

The Definitive Guide to Virtual Events

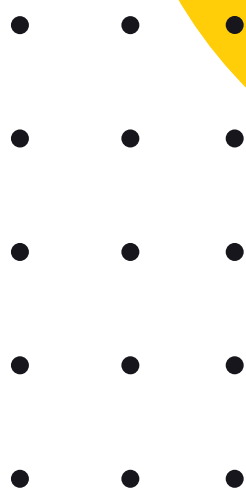




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Introduction

Virtual events have been around for some time. But, advancing event technologies, an expanded global market, and a worldwide health crisis have pushed them into the mainstream.

Because virtual events are still relatively new to event hosts, event planners, and marketers (and the audience, too!), Accelevents has put together this virtual event guide to walk you through everything you need to know when it comes to hosting a virtual event— from defining a virtual event to planning, preparation, and analyzing post-event data.





What is a virtual event?

A virtual event is an event where the activities and interactions occur in an online or digital space instead of a centralized, physical venue. Like in-person events, virtual events can take a number of different forms.

While each type of virtual event has its own look and feel, these events typically facilitate interactions between remote attendees and virtual elements through aspects like keynote speakers, breakout sessions, roundtables, live chat, live streams, simulive video streams, downloadable assets, virtual exhibitor booths, and interactive features like live polling, question and answer (Q&A) sessions, and gamification.



All Events Can Be Virtual!

Virtual events are remarkably flexible and can accommodate a range of brand goals. Some common types of virtual events include conferences, summits, career fairs, college fairs, expos, trade shows, fundraisers, and entertainment events like concerts and comedy shows.

Each one of these virtual event types can be built to include whatever features the host needs to deliver maximum audience engagement, participation, and satisfaction.

Some of these features and elements include networking sessions, breakout sessions, keynote addresses, fireside chats, a virtual lobby or lounge, virtual cocktail parties, gamification, streaming video, chat options, online auctions, a virtual exhibit hall, virtual exhibit booths, and more.

It is likely that you already know what kind of event you want to hold— a conference instead of a career fair for example— all you will need to do is decide how you want to host the event: Will your event be completely online, a mixture of in-person activities and online content (i.e., a hybrid event), or a simulated live event, one that appears live but can feature pre-recorded content?

We have already defined a virtual event, but you may find that one of the following better suits your intentions.

Hybrid Event

A hybrid event combines a live, physical event with virtual components. This means there is a physical event taking place in a physical venue with an in-person audience and these elements are being broadcasted to a virtual audience at the same time. The goal of a hybrid event is to provide the same experience to both in-person and virtual attendees.

Simulive Event

A Simulive event is a pre-recorded session that is broadcasted as live. This is not an attempt to mislead the viewer; instead, it allows the event hosts to schedule the session for specific times across a number of time zones. These pre-recorded sessions will typically have a moderator available to host a live Q&A, or something similar, so the online audience does not lose engagement with the brand in the experience.

What to Look for When Choosing a Virtual Event Platform

A virtual event platform is a valuable tool that will help make your event a resounding success. There are many different platforms to choose from and it is important to do your research so you can find the one that best suits your needs and your event type.

Important features that you will most definitely want in a virtual event platform include:

Event Website Builder

Choose a platform that allows you to create a dedicated and fully branded event website. This site will act as your foundational marketing tool, providing interested parties with the key event details, speaker/ vendor/ performer bios, a highlight of event sponsors, and information on how to purchase tickets and register.

Social Media Integrations

Social media remains one of the best ways to reach your virtual audience. Not only are you able to easily share event news and updates, but these integrations allow registered attendees to share their participation in your event on their personal or business profiles, expanding your brand's reach and giving you access to a remote audience.

Ticketing and Registration

You never want to make it a burden to purchase tickets. The easier it is to get registered for an event, the more people will do so. A platform that has integrated ticketing and registration capabilities will make it easy for attendees to purchase tickets and allow event hosts to collect and track attendee and sales data.

