

Wow Them with Your Virtual Event

Why Technology Matters for Engaging Users

With the recent shift to remote work, the professional events landscape has changed dramatically. Faced with the reality of canceling most in-person events due to the global pandemic, many organizations have switched to online and virtual events to keep customers, employees, and other stakeholders engaged.

As a result, the popularity of hosting and attending virtual events has increased. To better understand the experiences and perceptions of virtual events among IT and line-of-business (LOB) executives, IDG surveyed 200 respondents in a variety of industries about their attendance at virtual events.

Today's Virtual Events

When the reality of canceled live events sank in, many companies scrambled to find alternatives. So, too, did professionals who still wanted ways to learn, network, and develop their career. The answer: online or virtual events.

On average, respondents to the survey attended 20 virtual events in 2020. Some attended even more: 37% attended between 10–25 events in the last year, and another 25% attended between 25–50 events.

The most common type of virtual event was the webinar (56%). Other common formats included online training (55%) and professional conferences (54%). Respondents turned to virtual events for a variety of purposes, including social gatherings, training, and marketing webinars. And the interest in continuing to do so shows no sign of waning: 83% expect their virtual event attendance to increase post-pandemic.

The results reveal that virtual events have caught fire in the last year and likely won't abate anytime in the near future. With this in mind, businesses that plan to host virtual events need to utilize the best technology possible to keep attendees engaged—and coming back for future events.

This white paper examines the results of the IDG survey and explores what the findings reveal about the state of virtual events today, which technology organizations should consider when hosting virtual events, and how to best evaluate technology to ensure user engagement and satisfaction.

“People don't necessarily want to be taken away from their families and to have to commute a long distance to attend an event,” says Zach Bosin, Vice President, Product Marketing & Communications, at BlueJeans. “And we now know that there are ways to build brand loyalty without forcing someone to fly across the country and attend a conference. Because of these virtual events, we see there are a lot of great things you can be exposed to online, and you can fit those into your work week.”

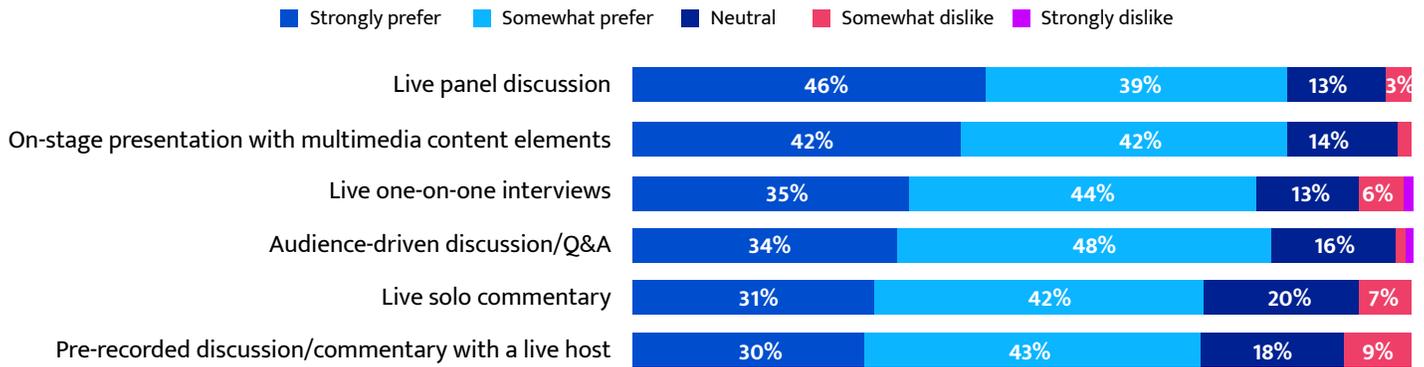
User Experience Is Critical to Success

Although the results show that virtual events are popular, offering a positive attendee experience is critical: 83% indicated that their expectations of virtual events are higher since the start of the pandemic—and they care more now about their experience than ever before.

Which factors make for strong virtual events? And how can hosts ensure that audiences leave feeling satisfied? Start by making sure you deliver the right type of experience. Survey respondents clearly prefer live panel discussions (46%) and onstage presentations with multimedia elements (42%).

Respondents are most enthusiastic about speakers who are executives in their industry or who are well-known lecturers (49%). Other popular types of speakers include subject matter and industry experts (48%) and market competitors (48%).

Figure 1: Preferred Virtual Event Formats for Work-related Topics



Source: IDG

Check the Clock: Timing Is Essential

The time of day and length of the event are also key considerations for crafting a successful experience. Respondents think work-related events should be kept to just under one hour, or in segments, to hold participants' attention. Many respondents (41%) said events should be 45–60 minutes long.

The survey looked at preferences in both the United States and Europe, Middle East, and Asia (EMEA). Attendees in EMEA prefer midmorning for attending work-related events, whereas U.S. respondents prefer a later start time: 30% after 5 p.m.



Great Events Are Smooth, Interesting, and Interactive

Regardless of what time an event takes place, the highest priority is ensuring that the content is captivating and that the event goes smoothly. Survey respondents noted that boring content (26%), disorganized hosts/moderators (25%), lack of opportunities for interaction, and uncharismatic speakers are the leading problems with all virtual events.

