



Creating an Experience:

Reinventing Virtual
and Hybrid Events

ASSOCIATIONS GUIDE



Introduction

In 2020, association conference, meeting and exhibition plans were forever changed. Effects of the global pandemic challenged associations to make a monumental shift from in-person events to virtual platforms. Fast-forward to today, associations are at a crossroads of whether to pour their efforts and funds into in-person events, virtual ones or some hybrid of both. Not to mention, how do associations financially sustain hybrid models while keeping both attendees and sponsors interested?

It's clear that events have evolved very quickly, but evolution is a result of environmental drivers. Association audiences have different environments post-pandemic resulting in members, prospects and sponsors requiring the option of face-to-face and virtual events in combination to fit their customized needs.

"...meeting planners may need to take a digital-first approach, at least for the time being, building events for the larger, remote audience while ensuring that people on-site are engaged. She compared the technique to how a TV studio might handle a live audience when filming a sitcom." (Associations Now article)

In their new hybrid forms, events need to be reinvented into a larger vision in association strategy. In this guide, you'll learn how to keep your audience captivated and interacting, all while reaching new prospects and making sponsors happy. You are no longer simply producing a digital event, you're creating an experience.



66.5% of event professionals plan to use **hybrid** as their go-to format once in-person events resume.

(EventMB, 2020)



REACH THE MASSES WITH HYBRID EXPERIENCES

When you think about rebuilding your event strategy as an experience for the entire audience you want to reach, you're no longer limiting content to only in-person or virtual audiences. Keep in mind, while you have a sector of your membership and prospects that enjoy the travel and logistics of attending your annual conference, you also have an audience that needs to participate from home or likely would rather spend money on valuable content access and virtual networking opportunities than flights and hotels.

74% [of attendees] said they believe scientific meetings should continue to **be virtual, or include virtual pieces**, according to a recent poll of scientists conducted by the journal Nature.

(Associations Now article)

CREATING VIRTUAL EXPERIENCES THAT ENGAGE

“Events were built to succeed hundreds of years ago, but they are built to fail in the 21st century. Post-Covid virtual events and webinars will be unrecognizable. It will be like comparing traditional TV with streaming, print magazines with tablets or music CD’s with Spotify.” – Marco Giberti, co-author of Reinventing Live (Forbes article)

Associations are no longer limited by convention center capacity, seats in a room or space in an exhibit hall. You can reach audiences directly in their living rooms and offices with the touch of a button. In fact, many events are experiencing double or triple the number of attendees in virtual as compared to in person events.

However, post-pandemic you’re facing a new obstacle: **Zoom-fatigue**.

To combat screen-fatigue, there are several tactics associations can use in various stages of the event experience to capture attendees’ attention and reduce drop-off.

+ OVERcommunicate the event agenda. Especially for virtual attendees who may be used to more flexible workdays, you’ll want to ensure they prepare their calendar for your event. Association newsletter emails should include your event’s agenda at least one month ahead of the event. And don’t forget, your event’s Show Daily news emails should include reminders of the upcoming day’s schedule. **Bonus tip:** Provide them links to add notable sessions to their calendar apps.

