



HYBRID MEETINGS PLAYBOOK

By Brandt Krueger

*Developed in partnership with
Radisson Hotel Group*

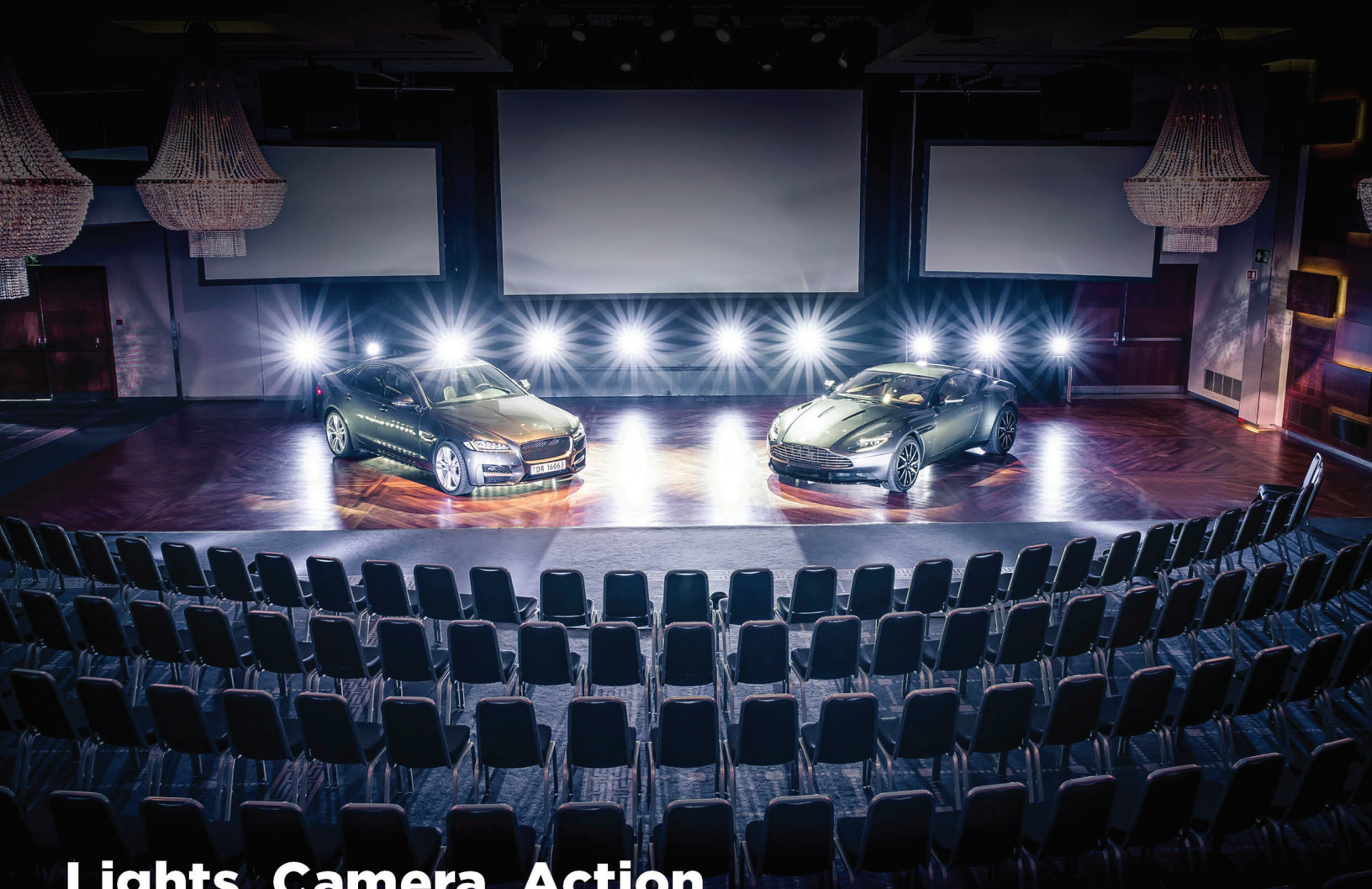


CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION: HISTORY INFORMS THE FUTURE	4
2. PREPARING FOR YOUR HYBRID EVENT	5
What Is (and Isn't) a Hybrid Event?	
Types of Hybrid Audiences	
Starting with the Why	
Know Your Stakeholders	
3. DESIGNING YOUR HYBRID EXPERIENCE	10
Think Like a TV Producer	
The Hybrid Host	
Other Engagement Opportunities	
Presenters and Rehearsal	
4. THE TECHNOLOGY OF HYBRID EVENTS	13
In-Room Audiovisual	
The Encoder, Venue ISP and Platform	
The Last Mile	
Vendor Support	
Technology Troubleshooting	
5. VENUES AND BUDGETING	16
Choosing an Online Platform	
Budget Considerations	
Choosing Your In-Person Venues	
6. CONCLUSIONS AND DEFINITIONS	19



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1 INTRODUCTION: HISTORY INFORMS THE FUTURE

In the early 2010s, hybrid meetings were hailed as the “breakout star” of the meeting and event industry, offering incredible opportunities for planners, sponsors and venues. With successful execution of hybrid events, planners could expand their audiences globally, introduce new and engaging formats, easily generate content for marketing and attendee on-demand experiences and give voice to those who might be reluctant, or unable, to attend in person.

Early evangelists in the format successfully pushed the envelope of what was possible with the tools and suppliers available at the time. They learned hard-fought lessons about things like online streaming providers, bandwidth, latency, video and audio quality and delivering engaging experiences to audiences that were not only not in the same ballroom, but were connecting from offices, homes and mobile devices around the world. Even in these early days, research conducted by MPI about hybrid events showed increased audience engagement, value for sponsors and exhibitors and in-person attendance to future events, despite planners’ fears that online audiences would somehow “cannibalize” the in-person experience.

Even so, an industry that prided itself on connecting in-person was skeptical of incorporating a digital audience. They worried about cost, complexity, technical failures and, despite research to the contrary, losing their in-person audiences. As a result, online and hybrid events saw little innovation over the decade, and frequently amounted to little more than placing a camera in the back of the room, broadcasting it to the Internet and calling it “hybrid.”

