

swaccard

Hybrid is Now

Analyzing the future of
in-person and virtual events



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Written by: Mia Masson & Julius Solaris



TABLE OF CONTENTS



About this report.....	7
Research.....	8
What is a hybrid event?.....	14
Challenges of hybrid events.....	15
Value of hybrid events.....	17
Your hybrid strategy.....	19
Size of your virtual audience.....	22
Size of your in-person audience.....	23
Your event objectives.....	24
Exhibitors and speakers: Who needs to be onsite?.....	27
Choosing a venue.....	29
Content.....	30
Engagement.....	31
Hub & spoke model.....	33
Community.....	34
Choosing a platform	36
When do onsite and online attendees & exhibitors meet on the platform?.....	37
Monetization strategies.....	40
Key Learnings.....	43

HYBRID HAS ARRIVED. SWAPCARD IS READY.



swapcard

Hybrid is Now

Analyzing the future of in-person and virtual events

The future is hybrid. You have probably heard this phrase over and over again over the past few months.

Yet the event industry is facing one of the most uncertain times. The dynamics of in-person events and virtual events and how the two may potentially come together are very unsure.

Our research says that the majority of planners will plan some form of hybrid in the next few months. They feel confident about their choice, yet the challenges, especially in terms of engagement, are clear.

We struggled over the past year to engage a virtual audience. We are now faced with the new challenge of planning engaging in-person experiences during a pandemic, while trying to connect with a remote audience who could not be there.

Many issues arise.

What is the experience for the two audiences?

Should we treat them differently?

Is one audience more valuable than the other?

Should every event have a digital component?

What does the business model look like for hybrid?

What is a hybrid event to begin with?

There is no doubt that what happened over 2020 and 2021 will have an indelible impact on the way we plan and execute events. With virtual event platforms gaining never before seen traction, there is now a considerable level of interest and curiosity about the future of virtual events.

It is fair to say that virtual event platforms offer features we have never witnessed over the past 15 years. They are becoming complex tools for fantastic virtual experiences. The opportunity to keep using these new assets in extremely uncertain times is palatable to many planners facing 20/30/40/50% capacity at their venues.

Should we make these two experiences collide then? Many seem to be convinced that the answer is yes. As soon as the planning starts, issues arise. We know that at Swapcard. Helping our clients to navigate the uncertainty of hybrid has been on top of our minds. As our CEO, Baptiste Boulard likes to say:

*“Swapcard comes from in-person events. We were a physical event app long before we pivoted to virtual. **Now, with more than a year of experience and 2,000 virtual events in the bag, we are confident that we can provide event planners with the best of both - digital and onsite - technology and expertise for their hybrid events. With our acquisition of Avolio last year, we brought registration in-house and are becoming the leading all-in-one technology platform for events. We’re working on exciting new hybrid features that’ll help engage audiences, collect behavioral data and boost ROI, no matter where your event’s attendees and exhibitors are.**”*



- Baptiste Boulard, CEO & Co-Founder, Swapcard

This report is the result of hundreds of conversations and product development on hybrid events. We believe that the way event technology companies can contribute to the next phase of events is by sharing and being transparent about data and insight.

About this Report

In this report, you're about to find out what exactly the term "hybrid events" refers to, all the **challenges** you'll face in putting one together, and most importantly, the **value** that lies behind implementing a hybrid model. You'll also be taken step-by-step through the process of **creating your hybrid event strategy**.

By the end of this report, you'll have a much clearer picture of how to implement hybrid events, what value you'll get out of it and what to look out for.

This report cites research conducted by Swapcard and includes the expert opinions of 364 event industry professionals.

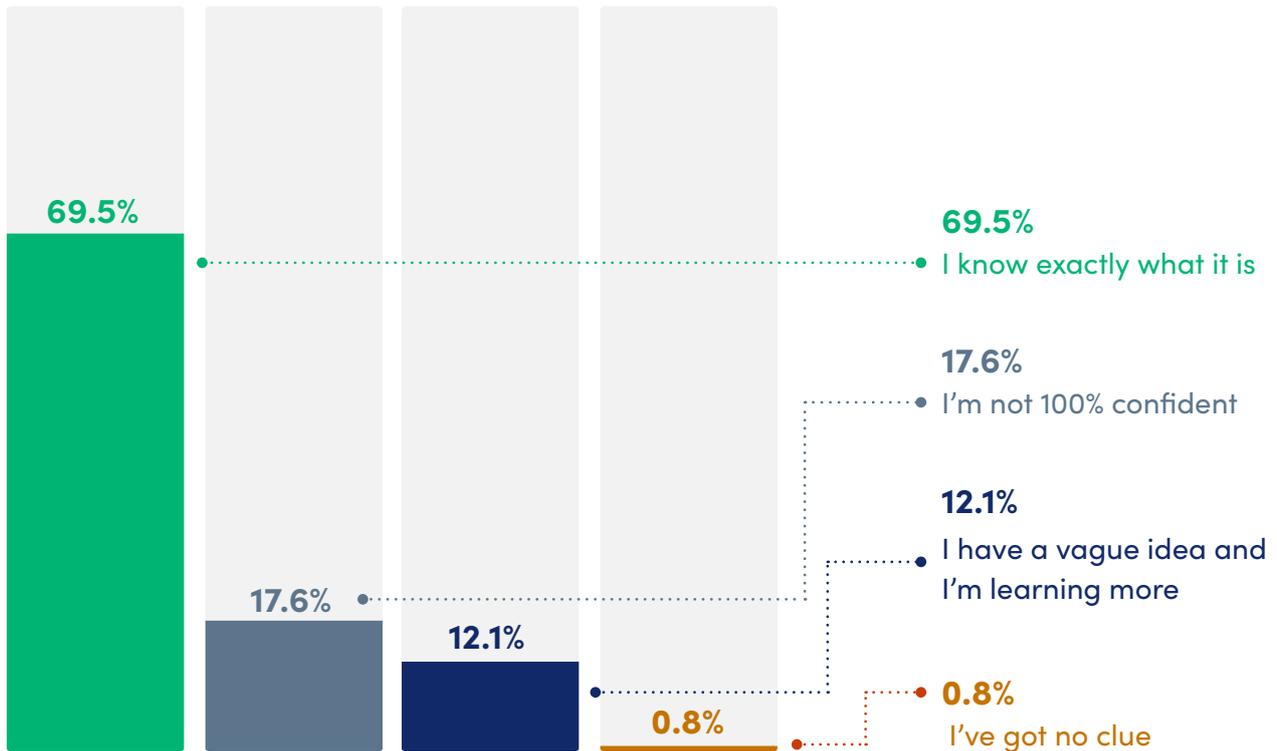


Research

This survey was conducted among
364 event professionals in April 2021.

Research

DO YOU KNOW WHAT A HYBRID EVENT IS?

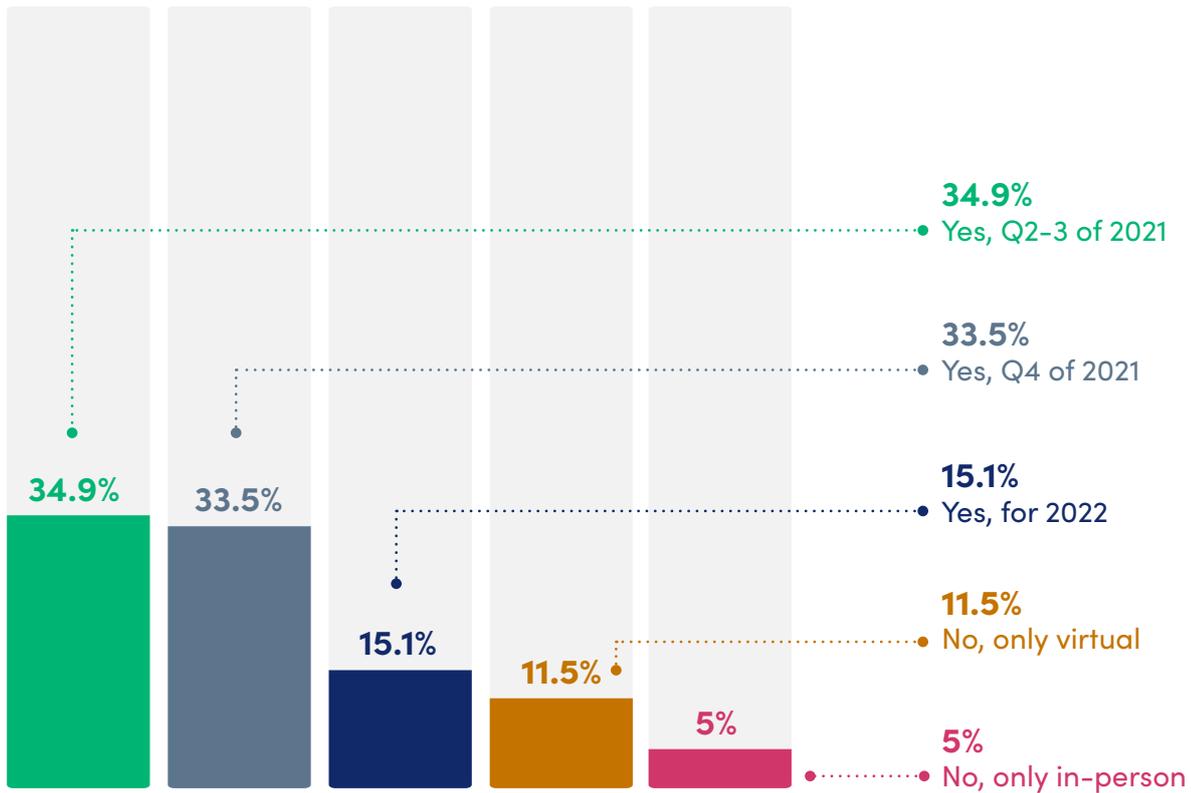


TAKEAWAY

A significant chunk of event professionals (a little over 30%) do not have a crystal clear idea of what a hybrid event actually is. There is confusion around the definition and structure of this model. It's safe to assume that they also don't know the value, challenges and steps to execute a successful hybrid event.

