

10 EVENT TRENDS

FOR 2021

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Please refer all pertinent questions to the publisher.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julius Solaris is the founder and editor in chief of *EventMB*. Started in 2007, EventMB is the number one online platform for event professionals. EventMB was acquired in 2019 by Skift, the largest and most influential travel media company worldwide.

He has been named one of the most influential individuals in the meetings industry by many magazines and media for the past 10 years.

Julius has conducted some of the most groundbreaking research for the event industry. Over 3,000 events reviewed and 15,000 event professionals interviewed.

Julius' analysis and reports have been downloaded by over 300,000 event professionals. 300,000 more read EventMB every month. Julius has been keynote for events in 12 countries and for over 200,000 attendees.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Event professionals will remember 2020 forever – a year that has redefined the industry forever. The new safety concerns, the rise of virtual events. As a result, the landscape for 2021 is profoundly changed.

Our research over the course of the year has included over 4,000 event professionals and serves as the backbone of this report. It says that uncertainty will define 2021. With a vaccine on the brink of being released at the time of writing, we do not know when we will be able to travel and attend events again.

It will take a while to get past the stigma of superspreader events. Event professionals will need to work hard to ensure the safety of their in-person events while keeping event brands alive with virtual events.

Hybrid events will be king. Not because attendees want them, but because they will be the only way to include those unable to attend in person.

We can expect 2021 to be a year of rebuilding, the first of many. The industry will need to face one of the most severe losses of talent ever faced. With furlough schemes in different countries drying out and massive layoffs, many will leave the industry for good.

Julius Solaris

Editor of EvenMB, a Skift brand

10 EVENT TRENDS FOR 2021

1. MICRO EXPERIENCES

As the industry is redefined for 2021, the concept of planning large events in exotic locations will change dramatically in the scale of how these experiences will be planned.

Large events will come with a lot of complications. They will be possible, but not how the industry is used to planning them.

Therefore, a new breed of destinations that help event professionals create more contained experiences will have an advantage. These will furnish planners with opportunities for surprising and enticing experiences that cater to a smaller number of people than what event professionals were used to. Despite being smaller, they will be more palatable and less risky than larger events in large cities and large venues. How destinations work within a network to create these experiences will define 2021.

Smaller experiences will offer an unprecedented opportunity to offer more exclusive events that are more intimate, with smaller groups that can foster more meaningful connections. Very large events traditionally suffered from a lack of personalization. It seems the industry has a strong opportunity to redefine in-person connection.

Industry experts foresee that hybrid experiences will have a smaller percentage of attendees in person compared to those online, and obviously the incentive to attend in person before a vaccine becomes available needs to be something unique. How event professionals coordinate that with a virtual counterpart is going to be very interesting.



JELMER VAN AST

CEO, *Conference Compass*

Jelmer van Ast is the CEO and founder of Conference Compass, a pioneer of event apps since 2009. Their apps have been used at 250 conferences last year, including 10 of the 25 world's largest association conferences. With the Society App, Conference Compass enables associations and meeting planners to unite their communities around conferences, whether they join the event virtually or in-person.

Jelmer holds a PhD in Artificial Intelligence and knows first-hand what it takes to publish scientific research and deliver engaging presentations. With his roots in academia together with over 10 years of experience building an event tech company, he and his team stand by their customers to manage the virtual experience.

PIONEERING HYBRID EVENTS IN 2021

Where the industry was forced to experiment with online events in 2020 due to the pandemic, I believe that 2021 will be the year where the industry begins to experiment with hybrid. There are a number of ways in which online and on-site event components will be able to fuse into amazing hybrid event experiences.

STREAMLINED WORKFLOWS.

Event planners have had to take an enormous financial hit due to the pandemic, though many salvaged some revenue by pivoting to virtual. In 2021, they will have to continue to invest and factor in the economics of catering to both online and onsite attendees. More than ever before, this will require event platforms that save a lot of valuable time so event planners can focus on delivering on the experience without worrying about the technology.

INTEGRATED EXPERIENCES.

All-in-one event platforms will play a crucial role in making this happen. Not just the traditional event registration and website, but the entire experience for all stakeholders — attendees, speakers and sponsors — with video streaming natively built in, mobile and browser apps working in unison, and high production value right out of the box. Speakers on-site will be streamed through the platform to attendees joining online, and speakers presenting online will be projected to the stage.

MORE INCLUSIVE EVENTS.

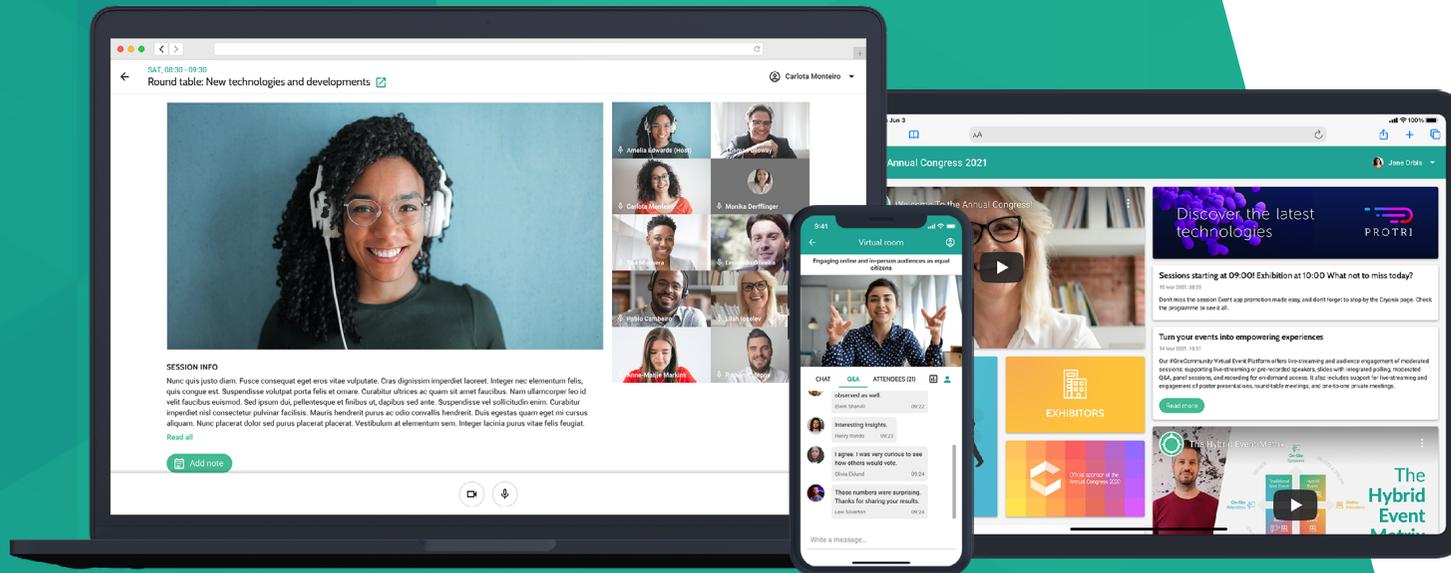
With virtual and hybrid platforms powering event experiences, attendees are able to discover people to meet and break into private video meetings with people all over the globe.