Email Integrations

Email marketing is an essential method to spread the word and keep attendees informed. Look for a platform that integrates with email service providers like MailChimp or Constant Contact so you can easily send invitations, announcements, reminders, and instructions to all registered guests.



What to Look for When Choosing a Virtual Event Platform

Networking Capabilities

Because your audience can potentially be spread out across the globe, you will have to go out of your way to help them connect to one another. Find a platform that allows you to set up virtual meeting rooms and host networking sessions. Look for live chat capabilities, contact sharing among attendees, and gamification features. Speed networking and open forums like virtual lounges for coffee breaks can go a long way in fostering connections.

Fully Integrated Live Stream Video

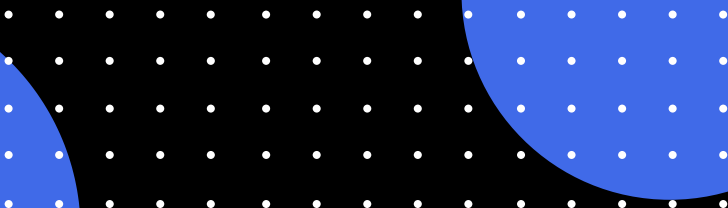
Live video can generate audience interaction. Choose a platform that has integrated live streaming capabilities and supports Simulive opportunities. With these capabilities, there is no need to embed a third-party streaming service like Zoom or YouTube.

Real-Time Data

If you do not have access to real-time data, how are you ever supposed to know how both your marketing strategy and event are performing? This data will allow you to make informed decisions and necessary adjustments to marketing and event logistics to increase attendance and improve the attendee experience.

24/7 Customer Support

In the virtual world, anything can go wrong. Select a platform that offers 24/7 live support so that you can find workable solutions or troubleshoot problems anytime you need.





How to Plan an Online Event

Once you know the type of event you are going to hold, you have your speakers and vendors lined up, and you have chosen the date and time, you can then start to build out the event using your chosen virtual event platform. Within minutes, you can have a fully branded website and ticketing page so you can start collecting registrations! But, before you set up registration, you will need to think about two important details: event pricing and ticketing options.

How to price your virtual event?

Since the investment cost of a virtual event is typically lower than a physical event, the notion is that attendee registration costs are lower as well.

However, a price that is too low will reduce the perceived value of your event and lead potential attendees to think that it's not really worth their time.

When setting your admission price, consider the following:

Your break-even price

Know and understand your expenses and potential revenues so you do not sell registrations at a loss.

Your experience

If this is your first virtual event, keep the price in the mid-range. Without a proven track record, attendees will be hesitant to shell out top dollar.

Your perceived value

Think carefully about your event and what you are providing. The more you can do to engage the audience and provide opportunities that match or exceed those available at a physical event, the higher your perceived value will be. Focus on what the attendee will get from your event.

Offer ticket tiers

Creating different ticket tiers not only provides attendees with options but they can also provide a point of reference and increase value when the tiers are compared to one another.



How to Plan an Online Event

Ticketing Options & Ticketing Tiers

Virtual event attendees are looking for choices. Here are some options, or ticket tiers, you can provide:

Early Bird Tickets

These tickets create a sense of urgency and can kick start the sales process. These tickets should be limited in number, offered at a discounted price, and for a limited period of time.

General Admission

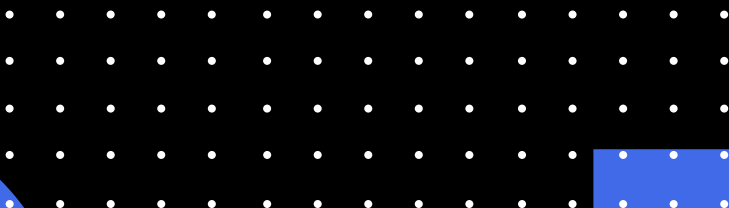
General admission tickets are priced between early bird and VIP tickets. They provide access to the event as a whole. If you are hosting a multi-day event, you can consider further breaking down this tier into “single day” or “single session” tickets.

