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The Ultimate Guide to
HYBRID EVENTS

Best Practices and Solutions to Delivering
SUCCESSFUL HYBRID MEETINGS

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WHAT THIS GUIDE INCLUDES

Regardless of the industry, organizations use training, networking, and collaboration events as a foundation for growth and progress. In-person events often make collaboration more effective however, when meeting in person is not possible, hybrid and virtual meeting technology offers a great alternative.

While there has been a considerable shift in the virtual meeting space, many event program managers are still struggling to incorporate virtual components s because they don't know how to leverage hybrid technology and communicate the value to stakeholders and attendees. By understanding the strengths and limitations of hybrid events, meeting owners can offer this dynamic solution more effectively.

GET SOLUTIONS AND ANSWERS

This resource guide is designed to provide best practices, solutions, and answer questions about how to deliver a hybrid meeting, training event, or conference. We do not suggest a particular platform or technology—rather, we explore the options and solutions that will best fit a variety of event needs. As a result, there is no one size fits all solution.

We present a definition of a hybrid event, and discuss technology trends and how these are contributing to added benefits. We also address the challenges and limitations of hybrid.

We provide a success story on how a prominent medical device company pivoted a large in-person event to hybrid, offer tips for delivering a successful event, and provide advice on how to prepare for and overcome potential obstacles.

We hope these tips and tools will help organizers implement hybrid components into their next event more successfully.

WHAT WE WILL COVER

1. What is a hybrid event
2. Industry trends and statistics
3. Benefits and challenges of going hybrid
4. Whether the hybrid event model is right for you
5. How to implement a successful hybrid event
6. Tips and best practices for success
7. Marketing hybrid events

We hope this guide is your go-to resource to more effective, efficient, and enhanced events through the hybrid model.

HYBRID MEETING PLANNING SHEET

WHAT IS A HYBRID EVENT?

SOME PERSPECTIVE

COVID-19 completely changed the MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and events) industry. While hybrid components existed and were being used primarily by larger companies, the pandemic forced virtual meetings to become more pervasive as a way to keep business moving. While some organizations were able to convert their events easily to hybrid or completely virtual, others found it difficult either because of the content limitations, technology, or logistical challenges.

Virtual event technology has been effectively used within the events industry with on-line ticketing and registration, live-streaming, and more. Today, virtual components are becoming much more commonplace as organizations embrace the capabilities and benefits of tracking meeting ROI and increasing engagement.

ACCORDING TO WIKI, A HYBRID EVENT IS...

A tradeshow, conference, unconference, seminar, workshop or other meeting that combines a live, in-person component with a virtual, on-line component.

WHY HYBRID

When event program managers are tasked with increasing participant engagement and reach, many have looked at marketing solutions rather than a hybrid model. However, both meeting champions and participants alike now better understand and welcome the convenience and cost savings of adding virtual components. In fact, it is even preferred in some cases.

With hybrid events, the focus is on the attendee and their desired engagement. And because virtual solutions are more accessible to both organizations and participants, there is no need to limit your reach, worry about transportation and lodging logistics, or fear cancellations due to restrictions or circumstances.

For the purposes of this guide, hybrid meetings will always be referred to synchronous (live) events that incorporate both in-person and virtual components. They create an equal experience for both local and remote attendees and presenters— effectively expanding the event.

TWO MAIN COMPONENTS

The hybrid meeting model features two main components: an in-person experience and a virtual platform.

In-person meeting components may include presenters and trainers, a trade show, breakout rooms, performers/entertainment, demonstrations, and more. Remote participants can join in virtually to observe or engage with speakers and fellow attendees by using various tools to ask questions (verbally or by chat), take surveys, or participate in breakout sessions with live and/or other remote participants and/or presenters. The configurations of a hybrid meeting are only limited by the imagination. In the physical event space, in-person participants can be more aware of their virtual counterparts through additional screens such as laptops, tablets, and other A/V tools that allow them to see and hear remote attendees.

Hybrid has opened up attendance to audiences around the globe. Live-streamed events and other presentations may be recorded and viewed on demand in different time zones. Engagement tools, such as chat and polls may also be used for comments and questions.

The most popular setups include:

LIVE MEETINGS WITH VIRTUAL COMPONENTS

In this scenario, the organization hosts a live, venue-based meeting with space for a general session, breakout session rooms, and a dining area. In addition, a portion of the live meeting is broadcast to remote attendees.

LIVE PRESENTER WITH VIRTUAL ATTENDEES

Requiring much less space, this model has the speaker(s) present from a studio or staged location while remote attendees interact through a digital platform. The audience participates from multiple individual locations such as their office.

VIRTUAL MEETING WITH REMOTE ATTENDEES

Attendees particpate from remote satellite locations in smaller groups, and presenters are either in person, virtual or provide pre-recorded content. This webcasting option may also include live components such as Q&A or chat.

Live Events + **Virtual Components** = **Powerful Experiential Environment and Wider Reach**

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TRENDS

With the prevalence of social media, video conferencing, mobile learning, and workplace BYOD (bring your own device), organizations have a fantastic opportunity to leverage these technologies to create a powerful, engaging, and wide-reaching virtual environment to complement the in-person event space.

TREND #1:

Remote Workforce Training and Development

The remote workforce is growing with work from home (WFH), collaborative workspaces, and flexible hot-desk options. Concurrently, the cultural paradigm for training and development is also changing. Companies are now using virtual and hybrid events to train, onboard, gather satellite offices together, provide product demonstrations, and more.

In a study conducted by Training Industry, 37% of companies' training portfolios are now being offered in either a purely virtual or hybrid delivery model, with 31% of total learners attending training remotely. The study also cited the majority (82%) of virtual instructor-led training was primarily for internal training

and used to complete certifications, increase product knowledge, increase leadership development, and increase technical skills.

The trend toward virtual and hybrid events is expected to increase as companies seek more efficient and effective methods to stay competitive. As the technology learning curve decreases, employees and organizations will become more accustomed to gathering remotely to conduct business activities traditionally done in person.

TREND #2:

Safety and Sustainability

The value and impact of in-person events cannot be understated. However, on the heels of a world health crisis, economic uncertainty, and increasing negative effects of climate change, the hybrid meeting model is being looked at as a great way to ensure safety, control costs, and promote sustainability.

In addition to hybrid technology, companies are shifting to digital media instead of printed materials. More and more, educational content, agendas, schedules, and presentations are being delivered via apps, PDF, or through an on-line content management system. On-line registration, virtual tickets, digital gifts, and on-line surveys are other ways companies are reducing paper during events.

Safety and sustainability are top of mind for in-person meetings as well. Wellness checks and sanitization stations are now must-have on-site elements. Similarly, event managers are seeking eco-friendly venues that offer energy-efficient appliances, water conservation protocols, and energy-efficient transportation to meet their organization's sustainability requirements.

Continued...

> The trend toward virtual and hybrid events is expected to increase as companies seek more efficient and effective methods to stay competitive.

