

Going Virtual: Best practices for rewriting the playbook on event marketing

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A common misconception by first-time virtual event organizers is that digital is easier to execute than in-person. But the reality is virtual is just a different beast. A digital execution requires a heavy lift and is a rapidly transforming channel that is still heavily experimental. Rather than trying to force the trappings of what happened in person into an online experience, the most successful companies have reinvented their entire program and strategy from start to finish.

As the organizer of the massive Consumer Electronics Show (CES), the Consumer Technology Association started from scratch in preparation for the fully virtual January 2021 event. “We had to shift our mindset away from producing a physical show,” said Jean Foster, senior vice president of marketing and communications. “Like any organization, we had a playbook on how to approach CES. We’re ripping up our playbook via marketing, via our content, via our sales, and via sales engagement, because physical is a very different experience and we’re really creating a new playbook for a digital environment.”

Ideally, marketers should throw out the in-person roadmap and devise a virtual event strategy from the ground up. eMarketer

identified three key best practices for event marketers rewriting the playbook:

- **Reassess the goals of a virtual event strategy.** With so much transformation underway, now is the time to reconsider the objectives of an event strategy. Those primary goals may be very different from what could have been achieved in person, and that is OK. A virtual event cannot accomplish all of the same things, but it should accomplish what was intended.
- **Explore what type of event is right to accomplish those goals.** There are several varieties of virtual events that B2B companies can execute, whether as a host or as a sponsor. This is a time to experiment and get creative, so it's important to consider all options and select the appropriate type of event based on the established goals.
- **Realize that virtual events have the power to reach a larger audience (if desired).** In August 2020, Bizzabo asked event marketers in Asia-Pacific, Europe, and North America about the benefits of virtual events: 80.2% said they saw considerably more reach and were able to attract a wider audience. There are several reasons for these benefits: Virtual events disencumber both organizers and attendees from the limitations of the venue space; physical accessibility is no longer a factor; travel is not necessary; and it's often less expensive (or free) for attendees to join.

"Marketers must recognize that a virtual event is a marketing activity that takes place based upon the marketing goal," said Peter Micciche, CEO of enterprise event management software company Certain. "Are you trying to accelerate a sales cycle? Are you trying to educate your community? Are you trying to penetrate a new marketplace? Are you trying to get customers to upsell? Those are all different objectives and they all require a different strategy and a different approach."

To get a virtual event off the ground, marketers should use the event life cycle to break planning and logistics into three stages: the pre-event, the event experience, and the post-event.

Join us at our upcoming webinar to hear more from Jillian Ryan, eMarketer principal analyst at Insider Intelligence, on what event organizers and sponsors have learned, and essential tips to keep up with this transforming space. [Click here to reserve your seat.](#)