VIP Tickets

These tickets are limited in number and are more expensive than early bird or general admission tickets. Unlike those other tiers, VIP tickets will grant access to exclusive, all-access content or sessions.

Last-Minute Tickets

Virtual events tend to see a large number of last-minute purchases. Capitalize on this by removing general admission tickets a few days before the event starts and add last-minute tickets at a slightly higher price. This is similar to an “at the door” price. If you are going to do this, be transparent about your pricing and make it clear that the price goes up the closer you get to the event.



How to Plan an Online Event

Take Advantage of Free & PWYC

Offering free tickets or a “pay what you can” (PWYC) option is a great way to reach a wider audience by making your event more accessible. Not everyone who can benefit from your event will be able to afford the price of admission.

If you are offering free tickets, consider having the cost underwritten by your event sponsors. Virtual events can provide a treasure trove of useful information to brands and their marketing departments, so give attendees the option to attend for free in exchange for providing additional information to your sponsors.

Some virtual events, particularly smaller or less established ones, have a difficult time generating large audience numbers with paid tickets.

One way to ensure attendance numbers AND earn revenue is through a freemium ticket model. In this instance, access to the event is free but attendees will have to pay for exclusive content.

For example, access to a virtual trade show may be free, allowing attendees to view and interact with exhibit booths and sponsors, but access to special sessions like a new product demonstration or announcement, or a keynote address, will be limited to paid access.

Once people are “through the door” and see the value of the content you have put together, they will be more likely to pay to see even more.

PWYC options work best when providing access to a single session. Provide a moderate suggested price and more often than not, the attendees will pay that price. It is likely that attendees will recognize the value of your event and will want to contribute something in exchange for access.



Optimizing Sponsorship for Maximum Impact

For most event planners, sponsors are the backbone of your success. Without their participation, it can be difficult to turn a profit, especially if your virtual event is brand new.

The good news is that virtual event sponsorship is a valuable prospect for most brands or companies. A virtual event has the potential to reach a global audience but at the same time, that global audience will be relatively narrow and targeted, depending on the themes or topics covered by your event. It is important that you create sponsorship packages that are tailored to the virtual environment. Some of your traditional sponsorship tiers will no longer be appropriate. Besides, you will look far more attractive to potential sponsors if you create a plan that better speaks to the situation and opportunities available within it.



Be sure to use your sponsorship opportunities wisely. Do not chase brands that do not align with your industry or event theme/topic. Make sure that sponsors understand that virtual events can be a **great source of qualified targeted leads while boosting demand generation and providing greater return on investment (ROI) when compared to live events.**

Place sponsor logos in high trafficked areas, like the virtual trade show floor, or on your event landing page and confirmation emails. A confirmation email will deliver the sponsor directly to your attendees and will be considered a very valuable placement.

If you choose to give attendees the option to pay a nominal registration fee or provide additional personal information in exchange for free admission, you can put a higher price tag on your sponsorship package. Use messaging like, "Free admission, thanks to your sponsor." The personal information received in exchange will be worth it to the sponsor's future marketing efforts.



Sponsorship Ideas

Some creative virtual event sponsorship ideas include:

Sponsored Games

Between sessions, hold quizzes, challenges, and competitive play. Sponsors can contribute to the game and or prizes.

Branded Virtual Waiting Rooms

Before a live stream or a keynote address, attendees will wait in a digital space. This space can be branded with attendee logos or short video ads. Depending on the length of the wait, you can work in some games as mentioned above. Consider placing sponsorship logos on the session landing pages as well.

Sponsored Breakout Sessions

Breakout sessions will be some of the best networking tools available at your virtual event. They also provide a great opportunity to brand the digital space in sponsor logos and colors or feature pop-up windows and chat boxes.

Printed Agendas vs Virtual Programs

When people receive agendas or programs at a physical event, they have it for the duration and then toss it. If you mail an agenda or program to your attendees in advance of the event, they will not only reference it all day during the event, but they will have it around much longer, providing more value to your sponsors.

