

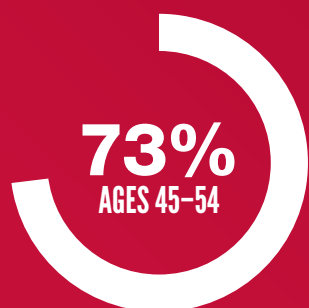
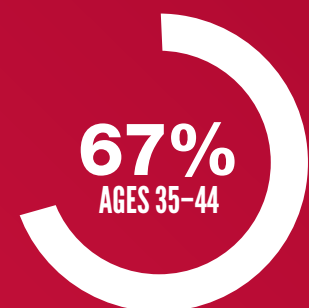
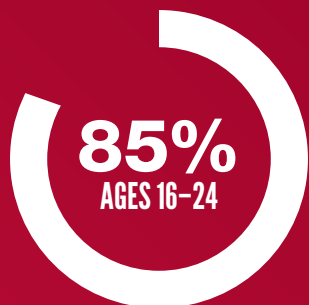
Virtual Events

A complete playbook for association
meeting and event planners



ASSOCIATION
HEADQUARTERS

MOST PEOPLE PREFER in-person meetings



virtual event stats you need to know

\$1,000

the average cost-per attendee of virtual events

11%

are willing to pay more than \$300 to attend

45%

of survey respondents prefer to pay between \$100-\$200 for virtual meeting registration

93%

of event professionals plan to invest in virtual events moving forward

DOLLARS & CENTS

TIMING & FORMAT

3%

of survey respondents prefer virtual meetings to last longer than one day

59%

of survey respondents prefer virtual meetings to last between 1 and 2 hours

60-90 minutes

the ideal length of a virtual roundtable

46%

of survey respondents prefer virtual meetings to mix live sessions with recorded sessions

68%

of event professionals are looking for hybrid event technology that supports both in-person and virtual events

wednesday

is the most ideal day of the week to attend a virtual meeting

The **least desirable** time of day is **evening**

monday is the least

ideal day of the week to attend a virtual meeting

Most survey respondents prefer virtual sessions to be in the **morning**

WHEN to PLAN

SOURCES

<https://promoleaf.com/blog/the-surprising-truth-about-virtual-vs-in-person-conferences?eraseCache=true&time=1592937161508&version=0e49a01ab2bde7ecac917b70a19494f15e8decce&apiVersion=172e1b59f6>

<https://welcome.bizzabo.com/post-covid-19-event-outlook-report>

<https://www.markletic.com/blog/virtual-event-statistics/>

virtual events

An Evolution for Associations

Events are the cornerstone of associations. Frequently rated among the top benefits of membership, in-person annual meetings, conferences, and conventions simultaneously build relationships, establish thought leaders, showcase innovations, and celebrate achievements both individually and as an industry.

At the same time, working virtually is nothing new to associations, whose leaders and volunteers are often convening via conference calls and video chats from around the world.

However, nothing could have prepared the association events industry for the events brought about by COVID-19. Quite suddenly, the world closed down, restricting gatherings and travel. Not to be deterred, associations pivoted quickly to deliver world-class events virtually.

With all that pivoting, though, came lessons learned. Lessons about platforms and functionality. About communications and marketing, social media, on-demand learning, and new forms of networking. About creating and reinforcing relationships with sponsors and exhibitors.

We navigated through some tough and exciting times to discover how association meeting and event planners can succeed at planning a virtual event. We searched high and low for resources and guides, and while there is a lot of content out there, very little addressed the specific and unique needs of association meetings and event planners.

From that experience, this playbook was developed to be an industry resource specifically for our colleagues in the association meetings and event planning industry. We've incorporated many examples, options, and guidance from association event planners who've been there. The intent is that this playbook will help guide you through the process of planning a virtual event for your association that meets your membership's unique needs and expectations.



**For additional
guidance, contact
AH's Meetings and
Events Specialists at
inquire@ahint.com.**

Section 1

Getting Started

The first steps toward planning
a virtual event

The shift from an in-person event to a virtual one can be an intimidating task for even the most seasoned association meeting and event planner. Relatively few virtual events reach the scale and complexity of associations' annual meetings, conferences, and conventions, making planning a virtual event for an association a unique endeavor. This section walks you through the initial considerations when planning for a virtual event.

Dates: To Shift or Not to Shift?

Many associations made the difficult decision to pivot to a virtual event when COVID-19 closures and health recommendations prevented in-person gatherings. When making this difficult decision, an initial consideration may be whether to change the event dates, given the new format. Dates for in-person meetings are often established after considering the amount of programming, events, and attendees, in addition to factors like travel time, industry, and location. Transitioning to a virtual event effectively removes many of those elements, which may also cause you to evaluate the dates of the virtual event.

The primary consideration is the demographic of your attendees. Consider:

- Does their industry affect what days they may be available to participate?
- Where are most attendees located?
- What work/personal schedules might the event be conflicting with?

Addressing Existing Communications for Attendees and Sponsors

If you have already communicated that your event is in-person and are now pivoting to a virtual one, the thought of communicating the shift to an audience that has already received one message (of an in-person event) may seem daunting. Fight the urge to jump on social media and post that the event is going virtual until you have a formal communications roll-out planned. This should include updated event graphics, website, email signatures, and any other channels where attendees might hear about the event. Keep all existing announcements live—even if they're about the in-person event—until you have a complete communications roll-out ready to go.

Know Your Member *COMMUNICATING EVENT CHANGES*

The Institute for Nuclear Materials Management (INMM) had only recently announced their in-person meeting before deciding to go virtual six months prior to the event date. To ensure that their event communications were streamlined and consistent, INMM updated all of their event communications to reflect the pivot to a virtual event and released all information in one sweep of their communications channels. Updating all event announcements and communication channels at once ensured that the information about the event was current no matter where viewers saw it.

Know Your Member *RESCHEDULING AN EVENT*

The Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nurses Society™ (WOCN®), discovered that the dates for their original in-person event—originally taking place during the week—conflicted with their attendees' typical work shifts. Understanding that their primary attendees were nurses who, when working, don't have the luxury of devoting a workday to attending a virtual event on a computer, they opted to reschedule the meeting to take place over a weekend to ensure better attendance.

Once all information has been green-lighted, send out that information to attendees across all of your communications channels, effectively conducting a communications sweep. When making the announcement about their in-person event going virtual, the Institute for Nuclear Materials Management (INMM) updated all of their communication channels at once, including their website, social media, an email from the INMM president, and a video message posted to their website. Associations whose events get press coverage may want to release an official statement to media outlets.