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TRENDS ...*Continued*

TREND #3:

Faster Time to Market and Resources

Innovation, agility, and faster time to market is a growing trend, as speed directly contributes to competitive success for many companies. Companies that make it first out of the gate typically get to enjoy setting premium prices early in their product life cycle yielding higher profits. Hybrid events support a faster time to market by lifting the geographic barriers, travel logistics and expense, and force majeure shutdowns.

When it comes to product launches, sales demonstrations, and dissemination of company-wide changes, these events usually cannot be postponed. Hybrid events allow for faster time to resources to keep organizations moving forward on mission-critical tasks.

TREND #4:

Increased Engagement and Personalization

The hybrid environment is made for individual preferences. For example, attendees with disabilities may opt to attend events virtually, where their needs are better accommodated. Today's virtual technology includes screen readers, closed captioning, and other aids to customize the meeting experience.

With hybrid events, audience engagement is a top priority and is often cited as a key indicator of overall event success. Numerous learning and development studies purport that higher levels of engagement directly correspond to higher retention rates and increased attendee satisfaction. Hybrid events, when done well, allow both live and virtual participants to engage more fully.

Today's most popular virtual engagement tools include surveys, games, polling, chat, and digital whiteboards. Speakers who are presenting to hybrid audiences can use these tools to engage both in person and remote attendees simultaneously.

TREND #5:

Event Destination Personalization

The pandemic has caused an increase in awareness of health, hygiene, and safety. Just as other major life-changing events have altered public experiences, masks, physical distancing, increased hygiene, and other safety measures are likely here to stay. While many love in-person events, others feel more comfortable in smaller groups or in the safety of their own space.

Hybrid events allow participants to engage in events at their own comfort level while allowing organizations to enjoy high attendance rates.

> The best events consider the most fundamental element of success: the attendee experience.

BENEFITS OF HYBRID

The observed and studied benefits of virtual and hybrid events continue to grow, but there are still challenges to overcome. Understanding both will help you to create more successful events and avoid pitfalls.

BENEFIT #1

Improved Audience Engagement

The goal of most events is to create engagement that leads to action— such as to drive sales, improve staff performance, or build loyalty and connection. Hybrid events provide a better opportunity for providing choice in how a participant *wants* to engage with the event, creating an improved experience.

BENEFIT #2

Extended Reach

Hybrid events provide the most flexibility and reach, allowing you to tailor the experience to attendance preferences, include a geographically-dispersed audience, all without comprimising the event experience. Because the event can be recorded, there is an added benefit to provide on-demand content at a later date to extend the reach even further. Post-event content can also be referenced later by attendees to reinforce learning content long after the event has finished.

BENEFIT #3

Faster Time to Market / Time to Resources

Combining face-to-face and other virtual components balances and optimizes meeting effectiveness and efficiency, making better use of time and money. As a result, organizations report exceptional results from their hybrid meeting initiatives:

· Events are produced more efficiently

· There is more participation at events due to increased flexibility

· Companies experience reduced travel costs and employee time away from office

Acceleration of mission-critical knowledge, both internally (staff and stakeholders) and externally (customers, members, partners), has a profound impact on the organization's bottom line.

BENEFIT #4

Improved ROI

Hybrid events improve ROI by combining all of the benefits stated here. Delivering a hybrid event may not be less expensive than a traditional, in-person meeting, but the overall ROI it delivers makes it a top alternative.

Hybrid events allow you to harness the power of both in-person and virtual experiences to expand your event reach and make it easier for your audience to attend. It provides tools to customize the attendee experience and increase engagement. Lastly, hybrid technology provides efficiencies in meeting administration.

BENEFIT #5

More Choice and Flexibility

Hybrid events is all about audience choice. Some are excited about traveling to a new destination and staying at the venue. Others are excited about the speakers and session tracks. Providing attendees the choice to attend the way that suits them best is a fantastic benefit not achieved by in-person or virtual only.

> ROI Improves because of higher engagement, extended reach, faster production, and the ability to expand the event beyond the physical venue.

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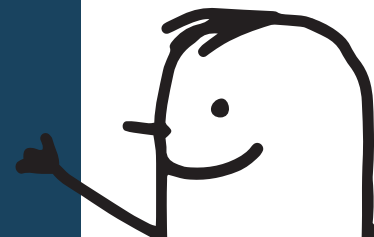
CHALLENGES OF HYBRID

CHALLENGE #1

Planning Two Events

When starting out with hybrid, you may approach it as planning two events instead of one. It's important that you keep a balance between the two event formats and ensure they are properly synced.

It's also important to create a unified experience. This means choosing the right platform that supports both meeting formats equally. Choose a platform and engagement tools that can connect your in-person attendees to remote attendees and your entire audience to the presenters equally.

Working with a hybrid event planning expert will help you choose the right event technology that supports your program goals without draining your budget. Don't be too experimental at the risk of attendee satisfaction and engagement.

CHALLENGE #2

Setting Prices for Events

If your event invovles ticketing, you may struggle with setting prices for both in-person and virtual attendance. If your aim is to create a unified event, you might not want to set different prices for in-person and virtual attendance. Instead, try a tiered approach. This puts the onus on the attendee to make the decision on the value of a particular event or experience.

CHALLENGE #3

Connecting On-line and Onsite Attendees at All Times

Collaborating in event breakout rooms is one thing, but what about networking. With hybrid events, the challenge is to keep both on-line and onsite audiences engaged equally and maximum opportunities for them to connect with each other.

Working with a hybrid event planning expert can help you with ideas on how you can leverage the platform to create virtual networking lounges, incorporate tablets onsite for attendees to better connect to each other, use social media feeds and content to create discussions.

And what about meal breaks? There is a potential to lose your virtual audience during these times, since meals are often the best times to chat and network with other attendees. Consider your program flow to ensure that there is equal opportunity for both types of attendees.

CHALLENGE #4

Catering to Different Time Zones

Hybrid meetings expand the reach of your audience, which means that attendees could be in any time zone.

Setting a suitable schedule to conduct your meeting is challenging and will not meet the needs of your entire audience. To overcome this you may wish to host the event over multiple days or create on-demand content so that everyone feels included. Incorporate sessions that may be delivered live in the time zones with the most participants.

Encourage attendees that are watching on-demand content to ask questions and leave comments for follow up later.

CHALLENGE #5

Proving Value to Event Sponsors

Because hybrid meetings are still a relatively new concept, event sponsors may be leary of the benefit it provides to them.

The fact is, you can provide the same brand exposure to virtual attendees as you can at the venue. Today's hybrid platforms allow for full customization supporting digital banner displays and realistic virtual booth environments. On-line scheduling apps make virtual matchmaking sessions possible.

An added advantage to hybrid is that virtual attendee traffic may be tracked and recorded, making it easier to see who visited your virtual booth and what content they interacted with.