Virtual Scavenger Hunt

If hosting a virtual trade show or expo, sending attendees on a scavenger hunt on the show floor will not only be fun, but it will increase interaction with sponsor and exhibitor booths. The winner of the scavenger hunt can win a prize from one or multiple sponsors.

Virtual Happy Hour

Even virtual attendees need some time to kick back, have fun, and visit with one another. A cocktail party or themed happy hour is a great way to do this. Sponsors can have naming rights for the session, or they can send a gift package to registered attendees. This package can include branded swag to be worn to the session or craft beer, wine, or a cocktail mix so attendees can have a truly shared experience.

Sponsored Meal Breaks

For day-long sessions, your attendees will need to break for meals. Partner with a sponsor to deliver coffee and a snack or a meal to attendees. For an event with widespread reach, consider having a sponsor underwrite a discount code or coupon for UberEATS, GrubHub, or another delivery service so attendees can order the meal of their choice.

What You Need to Know About Live Streaming Technology



Effective and smooth video streaming is essential to a successful live event.

There are many available platforms that allow you to live stream like YouTube Live, Facebook Live, and Vimeo. But, when using an event platform like Acelevents, you will have access to a built-in production studio and broadcasting platform.

Acelevents is lightweight compared to 3D SIMS-like platforms and will not slow down or negatively impact the user experience. The online world is full of live streams and most of us interact with them on a daily basis. However, to meet attendee expectations and quality standards, there are a few things you need to keep in mind.

Fatigue

Video will play a big role in your event, but you need to be mindful of the fact that most of your attendees will likely be experiencing video conference fatigue! So much of our work and social lives are taking place in a digital environment and looking at a screen can get old. Break up your video sessions so that attendees don't become bored or disinterested. Have an intermission for lengthy keynotes or leave a short period of time between product demos and exhibitions.

Video Quality

Because streaming video is very much a part of our lives, you will have to stream professional-looking videos. Make sure all video will be streamed or recorded with a quality camera and with proper lighting. It might be necessary to rent equipment for your event speakers and panelists.

Internet Speed

High-speed internet will be the key to streaming quality video. For a hybrid event, check the internet connection at the physical venue. It is likely that most conference centers and venues that you use will have high internet speeds required. When it comes to virtual events with speakers streaming from home, you will want to run a test of their connections. Consider renting boosters and sending them to participants where necessary or advising them to connect through a cable instead of WiFi.

How to Increase Attendee Engagement

Physical events create natural opportunities for engagement. It is hard to be in a physical space and not interact with what is going on around you.

Virtual events, on the other hand, have to compete with distractions from the attendee's physical space.

It can be difficult for someone to fully engage with a digital presentation when the kids are fighting in the next room or the football game is on television. To combat this, you will need to create a virtual environment that someone wants to hang around in.

Virtual lobbies, lounges, and meeting rooms can give people a place to interact between sessions, keeping them on the platform and more invested in your event as a whole.

Enable attendees to have breakout sessions, further discussions, and casual chats so they can feel more involved.

Tips for Increasing Attendee Engagement

Stimulate Using a Rewards System

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that makes people feel happy. Feeling positive and happy can increase creativity, produce better learning outcomes, and improve networking sessions. The idea of "winning" stimulates this system. Use gamification like quizzes, scavenger hunts, and trivia sessions to produce this effect.

Appeal to Emotion

If you can make an attendee care about your event, they are more likely to engage with it. Set the tone early. Every element of your event needs to be welcoming and inclusive. If people feel like they belong and that their input matters, they will become more emotionally invested and more active overall. Make them care about their involvement.



... more engagement tips

Prime Your Audience

Priming the audience means preparing them in advance so they can get the most out of your event. In your marketing materials, ask questions that attendees are unlikely to have the answer to before they attend. This will help them start thinking in a particular direction. Have speakers commence their sessions with open-ended questions to produce a similar effect. If you can direct attendees toward certain topics, they are likely to pick up more when those topics come up.

Use Storytelling

Storytelling produces an effect known as mirroring. It allows attendees to connect on a deeper level. The listener hears a story and is able to relate it to an experience in their own life. This deeper understanding and connection will help remote attendees better engage with the content as a whole.

