Planning and Delivering Hybrid Events for Engagement

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The good news is that you can do about anything you can conceive of in a hybrid event. And that's the bad news, too.

This also means that if you get caught up in the all the details before you've decided what you want to accomplish, you're going to pull your hair out. A good strategy will help guide all the details, and what follows will help you and your team avoid big mistakes and ask the right questions.

4 Tips for Adapting Your Plan

Our session for MPI focuses on engagement, but let's briefly start at the beginning. You don't have to reinvent the wheel in terms of your process to consider how the hybrid part of your event will need to be considered.

Get clear on your objectives, or leave "money on the table" for your virtual participants

You know you should have objectives. Now the question is, *"How likely is it that I'm going to pull this off with virtual participants?"*

Objectives that are easy:
  - Inclusion of target audience members who couldn't otherwise make it
  - Broadening the potential audience

- Reducing meeting/budget costs
- Keeping sales reps in the field more
- Supporting sustainable initiatives
- Extending the life of your event with a follow up session

Objectives that are harder:
- Do a team building exercise like a chili cook-off
- Generate revenue

Objectives that depend:
- Create a strong educational experience
- Include speakers who couldn't otherwise make it

Start with a budget guess, then balance "high production" vs "low production" tradeoffs

The virtual part of your event is going to include things you may/may not otherwise have included, such as
- Video production
- Internet connectivity
- Streaming services
- Web conferencing/streaming platform (software) charges
- Additional time to develop/adjust content
- Consulting and labor

As you might guess, the cost for this can be all over the map. A serious streaming vendor and high production virtual event can be $1000 or $100,000. That's a nasty range.

Lower-budget options might include
- Reducing the number of camera operators
- Using only audio (like a conference call)
- Limiting the number of sessions you deliver life
- Using a simple web conferencing setup with a computer on either end

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Decide if "success" for online attendees is the same as onsite

Creating an "experience" online is not impossible. It IS different. The biggest factors in experience tend to be *how participants interact with other people - the speaker and each other*.

It's relatively cheap and easy for you to enable them to see and listen, and maybe you have a different set of metrics, charge a different price, or give them a different evaluation form. It's not right or wrong, but it is something to think through.

Analyze your virtual audience and factor different experiences into your plan

It's pretty much guaranteed that people in the same room are in the same time zone. Not so online! Additional things to consider:
 - They may not have the same attention span (how long are the sessions?)
 - How long they need for breaks (less than in-person audiences, generally)
 - The value of interaction (needs to be realtime!) versus just watching (it might matter less; maybe watching a recording would be sufficient).
 - Are there any technological items you will want to communicate to them uniquely (e.g., how to interact with the presenter and each other, a link to test their browser, how to download a handout, etc.).

Finally, when considering all of the above, consider this: The number of potential combinations of how an audience member relates to a presenter and each other are many, but the most common include:
 - (Presenter + room) + (additional room)
 - (Presenter + room) + (desktop participants)
 - (Presenter) + (room)
 - (Presenter) + (room) + (desktop participants)

3 Steps for Preparing Speakers for Engagement

Speakers and facilitators obviously can make or break an event, and the same is true for a the virtual portion of your event (if not more true!). And to be fair, many of them (most?) may not have delivered a hybrid event, of if they have, it's likely that it was for a remote audience that had a passive experience.

Remember, this is to better understand the process of improving engagement…you may or may not be the one who's actually going to do it.

Analyze: Ask what they do for an in-person gig.

When I coach presenters or teams, this is exactly where I start: Analyze what they do in person first.
 - How do they interact with audiences in a room?
 - If they're not interactive with an in-person audience, don't expect magic for the virtual audience.
 - What do they give participants (physically)?
 - Do they show a video in the middle of their PowerPoint?
 - Do they use a flipchart?

Take them from the beginning to the end. Now move on to step two.

Adapt: What needs to happen given your "rooms?"

The online experience isn't going to be the same as the offline experience. It's different. Now that you have an idea of what's going to happen offline, you can begin to help them adapt it online. Here's an important thing to remember: sometimes a tactic for interaction doesn't directly translate, *but you can accomplish the objective with an adjustment to the tactic*.

Discover: Are there any things that the virtual platform can do that bring new opportunities?

For the communication geeks among us, look up "transmission theory" or "medium theory" of communications. In short, the medium affects how messages are sent and received. Simply, the change of medium means you lose something and you *also* gain something. If you really want to tap into the power of technology, look for what you gain (can do better)!

7 Things to Add to a Request For Speakers

Now that we're looked at the bigger picture, think about how this translates to your strategy for sourcing speakers.

