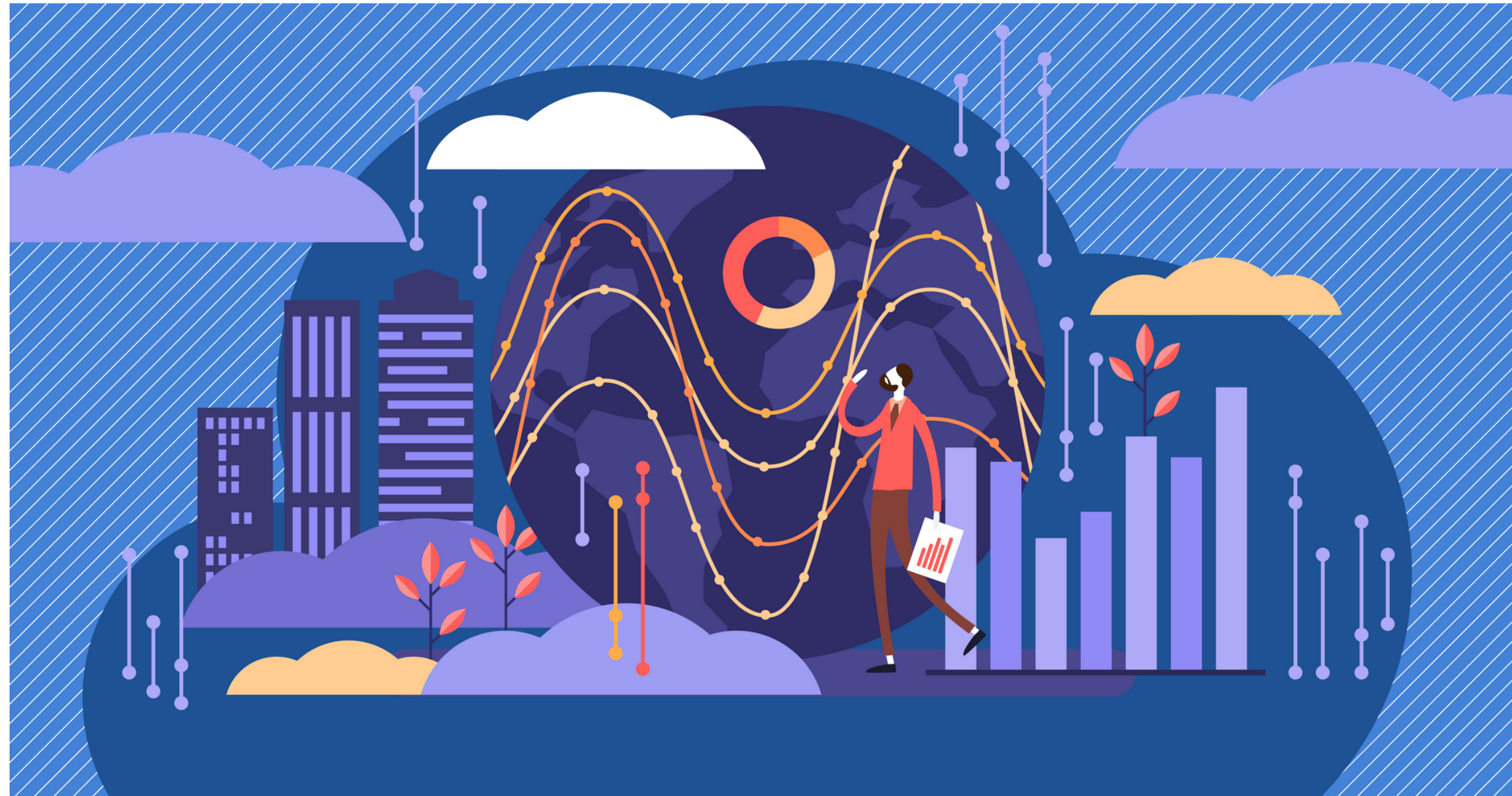


BACK TO THE FUTURE

EXPLORING TRENDS, INSIGHTS & THE POTENTIAL OF VIRTUAL EVENTS



2020 Virtual Event Trends Report

November 2020

PRESENTED BY *Pixilated*

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Introduction & Thank You

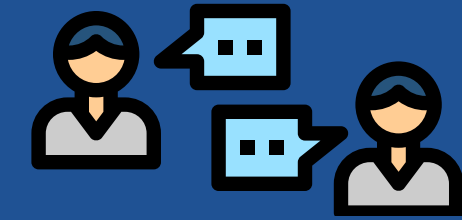
When we started thinking about this survey, we knew that asking event professionals about the biggest virtual trends would be a loaded question. Obviously, there are strong opinions, but we weren't prepared for such a wide range of responses; there was a lot to digest.

What is abundantly clear is the events industry has an opportunity to create true digital experiences with authentic user engagement. While it may not be easy, it is possible. The broader reach of virtual events offers the chance to promote your mission and organization to a national, or even global, audience.