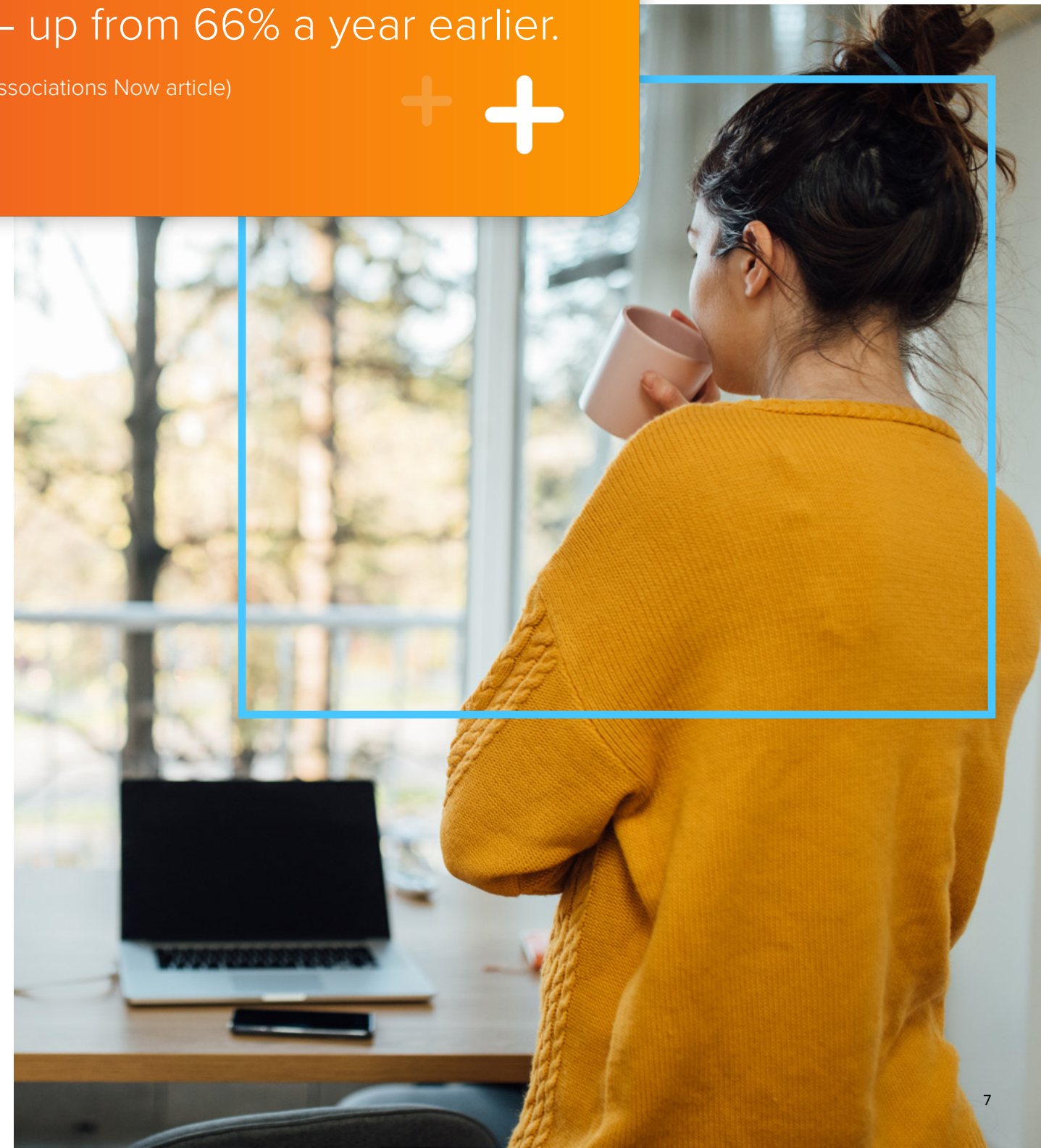
+ Open up their calendar. Speaking of the agenda, we’re all accustomed to full-day or multi-day events, but no one wants to stare at a screen for back-to-back sessions for eight hours. Try keeping events to 4 hours or less each day to reduce screen time and allow attendees blocks of open time to get other tasks accomplished.

+ Create conversation prior to the event. As you prepare for your events, are you asking your members and polling prospects what they want to hear from you? Many associations use surveys to guide their event content planning. Give them another opportunity to take part in strategizing your event content by requesting session topic questions ahead of time. Attendees can send a video of themselves asking the question and you can feature their video during the Q&A section of your session and speakers can answer it live.

+ Provide virtual badge backgrounds. To reinvent the conference badge experience, create customized backgrounds for your attendees to use during the virtual event instead to add a little pizzazz to their video feeds and give other attendees an idea of who everyone is. Consider allowing the attendee to customize the background with a logo and their title or create specific background designs related to attendee roles. Being able to identify attendees more easily will encourage networking with peers throughout the event.

86% of respondents said they have **left a virtual event early** — up from 66% a year earlier.

(Associations Now article)





+ Break the ice with breakouts.

Speaking of networking, you can guarantee attendees will meet someone at the very beginning of your event by kicking it off with introductions. Instead of starting a session with a speaker only, send your attendees to breakout rooms to introduce themselves (you can even pre-determine them based on roles before the event). Encourage them to reveal what they want to learn from the event or identify a challenge they're facing that their peers or the association can help them answer.

+ Reroute session content based on feedback.

A little different than a simple Q&A. Consider preparing some of your sessions with presentations that have a couple different routes it can take based on conversation points with your audience. Being prepared with presentations that can answer all the possible feedback outcomes will be a welcomed change to typical set-in-stone sessions attendees are accustomed to.

+ Schedule screen-free breaks. Show your attendees that you want their attention, but you know they need personal time too by adding breaks to the agenda. Everyone needs an intermission from their devices, so encourage attendees to take a walk, grab a snack, do some yoga or run a quick errand to get their minds refreshed for following sessions.

+ Pulse-check the audience. If Netflix asks if you're still watching, so can you. Live polling and pop quizzes can be used for more than gaining attendee feedback. It also gives you a check-point to find out if they're still tuning in. Bonus tip: Encourage participations in these pop polls and quizzes by offering prizes and giveaways.

