

5 ways to enhance your virtual event strategy



campaign

BlueJeans
by Verizon

Introduction

It goes without saying that Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on the live events industry. With much of the world in lockdown over the last year, in-person events such as meetings, trade shows, conferences, and festivals were cancelled globally. With events like these on hold, the industry was forced to pivot towards virtual events.

As the world emerges from lockdown, many businesses are now making a conscious choice to continue with virtual events. There are several reasons behind this shift, and one predominant factor is that on a practical level, the return of live events is still very much in the balance in many countries, while travel restrictions also remain in place globally.

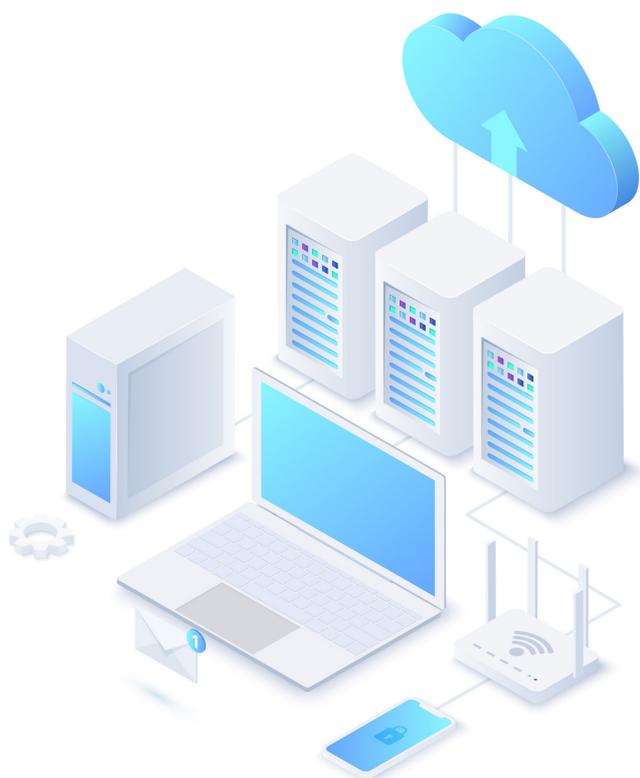
Events that engage

With many people still working from home and continuing to do so for the foreseeable future, we have seen businesses relinquish office-based working



and adopt a hybrid workplace strategy – what global market research company Forrester refers to as an ‘Anywhere Work’ policy. With the current state of affairs, virtual events provide businesses with the opportunity to engage with audiences at scale, regardless of where they are based. Businesses are also becoming much more accustomed to using virtual event tools, and these in turn have also become more sophisticated. We can chat, ask questions in real-time, conduct polls, record, share presentations, host panel discussions together, alter our background and more – all of which means that virtual events can deliver more meaningful and immersive experiences to mass audiences, enabling them to engage and feel part of the event.

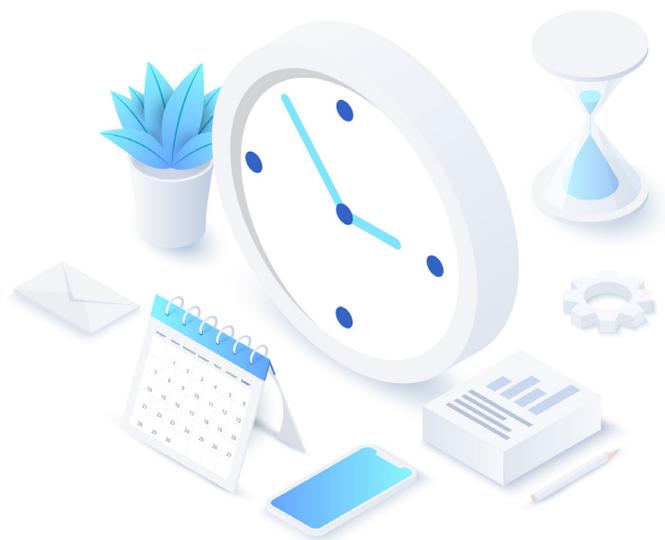
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Using time more efficiently is also a key consideration. With virtual events enabling people to meet regardless of time zones and across multiple geographies, removing the need to travel to and from an event, will save attendees time that can be better spent focusing on other fundamental parts of their job. And for large gatherings in particular, switching to virtual events would mean thousands of people can meet safely, without the concern over number restrictions at venues – an important consideration in light of the pandemic.