That said, how do you measure success behind an entirely virtual event? It cannot simply be by registrations since they're often free and attendance is not guaranteed. Virtual events allow us to track who logs on and off, who is idle, which sessions were the most popular, how many people visited an exhibit booth, and much more. Do these metrics give us the full picture when we account for Zoom fatigue and the saturated virtual events landscape?

In the pages that follow we dive into all of this and more. Thank you to those who provided feedback and shared your expertise. The Pixilated team appreciates your time, and we hope that everyone benefits from the creativity of your peers.

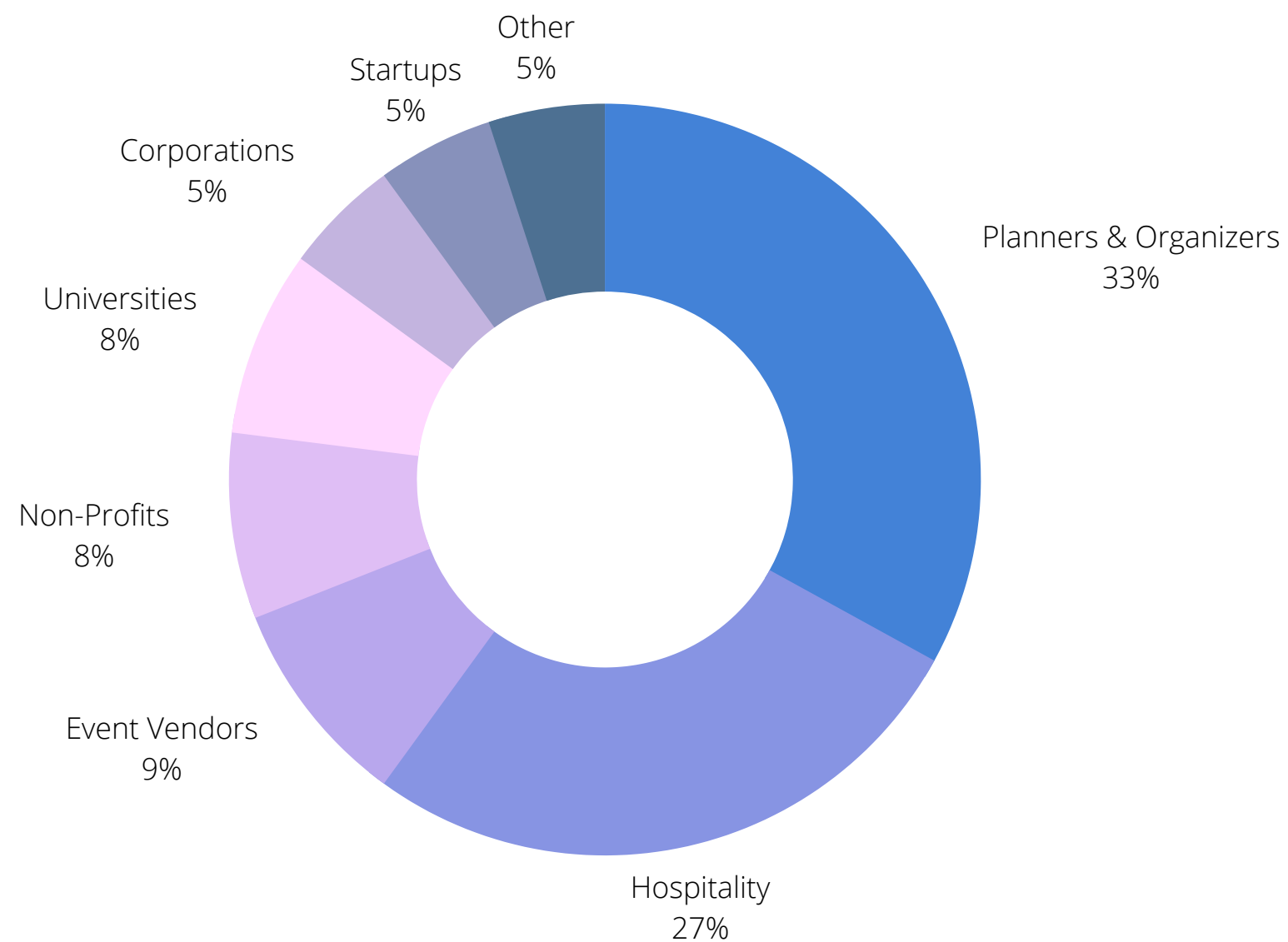
Who Responded?