THAT ALL CHANGED IN 2020.

Nowhere in the history of meetings have we seen such an explosion of so many different formats and applications of new technology.

“Nowhere in the history of meetings have we seen such an explosion of so many different formats and applications of new technology,” wrote the authors of the original MPI *Hybrid Meetings How-To Guide* almost a decade earlier. If only they knew what was to come! As the pandemic forced the meeting industry online, hundreds of companies created streaming platforms or pivoted from other event technology solutions. Planners were left to figure out how to translate and adapt their agendas, find unique sponsorship and exhibitor opportunities and explore ways of engaging and keeping their online audiences engaged. They were thrown into a technological hurricane and given the choice to sink or swim.

Those who succeeded discovered what those early pioneers had already learned—adding online components to events expanded their audiences globally, introduced new and engaging formats, easily generated content for marketing and attendee on-demand experiences and gave voice to those who might be reluctant, or unable, to attend in person. Sound familiar?

As the world opened up again, they naturally looked for ways to re-incorporate the in-person experience, and what was old became new again as the hybrid event experience was reborn.

2 PREPARING FOR YOUR HYBRID EVENT

WHAT IS (AND ISN'T) A HYBRID EVENT?

A hybrid meeting or event is about more than just having two or more audiences. Watching an awards ceremony such as the Oscars or a sporting event like the World Cup from home alongside in-person fans does not make these two experiences hybrid. Just broadcasting an event to an online or television audience doesn't make it a hybrid event.

The dictionary definitions of “broadcast” all surround the idea of one-way communication: a “transmission” or “spreading of information.” For hybrid events, the following has been MPI's definition for a decade.

A hybrid event is a meeting or event with at least one group of in-person participants connecting with remote participants in one or more other locations.