Research

ARE YOU PLANNING HYBRID EVENTS?

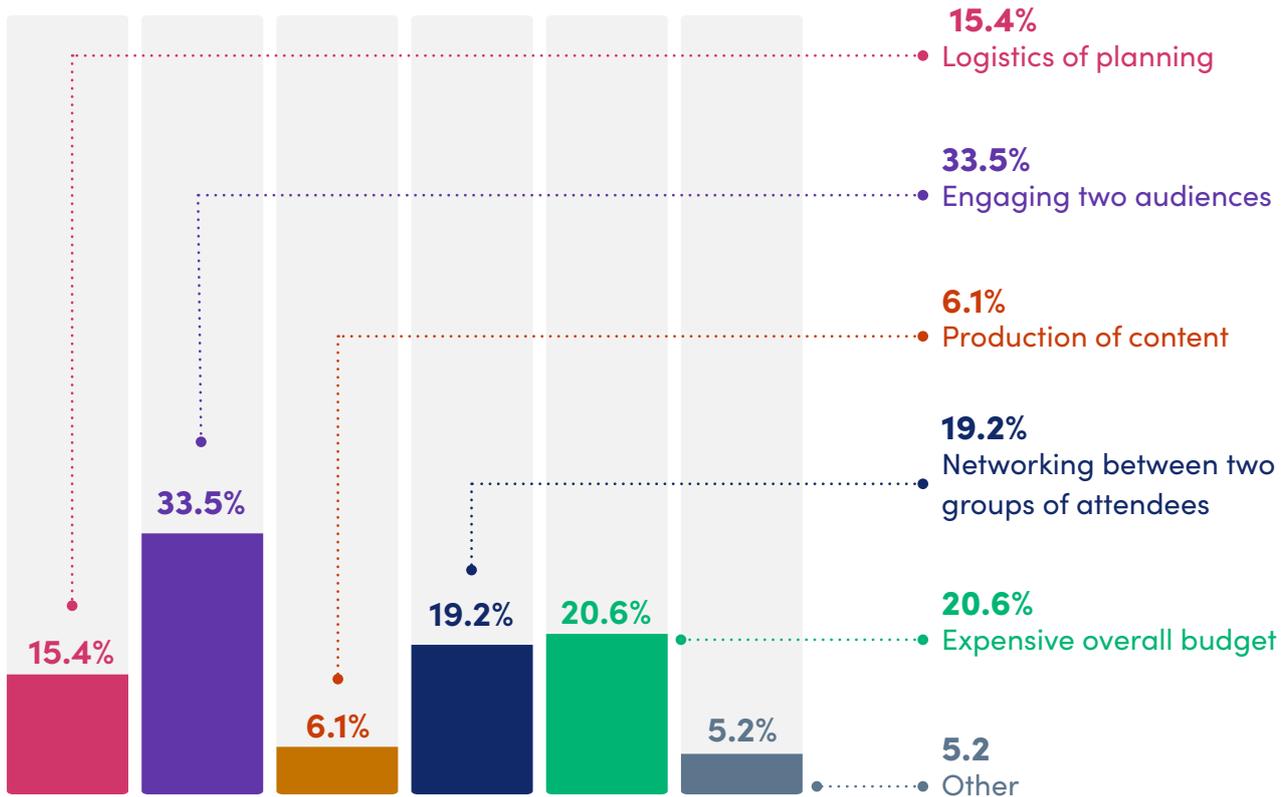


TAKEAWAY

The majority of event planners (close to 70%) are organizing hybrid events in 2021. Some are planning to go hybrid in 2022, but there is still a minority of 11.5% who are only planning 100% virtual events. A very small percentage of event organizers are still hanging onto the idea of in-person only events. This shows that the majority of the industry has started to embrace technology and the value it can bring to events.

Research

WHAT ARE YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGES WITH HYBRID EVENTS?



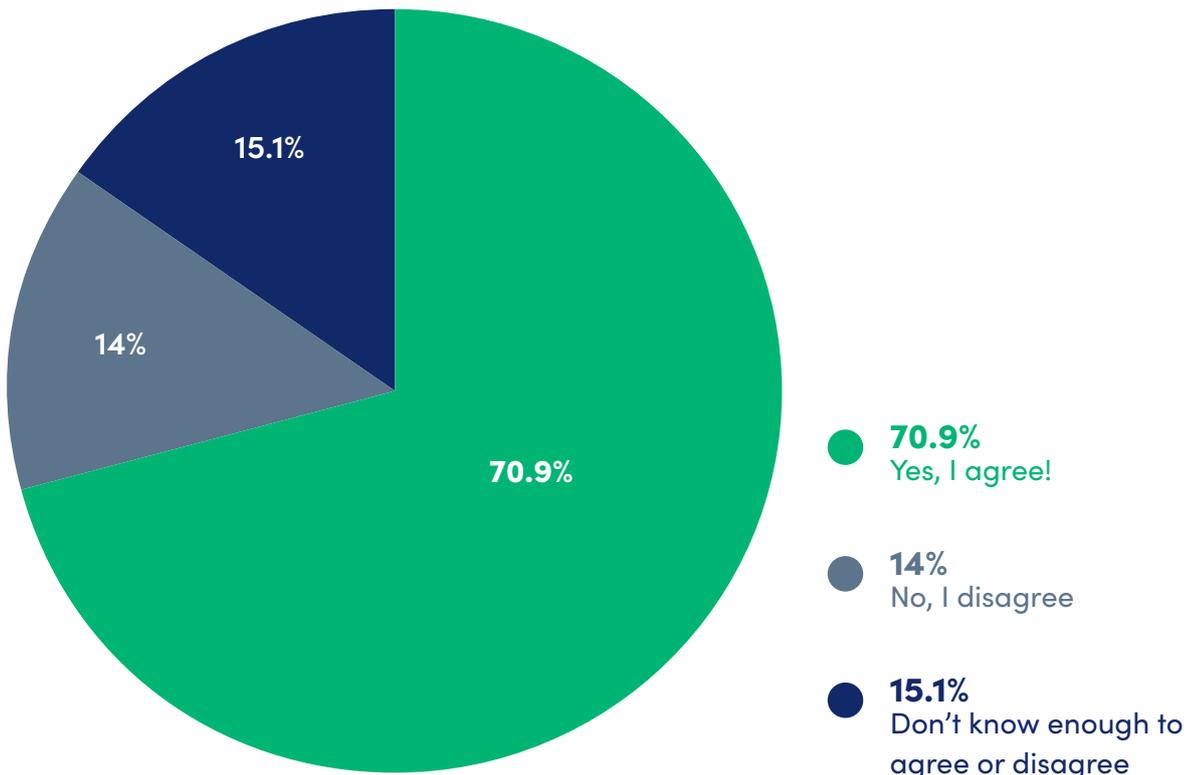
Some commented “All of the above”, while others mentioned ROI for exhibitors, wifi speed and reliability at the venue, getting approval from skeptical HQ, and pricing the tickets for attendees.

TAKEAWAY

Engaging two audiences in different places is considered to be the biggest challenge of hybrid events by a third of event planners (33.8%). This proves that their main goal is to provide a valuable learning experience for attendees. The second challenge, voted by 20.6% of respondents, is the belief that hybrid events require a larger overall budget, followed closely by providing adequate networking opportunities for attendees.

Research

DO YOU AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT THAT “THE FUTURE IS HYBRID”?

