks to organize a repetitive event.

- If the target audience of the event is people with whom the organizer has already had contact or interaction with (e.g. clients, consumers, members etc.) the time planned for promotional activity can be cut down as well. However, always have in mind that people plan their time at least a week in advance, and they will need time to incorporate the event in their plan.

- If a series of events is planned, the organizer can combine the stages for creating the strategy, design/planning, and promoting the events.

Tips for a rapid realization of a virtual event:

▶ Use a platform and promotional tools that you are familiar with. This helps control the process, and reduces the time from creating the event to its promotion and realization.

▶ Be real about your resources. Focus on the advantages and the channels that will get you the largest audience attendance to the event.

3.1.
DEFINING A STRATEGY FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

Creating a strategy starts with determining the objective. For each event, we need to create a strategy that depends on what we want to achieve, who we want to target, what kind of answers/responses we want to receive from the audience, or what kind of topics we have that are relevant and interesting for the public.

In order to prepare a strategy for organizing a virtual event, you need to answer the following questions:

▶ Why are you organizing this event? – Define the purpose of the event.

▶ Who is it meant for? - Define the target group/audience.

▶ What will be the main topic of the event? – Define the topic.

▶ What will be your budget? – Define costs + ROI

▸ How will the event be delivered? – Define the type of event and the virtual platform.

▸ Do you need to hire technical support for delivery of the event? – Decide if agency/company for event management is needed to be engaged.

▸ Who will be a part of the organization team? – Select members and assign them roles.

Events in recent years, no matter if they are live, virtual or hybrid are defined in one word – experience! Every event represents a different experience for all involved and every experience should be a positive one.

For that reason, the main focus while organizing an event are the people – the experience of the audience and the visitors. In the group of stakeholders of an event, the following stand out: participants/audience, organization team, moderators, speakers, trainers, panelists, sponsors, supporters, media and associates (marketing agencies, designers, technical support).

When launching a virtual event, the organizer must know how to master the virtual experience as a whole. One of the most important prerequisites for a successful event is the participation of the right audience. In identifying and attracting the appropriate audience, the organization/company can use the help of many of its stakeholders i.e. the organizing team, colleagues from other departments of the organization/company and the company's partners. After identifying the target audience, the event needs to be designed and customized holistically based on the audience's needs. And last but not least, it is an imperative to master the technology, so that it can be used in creation of industry-leading events.

3.2.
IDENTIFYING GOALS

Common event goals include:

- Raising brand awareness for products and company;
- Enhancing prospect relations, lead generation, and sales acceleration;
- Improving customer relations, education, and retention;
- Community building;
- Generating revenue from ticket sales or sponsorships;

- Reinforcing employee relations, education, and retention;

- Recruiting.

Once the goals of the event are set, it's time to consult other stakeholders—both internal and external. For instance, the organization's leadership, the sales team, and event partners may all give input on targeting a specific audience. Likewise, these different stakeholders can be valuable in helping drive registrations from that audience.

3.3.
IDENTIFYING ATTENDEES' NEEDS/ EXPECTATIONS

Designing the perfect virtual experience starts with the attendees. Event organizers and event leaders understand the synergy and unique opportunities that physical events bring. It's important to understand all the different reasons as to why attendees come to a virtual event.

> To identify the attendees' requirements and needs, you may find it helpful to have answers to the following questions:
>
> ▶ What are my attendees' expectations?
>
> ▶ What discussion formats are the most engaging for my audience?
>
> ▶ When repurposing event content, what formats are most valuable to attendees [what kind of content can be delivered via a certain type of virtual event (training, conference, meeting)]?
>
> ▶ How can this event make my attendees successful?

One of the most straightforward ways to get answers to these questions is to ask previous participants (gather feedback via evaluation/feedback forms) or use existing information on the preferences of attendees pulled from previous events or data available from other organizational sources.

3.4
PLANNING THE VIRTUAL EVENT

At the beginning of planning for the event we need to start with effectuation of the previously defined strategy. Now, the event already has a different, tactile form. A well planned virtual event means increased probability for success and decreases the risk of failure of the event.

Similar to planning the physical events, when planning a virtual event, one must pay attention and separately implement the following steps:

- Determine the date and time of the event;
- Choose the virtual event platform;
- Define the target group and ways of recruiting;
- Select the organizing team;
- Select and recruit speakers/trainers/moderators/panelists;
- Plan the promotional activities for the event;
- Define the budget for the event

There is one factor that is crucial to success in the event industry, and that is experience. However, the lack of years of experience can be made up for by setting clear goals and priorities, use of user manuals and checklists when it comes to organizing virtual events.
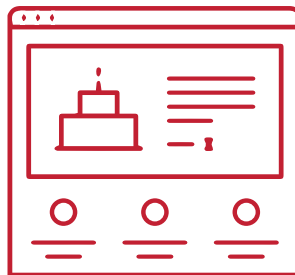
Tips about the factors for success that need to be considered:

PERSONALIZATION OF EXPERIENCE

One of the advantages of virtual events is the absence of a large number of restrictions present at events organized for physical presence. This opens up the possibility to work with an audience of any size, according to the needs and preferences of the organizer. However, with the ability of organizing a particularly large audience also follows the responsibility to provide an experience that meets the needs of individual participants. This means that the personalization of the event for each participant is a key element in the strategy for organizing events, a clear priority. Attracting the desired audience depends on the experience specific to that group.

CUSTOMIZING ACCESS AND VIEWING

The experience of the participants starts long before the event. Adapting promotional messages to the industry and the nature of the target contacts is the first step towards personalization. The same goes for post-event communications, as it's crucial that they are tailored to the participants' experiences. If a participant has registered for the event for a specific reason, left a message or feedback, or is open to a follow-up discussion, it is a good idea for the organizer to mention this in the follow-up communication.