I'm personally very excited about this trend, as it provides a golden opportunity for the industry to become much more inclusive. At last, it will allow people at all stages in their careers and from any country to attend professional events. Even if attendees opt out of travel due to, for example, sustainability concerns, they can still join the event experience.

YEAR-ROUND EVENT COMMUNITIES.

With an online platform, the content and networking not only takes place during the couple of days of the event, but has all the potential to last much longer. Sessions are automatically recorded and can be made available for year-round access, making learning possibly much more effective. Conversations can be deeper and extended over a much longer time through online correspondence. I predict that associations and event planners will (re)discover what perhaps their strongest asset is: the communities they bring together at their events. And now they have all the tools to keep engaging these communities year-round.

Discover the most inclusive platform for live events & virtual experiences



Whether your attendees gather in person or join remotely, they all belong to One Community



Conference
Compass



Native live-streaming
and session recording



Designed for a future
of hybrid events



A community platform
for all your events

Learn more

2. SAFETY FIRST

No question that in 2021, the way attendees evaluate whether or not to attend events will be dictated by safety. A lot of that will be counterbalanced by when and to what extent effective vaccines become available, but until then, event professionals will need to strongly consider the safety measures in place for live events.

The industry witnessed this in July and during the summer of 2020, when

there was a break from the virus in many countries of the Western world. Events started to pick back up, and safety was paramount in terms of how attendees evaluated whether to attend or not.

Events cannot afford to become super spreaders. Therefore, the reputation of event brands will be built on health and safety:

- ✓ Social distancing at all times and especially indoors
- ✓ Mask wearing at all times
- ✓ Seated, socially distanced, and potentially staggered meal times
- ✓ Ventilation that is up to date
- ✓ Sanitation and separation by plexiglass and other types of dividing materials
- ✓ The use of counselors or stewards to direct attendees and force compliance with the rules at all times
- ✓ Onsite testing and event bubbles

Events that have these in place will have an advantage compared to those that do not. Another key component is a system for tracking whoever attends the event and informing by spotless communication in the event of an outbreak during the event.

Testing is important not just onsite, but for multiple days before and after. At the time of writing, some airlines are announcing ways to enforce vaccine passports or antibody passports for attendees to be cleared. Event technology providers are beginning to establish the infrastructure for replicating that for events.

To attend specific events, the feeling of safety and confidence will be number one, so the industry must necessarily engage in and prioritize safety above everything else.



BECKY BLAINE

Deputy Director, *Arizona Office of Tourism*

Becky has spent 16 years promoting tourism and hospitality in Arizona, including spearheading PR and marketing efforts for the iconic Arizona Biltmore Resort before coming to the Arizona Office of Tourism. In her current role as Deputy Director, she guides AOT international marketing efforts, overseeing the media relations and trade divisions, and is responsible for long-term strategic planning.

DESTINATIONS OFFER SAFE AND ENGAGING WAYS TO GATHER

WIDE OPEN SPACES OFFER SAFER PLACES FOR YOUR NEXT MEETING.

Destinations with beautiful weather year-round can offer event planners a more reliable option for safer outdoor events. Wide open spaces against spectacular scenery offer the perfect backdrop to host your group large or small. The majority of Arizona's venues, attractions and museums make it easy to keep your distance with unique outdoor and hybrid spaces framed by spectacular mountain ranges. In fact, you may feel like you have the space all to yourself! These conditions make for the ideal travel destination for safe, social-distanced meetings and events.

CVBs OFFER CRUCIAL HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR EVENTS.

As an important first step in bringing critical business meetings back to Arizona, the Arizona Office of Tourism worked with the Arizona Department of Health Services to lay the groundwork and develop guidelines for meetings and conventions, which enabled hotels, resorts and venues to return to hosting meeting planners and their client events.

Tourism and hospitality institutions are more important than ever during this time, helping event planners connect with local partners who are committed to ensuring guest and group safety by following the state and CDC guidelines. Many of our venues and hotels have secured designations from the Global Bio-risk Advisory Council and the Arizona Lodging & Tourism Association's Safe & Clean initiative, certifying that they have trained staff and are maintaining sanitation best practices.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES MAKE FOR AMAZING POST-EVENT ACTIVITIES.

Selecting a destination with endless activities in the great outdoors will give planners plenty of opportunities to let attendees unwind after a successful event. Hike or ride horseback along scenic Arizona desert trails. Tackle red-rocked backcountry on a Jeep. Raft the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. Embark through Arizona's stunning scenery on a road-trip filled with Old West culture, food worth traveling for, and iconic landscapes.

SPREAD OUT.

And still come together.

Arizona is open for meetings. Our year-round exceptional weather makes hosting outdoors our specialty. From amazing resort patios and outdoor venues to unique attractions and world-class museums, we will inspire you to trade your virtual background for a real one.



ARIZONA
THE GRAND CANYON STATE

ArizonaMeetings.com

3. MAKING MONEY WITH VIRTUAL

If event planners want to host a secure version of their event without having to consider social distancing, testing, tracing, sanitizing, crazy traveling, and the possibility of being sued, **virtual events are the only option.**

The issue is that very few people are making money from virtual events.