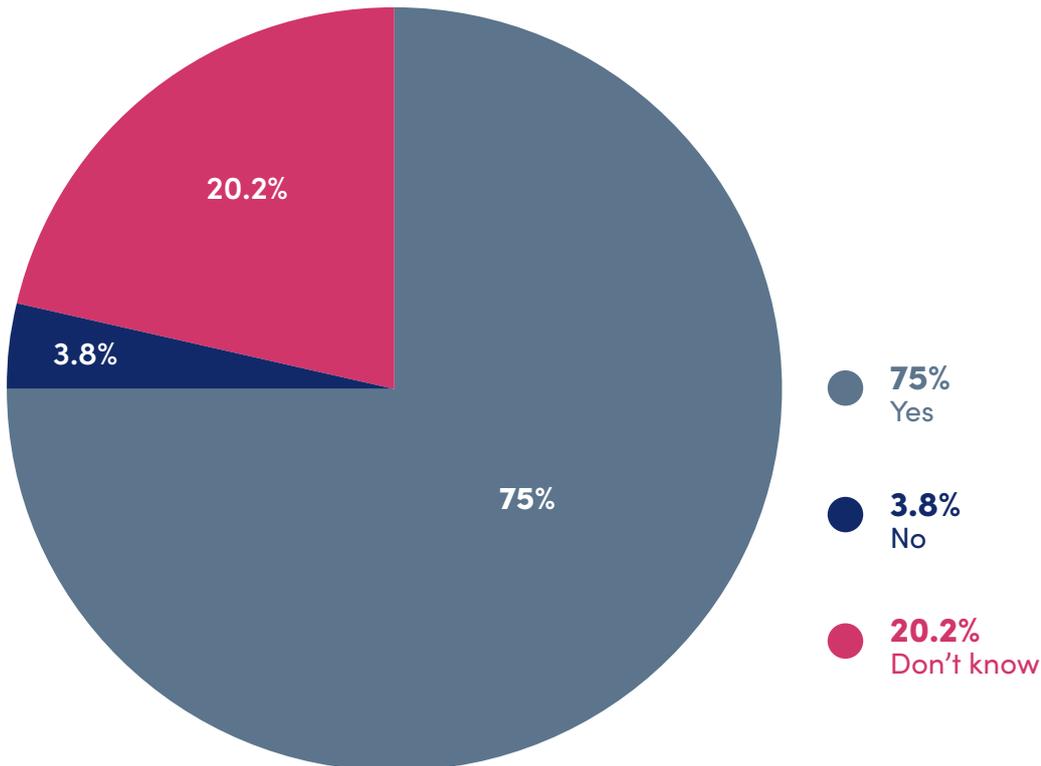


TAKEAWAY

The vast majority of event planners expect to see a hybrid model emerge as the main event type going forward. But nearly 30% of respondents are either unsure or do not agree that hybrid events are the future. This consolidates the takeaway from the first question of this survey: there is a lack of knowledge about hybrid events in the industry.

Research

ARE YOU PLANNING TO OFFER A DIGITAL EXPERIENCE ALONGSIDE YOUR IN-PERSON EVENTS GOING FORWARD?



TAKEAWAY

Nearly three quarters of event organizers plan to incorporate technology into their events going forward, no matter the event format. Only 3.8% of respondents are against this idea, while the rest have yet to decide. This proves that the event industry has come to understand the value of technology and its effect on ROI and success at events, no matter if they're 100% virtual, hybrid or even in-person.

What is a hybrid event?

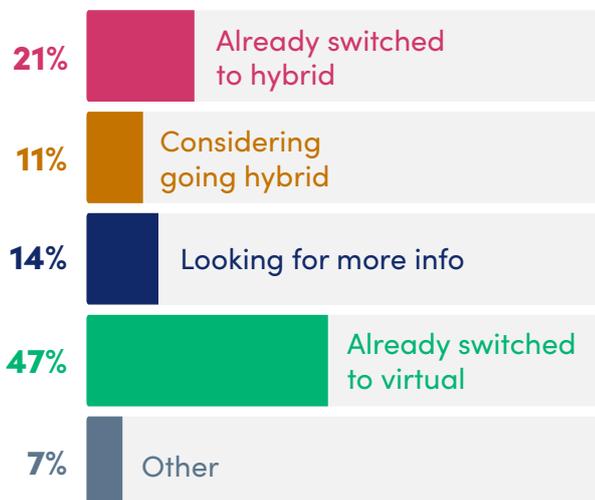
There is no single, clean definition of a hybrid event that encompasses all the varieties possible in today’s tech-centric world. The Events Industry Council defines hybrid meetings as “a meeting that combines face to face and virtual aspects.” While there may be many faces to the hybrid model, one golden thread will link them all together - the idea that **there is both a virtual and in-person aspect to a gathering of people and exchanging of ideas.**

How and when this group of people meets may vary, as well as how they share, learn, exchange, network, buy and sell. The hybrid model can even extend beyond a single event and run throughout the year, making it more of a community than a one-off occurrence.

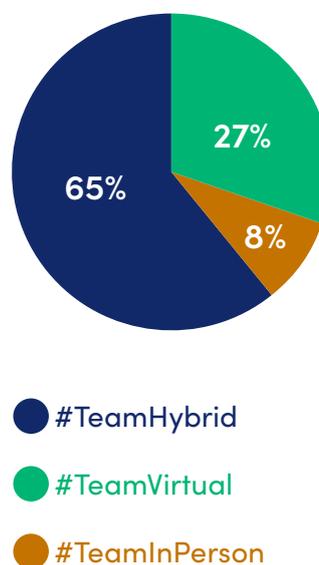
You’ve probably heard of hybrid events being referred to as “the best of both worlds” or “the bridge between online and onsite” or even “the future of events.” They create an opportunity for people at home and people who’ve traveled to experience the same content, to meet each other, and to become part of the same community.

Research conducted among 10,000 attendees at Swapcard’s virtual event, Evolve 2.0, held in February 2020, showed that 33% of event planners are either considering switching to a hybrid model or have already started running hybrid events. 14% wanted to learn more before making a decision. 64% of attendees even labeled themselves as #TeamHybrid for the future of events.

CURRENT EVENT STRATEGY



WHICH TEAM ARE YOU?



The challenges of hybrid

Based on hundreds of conversations with event professionals globally, it is clear that event planners are worried about certain aspects of going hybrid. Our survey shows that they fear the complex logistics of planning a hybrid event, engaging two audiences, producing hybrid content, providing adequate networking opportunities for onsite and online attendees, an increased budget, boosting ROI for exhibitors, choosing a venue with adequate space and wifi reliability at the venue, as well as pricing the tickets for attendees. Here are some of the proven challenges for hybrid events:

People are comfortable at home after 13 months of remote work

Hybrid events are coming to the forefront at a unique moment in the industry - after 14 months of virtual-only, the community is going through a phase of "Zoom fatigue." On the flip side, it's going to take something exceptional for people to risk leaving their homes, getting on a plane and attending an in-person event now that they've experienced the convenience and efficiency of working from home. Hybrid events face the challenge of having to **come up with compelling, inspiring ideas just to get people off their couch.**



HYBRID PLANNER PERSPECTIVE



Barbara Moore

Client Relations Account Manager
Big Head Cartoon Caricature Art & Entertainment

"Hybrid doesn't have to be as complicated as you think! The key to hybrid is intentionality with virtual integrations for your in-person events. At Big Head Cartoon, instead of thinking of two separate events we have weaved the two components together to create a brand new experience, the Big Heads & Beats Caricature Art Photo Booth.

Approach the quality of your hybrid components from every angle - visualize every aspect of the experience and make each part great! Focus on easing the user experience -- simplicity is key. Partnerships and collaborations are crucial for the future of hybrid events."

Safety measures will alter the in-person experience

At the time of publication, there are still **restrictions on gatherings of large groups** in most countries around the world. In the countries where hybrid events are already kicking off, strict hygiene and **safety measures** are put in place to prevent the spreading of the virus. These measures include the mandatory wearing of masks, washing and sanitizing of hands, social distancing and single-use stationery, pamphlets and other physical objects. While necessary, these efforts **completely change the in-person experience**, sometimes in a negative way. They could contribute even further to the list of reasons people don't want to leave their homes.

Low likelihood of a large in-person audience

Another challenge is that there is little certainty about the future and in-person attendance will likely be challenging for the foreseeable future in most regions of the world. Why?



Many people will still be fearful of catching COVID-19 in the months and even years to come. This will stop them from traveling.



Companies are likely to reduce their travel budgets after a year of efficient remote work and virtual events. The likelihood of fewer employees being sent onsite with company budgets is significant.



Health insurance (specifically COVID-19 related) for employees who travel for work will likely skyrocket, causing companies to further reduce their travel allowances.