Create a Multisensory Experience

Virtual events mean long periods of time staring at a screen. People tend to learn better when they can get multiple senses involved. This can be hard to do in a virtual environment but consider using augmented reality or virtual reality to stimulate attendees and require them to use their imagination. Storytelling can be employed here as well. Depending on the nature and size of a particular session, attendees can be encouraged to share a story or talk about smells that produce positive memories, for example.



Keep it Simple and Interesting

No matter how smart we think we are, it is nearly impossible for humans to process large amounts of data in a short period of time. It may be possible to retain information for short periods, but long-term recall will suffer. Encourage speakers, presenters, and exhibitors to break information into smaller chunks. Doing so gives the audience time to process the information and form a memory. Visual aids, humor, and interactive elements should be encouraged as they break up the speech patterns and again, help individuals remember details.

Make it Social

Humans are social creatures. When people feel a part of a larger group, they are more likely to participate, connect to, and engage with the material. Enable live chat options, networking sessions, virtual meet and greets, and cocktail parties. Consider live tweeting your event for broader social engagement and give attendees one more avenue to discuss and engage with the topic. The more you can do to promote social interaction, the more engaged the audience will be.

... and even more.

Virtual Fitness Class

If you are hosting a multi-day event, consider starting one of your days with a virtual group fitness class or yoga session. This is a way for you to connect with attendees, stoke investment, and foster engagement by setting the tone early in the day.

Gamification

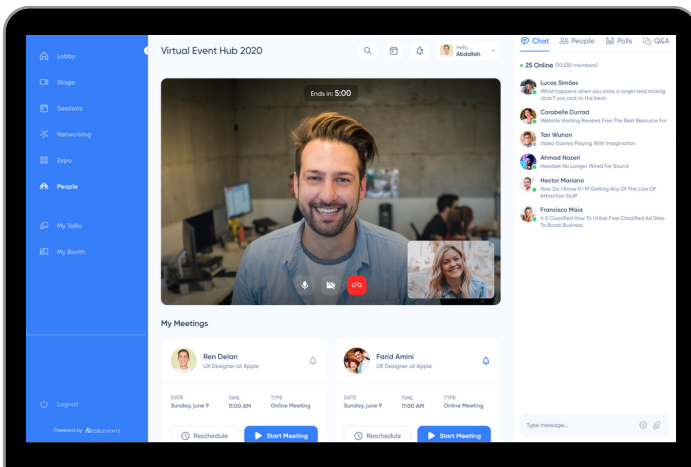
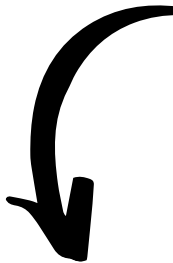
Event gamification is a sure-fire way to get attendees involved. It promotes networking and team building while tapping into the reward center as mentioned above. Create a defined set of rules and offer worthwhile prizes and you are sure to see engagement increase.

Social Walls

Adding a social wall to your live stream gives attendees a way to converse with one another, and with the speaker, without disrupting the flow. Hashtags can be used to more easily identify questions and topics. Attendees can take pictures of themselves and share them to the wall. By incorporating social media into your event, you are creating new avenues for connection.

Live Video Chat

This is a given for virtual events but not always executed well. Make sure that video and text chat is available for all major sessions and smaller, breakout groups and workshops. Having the ability to speak to fellow attendees and ask the presenter a few questions will go a long way to boost engagement and improve the event experience.



How to Prepare your Event Speakers

As an event host, it is important to ensure that your speakers are set up for success.



Do an early test on their technology.

Check to make sure that your speakers have access to the right audio and video equipment. It is important that all streamed sessions be of high quality. Choppy video, poor audio, and dim lighting will not get the job done. If these individuals require an upgrade to their equipment, look for rental options that can be sent to their home or office for the duration of the event.

Early in the planning process, make sure that all speakers know exactly what is expected of them. Give them clear guidance on the length of the presentation as well as the topics or areas you'd like them to focus on the most. Let them know if you'd like them to produce supplemental, downloadable content as well.

