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Optimize Your Technology And Strategy For A Virtual And Hybrid Events-Dominated Future

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FORRESTER OPPORTUNITY SNAPSHOT: A CUSTOM STUDY COMMISSIONED BY BLUEJEANS | MARCH 2021

Retool And Invest For The Virtual And Hybrid Event Future

The pandemic has forever redefined marketing event strategy. COVID-19 forced marketers around the world to quickly pivot to virtual events, and as the pandemic winds down, there's no returning back to "normal."¹ Digitalized events are here to stay.

Hybrid events will blend the best of both in-person and virtual experiences.² Marketers must reevaluate their virtual and hybrid events strategies and technologies to successfully meet customer expectations and achieve customer engagement, marketing, and sales goals. Only with the right mindset and tools can marketers successfully evolve their events from a marketing tactic to a series of invaluable, reusable assets.

In 2020, BlueJeans commissioned a custom study from Forrester Consulting to understand how marketers are delivering virtual and hybrid events today.

Key Findings



Marketers know that virtual events can deliver flexibility and analytics that in-person events can't and plan to use virtual and hybrid events to drive customer engagement and loyalty in the future.



Two-thirds of marketers say their firms are struggling to achieve the same success from virtual events that they would get from in-person events.



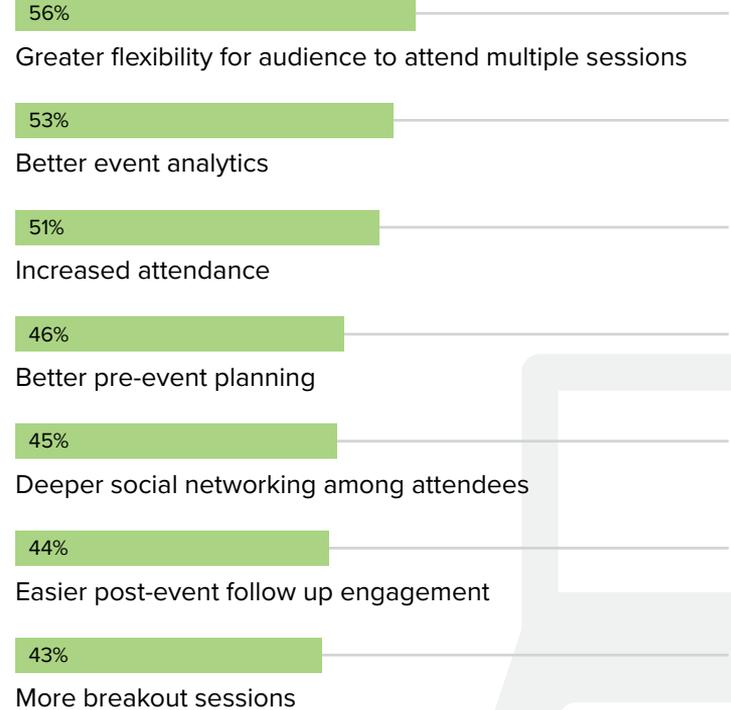
Over 80% of decision-makers agree that with improvements to their virtual/hybrid events strategies, they could achieve the same or greater success as in-person events.

Digitizing Events Extends Flexibility, Engagement Opportunities, And Reach

Events are evolving from a marketing tactic with questionable measurable returns to a digitized customer experience that produces reusable and insight-rich marketing assets.³ Marketers recognize that virtual events can deliver in ways that in-person events cannot. North American marketing event strategists agree that, compared to physical events, virtual events can allow for 1) greater flexibility for audiences to attend multiple sessions, 2) better event analytics, and 3) increased attendance. Hybrid events, in turn, can merge the best of both in-person and virtual events.

Going forward, marketers plan to use virtual and hybrid events to create and maintain customer interaction. Top goals for digital events in the next 12 months include increasing awareness of new products and services, driving customer engagement, and promoting brand loyalty.

“Which of the following can you achieve from virtual events that you can’t achieve from physical events?”



Virtual And Hybrid Events Are The Future

The future of events is virtual and hybrid. While digital events were part of some companies' pre-pandemic event strategies, the pandemic forced *everyone* to go online. In a post-COVID world, virtual and hybrid events are expected to play a much larger role: Decision-makers anticipate an increase of 25%, representing two-thirds of organizations' overall event mix.