The value of hybrid

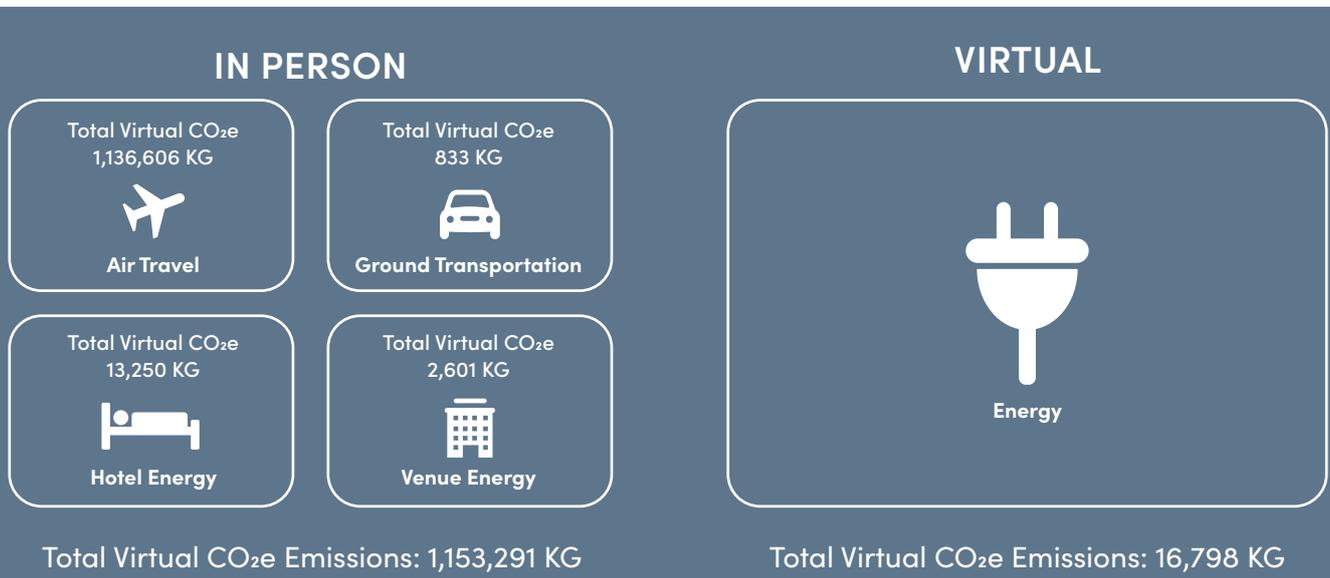
Our research shows that close to a third of respondents are unsure of what a hybrid event is, let alone the value it can bring to organizers, attendees and exhibitors. We decided to explain the value you can deliver using a hybrid model.

Hybrid events are profitable

Hybrid is the **best solution that increases revenue opportunities** for event organizers at the moment because it maximizes your audience reach and potential for boosting ROI. If you organize **in-person only events** in April 2021, you'll be **losing money** or breaking even because your audience will be small and your overhead costs (especially insurance and safety measures) will be very high. If you do **virtual-only** events when travel is allowed, you'll break even or end up losing money because you'll be **missing out on the attendees who are healthy, eager and motivated to travel**. At a hybrid event you'll get the best of both worlds, so it should be your first choice of event model for the foreseeable future.

Hybrid events have a lower carbon footprint

Air travel is one of the biggest contributors to pollution and climate change of all the world's industries. According to a report published on the MeetGreen's UnCarbon Calculator website, which was used on the virtual version of the 2020 event UN Global Compact Uniting Business Live, going virtual saved 1,136,493 kilograms in CO2 emissions, with air travel being the biggest contributor by far. **Going hybrid with a smaller in-person audience means you'll cut down on everything that produces waste and pollutes the planet**, such as food and beverages, electricity, printouts, paper, plastic, booth structures and more, saving the environment in the process.



Hybrid events are accessible to a global audience

One of the highlights of the virtual revolution the event industry has seen is how much more **accessible and inclusive** events have become. People who were unable to travel and attend in-person due to financial, visa, timing, disability, childcare or a plethora of other reasons are now able to enjoy content and networking from their home or office. **Why should we close the doors to them once travel comes back?** At the very least, organizers expand their budget for a virtual platform to stream the content and facilitate video calls, without much planning and organization. At the most, they're providing a whole world of opportunities to online attendees and helping them do business in what would otherwise be an impossible situation. It's a win-win.

Going hybrid can boost brand awareness

Going hybrid is often as simple as adding a virtual element to the existing physical event that is known and loved by many. When delivering the new vision to an established old community, it can help **rebrand the company as forward-thinking, open-minded and modern**. With a hybrid event there are plenty of **opportunities to deliver innovative, creative experiences to a new, larger audience - no matter where they are**. When done properly, reinventing a brand can lead to greater market share and boost the way the brand is perceived.

Hybrid models increase the potential for ROI by removing event borders

A hybrid model helps you **extend your event's reach** in more ways than one. You open up the possibility of attendance to a much **larger and more global audience** when removing geographical and financial barriers. This also gives you the chance of extending your event's reach in terms of time. The virtual platform you'll undoubtedly need for a successful hybrid event can be optimized by leaving it open for networking and new content for months after the event or even all year long. **You'll soon see higher ROI thanks to a wider audience being able to interact for longer.**

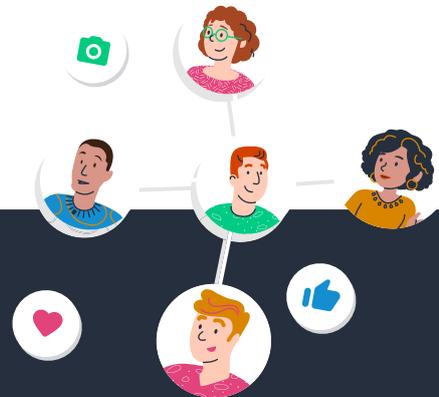


A hybrid strategy increases marketing opportunities

Another perk of a **year-round virtual platform** that keeps your community interacting in the build-up to your hybrid event is the **never-ending opportunities for marketing**. The platform can be used in the same manner as social media throughout the year: for publishing content, holding mini events, and communicating with your followers. Being in regular contact with your community immerses them in your brand and, if done right, helps them become advocates for your events.

A hybrid strategy helps you own your community

A key advantage of the year-round virtual platform is that your **audience's journey, from A-Z, stays within the confines of the platform and makes participating easier for them**. Starting from registration, moving to networking and engagement during the event, and then on to year-round interaction, everything happens in one place. This allows you to fully own your audience and create brand safety. **One virtual platform will help you to avoid diluting your audience**. Where they would normally be signing up to several different platforms or following various media, you can now make their journey an easy one. By keeping your online and on-site audience in one place, they remain in that place throughout the year and **you control the storytelling, the opportunities and the way your community interacts**.



HYBRID PLANNER PERSPECTIVE



Cindy Y. Lo
CEO
RED VELVET

"Budget by far is the biggest challenge when going hybrid. My advice for other event planners organizing hybrid events: determine early on what your goals are so that you can validate if they are prepared to make the financial investment necessary. Every company has a different risk-tolerance and that's where we are right now with planning hybrid vs 100% digital events. I would also recommend that if you did not evolve in the last 14 months to the digital world, invest in hiring someone that has taught themselves what it truly takes to produce a solid digital experience or at least comfortable with this because virtual isn't going away. It's going to evolve again in the next 12-24 months, and we are excited to be a part of that change again."

How To Close Business At A Virtual Event, According To Data



[ACCESS THE RESEARCH](#)

How to build your hybrid event strategy

Size of your virtual audience

When setting attendance goals, it's important to distinguish between virtual and in-person attendance, preparing for a larger chunk of the audience to be digital. The size of your online audience will help determine the virtual platform you'll use, so it's important to be realistic about your expectations while at the same time being prepared for more than expected, just in case. This is because virtual attendees don't need to prepare their event weeks in advance - if there's no deadline for registration, attendees can register right up until the day before the event, and your marketing strategy should also aim to push registration until the last minute. With no physical borders or travelling to do, you should have a larger group of online rather than in-person attendees.



HYBRID PLANNER PERSPECTIVE



Scott Craighead, CEM

Vice President of Exhibitions & Events

International Association of Exhibitions and Events - IAEE

"We are utilizing the data and learnings from last year's virtual Expo! Expo! to improve and enhance the overall virtual experience, while focusing on the unique opportunities and needs for those attending and exhibiting in Philadelphia, 7-8 December. We are looking for the virtual components of Expo! Expo! to serve as a way to reach audiences unable to attend in person, such as markets outside of North America, and to extend the content and networking options for all stakeholders, beyond the designated show dates."

Size of your in-person audience

If you used to plan in-person events before COVID-19 hit, you shouldn't have any trouble planning for your onsite attendees. This group will determine your **venue, wifi connection, hotel logistics, catering, and a new aspect of the planning process: safety and hygienic measures**. Make sure you prepare the venue to accommodate **social distancing during plenary and breakout sessions, on the show floor and during coffee breaks**.

