

VIRTUAL  
EVENT

*Best  
Practices*

# Time to Consider a Virtual Event

If the cornerstone event on your calendar has been canceled or postponed, or maybe the live event is going forward but you are anticipating significantly reduced attendance, you're likely considering a virtual event. Before you jump right into a virtual event, here are some tips that will make that event more successful.

It happened to all of us at some point this spring. Seemingly without warning, the cornerstone event on your marketing calendar was canceled or postponed. This was the event that your entire year was geared around for brand building, a new product launch or major lead generation. Or perhaps there is still hope that the live event is going forward but you are anticipating significantly reduced attendance. What now? If you are like most Sales and Marketing teams, you are likely considering some kind of virtual event. It's easy to get caught up in the technology and trying to replicate what you had planned in a digital environment. But before you jump into the world of virtual events, take a step back. Here are proven tips to help make your event, regardless of the technology, more successful.





## 1 The Brief is Your North Star.

The key to every successful sales and marketing initiative is clarity around your goals, your target audience and your message. Before diving headfirst into virtual event planning, hit the pause button and review your Creative Brief. The brief is the document that captures the details of the situation, the opportunity, your ideal target audience and what behavior you are trying to motivate. Do not assume that the brief you created for the face-to-face event will work as-is for a move to a digital environment. Think through the implications of a digital experience and modify the brief accordingly. And refer to the brief throughout your planning process.

## 2 Who's Coming to the Party?

Depending on the configuration of your booth, people will be entering from a number of different openings. Make sure that your staff is standing near the entrances and inside near points of interest, ready to speak with visitors. It should be clear to visitors who is working and available to help. If traffic is slow, it might be tempting to wander the hall looking to entice people to come to your booth. This can be considered distasteful and is generally frowned upon by the show organizer.

Never enter the booth to entice people to come inside, and especially don't enter any neighboring booths to ask visitors to come into your booth. This is extremely off-putting and while it's tempting to pull visitors away from the competition, it's disrespectful. Let your booth's appearance, engagements, and staff inside attract a crowd.



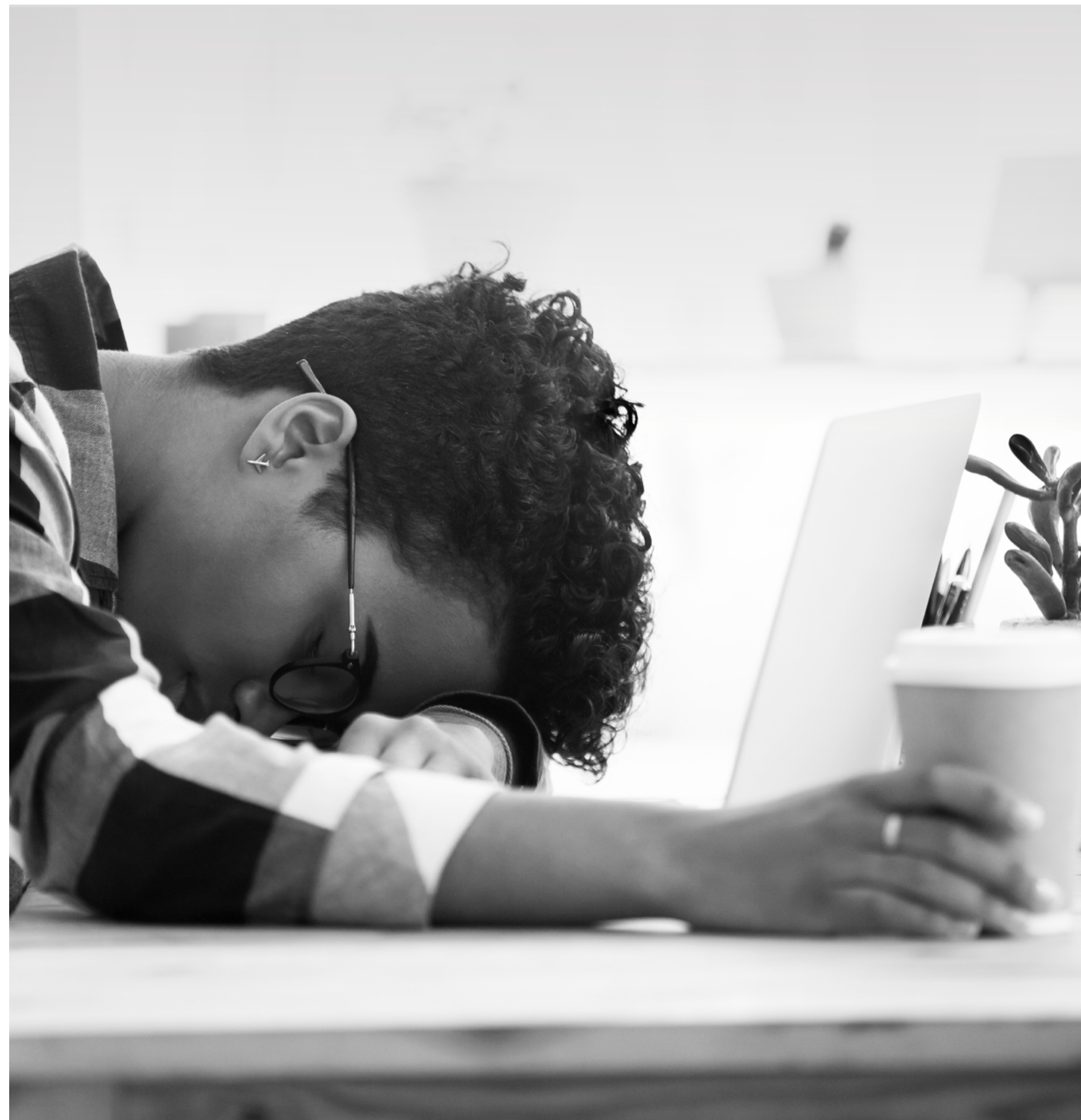


## Timing is Everything.

The natural tendency when you learn of a conference cancelation is to plan your own event to coincide with the original event timing. Logical, right? But is it logical? Is it necessary? Going virtual opens new possibilities with respect to the timing of your event(s). If you have a major new product launching in the summer, why wait until November to make a splash in the market? A face-to-face conference might last three days. What's stopping you from making your digital event and content available for a longer period? Not everyone can be available during the show organizer's run-of-show. And what about people who want to go back and repeat the experience or share it with a colleague? You can now control the duration, frequency and timing to best suit your needs.