Once you have set the schedule for your event, make sure your speakers know when they are required to be online. Give a buffer so they have time to set up and get settled before they are expected to speak.

Let the speaker know if there will be a moderator for their session.

When dealing with a virtual audience, it can be easy for a presenter to forget to check the chat for audience questions. If there is not going to be a moderator who will handle this task, recommend that the speaker work pauses into the presentation to check-in and respond to the audience.

To help increase engagement, recommend that the speakers begin their session with open-ended questions to get the attendees thinking in the right direction.

Make sure that the speakers have access to your tech support team.

Things can go wrong at any time and having a direct line or dedicated support person can help mitigate the trouble.

Do a live practice run before the day of the event. This will help to smooth out any kinks and ensure that all elements are working as they should.

How to Prepare your Event Exhibitors

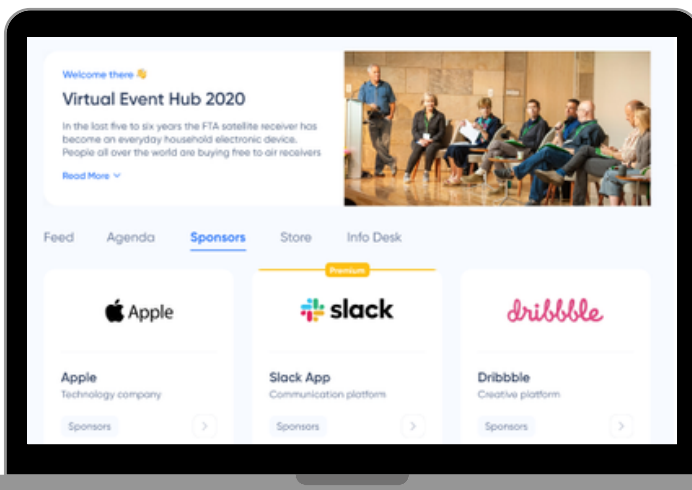
Similar to speakers, it is important to ensure that your exhibitors are set up for success.

Make sure exhibitors know how long they will be expected to staff their virtual booth and whether or not there will be any scheduled breaks on the floor. Make sure they have branding elements prepared so they can customize their booth just as they would at a physical event.

Inform them of the capabilities of the virtual booth. Beyond branding, let them know about any lead retrieval systems you have in place, real-time chat capabilities, and what types of content they can make available for download.

Perform a walkthrough with your exhibitors so they can see what the virtual event space will look like, learn how to operate the booth, and determine their best approach to virtual visitors.

As with the speakers, you will want to provide exhibitors with access to your tech support team so issues can be resolved quickly.



How to Prepare your Event Attendees

In many ways, preparing attendees for your event will **take the most effort**. You will need to do everything you can to **ensure ease of access and to put attendees in the right frame of mind to learn from and engage with your event**.

Send event reminders to all registered attendees. With this reminder, provide clear instructions on where and how to log in to the event. Large scale virtual events are still relatively new to most people, so you want to be sure that everyone starts from a place of confidence and comfort with the technology.

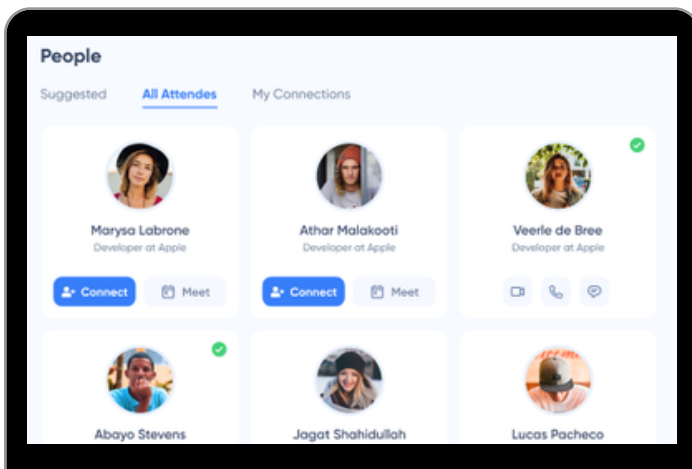
Consider providing attendees with a digital, printable, or physical map of the virtual venue. This will help attendees get a better sense of where they need to be and what options are available to them.

