

# Your top questions about virtual events, answered.



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With the limitations on travel right now, companies need an effective way to host corporate events and communicate with their audiences, whether it's to launch a new product, facilitate training, share marketing information or host a recognition event. The virtual atmosphere, while never as effective as a face-to-face event, offers a great solution. In a recent webinar, we gathered the most pressing questions facing leaders today when it comes to planning and producing virtual events. The answers – below – will offer guidance and best practices on everything from audience engagement and content delivery to timing and budget considerations.

## CONTENT and ENGAGEMENT

### **How do I capture attention and get people to attend my virtual event?**

Creative pre-communication is the key to your audience understanding the value of your virtual event. You need to build excitement and convey the feeling that attending will be worth their time. Creativity will show it's not just another webinar – that it will be an EVENT.

### **How do I create engaging virtual content?**

The first step in creating content to engage your audience is to consider what you want them to think, feel and do after attending. What behaviour change are you looking to achieve? That should be your guide as you build out the elements of your virtual event. You should also look at what things you can do pre- and post-event to reinforce your message and create an ongoing connection with your audience. It's not enough to simply take all of the information you want to share and put it into a website or app.

It can also be helpful to partner with an event production company that understands what works (and what doesn't) in a virtual environment. They can recommend engagement tactics based on the content so it will feel natural and keep your audience absorbed in the material.

### **Do interactive tools like polling or chat boxes help increase audience engagement?**

Interactive engagement tools like polling or chat boxes do help increase engagement. The trick is to use them appropriately based on the content and to know the frequency with which to use them. Overuse can feel forced and underuse can lose your audience's attention.

### **How do I stand out and create an engaging virtual conference or exhibit hall experience?**

Keep the design of the experience very graphically connected and the information readily absorbed. Don't overcomplicate exhibits. Perhaps add a

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professional host to take the audience through a high-level overview of the exhibits so they can prioritize which to attend. Gamify the exhibits – build in checkpoints that give the audience points for visiting an exhibit or watching a full presentation.

## **How do breakout sessions work virtually?**

Virtual breakout sessions work very much like live breakout sessions except you will want to keep them short, to the point and build in engagement tactics. There are several metrics you can utilize around breakouts so make sure you are familiar with what your particular event platform offers. The one bonus of virtual breakouts is that you do not have the space restrictions you would have in a live venue. The entire audience can attend all at once if they'd like so you don't need to monitor registration and limit the number in the live audience due to maximum seating.

## **How do I bring elements of prestige to a virtual event?**

Attendance through a "special invite-only" method always piques the audience's interest. Adding touchpoints pre- and post-event, such as personal mailings of objects that relate to the virtual meeting content help to elevate the experience. Gearing all of the presentations in a very personalized manner can also help bring an element of prestige, such as asking the audience's opinion or recognizing their contributions.

## **How can I add a hospitality element to a virtual event?**

Sending a tactile object that can be enjoyed during the virtual event, such as drinks, snacks or other items that will be used during the event can bring that hospitality element to a virtual setting. The key is making sure what you send relates back to the theme or content of the event. If it's a breakfast with the CEO, send scones; if it's a networking happy hour, send a cocktail drink mix or a case of beer. Be creative - think of things that will help recreate the live atmosphere as much as possible.

## **PLANNING and EVENT PRODUCTION**

### **What's a typical timeline to produce a virtual event?**

The timeline to produce a virtual event is generally similar to producing a live event. The amount of time it takes to develop the content is critical. You can also look at the platform design and development as similar to designing and building the physical stage for a live event.

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## **How do budgets compare for a virtual event versus live events?**

Typically, the production/content development costs for a virtual event will be relatively close to or the same as the production/content development for a live event. That's because the physical stage costs become your virtual meeting platform costs. However, you will see savings in terms of venue rental, airfare, hotel rooms, transfers and food and beverage.

## **How long should my virtual event be?**

The length of a virtual event should reflect the complexity of the content. If your content is intricate and detailed, the length of the session should be shorter than if your content is lighter or more motivational in nature. We recommend no more than 60 minutes for any session and complex content should be consumed in 30 minutes or less. And just as in a live event, you can build in breaks and interactive transitions that allow your audience to reset before the next session begins.

## **Should my virtual event be pre-recorded or live or both?**

The best practice is to pre-record anything that makes sense to pre-record, such as an executive presentation. This allows the presenter to do multiple takes if they don't like their delivery or the production company can edit the presentation before it's aired. (It also eliminates one live element to possibly go wrong on show day!) Clearly, not all presentations can be pre-recorded, such as one where you're hoping to get audience participation with live polling or surveys. Panels can be pre-recorded as long as there is no audience interaction.

## **How do I coach my presenters to adjust their style to be effective in a virtual environment?**

Just as with a live event, it's important to do extensive speech coaching for presenters. It's best to keep the virtual experience as similar to speaking on a stage as possible to make it feel familiar and comfortable. With our clients, for example, we have rehearsals take place in a virtual green room where the presenter can see their prompter and/or confidence monitors with graphics. We also work specifically on their cadence and inflection. Presenting virtually offers a unique challenge because the presenter can't feed off the energy of a live audience. This makes it all the more important to coach them through delivering in what feels a bit like a void.

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## How can I measure the success of my virtual event?

Establish early on what your goal for the event is – what will make it successful for you and for your company. Then build in metrics and analytics to measure that. The simpler the goal, the more successful you will be to realize if you obtained the results you wanted.

There is great opportunity to share your message virtually when a live event can't take place safely. If you have other questions or would like to discuss how **BI WORLDWIDE Canada** can help with your virtual events, let us know at [canada@biworldwide.com](mailto:canada@biworldwide.com).

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