There are a couple of key points in that definition. The first is the word “connecting.” The main difference between a traditional broadcast event and a hybrid event is that a successful hybrid event creates connections between in-room and remote experiences, no matter their locations in the world, making sure everyone is part of the conversation and has a seat at the table.

And yet, technology and the Internet (especially since the advent of social media) have helped to create near-real-time feedback capability for live

broadcasts, allowing remote audiences to weigh in on gameshows, reality television and other primarily broadcast events. The lines are blurring, so rather than rigid definitions, it's more helpful to think of the event types on a spectrum (See Figure 1.1).

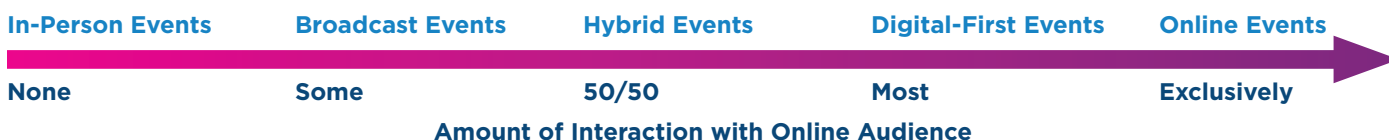
On the far left sit fully in-person events. There is no remote audience, so the amount of interaction with one is zero. Just next to that are broadcast events. Traditionally, these were one-way interactions (unless you mailed the television network a sternly worded letter), but more and more broadcast events are offering opportunities for remote audiences to participate through social media, texting and dedicated apps.

The more interaction, and the more connections you make between in-person and remote audiences, the closer you come to hybrid and offering experiences of similar value. Most industry experts agree that this is the sweet spot for hybrid, despite most “hybrid” events lying somewhere between broadcast and hybrid.

Continuing down the spectrum are digital-first events. These exist as a counterbalance to broadcast events in that the primary audience is the online audience, with limited interaction with a smaller, in-person audience. And finally, on the far right of the spectrum, we have fully digital events in which there is no in-person audience, so all participant interaction is exclusively online.

Determining which model is right for your organization is an essential part of the design process and stems directly from the concepts outlined in the sections following.

Figure 1.1



2 PREPARING FOR YOUR HYBRID EVENT

TYPES OF HYBRID AUDIENCES

The second key phrase in the definition of hybrid events is “one or more other locations.” The most common type of hybrid event combines an in-person gathering with a group of individuals viewing in remote locations such as their offices or homes—but that’s by no means the only configuration. Successful hybrid event experiences are not limited to just in-person and online audiences. They can be delivered to multiple different audience types, in multiple different types of locations, around the world.

We’ve already covered the first two types of audiences: the in-person, face-to-face audience and remote individual participants. But there’s just something compelling about getting together in groups. Even in this most basic configuration (or during broadcast events), people will arrange “watch parties” or just agree to meet in the office conference room to remotely attend the event together. So why not embrace and encourage it? Or even make it official by organizing remote event gatherings, most often referred to as “pods.”

A pod is a remote group of people attending the event via livestream but still gathering in person.

A pod is a remote group of people attending the event via livestream but still gathering in person. Pods are usually smaller than the main in-person event, but offer opportunities for in-person networking, socializing, teambuilding and offsite activities. Pods are great ways to include smaller audiences in different geographic locations,

for those who might be willing to drive into the closest major metropolitan city for the day but might not be able to fly halfway across the country or the world for a multi-day event.



Of course, not just audiences can be remote. You can bring in presenters from anywhere in the world, as well. This creates even more possible configurations. Much like offering the ability to attend an event online can increase the global reach of your event, allowing presenters the opportunity to present online can increase the potential caliber and quality of an event. A world-renowned heart surgeon or philanthropist might not be able to take time from their busy schedules to present at your event, or your budget might not be large enough to include their travel arrangements, but they might be able to present from their office or a local studio.

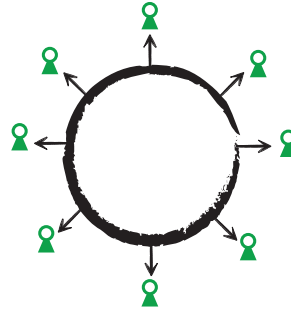
Here are a few examples of potential hybrid event configurations. (See page 7.)