From owners to CEO's and students to seasoned planners, we received over 500 submissions from all types of organizations across the industry.

Including:

- Hospitality & Destination Management Organizations
- Event Publications and Services
- Event Vendors
- Meeting Planners & Conference Organizers
- Non-profit Leaders
- Event Tech Startups
- Large Corporations
- Colleges & Universities



WORD ON THE STREET

Frequently used Phrases

- Engage
- Interact
- Fun
- Entertaining
- Attention
- Boredom
- Uniqueness
- Personalized
- Burnout
- Hybrid
- Reach
- Scale
- Tangible
- Quality
- Flexibility
- Creative
- Integrated
- Seamless

Top 5 Takeaways

#1

Keeping Their Eyes on the Prize

*How Can Organizers
Defeat Zoom Fatigue?*

Top 5 Takeaways

#1

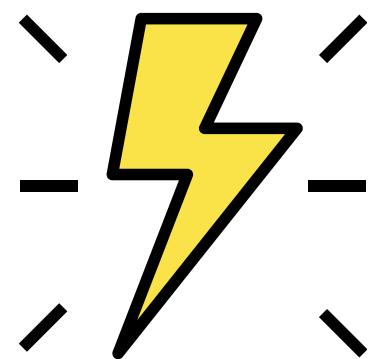
Keeping Their Eyes on the Prize

How Can Organizers Defeat Zoom Fatigue?

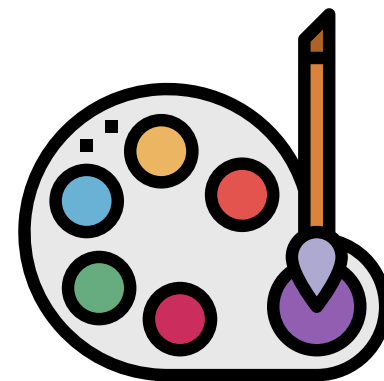
A simple Google search of “Zoom fatigue” brings up infinite results!

It’s not farfetched to say that every organizer – regardless of event type – is struggling to find ways to keep preoccupied audiences focused on their messages.

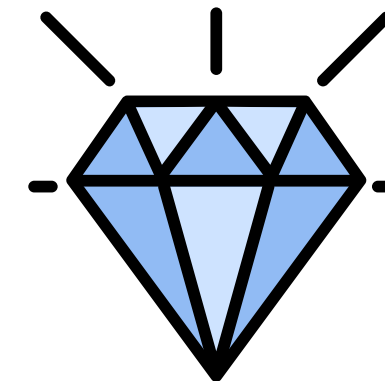
No matter how they are delivered, networking remains the cornerstone of events. It is still an organizer's job to facilitate connections and create engagement. How exactly do you do that when distractions are abundant?