The size of your onsite audience will determine how you set up networking and engagement tools and features for them to connect with those joining from home. When bringing the two groups of audiences together, you might decide to implement **small meeting rooms dotted across the show floor, individual phone call pods, screens on the backs of chairs or charging stations for tablets, mobile phones and laptops**.



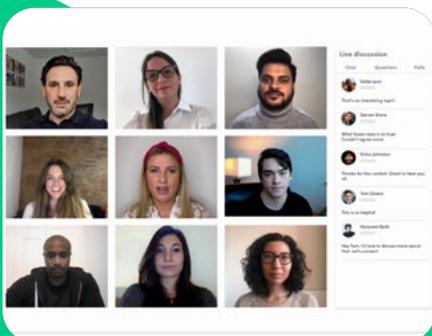
Your event objectives

Though the event industry has gone through more than a year of disruption and change, the reasons why people miss events and want to continue attending have not changed. **There are three main reasons that make events worthwhile for attendees, no matter the event format: learning, networking and entertainment.**

Now you need to find ways to deliver value on each of these attendee goals for both in-person and virtual attendees. **Once you break it down into smaller steps, the obstacle becomes easier to surmount!**

LEARN

- **For virtual attendees learning is the main reason they watch an event from home.** Online learning is not a new concept and is relatively easy to implement. Make sure your content is inspiring, train your speakers and moderators to address the online audience and find ways for them to react and interact using technology. They will have no trouble finding value in your content and learning new things.
- **In-person attendees need star power. After comfortably working from home for so long, only big names can draw them to an event physically** and make them sit through hours of talks in a venue packed with people. Celebrity speakers, Q&A opportunities and workshops or brainstorming sessions at the venue are a great way to help attendees along their learning journey. Organizers should invest in bringing speakers to the venue to deliver physical talks, because attendees risk being disappointed if speakers appear virtually.



Your event objectives

NETWORK

- Virtual attendees are more likely to feel left out than their in-person counterparts, so it's important to focus the design of your event on creating interaction possibilities for them. Virtual platforms are innovating and releasing new features every week, and there is no shortage of tools to get the online community engaged. **Video calls, group chats, online roundtable sessions with video or audio-only options, private discussions and other features exist to help the virtual audience network.** Organizers have the responsibility of finding innovative ways to integrate the aforementioned virtual features into their in-person networking meetings. Onsite exhibitor booths, meeting rooms and robots - or any other creative tools you may use - should be able to display the face of a virtual attendee in a video call.
- In-person attendees would need little to no help networking among themselves. That's the part of events that everyone missed the most over this past year, so people will be sure to strike up a conversation with just about anyone during coffee breaks, on the show floor or even in the bathrooms, as they've always done. **The tricky part will be getting the physical attendees to incorporate virtual meetings in the adrenaline rush. Make time in the schedule dedicated to virtual networking, games and engagement activities.**

TOP TIPS:

- Ensure that booths and smaller meeting rooms are equipped with a strong wifi connection and screens linked to the features you're using.
- Be creative with pods and tablets that can be placed around the venue, ready for delegates to log into their account and run their meetings in the venue so that they don't have to go back to their hotel room to find a quiet space.



Your event objectives

ENTERTAINMENT

- The fun part of events, including cocktail parties, coffee breaks and dance floors, are more challenging to translate into a digital world. Event organizers may opt to host virtual-only cocktail parties with a DJ set on live stream and lots of interaction in the chat box, as well as the sharing of videos and photos on social media to make those joining from home feel part of a community. Planners could also create speed networking sessions where the onsite audience plays “musical chairs”, landing on a new chair in front of a tablet screen with a different online attendee’s video each time and being given 5 minutes to chat before moving on. Some events have robots on wheels rolling around the venue with a video feed from attendees at home displayed. It’s fun for the online attendee to see the venue as if they were there, and it’s fun for the onsite attendee to talk to a robot. There are plenty of creative ways to make the event entertaining for both audiences.
- Onsite attendees will enjoy the old-fashioned parties and games that have always been a fun staple of events. **This time, a virtual twist will make it even more entertaining.**



Exhibitors and speakers: Who needs to be onsite?

The next thing to consider is where your speakers and exhibitors will be during the event. Organizers shouldn't think that there is a one-size-fits all model for this part - **there are countless possibilities, leaving room for creativity!**

SPEAKERS

Hybrid events require in-person speakers. After hundreds of conversations with industry professionals, it's clear that attendees will be less likely to travel to an event if speakers deliver content virtually. **The industry is longing for the in-person experience of watching celebrities or influencers talk on a stage** and the ability to ask questions face-to-face. They also hope for the opportunity to network with the speakers during coffee breaks. So organizers should prioritize onsite speakers and build the stage, schedule, streaming and engagement opportunities around their sessions.



Exhibitors and speakers: Who needs to be onsite?

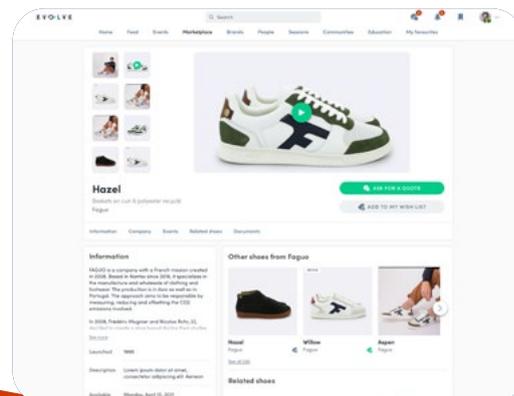
EXHIBITORS

There is room for customization in the way exhibitor packages are drafted at hybrid events. The first step should be asking exhibitors who their target audience is and finding out what their goals are. Some exhibitors target only in-person attendees, while others target only those who join virtually. **There should be options containing in-person booths exclusively, as well as options for only a virtual booth.**

New data released by Swapcard shows that virtual booths are where the business happens at virtual events, and so they should not be underestimated by sponsors and exhibitors. The data reveals that anywhere between 30% and 45% of leads come in directly from the virtual booth, so exhibitors should not miss out on that opportunity, even if they also have a physical booth. **Virtual booths need to be customized with care.**

On virtual platforms like Swapcard, organizers have the option to give exhibitors rights to upload photos, videos, live streams, branded backgrounds, logos, products, documents, marketing materials, prizes, vouchers, discounts, website links, social media accounts and much more. Exhibitors can design their booths to evoke emotion and curiosity, drawing attendees in and following through with responsive team members through the live chat or video calls.

Organizers should provide the option of a **package deal - one where exhibitors have a physical booth on the show floor and a virtual booth on the platform.** The platform you use should have the features exhibitors need to reach whatever audience they're after, and to make the most of their booths, no matter the format.



Choosing a venue

Going hybrid will affect your list of criteria for potential venues more than you might think. Here are some things to consider:



The venue needs to adhere to **capacity and mass gathering restrictions** enforced by state and local governmental authorities



Your venue will need **strong and consistent internet connectivity** so your onsite attendees can be active on their mobile apps. The wifi needs to handle all the video calls, live chats and searching of lists that will be happening on the network.



Ensure the venue has space for **social distancing** to keep in-person attendees safe. Plenary halls, breakout rooms, the show floor and meetings rooms all need to be large enough to accommodate your entire onsite audience while allowing people to stand or sit a reasonable distance apart.



Onsite attendees need easy ways to network with their online counterparts. **Meeting rooms or individual pods** need to be made available with limited time slots and screens, ready to log into the event platform, should be stationed in each room.



Menus should rely on plated options or grab-and-go offerings and individually wrapped items. Buffet stations will need dividers and require staff to serve customers.

Content

Hybrid event content directors have the opportunity to get creative and take risks. Having two distinct audiences and perhaps even two speaker groups makes for a complex, entertaining schedule!

Organizers should consider including different session types and durations with different target audiences. Panel discussions with half the panel on stage and the other half joining via video call, regionalized studios to record virtual sessions and dedicated virtual and in-person MCs are some examples of innovative content formats for hybrid events. And don't forget about the value of pre-recorded content that can be played for all audiences - it's a time saver and risk-free, but can potentially be very engaging if done right!

Holograms are another fun idea and they're becoming less expensive the more technology advances. Don't hesitate to take risks - there is little chance that with great speakers and relevant topics, attendees won't be drawn in by the content.

The key will be making the content engaging for both audiences, and by implementing varying session formats and lengths, a part of the job is already done.