Describe your current audience engagement tactics

Finding a good match now isn't just about content, it's about how engagement will reach your whole audience.

This event will include virtual participants <in another room, at their desks,>. Describe how, if you are selected, you will adapt what you do for an in-person audience to include the virtual participants?

You may not have thought of everything, AND you want to see if they're creative enough to make an attempt.

If you are asked to present virtually, describe what you would do to become competent using <insert platform here>

Sometimes there is little or no way for a speaker to prepare in advance of arriving onsite. Other times, however, you might use a software (like GoToWebinar) that enables more interaction than a simple Skype session. Are they willing to get ready?

If you are asked to present virtually, can you meet our requirement of using hard-wired internet connection?

Wireless internet connections are one of the most common causes of poor video. Too, more often than not, people don't think about this because 'YouTube works just fine on my wireless connection at home.' Don't do it.

If selected, are you willing and able to <show up early for rehearsal, attend a rehearsal the day before, …>?

The higher the production need, the more important this is.

What computer operating system/presentation software do you use?

Macs, iPads, netbooks, Keynote, Prezi, and a variety of other tools are increasing in use. Be prepared. Want sweet awesomeness out of your speaker? Let them use their tools if possible.

This event will be recorded.

Speakers don't usually show up expecting that an event can be recorded (for no extra fee). When there's a virtual component, it's usually a lot easier to record. Avoid surprises.

10 Engagement Tactics to Consider

Engagement itself is a big word. There are lessons from Hollywood, lessons from professional educators, lessons from vendors, and maybe even from there will be lessons from the speakers themselves. What follows is not exhaustive, but it should tickle your thinker.

"Flip" the content/conversation balance

You have more room for interaction when you try to squeeze in less content. Put content in other forms (like I'm doing here) to take advantage of what's uniquely live - the conversation.

Use a virtual emcee

Experienced speakers should be able to monitor audience questions on the fly. Less experienced speakers will benefit from someone who serves as a bridge between online and offline.

Blend the entirety of a program

Some content might benefit from doing pre- or post-event webinars to set up a topic or go deeper into it.

Provide participant guides/handouts in both hard-copy and digital forms

People can use what they're comfortable with, and taking notes itself is a form of reinforcement.

Consider a cloud-based audience response system

Give people something to do with their mobile devices. They will be doing something with them anyway, right? (P.S. Try **www.slideklowd.com** …it's awesome).

Switch between multiple video cameras

Hollywood does this. A LOT. Why? Because change gets attention.

Have an audience member or appointed staff member monitor and moderate online chat

People love to be responded to. But it doesn't have to be the presenter.

Create digital breakout rooms

Some web conferencing platforms can break participants out into subgroups. It's like when presenters tell participants to work on something at their table before coming back to a whole-group discussion.

Make sure all participants can ask audio questions, too

There's nothing as powerful as dialogue. In a physical room, this is an A/V setup and logistics issue. Online it's a mute/unmute issue, and the logistics mean that an audio conference will be involved.

Have presenters practices making eye contact with the camera

It's powerful for newscasters who use it to make an audience feel like "they're talking to me." The same is true for your video viewers.

7 Ideas for Maximizing Twitter

There is more than one way to create peer-to-peer interaction, and most of those rely on the speaker. Twitter, however, is a perennial favorite.

Get the hashtag out in other communications

Take advantage of your heavy tweeters. Get 'em what they need before the event even starts.

Plan to provide an option for non-tweeters

I'm a fan of **www.todaysmeet.com**. It still requires an internet connection, but it doesn't require anybody to log in with Twitter.

Consider projecting tweets on a wall

People love to see what they tweet, and this is another way people can see it if they don't use Twitter.

Project tweets in a hallway to engage attendees outside the room

Ever have attendee poke their head into a room to see what's going on? Of course! Give 'em another way to get interested.

Try one of these vendors who have software that works for projecting tweets

 - Tweetwall
 - Tweetwally (different one!)
 - Twubs
 - Tweetchat
 - Tweetbeam
 - Twitterfall

Hold a contest to get people tweeting

Attendees love having fun. Have a random drawing…it's cheap to do and it works.

Use Storify to gather tweets; publish it for post-event followup or additional conversation

One other benefit? If you publish to your blog, it helps SEO, too.

Roger Courville: Keynotes, Workshops, RFP Development, Virtual/Hybrid Speaker Coaching

Roger Courville has been called the Michael Jordan of online events. In reality, he's just a normal guy who has a passion for helping people effectively and authentically connect with audiences they can't see. You can find his full curriculum vitae at http://thevirtualpresenter.com/roger-courville/. Better yet, just pick up the phone and call: +1.503.329.1662