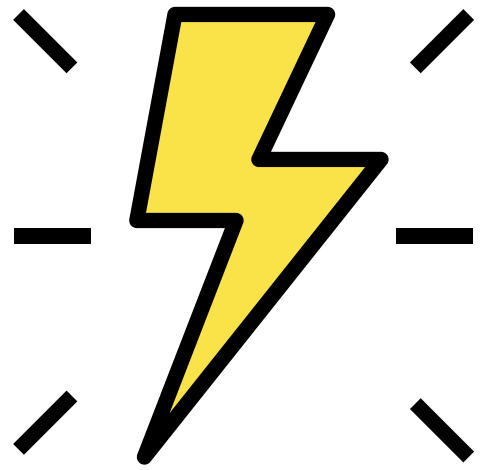
CREATE ENERGY



PERSONALIZE EXPERIENCES

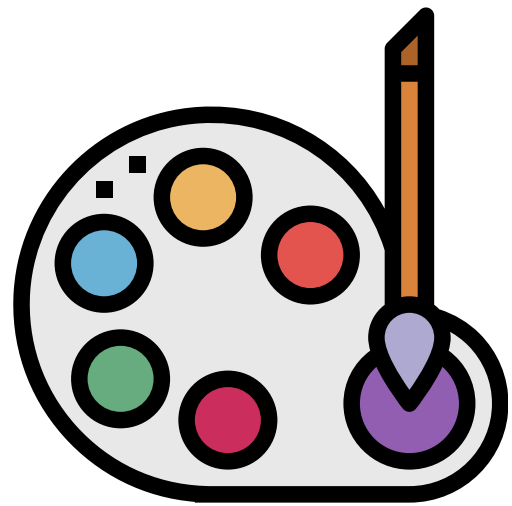


PROVIDE VALUE



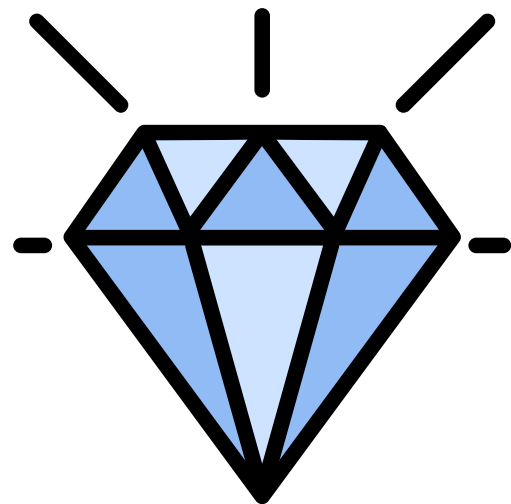
CREATE ENERGY

- Engaging MC's and dynamic breakout speakers – generate FOMO by recruiting presenters that radiate confidence on camera.
- Entertainment – make breaks and transitions fun, create a reason for attendees to stay online.
- VIP's or motivational keynote speakers – look outside of your industry for someone who will pique interest.



PERSONALIZE EXPERIENCES

- Send swag in advance – create a tangible connection between attendees and your event.
- Breakout sessions by topic – give everyone a voice and way to be heard.
- Interactive games and activities – lighten the mood, competition can create levity.
- Video on or avatars – many attendees want to be on camera, but for those who prefer not to be, avatars are a great way to encourage participation (based on platform).



PROVIDE VALUE

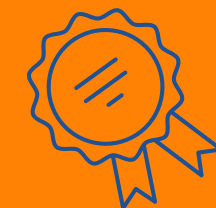
- Condensed timelines – be mindful of home commitments and differing schedules by splitting up the day and offering 30-45 minute sessions.
- On demand content – attract people who have a hard time committing to live options. Gary Schirmacher with Maritz Global Events suggests “look at ESPN type highlights. It would be nice to tune into an hour or even 45-minute show that gives the highlights, has commercials from sponsors and leads you to deeper education ops.”
- Post-event content library – offer deliverables (videos, PDF's) that can be applied in the real world.