EventMB research says that less than 40 percent of event professionals have

been able to pivot profitably, and about 60 percent of planners will recoup less than 25 percent of lost revenue for 2020. Only 8 percent expect to recoup more than 75 percent. These numbers will not support a comeback; **virtual events need a better business model, and better support from virtual event platforms.**

Here are some of the key considerations for the future of virtual revenue generation:

- ✓ **USE A SUBSCRIPTION MODEL FOR TICKETED EVENTS.** As Netflix does with shows, planners should deal with events. Bundling creates more value than selling tickets for individual events.
- ✓ **BUILD A COMMUNITY.** Content-heavy events in particular have an opportunity to get people online talking to each other on an ongoing basis, and it's just a waste to register attendees every time and reset the content for a repeat event.
- ✓ **REWARD LIVE ATTENDANCE.** The promise of the kind of engagement that only events can offer materializes only when attendees are participating live. Catching up on demand cannot be the default option. Live attendance should be rewarded with a free ticket (if the event is free); on-demand content should be paid for.
- ✓ **OFFER BETTER CONTENT ON DEMAND.** Those planning to upsell on-demand need to up their content game. The content has to be packaged in a better way. It cannot be a four-hour video to watch without cues. Break down the video per session, add notes, offer different media formats, and include audio-only access.
- ✓ **OFFER ONE-TO-ONE MEETINGS AND NETWORKING.** Networking is an ongoing struggle for virtual, and it does not deliver on business objectives. For trade shows, emphasize delivering better lead generation opportunities.



PIERRE METRAILLER

CEO, *SpotMe*

Pierre joined SpotMe in 2001 and became CEO in 2016. In 2004, after a research position on distributed algorithms at NTT Japan, he returned to SpotMe and led the pivot from proprietary hardware to SaaS, making SpotMe the leading event app and virtual event platform.

Pierre holds an MSc in communication systems from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology and is also a graduate of INSEAD. He enjoys sky running and ski mountaineering in the Swiss Alps.

EVENTS INCORPORATE MARKETECH, BOOST PRODUCTION AND EXTEND ENGAGEMENT

2020 saw a seismic shift in how we live and work. Virtual experiences were thrust to the forefront of everything from peer-to-peer communication to major industry conferences and trade shows.

These trends were already in play; 2020 simply accelerated the transition. Next year will see, first and foremost, companies' marketing teams becoming event management stewards as the norm. As a result, I see three critical event trends your team can't ignore in 2021.

1. EVENT TECH IS NOW MARTECH. Event management teams in 2021 will expect deeper integrations, lead generation and capture tools, deep analytics, and the ability to start active sales conversations before, during, and after the event.

2. DIY PRODUCTION, BUT DIY PRODUCTION THAT LOOKS GOOD. Reduced budgets, increased expectations, and new available tech will have audiences demanding highly produced shows without the 20-person crew they needed in 2020.

3. LIVE AND ON-DEMAND. 2020 pitted virtual against in-person events; 2021 will see events alternate between synchronous live experiences and asynchronous on-demand content.

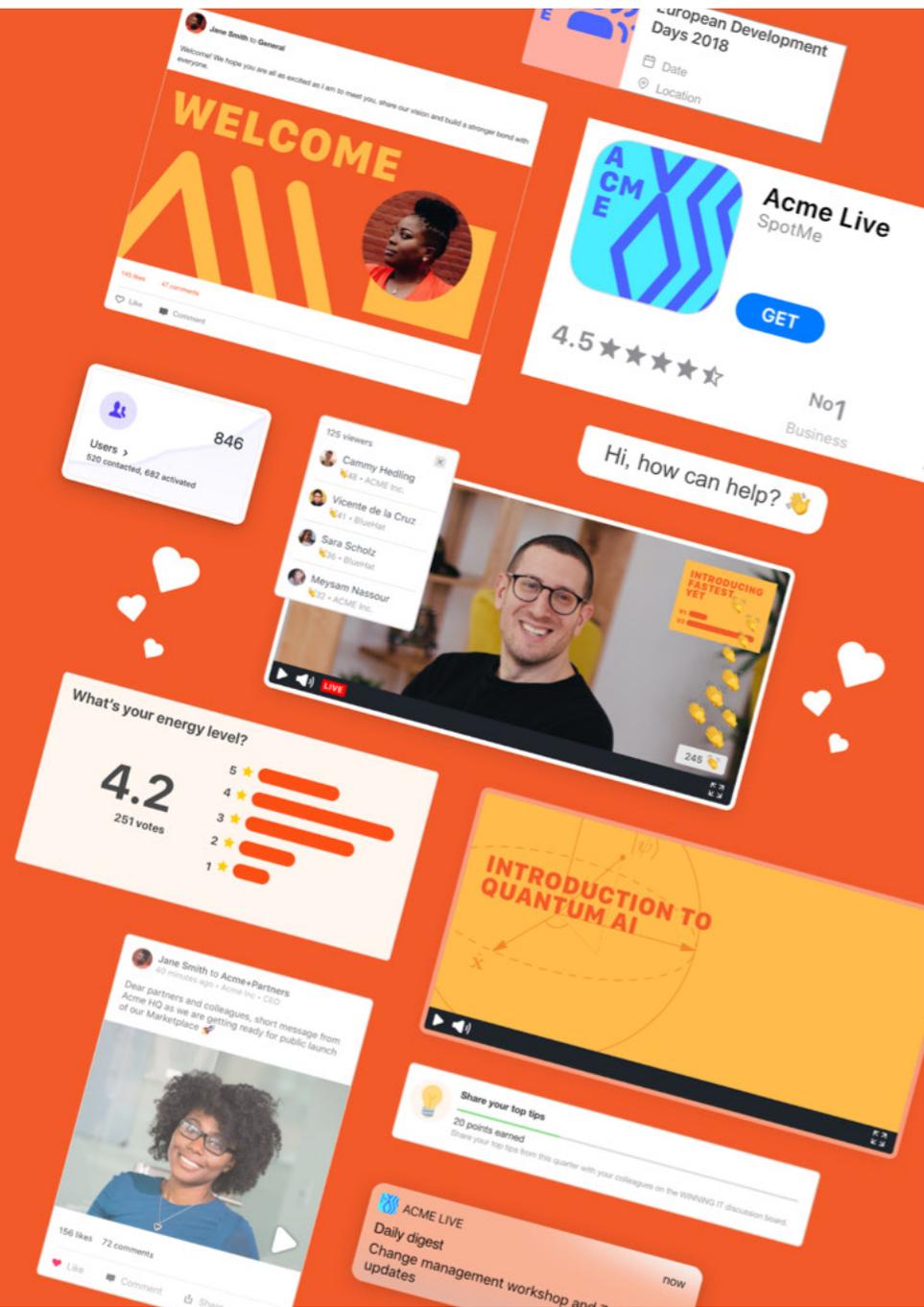
As marketing and sales teams make virtual education, entertainment, and even one-to-one experiences central components of their footprint, always-on event and demand generation strategies will require a stronger commitment to virtual event platforms that can support the data and execution sophistication modern revenue operations require.