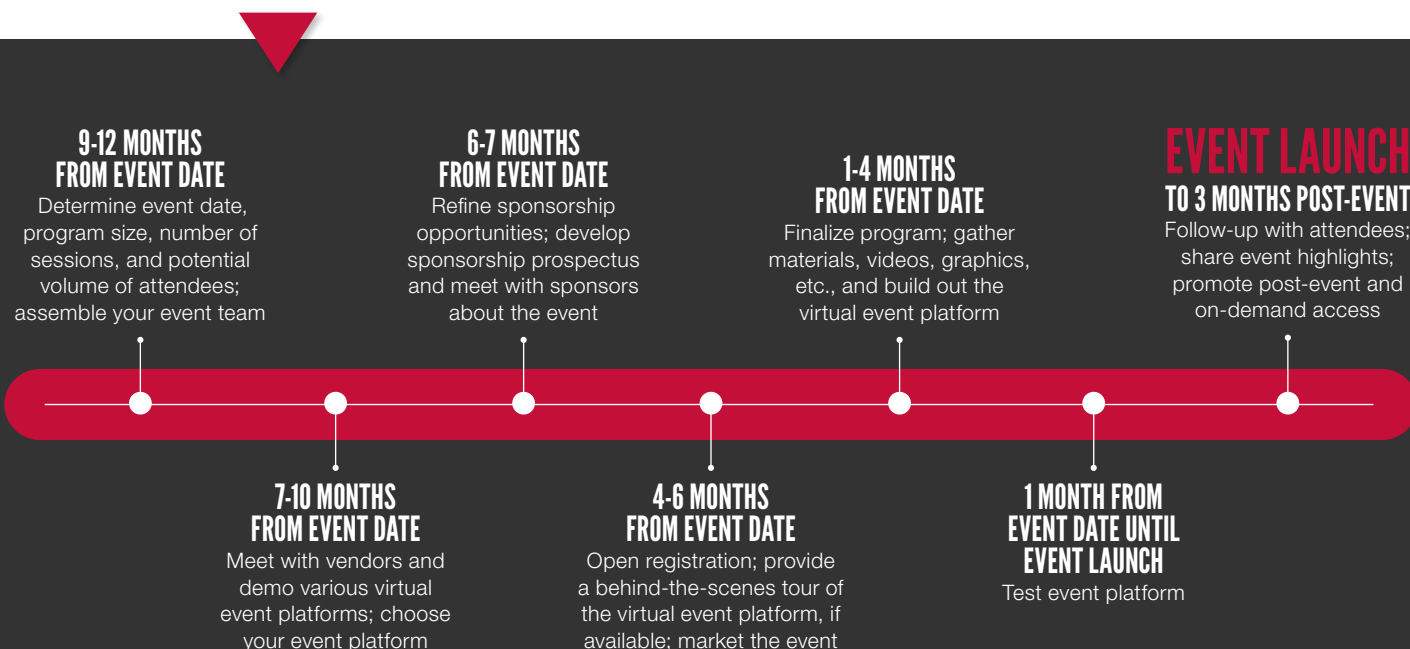
Timeline for Planning and Execution

Associations that are navigating an unpredicted shift from an in-person to a virtual event will have varying lengths of time to plan and execute the event. Virtual event planners say they need just three to six weeks to plan a small virtual event, while larger events may require months of planning. The size and complexity of your event will affect how much time you need to plan a successful event.

If you only have a few weeks to set up a virtual event, take stock of what relationships you currently have with vendors. If you need a particular functionality or capability in a virtual event platform but are unaware of who might offer such services, ask your current vendors for guidance. They may offer services you were previously unaware of or know of a complimentary platform that can help you accomplish your event goals. Also connect with other association meeting and event planners who have successfully planned virtual events for their insight and guidance. Take advantage of resources and networks offered by event planning industry groups, including the [Events Industry Council](#) and [Professional Convention Management Association](#).

Find more about communications and marketing in Section 5: Communications and Marketing.

IF YOU'RE PROACTIVELY PLANNING A VIRTUAL EVENT, A POTENTIAL TIMELINE IS AS FOLLOWS:



Building a Virtual Events Team

The key to success is having a strong team assembled to build and manage the many aspects of a virtual event. Association meeting and event planners are used to wearing many hats, so some of the following may be shared roles.

- **Meeting/Event manager**

This person serves as the project manager for the event, communicating with internal and external stakeholders throughout all phases of event planning and execution. This key role is the center of it all: program planning, timeline development, vendor management, team coordination, budget management, and more.

- **Industry relations manager**

This team member coordinates sponsorship sales related to the event; manages virtual exhibitions and e-booths; and facilitates the needs of the sponsors before, during, and after your virtual event.

- **Communications staff**

The number of communications team members may vary depending on your event's needs, but they are responsible for managing the event's social media promotion, generating and sending emails regarding the event, developing consistent messaging, deploying information about the event on the website and other communications channels, and general event marketing.

- **Logistics coordinators**

Just as in-person events need logistics staff to help guide attendees at the event, ushers in your virtual event can help keep things flowing. Virtual ushers can be waiting in the virtual conference rooms to help answers attendees' questions before a presentation, set up polls and other interactive widgets, and direct attendees to other spots of the virtual event.

- **Production staff**

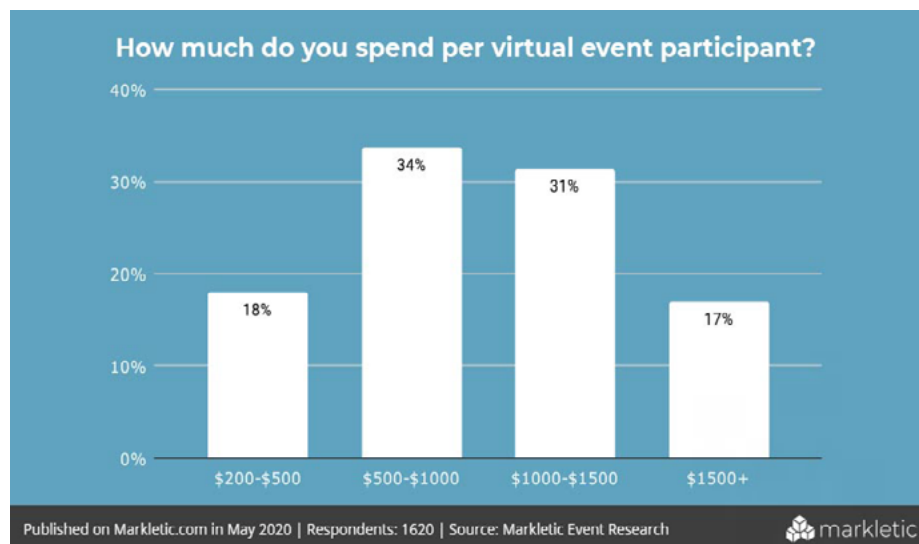
If your event includes a range of sessions with various technical needs, or if you plan to record sessions for on-demand viewing, a production team member can lead the charge on troubleshooting, recording, and post-event file management. While remote teams may not be able to gather during the event, producing the event together in the same room can expedite problem solving and help the event run more smoothly, since behind-the-scenes communications can be handled swiftly among the team.

Budget Implications

Virtual events will invariably cost less than an in-person event as there are no hotel, food and beverage, audio visual, facility, and other fees. However, no matter what budget size you had for an in-person event, a virtual event budget warrants careful consideration.

IN-PERSON TO VIRTUAL EVENT CONTRACT CONSIDERATIONS

If you're changing a previously planned in-person event to a virtual event, be sure to investigate your hotel and convention center contracts. There may be penalties and cancelation fee schedules built into those contracts depending on the cause and timing of the cancelation. These fees could drastically chew into your event budget.



PLATFORM EXPENSES

When evaluating virtual event platform providers, consider what functionality and capabilities your event will require beyond just their base services. Will you need a job fair, a tradeshow, poster sessions, chat rooms, meetups, and more?

Adding to the potential need for additional services, think about how many streams you will need for the length of the virtual meeting; will you need a live program that runs around the clock to accommodate international attendees in different time zones around the world? How about different video chat rooms so members can network?

All of these features come with an added cost that can be significant, so having a complete understanding of the features and related costs will help you build and manage your event budget.

REVENUE IMPLICATIONS

Events and conferences represent a significant source of non-dues revenue for associations. However, the cost of registration and sponsorships for a virtual event rarely remains consistent from in-person to virtual events. Before setting pricing, scout your industry to find rates related to virtual events, and use that information to help inform your event pricing. If your event offers credentialing, be sure that registration fees for the event cover the expense of training and exam administration. In addition, if your event allows attendees to earn professional education credits, consider the industry value of a credit hour and the potential number of credit hours that can be earned at the event. This information will inform your event's registration fees and value proposition.

When projecting registration revenue, consider that the number of attendees has the potential to expand exponentially as barriers to attending an in-person event are now removed—attendees do not need to spend time and money on travel, obtain visas, or take significant time away from work and home. Budget for registration revenue to align with the number of attendees you expect.

EXTENDING NON-DUES REVENUE EARNINGS POST-EVENT

On-demand viewing of event sessions is a major benefit of virtual events. Post-event access is generally included in a full registration for the live event. However, those who do not register for the live event may still be interested in purchasing access to the event information after the fact. Develop on-demand package pricing for these recorded sessions, grouping them in packages of one, three, or five sessions. Preliminary industry research has shown that offering post-event, on-demand access via these microtransactions may increase revenue between 35% and 45% when compared to the full conference on-demand package.

Virtual Event Platform Vendors

A major pillar for your virtual event is what kind of software and vendors you'll use to have attendees' network, watch/listen to live presentations, participate in breakout rooms, and more. Choosing the right one could make the virtual event a standout or a dud.

Poll members and past attendees on what software and platforms they're already familiar with. Online video conference provider Zoom has skyrocketed to daily use for much of the world, while others may know how to use Skype or Google Meet. Some vendors engage multiple platforms for a meeting. Providers who are coming in with complete virtual event solutions and services include audiovisual providers, program management software companies, apps, learning management systems, and others. These all-encompassing vendors and their software have the ability to manage the technical details of a virtual meeting like event moderations, registration, live-streaming presentations, chat rooms, and more.

Know Your Member

MEETING THE NEEDS OF SMALL EVENTS

The International Consumer Product Health and Safety Organization (ICPHSO) hosts a small Regional Workshop that went virtual this spring. ICPHSO engaged WebEx, provided by a member company, to host a full-day event for nearly 200 participants. The platform was ideal for the smaller event and extended ICPHSO's outreach to global members who may not have been able to make the in-person workshop.