BOTTOM LINE

Remain flexible in your attitude by thinking of ways to use technology to your advantage and approach the planning as if it is both a professional conference and entertainment production.

SENDABLE SWAG

- Drink ingredients (coffee, alcohol, etc.)
- Gift cards (for lunch, cooking class supplies, etc.)
- Badges and lanyards
- Snacks
- Masks, hand sanitizer, PPE
- Props for dance parties or other entertainment
- Books
- Trivia or bingo cards
- Race (running or walking) numbers
- Scavenger hunt materials
- Apparel
- Tech items (power packs, screen cleaners, USB hubs)
- Drinkware
- Buttons or pins



“Avatars provide an opportunity to design your character that can represent you and still engage with others without the awkwardness of showing your face and your home online.”

-Stephanie Spooner, Senior Event Manager

Top 5 Takeaways

#2

What's In It For Me?

*How to Differentiate
Your Event*

Top 5 Takeaways

#2

What's In It For Me?

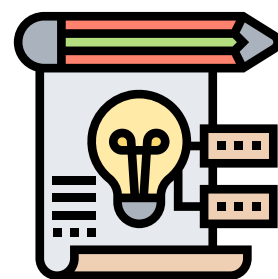
***How to Differentiate
Your Event***

With so much interaction going digital, attendees are beginning to see any kind of Zoom meeting as a virtual event.

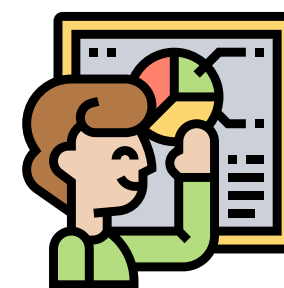
No longer are you just competing for attention within your own industry, you are now competing against personal obligations. It is more important than ever to answer the attendee question “what’s in it for me”.

You must show how you can resolve challenges or provide guidance – how are you going to help them in their daily lives?

**How are you
going to help
them in their
daily lives?**



RELEVANT CONTENT

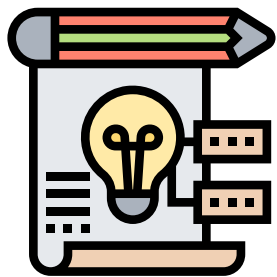


ENGAGING & QUALITY
SPEAKERS



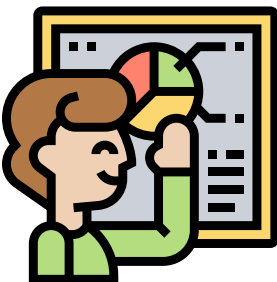
PERSONALIZATION

Differentiation comes down to a few key components



RELEVANT CONTENT

Focus on finely tuned subjects that will resonate, this is not the time to offer an abundance of sessions.



ENGAGING & QUALITY SPEAKERS

Presenting on screen is not a universal skill, make sure to find speakers who can do this effectively.



PERSONALIZATION

Involve attendees in the event, make them feel seen and heard (see our *Ideas Exchange* on the next page for ways to increase participation).

Your messaging needs to be less about you and more about them.

Move away from listing all the things you are offering.

Start highlighting the questions you are answering and problems you are solving.

BOTTOM LINE

Help attendees be the hero of their own story by clearly providing solutions to their challenges – if you can tell them what’s in it for them to attend you will stand out from the crowd.