2 PREPARING FOR YOUR HYBRID EVENT

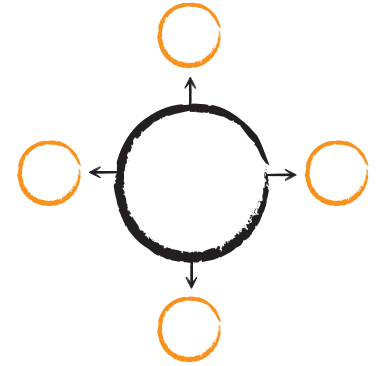
LIVE MAIN EVENT



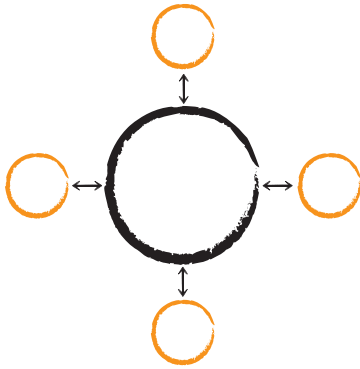
LIVE MAIN EVENT + VIRTUAL PARTICIPANTS



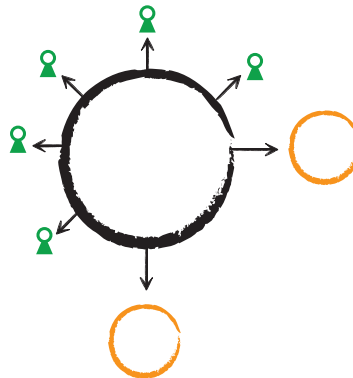
MAIN + 1-WAY PODS



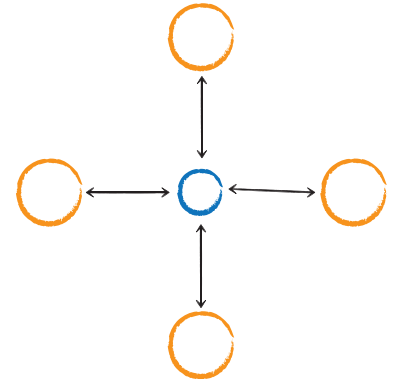
MAIN + 2-WAY PODS



MAIN + 1-WAY PODS + VIRTUAL PARTICIPANTS







STUDIO + 2-WAY PODS







LEGEND

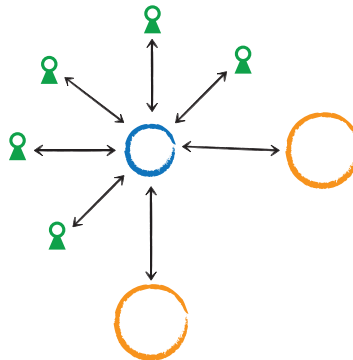
space types

-  face-to-face event
-  pod event
-  studio event
-  online individual

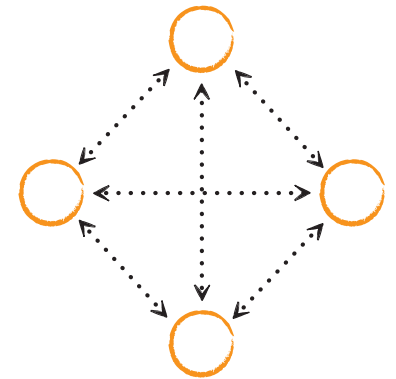
communication connection

-  real-time 1-way broadcast stream
-  real-time 2-way communication
-  on demand broadcast stream
-  near real-time

STUDIO + 2-WAY PODS + VIRTUAL PARTICIPANTS



EQUAL PODS



2 PREPARING FOR YOUR HYBRID EVENT

STARTING WITH THE WHY

The No. 1 mistake that planners make when adding an online component is not clearly understanding the “why” of their events. Every event has a purpose, such as education to improve client satisfaction, networking to break down silos or inspiring employees to increase sales. Each event has a unique reason for existing, along with a unique set of goals and objectives.