A BUSINESS CASE STUDY FOR HYBRID MEETINGS

HYBRID EVENT STATS

Here are some current statistics courtesy of Markletic.com, that speak to the success factors, trends, and predictions of hybrid events.

Hybrid Event Success & ROI

1. 86% of B2B organizations see a positive ROI of their hybrid events 7 months after the event date.

2. 81% of event organizers say that networking capabilities are a key contributor to audience satisfaction of hybrid events.

3. 47% of event organizers say that hybrid events are a solution in connecting internationally dispersed audiences.

4. 89% of event organizers measure the success of their hybrid events by attendee satisfaction.

5. 66% of event organizers state that live sessions contribute to higher audience engagement and overall event success.

Hybrid Event Outlook and Predictions

1. 34% of event organizers expect to invest more in hybrid events in the next few years.

2. 21% of marketers say they are procuring a hybrid event platform.

3. 57% of respondents say they would rather attend an in-person version of a hybrid event than the virtual version.

4. 72% of respondents believe they will get more value out of attending a hybrid event in-person.

5. 25% of respondents say they will host between 5-10 hybrid events per year.

Hybrid Events in The Enterprise

1. 63% of companies with 2,000-5,000 employees included hybrid events in their event portfolio.

2. 71% of organizations with 5,000+ employees have hybrid events in their portfolio.

3. 38% of enterprise organizations say that costs related to venue, A/V, and branding are the biggest hybrid event expense.

4. At enterprise level hybrid events, 59% of attendees join the in-person version of the hybrid event.

5. 32% of enterprise organizations say that their global events team primarily host hybrid events.
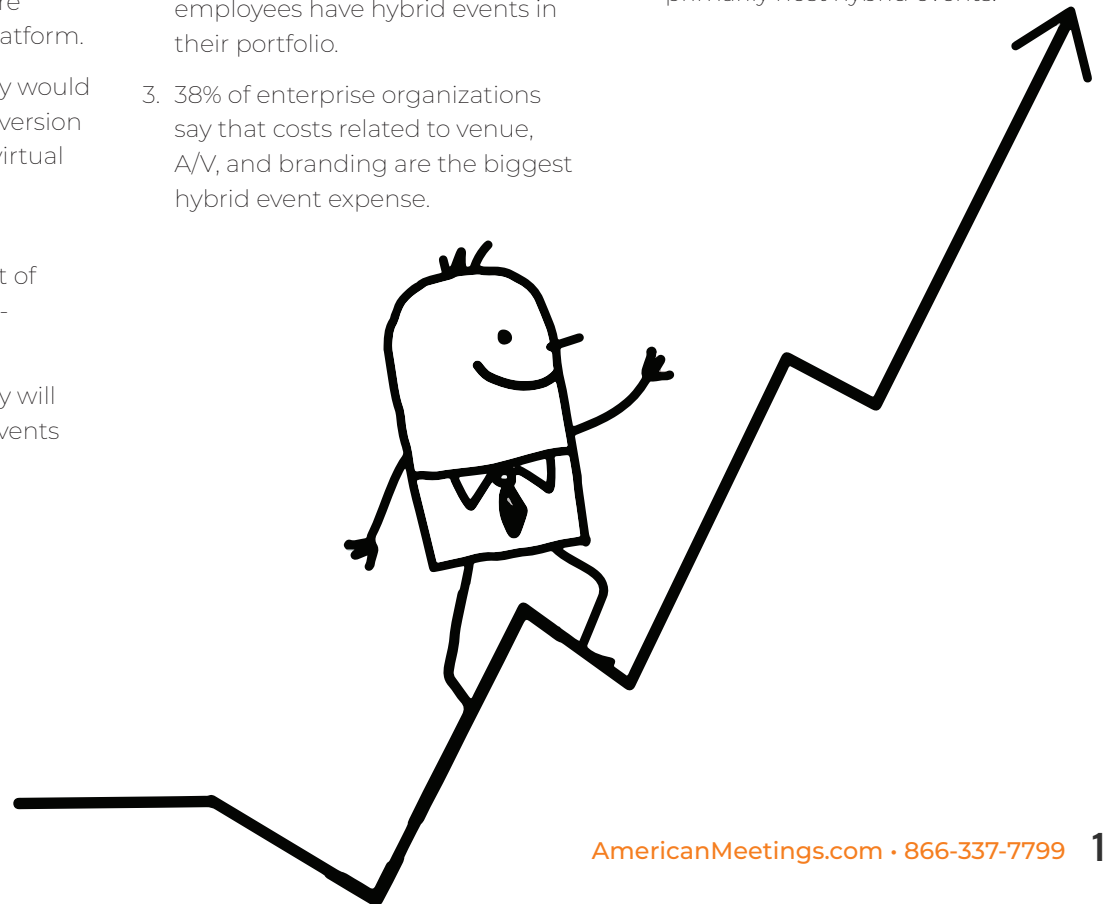
CASE STUDY

Stratus®

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National sales meetings are an annual event for Stratus, a medical equipment company. So when COVID-19 shutdowns brought a halt to their live event plans, they sought other solutions to deliver mission-critical information to their staff.

Being 100 percent virtual wouldn't meet their needs, so they looked at a hybrid model to support their objectives while maintaining safety and following local mandates.

CHALLENGE

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced travel shutdowns, Stratus was in a bind. They needed to train their sales representatives on a new sales model, build team collaboration, and communicate a corporate rebranding.

SOLUTION

Stratus set up "pod" locations that allowed little to no travel for participants. Each pod chose a venue to support their small group of 10–12 attendees plus a Regional Director and AV support.

The corporate headquarters became a studio that produced the high-quality broadcast to the six local pods plus the headquarter audience. First, participants were given information from headquarters, and then the Regional Directors took over training with corporate resources.

To circle back around, each local pod shared videos of their representatives demonstrating the new training materials. Then, they turned this into a contest with winners for the best role-playing videos, further strengthening the training and building the team remotely.

Continued…

BY IMPLEMENTING HYBRID EVENT SOLUTIONS, STRATUS WAS ABLE TO:

1. Gather together people in seven locations for simultaneous communication

2. Record the event for later viewing by participants not able to attend live

3. Create consistent communication to their staff as they would if it were a large scale event

4. Implement creative solutions for teaching and delivering content

5. Empowered local leadership to direct their local staff for team building
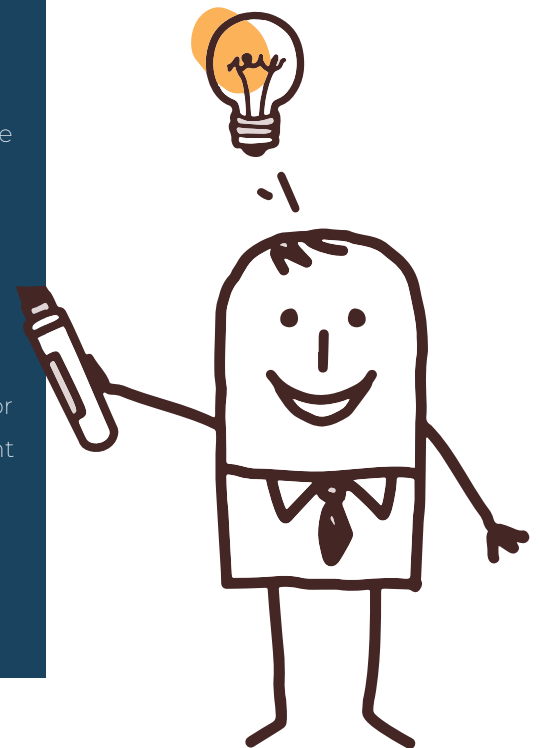
CASE STUDY

Stratus®

...Continued

RESULTS, ROI, AND FUTURE PLANS

Stratus was put in a position outside of their control and now understands and can choose to continue their future sales meetings in person or hybrid.