IDEA EXCHANGE



- Happy Hours
- Photo Booths
- Celebrity Entertainment
- Museum Tours
- Fashion Shows
- Cooking Class with Celebrity Chef
- Silent Auctions
- Exercise Classes
- Mixology
- Charity Fundraisers
- Avatars
- Micro Receptions



- Galas or Ceremonies
- DJ's
- Welcome Kits
- Virtual Dance Party or Dance Lessons
- One-on-One Meetings
- Trivia Hour
- Book Discussions
- Gamification
- VR/AR experiences
- QR codes
- Chat widget (text and face-to-face)
- Artificial intelligence



Top 5 Takeaways

#3

From Infancy to Adulthood

*Navigating Event
Technology*

Top 5 Takeaways

#3

From Infancy to Adulthood

Navigating Event Technology

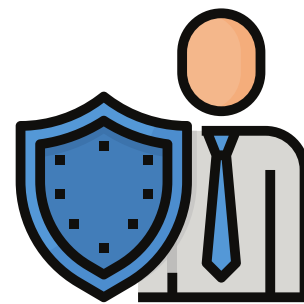
In what felt like a matter of days, event organizers experienced a virtual event platform boom.

We uncovered two schools of thought related to the dramatic increase in platforms – those who find it difficult to keep up with the changing landscape and those who feel nothing new has been introduced in months.

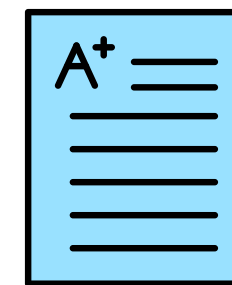
Regardless of your take on the technology, everyone agreed on one thing - attendee standards and expectations have noticeably increased. Initially, simple webinars and platforms were acceptable, but as time has marched on, participants have become more discerning.

**TECHNOLOGY
EXPECTATIONS
HAVE RISEN**

Now they're expecting...



PROFESSIONAL FEEL

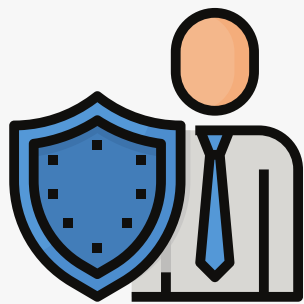


LESS IMPERFECTIONS



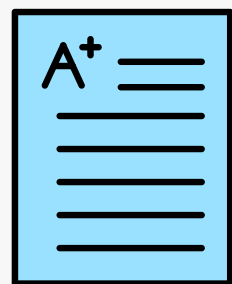
SIMPLE INTERFACE

Now they're expecting...



PROFESSIONAL FEEL

Higher production value, including professional pre-recorded videos that can be streamed.



LESS IMPERFECTIONS

Reduced patience with “technical difficulties” and the expectation of a friction free experience.



SIMPLE INTERFACE

A seamless, easy-to-navigate platform where resources are readily available.

Attendees are not the only ones with higher expectations, *sponsors are demanding more too.*

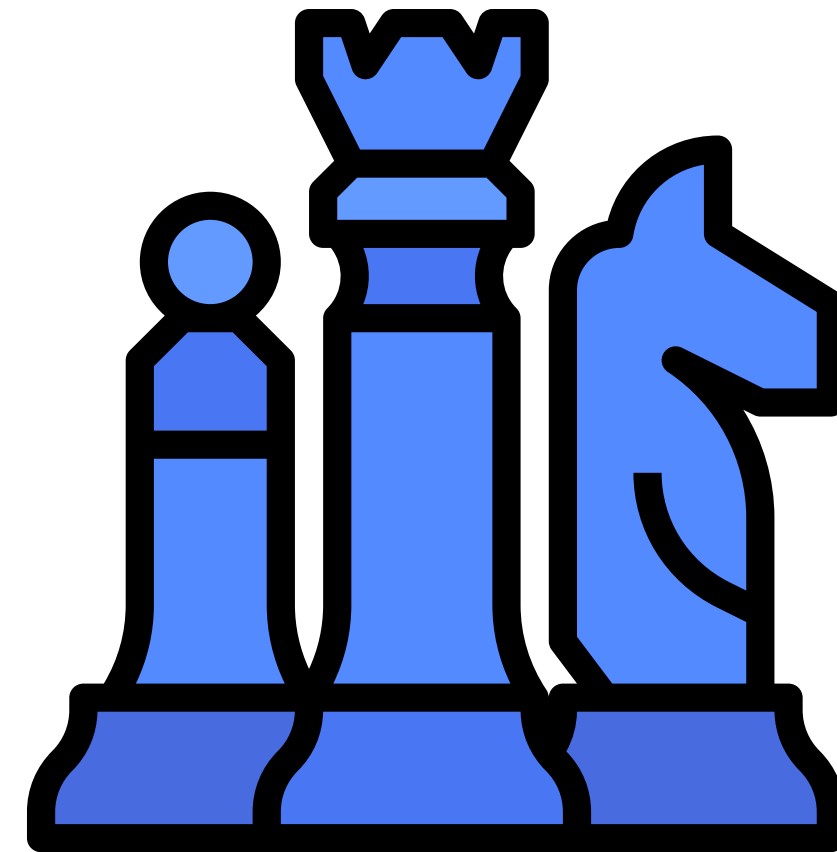
Improvements are needed in the virtual tradeshow experience; exhibitors are not finding an effective way to tell their company story and low booth attendance makes it hard to justify the ROI on sponsorships.