Every major design decision stems from those goals, and how those goals previously served in-person may not have a direct analog in the digital world. Just replicating the in-person agenda isn’t necessarily going to work for your remote audience. You will have to find new and creative ways to achieve the same desired results.

In addition to knowing your goals and objectives, it’s also important to know how you’re going to determine whether or not those goals were achieved. How do you know if your event was a success if you don’t have a way to measure it? How will you measure that success? While many events rely exclusively on attendee survey data or feedback from executives to determine worth, the real magic lies in finding objective, measurable results that prove goals are being met. After all (to paraphrase Lord Kelvin), to improve something, you must first be able to measure it.

Hybrid and online events offer the ability to gather and analyze data in an unprecedented way, allowing you to measure almost every possible aspect of the remote attendee experience.



Hybrid and online events offer the ability to gather and analyze data in an unprecedented way, allowing you to measure almost every possible aspect of the remote attendee experience. Not only can you determine exactly how many people attended online, but you can also tell exactly what sessions they attended, how long they watched and if they engaged. While badge scanners can tell you how many people attend an in-person breakout, rarely do they tell you how many people left halfway through.

If one of the goals of the event is education on a particular topic, you might want to offer polling on that subject at the beginning and end of the event, comparing the results to see what attendees learned and if they will apply it. If a goal is to facilitate networking, offer attendees a way to meet and engage, then gather statistics on the number of people who request connections. You’ll be able to directly measure which activities facilitated networking and which ones flopped.

Of course, event organizers aren’t the only ones who are going to have goals and objectives for the event. Participants have their own goals, too. While the main purpose of an event may be a fundraiser for a local charity, attendees may want to network with likeminded philanthropists, or to elevate their social standing. While the event might be a product launch, the real

2 PREPARING FOR YOUR HYBRID EVENT

reason people might attend is because it's an opportunity to see friends or colleagues who they only see once or twice a year. The product might be the most important thing in your world, but not necessarily theirs.

Sponsors have different goals and objectives, too, as do exhibitors. When designing a successful hybrid event, you'll need to keep all of these various stakeholders' goals and objectives in mind alongside your own and those of your organization.

KNOW YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

If not knowing goals and objectives is the No. 1 mistake planners make, not knowing their stakeholders is number two. This can be challenging enough for a single in-person event, but for hybrid events, you may have as many as four types of attendee experiences: in-person, online at a home or office, pod or even just on-demand after the event. Each one of these audiences deserves a quality experience that meets their expectations, so it's more important than ever to fully understand what each group is looking for.

Likewise, not all sponsors or exhibitors have the same approach to making the most of the event. Some exhibitors are content to sit in their booths and offer people a chance to win a prize if they drop their card in a fishbowl, while others offer engaging activities designed to qualify leads and encourage networking between salespeople and attendees. While the former might be perfectly happy being handed a list of online attendees after the event, the second is going to want more targeted leads. How can you help facilitate that—in a GDPR world?

Some sponsors seek name recognition and are happy to have their logos splashed all



over banners, printed or digital. Online event components offer ample opportunities to do this kind of branding. Others want more data to show ROI. If you haven't determined what constitutes success for these essential stakeholders, how can you determine whether or not your event succeeded?

Focus groups, surveys, advisory teams—all of these can be valuable ways to get inside the minds of your stakeholders.

Focus groups, surveys, advisory teams—all of these can be valuable ways to get inside the minds of your stakeholders. While not every attendee or exhibitor is going to have the same goals, analyzing the data from these groups can help you begin to put them into smaller, more manageable groups. Marketing techniques such as “personas” (fictional characters based on real demographic data) can be helpful ways to view your attendees' experiences from start to finish, looking for pain points, making sure their needs are met and providing exclusive value to each and every stakeholder.