For a list of software and vendors check out Section 2: Virtual Event Platform Vendors.



scorecard

Dates: To Shift or Not to Shift?

- Consider attendees when setting virtual event dates.
- Industry demands may require events to be scheduled on certain days of the week.

Addressing Existing Communications for Attendees, Sponsors, and Exhibitors

- If transitioning to a virtual event from an in-person event, wait until you have formalized the details for the virtual event and keep your former announcements live.
- Do a communications sweep when the virtual event details are ready to be announced.

Timeline for Planning and Execution

- Don't panic if you have a limited amount of time to setup a virtual event! Take stock in your relationships with your vendors.
- Establish a timeline for planning your virtual event, engaging vendors early on to establish your event's technical needs.

Building a Virtual Events Team

- Gather the team at least 9-12 months prior to the event.
- Include staff to manage sponsors, communications, logistics, and production.

Budget Implications

- Investigate contracts with your hotel and convention partners before canceling an in-person event.
- Functionality beyond basic services for a virtual event can incur substantial cost; establish your event's technical needs early on to set an accurate budget.
- Evaluate your competitive landscape when determining registration and sponsorship pricing.
- Post-event, on-demand purchasing can increase revenue when sold in smaller packages or one, three, or five sessions.

Virtual Event Platform Vendors

- Poll your attendees on what software they have used or are comfortable with.
- Explore whether your existing technology vendors provide the services needed for your event.

Section 2

Virtual Event Platforms

A selection of vendors, platforms,
and solution providers to consider
for your event

NOTE: This is not an exhaustive list of vendors and platforms providing support for virtual events and AH does not endorse any of the platforms listed. We encourage you to continue exploring options to find the best solution for your event.

Platform Information				Platform Functionality								
PLATFORM	WEBSITE	PHONE	ABOUT	CONCURRENT SESSIONS	LIVESTREAM	Q&A	LIVE POLLING	NETWORKING ROOMS	EXHIBIT HALL	SPONSOR	POSTER/ABSTRACT DISPLAYS	KEYWORD SEARCH
Blue Sky	blueskyelearn.com	858.900.2283	Blue Sky provides an award-winning learning management system and virtual event services to maximize your content and create deeper engagement with your audience.		Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes	
CEAVCO	www.ceavco.com	303.419.5659	CEAVCO Audio Visual provides video, audio, lighting, staging, and creative services solutions for meetings and events nationwide. For more than 50 years, our highly skilled team has created exceptional event experiences by providing creative and technical expertise, guidance, and extraordinary service.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
CSlides	www.ctimeetingtech.com	507.403.2296	As pioneers in digital abstract management and presentation management with more than three decades of experience assisting the world's leading associations. CTI continues to innovate with the introduction of Virtual Meeting options in March 2020.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Digitell	digitellinc.com	800.679.3646	Our virtual event and live streaming platforms give you the ability to connect with a global audience. User-friendly and scalable, our platform ensures that your attendees get the 'real event feel' while helping you reach more people and create community across the world.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Engagez	engagez.com	415.763.8660	Engagez is a single platform to host all your digital events: live, simulive, on-demand, individual presentations, multi-day conferences, expositions, job fairs, online classrooms, and engaging always-on destinations.	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
EventsAir	eventsair.com	855.236.8486	OnAIR delivers a great way to build your virtual or hybrid event. Tailor your sessions, workshops, meetings and presentations with ease. Add in interactive content such as meeting hub, exhibitor hall and ePoster and you have an amazing online experience.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Falcon Events	www.falconevents.com	800.895.6934	Falcon provides end-to-end event streaming solutions from onsite production, to platform choice and setup, to marketing and strategy.		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				
GoToMeeting	gotomeeting.com	800.514.1317	With a focus on ease of use, GoToMeeting provides video conferencing services to support virtual event presentations. This platform offers high-quality audio and video, as well as mobile-compatible options for video conferencing wherever you are.	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No

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Platform Information				Platform Functionality								
PLATFORM	WEBSITE	PHONE	ABOUT	CONCURRENT SESSIONS	LIVESTREAM	Q&A	LIVE POLLING	NETWORKING ROOMS	EXHIBIT HALL	SPONSOR	POSTER/ABSTRACT DISPLAYS	KEYWORD SEARCH
IMS Technology Services	imsts.com	610.361.1870	IMS Technology Services is an award-winning provider of systems integration and event staging solutions designed to foster collaboration, productivity, learning, and business communication. Our success is defined by our clients' ability to look and sound their very best.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
OpenWater Virtual Conference	www.getopenwater.com/virtual-conference-software/	202.765.0247	OpenWater Virtual Conference, trusted by small and large associations, acts like a hub for all of your conference needs while integrating with your AMS and other tools. Also, if your needs go beyond software we have you covered.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PSAV	www.psav.com	866.722.2128	PSAV offers a wide array of planning, design and technology solutions to create awe-inspiring event experiences of any size, anywhere you are – or want to be. With our world-class service, you'll have the peace of mind that we are personally invested in making your event a success.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes		
Socio	socio.events	877.336.2888	Socio provides a full suite of virtual event services that make it easy to build and deploy a branded event platform with robust networking and sponsorship functions.	No	Link to Zoom	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Virtual Press Office (VPO)	www.vporoom.com	877.297.8912	Cision has a suite of solutions for event planners. From Virtual Press Office's online media hubs, exhibitor microsites and news distribution packages to webcasting services, interactive content, and branded landing pages powered by MultiVu, Cision can help bring an event to life.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No		
WebEx Events	www.webex.com		From planning to follow-up analysis, Cisco Webex Events and Webex Webcasting provide the features to effectively host large-scale events or webinars to target audiences anywhere. Boost attendance, engage your audiences and increase leads, all while using a scalable and highly secure platform.	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Zoom	zoom.us		Zoom provides video conferencing, recording, chat, and content sharing for small and large groups. Built-in features, such as auto-generated note taking, make post-event content a breeze with searchable transcripts.	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes

Section 3

The Attendee Experience

Going beyond the webinar to create
a unique virtual experience

Although most people still prefer to attend in-person events when surveyed, there is no denying that virtual events have their advantages. As one event attendee commented to researchers: “I personally appreciated the flexibility it provided. I could attend the sessions I was interested in, yet was still able to work throughout the rest of the day. It certainly eased some of the stress of being away from my desk that comes with attending in-person events.”

However, those advantages won't create a positive event experience on their own. To create virtual events that attendees will find satisfying and will consider attending again in the future, there are several essentials that are vital to include in the planning process.

Event Schedule

explore the need to consider event dates when pivoting from an in-person event to a virtual one. Event dates, and whether they pose a challenge for attendees to make, directly affect the attendee experience. Wednesday may be the general population's preferred day of the week for events, but we urge you against blindly following blanket advice to avoid mistakes that could lower your attendance.

Questions to consider regarding the unique needs of your attendees:

- When is your audience normally most engaged with the association? Do they normally volunteer or attend events on weekends or during the week?
- Are there subgroups within the association's membership that have different days that they are available? Should you consider a range of days/times to accommodate these preferences?
- Are the attendees mostly located within the same country, or will there be a variety of

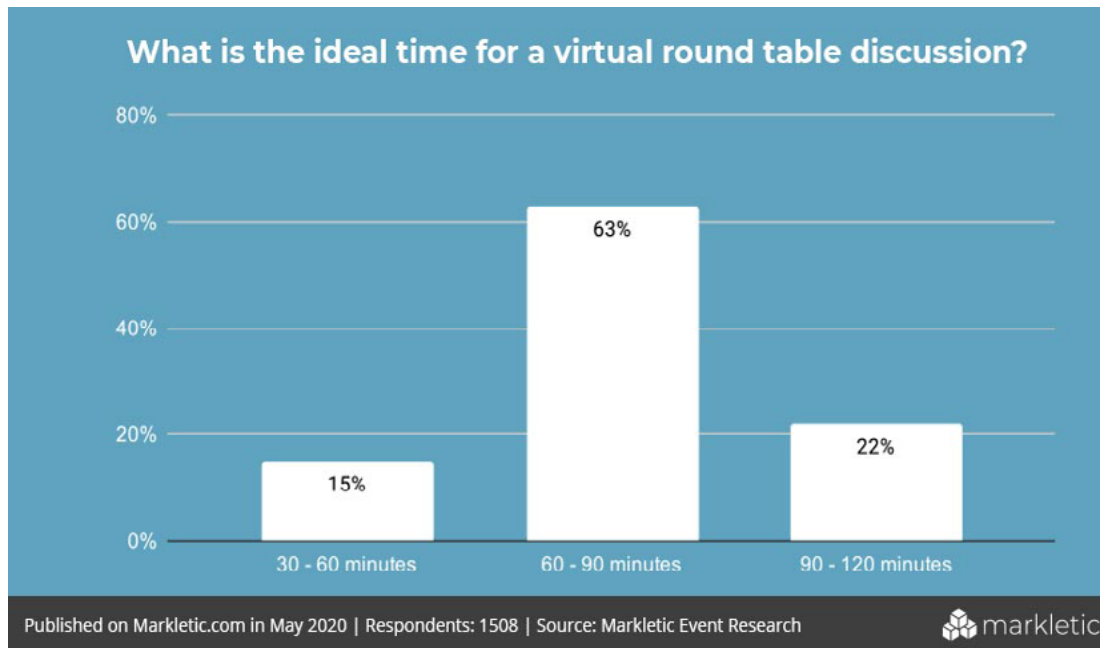
international members that may affect an attendee's availability (i.e., one member's Sunday may be another member's Monday, depending on where they are located in relation to the International Date Line)?