As the conversation continues it will be focused on **platform flexibility vs. leveraging the platform strengths**. Technology should continue to grow, but moving forward it should be a collaborative effort between planners and developers with an emphasis on building out networking.

BOTTOM LINE

Focus on your event strategy, then choose a platform that you can easily manage.

Your comfort with the technology will allow you to build a better user experience.



“It’s not about the platform, it’s about the experience you’re trying to create.”

-Kristi Sanders, Sr. Director of Community Engagement - Meeting Professionals International

Top 5 Takeaways

#4

Show Me the Money

*Monetizing the
Digital Experience*

Top 5 Takeaways

#4

Show Me the Money

Monetizing the Digital Experience

With the digital experience untested, early virtual events were largely offered at no-cost.

Overcoming the initial expectations for free content is proving to be a hard mentality to break. If you can get past the reluctance to pay, attendees don't feel that a virtual experience should come at the same price as the in-person event.

The truth is, they are not wrong. Though producing an online event does carry a lower price tag than in-person meetings, it is certainly not free. Unfortunately, there is a wide gap between revenue generation and digital production costs.

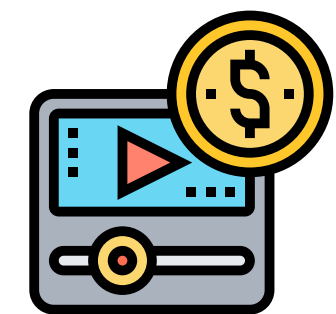
How event organizers are monetizing...



FREEMIUM



WHAT YOU THINK
IT'S WORTH



SPONSOR VIDEOS

In need of revenue, organizers have employed many ways to monetize experiences:



FREEMIUM

Different levels of access or varied availability with assigned price tags.

For example: Level 1 - attend keynote and tradeshow for free; Level 2 – level 1 benefits, plus participate in breakouts for an additional fee; Level 3 – level 1 & 2 benefits and access to recordings as an add on; Level 4 - full VIP experience at a premium rate



WHAT YOU THINK IT'S WORTH

Set a value and ask attendees to either pay that value up front or invoice them post event asking them to pay what they felt the event was worth to them.



SPONSOR VIDEOS

Increase sponsor visibility by selling as a standalone opportunity or as part of a sponsorship package; play them during highly attended portions of the event (i.e. keynotes).

BOTTOM LINE

Moving toward a paid model for virtual events will take a seismic shift by the entire industry as we find ways to generate revenue for the sustainability of our organizations.



“Our customers are finding ways to monetize online content using perks, different levels of access, or varied availability.”

-Spencer Elliott, CEO of ViewStub

Top 5 Takeaways

#5

Until We Meet Again

*The Emergence of
Hybrid Events*

Top 5 Takeaways

#5

Until We Meet Again

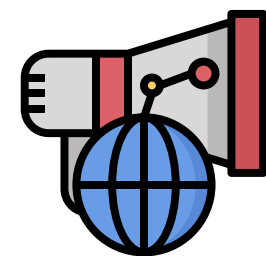
The Emergence of Hybrid Events

Though the events landscape is forever changed, there is no doubt that face to face (F2F) meetings will re-emerge, taking on a critical role.