Respondents also cited poor audio quality, unreliable platforms, and the inability to properly participate as the

worst aspects of traditional webinars. Just under one-third of virtual events in 2020 exceeded expectations, whereas one-quarter, on average, were worse than expected.

Among respondents who have hosted a virtual event this year, viewing real-time metrics such as audience attendance, demographics, and engagement is the No. 1 way to improve the moderator's experience (see Figure 2).

And after respondents join a virtual event, video and audio quality, app integration capabilities, and opportunities for audience participation most often keep them engaged (see Figure 3).

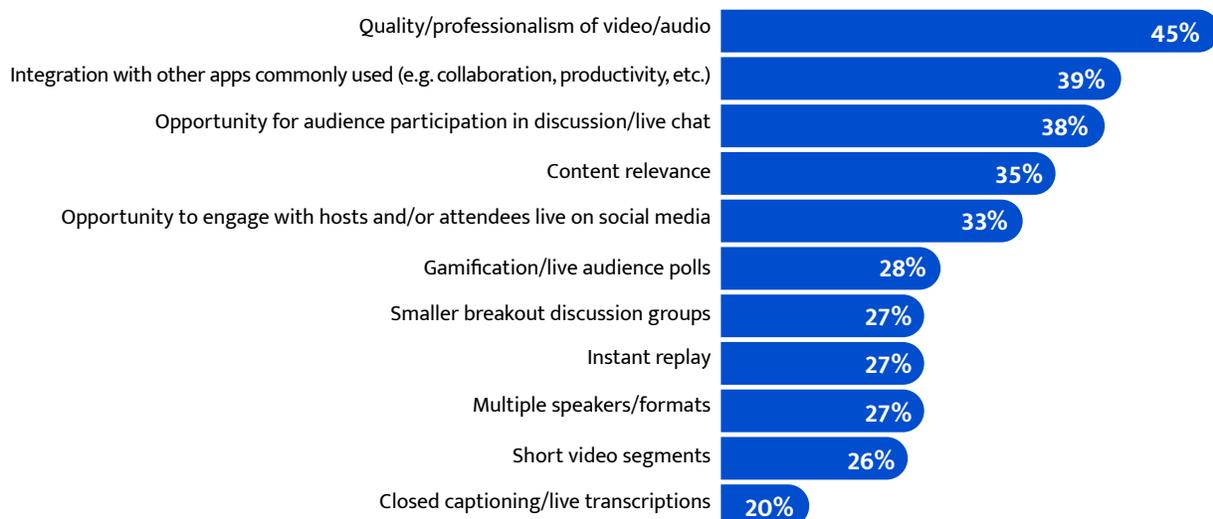
Figure 2: Technology Features that Would Improve Moderator Experience

Source: IDG



Figure 3: Factors That Motivate Virtual Event Engagement

Source: IDG



As virtual events become more common, businesses are finding ways to up-level them with new approaches to getting audiences involved.

“There’s a reason for people to pay attention when you’re actually generating insightful things in real time and you’re able to relay that to the audience members and give them a voice to have that back-and-forth dialogue,” says Bosin.

The Technology to Keep Users Satisfied and Engaged

The future looks bright for virtual events. Although the pandemic brought them to the fore out of necessity, the benefits are clear, and virtual events are expected to become a mainstay of business. The survey results show that the appetite for investing in upgraded virtual event and webinar software is apparent and that most organizations see a need to improve event technology capabilities. In fact, 85% of the respondents indicated that their organization is under pressure from employees and customers to improve event technology capabilities and 85% cited plans to evaluate new virtual event technology in 2021.

Choosing the right partner and platform to enable interactivity, quality audio, and other important measures for audiences is key to bringing an organization’s event hosting strategy into the future to match the current demands and expectations of global participants.

There’s a new quality threshold that’s been established,” says Bosin. “There’s now an expectation that if you’re going to sign up and register, and provide your credentials, and maybe even pay to go to an event, you expect a certain degree of production quality, you expect the audio to be flawless, the streaming quality to be perfect, and the event to be orchestrated in the way you would expect.”

Ensure that your next event is captivating, interactive, engaging, and flawless with BlueJeans by Verizon.

Learn more at bluejeans.com/products/events.

About the BlueJeans Events Platform

The BlueJeans Events platform can help companies up-level their events and keep users engaged. Consider these features:

- ✓ Up to 150 on-camera panel members can engage the audience through real-time interaction.
- ✓ Speakers can appear on live video or share prerecorded content to create a dynamic, multiformat presentation.
- ✓ Three unique participant roles allow for end-to-end control and participation during live events.
 - Moderators, presenters, and attendees can join based on their required level of access and communication (as determined by event organizers).
- ✓ Moderators can manage chat, polling, Q&A, and in-event announcements to maximize audience participation.
- ✓ Dolby Voice audio is fully integrated with every BlueJeans Events license to ensure the highest-quality audio.
- ✓ Real-time polling metrics, question up-voting, and direct messaging options provide BlueJeans Events moderators with complete visibility into all audience participation.
- ✓ YouTube Live, Facebook Live, Workplace by Facebook, and HTML video embed options enable organizers to integrate events for flexible, scalable attendee viewing.
- ✓ BlueJeans Events can accommodate as many as 50,000 attendees for the largest company presentations, and lower-capacity packages are also available for marketing webinars.

Learn more at bluejeans.com/products/events.