With SpotMe you don't have to be an AV pro to create virtual events your audience loves.

Live streaming, video calls, breakouts, personalization, chatbots, branded site&app, and more.

TAKE THE TOUR



4. HYBRID IS THE FUTURE

According to EventMB's latest research, 67 percent of respondents agree that hybrid is the future of events, and 71 percent said that they would continue to employ a digital strategy even after live events return.

It's unrealistic to think that the incredibly absurd collective experience of the past 11 months won't change the way attendees consume events going forward. Event professionals had to become fluent in virtual event technology.

Here are some reasons why hybrid events will become the norm:

- ✓ **THE CAT IS OUT OF THE BAG.** Event planners now know the benefits of attending online events, as much as they are very clear about the limitations, and for many content-dependent events, virtual formats may increasingly replace in-person ones.

- ✓ **THE COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS DOESN'T FAVOR TRAVEL.** Traveling thousands of miles for a two-hour meeting is a waste of resources and money few will be able to afford, not to mention the environmental impact.
- ✓ **CORPORATE TRAVEL IS FAR FROM RESUMING.** A pillar of the event industry is corporate travel; corporate events bring money in and local economies thrive. As the pandemic drags on, many companies will need to cut luxuries such as corporate travel to attend an event and many more will be dissuaded by the liability.
- ✓ **THERE IS STILL SUBSTANTIAL RISK.** With vaccines on the horizon, now is not the time to let guards down. The percentage of those at high risk in the industry is quite substantial, and one can expect this substantial portion of attendees to prefer virtual over live in order to minimize the risk of contracting Covid-19.

What will these hybrid events look like?

- ✓ **MORE TV SHOW, LESS CONFERENCE.** Event planners can expect events to morph into the TV show format: live speakers or performers, a limited live audience, and a strong tech infrastructure, and increasingly competitive production quality.
- ✓ **NEW HIGH TECH 'VENUES'.** AV support, technology, and incredibly fast internet speed will replace former priorities like square footage.
- ✓ **BIGGER BUDGETS FOR AV THAN F&B.** Nimble AV teams able to deliver both live and online events will re-shape the current AV market, whereas food at live events may be skipped altogether to avoid unnecessary risk.
- ✓ **TWO EXPERIENCES.** The hybrid event experience will need to be co-created in a two-dimensional environment with event design that supports each audience's goals.
- ✓ **EVENT CONTENT RESET.** The industry loathed the 'keynote, breakout and repeat' format of most events — planners know for a fact these will need to go. Shorter sessions will prevail.



KELLY KNOWLEN

Executive Director of Sales Engagement and Special Events, *Hilton*

Kelly Knowlen is the Executive Director of Sales Engagement and Special Events at Hilton, where she leads the execution and strategic priorities of Hilton Worldwide Sales customer events, industry events, and internal conferences for the Americas.

Following the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, she launched Hilton EventReady with CleanStay and the EventReady Playbook, a proprietary tool providing curated resources for teams and event planners.

Knowlen began her 28-year Hilton career as a Sales Manager at DoubleTree Concourse in Atlanta. She was later promoted to Director of Sales and Marketing followed by roles as Regional DOSM and for Hilton Corporate in Sales operations, global engagement, and events.

VENUES WILL STEP UP TO SUPPORT HYBRID EVENTS IN 2021

It's clear that virtual pieces of events are here to stay for the foreseeable future – and with hybrid events quickly becoming the strategic event medium of choice, venues, like many hotels within the Hilton portfolio, are finding ways to adapt their event spaces into broadcasting studios to facilitate the highly technical aspects involved with the hybrid event production.

By creating studios in-house to facilitate pre-recorded sessions, which are then used during the event live-stream, hotel teams can keep the customers' costs internal and help the planner reduce their risk with live-streaming a majority of event content.

Our hotel teams are also working with planners to ensure they understand the accurate bandwidth needed to broadcast externally and that they have contingency plans should the event experience internet hiccups. Additionally, they build in ample rehearsal time for event producers, speakers, and event staff to test redundancies and all event technology, which is crucial for success.

As part of Hilton EventReady with CleanStay, our hotel teams provide their event planner partners with real-time updates on local ordinances related to COVID-19. Establishing a constant flow of communication from the onset of planning and staying connected before, during and even after the event to review to-dos, set-up changes and then compile post-event feedback is a must – especially in our current climate where both in-person and virtual attendance could change from one day to the next.

As hybrid events are still a relatively new concept, we encourage planners to do their homework so they can help prepare for the unknown. To arm planners with expert guidance and curated resources, this past summer we launched the Hilton EventReady Playbook, which covers a range of topics including hybrid meetings, creative meeting sets and sustainable practices for the entire attendee journey – all backed by Hilton hospitality from dedicated team members. The next version of the Playbook's Hybrid Event chapter will feature multiple case studies of successful Hilton and non-Hilton hybrid events of varying sizes with different setups. The case study material includes examples of event agendas, planning methodology, event success and many – many – lessons learned.



A Higher Standard for Meetings and Events

Hilton EventReady with CleanStay delivers event experiences that provide peace of mind from start to finish.