DEFINING COMPLEXITY

Depending on the needs of the organizer, it is necessary to determine the structure of the event. If the topic is more specific, it is better to create a single agenda tailored to a specific industry, position or issue. For more extensive and larger events, it is advisable to have a multi-directional agenda, where participants have the opportunity to be a part of one or more different modules.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Separate rooms (virtual meetings) and workshops allow participants to better absorb material from a single session, while socializing with colleagues in a smaller circle. The experience of physical events can be captured by creating these separate meetings, where smaller groups (separated by a large joint group) can communicate via video conferencing, messaging, and various virtual communication tools.

COLLABORATION

Co-promoting an event is a very powerful way to increase attendance at a virtual event. The more the organizer can permeate a new audience, the more likely they are to entice a larger number of newly registered participants. Therefore, sponsorship, partnership and cooperation with other organizations or companies are beneficial for creating a successful virtual event.

3.4.1 DEFINING THE TARGET GROUP AND WAYS OF RECRUITING

When setting the goals for the recruitment of participants and sending invitations for an event, one must carefully consider the next few factors that correlate with the rates of RSVPs (Répondez S'il Vous Plait), as well as the number of registered participants that will actually attend. We should ask ourselves the following questions:

- Will an existing database of contacts be used or will the organizational team appoint a sum of the budget and buy a database of contacts especially for the event?

- The content of the database, i.e. how resourceful the database is?

- How to name the event in order to attract audience including the attractive visual identity of the event?

- How to create an invitation according to all regulations for it to be resistant to all spam filters?

- Is the image, the brand and all quests of the event attractive (speakers, panellists, moderators)?

- How quickly is the invitation delivered?

In general, the response rate of the invitation by contacts/potential participants who already know your organization/company is higher than that of the contacts you reach out to for the first time. Possibilities for purchase or temporary lease of a database exist as an option, but evidence shows it does not guarantee reliable responsiveness.

There are some common assumptions about response rates, enrollment rates, attendance rates and lead ratios that one should consider when deciding how many invitations to send to reach a certain audience size goal. Response rate, also known as completion rate or return rate, is the number of people who answered to the invitation divided by the number of people invited. It is usually expressed in the form of a percentage and usually has a 3 to 1 ratio (for every 3 persons invited, 1 would participate). In some circumstances this percentage can be lower or higher depending on the type of event.

> " In the process of sending the invitations, it is important to define option that relates to post-event activities. Almost all platforms offer the option of sending an email after the event. It is an important element in defining the event.
>
> ▶ Scheduling an automatic email containing the necessary information (Thanks for participating/Expressing regret that someone did not attend.);
>
> ▶ Scheduling a sales campaign, meetings with a salesperson;
>
> ▶ Sending links, presentations in advance;
>
> ▶ Scheduling a follow-up meeting one week after the event.

The response rate will vary depending on a variety of factors such as:

- Richness of purchased or owned e-mail list;

- Use of unsolicited lists versus known leads;

- Resonance of the event title and description to target audience;

- Quality of the invitation copy;

- Ability of invitation to get past spam filters;

- Appeal of the brand and the guest speakers;

- Amount of advance notice provided for the invitees;

- Time and day of the week the event is scheduled for;

- Ease of filling out the enrollment form.

In general, there is a better response rate from lists of people who already know the organization compared to "cold" lists that are bought or rented from 3rd parties. Usually, the lists are rented by 3rd parties for the purpose of reaching a greater audience and subsequently attracting more participants. However, it has been noticed that even though the numbers seem bigger, at the end, the registration to participation ratio shows that not all of the people that register actually participate in the events.

3.4.2 SELECTING DATE AND TIME FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

In the process of choosing the date for an event there are several important factors. The first and most important one is to avoid major holidays, and the days immediately preceding/following them. Mondays and Fridays average lower attendance than Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Avoid times when the target audience is generally

unavailable (e.g., end of month for Finance, August for education professionals, etc.). Events held in the last two weeks of the quarter typically receive less sales support, because their focus at this period is usually on closing business rather than prospecting. Events held early in the quarter have a better chance to raise sales in that quarter.

> **While defining the date of the virtual event, you must think about the schedules and the lifestyle of your target group as well as the specific cultural context.**

3.4.3 SELECTING THE BEST VIRTUAL CHANNEL/PLATFORM

While organizing a virtual or hybrid event it is crucial to define the type of the event - a webinar, training, conference, fair, etc.

Depending on the goals and strategy, the next decision that needs to be taken is choosing whether the event will be fully virtual or if a hybrid is a better solution.

If you go with a hybrid event, the choice for a physical location must be done very carefully, taking into consideration all conditions of the premises so that the streaming of the event can take place without any interruption. This means that you would need spacious premises with good lighting, sound system, audio and video equipment for streaming the event. Additionally, it's of high importance to have immediate access to technical support that will be in charge of equipment management, unless the organizing team doesn't already have a member of the team who will be in charge of this.

> **The choice of the platform should depend on the goals of the event, its attendees, and its budget.**

3.4.4 SELECTION OF THE ORGANIZING TEAM

For a successfully completed task, it is necessary to establish internal communication and define the roles of the staff involved in the organization of the virtual event. In addition to individual interaction, this includes defining the functions and the interaction of specific teams: event coordinators, marketing, sales, technology staff, etc. As with physical events, cooperation and collaboration among the different teams will define the success rate of the virtual event.