The benefits of going virtual

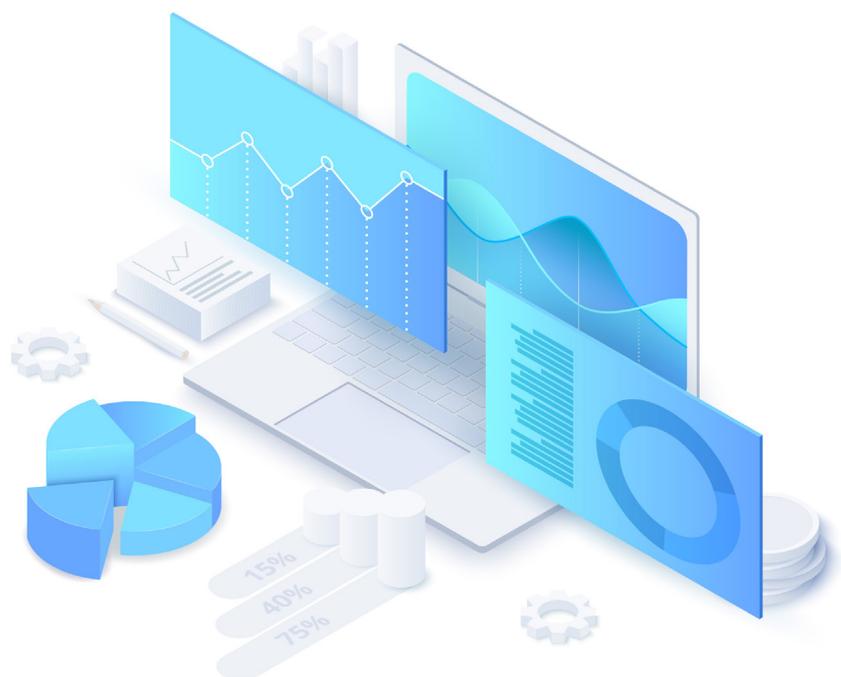
There are longer-term gains to be made with the use of virtual event platforms. First, organisations are able to reduce costs by eliminating travel and expenses related to attending in-person events. With virtual events, you can also host and deliver content in a variety of formats based on yours and your audiences' requirements. For example, you can deliver more content in multiple online breakout rooms, whereas in-person events may have space restrictions. Virtual events can be shorter in length and repackaged with on-demand sessions, and attendees can join when it suits them, maximising their time and focus. The pivot to virtual events has also offered organisations and



their employees the chance to evaluate their work/life balance – removing travel, for example, can result in more personal quality time and an increased level of efficiency and productivity and can also be beneficial for mental health.

This report, produced in partnership with BlueJeans by Verizon, examines the benefits of hosting virtual events, how to create and increase levels of engagement in an online environment, how technology has transformed events (and continues to do so) and what the future for virtual experiences will look like.

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How virtual events can power-up your business



Many companies were forced to quickly move to virtual events last year as a consequence of the pandemic. Many businesses scrambled to make sense of technology and systems that were already in place or selected solutions impulsively as a knee jerk reaction, because these fit a particular request short-term, without much thought for any long-term implications.

Research from Forrester released in April 2021, and carried out on behalf of BlueJeans, looked at how to optimise technology for a virtual/hybrid events future. More than half of those surveyed (57%), said they didn't have enough time to select their virtual events software as the pandemic hit. Going forward, such an approach may not be suitable in relation to technology assurance. As Forrester outlines, this can

result in a poorly delivered event, with more than half of those surveyed saying there were increased costs (57%), while 54% said there were missed opportunities and revenue, and the same number again cited poor customer and attendee experience.

Use virtual to strengthen offering

Therefore, it is vital to spend time considering your business' objectives and how a virtual event strategy can support these aims. Could it help your business achieve its revenue targets, attract more customers and generate new leads, or is it more about distributing information in a timely fashion to a mass audience geographically dispersed? Are you looking to gather data and intelligence on a particular audience that can be used in marketing or do you want real-time feedback on a specific topic? Will virtual events be used for a 'Town Hall' mass audience discussion or keynote presentation or do you want to deliver online education and training sessions?