1. By using a hybrid model, Stratus was able to get 100 percent participation from staff who attended the event or watched the recordings after the event. Previously, headquarter staff didn't participate in the event.

2. Regional managers were tasked with training their staff, empowering them to lead and connect with the smaller groups more effectively.

3. Because of decreased podium and travel time, corporate created information materials tailored for participants with relevant local information.

The overall experience for both presenters and staff has been overwhelmingly positive. The hybrid model, primarily implemented under stressful conditions (some cities and states still weren't allowing travel), allowed higher participation and lower travel costs. While there were some technological glitches, the benefits of the hybrid event model became very evident.

According to Stratus, "Managing six different venues and the broadcasting studio at headquarters, versus having everyone gathered in one large space, made it a little bit challenging, but we made it work beautifully."
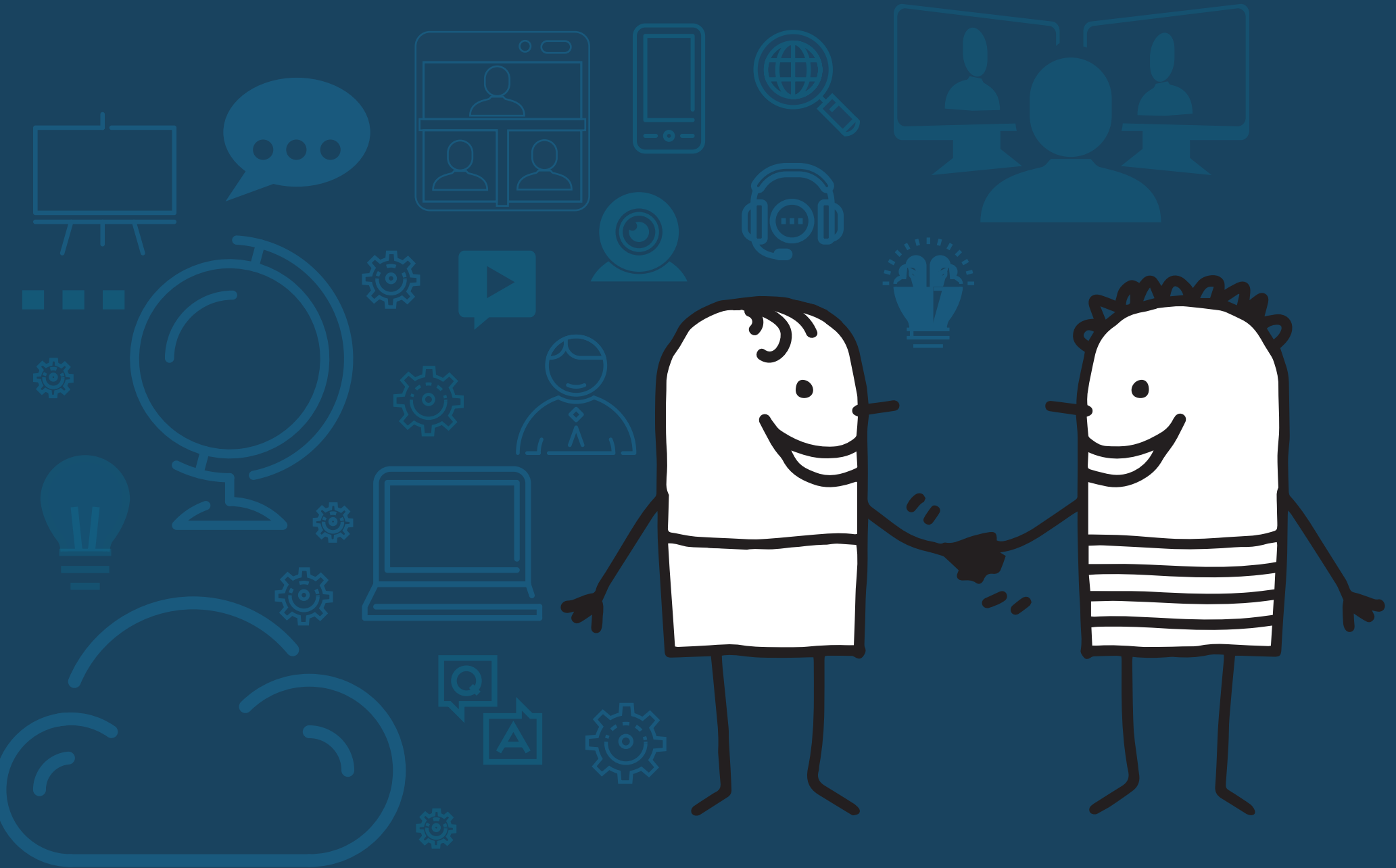
They also reported that the regional managers did an excellent job training, as demonstrated by the quality of the role-playing videos submitted for voting.

> "This experience has really opened my eyes about how we can expand our messaging and culture to the rest of the organization."
>
> —Stratus CEO Charlie Alvarez

RESULTS

IS A HYBRID EVENT FOR YOU?

WORKSHEET

Is a hybrid model right for you?

DIRECTIONS

Use this worksheet to determine if your event could benefit from a hybrid delivery model.

- For each statement/question, select the appropriate number.
- If you strongly disagree, choose 1.
- If you strongly agree, choose 5.

The numbers in between 1 and 5 correspond to your level of agreement, neutrality, or disagreement.

Tally your score when you're finished and follow the instructions at the end.