3.4.5 SELECTION, RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF SPEAKERS

A large part of what attracts participants to a specific event are the speakers. Even before the actual event, the interest in the speaker or what the speaker would talk about is highly anticipated and could be a decisive factor as to whether people would choose to attend the event. However, the rules of creating a virtual event are a bit different than the ones when you organize a physical event. We need to take into consideration the following influencing factors:

- A good introduction at the beginning of the event is necessary in order to engage the participants. Personal stories, quotes, current statistics and similar analysis related to the topic of the event are a great way to start;

- The authenticity and making a personal connection with the audience always has a positive impact on their opinion of the event. The need for personalization of the event can also be achieved through the speaker;

- For virtual events, the conversational tone is more acceptable and recommended since the computer screen interferes with a lot of the non-verbal communication, as it also does with the attention of many viewers;

- At the end of the event it is recommended to have a call to action in order to involve the audience. This additionally contributes to a positive experience of the event;

- Breaks during the speech are desirable with the purpose of holding the attention of the participants.

Due to the virtual environment, the conciseness and focus of the topic are crucial in the content of a virtual event. Practice of presentation speech makes it perfect.

3.4.6 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The organizer should always identify who will address the attendees at the beginning, and thereupon prepare key instructions:

- Giving specific and detailed technical instructions on how the event speakers will access the platform, as well as which tools will be used;

- Providing tips for virtual presentation and support tools (along with detailed instructions on how to use them);

- Discussion on the topics of the sessions, duration, scenario and presentation plan;

- Set a time for the speaker to enter the event and allow for a warm-up time;

- Appointing a person to introduce the speaker and/or serve as a moderator;
- Organize training for the moderators and the speakers.

3.4.7 CHOOSING AND PREPARATION OF THE SPEAKERS

After choosing the target group and determining the topic of the event (as well as the other creative elements), the next step is to choose the appropriate speakers, panelists and guests. Usually, the speakers are chosen based on expertise and ranks in a certain industry or a profession appropriate for the chosen topic. If there is no specific person in mind, it is advisable for the organizer to look at leaders, experts, or sponsors in the appropriate field.

> The speaker of the virtual event is the key to the success of the event. They have to be interesting for the public and prepared to create relations with the participants. The speaker can help promote the event and invite their own network of contacts to participate in it.

After determining the speakers, for the sake of realizing a successful event, it is of key importance for the organizational team to prepare the speaker. Whether the virtual event will be successful or not, to a great extent depends on the preparation of the speaker by the organizer.

> Technical tips for the speakers:
>
> ▸ Testing the internet connection, scheduling a test session before the event;
>
> ▸ Setting up the laptop or the camera on an eye level or a bit higher;
>
> ▸ Checking all devices (especially the microphone) and the appropriate way to use it;
>
> ▸ Having a good internet connection, as well as connecting all devices to said internet connection;
>
> ▸ Setting up appropriate lightning;
>
> ▸ Natural lightning: placement of the person across from a window (there cannot be light behind them) if the lightning from the sun is to bright, it is suggested to partially cover the window;
>
> ▸ Artificial light: placing a softer, diffused lamp at a 45 ° angle in front of the speaker eliminates almost all shadows from the face, giving an optimal look. It is also recommended that the speaker turns their back on a bright background without glare. If they do not have a lamp, they

> should be repositioned to the strongest light source (while trying to be well lit);

▸ Scheduling a test session before the event, where there's a chance to test the function of the devices and the presentation;

▸ Practicing the speeches;

▸ Detecting whether there is a need to change some topics and questions;

▸ Practicing the rhythm and the pace of the speech;

▸ Defining the timetable to avoid shortening of the provided program.

DOs	DON'Ts
• Eliminate distractions • Dress the part • Use solid neutral colors • Choose a good microphone • Speak clearly • Practice • Smile and have fun!	• Present with the light behind you • Leave your audio notifications on • Wear noisy jewelry • Forget to engage your audience • Speak too long • Speak too fast

3.4.8 PLANNING THE PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

### Defining the event headline

Topic of the event needs to originate from its goals and objectives, as well as from the needs of the audience.

Thus it will be beneficial to define an excellent, appealing headline.

Designing and sending invitations

While organizing a virtual event, the invitation for said event is integrated into the platform that will be used for the event. It is very important to take into consideration the number of invited people.

It is necessary to design an invitation that will keep the attention of the invitees, and it must contain information about the time of the event and its speakers. Most often, it is sent via email or placed on other online channels – banners, social media posts, but also through channels that enable automation of the experience.
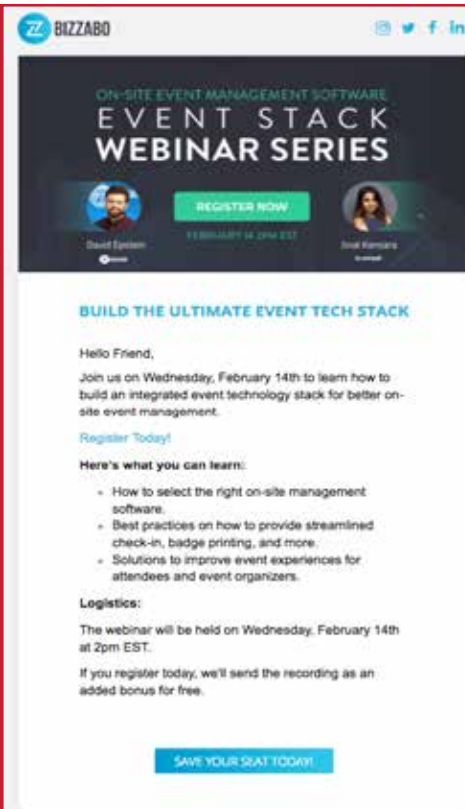
Picture 03: Example of an invitation.