- Are there any industry-specific considerations to take into account, such as a time of year where most members are focused on completing certain tasks within their industry and may not have the time to attend (i.e., accountants during tax season)?

Know Your Member VIRTUAL EVENT SCHEDULING

Event planners for the Controlled Release Society (CRS), understand that the attendees for CRS's Annual Meeting include many international attendees who are not only in academia, but are 9-to-5 professionals in the pharmaceutical industry who are more engaged and “ready for work” in the beginning of the week, or whose companies may not pay them for time spent attending events outside of regular weekday business hours. Also, because of the international factor, one person's Monday could be another person's Tuesday; therefore, the best days of the week to plan a four-day virtual conference for the CRS membership would be Monday to Thursday.

In addition to needing to consider event dates, session format is a significant consideration. The average attendee reports that the ideal length of a roundtable session is 60-90 minutes. Understand that attendees are often participating in virtual events from home and work, where other distractions and obligations may interfere. Incorporate adequate breaks and set session lengths that allow attendees to manage their other obligations without missing much of the program.



Working with Time Zones and International Reach

If there are no international considerations, time zones are generally less of an issue, though they do need to be kept in mind (you may get great turnout from East Coast members at a 9:00 AM EST event, but a sparse, resentful turnout from West Coast members because for them, it is 6:00 AM PT).

However, when you are creating an event to attract members from all over the globe, time zones get even trickier – some parts of the world are sleeping while others are working. Here are some essential things to consider:

- When planning the most keynote events, note what are considered the “Golden Hours” of international virtual event planning: 7 AM–2:30 PM EST. During these hours, not only is it accommodating of those located in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, but allows for those in Europe (for whom it is late evening) and those in Asia (who are just waking up) to participate live. In this way, no one is required to attend a major event in the dead of night in order to participate live.
- Ideally, the event website should make accessing events easy by organizing them according to time zone. Some event websites utilize time zone breakdown buttons (users simply click on a particular time zone, and all events are listed according to the times they happen in that time zone, while also denoting live vs. recorded events), or allow a member to set their agenda with a function to personalize their time zone.
- Do some research and be aware of the current events and political concerns in the geographic areas your attendees will be logging in from. Storms and internet issues plague most areas in the world from time to time, and occasionally, even firewalls will go up in one country to block another for a variety of political reasons.
- Due to the necessity of providing content even in the event of these unpredictable circumstances, pre-recording the main session presentation is essential, whether you plan to have the speaker or panel present live, or present the recording and then have a live Q & A afterward. For non-keynote, non-“Golden Hour” live events, you can record them for playback in time

zones where attending live would not be convenient (i.e., recording a live, 2:00 PM Eastern Standard Time event for playback at 2:00 PM China Standard Time).

enthusiastically attend again? *Engagement*. If your members are typing up work memos while half-listening to droning presenters, you won't ever get them to sign up for another virtual event. However, here is where you can get creative, and "wow" your members:

Know Your Member MANAGING ACROSS CULTURES

CRS has many members from countries whose internet connectivity is sometimes affected by political concerns and the current standing of their relationships with the United States. For example, during times of strained relations, firewalls in Iran or China have blocked out connectivity from the United States, and there have been incidents of Muslim countries shutting down connectivity when a Christian religious symbol, such as a cross, is detected. Because of this uncertainty, all talks are prerecorded, then a speaker presents live afterward. All live presentations are also recorded.

Ways to Better Engage Attendees

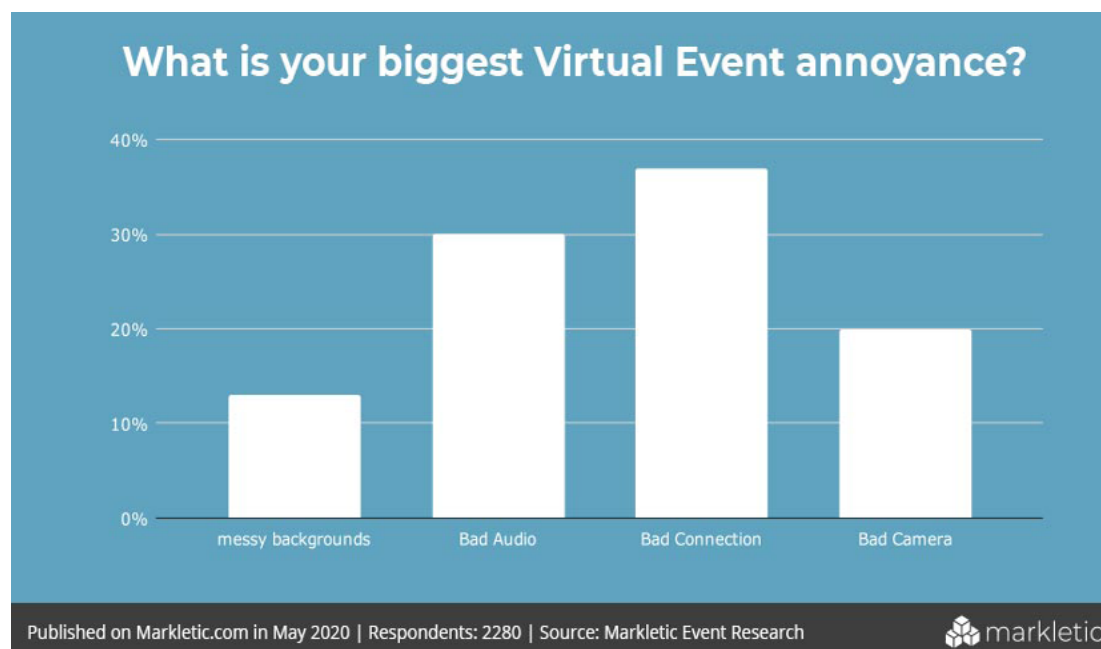
What is the difference between a webinar-like event that members will easily forget and a successful event that members are willing to

- **Platform functionality**

First and foremost, as discussed in Section 1, make sure you have a quality platform that meets your needs, and budget for it. When it comes to the software and the production company, remember that you get what you pay for. All the greatest, most innovative ideas to engage attendees mean nothing if they can't consume the content or connect with others because of technical issues.

- **Audio and video quality**

Attendees cite audio and video quality issues as the top detractor of the virtual event experience. Make sure video and audio are clear and as glitch-free as possible. One event attendee described a frustrating experience: "The video quality was a bit blurry. But the video quality didn't bother me as much as the fact that almost everything people were typing in the chat feature was about the poor video quality!"



- **Ease of access**

It should be easy to use. Another event attendee described a positive experience that would bring them back again: “It was very easy to join the event. The platform allowed for concurrent sessions so it was easy to switch between them, much like switching rooms at an in-person event.”

- **Build in breaks**

Just like an in-person event, people need fun breaks and transitions. Examples we’ve seen at various virtual events are virtual lunch break rooms where people can grab their sandwich and chat in another virtual room; a “bite size” yoga class for a stretching break; “commercials” from sponsors that play during virtual room changes (similar to what you would see on convention center screens); bathroom breaks, etc. Commented one event attendee, “I really liked that there were short breaks built in in-between, so I could take a few minutes to figure out which of the next sessions I was most interested in.”

