

Creating a successful virtual event

Virtual events are here to stay! Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, more people than ever before have used the internet to connect with colleagues, friends and family, and there's no doubt that virtual meeting and event software has seen an unprecedented boom due to this.

Although in-person gatherings are in the early stages of making a comeback, and will likely pick up in popularity in late 2021 and beyond, many businesses have seen the benefits of virtual events. Everything from conferences, networking, product demonstrations and beyond can be hosted more easily virtually, whilst minimising costs. This frees up more time and budget to reach more of your target audience, and could help to generate leads that turn into revenue for your business.

Add all this up and a simple discussion can take up to an hour to complete, as well as causing a significant interruption to the flow of work. It can take another 10 minutes to refocus the brain between switching tasks, while there are also delays that must be taken into account. Finding a time when all the stakeholders involved are free can be difficult and although this allows for thorough preparation, it can result in slow and unresponsive decision making.

So how do you make your virtual event stand out from the crowd? Read on for our top tips on creating a successful virtual event.



Stage One: Initial event planning

Whether your goal is generating revenue for your business, raising brand awareness or simply hosting something informative or fun for existing customers or people already aware of your business, there are some key things you need to consider.

Your target audience

Knowing your target audience is the key first step in helping to inform your agenda and schedule. So consider, what kind of contact do you want to attend your event? Is there a specific job type, industry or other demographic which can help you make your event more targeted?

Differentiating your event

Once you've identified your audience, you need to consider what will add value at your event to suit that demographic. A unique approach to content, networking, or a headline speaker can all be great options to attract the attention of your attendees.

Structuring your event

There are a multitude of options you may want to consider when it comes to creating an engaging event experience. One-to-many presentations from speakers, smaller workshop groups or networking sessions can all be used to fully immerse your audience in the speakers and content. Not to mention helping to prevent potential drop-off (don't forget, the exit button is only ever a click away with virtual events).

Time to plan

So how much time do you need to plan your virtual event? Depending on the complexity of your event,

we would recommend at least 8-12 weeks of planning, preparation and, importantly, marketing time.

Budgeting

It’s difficult to give an exact budget as your event will be as unique as your company, but some key allocations should include, your chosen virtual event platform, marketing to and acquiring attendees, headline speaker fees, content production, and potentially even attendee gifts.

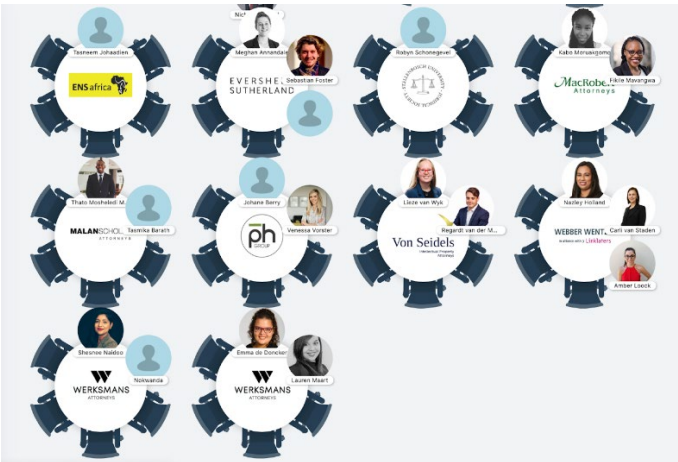


Stage Two: Choosing your virtual events platform

Choosing the right technology is the key to making your virtual event a success. Consider a platform that:

Lets you focus on organizing

An end-to-end platform, supporting you from registration, ticketing and payments through to close allows you to focus on organising the day, the speakers and generally making the rest of your event a success.



Empowers speakers, exhibitors, and attendees

Virtual events should be about creating connections, so choose a platform that creates the spaces and opportunities for those connections to form and thrive. Perhaps including the opportunity

for one-to-many presentations, virtual exhibitions for event sponsors and virtual networking.

Creates authentic interactions

Spontaneous connections with other attendees creates the best virtual event experience. Your chosen platform should allow for this to happen.

Don’t miss an opportunity to connect

Choosing a platform with asynchronous messaging, means attendees can leave audio notes, video, or chat messages. Hop in and out whenever to keep conversations moving.

Lets you measure the success of your event

Interactions, sessions, or virtual footfall; whatever metric you will use to measure the success of your event, ensure your virtual events platform allows you to track this.

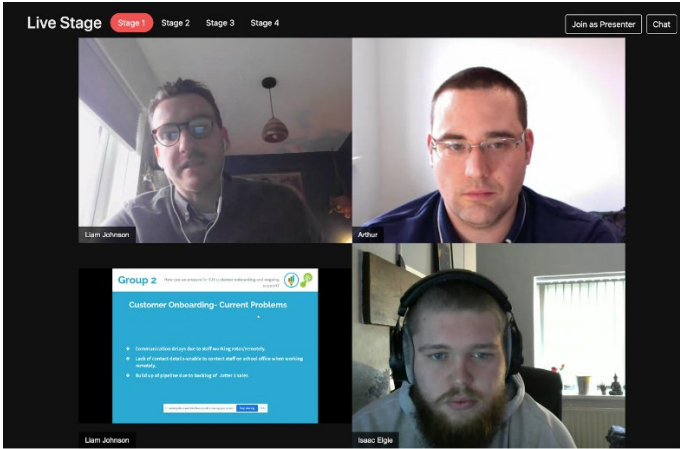


Stage Three: Pre-event preparation

Now you know your audience, and have chosen your virtual events platform, there are just a few more steps to take before you begin to market your event. Some time and consideration needs to be put into the end-to-end experience you will provide for attendees.