Source: https://www.bizzabo.com/blog/event-invitation-email-examples

Sending invitations – Necessity to comply with data protection regulative

While organizing virtual events it is necessary to follow certain rules that are defined by law, and without which one should not even consider advertising an event. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is implemented with every organization of an event by using platforms for event organization, mobile applications and platforms for B2B meetings. The duty for implementing GDPR stems from the inevitable processing of personal information of the participants at the event, and it includes: Name and Surname, E-mail Address, location, IP address, etc.

Most often, while sending the invitation, databases are being used without the complete permission of the owner. Also, virtual events are being recorded, so if the organizer plans any kind of sharing of the recording, they must not share it without the consent of the speakers as well as the participants (if they appear in the recording).

It is needed to define concise, clear, transparent and easily accessible information:

- Which personal information will be collected from the participants? Will the personal information be used for a different goal?

- What are the rights of the participants connected with the protection of their privacy?

- How long will the organizer keep the personal information of the participants?

This information can be written in a form of a short Policy of privacy which will be made accessible to the participants before the event.

" 5 key principles for data protection:
  ‣ Lawfulness, fairness, transparency;
  ‣ Purpose limitation;
  ‣ Data minimization;
  ‣ Accuracy;
  ‣ Integrity and confidentiality;
  ‣ Accountability.

Preparing presentations and other materials

The materials that will be shared with the audience need to be defined prior to the event and shared with the audience.

Since virtual environment is less interactive, speakers should provide materials that will elevate interaction levels. If it is about a virtual training it is necessary for the materials (scripts, presentations and other necessary documentation about the training) to be prepared and sent to the participants of the event prior to the event. If it is about a webinar, conference or other type of a virtual event, where it is necessary for the materials to be sent after the event (as a follow up), the materials need to be concise, unified, and appropriately distributed to all participants. It is necessary to determine if and what content will be shared with the participants, and who will be responsible for preparing the materials.

" Tips for Making Effective PowerPoint Presentations:
  ‣ Simplify and limit the number of words on each screen. Use key phrases and include only essential information;
  ‣ Limit punctuation and avoid putting words in all-capital letters. Empty space on the slide will enhance readability;
  ‣ Use contrasting colors for text and background. Light text on a dark background is best. Patterned backgrounds can reduce readability;
  ‣ Avoid the use of flashy transitions such as text fly-ins. These features may seem impressive at first but are distracting and get old quickly;

▸ Overuse of special effects such as animation and sounds may make your presentation "cutesy" and could negatively affect your credibility;

▸ Use good-quality images that reinforce and complement your message. Ensure that your image maintains its resolution when projected on a larger screen;

▸ If you use builds (lines of text appearing each time you click the mouse), have content appear on the screen in a consistent, simple manner; from the top or the left is best. Use the feature only when necessary to make your point, because builds can slow down your presentation;

▸ Limit the number of slides. Presenters who constantly "flip" to the next slide are likely to lose their audience. A good rule of thumb is one slide per minute;

▸ Learn to navigate your presentation in a nonlinear fashion. PowerPoint allows the presenter to jump ahead or back without having to page through all the interim slides;

▸ Know how to and practice moving forward and backwards within your presentation. Audiences often ask to see a previous screen again;

▸ If possible, view your slides on the screen you'll be using for your presentation. Make sure the slides are readable. Text and graphic images should be large enough to read but not so large as to appear "loud";

▸ Practice with someone who has never seen your presentation. Ask them for honest feedback about colors, content and any effects or graphic images you've included;

▸ Do not read from your slides. The content of your slides is for the audience, not for the presenter.

Planning and organizing interactive tools (polls, surveys, question-naires)

If the event calls for a direct answer from its participants, it's importantto predict and define the survey/questioner and the way it will be distributed. SurveyMonkey, Google Forms, Mentimeter, can be used as various options, and the link that leads to the survey always needs to be shared with the participants during the event.

" If you decide to create a survey during the event, you need to define which platform you'll use beforehand. The option "Polls" enables direct communication with the participants which creates a unique personal experience for the participants.

Promotional Campaign

When it comes to virtual events it is logical to execute the whole campaign online – meaning that all of the promotional activities should be conducted via social and online media.

It is best to start the promotional campaign 3-4 weeks prior to the event, intensifying communication in the last 7 days before the start of the event.

Bearing in mind the current situation, even though the promotional opportunities look reduced, the digital communication channels are the exact place where the attention of the audience is focused. Starting from the company's website, media announcements, direct marketing, personalized invitations, promo-interviews and the assortment of social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube etc.).

At the end, as the event date comes closer, it is important to implement event reminders. There are multiple ways to remind the participants of the event, but experience shows that the most effective way to do it is via e-mail or phone.

Statistically, reminders are proven to be one of the most efficient marketing tools as they significantly increase participants' login rate compared to other tools. People are dealing with hectic schedules and often unintentionally miss some information, so it is always useful to remind your target audience that the event is starting in an hour.

> **Tips for preparation and delivery of the promotional campaign:**
> ▸ Promotion usually begins 3-4 weeks prior to the event (best practice is to narrow it 7-1 days before the event);
> ▸ Combination of e-mail, home-page placements, web ads, banner ads, newsletters, direct mail, Sales invitations, PR, ad-tie-ins, and viral marketing should be used to promote the event;
> ▸ Specify lead-source tracking ID's to measure which sources are most effective and efficient;
> ▸ Execute the campaign and drive enrollment traffic;
> ▸ Reminders should be sent (1 week and 1 hour in advance) to the registered participants;
> ▸ Optional: Call the registered participants the day before the event to orally remind them.

The promotional activities for a virtual event depend on the type of event and its targeted audience. If it is an internal event and all participants are known to the organization, there's no need for advertisement. One email containing the invitation with the link from the chosen platform is enough.