## Let Content Drive Length.

Let's be real. Just because the conference expo was three days long, doesn't mean that your event needs to be that long. Let your content be your guide as to whether you are having a 30-minute, 2-hour or full-day event — or longer. Do you have several speakers? Are you planning a panel discussion? Will there be breakout sessions or 1-to-1 meetings? Do you have multiple relevant videos to share? Are you planning networking conversations? Are there polls or other engagements planned? Think about the best interactions you had in your trade show booth. How long did an attendee stay? And keep in mind, because you are digital, you've likely already gathered demographic information about the attendee through the registration process that you don't need to take additional precious time gathering. The most important consideration is to make sure you have relevant, engaging content.



## Don't Let the Technology Freak You Out.

Stepping into the digital world, especially right now, can be daunting. There are so many options available these days. You can start very simply with a webinar that you host using whatever video conferencing solution your company has in place. Or you can partner with a virtual platform provider. Whatever path you choose to go down, make sure you're covering your needs as well as your attendees'. Put yourself in their shoes and keep things tangible based on the information or experience you're trying to accomplish — you don't need a decked-out expedition vehicle to drive to the grocery store. Look at it from a use case first: I need to do X,Y and Z and then pair your technology appropriately. Use an intuitive solution for your audience that gets them to your content quickly and most importantly, test anything tech you're trying out. Remember, these tools are designed to do exactly what you're trying to do, so once you pair the right tools with your content needs, the tech should be second fiddle to your event goals.

## Practice Makes Perfect.

Now is not the time to “wing it.” Just like you have a pre-event prep meeting and booth walk-thru for your booth staff and brand ambassadors, you want to do the same thing and more for your virtual event. You will want to run a complete dress rehearsal of your event, start to finish. A best practice is to have a written show run-down document timed out to the second that details who is speaking, what videos are playing, who is monitoring and responding to live chat, etc. Leave nothing to chance or question. Make sure that all your live speakers present their content from the exact location (in their office or other location) where they will be on the day of your event. No exceptions. We have all experienced Wi-Fi signal strength differences.





## Backup Plans A, B, & C

The point about practicing in the exact environment you will have on the day of your event is closely followed by the adage, “expect the unexpected.” As a live event professional, you know full well that despite your best efforts, something is bound to go wrong. And you are prepared for that. You keep a kit with extra supplies. You know the closest electronic and office supply stores near the convention center. You know who is going to make a speech if your keynote speaker falls ill. So, bring that same contingency planning mindset to your live event. Think about every element of your event and have a backup plan. How will you communicate with attendees if there are technical difficulties? Make sure your speaker working from their home office has a secondary Wi-Fi option, a fully charged laptop and backup headset or microphone. Record your dress rehearsal so you have that content as an option.

## What’s Your Wow?

Think about your inbox this past week. How many invitations did you receive to digital events? How many webinars? Your audience is no different. Everything that can go digital has gone digital. And most everyone is experiencing digital screen fatigue. At a live event, we are very active. We are standing. We walk between booths or sessions. We participate in hands-on interactives. Surprisingly, sitting at our desk and looking at our computer all day long is exhausting. Do not expect your audience to watch your event for hours (or even minutes) unless you have incredibly compelling, engaging and relevant content. And think about your wow. What might you incorporate into your event that is a happy surprise for your audience?





## Engage Your Sellers.

Engage with your sellers early in your planning process. Whether or not they have a presentation role or not, chances are, you plan to have them available for 1-to-1 meetings during or shortly after your event, much like they would be staffing a demo station in your booth. They will also be instrumental in inviting target prospects or clients to your event. Take heed of their advice on attendee personas and content that will resonate. Make sure that they understand their role and messaging points. If they are going to work the chat feature or 1-to-1 sessions, rehearse with them like you rehearse any other speaker.

## Choose Speakers Wisely.

We've all experienced a webinar (or live event for that matter) with a dry, robotic speaker. It can be the most painful 30 or more minutes for both parties. At a live event, some people might leave, but most will be polite and stay in their seats. But the same isn't true for a digital event. It is too easy to disconnect or multi-task when the speaker or the content isn't engaging. Choose speakers who are genuine and charming and can connect with the audience regardless of the medium. You put a lot of time and resources into planning your event. You have a great message and exciting engagements planned for your attendees. Make sure the messenger enhances the message. You've worked too hard in planning the event to have the message fall flat.





## In Conclusion

Going digital is pretty much the norm right now. In the future, we anticipate the return of live marketing and the likelihood of hybrid events going forward. Don't be intimidated by the prospect of a virtual event just because you may not have done one in the past. You know the value of face-to-face marketing and you're an event planning professional. Use all that knowledge and experience in planning your virtual event. The channel may be different, but the planning steps are the same.

**Are you looking for a Virtual Exhibit Platform to take your virtual event experience to the next level?**

Let's talk!

**800.324.5063**