The pandemic left marketers scrambling to figure out new virtual events strategies and to pivot their teams from working on physical events to virtual and hybrid events. After the pandemic, marketers anticipate increasing implementation of virtual events initiatives, including creating a personalization strategy, developing a new hybrid events strategy, and pivoting their events team from work on physical events to virtual and hybrid events.

“Which of the following initiatives related to virtual and hybrid events do you expect your organization to work on after the pandemic?”

1

Creating a personalization strategy

2

Developing a new hybrid events strategy

3

Pivoting events team from working on physical events to virtual and hybrid events

4

Developing a new virtual events strategy

5

Finding a new platform specific for virtual/hybrid events

Marketers Struggle To Achieve The Same Success From Virtual Events As In-Person Events

A memorable event experience is a must to achieve customer engagement goals. Attendees look for a flexible, personalized, interactive, and engaging virtual event experience while marketers anticipate using event data to personalize sale conversations more effectively.⁴ The success and insights garnered from a virtual event ultimately depend on and are determined by the customer experience (CX).

However, two-thirds of surveyed marketers struggle to achieve the same success from virtual events that they get from in-person events: Most marketers find it challenging to replicate the interactive, compelling storytelling and lead-generating aspects of in-person events. The ramifications are clear: Over half of marketers agree that poor event delivery results in increased costs, missed opportunities, and poor CX.

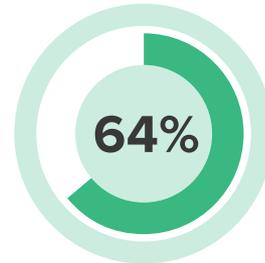
“How challenging is it for your organization to deliver on the following?”

● Very challenging/Challenging



Making hybrid or virtual events resemble all the interactive, human-to-human elements of an on-site event

Bringing our products, services, and story to life in a compelling format on a virtual/hybrid events platform



Effectively isolating the most engaged leads from a virtual/hybrid event to improve sales performance after the event

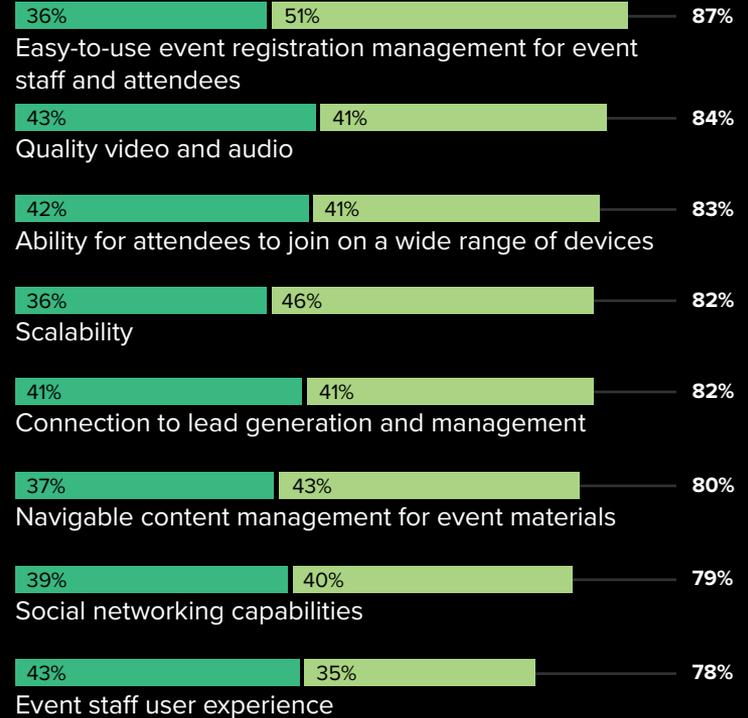
Virtual/Hybrid Software Is Critical To Event Success

Choosing the right technology and knowing how to use it lie at the heart of a successful virtual or hybrid event; otherwise, event planning, content, and personalization efforts are all for naught. Nearly eight out of 10 decision-makers agree that technology platforms (78%) and tech support (79%) are critical to virtual events success.