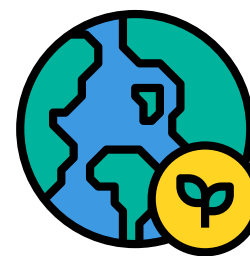
A handful of respondents felt investing in virtual events was not worth it, preferring to wait out for in-person gatherings, but most agreed that moving forward hybrid meetings will become standard.

Many are seeing increased requests from clients or within their own organizations to book F2F meetings where allowed. Presenting multiple registration options offers several benefits.

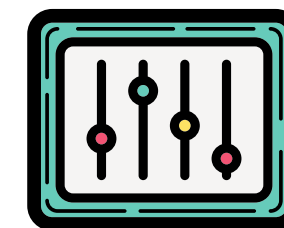
Benefits of offering virtual and in-person attendance



EXPANDED REACH & ATTENDANCE



REDUCED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

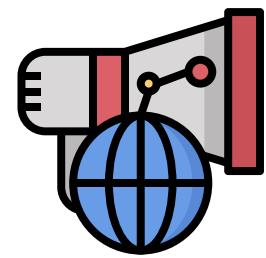


GREATER FLEXIBILITY



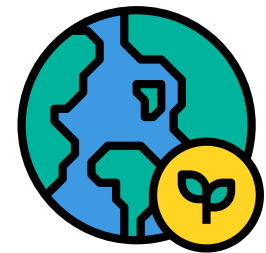
NEW REVENUE STREAMS

Multiple registration options, both virtual and in-person, offers several benefits.



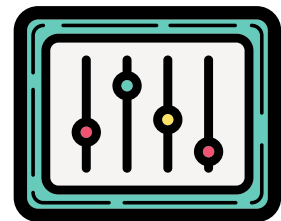
EXPANDED REACH & ATTENDANCE

Hybrid event models allow for a broader, possibly international audience with fewer travel costs associated.



REDUCED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Less travel and tradeshow waste have a substantial effect on sustainability.



GREATER FLEXIBILITY

Having multiple options tackles changing needs for both attendees and event organizers.



NEW REVENUE STREAMS

A virtual event component will ultimately increase revenue potential.

BOTTOM LINE

Virtual event options will not suddenly disappear, so begin looking at how offering digital experiences can enhance future in person offerings.



“While in person events will not be totally lost, people are going to tsk tsk if there is not a virtual option.”

-Cameron Toth, CEO of Toth Event Staffing

The Show Must Go On

“What Was” vs “What Can Be”

All differences aside, we continually heard many mourn the loss of events as we knew them. While it is difficult, we must wrap our minds around the fact that we are witnessing a massive shift in the industry. Even as F2F meetings return, digital experiences are here to stay.

Answers focused on the need to replicate in-person experiences, but a handful of people called out fellow planners on failing to take advantage of virtual platform benefits. Events of all sizes are announcing fully virtual experiences in 2021, so the question begs to be asked, at what point do organizers capitalize on platform strengths and tailor their content accordingly?

As Greg Elmhirst, GM of Elmhirst’s Resort said, “the rise of virtual events could be a ‘Napster moment’ for the events industry.” As event professionals it is up to us to create innovation that propels our industry forward and guarantees our future.

“I have been very impressed with the resiliency and creativity of our industry,” claims Stewart Mann, CEO of Wild Rooster Events, “and I believe those traits will ultimately help us persevere.”

Bottom Line: By focusing on what has been and applying those lessons to what can be, the events industry will come back, bigger and better than ever!

Thank You



About Pixilated

We bring fun!

At Pixilated, we specialize in creating engagement solutions for virtual, live & hybrid events.

Our innovative technology brings photo booth products to marketers & brands, parties & people! Whether you're looking to capture personal or professional memories, Pixilated's revolutionary event services technology can help.

Founded in 2012, Pixilated is headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland. 

Find us online and learn how you can bring the fun!



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