Hilton CleanStay Standards

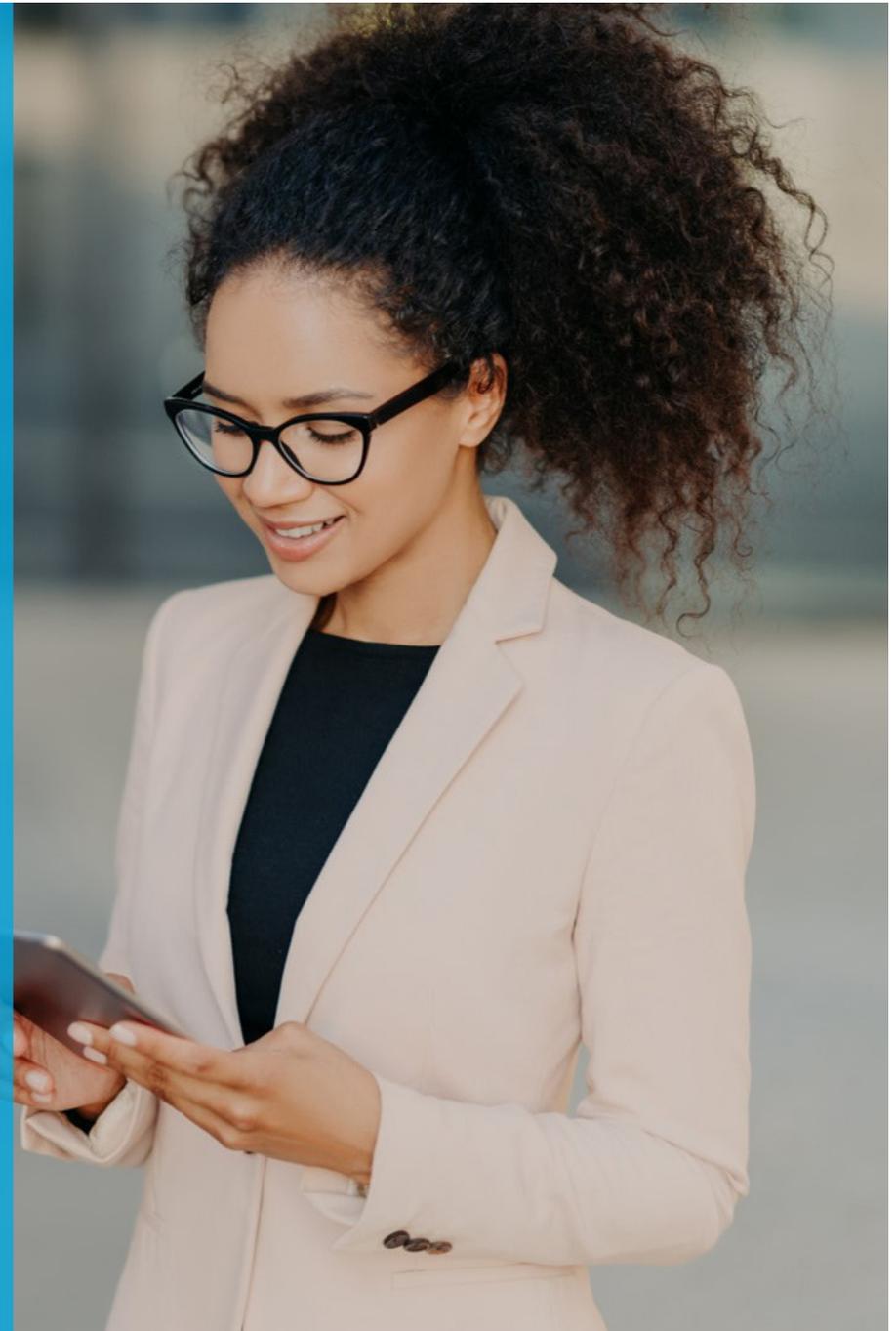


Flexible



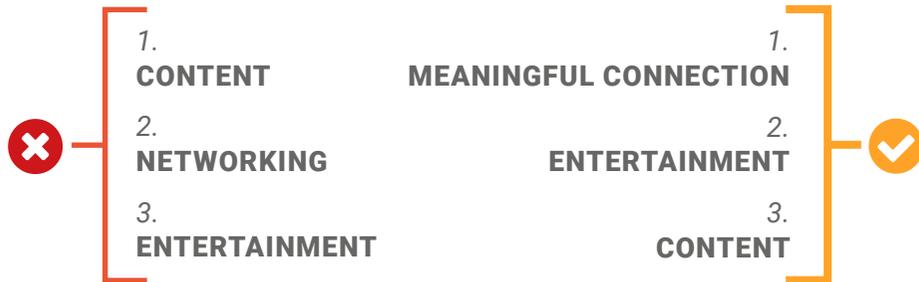
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meetings.hilton.com/eventready



5. NEW PRIORITIES

THE NEW HIERARCHY OF ATTENDEE NEEDS



The industry should focus on bringing FOMO back to virtual and hybrid events.

When planning an event, planners have a budget and a revenue objective; this logic also applies for virtual event components, but the competition is steep. The industry is in need of barriers to entry. Why should someone choose a paid for event over a free one with essentially the same offering? Invest in a more sophisticated platform, in digital event production, in professional speakers, in good moderators. If event planners are thinking zero budget, they will get zero revenue.

This trend profoundly redefines the priorities attendees will have when attending live events.

Creativity and strategy need to prevail. Content and speakers won't be the draws they used to be. Attendees will crave networking -- or better yet, connection. How events connect attendees with physical distancing, plexiglass, and face masks will be the main decider for success.

The glitzy part of experience design -- the big shows, the incredible decor -- will equally be important. After months of sensory deprivation, attendees will need more entertainment.



STEVE BRAZIER

Co-founder, *Canapii*

Steve founded Canals in 1998 to build a global technology analyst and research firm that recognized the role of the distribution channel. Canals is one of the best known and most quoted technology analyst firms. Canals has also developed a reputation for industry-shaping, high-quality events, through its global series of Canals Forums, where it drives the tech partner community to ever greater success.

Building on this experience, in 2020, Steve became one of the four founders of Canapii, a company based on the popular digital event management platform developed by Canals, its parent company. The goal of Canapii is to become the leading platform for virtual, onsite, and hybrid events by delivering amazing user experiences, and sophisticated tools for event managers. Steve holds a joint honors degree in Mathematics and Physics from the University of Bristol, UK. He also completed an international executive management program at the Stanford Graduate School of Business in the United States.

EVENT TECH WILL INTEGRATE ONSITE AND VIRTUAL CONNECTIONS

Virtual events will dominate the first half of 2021, regardless of the success of the vaccine. Only a few large companies will have budgeted to sponsor live events, and budgets will remain an issue throughout 2021 (and probably longer). They will be unwilling to take on the cost and liability of asking their staff to travel again, especially as they realize how much business they can do without the cost of travel. It also means a rapid drop in their carbon footprint for those who prioritize sustainability.

The race to develop the best virtual event platform will therefore continue, with the winners being those that emphasize engagement and activity through gorgeous UI, chats, polls, video meetings, expos, speed dating, etc.

The near future will be about hybrid events. An event venue of the future will have 'Zoom' meeting rooms so three people can meet onsite, and others easily join virtually. Conference centers and hotels need to start enabling hybrid events by equipping

meeting rooms with video collaboration tech. The future will involve your event platform (hopefully Canapii) recognizing which room attendees enter via QR code and Bluetooth based location services, thereby determining who meeting participants are. Their devices will then auto-connect to the equipment in the meeting room, enabling the hybrid meeting to start smoothly and on-time.



Extraordinary
platforms for
exceptional events

Book a demo

The image displays three overlapping screens showcasing the Canapii platform. The background is a dark blue gradient with abstract, colorful shapes in teal, pink, and yellow at the bottom right.