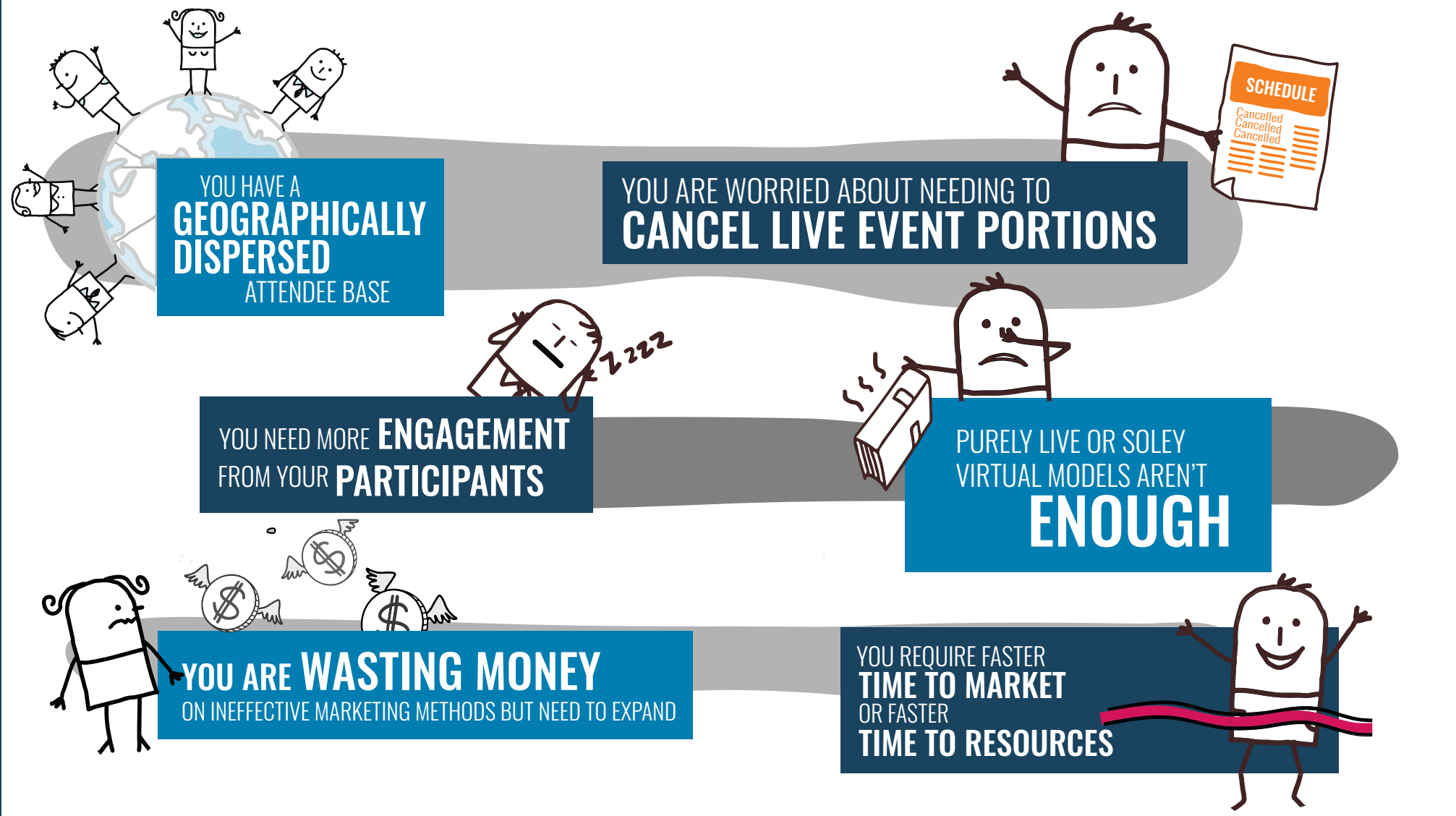| Factor	Disagree				Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
Our meeting needs are complex. It involves the coordination of multiple locations and coordination and support of many individuals.					
We present high-level information that requires close monitoring and coaching.					
Our attendee base is geographically dispersed.					
We are concerned about having to cancel the live portions of the event.					
Delays in meeting negatively impact our speed to market.					
An entirely virtual event doesn't fully meet our needs or goals.					
Coordinating many people into a single venue can be difficult.					

HOW TO INTERPRET RESUTLS

- If you scored >28, you would benefit from a hybrid event model.
- If you scored between 18-28, consider talking to a professional about your specific needs to determine the pros and cons.
- If you scored under 18, you might not need a hybrid event, or it isn't a good fit for the specific event you have in mind. However, that doesn't mean you can't keep learning about it for future events or meetings.

SIX SIGNS
You need to transition to a hybrid event

YOU HAVE A **GEOGRAPHICALLY DISPERSED** ATTENDEE BASE

YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT NEEDING TO **CANCEL LIVE EVENT PORTIONS**

SCHEDULE
Cancelled
Cancelled
Cancelled

YOU NEED MORE **ENGAGEMENT** FROM YOUR **PARTICIPANTS**

PURELY LIVE OR SOLEY VIRTUAL MODELS AREN'T **ENOUGH**

YOU ARE WASTING MONEY ON INEFFECTIVE MARKETING METHODS BUT NEED TO EXPAND

YOU REQUIRE FASTER **TIME TO MARKET** OR FASTER **TIME TO RESOURCES**

IMPLEMENTING HYBRID MEETINGS

CONSIDERATIONS

CHOOSING A PROVIDER

Successful implementation of a hybrid model goes beyond simply choosing an off-the-shelf platform. Instead, look for a provider that is an expert on hybrid meeting management and can help guide you through planning and delivering the entire event.

When seeking assisstance, ask these important questions.

1. Is the provider an expert in hybrid meetings?

You need top-level event production expertise if you want to create a rich and memorable experience for attendees. Your provider should be well versed in all of the platforms and understand the how to leverage this technology to increase collaboration and engagement across the entire event.

Consider the goals for hybrid event. This includes before, during, and after. How will you measure success? Where will your ROI come from? Ensure your provider has the expertise to help you with the event strategy and knows how to capture the right metrics.

Not all hybrid providers are created equal. Some are more technology focused. Look for a provider that can help you source the entire meetng—ensuring the venue(s) selected offer the best setup to provide the optimal environment for both in-person and remote attendees. The provider should know how to optimize both the physical and virtual elements of the space to allow the presenters to share their information rather than focus on technology or logistics.

### 2. Does the provider offer comprehensive and flexible solutions?

Ideally, you want to work with one provider that offers everything you will need for a successful hybrid event. This not only saves you time and money but helps ensure that all of the elements of your event work together seamlessly. Can the provider help you with branding and customizing your event? Will the provider help you track metrics and analytics?

3. What sort of support does the provider offer?

Look for a provider that will make the setup and delivery of a hybrid event as stress free as possible. Your presenters, vendors, and talent shouldn't be worrying about the technology or room setup. Your provider should offer assistance before, during, and after the event to ensure success.