If the event refers to a wider audience, it is necessary to define and design an appropriate promotional campaign.

> Tips for event promotion:
> ▸ Whenever possible, make sure that the event is a part of the marketing message in the process of preparing for the event;
> ▸ Add an active link to the home page of the web site that brings the viewer directly to the descriptive/enrollment page;
> ▸ Reminders for registrants are an important part of delivering the largest audience to the virtual events possible. Statistically, reminders e-mailed 24 hours and 1 hour in advance of the event seem to have the greatest benefit;
> ▸ If the organizer is short on time or has insufficient knowledge and skills, outsourcing is always a good option.

3.4.9 DEFINING THE BUDGET FOR THE EVENT

Although the costs for organizing virtual events are lower, it is important for the budget to be planned in accordance with the separate costs depending on the aspects listed below: check if participants know the spoken language of the event and whether interpretation is needed;

- Determine the number of participants, and buy/ purchase additional updates or technology options that some platforms offer, if needed;
- determine the cost for additional equipment in case of hybrid events;
- Estimate the cost for the speakers;
- Determine the cost for the organizational team;
- Define whether it is possible to secure funds from the registration fee, as well as from sponsorships;
- Estimate the cost for the promotion of the event.
- Foresee any additional expenses for the event.

3.5
ACTIVITIES DURING THE VIRTUAL EVENT

Right before the start of the event it is important to check-up on the technical features and go through the event strategy and the action plan along with the organizational team. Important during-event activities are:

- Checking on the event details;

- Opening the virtual event earlier (30 minutes) before the scheduled start, in order to facilitate the registration process;

- Adding a waiting room so participants will not enter the event before time, and organizers would have time to prepare and do last adjustments

- Starting the event recording and keeping it going until the event ends;

- Controlling and overcoming any problems that may arise from last-minute changes, and preventing panic and confusion;

- Having the survey questions ready in order to smoothly implement them during the event;

- Active use of tools that promote and support participants' engagement;

- Enabling participants to ask questions live or after the event for the purpose of keeping the post-event connection live and active;

- Saving the survey results for gathering valuable statistics;

- Informing participants that the event will be recorded;

- Pre-creating the working groups (Rooms);

- Managing chats and Q&As.

Creating participants' experience

Getting ready to meet all the participants' needs and expectations before the event increases the probability of active participation and greater engagement. Some of the best practices for increasing participants' engagement during the event and providing quality event experience are:

- Making the event time-appropriate (preferably shorter). Even though when it comes to in-house or multi-day events the longer duration is an upside, virtual and hybrid events are more effective when organized in shorter formats. The participants' focus is harder to keep when the event is longer;

- Creating a set of "ground rules" - In order to achieve more effective event organization, it is important to set some rules for the participants, speakers, panelists and for the organizational team. Because of the format of the (virtual) events, you need to organize audience participation in the discussions. Otherwise it will potentially cause technical issues (lost/poor Internet connection, bad background, microphone or camera not working properly, etc.);

- Dedicating time for Q&A - This is a great way to get participants' engagement and secure content understanding and apprehension. It also enables a direct connection between the participants and the event speakers;

- Allowing for an on-demand option - It is a good-case practice to record the event/training/conference and provide the video and materials on-demand, so that participants can access it after the end of the event. Moreover, that is the only way to provide the event content and other materials to registered participants that were unable to join;

- Engagement - The so-called "engagement tools" are an imperative during virtual and hybrid events. Their implementation is not limited in any way, i.e. you can use them during the event and relate them to the actual content, or implement them as energizers to boost the participants' energy during breaks.

Engagement during virtual /hybrid event

The concept creation of a virtual/hybrid event includes many creative decisions, mainly focusing on creating content that will actively engage the participants. To be able to inspire the participants to engage and be proactive during the event, the organizers must be familiar with the target audience for the event. Take into consideration the following:

- Point out all of the benefits that participants will get from the event;

- Polling, chat boxes, quizzes, Q&A's, surveys, and note-taking are some of the most common and simple ways to use engagement tools;

- Break up sessions are recommended for attendees to have a chance at networking and group work, to take a poll, ask questions or complete an exercise;

- When using presentation slides, to increase the engagement levels it is recommended to use one of the interactive presentation tools, that provide instant feedback such as Mentimeter, Slido etc.;

- Introducing multimedia with relevant content can also raise proactivity;

- Limiting event sequences to shorter time-frames automatically increases levels of engagement, since it increases the participants' focus and productivity. It also enables optimal content distribution and delivery. Introducing points

and awards to appreciate participants' interaction throughout the event can increase their motivation to take part;

- Alertness checks also measure continued engagement. Attendees have a few seconds to click and show they're participating. Set a few attention checkers to occur at different intervals throughout the session;

- Another way to increase the engagement for the current, and future events is acknowledging and uncovering the most engaged participants, and making them brand ambassadors.

"

Tips for increasing the participants' engagement:

▸ The most efficient event length is 45min to an hour, without any breaks. If the event is shorter, participants feel like they didn't get the best value for money. And if it is longer they may leave the event earlier.

▸ Always make sure to plan 5-10 minutes for a Q&A session to increase the event quality experience.

▸ Use different "call-to-action" methods: discounts for the most proactive participant, opportunity for a one-on-one meeting with the speaker, etc.