- **Incorporate live polling**

In the middle of a session, a speaker can pause and ask people to vote on particular issues and topics, and get immediate feedback. This can help the speaker to tailor the talk to what the members are most interested in at the moment, and pulls the attendees back into engagement with the speaker if they were drifting.

First-time Attendees/ New Members

You only get one chance to make a good first impression, so it’s important not to forget those who are new to the membership, or those new to the idea of virtual meetings and conferences. To bring them into the fold, what’s most important is that they feel welcome and not like outside observers, and have a chance to get acclimated to the program at their own pace.

Some ideas to consider:

- Special advance invites for new members or first-time summit/conference attendees. These invites, perhaps made available a week or the day before the virtual event, could include virtual focus groups and meetups where topics are presented and discussed live, and attendees can have a chance to ask questions and “meet” other members in a smaller, less overwhelming group setting.
- Provide a detailed email, complete with links, that outlines the virtual event’s information. First-timers especially want to have as much advance information as possible to feel comfortable. As one virtual event attendee commented, “The only thing that I see as an issue for joining an event is when there are no instructions for attending, or links, or anything sent out until the day of or the day before. I like to be able to preview the sessions before the day of, or at least have

Know Your Member *PRESERVE VALUED INTERACTIONS*

During the COVID-19 lockdown, CRS was aware that their academics were away from their hands-on work and labs and hungry for human interaction. Also, in the scientific culture of the membership, it is important for scientists to see the people who are asking questions of a moderator or speaker (traditionally a line forms at a microphone at an in-person event). However, with 900 attendees at their virtual event, asking questions via a “chat” function was not going to be at all satisfying. Therefore, a platform was chosen where attendees could “raise a hand” and “get on line” to be seen onscreen during the Q & A sessions.

descriptions of them.” Some things you may want to provide well in advance are:

- » the schedule
- » speaker list and bios
- » virtual meeting etiquette recommendations
- » platform use instructions
- » contact information to ask a question or to report issues

Know Your Member

CREATING AN EVENT EXPERIENCE

The Society for Technical Communications (STC) Virtual Summit for 2020 included a relaxed, one-hour Sunday evening preview event that new members and first-time attendees were encouraged to attend. It included blues music (performed by a member) between short presentations and fostered a friendly vibe that invited participation. New members and attendees were also encouraged to introduce themselves and be greeted by established members.

Ways to Incorporate Networking

One of the biggest concerns for virtual events, summits, and conferences is the networking experience. Said one disappointed virtual conference attendee, “I did miss the networking that is found in-person. While the platform that was used did encourage virtual networking, it was certainly not the same experience.” Attendees *rate* networking as the second most important reason for attending a virtual event, after education.

Although it is apparent that nothing will ever replace face-to-face contact when it comes to networking, there *are* ways to vastly improve this experience for your members. Simply providing a platform that allows for chats and virtual teleconferencing is not enough. By getting

creative and actively providing networking structures and opportunities, you may even pleasantly surprise your attendees and make your virtual event stand out. Some ideas include:

- Providing “side rooms” for members to “walk into” during or after a presentation, or ties into the topic being presented.
- Lunch or happy hours. These should have their own schedule and “room,” and be relaxed with no agenda. Happy hours should always occur after the main presentations are finished for the day, perhaps at 4 or 5 PM. Sometimes musical “concerts” can be scheduled, with time afterwards for conversation.
- The trade show. This would seem to be the hardest area to recreate networking, both for the exhibitor/sponsor or for replicating the natural conversations that arise between event attendees in line at the booths. However, there have been many ways to recreate these experiences as closely as possible. Some include:
 - » A virtual “booth.” Each sponsor not only has video demos and presentations to open and visit, but attendees can open a videoconferencing “room” (such as Zoom) to get live facetime with vendors. If the vendor is not available live, the attendee can leave a message (akin to leaving a business card) to set up an ideal time to video chat.
 - » When in a “booth,” another person can also join live (akin to “another person in line”), where natural networking can occur.
- A job fair. This would be the same idea as the trade show booths, but instead, attendees would have the option to upload their resume to the whole job fair, or specific employers. If the membership is used to having large events at huge convention centers, this becomes an advantage: the interested employer is directed to the job

seeker immediately, without either needing to take long walks around the event space to locate the employer or job seeker they are interested in. Also, having videoconferencing “rooms” available would be essential to connect directly at the job fair.

Know Your Member 24/7 POSTER PRESENTATIONS

For CRS, “poster hours” (a designated section of event space at a designated time for viewing posters placed by scientists and students that detail their research) are essential for connecting academics with employers and companies interested in their research. However, unlike a face-to-face event, there is an advantage to the virtual event: there are no particular “hours,” and the posters are never taken down. They are available online 24/7, and without space limits, thousands can be “shown” at one time. They are also organized by topic, making it easier to be found by interested employers and companies.

Incorporating Live Media

The creative use of live media allows attendees to get close to the ephemeral feeling of face-to-face events and enhances the overall attendee experience, making the virtual event an exciting forum for “it happened here” announcements and interactions.

- **Encourage live discussion on Twitter**

Start a live Tweet session online during the event: live Tweet a video clip, ask a question, or host an “Ask Me Anything.” Use a hashtag to help people find and follow the conversation.

- **Social stories**

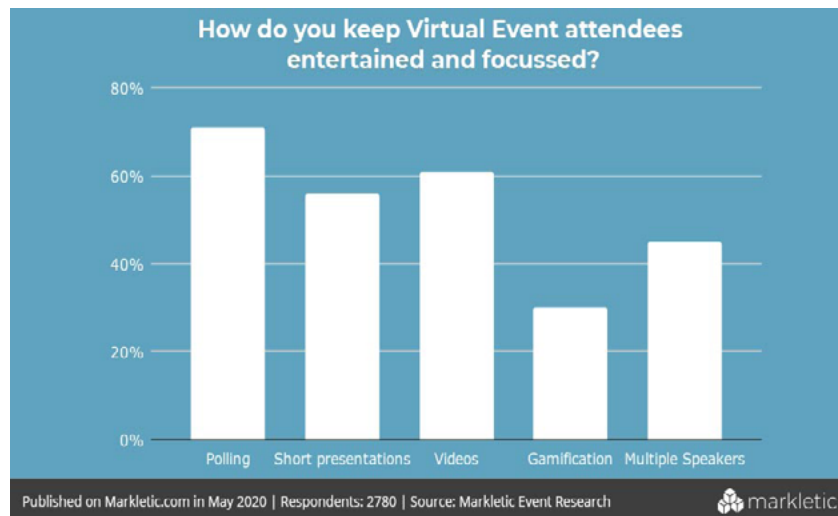
Stories are a great platform for the “you had to be there” feel, as posts are streamed live and some even disappear after a short life. The most popular

platforms to explore include Instagram Stories, Facebook Stories/ Facebook Live, Snapchat, and TikTok.

- **Incorporate live polling**

Live polling is cited as the top way virtual event planners keep attendees engaged during sessions. Task an event staff member with running a live poll during a session and involve presenters in generating the poll questions prior to their session. They can reference the live polling responses during their presentation.

Before the event starts, make sure your members know what live social platforms to follow and hashtags to follow. Include this in their registration confirmation email, welcome email, and subsequent communications leading up to the event, as well as on the welcome slides at the start of presentations.



Know Your Member BUILDING ENERGY

The Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association (JPMA) hosted its Innovation Awards announcement via Facebook Live, and as a result could gather an audience at a specific point in time. Also, using it for points of activity throughout the show helped keep the energy level high. As the focus of membership is juvenile-product manufacturing, participants appreciated JPMA’s efforts to draw attention to their brands, and attendees were gracious in volunteering to provide ongoing media coverage.



scorecard

Dates/Days of the Week

- What days of the week are your members most engaged and available?
- Are there industry “busy seasons” or other events that may lower attendance and should be avoided?

Times Zones and International Reach

- Aim for the “Golden Hours” when scheduling key events.
- Make events easy to access during the event according to time zone.
- Stay aware of international politics, possible international firewall blocks, and current events.
- Pre-record presentations either to initially broadcast, or as backup for unexpected area-specific contingencies.

To Better Engage Attendees

- Budget for and choose a quality platform that meets your member’s specific needs.
- Make sure using the platform and attending is easy.
- Schedule fun breaks and transitions.
- Incorporate live polling during events to sustain interest.

First-time Attendees/New Members

- Create special advance invites for new members or first-time virtual summit/conference attendees to welcome them.
- Make sure to provide detailed information well in advance to get them acclimated and comfortable.