+ Integrate rapid fire mini-presentations.

Break up the monotony of one single presentation by allowing sponsors, speakers and attendees to be a part of a session and providing short, 5-minute presentations one after another to keep the content fresh, change up the discussion and keep attendee's attention to what's happening next.

+ Reinvent the post-session experience with break-out groups and speaker meet'n'greet.

The most difficult piece to capture in a virtual event is the experience of being able to network with others in the "room", ask questions and gain insight from your peers. Consider breaking out into your small groups that you did at the beginning of your session and give your attendees the spotlight to share what they learned or provide help to their group members. In addition, at the end of your session, give attendees the opportunity to sign-up to "get in line" to meet the speaker and have a 1-on-1 introduction and discussion – adding value from the in-person event back into the virtual experience.

"When we first had elevators, we didn't know whether we should stare at each other or not... ridesharing has brought up questions about whether you talk to the driver or not, or whether to get in the back seat or the passenger seat. We had to evolve ways to make it work for us... we're in that era now with videoconferencing."
– Jeff Hancock, founding director of the Stanford Social Media Lab

In the age of Zoom-fatigue, associations need to reimagine their virtual events in order to drive registrations and obtain sponsors. What if associations took a page from the entertainment industry's playbook? The evolution of media and entertainment has opened up new ways for audiences to consume and engage as long as there's a wi-fi signal present.



MODEL YOUR EXPERIENCE AFTER **ENTERTAINMENT**

"With the click of a button, people can watch an artist they thought they would never see in concert on Instagram... or a Q&A with a movie director that would typically be industry only. Or an interview with their favorite author who would normally skip their town on a book tour. While live-streaming can never replace real-life options and is unlikely to have the same financial benefits, organizers and artists have witnessed the power of opening up events to a larger audience online..."
(Washington Post article)

Masterclass promotes courses by capturing short videos of the speaker iterating key learnings from their course or some exclusive information to draw audience sign-ups.

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To go beyond just engaging audiences to actually entertaining them, consider adding these 8 trends to your event strategy.

1. Teasers aren't just for movies.

Tickets don't sell without pre-event promotion, so producing quality teasers for your event content is a must-have. Create trailers to excite members, sponsors and event prospects, but keep each one to 30 seconds or less. Keep it sharp like Masterclass's soundbite trailers. Similar to a TEDTalk, Masterclass features smart and savvy individuals from their field and gives them a platform to teach a course on what they specialize in.

2. TikTok is trending for a reason.

It's not only Gen Z utilizing one of the newest social media platforms out there, TikTok content is popping up on every generation's devices. Think about how your association can use the platform to promote your event pre, during and post. TikTok's popularity gives anyone the ability to do creative cutting and video effects, but for your association, it gives you the opportunity to display authenticity, add an element of fun to your content strategy and create human connection. Tap into TikTok to peak interest from younger generations who see something they can relate to and just might seek membership after.

3. Create event-fluencers with promotional kits. Try spotlighting key members and send them special gifts and event promotion items ahead of the event with instructions as to how to promote their items and event on social media. Even get sponsors involved to supply items or fund through their sponsorship package.

4. Produce events like a talk show. Need help brainstorming fun, entertaining content for your next event? Put these YouTube channels on repeat: The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, The Ellen Degeneres Show and Jimmy Kimmel Live. The kings and queen of day and night-time comedy are famous for viral celebrity interviews, giggle-inducing games and shareworthy performances that keeps their content alive long-after its premiere. You're sure to come up with fresh ideas to get your event attendees grabbing popcorn or posting to their social media about you with these three as models.

"To make it as visually compelling as possible, we changed up the camera angles and how we displayed content. We filmed in various studio locations that offered dynamic lighting and backgrounds to add visual interest. In short, we approached each session like we were filming a TV show — rather than just a speaker with a PowerPoint presentation — and that made all the difference." — Patrick Smith, CMO of CVENT (EM Blog)

5. Gamification always wins. Have you created a virtual version of the expo floor punch card yet? What about using prizes or raffle entries as incentives to providing feedback during discussions? Everyone loves to win something, so design games or contests to get your attendees engaged.

6. Interview celebrities with a passion for your mission. Your members like to see famous figures involved in your association and celebrities tend to have a following you can tap into. Identify individuals with influence to speak during your events, perform if they're an entertainment artist, provide autographed memorabilia as raffle items, and use them to promote your events.

7. Think like Netflix and Hulu. Especially when it comes to content access, are you enabling your virtual platforms to provide a mix of live and on-demand content? Are you continuing to build a content library well-after your events? And are you making all your live content available for on-demand after the premiere? Keep members coming back for more by producing creative and entertaining content they can access on their own time and categorize your library for ease of use (even personalize your platform!), so members aren't wading through topics they don't care about.