Ask what is included and excluded in their services. Do they offer everything you will need? Can they help with sourcing the venue, A/V and talent? Are they virtual-platform neutral? Can they offer technical and attendee support before, during, and after the event? How are they handling security, both on-line and offline? Developing a comprehensive request for proposal will help ensure you select the right provider for your event.
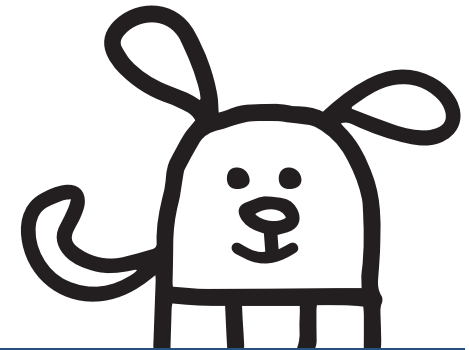
STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTING A HYBRID EVENT AT-A-GLANCE

✔ **Determine your goals**

✔ **Identify your event needs**

✔ **Determine the level of support required**

✔ **Request proposals for hybrid event production**

✔ **Schedule your event**

✔ **Market your event**

✔ **Prepare presenters**

✔ **Prepare participants**

✔ **Hold your event**

WHAT'S NEW IN HYBRID MEETING TECHNOLOGY

Advancements in artificial intelligence and virtual reality have bridged the gap between physical and virtual meetings in exciting ways.

Holographic Telepresence

What if you could beam a presenter as a 3D hologram onto the stage? What would that do to boost engagement with your audience? This is possible with technology that delivers a digital, full-body and stage experience to both in-person and remote audiences. How does it work? The presenter stands in a studio with the lighting, cameras, and monitors off-camera so they can see the audience. The image projects onto a special screen and looks like they're actually in the room and standing in front of the audience. Surprisingly, this technology does not require a lot of bandwidth and transmits well over standard internet.

Audience Response Tools

Engaging hybrid audiences is critical if you are to create a unified experience for all. Advancements in audience collaboration tools have made it so audience members, regardless of their location, may

participate in real time in a variety of activities. For example, there are apps available that plug into popular video platforms allowing virtual audiences to take part in two-way conversations with in-person attendees. Other features of these plug-ins include moderated Q&A functions, surveys, gamification, and video.

Web Backgrounds

Have you ever been at a hybrid event, watching a remote presenter, and was distracted by their background? Now you can ship a portable green screen to all of your remote presenters so that they may project a professional digital background eliminating any potential distraction.

The green screens attach directly to the presenter's chair covering the background area captured by the webcam. With the green screen in place, the presenter may call up a more professional digital background that is suitable for the event.

Virtual Event Platforms

Attendees often comment that they don't get the same sense of connection and community from virtual events. Advancements in virtual event platforms now provide technology where virtual attendees can interact with anyone, on demand by pinging any attendee to interact with them privately—or, even jump into a private virtual face time with other attendees.

To better simulate a trade show experience, some platforms offer booth interactions, where you can click on a virtual booth to visit with vendors, view products, read literature, and watch demonstrations. There are also many gamification add-ons for attendees to enjoy as well, such as trivia, competitions, and escape rooms, which help increase interaction and enjoyment.
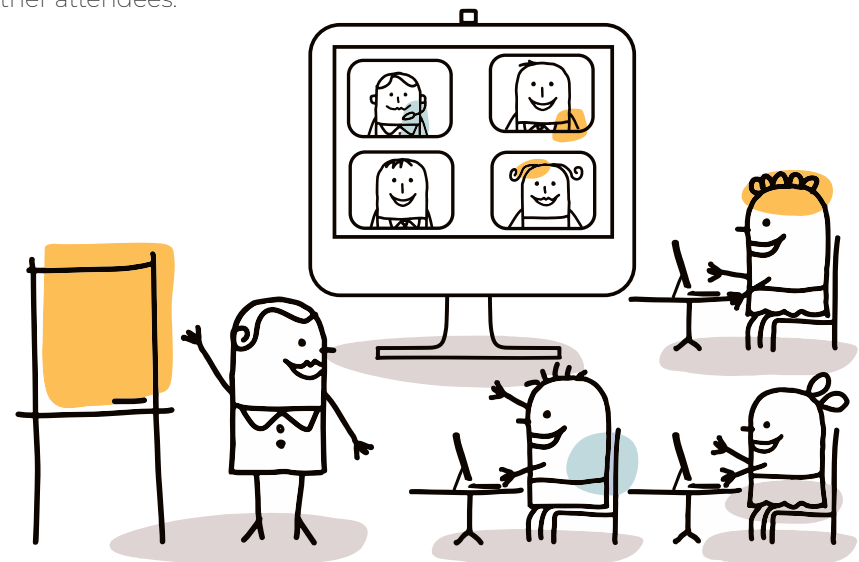
ENGAGING THE HYBRID AUDIENCE

Keeping virtual attendees engaged during a hybrid event is paramount. Here are some tips to help keep things interesting and fun.

Keep it Live

Whenever possible, use live video instead of prerecorded content. If your presenters are live, they can make active attempts to connect and engage on-line attendees so they don't zone out.

Use a Virtual Facilitator

Virtual audiences need someone to help keep the on-line conversation going. The virtual facilitator is a conduit between the presenters, live audience, and the virtual audience. They are responsible for monitoring the chat, fielding questions, and providing feedback from the remote audience to the presenters.

Make it Fun

The digital experience needs to be as fun and interesting as the physical meeting space. You'll want to make sure virtual participants get the same value as their in-person counterparts. When there are breaks in between sessions or a lull in the activities on-site, offer games and other exercises to fill the gaps. Interviews, prerecorded bonus content, Q&As, and virtual networking events will make that time feel well spent.

Create Networking Opportunities

Chatting with colleagues and meeting new people is easy at in-person events but is much more challenging in virtual spaces. Create networking opportunities for your virtual audience using chat, video breakout rooms, social media channels, and other tools. Assign facilitators and presenters to lead and encourage group discussion.

#GetSocial

Use social media platforms to encourage audience participation and interaction. Prior to the event, share event #hashtags to get attendees excited about the event.

Use the platform to encourage attendees to submit quesitons to speakers. Host live video chats and Tweet live during your event to generate real-time feedback from your audience.

Frequently Acknowledge the On-line Audience

At every opportunity, take the time to acknowledge the on-line audience. This will go a long way to keep them engaged. If your platform technology permits, allow your virtual audience to be seen as they ask their question, during Q&A.
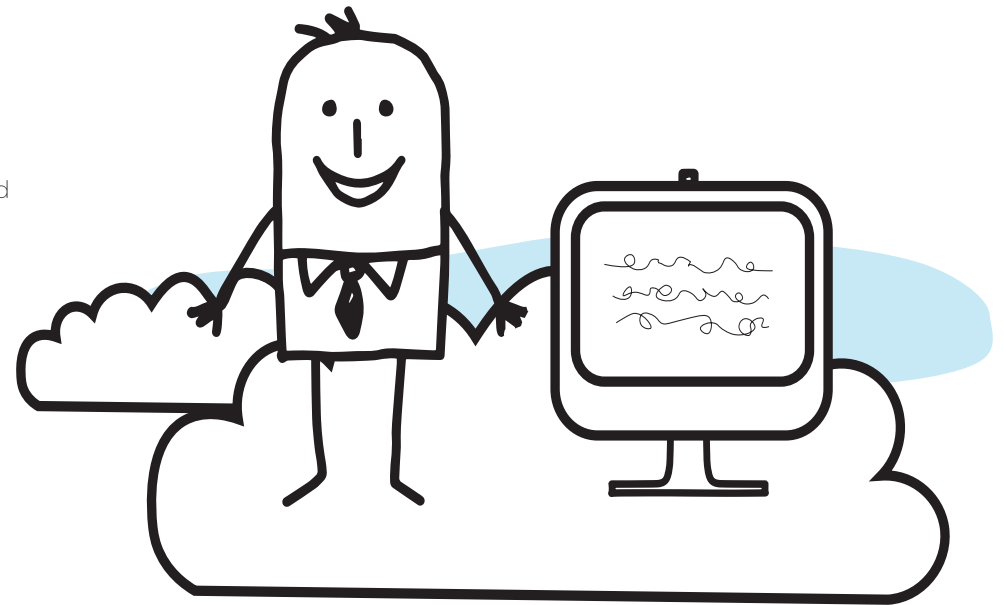
MARKETING YOUR HYBRID EVENT