Ways to Incorporate Networking

- Provide “side rooms” during or after a presentation to encourage connection and conversation.
- Provide relaxed events and spaces, such as virtual lunch hours and happy hours.
- Recreate the trade show experience as closely as possible, with “booths” that foster networking not only with vendors, but among event attendees as well.
- Provide a job fair experience, where resumes can be posted and organized, and attendees can connect via messaging and “meet” via video conferencing.

Incorporating Live Media

- Encourage live discussion on Twitter, utilizing hashtags.
- Use social stories platforms to such as Instagram Stories, Facebook Stories/ Facebook Live, Snapchat, and TikTok to broadcast videos of specific moments or special interviews, broadcast announcements, or conduct polls for a “you had to be there” feel.

Section 4

Virtual Event Sponsorship

Navigating selling and promoting
virtual event sponsorships

A key component of association events is the revenue generated from sponsorships and exhibitors. While association industry relations professionals make a wide range of opportunities available to sponsors and exhibitors, the most significant benefit is the ability to connect in person with attendees. Here, introductions are made to new prospects and existing relationships are nurtured. AH's Industry Relations professionals state that the ability to connect in person at events is often the key driver for sponsors and exhibitors to attend an event.

Virtual events, therefore, present a unique challenge in that they effectively remove that in-person element. However, virtual events still represent a valuable opportunity for associations to connect with sponsors who find value in their audience. This section explores the different ways associations can include vendors in their virtual events, as well as ways to enhance the value of the association's offerings related to virtual events.

Making the Shift from In-Person to Virtual

If your event was previously sold as an in-person event and you've made the decision to convert to virtual, either temporarily or permanently, acknowledging that the virtual event is different from an in-person event will be important in preserving relationships with sponsors and creating a slate of options that are relevant and effective for a virtual platform.

First, though: If the event was already sold as an in-person event that has now converted to a virtual event, provide options to sponsors as they're weighing their involvement with the event. These options may include:

1. Allowing them to reallocate what they've already spent to other options.

If a sponsor paid for an exhibit booth, simply converting that in-person exhibit booth to a virtual booth may not carry the same perceived value. Allowing sponsors to control where and how their investment is used in the virtual event allows the association to retain the full investment while maintaining relationships with sponsors.

2. Adding value to your current offerings.

If you plan on applying sales for an in-person event to the virtual event, add to their existing investment by incorporating other low-effort, high-value elements, such as increased exposure across different communications tied to or outside of the event, such as advertising.

3. Giving sponsors the option to apply their investment to the next in-person event.

If the previous options aren't received well, converting the sale to apply to a future in-person event shows flexibility, understanding, and avoids having to issue refunds.

4. Converting their investment to a donation for the association's foundation, education fund, or program.

Many sponsors are motivated to support

Know your Member

GIVING SPONSORS A BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK

The Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nurses Society™ (WOCN®), spent a lot of time making phone calls to sponsors, exhibitors, and supporters when they decided to make their in-person event virtual. They connected personally to not only ask sponsors to trust them and join them on the new venture, but to show and teach them the new online tools and features that would be available with the virtual event. Discussions highlighted what sponsors would need to have a successful event experience and updated sponsors regularly via a range of communication channels including their MyWOCN mobile app, social media, emails, and WOCN website.

an industry or the cause championed by an association. This option allows them to still support the organization in the event they don't want their investment applied to a virtual event.

Know your Member *SPONSOR RELATIONSHIPS*

The National Center for Homeopathy (NCH) found that their sponsors not only understood the need to change to a virtual format, but saw the virtual event as equally beneficial for their participation. The culture of the organization and relationships with sponsors is one where sponsors see their support for NCH as supporting an industry and cause for which they all care deeply, thus a change of plans didn't change their dedication to participating in and supporting NCH's event.

In addition to new opportunities, the communication to sponsors about the shift in events can be difficult to navigate. Remain upbeat but acknowledge that the event is different. Connecting personally via a phone call as opposed to an email will help preserve the relationship and foster a sense of teamwork as you work to identify a solution that is ideal for all given the circumstances. Finally, while there's no one-size-fits-all approach to handling difficult conversations, the following tips may help guide your conversations with sponsors about in-person events going virtual:

- Make them feel like they have options.
- Be sensitive to their situation and the challenges this might present.
- Be honest and relatable.
- Clearly articulate what aspects of the virtual event represent the most value for the sponsor.
- Allow time for them to consider their options and make a decision, but set a clear deadline.

Last, when converting from in-person to virtual, consider that vendors and sponsors may not take issue with the change of plans.

Incorporating Sponsors in a Virtual Event

When launching sales efforts in support of a virtual event, it's critical to create opportunities that are relevant in the context of a virtual event. These opportunities must be different from those developed for an in-person event (i.e., they should be novel, not seen as a substitution or replacement). While it may be tempting to start selling the virtual event as soon as it's decided upon, take time to create interesting opportunities that leverage the full functionality of the event.

The following are approaches you may take in planning your virtual event to ensure that sponsors have innovative ways to engage.

Know Your Member *ENGAGING SPONSORS AS PRESENTERS*

The Restoration Industry Association (RIA) launched a virtual town hall in response to COVID-19 and found that sponsors had thought leadership to contribute to the rapidly evolving conversation. They welcomed sponsors to present brief sessions to the full audience, creating value for sponsors while also enhancing the depth and breadth of the overall program.

ESTABLISH THOUGHT-LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

While sponsor engagement might be promoted during breaks and mealtimes at in-person events, audiences tend to leave the event (by getting up from the computer) during these times, meaning that the in-person event approach of scheduling sponsor presentations during breaks will not yield much value for sponsors. These brief sessions may be strategically positioned before or after prominent presenters or sessions to ensure they benefit from a fuller audience. Last, including these sessions as part of post-event, on-demand programming lengthens the shelf-life of sponsors' investment.

ALIGN SPONSORS WITH SESSIONS FOR STRATEGIC PLACEMENT

Understanding that attendees of a virtual event may log in and out of the event to view specific sessions, aligning sponsors directly with sessions can be an effective way to ensure exposure for sponsors and drive value. Place sponsor logos on cover slides and include these in the recorded sessions for post-event viewing. The National Center for Homeopathy (NCH) positioned this opportunity as the ability to support a speaker and gave sponsors a two-minute promotion at the front end of the session. During their two minutes, sponsors may introduce themselves and their company or even share a few prepared slides. The goal was to ensure that sponsors would have exposure to NCH's audience even after the event by tying their sponsorship to sessions and speakers that would attract views.

LEVERAGE THE VIRTUAL PLATFORM FOR VIDEO, CHAT, AND APPOINTMENT SETTING

No matter what platform the event's virtual exhibit hall uses, creating opportunities for attendees to have conversations with sponsors is still an element industry relations professionals say drives interest and value for sponsors. If your event platform is fully immersive, encourage sponsors to provide a video with their profile and a video call or chat link to engage in direct conversation with attendees. Incorporate immediate booking for attendees to set appointments with vendors and sponsors for live demos and conversations. This eliminates the chance that an attendee will forget to follow up after an event by allowing them to set the appointment then and there.

With these newer platforms and ever-evolving capabilities, sponsors may require a more personalized introduction to their options to see the big picture and truly understand the value you're creating. Take time to walk sponsors

through the platform, piloting what their virtual exhibit might offer and helping them achieve the experience they're hoping to have at the event. Proactive vendor management to gather materials and information—in addition to guiding them on what ads, content, and materials will resonate the best with attendees—is key to ensuring they see the intended return on investment.

INCREASE VISUAL BRANDING OPPORTUNITIES

The Restoration Industry Association (RIA) opted to produce a digital program guide that incorporated ads, understanding that their audience would still turn to the guide for event and program information despite its virtual format. Go beyond traditional program guides to include links to sponsor profiles, videos, and video conferencing information, making the program guide a complete resource for a virtual event and allowing both sponsors and attendees to act on their interests immediately. Also explore the event platform to identify where rotating banners may be placed to spotlight sponsors. Include logos on session pages and throughout the app or platform. Last, include sponsor logos and/or information on promotional emails for the event, rotating sponsors for each email sent.

Expanding Sponsors' Reach

In addition to program materials and session sponsorships, associations must challenge themselves to develop robust opportunities for sponsors to reach their audiences that go far beyond an event-centric sponsorship package. Consider all aspects of the association's communications and relevant channels and evaluate where and how sponsors may benefit from exposure. This holistic approach to sponsorship provides long-tail exposure for sponsors to engage with your audience.