Attendees and event staff alike are looking for flexibility and convenience, especially when accessing content and data insights. Decision-makers report the most important tech features to deliver successful virtual/hybrid events are 1) easy event registration management (87%), 2) quality video and audio (84%), 3) the ability for attendees to join on a wide range of devices (83%), 4) scalability (82%), and 5) connection to lead generation and management (82%).

“How important to your organization is each of the following tech features of your software in delivering successful virtual/hybrid events?”

● Very important ● Important



Take More Time To Choose Your Virtual/Hybrid Events Software

Despite the importance of technology, only about half of marketers are satisfied with their virtual events software. Specifically, the top three software issues marketers face are challenges with troubleshooting technical difficulties, personalizing aspects of events, and developing, managing, and delivering event content.

Marketers must be deliberate in researching and selecting the right virtual events technology. Over half (57%) say they did not have enough time to select their virtual/hybrid events software. This is unsurprising as 61% say their organizations scrambled to purchase a virtual events platform in response to the pandemic. Even worse, a quarter of marketers are just using their existing general-purpose conferencing software to support virtual events. This lack of good tech shows: 94% of marketers have experienced issues with their current virtual/hybrid events software.

“Which of the following issues does your current virtual/hybrid events software have?”



1 Difficulty troubleshooting technical difficulties



2 Difficulty personalizing aspects of events



3 Difficulty developing, managing, and delivering event content



4 Poor social networking capabilities



5 Difficult learning curve for use of software



6 Poor attendee experience



7 Poor navigation for attendees



8 Poor networking performance

Improve Virtual/Hybrid Event Strategies To Achieve Greater Success

Marketers can achieve greater success with their events if they:

- Reevaluate their mentality toward virtual and hybrid events by focusing on creating reusable marketing assets and a personalized, educational CX.
- Select the technology equipped to achieve what they want to convey.⁵

Over 80% of marketers agree that with improvements to their virtual and hybrid events strategies, they could achieve the same or greater success as in-person events. With better virtual/hybrid events, leaders expect significant or transformational benefits, such as a competitive advantage (80%), better customer engagement (77%), and greater brand loyalty and awareness (76%).

“To what extent do you expect your organization would receive the following benefits from being able to conduct better virtual/hybrid events?”

● Transformational/Significant benefit



Conclusion

Virtual and hybrid events are the future. They can offer greater flexibility, event analytics, and attendance. Refashioned as a personalized customer experience, digital events can be invaluable marketing assets in marketers' toolboxes. Yet decision-makers are struggling to replicate the interactivity, storytelling, and lead-surfacing aspects of in-person events due to limitations of their virtual and hybrid events software. If marketers reevaluate their mindset, strategy, and technology for virtual and hybrid events, they can untap a competitive advantage that furthers customer engagement, brand benefits, and sales opportunities.

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Methodology

This Opportunity Snapshot was commissioned by BlueJeans. To create this profile, Forrester Consulting supplemented this research with custom survey questions asked of 200 North American decision-makers of marketing event strategies. The custom survey began and was completed in January 2021.

ENDNOTES

¹A virtual event is an online experience that connects brands and services with their customers through real-time video streaming. Examples include marketing webinars, ticketed events, virtual conferences, and product launches.

²A hybrid event combines traditional, on-site gatherings with livestreaming to maximize audience size and experience.

³Source: "Increase B2B In-Person Event Payoff With Digital Immersion," Forrester Research, Inc., August 14, 2019.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Source: "Virtual Event Experiences Position B2B Marketers For Post-Pandemic Success," Forrester (<https://www.forrester.com/fn/4m0OVdkl890VGHc2ha7hNb>).

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Demographics

COUNTRY

68% US

32% Canada

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

27% 500 to 999

47% 1,000 to 4,999

21% 5,000 to 19,999

5% 20,000 or more

TITLE

24% C-level

35% Vice president

30% Director

11% Manager

TOP 4 INDUSTRIES

16% Retail

13% Advertising and marketing

10% Healthcare

10% Consumer services

A person is seen from behind, sitting at a wooden desk and using a laptop. The laptop screen displays a video conference with four participants. The Forrester logo is overlaid in the center of the image. The background shows a cityscape at night.

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