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Virtually anything is possible in an online format, but organisations should carefully consider how they successfully choose and integrate a virtual events solution into their business strategy and what they want to achieve from it. Ensuring the best solution is chosen and fit-for-purpose is integral because many of us have experienced 'video call fatigue' over the past year. Screens can be seen as in danger of inhibiting virtual events rather than enhancing them, so it's vital to be clear what you want to achieve from the outset to generate the best outcome.

Virtual events can also be less 'compelling' than physical ones, as they require a far lower level of commitment to attend, and there is a greater chance for prospective attendees to cancel last minute or not show up at all.

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It has also become all too easy to be distracted at a virtual event, perhaps because we have too many screens at our fingertips and therefore different demands on our time and attention. To mitigate this, thorough research into virtual event solutions and a clear understanding of best practice for online events from the start can support decision-making efforts. This should be carried out alongside an assessment of business goals and desired outcomes, with technology underpinning all of this and facilitating the right solution.

Give your audience what it wants

Virtual events can truly deliver in ways that physical ones can't. As the Forrester research outlines, respondents believe that key benefits include greater flexibility for audiences to attend multiple sessions, better event analytics and increased attendance. Other advantages include improved preparation pre-event, deeper social networking among attendees, easier post-event follow-up engagement and the ability to host a greater number of breakout sessions. And if you find that attendees are leaving your virtual events early, it could be the spur you need to reassess your content and adapt it to resonate better with your audience.





Putting people first

Whatever your goals for a virtual event, people are critical to its success, much as they would be for a live event. Behind every screen is a human and it's vital that your content resonates and engages with each and every one of them, ideally pre, during and post-event.

To get your virtual event off to the best possible start, think about ways to surprise and delight your audience. In a virtual environment this could mean creating a sense of anticipation ahead of the event, by sending a swag bag or event-themed prop in the post, or a digital teaser. Consider asking attendees to submit questions in the run-up to the event; this could identify areas of interest that can be further explored in the content.

Communication and great content

During the event, as part of a breakout session or during a keynote, encourage your attendees to start a conversation with a live chat function, and depending on the number of participants you are expecting, encourage them to say a little bit about themselves when they post. This will help to bring a more relaxed, human touch and make your attendees feel more valued. The ability to respond to requests in real-time is important too, as this helps to build the conversation as well as reinforce levels of interaction. Other tools such as interactive polls and enabling feedback can draw attendees in; for Q&A sessions, a feature such as BlueJeans' 'raise hand' enables participants to get a

moderator's attention online without interrupting the flow of the session.

Gauging audience reactions in real time can also help you to shape the content as the event progresses, deepening levels of engagement. If attendees can see that their requests are being accommodated, shared or responded to, they are more likely to invest further in the event, both in terms of time and engagement.

Additional content can also provide a more dynamic and immersive environment, as professional basketball team Phoenix Suns discovered when it used BlueJeans Events to provide fans with additional streamed video content during games. With the National Basketball Association (NBA) 2020 season played behind closed doors due to Covid-19, Phoenix Suns brought the atmosphere and thrill of the game into its fans' homes. Fans could access a 'second screen experience', with the additional streamed content featuring contests, giveaways, chat, polls and Q&As. The platform also gave partners the chance to promote their brands and interact with a wider audience.

To interact with your audience after the event, consider offering sessions on-demand for a set period of time, or encourage them to post questions that can be followed up in the form of exclusive content or an event overview.



Pack a punch with your production

The move to virtual events has also highlighted the benefits of bringing high-definition production-style credentials to your events, which can also enhance engagement. For a physical event, planners spend time and effort researching the perfect venue and ensuring the look fits with the occasion, so why not apply the same thinking to your virtual event platform?

Attendees are more likely to respond and engage with an experience that feels like a broadcast, almost akin to watching a television programme they are invested in. This translates to razor-sharp images and clear Dolby-quality sound, enhanced lighting and content that moves seamlessly from one frame to the next.