Strategies to make your program more widely visible and accepted.

Communicate the Benefits

As you develop your hybrid event marketing plan, be sure to communicate the benefits of the approach compared to either in-person or virtual-only options. That's right—you may need to make the case for why someone would want to participate in a hybrid event. Some may be wary of change, mainly if this virtual component is new or seems too complicated.

Consider creating a web event page, email, or short FAQ that highlights the benefits of this hybrid meeting environment, such as:

1. A safer experience for all participants

2. Flexibilty to attend the event from the comfort of their home or office

3. Modern platform to see and interact with fellow attendees and presenters

4. The elimination of time and expense associated with travel to the event

5. Decreased environmental impact from travel

6. Potential lower cost

In your marketing, use research on hybrid success to help sell audiences on the benefits of hybrid meetings. Detail the features of the platform and describe the interface and tools remote attendees will use throughout the event. The messages should evoke excitement and reinforce the value they'll get from participating this way.

Use Surveys

After every event, you should survey participants on their event experience. Collect both quantitative and qualititative responses to use them in your marketing efforts. Quantitative data can be used to support attendee satisfaction scores and ROI. And, long-form responses may be used as testimonials on event web pages and in email announcements and other promotional materials. Survey data helps add credibility to the power and value of the hybrid event model.

Enlist Advocates

Research shows people are influenced most by peers that they trust. Find champions and influencers to speak about your event to create additional buy-in.

Have speakers create blogs covering the topic of their sessions. Use these to create excitement about the event. Write articles on tips to make the most of the hybrid event experience.

Mention Sponsors and Speakers

Tag and mention sponsors and speakers who will be at your event on social media. Encourage them to share your messages for added exposure.

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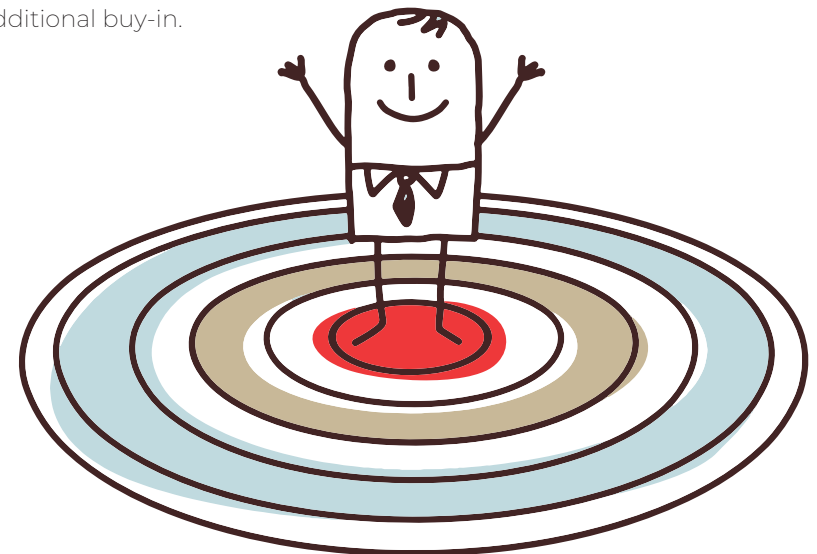
PRESENTER PREPARATION

A successful hybrid event is not just about putting together a good agenda—it's also making sure speakers are prepared to deliver and engage in this new format.

In many cases your presenters are not professional speakers but instead subject matter experts who are needed to share their insights and knowledge on a particular subject. Some presenters may be hesitant to participate in a hybrid event because of a negative past experience. The more information, tips, process, and support you provide presenters, the more encouraged they will feel. Assure them they will have the proper A/V, technical support, and facilitation assistance to ensure a smooth session.

Host a Presenter Dress Rehearsal

A technical dress rehearsal will help presenters, A/V, and the tech support team work through potential problems and transitions before the event. During this meeting, every role should be familiarized with the platform from the vantage point of how they will use it. Review all of the interactive features and what to do in case of a problem. This training and practice will allow the event team to become comfortable in this environment.

If you have both in-person and remote speakers, hold separate rehearsals for them, as their requirements will be different.

Specify a Dress Code

You don't have to be overly prescriptive as it relates to dress for the meeting, however, the dress code should include what not to wear. Busy patterns or colors that clash with digital backgrounds or stage colors can be very distracting on camera. Likewise, you don't want your presenters blending in with stage backgrounds by wearing the same colors. Your presenters will thank you for your recommendations and tips.

Content Preparation

Designing a presentation for both an in-person and on-line audience can be challenging as both are viewing the slides from a different perspective. Coach presenters to design their slides with both audiences in mind.

Make Visuals Interesting

Remote attendees are primarily relating to the event through a screen. If the image on that screen is not moving and changing, they are likely to become distracted or bored. To hold their attention, keep the images on screen engaging and interesting.

1. Position cameras, so presenters are visible at all times. Use movement to enhance messages and be mindful of repetitive movements that may be distracting.

2. Consider including more slides and visuals than you would for a traditional in-person presentation, remembering some virtual participants may be using screen readers.

3. Use colorful and exciting images that tell a story, making them accessible and/or visible to on-line participants.

4. Use whiteboards and annotation to engage and create movement and interactivity.

A/V Checks

Presenters in a hybrid environment need to be seen and heard. In some hybrid environments, they also need to see both in-person and virtual participants. Schedule rehearsals with speakers to test their slides, get comfortable with the technology, and understand where the cameras will be positioned. If the virtual attendees will be on screen at the back of the room, they should be prepared to address and make eye contact with this audience as well. Ideally, speakers should rehearse in the room in which they will be presenting. If the presenter will be using internet connectivity, video, polling, or chat features, be sure to check that there is proper bandwidth and all technology is functioning prior to the event.

VIRTUAL PARTICIPANT PREPARATION

A significant contributor to the success of your hybrid event is setting proper expectations with your participants.