- Desktop View:** Shows the Canapii website interface. The browser address bar displays "https://www.canapii.com". The navigation menu includes "Home", "Event now", "Networking", "Agenda", "Virtual Run", "Polls", and "FAQ". The main content area features a large banner with the word "ACCELERATE" in white capital letters over a vibrant, abstract background. Below the banner, there is a section titled "Accelerate through digital" with a paragraph of text.
- Mobile View (Smartphone):** Shows a dashboard for "North University". The time is 8:34. The dashboard includes:
 - A "Welcome back Chris!" message with statistics: "233 new attendees" and "34 new meetings booked".
 - A "Goal Registration" section showing "89%" completion and a target of "2000".
 - A "Registration per day" line chart showing a total of "1778 Registrations".
 - A list of meeting statuses:
 - 709 Approved Meetings
 - 289 Pending Meetings
 - 122 Cancelled Meetings
 - 0 Deleted Meetings
- Tablet View:** Shows a grid of event cards, with one card labeled "Booked" and another labeled "New".

6. AUDIO TO COMBAT ZOOM FATIGUE

Zoom fatigue and platforms like Clubhouse are spurring a new way of hosting events: audio-only.

This may seem at odds with engagement, but the point is to offer attendee-centric options. Convenience is central to the success of the format. On Clubhouse, everybody participates via their phone. Some speakers are walking their dog, some others are multitasking at work. Portability is a key concept.

Offering audio attendance could help to create new ticket opportunities for paid-for virtual events as well as giving more relaxed attendance options to those who feel overwhelmed by Zoom meetings and virtual event invites.

Moreover, listening as opposed to watching stimulates a part of the brain that makes us visualize concepts. This is a completely different experience from having the event on a desktop window while attendees are multitasking.

- ✓ **PLAN CONTENT IN A WAY THAT ACCOMMODATES ALL AUDIENCES.** Having substantial visual references may alienate the audience listening in.
- ✓ **DON'T ASK ATTENDEES TO CONNECT ON A MOBILE BROWSER.** Offering an audio-only stream is key to optimizing background playback.
- ✓ **OFFER EVENT PODCASTS.** Event podcasts should be optimized for major consumption platforms.



COREY MCCARTHY

Chief Marketing Officer, *Socio*

Corey McCarthy has more than twenty years of experience in media and tech. As Socio's Chief Marketing Officer, Corey and her team bring event organizers impactful tech and thought leadership that truly delivers success.

In her former life, Corey ran a portfolio brand for Penton Media, and has extensive insights into all facets of the event, digital media, and publishing businesses.

VIRTUAL WILL IMPROVE TO DOMINATE 2021

According to recent Socio research on the current and future state of B2B events, even with a vaccine on the horizon, virtual events will remain the go-to event format for a majority of 2021.

- ✓ The majority of respondents said their companies' post-Covid (2021) events will be virtual.
- ✓ 59 percent of respondents reported that less than 25 percent of their greater event programming will incorporate in-person events in 2021.
- ✓ 1 in 5 respondents reported that they will produce no in-person events in 2021.

And when in-person events do start to return, we should anticipate a hybrid model consisting of smaller in-person gatherings combined with a much larger virtual attendee base.

However, the continued reliance on virtual will require event planners to improve virtual ROI. While we saw the industry make incredible progress with virtual and hybrid events, demonstrating ROI is still challenging for many organizations.

According to our study, while almost half of the respondents reported an increase in their attendance, only **27 percent of respondents achieved a positive ROI**

from their virtual events in 2020. Notably, of those who did see a positive ROI from their virtual events, more than half reported increased attendance.

Considering these learnings, I think marketing and attendee attraction efforts will play a key role in helping organizations grow their virtual attendance, and ultimately their ROI.

There was a sharp learning curve in 2020 as we learned to pivot our events to a digital format and reimagine all the facets of event design, but we've made significant advancements as an industry when it comes to live streaming, engaging virtual attendees, leveling up production value, and so much more.

The pandemic forced us to innovate. What we accomplished in 2020 alone likely would have taken years under normal circumstances. When you compare those early virtual events run on meeting software to the high-production value events we're starting to see today, I think we've only scratched the surface of what we can actually accomplish.

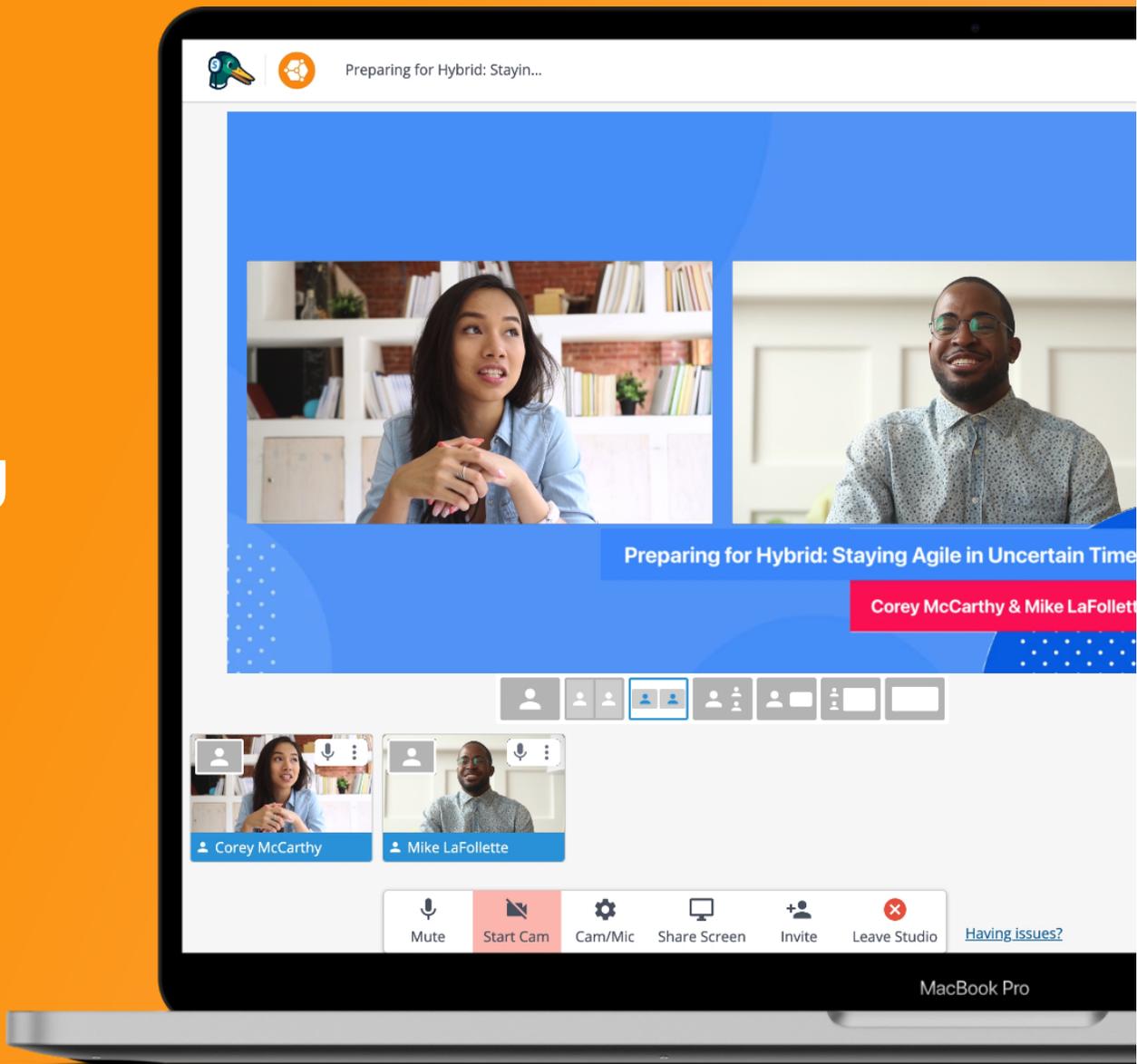
I believe 2021 is truly the year of the virtual event — and we have to nail it.