3 DESIGNING YOUR HYBRID EXPERIENCE

THINK LIKE A TV PRODUCER

Just as there are unique opportunities that come with offering a hybrid component to your event, there are design challenges as well. Broadcast and hybrid events both have two audiences: in-room participants and remote ones. Event planners are masters of designing the in-room experience. Now we must add an equally engaging remote experience. The key word is “**engaging**.” The more your event engages your remote participants, the more likely they will feel part of the community.

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Television producers know how to keep audiences engaged and coming back week after week, so it shouldn't be much of a surprise that audiences overwhelmingly cite talk shows, newscasts, interviews and even awards shows as formats they like to see. Yet, the most common format continues to be standard “lecture and slides,” followed by a brief Q&A.

Planners need to think more like television producers, or as Bob Bejan (vice president of global events for Microsoft) once put it, “cinematically instead of theatrically.” What's going to keep your audience's attention? What new formats can you try? There's a reason talk shows have dominated the daytime and late-night ratings for half a century—the format works. Start with a monologue, do a bit (or joke), conduct an interview, do another bit, offer a musical number, stage another interview. While the overall format remains the same, there's infinite variety within,



and the show moves quickly from segment to segment. Even the big awards shows like the GRAMMYS and Academy Awards offer musical numbers and video clips strewn throughout the show to keep the program moving and compelling.

Television shows also tend to be less than an hour in length. Broadcast television still allows for plenty of breaks during commercials as well. But even in the online streaming universe, shows tend to be relatively short in length and allow the viewer to decide when to take a break in-between bingeing episodes. Experimenting with lengths and variety of session types can go a long way toward keeping your remote audience engaged. You never know, you might wind up improving the in-person experience as well.

THE HYBRID HOST



Talk shows, newscasts and interviews (again, formats audiences say they want) all have something in common. They all have hosts.

3 DESIGNING YOUR HYBRID EXPERIENCE

You might already have an emcee, but much of what helps keep a remote audience engaged is providing experiences that are exclusive to them. This can go a long way toward making the remote audiences feel like they're co-equals to the in-person experience. The hybrid audience host can act as a tether between the remote and the live audiences. Additionally, they can serve as the voice of the remote audience for in-room Q&A. Rather than try and feed a speaker questions from the remote audience via a downstage monitor or note cards, a facilitator or in-room emcee can throw it to a separate "anchor desk" to see if there are any questions coming in from the remote audience.

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After the session is over, the presenter can sit down with the host for a "private" Q&A with just the online participants. This can fill some of the empty spaces in the schedule while the in-person audience is having a coffee break or transitioning to breakout sessions. It's important to think about what each audience is doing during these transition times and avoid "dead air." Your remote attendees may be attending from all over the world, so the in-person audiences' lunch might be in the middle of their evening. Record these interviews and use them as on-demand education or marketing content.



OTHER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The hybrid host is just one of many possible ways to keep your remote audience engaged. One of the most common is simply the use of polls and Q&A to help keep the remote audience mentally active and connected to the main event, but this should be thought of as the bare minimum for audience interaction and engagement.

Here are a few others to consider:

- Using the same event mobile app for both in-person and remote audiences, ensuring the schedule is up-to-date and consistent for everyone
- Having a single Q&A/polling experience that all attendees can participate in no matter their location
- Monitoring social media for feedback and questions, and rewarding those with the most posts
- Offering a "digital concierge" to assist attendees with navigating the technology
- Allowing attendees to have private conversations and exchanging contact information
- Sending exclusive swag or gifts to your remote attendees

3 DESIGNING YOUR HYBRID EXPERIENCE

We want to create “surprise and delight” for our in-person audiences, and remote audiences deserve nothing less. Since not all in-person activities translate to the remote audience, look creatively for opportunities to add exclusive moments to their event experience.

PRESENTERS AND REHEARSAL

How your in-person (or remote) presenters address the remote audiences can go a long way toward supporting their connection to the in-person event. It’s important to notify your presenters that there will be a remote audience, and ideally, provide them with training or coaching. Additional rehearsal time might be necessary if it’s the first time they’ve spoken to a dual audience. This also gives them the opportunity to meet the host and discuss Q&A with digital attendees.