During a hybrid event, it's important that activities are done *with* the virtual audience and not just *to* them.

How do you prepare remote attendees for the best on-line experience? First, let virtual attendees know how they will communicate, what type of interaction is expected (and appropriate), and when cameras and microphones should be on or off (muted).

When there is a transition to a breakout room, communicate how this will occur. The moderator can make an announcement or the presenter can put up a visual with instructions.

At every opportunity, virtual participants need to be acknowledged, addressed, and interacted in a way that supports the objective of each event segment.

If interaction between in-person and virtual participants is encouraged, then both audiences need to understand how and when this will occur.

VIRTUAL CONFERENCE ETIQUETTE

For conferences that expect their virtual audiences to be on camera and interact with either on-line facilitators, presenters, and other attendees, they need to know the rules for engagement. The level of participation will be different depending on the event structure. For example, a workshop with 50 participants will differ from a speaker bureau meeting broadcasting to thousands of participants. Regardless, always communicate expectations and provide information to maximize participation.

For smaller meetings and workshops where cameras are always on, consider the following tips.

Eliminate Background Noise

Always mute participant microphones when they are not expected to speak.

Platforms that allow for presenter or moderator control of video and audio can be beneficial with managing audience audio, when they are not aware.

Avoid Distractions and Interruptions

Encourage participants to attend the meeting ona desktop device from a location that is free of distractions, noise, and interruptions.

Consider Lighting

Virtual audiences that will be on screen should sit in a room with adequate lighting. The light source should be directly in front instead of behind them. Bright front lighting can be equally garish, causing the participant to look washed out. Encourage participants to experiment with the light source and positioning that works best.

Do a Test Run

Provide participants with a link to the video conference platform so that they may test their connection, sound, and video before the meeting. In case of connectivity issues, provide a support desk to troubleshoot.

Consider Participant's Background

Provide virtual attendees tips on where to attend the meeting. Messy spaces, backgrounds with inappropriate artwork, or busy spaces may cause a negative distraction. You may wish to use a branded digital background filter for all participants to eliminate the risk of unsightly backgrounds.

Camera Position

Suggest participants position their web cam near eye level, slightly to the right or left of center. A comfortable amount of space should be around the participant's head and shoulder area, as if they are being framed within a picture.
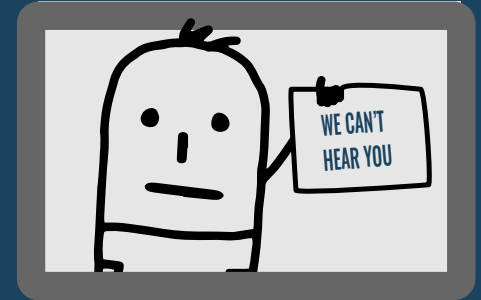
VIDEO CONFERENCING ETIQUETTE

Consider these tips
for your next virtual meeting
or training session

ELIMINATE BACKGROUND NOISE

CLACK CLACK

CLACK CLACK CLACK
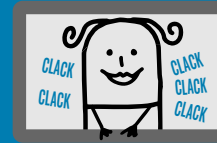
If your system isn't on mute, be aware that everyone can hear you moving around—including rustling through papers, typing on your keyboard, coughing or tapping on your desk.

WE CAN'T HEAR YOU

PLAN AHEAD TO AVOID DISTRACTIONS

Carefully choose where you will take part in the virtual session to avoid distractions for you and your colleagues.

CONSIDER LIGHTING

Eliminate background light from windows so that you don't appear as a silhouette; Bright front lighting can be equally garish, causing bad shadowing. Lighting that works well during the day can be disasterous at night. Experiment and see what light source and positioning works best.
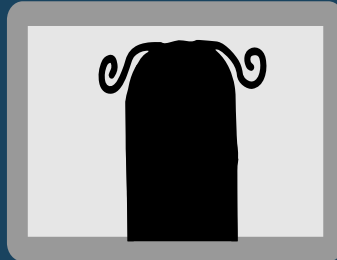
PREPARE

Complete a test run before your meeting or training session to make sure all the equipment is working properly. This will ensure you can start and end the event on time and keep everyone engaged from the beginning.

DEFAULT TO MUTE

By default, keep your microphone on mute and then unmute just before speaking, to avoid unwanted audio feedback. If you are going to step away from your meeting, be sure to mute your camera first, to avoid distracting others.

BE AWARE OF LOCATION

Your surroundings are also on camera. Consider your decor. A messy space may reflect poorly on you.
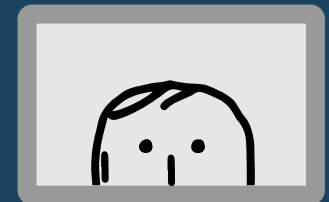
THINK POSITION

Position your camera at the top rim of the monitor in the center, or slightly left or right. Distance yourself so the camera can see about halfway down your chest. By doing so, you will look the most natural.

ON-LINE SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

Establishing security protocols and processes for accessing and sharing data is a top priority for hybrid events.

Virtual platforms can mean less control over client information, meeting access, and increased cyber threats. Therefore, creating processes for accessing and sharing data is a priority for hybrid events.

Verifying users and participants can help control hacks and disruptions. There must be a balance between attracting attendees and protecting data. Disruptions can be caused by event crashers, hackers, competitors, or attendees with problematic behavior.

Here are a few tips to prevent unwanted guests from entering your virtual space:

Use Validation APIs

Integrated validation APIs can be used with client databases to ensure only validated invitees can attend. Many platforms have the ability to include passwords or whitelist company email addresses so that only those with a valid email can register and attend.

For extra security, you can implement a two-step validation process where verification is required via text or email before entry is allowed.

Use Waiting Rooms

Virtual waiting rooms help establish security by screening the audience before they become part of the event. Sometimes people register with guest computers or aliases, and you want to be sure that only the correct people are admitted, especially in private meetings.

Review Registration Lists

Allowing only invited guests to register, rather than providing a general registration portal, will keep unwanted guests at bay. If an unknown person registers, have someone reach out to them to see if they are meant to be in attendance. Ask how they found the event and what they are looking to gain from it. Then, close the registration early enough to go through the list as crashers and competitors will try to sneak through at the last minute.

Remove Search Engine Tags

Tags used to promote your event can attract unwanted guests, so use an API integration instead to create more robust security measures and password-protected invites. Don't give the same password to attendees as this poses a security risk. A best practice is implementing random or user-specific passwords.

> "You must find the balance between security and creating roadblocks for attendees. There is a need for the right amount of secrecy, security, and accessibility."
>
> —Andrea Velasquez,
>   Head of Event Technology, AMI

WHAT'S NEXT?

Are you ready to integrate hybrid for your next event?

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American Meetings, Inc.
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American Meetings, Inc. is here to help you maximize the impact of hybrid meetings. From strategy and planning to technology and venue selection, we can help you create and deliver a spectacular experience to your audience.

Contact us for a consultation today!

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