HIGHLIGHTING SPONSORS ON THE ASSOCIATION WEBSITE

The Controlled Release Society (CRS) developed new platforms to highlight and promote sponsors, considering them CRS sponsors, not just event sponsors. On its website, CRS created a “Preferred Vendors of CRS” page, and any vendor that supported the virtual event was listed there in addition to the virtual event site. Even those who’ve made a base-level investment in CRS and its event get the benefit of being listed on this page, which CRS promotes to its membership via quarterly emails. Higher-level sponsors are highlighted in that quarterly email, providing an added layer of exposure.

PERSONALIZED SOCIAL PROMOTION

A truly unique take on promoting event sponsors and adding value to their investment is developing customized social promotional campaigns specifically to highlight sponsors. CRS created its social media gratitude program specifically for highlighting CRS sponsors and thanking them for their support. The personalized social media promotion engaged senior leaders of CRS to share a social media post that included sponsor information on their personal networks. This high-value initiative wasn’t a direct paid opportunity, but rather a way to nurture relationships between CRS and its sponsors, and something CRS could highlight as a benefit of supporting CRS that went beyond being aligned only with the association’s virtual event.

While sponsors may also buy website and publication advertising space or pay for sponsored content on a website or in an e-newsletter, these tactics are often in an effort to supplement and enhance their conference experience. This makes these channels potentially less exciting for sponsors who would have engaged those channels anyway. Making a concerted effort to identify and develop high-impact, high-value opportunities to pair with event sponsorship will yield better results for both an association and its sponsors.

Data After the Event

As apps and online event registration proliferated, so has the use of attendee information and data as a benefit of sponsorship. With a certain level of sponsorship comes more robust information and contact information. However, virtual events present even more opportunities to gather and interpret data that sponsors may find useful, which means that there is often more work to be done after a virtual event than an in-person event.

Depending on the functionality and capabilities of the platform used to host your virtual event, you may need to gather and report metrics related to:

- Who went in and out of sponsors’ virtual exhibit booths
- How attendees trafficked the event
- What areas of the event were most attended
- Who viewed sponsor messages/presentations during the event
- Who registered for post-event/on-demand programming

In addition to providing contact information, associations may find that the value of their event for sponsors is found in more detailed data about user/attendee behavior, and what options exist for follow up. Work with your event platform to devise when and how attendee data will be gathered and tracked, and what data will be provided to sponsors after the event.

Another layer to data gathering and reporting that must be considered is how associations will track and report data from on-demand purchases and views that occur after the live event has ended. If sponsor messaging will be preserved in the on-demand programming, it is necessary to provide them with information about on-demand views and attendees. Devise a plan for tracking and reporting on-demand viewer data, and include that information in your event prospectus and sponsor communications.



scorecard

Making the Shift from In-Person to Virtual

- Personally deliver the message that the event format has changed.
- Give sponsors options for how to reallocate their investment, if possible.
- Diversify offerings to create a high-value mix of exposure opportunities.

Incorporating Sponsors in a Virtual Event

- Allow sponsors to contribute relevant content to the program.
- Allow sponsors to support a presenter, speaker, or session with a dedicated introduction.
- Guide them through maximizing their experience on the virtual platform with video, chat, and immediate booking opportunities.
- Incorporate more visual branding on the virtual event platform for sponsors.

Expanding Sponsors' Reach

- Look beyond the program and the association's typical offerings to add value to sponsors' investment.
- Create unique programs that highlight and recognize sponsors for their support of the association, not just the virtual event.

Data After the Event

- Work with your event vendor to understand what data can be gathered and reported during and after the event.
- Establish what and how data will be reported to sponsors after the event.
- Consider how to track and report data from post-event/on-demand views.

Section 5

Communications & Marketing

Generating interest in your virtual event

While your association event—be it in-person or virtual—will inherently drive interest from those who are highly engaged in the association and industry, virtual events have a much broader audience and wider reach. Effectively marketing to a larger audience, and in a way that sets your virtual event apart from other webinars, virtual events, and other things vying for potential attendees' time, requires a comprehensive marketing and communications plan. This section outlines different marketing and communications techniques various associations have utilized to promote their virtual event to attendees and sponsors alike.

In-Person Events Going Virtual: Pivoting Communications

If your association decided to make its already-announced in-person event virtual, a communications overhaul is in order. Not only must you address the existing communications that have already been shared, but craft messaging that maintains excitement and engagement in the virtual event.

introduced the idea of needing to address existing communications. Here, we continue that conversation.

There are different approaches to how to address communications when making the switch from in-person to virtual.

DELAYING UNTIL ALL DETAILS ARE WORKED OUT AND SWEEPING ALL COMMUNICATIONS AT ONCE

discussed an approach by the Institute for Nuclear Materials Management (INMM) to sweep all of INMM's communications channels at once after the virtual event details were ready, issuing an email announcement, updating the website, and changing social media messaging and graphics for the event.

This approach is effective for organizations that want to make a swift pivot and change potential attendees' focus immediately to the merits of the virtual event.

Before implementing this approach, though, it is ideal to have the following in place:

- Dates for the virtual event
- Updated graphics for all communications channels
- An update on program changes, or that updates are forthcoming
- The platform for the virtual event to communicate what attendees and sponsors can expect

Your communications sweep may include updates to the following:

- The event website
- Association website
- News/media releases
- Social media
- Event marketing emails
- Member forums
- Event app
- Sponsor/exhibitor prospectus

Investing the time in preparing for a large-scale announcement will allow for a clean break from promoting the in-person event and focus all attention on the virtual event.

KEEPING MEMBERS UPDATED THROUGHOUT THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

While the "clean break" approach may be ideal for many associations, others may opt for an early announcement that the event format is under review and that a decision will be forthcoming. This approach buys the board time to consider all factors of canceling an in-person event and the logistics of launching a virtual event. At the same time, it addresses questions that potential attendees may have

about the status of the event, even if the status is “under review.”

If this approach better suits your organization, it is ideal to establish:

- **What channels will be updated.**

Do you send communications only to association members, or broadcast the status of the event on your social media and website? Do you include sponsors and exhibitors in those communications?

- **How often updates will be sent.**

Setting a regular interval for communications can keep your decision-making process on track and help ease tensions or anxiety of members and attendees who are curious about the status of the event.

- **What and how much information will be shared.**

Understanding that canceling an in-person event can have significant financial consequences on an association, members may question the health and fate of the organization in light of a cancellation. Conversely, members may not be aware of the consequences of canceling an in-person event or what considerations have been made in weighing the decision to go virtual.

Being transparent with that information can build trust between association leaders and members and support for the difficult decisions that must be made when pivoting from in-person to virtual.

Marketing to Sponsors and Exhibitors

If your event is making the change from in-person to virtual, it is critical that your event sponsors and exhibitors receive dedicated communications prior to the broader announcement. See

for a more in-depth discussion of communicating with sponsors about this change and more details about selling sponsorships for virtual events.

Be sure to share your virtual event marketing plan with your event sponsors, either in the prospectus or through a dedicated sponsor update email sent to all sponsors. This update might include:

- Channels used to promote the event
- How often promotions will be going out
- Plans for social advertising campaigns
- A timeline for registration promotions

Know your Member

TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATIONS AMID EVENT CANCELATIONS

The Osteoarthritis Research Society International (OARSI) had scheduled its World Congress in Austria at the end of April 2020, shortly after COVID-19 closures and travel restrictions were implemented. They opted to cancel the in-person event, but were facing a significant amount in cancellation fees, which could be devastating to the organization. As OARSI leaders spent weeks negotiating the terms of the cancellation, they kept members apprised of every step along the way. Through email, Facebook, Twitter, a weekly newsletter, and OARSI’s website, OARSI shared updates about progress in the negotiations while emphasizing that they were doing everything they could to minimize the effects of the cancellation on the organization and its members. After a final deal was negotiated with the hotel in Austria, a formal notice was sent out explaining that the World Congress was canceled and rescheduled for 2024 in the same location. OARSI felt that the continuous communication was vital.

While this might be an unconventional approach to engaging with sponsors and exhibitors, showcasing your event marketing efforts can help them visualize their ROI on sponsoring the event.

Marketing the User Experience

One of the most important marketing elements of a virtual event is the user experience.

discusses

different ways you can create a true experience at your virtual event. From live media to virtual exhibit halls, live Q&A, and gamification, letting attendees know what to expect can be a valuable marketing tool to help establish how your event will be different from a webinar.