3.6
ACTIVITIES FOLLOWING THE VIRTUAL EVENT

One of the best ways to maximize event effectiveness and ROI is to proactively plan and execute a post-event follow-up plan. This part of the strategy should be planned in advance, for quick implementation, while the content of the event is still fresh in the memory of the participants. Typical follow-up activities include:

- Sending "thank you for participation" email, or "regretting not being able to join" email, to those who registered but did not attend;

- Add some value-added resources;

- Transcript of the Q&A session;

- A link that leads to the recording of the event for those who would like to (re)watch the event;

- Send a satisfaction survey to the participants, and a potential interest for individual collaboration;

- Personalized communication to individuals and/or groups, with follow-up question based on their activity level on the event, as well as additional offers (invitation for next event and so on);

- Editing and publication (public or internal) of the recording (a survey can be conducted, with the purpose for all those who watch the recording to be part of a research);

- Promotion of the event, in order to attract interest in future events and build interest for the available review materials;

- Second follow-up email (a week after the event) with an offer or an invitation to the participants which, if necessary, can be used to sell the product or service.

If the event is a great success, there comes an opportunity to repeat it, with some differences introduced, and a different target audience (this time implementing the lessons learned from the mistakes made on the original event).

> **Tips for overcoming the unexpected obstacles:**
>
> When a virtual event does not go according to plan, it is usually due to some unexpected disruption. This interference can be a power loss, damage to a device, or even a participant who is disturbing the program. Although such obstacles are an expected part of any type of event, preparing to deal with them can minimize their occurrence and impact. The solution is to plan a crisis strategy, calm down in case of obstacles, and gracefully deal with the situation at hand. There are several ways to deal with unexpected problems:
>
> ▸ Learning the tools of the platform you are using – One of the major reasons for interference is the lack of knowledge of the platform being used (or digital knowledge in general). Every organizer (or individual implementer) should have a broad knowledge of the platform and all its tools. Proper audio and video checks - lightning, position and microphone;
>
> ▸ Preparing the participants before the event – Sharing advice for the technology that will be used and preparing a user manual or instructions for the participants is an equal important part of organizing the event. One tip that is especially useful for participating in a virtual event is to connect to the Ethernet cable instead of wireless Internet, to avoid connection problems;
>
> ▸ Focus on tools that will actively involve the participants in the event;
>
> ▸ Teaching the tools at the time of the presentation;

▶ If appropriate, the organizers/speakers can teach the participants about certain functionalities of the platform, relevant to the event.

▶ Backup options

▶ In addition to a prevention plan and a quick fix of unexpected problems, a backup option must be established in case the problem cannot be solved. Organizers must have extensive knowledge of this backup option as well.

3.7.
VIRTUAL EVENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHECK LIST

PRE-EVENT ACTIVITIES CHECK LIST

Create Event Brief

- Event name (define an attractive and appealing headline)
- Event date (according to the target audience)
- Event length (efficient, focused)
- Event Format (webinar/conference…)
- Event Description (make summary)
- Outline Event Goals &KPI's/Metrics (what do you want to achieve)
- Outline Target Audience (according to the goals)
- Check for competitor events (don't overlap)
- Reach out to sponsors and partners if needed

Choose a platform - Event Hosting

- Choose a Virtual Event Platform
- Choose a Streaming Provider (if needed)
- Determine additional technology providers (networking tools, etc.)
- Build Event Website or publish the event on your current web page
- Build Event Registration Landing Page
- Identify key information required in the registration process
- Check the privacy policy and regulations
- Open the registration process

Define the organizing team - Roles & Responsibilities

- Clear plan and assigned tasks (responsibilities for each phase and task)
- Appoint a project manager
- Appoint moderator(s)

Event Management

- Define Budget (costs and revenue)

- Create Internal/External Channels

- Create a target audience database

- Send Invitations and Calendar Blocks to database

- Reach out to potential speakers

- Coordinate with the speakers

- Collect speaker assets (logos, biographies, photos, etc.)

- Provide speaker management trainings and tools

- Schedule a date and make a rehearsal

Event Design

- Design Event Logo

- Publish Event info on the website

- Design Event Invitation & confirmation Email Banners

- Define the Agenda

- Create FAQ Page if needed

- Design the streaming banners if needed

- Plan the promotional campaign including social media communication (LinkedIn Banner, Facebook Banner, Instagram Banner, paid ads or other online channels according to the target audience and budget)

Preparing activities for Sponsors & Partners

- Create a list of potential sponsors

- Determine sponsorship opportunities

- Complete sponsorship proposals

- Finalize sponsors (contracts, benefits, opportunities, marketing activities etc.)

- Collect sponsor assets (logos, biographies, headshots, etc.)

Event Promotion

- Build out the promotional campaign (roles and timeline)

- Promote the event on owned, paid and other marketing channels

- Draft event emails (invitation, confirmation, "starting soon" reminder mail)

- Finalize the content of the event email that will be sent to a database

- Send email invitation

- Send a 24-hour email notice

- Send a 1-hour email notice

- Create a Facebook event or a LinkedIn event depending on the target audience

Content

- Draft content for sessions

- Draft copy for keynotes, opening/closing remarks

- Finalize copy for sessions, keynotes, opening/closing remarks

- Design separate slides for each session of the event (if there are more)

- Design virtual production backgrounds and frames

Event Day

- Write the Opening Remarks

- Back up (zoom) links in case of a technology fail

- Staff Schedule in Order: Who is Where and at What time

- Triple Check Virtual Settings/Speaker Information/Business logos/Presentations

- Ensure speakers, moderators and sponsors are ready and able to access the event

- Test event virtual production

During the Event Activities Check list

- Start the recording if needed

- Appoint a person/s who will have the privilege to be a host of the event (accept participants, mute, recording, organizing polls, Q&A, coordination with speakers…)

- Ensure speakers and attendees awareness if sessions are recorded

- Provide information about the interpretation options if offered

- Engage with the participants

- Overcome technical issues (poor internet connection, send backup links if needed…)