In EventMB's Future of the Event Industry Report, Pierre Metrailler of SpotMe indicated that he expects 80 percent of virtual engagement to take place on-demand in 2021, so making content available after the event — or even year-round — is crucial. (Event Manager Blog)

8. Entertain with commercial breaks and live performances. With a viewing audience of 93.4 million, the NFL Super Bowl is one of the largest annual events in the world, but did you know that 22% of viewers watch the big game for the commercials and 16% watch for the half-time show?



For your association, how can you **envision your events** to be the super bowl of your year and add tactics to draw viewers to watch for more than just the meat of your material?

8. Entertain with commercial breaks and live performances continued...

Consider giving your attendees a voice and asking them to record 15-second “takeaway” videos about what they learned during their session. Videos can be shown as commercials between sessions or even intermingled into presentations. Piggybacking on thinking like a talk show, think about asking members with unique talents to perform during your event and show performances between sessions. Call it Members Got Talent or Member Idol and let your attendees vote to name the award winner. And don’t forget, commercials and live performances give sponsors the opportunities they crave to get their brands in front of your members. Allow sponsors to provide short commercial breaks during your event. If you’re afraid of too much advertising, give sponsors guidelines on how to create videos that entertain vs. providing their typical sales messaging.

MONETIZE YOUR EVENT TOUCHPOINTS

Great entertainment experiences rely on more than creative content. Reinventing your events also means you need to rethink how you’re generating revenue for your association in order to fund your new exciting efforts and you also need to discover new channels to please your sponsors, so they can count on reaching your membership and achieve the ROI they expect.



"Outside of traditional sponsorships, virtual events present multiple untapped opportunities to monetize video content," Gil Becker explained. "This includes pre-event promotion, streaming during the event, and post-event opportunities like subscriptions, promotional content, video and display ads, click to action, and more." (CMS Wire article)

Price your tickets and create subscriptions.

Producing experiences has a heavy price tag. If you’re investing in your membership, then they will invest in your resources as they understand the value it provides. For virtual experiences, offset production and hosting expenses by charging less than you would for an in-person event if the content is only available for a short time, but if you’re creating a library of content available on-demand, then think about a subscription model with different tiered pricing for your members to choose from based on their needs. Alternatively, you can always transition from 2020’s free virtual events to offering trial subscriptions or introductory passes to virtual events that limit content consumption or interactivity, then offer full access for subscription prices following.

Grow revenue and delight sponsors.

From the pre-promotion and in-app or on-site hosting to in between and during sessions and even post-production, your association can offer vendors and exhibitors dozens of opportunities to promote their brand’s services and products to your members.

Here are the must-haves your association should implement to grow your bottom line, help sponsors achieve ROI goals and promote the best products in your industry to your attendees:

Commercials:

During presentations, in-between sessions, during wait times before and after content.

Pitch Opportunities:

Allow them to serve on speaker panels, give sponsored presentations, introductions prior to sessions and scheduled press conferences.

Event Kits:

Request collateral, small gifts or monetary support for your pre-event promotional kits.

Email Newsletters:

Earn revenue by adding sponsor advertising placements in your enewsletters.

Eblasts & Show Daily Emails:

Fund your communication efforts by offering ad placements in your Show Dailys, allow vendors to sponsor an issue and send emails to your attendees on behalf of your key sponsors.

Website Direct Placement & Retargeting:

Enable your website to make you money by allowing advertising placements within areas of your site, plus offer sponsors the added ability to retarget your site’s traffic with ads across popular other web channels.

Buyer’s Guides:

Members like the ability to access your association’s industry vendor group all in one place, so offer a buyer’s guide with listing sponsorship levels.



PARTNER WITH MULTIVIEW TO **SUPPORT YOUR STRATEGY**

Producing an experience will have your association leaders thinking about your entire audience and how they engage with you year-around. You have unlimited access to membership and revenue growth by expanding your audience reach when you focus more on virtual and digital channels in addition to your face-to-face engagements, but how will you do it all?

Multiview understands the challenges associations face concerning member lead acquisition, revenue generation, content development and digital marketing. By partnering with a team who has your goals in mind and taking note of how to engage your audience creatively to reinvent your event experience, your association will be surpassing its goals in no time.



We Can Help⁺

Start **attracting, engaging and retaining members** with advanced digital marketing and communication tools from Multiview.

As the largest digital media partner for associations, Multiview partners with over **1,200 associations** each year to help them reach their **strategic goals** through digital marketing and communications.

When you work with us, we'll come alongside your association to recommend and deliver strategic communications that benefit both your members and your bottom line.

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