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Self-service ease meets
TV-quality production.

See How



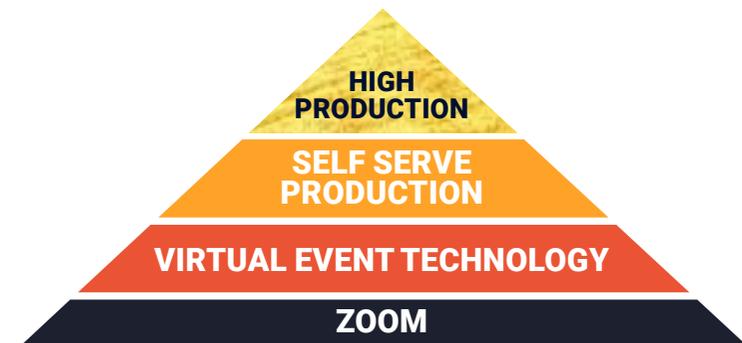
7. VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE SCALE UP

Even those who have done virtual events before January 2020 have never experienced the demand and depth the industry witnesses these days. Whatever virtual event technology platforms were before the pandemic hit, that represents a tiny fraction of what they are today. Many event technology companies I talked to confirm that the level of inbound requests they are receiving is at an all-time high, and there is no sign they are going down.

Event tech providers have also reported a shift in priorities just over the course of the pandemic, with event planners switching gears from scrambling for tech solutions they could launch quickly and unproblematically to a more demanding, purposeful and strategic purchasing approach.

While having a Zoom meeting was OK in March and April, needs are getting more sophisticated. As a result, expectations are evolving. The market is evolving.

- ✓ **ZOOM.** Zoom remains the primary layer to run virtual events. Internal events and those events in need of a quick transition to virtual continue to prefer this platform for its reliability and easy-to-use interface.
- ✓ **VIRTUAL EVENT TECHNOLOGY.** The platforms that were conceived as 100% virtual or that pivoted from a live component are now developing native streaming services that allow for some basic production features — three or four-speaker views, overlays, and lower thirds are popping up.
- ✓ **PRODUCTION SUPPORT.** About a fifth of event professionals rely on their virtual tech provider for AV and production support, and these teams are taking on the role of AV companies and producing the full event.
- ✓ **SELF-SERVE PRODUCTION PLATFORMS.** Tools that more or less one-dimensionally enhance the production value of live streams will soon be cannibalized by virtual event technology platforms.
- ✓ **HIGH PRODUCTION COMPANIES.** Events are happening with increasingly sophisticated levels of production. As travel restrictions ease, TV studios and virtual venues are popping up.





HOYIN CHEUNG

Founder & CEO, *Remo*

Hoyin is a serial entrepreneur, product manager, and digital marketer with an 8-figure Amazon business, a mobile agency, and also a \$1M ARR B2B SaaS company. His core passions lie in helping businesses to grow in a scalable way with the software tools his team develops. Hoyin has over seven years of experience building remote teams and has worked with Fortune 100 companies like Nike, Best Buy, TJ Maxx, SunGard, Cardinal Health, and Kaiser Permanente.

With experience in scaling three high growth companies from zero to multi-million dollars in revenue, Hoyin loves building businesses and processes for scale. He has expertise in creating and developing a B2B sales, product management, and growth marketing (PPC, SEO, content marketing, funnel optimization) team.

BETTER AND MORE FREQUENT VIRTUAL EXPERIENCES WILL DRIVE REVENUE

FEWER AND SMALLER EVENTS.

The pre-Corona paradigm of having large events once a year exposed its soft underbelly. Large ‘one and done’ events create peaks and valleys in audience engagement and interaction. Audiences are engaged during the event cycle, but then they disappear for the rest of the year — taking their valuable attention, connections, and spending power with them.

In 2021, small and intimate events (less than 300 people) will happen more frequently (1-2 times per month), allowing event planners and brands to build more enduring, profitable relationships with their audiences. For attendees, these will also lead to a more unique and meaningful personal experience rather than feeling like a statistic in a data set.

While they may sprout from a large “parent” event, smaller events will be a fixture in 2021.

A NEW WAVE OF THE VIRTUAL EVENT EVOLUTION.

The first wave of online events was predominantly live streaming, webinars, and content creation as brands scrambled to connect with their audiences online during the initial Coronavirus outbreak. But these events lacked human connections and left attendees dissatisfied.

Now, attendees want to interact with each other and sponsors through structured or serendipitous encounters. I believe we’ll continue to see more metrics around how connections are made during events and how this will be quantified to business value.

In the next wave, brands will invest in longer-term, sustained customer relationships with more profound engagement. The evolution of social media in events will develop into interactive (two-way) relationships between audiences and brands that become increasingly symbiotic.

EXPERIENCES DRIVING SPONSOR COMPETITION.