POST-EVENT ACTIVITIES CHECK LIST

On-Demand Materials

- Enable On-Demand Event Materials (the event recording, presentations etc.)
- Promote On-Demand Materials via social media or other marketing channels

Thank You's

- Send Thank You Emails to Speakers and Sponsors
- Ensure all sponsors agreements and deliverables are being adhered to

Gather Feedback

- Send Out Post-Event Survey
- Organize Post-Event Debrief meeting
- Create Debrief document to refer back to for the next event
- Collect Testimonials and promote them on Social Media and web

All event organizers who decide to organize a virtual version of their live event must face the challenges that their decision brings, and also rethink the whole process. Technology plays a key role in organizing events in this form. In order to organize and realize a fully virtual event, two criteria must be met in advance, namely:

- Choosing a reliable platform that can meet all the needs of the event
- Having a prepared and experienced technical support team during the event

The strategy and the purpose of the event are the most important when organizing virtual events.

Technology's purpose is to facilitate reaching the desired goals, and its use must always be aligned with the most appropriate format for achieving the wanted results.

" Tips related to criteria that are crucial when choosing a platform:

- ▸ Number of participants at the event (no matter the type of event) 100, 300, 500, 1.000, 3.000, 10.000+;
- ▸ Choosing the host and moderators;
- ▸ Sending invitations and their integration with calendars;
- ▸ Creating rooms (Breakout Rooms) and dividing the participants in said rooms;
- ▸ "Chat" communication, Screen share and sharing electronic documents;
- ▸ Recording of the event;
- ▸ Simultaneous translation and/or recorded transcription.

When choosing a platform, its functionalities should be evaluated, always in the direction of achieving our goals and the budget that is available to us. Some of the platforms are more suitable for webinars and trainings, while others are more flexible and enable the realization of other formats of virtual events. It is best to choose platforms that allow two-way communication. Most of the sessions may be without participant involvement, but some will require the ability to interact with the participants.

Factors that need to be considered while choosing the platform for organizing an event:

- Not all virtual technical solutions (platforms) are the same;
- Always opt for a secure and reliable provider/platform;
- Make sure it is a certified software and that the data (of both the participants and the organizers) is secured;
- Information about the company-provider (size, employees, experience in the field);
- Marketing tools and registration form;
- Interaction tools, implementation and support;
- Payment options within the platform and security specifications;
- Ways of access and technical specifications;
- Price for the platform;
- Live steaming features and tools;
- Networking opportunities, 1:1 communication, etc.;
- Opportunities and tools for active participation from the audience/participants;
- Branding opportunities (for the organizers as well as the sponsors);
- Possibilities for settings/changes.

4.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE BEST PLATFORM

4.1.
MOST USED PLATFORMS FOR EVENT ORGANIZATION AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

With the increasing digitalization, a growing number of platforms for organizing virtual events are appearing. Some of them are known and used globally, while others only regionally or locally, depending on how actively they are marketed and how well they respond to the needs and habits of a particular culture or segment.

- Depending on the type of event, different platforms offer different opportunities. Some of the most exploited platforms are: Zoom
- Cisco WebEx
- GoToMeeting
- MS Teams
- Moodle
- Gather.Town
- Wonder
- SpotMe
- Aventri
- LiveStorm
- Hubilo
- CVENT
- Bizzabo
- ON24

The following table summarizes the features of all platforms discussed below.

	Zoom	Webex	ON24	BIZAABO	MOODLE	WONDER.ME	SPOTME	GATHER.TOWN	KUDO	CVENT	HUBILO	AVENTRI	LIVESTORM
Suitable with Windows	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Suitable with Android	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Suitable with IOS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Web-based	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Open API	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Free trial	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Number of participants	1,000 – 10,000	3,000 – 10,000	5,000	250	100	1,500	50 – 5,000	25	1,000	500	50	1,000	1,000
Simultaneous translation	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Transcription	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓

BIZZABO'S VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE SOLUTION

Bizzabo offers three types of solutions for event management: in-person (physical), hybrid and virtual events. The great feature that Bizzabo offers is multiple event management, meaning that the platform itself offers the ability to plan and organize multiple events within the platform. The platform includes interactive tools such as: 1:1 Networking; Attendee surveys; Social Media integrations; Event agendas and Schedules.

ZOOM

Zoom unifies cloud video conferencing, simple online meetings, and group messaging into one easy-to-use platform. Zoom's solution offers the video, audio, and screen-sharing experience across Zoom Rooms, Windows, Mac, iOS and Android. Zoom is a platform for video, phone, web conferencing and content sharing. It offers four types of solutions: Free of charge; Pro version; Business, and Enterprise.

Picture 04: A comparison between Zoom Meeting and Zoom Webinar.
Source: https://www.uctoday.com/collaboration/zoom-meeting-vs-webinar-whats-the-difference/

GOTOWEBINAR

GoToWebinar is a webinar solution ideal for one-way presentations. Live sessions and the ability to pre-record sessions allow the event organizers to create different kinds of content. Reporting allows you to track registrants, attendees, engagement, and poll results. Furthermore, there are options for meeting type of virtual event that are provided by GoToMeeting.

ON24

On24 is an enterprise webinar solution offering interactive features, analytics, and on-demand libraries to give your virtual event all the tools necessary for an engaging and impactful experience. It is a platform that focuses on ways to increase the interaction during a virtual event. It offers intra-platform integration, making it the perfect mix of on-demand and physical events.

WEBEX

Webex App brings together Calling, Meeting and Messaging modes of collaboration into a seamless, engaging, inclusive and intelligent experience. It enables seamless collaboration across devices, locations and organizations. It makes collaboration more interactive, engaging and inclusive. It provides built-in Intelligence: Artificial intelligence to automate tasks and personalize experiences.