Interact with your audience

Whether you are hosting an event for customers or prospects, it can be useful at this stage to canvas some opinions from these potential attendees on what topics and speakers may be of interest to them. Just speaking to one or two people can provide valuable insights which will help you to structure your event.



Approach speakers and exhibitors

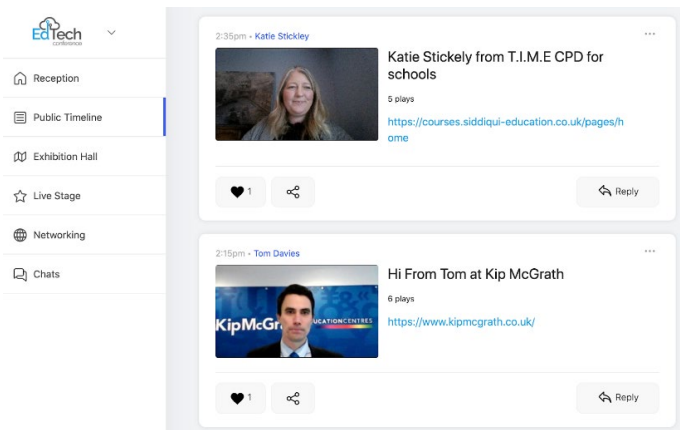
Armed with insights from your audience, you should now have a great idea of what speakers and exhibitors would be of interest to attendees and complementary for your business.

Design the agenda

The biggest difference in hosting a virtual event, as opposed to an in-person gathering, is that your sessions need to be shorter and more engaging to reduce the risk of drop-off. It's all too easy for an attendee to click to exit a virtual event.

With this in mind, consider the following:

- Session lengths of around 30 minutes, allowing time for Q&As to keep your audience engaged
- Ensure you have breaks in between sessions
- If you want to attract a global audience, ensure this is reflected in your timings
- Include virtual networking and time for exhibitors, if you have them
- Have a clear call to action for each session, so your audience knows what to expect next
- Leave time to ask for feedback. This could help to inform your follow-up after the event.



Set up your event page

Creating an event page or website is the final step before you're ready to begin marketing your event.

Ensure you include the following information:

- A brief overview of the event. What is it about, and who is the target audience?
- Details of how to register
- Your agenda, with dates, times and descriptions for each session
- Speaker bios and photos
- Sponsor logos, links and company information
- Any additional resources, such as FAQs or links to relevant blog posts or websites for further reading



Stage Four: Marketing your event

Depending on your target audience, there are a multitude of methods to ensure they hear about your event. Consider some of the following.

Email marketing

Sending invitations via email, to customers or prospects, is a great way to encourage attendance at your event. Use speaker bios, exhibitor information, and any other content you have created, such as blog posts, in a sequence of around three emails to generate buzz.

Social media marketing

Create a range of visual assets, highlighting your own brand, speaker bios and exhibitor info to raise awareness around the event. Additionally, encourage speakers and exhibitors to post from their own social media profiles, all whilst using an event hashtag, which attendees can get involved in.

If you have budgeted for this, paid adverts across social media platforms can help you to gain an even wider reach, targeting only those demographics who would be interested in your event.

Blog posts

Blog posts are a great way to let your audience know what will be happening at your event and why they should attend. These posts can be used in your social media and email marketing campaigns.

PR

Create a press release highlighting speakers and exhibitors and send to any industry media which may reach your target audience. Editors are always looking for stories, so this could be a great way to gain coverage.



Nurture these leads further in an email sequence by offering product demonstrations, invitations to future events, or any additional resources that may be of interest after the event. All of this ensures that your brand stays at the forefront of the minds of your attendees.

Planning a virtual event right now?

Speak with our virtual event consultants who are on-hand to help you get started with Event Anywhere’s virtual event management software solution, and demonstrate how it can help you maximise return on investment from your events.

I hope you find this new approach to video interesting.

Many thanks,



Sean

Sean Gilligan
Founder & CEO, Event Anywhere

Stage Five: Following up after your event

So that’s it. With all of your planning, the event of course ran smoothly, but what about follow-up?

This is your chance to continue the conversation with people who attended your event, and even those who registered, but didn’t attend. Using your initial audience insights, plus feedback during the event itself, there may be a few actions you want to take.

Follow-up with email

This should be personalised to your attendees, but shortly after the event, they should receive at least one email from you, perhaps with recordings of the sessions, or contact details for speakers and exhibitors they may want to follow up.