Engagement

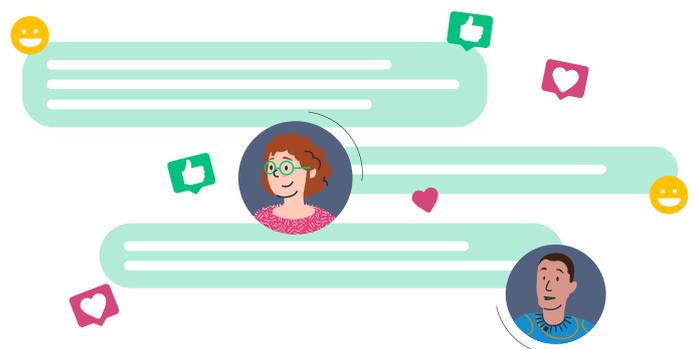
Engagement is key at any event, but even more so when virtual attendees are involved, because it's almost too easy for them to switch off their computer if they don't feel immersed.

When designing content with speakers, organizers should target virtual attendees first, seeing as they're the hardest audience to pin down. Get **dedicated MCs** or moderators that are either in a studio or onsite, and are streamed live to the online attendees to do regular check-ins, updates and announcements. **Invest in smart production services** for the onsite stage to implement camera angles and optimize streaming for the attendees at home. **The production needs to be polished and riveting** in order to deliver a truly immersive experience to those watching from home.

Be sure to include **frequent breaks and shorter sessions** for online attendees, as they tend to have a shorter attention span. Including virtual attendees from different time zones is also important, so consider having **multiple live sessions for breakout topics**.

As with the content, organizers shouldn't be afraid to take risks and try new things when it comes to hybrid event engagement. What about robots rolling around at in-person events with tablets showing the video feed of virtual attendees or proposing polls and surveys to onsite visitors? Or onsite breakout rooms with screens for roundtable workshops showing a few virtual attendees and accommodating a few physical ones, too?

The event platform plays a crucial role in fostering engagement and features like **live discussions during sessions, Q&A, polls, video calling, online roundtables and speed networking** should be in every organizer's list of basic requirements, as well as an **optimized mobile app**. Getting the physical audience involved with using the technology for engagement during sessions is key - that way, all the questions and poll results will be in the same place, making it **easier for speakers to address both audiences at the same time!**



Engagement

TOP ENGAGEMENT TIPS

1

Invest in audience engagement features for an immersive experience. Live discussions, live questions and polls allow both audiences to interact with speakers.

2

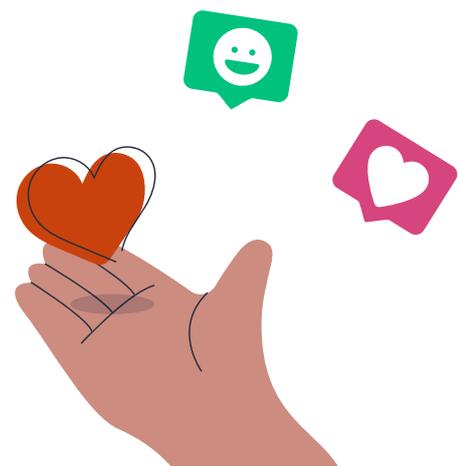
Photo-booths – go for a virtual and a physical option, with the photos all being uploaded into the same online gallery for all to see!

3

Artificial intelligence saves both groups of attendees time. Let AI tell them which sessions to watch, exhibitors to visit and people to meet. It will also help boost onsite-online engagement!

4

Have a dedicated virtual MC who's in charge of making sure those joining from home don't feel like an afterthought. The MC can provide regular updates, venue tours and more.



Hub & spoke model

Some hybrid event organizers will opt for a hub and spoke model that consists of **one main in-person event with smaller, satellite gatherings in different locations that participate digitally in the main event.** This model can easily incorporate virtual attendees who are alone at home or at their offices too. People at the satellite events will network, eat together, and enjoy meeting face-to-face while leveraging technology to stream the main event's content and interact with the main exhibitors. **This type of hybrid event allows people to grow their networks within their localised communities and allows them to experience the magic of in-person events without having to travel too far or pay too much for attendance.**

It requires more organization for the planners but can be done by assigning key attendees and exhibitors in different regions to be on a planning committee for the local gatherings. This hybrid event model also requires an all-in-one, customizable online platform for all the attendees and exhibitors to be able to meet and interact seamlessly.



HYBRID PLANNER PERSPECTIVE

Ivan Ferrari

CMP, Senior Director Telecom
Media & Technology at Informa Tech

"Hybrid is the new virtual. After a full year of virtual only events and the fatigue that it generated, there is definitively more interest from our audiences when it comes to a hybrid framework. The challenges though are many and multifaceted. From variable government regulations to the unknown number of physical attendees to the high cost of live broadcasting and the difficulties of engaging online and offline attendees simultaneously. In short, in 2021 given the overarching presence of covid it is like running 2 events concurrently, with the associated increase in costs, without really knowing what the operational parameters are. What we know for sure though is that exhibitors are better off and can create more engagement at both the virtual and physical events if they go for speaking slots and deliver meaningful content."



Community

We've all attended so many virtual events over the past year they're starting to blur into one. However, before being forced to go online due to COVID-19, the event industry was already on its way to a technological revolution, just like the retail industry implemented online shopping years ago. Today, most people spend the majority of their time online, but the in-store experience has by no means become obsolete; it's complemented by the opportunity to browse and discover online.

In a year where most people have been working from home and feeling isolated from their communities, virtual tribes have stepped up. It's not the same as grabbing a coffee or shaking hands, but online networking, sharing and exchanging have allowed people to remain connected, even when miles apart.

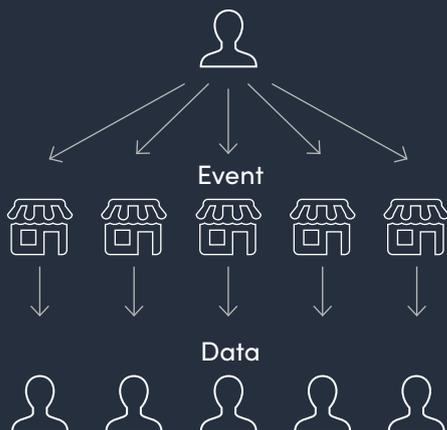
What's happening with events today is that **most interactions are moving online**, but that will by no means kill the value of in-person meetings. If anything, it'll render physical events more memorable and meaningful.

The future of the event industry is moving towards a **365-day community model with up to 80% of year-round interactions taking place online and the other 20% taking place in the annual hybrid event**. Community is very important in building brand loyalty and trust, as well as growing sales figures for recurring exhibitors and partners.

365-DAY COMMUNITY MODEL YEAR-ROUND INTERACTIONS



EVENT - SILO EXPERIENCE



COMMUNITY - GLOBAL EXPERIENCE



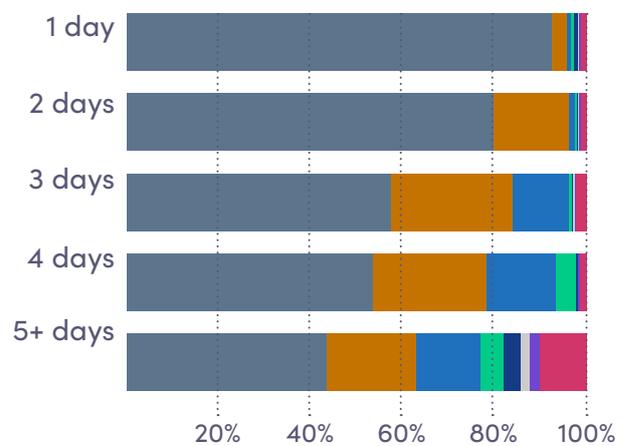
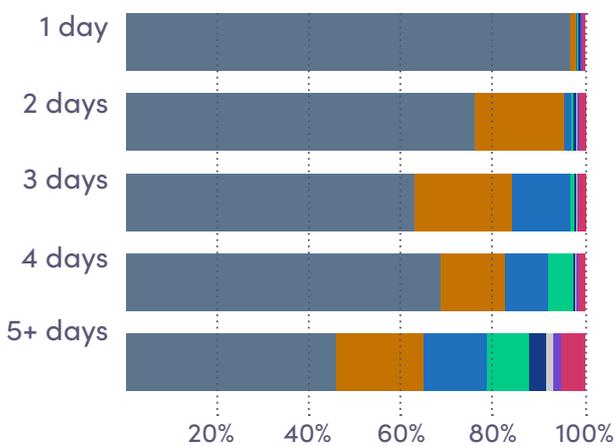
Community

Certain events have proven to be more effective and successful in a virtual format, and there are other types of events that will return to an in-person format when possible. However, one thing is sure: **a virtual platform will connect those communities all year long**, offering regular virtual meetings and networking opportunities as well as touchpoints for exhibitors to nurture their leads in the build-up to the less regular hybrid or in-person event.

A virtual platform with opportunities for year-round engagement, networking and content is proven to be most effective in closing business for exhibitors. Data shows that up to **90% of deals are closed in the days and weeks leading up to the actual event**. A year-round community & engagement approach maximizes business opportunities and extending the business lifecycle means higher ROI.