How your in-person (or remote) presenters address the remote audiences can go a long way toward supporting their connection to the in-person event.

Presenters need to be careful how much they walk or pace on stage, as this will require more camera movement, which can be distracting or cause motion sickness for remote viewers. Think of talk shows: Most of the time the hosts stay within a small area for their monologues and are seated for interviews, allowing for fixed camera angles and very little movement.



Extra rehearsal also provides an opportunity for presenters to get used to the delay (“latency”) that comes with all Internet audio and video platforms. Depending on the technology, that could be anywhere between less than a second to up to 40. Test the livestream during rehearsals with someone offsite to verify how much of a delay there is, and bear in mind that this could vary depending on where the person is in the world and the quality of their connection.

If a presenter intends on polling the audience about a topic, they need to be aware of this delay, not only understanding that it might be a full 30 seconds before the remote audience hears the request for their opinion, but also that they need to give them time to formulate and type a response. That could be a full minute, and a minute on stage can feel like an eternity. They should be prepared to ask the question, then fill some time with a story or anecdote, and afterward come back to check for responses.

4 TECHNOLOGY OF HYBRID EVENTS

If you flipped through the previous sections to get straight to this part, you shouldn't. There's a reason this section comes later in the guide. The vast majority of hybrid events don't fail because of their technology, but rather by skipping the important steps laid out previously. You should know your stakeholders—all of your stakeholders. You should know your goals and objectives and how you're planning on measuring success. Finally, you should begin the planning and design process. All of that should be done before trying to figure out what technology is going to make the most sense for your event.

IN-ROOM AUDIOVISUAL

Adding a remote audience of any type is going to add an additional layer of technical complexity to your event, but advancements in computer hardware and software have made it more affordable and reliable than in the past. Fortunately, the first stage consists of elements already in your budget. Most medium-to-large meetings or events have all the microphones, lighting and cameras required to accommodate a remote audience. If the in-person event is large enough, chances are you're already providing IMAG (camera shots of presenters displayed on large projection screens). For smaller events that might not have required IMAG or weren't already being recorded, a camera and camera operator will need to be added. Cameras love light, so even in a small room with a small in-person

audience, you may need to add stage lighting so that the presenters look their best for the remote audience.

Even if your production company or audiovisual partner is already providing all the cameras, microphones and lighting you need, it's important they know from the beginning that you're going to have a remote audience connected online. While it's relatively trivial to route feeds to the equipment necessary to broadcast to the world, some specific audio and video equipment make it easier.

There is, of course, another upside to all of this: upgrading your sound, lighting and stage décor to look good on camera is going to increase the production value for your in-person experiences as well. If even your breakout sessions have staging, lights and cameras in them, they're going to look and feel more professional to audiences and presenters alike. That could be significant if those stakeholders include potential clients, internal executives or sponsors.

THE ENCODER, VENUE ISP AND PLATFORM

The audio and video signals are now sent to the next equipment in the chain—the encoder. The encoder is usually a powerful laptop, desktop computer or stand-alone piece of hardware that takes these signals, compresses them and sends them out to the Internet. The vendor responsible for this stage is usually referred to as the “**streaming provider.**” The **streaming provider** sends those compressed signals out of the venue, most often using the venue's Internet service provider but occasionally through an external Internet service brought in by event organizers.



4 TECHNOLOGY OF HYBRID EVENTS



From there, the audio and video streams go to the **platform**. The platform is your “**digital venue**,” where the stream is hosted for your remote attendees. It is usually the website they’re logging into in order to watch and interact with the event.