Fully explore the functionality of your virtual event platform and what options are available for attendees. After determining what elements you'll engage for the event, select which are most marketable and develop dedicated messaging for attendees that showcases these features. This may be in the form of:

- A highlight email to prospects
- A detailed “what to expect” email for attendees
- A behind-the-scenes sneak peek at the platform via a demonstration video or brief live demonstration session for attendees

Know your Member MARKETING WHAT MATTERS

The American Transplant Congress (ATC) understood that what attendees value the most about its event is the quality of content. In preparation for their virtual event, they centered a significant amount of their marketing messaging on the content, ensuring attendees that their virtual event would be a seamless delivery of the high-quality content they expect from ATC.

- A section in general event marketing emails that highlights one feature each email
- Dedicated social media posts about an exciting or unique feature

Including a rundown of what attendees will experience in your event marketing can help build excitement, drive interest from those who enjoy exploring new technology, and calm nerves for those who are technology averse. If your virtual platform has live Q&As, live panel discussions, webinars, chat rooms, and more, include those features in your marketing.

Social Media

When it comes to paid advertisements for social media, focus on which social channels work best for your audience. A 2019 [survey](#) found that Facebook and YouTube are the two most commonly used social media platforms for adults, while Snapchat and Instagram are more popular with younger audiences.

However, that doesn't mean that Facebook and YouTube are automatically the two best social media platforms for your event marketing. Professional and trade associations may find a highly relevant audience on LinkedIn as well, though advertising options on LinkedIn are more limited than those on Facebook. Evaluate your existing social media channels and their related advertising capabilities to determine which ones to focus your marketing efforts on.

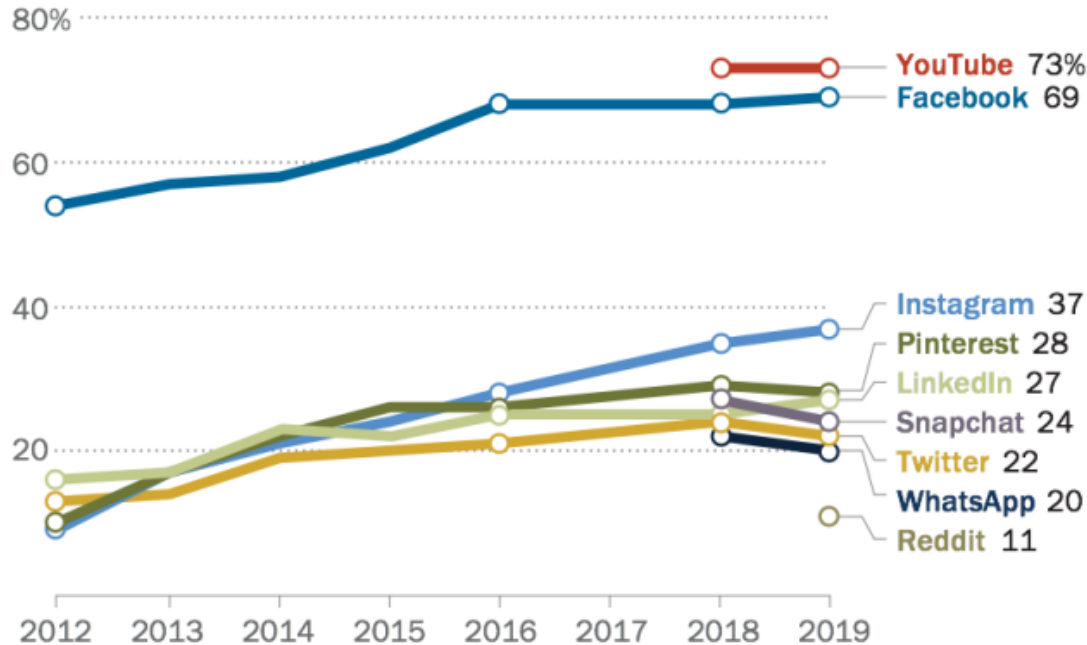
INCORPORATING SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING

Social media advertising is a highly effective way to market your virtual event. A modest investment of just \$500 can super-charge your social content to get it in front of highly relevant viewers.

However, for social media advertising to work well you must have an incentive for people to click on the ad. That might be a simple call-to-action to register for the event, or it may be tied to a promotion code for discounted registration. You may also consider linking them to a page to preview the event platform or view the program.

Facebook, YouTube continue to be the most widely used online platforms among U.S. adults

% of U.S. adults who say they ever use the following online platforms or messaging apps online or on their cellphone



Note: Pre-2018 telephone poll data is not available for YouTube, Snapchat and WhatsApp. Comparable trend data is not available for Reddit.
 Source: Survey conducted Jan. 8-Feb. 7, 2019.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

ENGAGING PRESENTERS

One key way to expand your social media advertising is by engaging speakers and presenters on social media. Provide pre-written social media posts with event graphics for them to share on their social media.

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Social media offers a prime opportunity to partner with influencers who can help market the event. This may incur a fee, though some influencers will partner with associations for free in exchange for the increased visibility to the association's audience. To get started working with social media influencers:

- Identify influencers in your industry.
- Reach out to them personally to propose working together to market the event.
- Establish the terms of the partnership (fees, if any; number of posts; duration).
- Set a budget for direct costs related to boosting the influencer's posts about the event.

For more guidance on social media advertising and working with social influencers, contact inquire@ahint.com.

Late Access/Post-Event Marketing

When establishing what registration for the live event includes, consider whether post-event access will be available for event attendees and for how long. Post-event access may be available for:

- One month
- One year
- Indefinitely

You may also opt to make post-event access a separate registration entirely that attendees can add on to their live event registration.

Marketing post-event access may affect your no-show rate (no-show rates for virtual events are **35%**, slightly higher than in-person events) as attendees don't feel a sense of urgency to attend the live event as it's happening. Carefully market this post-event access to ensure the live event sees the strongest attendance possible. Do this by:

- Not making post-event access a primary marketing message.
- Focus marketing messaging on the benefits of the live event.
- Scheduling post-event programming to become available one week after the event.

MARKETING POST-EVENT ACCESS TO ATTENDEES OF THE LIVE EVENT

Ensure that attendees are aware of and can find the post-event content:

- Send a dedicated email after the virtual event notifying attendees that they may now access the program's on-demand content.
- Include a notice about when and where to access on-demand content at the end of each session.
- Send an expiration email notification shortly before on-demand access is about to end.

MARKETING ON-DEMAND ACCESS TO PROSPECTS WHO DIDN'T REGISTER FOR THE LIVE EVENT

Virtual events present a rich opportunity for associations to extend the life and value of conference content. Develop a dedicated post-event marketing campaign to drive on-demand registrations that includes:

- A small "preview" of content from the event with a link to purchase full on-demand access.
- A round-up of social media posts from the event with a link to purchase on-demand access.
- Packaged content by level/track/topic, priced accordingly for limited access to those packages.
- Pre-written social media posts for presenters to share with their networks that link to the page to purchase on-demand access.

Know your Member MAXIMIZING PROGRAM VALUE AFTER THE EVENT

The Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nurses Society™ (WOCN®) allowed pre-registered attendees who couldn't make it to their virtual event, WOCNext 2020 Reimagined, to earn more than 30 contact hours by viewing sessions and some ePosters for more than two weeks after the live event ended. This post-event access, tied to the continued ability to earn so many contact hours, made the post-event access a significant marketing element for the event.



scorecard

Pivoting Communications

- Determine whether you'll update members about the status of the event as decisions are made or wait to conduct a complete communications sweep once a final decision is made
- If making a communications sweep, update graphics and messaging prior to the announcement
- If issuing regular updates on the event status, determine who, how often, and what will be shared

Marketing to Sponsors and Exhibitors

- See **Section 4: Selling Virtual Events** for more information
- Share event marketing efforts with sponsors and exhibitors to help visualize ROI

Marketing the User Experience

- Provide a sneak peek or demo of the virtual event platform
- Highlight exciting or unique features of the virtual event platform in your marketing emails
- Develop marketing messaging that speaks to attendees' top concerns and interests

Social Media

- Evaluate your association's social media channels and focus on those that will be most effective
- Use paid social media advertising to help reach targeted audiences
- Engage speakers and presenters to post on their social media channels to help promote the event
- Consider partnering with social media influencers, if relevant for your industry, to help promote the event

Late Access/Post-Event Marketing

- Determine what on-demand/post-event access will look like (as part of event registration, separate, available for a limited time, etc.)
- Do not make on-demand and post-event access a primary marketing message, or risk losing live-event attendees
- Repackage sessions by topic, track, or experience level and sell access to those specific packages
- Engage speakers/presenters to market on-demand sessions and access after the event



ASSOCIATION
HEADQUARTERS