A rise in experiential events will attract a wide variety of global and national brands competing to be associated with them. As we head once again into a worldwide increase of Coronavirus, those who thought we’d go back to live events in 2021 are realizing it’s not going to happen, so brands formerly on the sidelines will start to get serious about sponsoring online events.

This influx of sponsors will lead to breakthroughs in creative sponsorship as brands seek to stand out. The unique virtual experiences designed to attract their audiences will force virtual event organizers to push the limits of sensory engagement — sight, sound, taste (it’s happening), and more!

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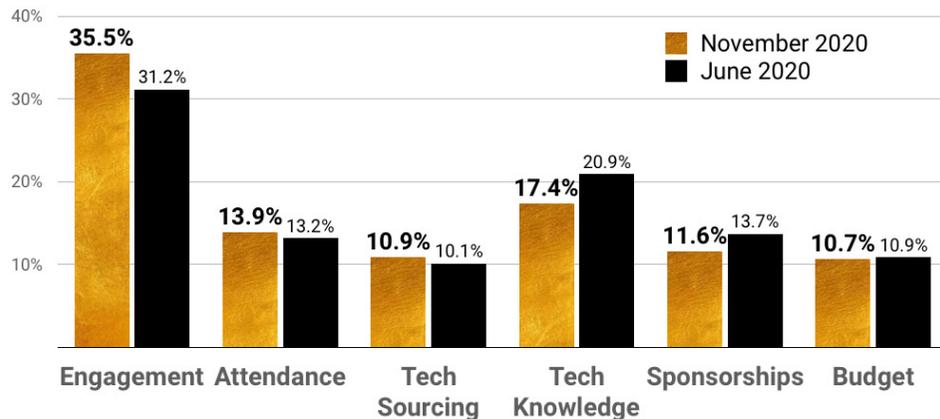


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8. REDEFINING ENGAGEMENT

Event professionals concur that engagement is the number one challenge they have with virtual events.



The question is how to define engagement for a virtual audience and where the blame rests for this lack of engagement – on the event platform or on poor event design.

Engagement 2.0 in 2021 must be a mix mixture of well-designed event experiences that have engagement moments built into the event itself and a virtual event platform that is able to deliver those engagement moments for both online and offline audiences.

As a result, event planners will need to completely revise their plans when it comes to delivering engaging events. They will need to think about different formats for online and offline, and hybrid interaction will be completely different and engage audiences on different levels.

That means coming up with two separate engagement strategies for each audience. It means rethinking the overall event design from the core, particularly regarding formats that never worked even pre-pandemic: the keynote/breakout session format, or the panel format without any touch points between an online or offline audience.

Then the industry will need a stronger investigation of the event technology platforms, which are evolving at a very fast pace. This means better scrutiny of the engagement features that they offer as well as a much better, sounder delivery on those features. Support from event technology partners will also be a major factor in that production plays a role in the engagement of the audience. Based on EventMB's latest research, nearly a fifth of event professionals rely on their virtual event tech provider to help them with production. Very basic events that don't invest in engaging content delivery (especially online) will have inevitably lower engagement levels.

9. INCLUSION 2.0

While 2020 has seen a major shift in priorities, the issue of systemic racism is front and center. The event industry must do better. While the work of operating more diverse and inclusive events is not easy, there are a number of quick wins event professionals can achieve to build momentum for these larger systemic changes. Speaker panels should be one of the easiest things to diversify, but organizations continue to miss the mark.

Based on recent EventMB research, 33 percent of events examined over 2019 and 2020 didn't even have one Black speaker. If the bar for diversity is raised to having a percentage of the panel representation that actually reflects the percentage of any given diversity category in the general population, the number of events with speaker diversity is likely far fewer. Based on the

research criteria, a 20-speaker event with 19 white male speakers and one Black female speaker would still be included in the 67 percent of events who hit all the diversity criteria.

People are used to thinking of 67 percent as a passing grade, but when 100 percent of events purport to cater to all audiences, a C+ in diversity is still a fail by a large margin.

For members of marginalized communities, diversity in positions of power, authority, or respect is essential for reinforcing the belief that people in marginalized communities can participate and have a place at every strata of the business. But it also has value to the industry as a whole. Diversity is not just about representation, it's about allowing everyone to benefit from the richness in knowledge and experience that comes from different perspectives.

- ✓ **USE EVENTMB'S *Black Event Business Directory*.** EventMB has always been committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Use the growing directory to source Black event partners in a given region or city.
- ✓ **REACH OUT TO BLACK PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES.** For more guidance and resources, contact these communities and organizations:
 - Black Event Planners and Meeting Professionals
 - Black in Events Network
 - The Black Table
 - National Events Council
 - National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals

10. THE NEW FUN (IT'S NOT ALCOHOL)

Happy hours have long been a staple of networking activities at live events, but they've been largely left out of the virtual scene. As the industry looks to a hybrid future, event professionals have an opportunity to reevaluate the role of alcohol at business events.

Somewhat ironically, the biggest reason to include alcohol is also the biggest reason to exclude it: It reduces people's inhibitions at a time when compliance

with health and safety regulations is more important than ever.

- ✓ **ALCOHOL INCREASES TRANSMISSION RISK.** Alcohol consumption simultaneously inhibits the disposition to comply and counteracts the two fundamental tools for reducing transmission: the wearing of masks and the enforcement of social distancing.
- ✓ **ALCOHOL ENTAILS LIABILITY.** While some have pointed out that virtual attendees are free to consume whatever beverages they have on hand at home, actively providing alcohol to attendees is assuming a level of liability that does not apply with remote participants who act of their own accord.
- ✓ **CHOICE DOES NOT EQUAL INCLUSIVITY.** Many legitimately cannot partake but feel pressured to attend networking sessions, putting themselves in the awkward position of having to constantly refuse well-meaning offers of alcohol—a practice which itself can alienate them from the networking attendees came there to do.
- ✓ **ALCOHOL UNDERMINES EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING.** Alcohol changes the nature of what people are there to do, and undermines the value for that segment of the audience who want to stay focused on professional opportunities.
- ✓ **HYBRID EVENTS ARE RECORDED.** It bears mentioning that the hybrid nature of these events means that everyone is effectively on camera, and most people would not be keen on the idea of their alcohol-influenced conversations being recorded or broadcast over the internet.

Event planners need to challenge themselves to reexamine the networking goals and objectives for the smaller hybrid experiences to come. What will justify the expense and the risk for prospective attendees? Hint: It's not a party.

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