Ensure that all attendees are aware of the chat features. You will want them to use these features to talk to one another and interact with the event content.

Emphasize networking opportunities.

One of the primary reasons people attend events is for networking, meeting new people, and creating new business opportunities. If you are hosting networking sessions, using gamification, or have found a creative way for attendees to connect, explain these elements, and make sure everyone knows how to use and access them.

Before your event, make sure you have provided a phone number and email address for your tech support team. More than that, ensure that these numbers are displayed and easy to find in the virtual event space. Again, if any problems arise, you want attendees to be able to resolve them as quickly as possible.



How to Utilize the Data from Your Event

Virtual events provide event hosts, exhibitors, and sponsors with valuable information about the attendees and the event itself. In fact, a virtual event provides even more data than a physical event. In a virtual format, you can better segment attendees based on their interests and activities.

Ticket sales/registrations vs event attendance: the number of people that bought tickets or registered for your event compared to the number of people that actually attended. This can tell you a lot about your marketing campaigns and whether or not you were effective in engaging people after they registered.

The amount of time spent logged in to the virtual event space and where that time was spent. This information is important for understanding attendee behaviors. Knowing where attendees spent their time can tell you a lot about your venue setup and which content was deemed to be most valuable.

Exhibitor booth data and engagement metrics. Event exhibitors and sponsors will want insight on booth traffic and engagement so they can properly follow up with leads and calculate their ROI.

Demographic figures. Virtual events allow you to take a deeper dive into audience demographics. You can combine age, gender, location, and profession details with the behavior metrics listed above to get a more complete understanding of your target audience.



Ahead of the event, you can track ticket sales, website conversions, social media engagements, email open rates, and clickthroughs, to evaluate your marketing efforts and make adjustments where they are necessary.

All of these metrics, along with your revenue goals, can be used to measure the success of your virtual event. But, to truly evaluate and understand your event you should conduct a post-event survey.

A post-event survey will help you better understand the attendee experience and indicate ways you can improve your event in the future. Ask questions about the virtual event platform, the agenda, the content, overall impressions, whether or not they would participate in a similar event at a later date, and what sort of content they would like to see in the future.

Ask attendees, on a scale of 1-10, how likely they would be to recommend the event. These responses will help you calculate your net promoter score (NPS). This number will help you determine your event's value to attendees.

Divide the answers into promoters, detractors, and passives. Detractors will give scores between 0-6, passives between 7-8, and promoters 9-10. Tally the numbers and use the following formula:

$$\text{NPS} = [(\text{Number of Promoters} - \text{Number of Detractors}) / (\text{Total Number of Respondents})] * 100$$

For example, if you have 120 attendees that break down like this: 15 detractors, 40 passives, and 65 promoters, the math will look like this: $[(65-15)/120]*100 = 41$

Rough back-of-the-envelope calculation ... a score greater than 50 and you have yourself a successful event!





Conclusion

The Definitive Guide to Virtual Events will be your roadmap to navigating what, at times, can feel like an uncharted new frontier. Equip yourself with the information outlined in this guide and partner with a virtual events platform like Accelevents to get started right away.

About Accelevents

Accelevents is an all-in-one virtual and hybrid events platform that empowers event organizers and marketing professionals to create authentic human connections and memorable experiences. As a leading event technology platform, Accelevents is redefining the way brands connect with their audiences with a user-friendly yet robust set of customizable and interactive features. Attendees can watch keynote talks, attend multiple breakout sessions, engage within workshops, interact with virtual exhibitors, network with groups or individuals, answer polls, download materials and participate in live chats. Accelevents supports multi-faceted online, hybrid and in-person conferences, summits, fundraisers, educational seminars, team building events, community networking, festivals and more.

accelevents.com