



Shifting Your Event

By Evan Carroll,
President and CEO, Attended Events
evan@attendedevents.com

To Thrive In Our New COVID-19 Reality

Almost overnight, the COVID-19 public health crisis caused the events industry to rethink in-person events. In the blink of an eye, everything changed. And the change looks like it's here for the duration. Without a doubt, in-person events will remain prohibited or be significantly restricted over the next 18 months. As a result, companies and organizations are increasingly turning to virtual or online events to fill the gap and keep events on the calendar through what's next. Trouble is, there's no one-size-fits-all solution.

So how do you make the best decisions for your event? We're here to help! We'll walk you through key questions to find your new "right fit" event solution and help you decide how to move your event online while staying true to your goals and engaging your audience.

A close-up photograph of a DJ mixer, showing various knobs, buttons, and a small screen. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. The title 'Reformatting Your Event' is written in a white, serif font across the lower-left portion of the image.

Reformatting Your Event

Good news: You have choices! Your online event can take many forms. Forget the cookie-cutter approach of following what others are doing. We recommend charting a course that's unique to your organization. As you approach planning or re-planning your event, make your unique goals the priority, and let them guide the event format you ultimately choose.

We have three key questions to get you started:

Why are you having the event?

What are your business goals? Which goals are most important? Are you willing to sacrifice any less-important goals? We find focusing only on your most important goals will position you to make the best decisions for your event.

Who is your audience?

Which audiences are essential to your goals? For instance, if your event includes both customers and prospects, might you prioritize customers over prospects right now? Does it make sense to split your event into multiple smaller events for each audience so you can speak to each one directly?

What does your brand stand for?

As always, your events must serve your brand. This holds true online just as it does in person. If your brand stands for "elegance," you must create an elegant solution. If it stands for "substance over style," your solution must reflect that. Stay true to who you are.

Your answers to these three questions will help you determine the *why*, the *who*, and the *what* of your event. With these in mind, you can then take the next step and figure out the *how*.



Choosing An Event Format

Think of event formats like a buffet —there are many options to choose from, but they may not all be right for you. Let the answers to the three key questions you just answered be your guide. The how that works best for you should be driven by your why, who, and what.

We have three more questions to help you bring your how into focus:

Will you have an in-person audience?

If your answer is no, go for a full virtual event or an event broadcasted from a studio.

- **Full Virtual Event:** Each presenter and guest participates from their own location.
- **Studio:** Each guest and some presenters participate from their own location, but the event is broadcast from a studio to facilitate higher production values. If your answer is yes, you can shift your event to stay connected—safely.
- **Studio + Audience:** In some situations, a small in-studio audience might participate, but the primary production focus is on guests participating from their own locations.
- **Distributed:** To support social distancing while maintaining human connections, a distributed event involves multiple groups of people at multiple locations viewing a simulcast of the same content in real time. There may be some in-person touches or enhancements at each location.
- **Hybrid:** A balance between full virtual and in-person, a hybrid event creates an experience for both types of guests, realizing that each experience needs deliberate design attention and planning.



What is the timing of your event?

Virtual events don't have to be one-and-done. Instead of limiting your event to a single time-frame, virtual events give you the power to strategically release sessions over different periods of time.

- **Advance Content:** Consider sharing some pre-recorded—or even live—sessions leading up to your event. Think of it as a drip strategy to boost your audience's interest and engagement heading into the main event.
- **Follow-Up Content:** Online events make it much more affordable to record all sessions, so consider making them available after the event to extend their value—and your audience's engagement.

Should you consider a virtual event at all?

Maybe, maybe not. Depending on your goals, it might make the most sense to instead modify your in-person event or divide it into multiple smaller events.

- **Modified Event:** A traditional in-person event, but with multiple precautions to ensure the health and safety of attendees within the parameters of social distancing.
- **Asynchronous Event:** Instead of hosting one large event, planning multiple smaller events in different locations reduces attendee travel and aids planning for social distancing. It will, however, require presenters to travel to each location.

More good news: These formats are not mutually exclusive. You're welcome to mix and match as it makes sense for your why, who, and what—your goals, audience, and brand. In fact, we recommend it!



Keeping Your Audience's Attention

Let's talk about keeping your audience engaged. Virtual events more closely resemble TV programs than they do in-person events. You lose your captive audience. And when there's no social pressure to stay put, your audience might drift away, multitask, or log off altogether. To honor your audience's attention challenges, and capture—and hold—their interest, you'll need to make a few adjustments.

We recommend four ways to keep your audience's attention:

- **Production Value:** Online audiences demand flawless audio and appreciate high-quality visual content. Said another way: Poor audio is the fastest way to lose your audience.
- **Strong Storytelling:** Compelling content makes audiences "lean in" with interest. Shorter sessions can help, by ensuring presenters focus only on what's critically important. Instead of a KISS keep-it-short-and-simple method, apply a keep-it-short-and-strong approach.
- **Interaction:** Power up Q&As, polls, chats to your advantage. Nearly every online meeting platform has these features. Use them as often as appropriate, and ask your presenters to integrate them into their presentations as well.
- **Choice:** In the same way breakout or concurrent sessions offer choice to in-person event attendees, online events should also offer options. When you can, empower your audience to choose content that interests them most.



Boosting Attendee Engagement

In a world in which social distancing is now the norm, we believe engagement is more critical than ever. Regardless of your event format, engagement is your differentiator—and where the rubber hits the road for your event's ultimate success. A little extra effort will make all the difference.

We recommend these ideas to amp up your attendee engagement:

- **Swag Kit:** Send an advance mailing to each attendee with cool swag plus conference materials and a fun snack.
- **Engagement Facilitator:** Tap a dedicated crew member to plan and execute polling, audience Q&A, and other real-time engagement techniques during your event.
- **Community Building:** Use a tool like Slack to build a closed, custom community for event attendees to network, socialize, and connect before, during, and after your event.
- **Entertainment:** Make it fun! Consider out-of-the-box ways to entertain your attendees—with music, comedy, magic, fitness, or even cooking demonstrations. Get creative!



Bringing It All Together

You've chosen your format. You have a plan for audience engagement. Now what? How do you make your event happen? And how do you make sure your event succeeds? As you turn to event execution, we have some final tips to keep your compass pointed in the right direction.

We recommend you take these success tips to heart:

- **Don't play follow the leader.** Just because other events do it doesn't mean yours must. You might be tempted to do what others are doing—just make sure you're doing it with purpose. Keep your *why*, *who* and *what* top of mind as you consider ideas and make decisions.
- **Rely on your event partners.** In these changing times, we're all working together to figure out the best paths forward. Your partners, like Attended, are ready to hop in the trenches with you to offer ideas, direction, insights, and inspiration.
- **Practice thoughtful reduction.** Simple ideas executed flawlessly always work better than elaborate ones executed poorly. As you build your event, focus on the components that matter most and then hit them out of the park.

The best part? All of these ideas can be integrated into whatever event format you choose. And once again, they're not mutually exclusive—you can even use them all! As always, remember to look to your why, who, and what to make the right-fit decisions for your event.

Getting Started

Now it's time to get started! Let our virtual event planning and production team at Attended help you plan an event that stays true to your goals and your brand while keeping pace with these changing times. We're happy to chat. Just drop us a line: hello@attendedevents.com.