LEAD GENERATION PER DAY - TRADE SHOW

LEAD GENERATION PER DAY - CONFERENCE



● Pre-event Period ● Day 1 ● Day 2 ● Day 3 ● Day 4 ● Day 5 ● Day 6 ● Post-event Period

The idea of creating a virtual community isn't a new one - look at Xbox, Starbucks, Lego, Peloton, GoPro and Adidas, to name a few. They are all betting on building tribes around their brand, and it's paying off.

Choosing a platform

When running a hybrid event, you need a platform that can accommodate the needs of both groups of attendees, speakers and exhibitors. Here are the roles that your platform plays:



It's the only place where those onsite and those at home meet



It's the data tracking, collection and analysis point



It's the event venue for those joining from home



It's the registration experience for everyone

It's best to go for an all-in-one virtual platform that can take participants from beginning to end with only one set of login credentials. From registration to data analysis, with the session streaming, networking and lead generation in between, it all has to happen in one place.

When do onsite and online attendees & exhibitors meet on the platform?

Below is a list of common touchpoints based on a real-life hybrid event that took place on the Swapcard platform in 2021. These are the first empirical research results to come out of the switch to hybrid for 2021.

WHEN DO ONSITE AND ONLINE ATTENDEES & EXHIBITORS MEET ON THE PLATFORM?

- Online and onsite contactless **registration** with barcodes for in-person attendees
- Onboarding and **training**
- Pre-event **ads and promotion** for exhibitors
- Pre-event **teaser sessions**
- **Travel advice**
- Pre-event **scheduling** of networking meetings and calls
- Suggestions of people to meet powered by the platform's **artificial intelligence**
- Pre-event **browsing** of the schedule, **bookmarking** of sessions to watch, **creating** a personalized agenda for the event days
- Visitor **identification** upon arrival at the venue by onsite attendees
- **Live Q&A** during sessions can be used by both audiences



WHEN DO ONSITE AND ONLINE ATTENDEES & EXHIBITORS MEET ON THE PLATFORM?

- **Gamification and competitions** during the event will be run on the platform and used by both groups of audiences to track the winners
- **Interactive floor map** of the venue used by onsite attendees and exhibitors
- **Virtual exhibitor booths** will be seen and contacted by both groups of attendees
- Virtual **sponsor branding** and ads will be seen by both sets of attendees
- **Badge** scanning and lead generation during the event
- Networking meetings and **video calls** during the event
- **Notifications** and reminders from the organizer during the event
- If the event model has smaller, satellite events linked to the main event, those participants will be active on the platform and get to network with a smaller group of in-person attendees and exhibitors
- Watching recorded sessions **on-demand** after the event
- **Follow-up** networking and lead generation post-event by exhibitors and attendees
- The **measuring** of data, ad performance, leads generated, new contacts made, and ROI on the online platform by exhibitors and attendees, online and in-person alike
- **Customer support** for the virtual app is available online to online and onsite participants

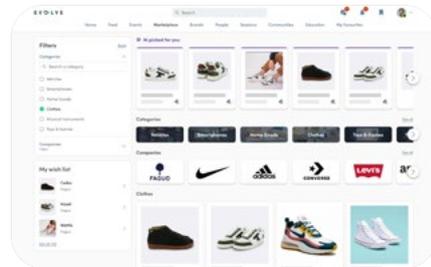
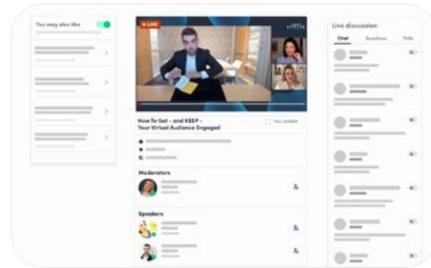


It turns out the in-person attendees are much more active on the virtual platform than previously imagined. So it's important to choose an **event platform that not only has a good web app for those watching from home, but also a reliable and easy-to-use mobile app so that onsite attendees can stay connected.**

IN PERSON



VIRTUAL

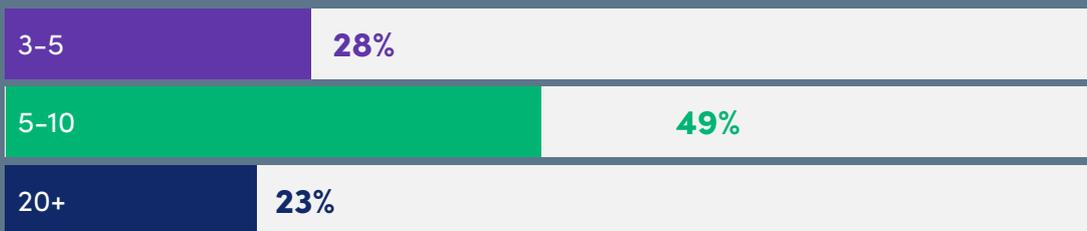


DID YOU KNOW?

Most people surveyed have a misconception about the value of the hybrid event platform in uniting two groups of attendees.

This poll was run on LinkedIn and features answers from a small test group of event professionals.

Hybrid events: How many common touchpoints do you think in-person and virtual participants have on the online event platform?



39 votes

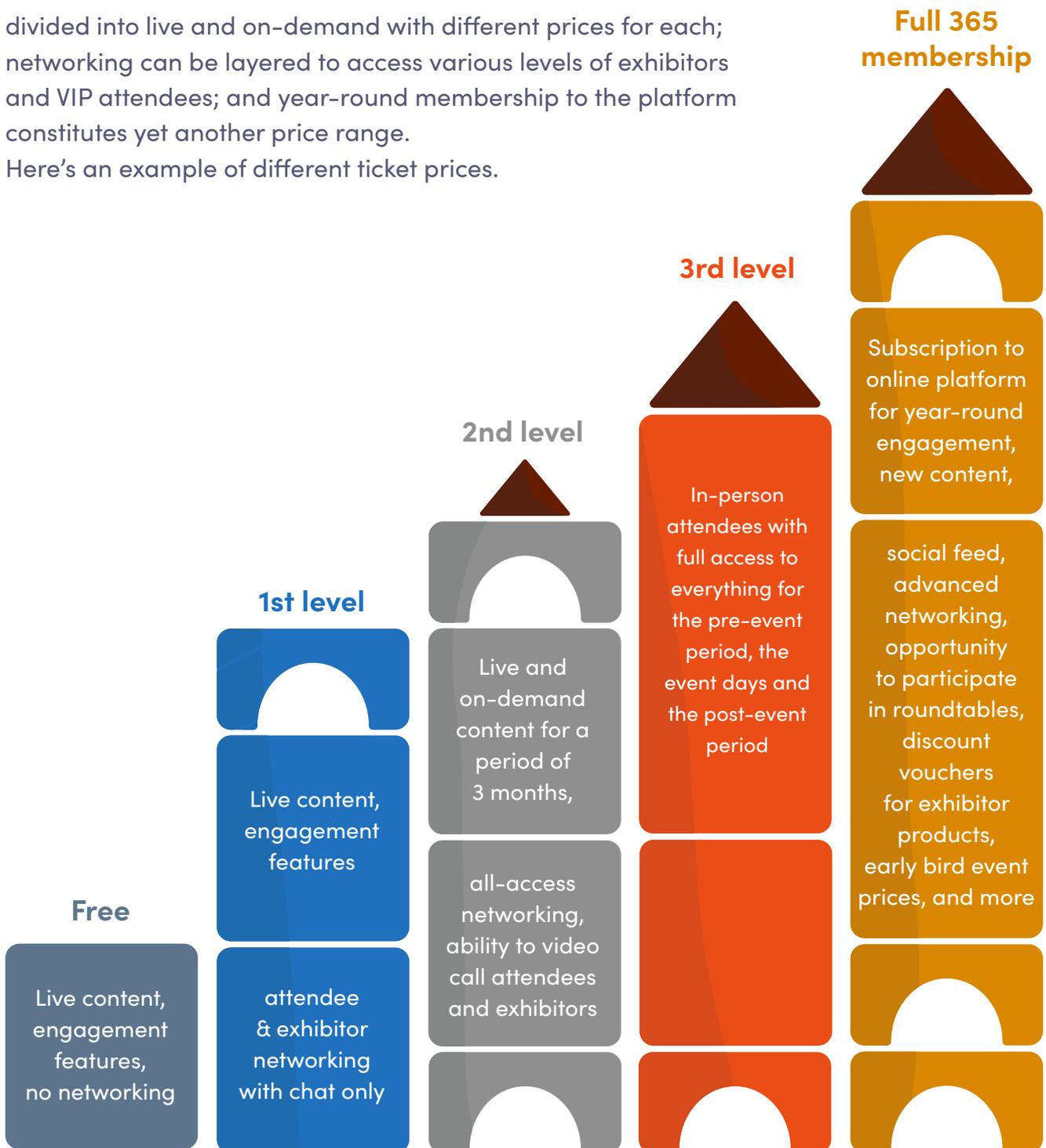
The answer is, in fact, 20+. This is clear from the list of touchpoints above. **Event planners: do not underestimate the power your hybrid event platform has in uniting your community!**

Monetization strategies

TICKETING

Many event organizers are struggling to imagine what ticket prices could look like for hybrid events. First, **research what different attendee groups want**. Is content, networking or entertainment more important for those at home and onsite? **The onsite attendee will take on the role of a VIP with the full experience - so their tickets can be as high as those at traditional in-person events have always been.** For online attendees it would be wise to **sell different tickets with varying prices for different levels of access** to features and content. Content can be divided into live and on-demand with different prices for each; networking can be layered to access various levels of exhibitors and VIP attendees; and year-round membership to the platform constitutes yet another price range.