Picture 05: A visual representation of how Webex works.

Source: https://www.infracom.com.sg/cisco-continues-to-overhaul-webex-with-real-time-vocabulary-transcription-now/

MOODLE

Moodle is a learning platform designed to provide educators, administrators and learners with a single robust, secure and integrated system to create personalized learning environments. Moodle allows educators in any sector to create flexible, safe, accessible and highly engaging online spaces for their learners. The platform includes: video conferencing; gamification; assessments; content library, grading of the students; file sharing; etc.

KUDO

KUDO is a Language-as-a-Service platform to facilitate multilingual meetings, online and offline. This platform provides a complete solution that includes state-of-the art technology and high-quality, human-powered language support (a.k.a. interpretation) delivered remotely or on-site.

CVENT

CVENT offers software solutions to event planners and marketers for virtual event registration, venue selection, event management and marketing, virtual, hybrid, and on-site solutions, and attendee engagement. Suppliers and venues use Cvent to drive group and transient business. The software solutions of this platform optimize marketing, sales, and operations with the only platform that connects you to number of event professionals.

WONDER

Wonder is a space where you can connect with others in a more spontaneous and fluid way and where you move around freely between different groups in the platform. The platform itself is created in order to give users the freedom to choose what they want to listen to and what conversation they want to be part of. It's fun, creative and energizing. This concept is called fluid togetherness.

Picture 06: A visual representation of how Wonder. me works.

Source: https://venturebeat.com/2020/12/07/wonder-raises-11-million-to-make-large-virtual-events-more-sociable/

HUBILO

Hubilo is a platform that offers solutions for two types of events: completely virtual and hybrid events. The platform itself is built for engagement and making any event excellent. Hubilo provides a wide range of features like accessing the attendee list, hosting 1-1 meetings, exchanging business cards, etc. Hubilo offers attendee interaction with chat; questions; leaderboards; selfie contest; quizzes; rewards; reactions; GIFs; Emojis; etc.

SPOTME

SpotMe is the B2B event marketing platform with tools & production to build amazing customer relationships. From live to on-demand, planners can easily deliver hybrid, virtual and onsite events, digital experiences, and event apps that their audience loves. From breakout sessions to personalized agendas to two-way communication and gamification, planners have the tools to build a thriving community online and offline. SpotMe is also great for networking, as the attendees can schedule one-on-one meetings with other attendees and speakers.

GATHER.TOWN

Gather.Town is a web-conferencing software like Zoom, but with the added component of seeing the virtual "room" you and others are occupying, and with the ability to move around and interact with other participants based on your locations in the room, just like in real life. Users easily start and end side conversations and chats, or return to a main speaker just as at a real-world conference or other gathering. Rather than being moved to a Zoom breakout room, in Gather.Town, you can simply walk yourself virtually to tables and chairs, sit down, and start a conversation.

Picture 07: A representation of how Gather.Town works

Source: https://techcrunch.com/2021/03/11/sequoia-capital-puts-millions-of-dollars-into-gather-a-virtual-hq-platform/

LIVESTORM

Livestorm enables powerful, yet pain-free video engagements at scale. Its end-to-end video engagement platform enables organizations to create professional video engagements that can be easily managed in one place. The platform can be accessed via web browsers so there's no need to download it. The platform includes: video engagement; landing pages, registration, email follow-ups, and sharing video recordings.

AVENTRI

Aventri is an all-in-one event platform that enables global brands to run highly engaging virtual and hybrid events. Aventri allows clients to create valuable in-person experiences, grow influential communities and expand brands. The comprehensive integrated solution starts with a meeting request, to every component of event management including registration, event marketing solutions, travel management, mobile apps to the all-important "experience" at the event with badges and onsite solutions.

Picture 08: Comparison between platforms
Source: https://www.aventri.com/strategy/virtual-events

5.

MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF AN EVENT

In order to be able to successfully measure the results of an event, we must:

- Set quantitative goals;

- Set a target number of participants (given that it is a dependent variable);

- Find a way to quantify participants' impressions;

- Evaluate the success.

Measuring the success of an event is realized in each phase of the process – before, during and after the event. From the moment an event is announced, communication with potential visitors is crucial. One of the most important factors is the successful connection with the visitors, which is most prominent at the event itself. Immediately after the event, the start of the relationship should be used and appropriate activities should be taken to capitalize.

Defining and measuring event success is a specific and personalized process. Which KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) are important to you will depend on what sort of goals you have set as an organizer. However, having these KPIs in your toolkit will help you better understand which metrics are most relevant for the event and how you can start measuring those numbers.

What can be measured as a result of one virtual event?

- Number of Registrations

- Number of Session Registrations

- Demographic Attendee Information

- Email Open Rate

- Email Click-through Rate

- Speaker Engagement via Mobile App

- Speaker & Session Engagement Via Live Polling

- Session Feedback & Ratings via Mobile Event App

- Social Media Engagement

- Social Media Mentions

- Qualified Sales Leads

- Connections

- Attendee Satisfaction Surveys

- Mobile App Insights

- Sponsorship Page Engagement

- Net Promoter Score

- Number of attendees

- Number of active participants

- Number and results from surveys after the event

- Number of messages sent during the event

- Involvement of the speakers

- Responsiveness to questions and polls during the event

- Social Media activities (post engagement, mentions…)

- Number of new clients

- Web traffic

- Number of return participants (those that return to the next events)\

Just a few years ago most of the content of this guideline would not have been possible. Owing to today's technology – the show carries on. Treat your virtual event with the same thought and strategy that you apply to live events. while the means for achieving your goals may be different virtually, if you incorporate strong content, facilitate engagement, and keep your audience in mind, you won't go wrong.

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