Tailor events with the right tech

BlueJeans Events platform, for example, features a dashboard that enables a meeting host which it terms a 'moderator'. This manages content in different ways so you can enable recordings, view multiple speakers together or presenters within one frame and share different content formats, such as presentations and videos.

Virgin Hyperloop, which is pioneering a transportation system using pods inside vacuum tubes that carry passengers at high speed, used BlueJeans Events to livestream the launch of its first passenger test. It created a drive-in theatre-style experience so employees and other stakeholders could still be together and experience the moment, while adhering to Covid-19 restrictions. The event was streamed using multiple fixed and mobile cameras, giving viewers the chance to capture and experience emotions such as excitement and exhilaration from different angles.

The result was a high-quality production where attendees connected with the content in real-time and where the format reflected the idea of speed and seamless movement associated with the brand.

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The technology experience



A further finding from the Forrester research pointed to how 78% of those surveyed agree that the platform used is critical to achieve virtual events success.

Whether you are hosting an external event for a few hundred or for 50,000 people, or organising an internal HR meeting attended by worldwide offices, your choice of technology needs to be robust, and able to withstand any bandwidth constraints. Indeed, the ability to host mass events without compromising on the tech experience is what sets dedicated virtual event platforms apart from video conferencing facilities or online meeting tools. Using a platform that can scale as your business grows also makes sense – technology is a long-term investment and as the Forrester research points out, scrambling for a solution can be detrimental in the long-term.

Choose a reliable, proven platform

Ease of access and ease-of-use are equally important – there is little point in using a platform that is not intuitive or which does not work on a particular interface. Interoperability is key and virtual events also need to embrace choice – after all, with thousands connecting remotely, you have no control when it comes to how participants are joining. By offering as many options as possible, your virtual event can be easily attended by each and every guest. The platform needs to work regardless of whether attendees are on a mobile, smart device or joining from a desktop.

It should be available on any browser and participants should be able to join an event by either downloading software or by streaming through a browser.

A solution that is adaptable can also be a good investment for the long-term. The School of Medicine at the University of Louisville (UofL) and the UofL's healthcare providers used the BlueJeans platform in different ways to achieve separate objectives. The School of Medicine was able to livestream open heart surgery to students who were unable to travel to the university during lockdown restrictions. This enabled students, regardless of where they were based in the US, to continue to learn in an innovative fashion. Moreover, they were able to ask surgeons performing the operations questions through immersive Dolby audio, furthering their knowledge in real-time.

Healthcare providers, meanwhile, were able to offer easy-to-access telehealth consultations to patients via Blue Jeans Meetings, while protecting patient privacy and data with enterprise-grade security controls that comply with the Health Insurance Portability and Accessibility Act (HIPAA).

This system ran across five hospitals and more than 250 clinics, ensuring as many people as possible could access a healthcare consultation remotely, regardless of the device used and removing the need to travel.

Virtual futures



In the past year, the events industry has demonstrated the extent to which virtual meetings can both support a physical event and be a successful stand-alone strategy. For larger gatherings in particular, virtual meetings have enabled people to meet safely across different time zones, without restrictions and without having to implement safety measures. Businesses have also realised the gains too, with virtual meetings lowering the costs associated with travel and reducing their carbon footprint too.

Use virtual to enhance experiences

In a post-pandemic world, some events will never return to a live setting so it's vital for businesses to be as prepared as possible for the virtual environment. And with everyone's circumstances different, providing a virtual option in addition to a live event may already be a given, and going forward will be the minimum that attendees expect.

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Successful virtual events are not about replicating face-to-face ones online; it's about offering the benefits of face-to-face and adding elements that can surpass or elevate this to deliver a seamless experience.

Today's event attendees are more discerning and harder to please. With so much competition for our time and attention, content needs to be compelling, relevant and memorable, while interactivity needs to be heightened, personalised and truly immersive. Virtual platforms can deliver on all of this, taking your events to the next level and beyond.



About BlueJeans

Our mission is to make online meetings fast to join and simple to use, so people can work productively where and how they want.

Our platform brings video, audio and web conferencing together to change the way people meet.

Try it for free and see how it can help your business or visit bluejeans.com