Here’s an example of different ticket prices.



Monetization strategies

STRUCTURING EXHIBITOR PACKAGES

Whether your exhibitors, sponsors and partners are planning on being present onsite or attending virtually, they'll want options for a hybrid event.

Listen to what their ROI goals are and who they're targeting, then **build custom packages** for each exhibitor. Allow them to have virtual-only booths, physical booths or a mix of both. Then offer add-ons in the form of virtual and in-person advertising, sponsored sessions on the event agenda, visibility in communications and more using the hybrid technology available.

HYBRID PLANNER PERSPECTIVE

Geo Connect Asia 2021

"Geo Connect Asia 2021 ran a hybrid event with around 500 in-person and 700 virtual attendees, exhibitors, speakers and sponsors hailing from 55 countries in March 2020. According to the organizers, this type of pilot hybrid events "facilitate progressive scaling up to larger events, and provide a crucial springboard to recovery and growth for both the ASEAN geospatial community and the wider MICE industry, overturning the assumption that larger international MICE events cannot be held safely. GCA 2021 saw the use of a Bluetooth-enabled dongle which tracked attendees' location and duration of interaction with other attendees at the event. The device, which was part of the Safe Event platform trialled onsite, aided GCA 2021 in ensuring the necessary Safe Management Measures (SMMs) were met. The pilot event also featured Geo Suites - ballrooms converted into "exhibition booths" that assumed the role of a typical trade show floor as the main mode of interaction and helped to minimise intermingling between cohorts of attendees - and Meeting Pods that allowed 2-to-2 meetings to take place with the safety of a plexiglass divider as well as hand sanitisers and cleaning supplies. At GCA 2021, Antigen Rapid Tests (ART) were administered onsite both days of the event. The testing provided valuable findings and data that will allow for the progressive refinement of SMMs and best practices for future MICE events in Singapore."

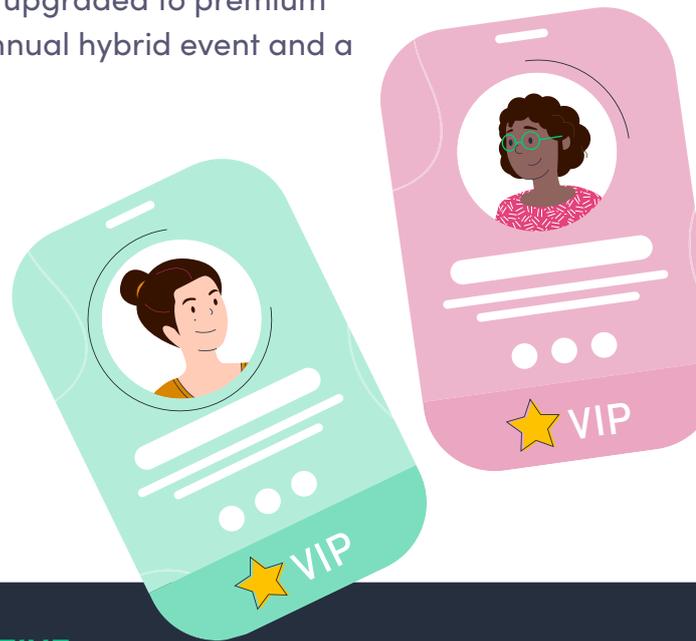
Source: Geo Connect Asia 2021



Monetization strategies

MONETIZING THE COMMUNITY

If organizers want to monetize their communities in a smart way, they can **charge exhibitors and attendees monthly or annual subscriptions to be part of the community**. There can be different levels of access - for example, a basic level for attendees with free on-demand content but no networking features, and a premium level with networking, on-demand content and live content in the form of monthly sessions. The same idea can be used for exhibitors - basic packages with the option of a virtual booth year-round can be upgraded to premium subscriptions that include in-person booths at the annual hybrid event and a detailed data dashboard to track ROI.



HYBRID PLANNER PERSPECTIVE



Dan Franks
President
Podcast Movement

"When we decided to do this summer's Podcast Movement as a hybrid event, it became imperative for us to figure out how we could best bring value to our exhibitors and sponsors. Their main activations will be on-site, yet a good portion of our attendees will be joining us virtually. We're currently in the process of figuring out all the ways that we can cross their in-person participation over to the virtual attendees. So far, we're planning on a "virtual hour" each morning before the in-person expo opens, where we encourage exhibitors to "staff" their virtual booths, and virtual attendees to visit those booths. We also will be giving all sponsors who will be putting something physical inside the in-person gift bags to also provide a digital "bag insert" for the virtual attendee gift bags. We're excited about these two crossover opportunities, but also hopeful to discover more ways to leverage the hybrid model for the benefit of our partners."

★ Key Learnings

Hybrid events provide attendees and organizers the best of both worlds. They bring together the virtual and in-person experiences under one online roof and allow organizers to run events without borders. A hybrid strategy is crucial to success in the foreseeable future, as our research shows that the majority of event organizers are moving towards a hybrid model.

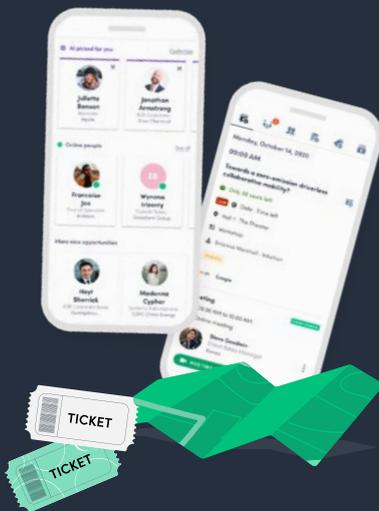
The world has changed over the past year, but creativity and imagination have helped keep the event industry afloat and this is evident in the variety of new ideas and innovations that are available to event planners today. They should not be afraid to try new things or take risks. Now is the time to be bold because we're all in this together - testing solutions to find the best way forward.

This virtual revolution may have been accelerated due to the pandemic, but it also opened the event industry's eyes to avenues for increased engagement and attendance, as well as new, better ways of becoming data-driven. Take this as an opportunity to increase reach, maximize ROI, cement brand loyalty, and expand your community beyond its original scope.

With the knowledge that, at this moment in time, hybrid events provide the best solution for running profitable events, make sure to choose an all-in-one technology platform. This platform is where your virtual and onsite attendees meet no less than 20 times before, during and after the event. Having an end-to-end platform will save event planners a lot of time and stress. Choose a platform that has encountered the same growing pains you have over the past year and understands your needs. Their experience and knowledge will be reflected in the product you end up working with.

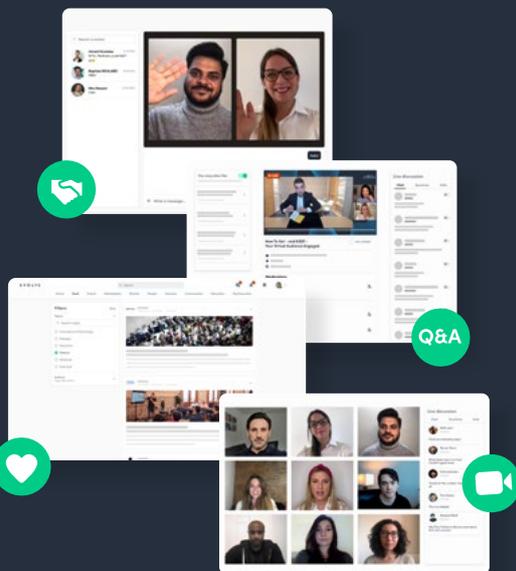


Swapcard's specialized hybrid event features



ONSITE ATTENDEES:

- Mobile based
- interactive floor plan
- QRcode to check-in and remove badges
- Onsite self check-in kiosk for touchless events
- Onsite check-in app
- Indoor geolocation



ONLINE ATTENDEES AND EXHIBITORS:

- Web based
- Filter between onsite/offline A and E
- Status - able to switch online / offline status that trigger timezone and meetings (F2F with a location or video call)

LET US HELP YOU GO HYBRID

swapcard