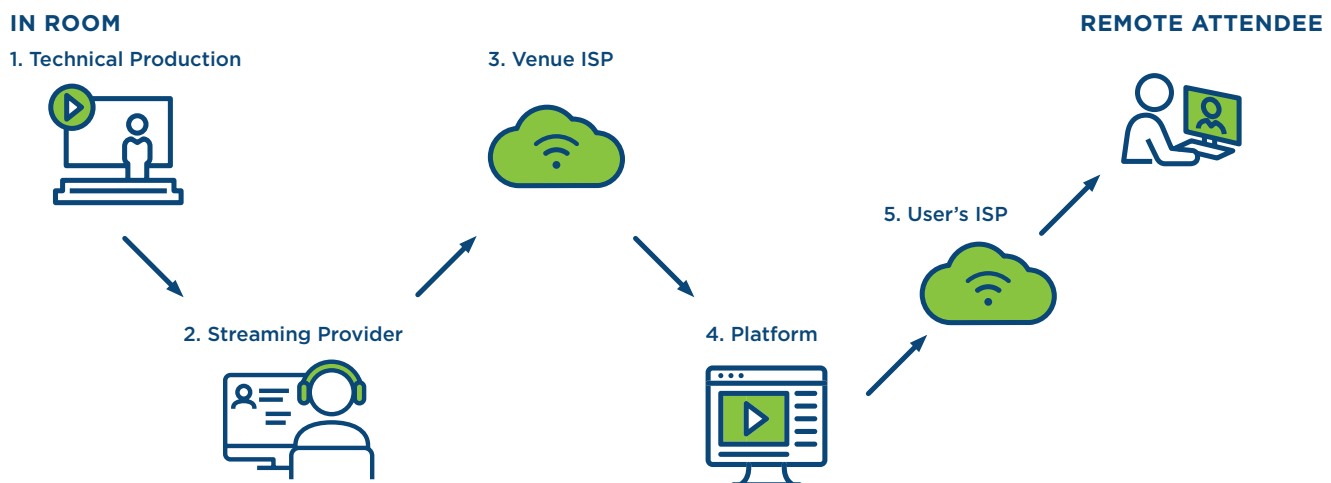
The platform is usually running on large web servers, capable of handling the number of remote attendees streaming simultaneously, whether you have 100 or 10,000 attendees. If this number of remote users attempted to connect directly to your event through your venue’s Internet provider, it would fail almost immediately. The platform provides stability and scalability, but is also the cause of the majority of latency, creating those 30-second delays.

THE LAST MILE

At this point, the signal leaves your control. Now, the remote attendees’ Internet service providers allow them to connect to the platform to view your event. It’s at this point in the chain that we encounter the most problems. People often refer to this final step as “The Last Mile” because all the high-tech gadgetry in the world can’t help if the last link in the chain—the attendee’s local home or office Internet—is slow or congested.

Unfortunately, while this is technically outside of the realm of your responsibility, attendees quite naturally blame the event itself for any difficulties logging in, stuttering or buffering video or garbled audio. It’s important to communicate to attendees what the minimum requirements are for logging into the platform, and if they still have issues to patiently work with them to fix those. Having dedicated support staff or a digital concierge can go a long way toward looking like you’re part of the solution instead of the problem.

Figure 3.1



4 TECHNOLOGY OF HYBRID EVENTS

VENDOR SUPPORT

All five of these steps must be planned and accounted for in the technical design of your event. To make things more complicated, different vendors provide different portions of these steps. For example, a production company may provide your audiovisual, the encoder and Internet. Most streaming providers provide a platform, but not all of them. Some just provide you with the streaming encoder hardware or software, and you are responsible for the distribution platform.

This can make comparing vendor quotes difficult. If you make sure that the vendor combination you choose accounts for all five steps, including attendee support of “last mile” issues, you’re going to be covered.



Some hotel chains—such as Radisson Hotels—offer services for hybrid events as part of the package, which means extra value for the planner.

TECHNOLOGY TROUBLESHOOTING

In addition to having a little extra rehearsal time, make sure to include troubleshooting time in the process, just in case one of the five stages isn’t cooperating. The livestream should be on stand-by two to four hours before the start of the event, just in case there are issues to track down. Given the near infinite combinations of venues, equipment, Internet service providers and attendee home computer configurations, it’s pretty much a certainty that somebody isn’t going to be able to connect.

This is one of the hardest truths for most planners to accept: Not every participant is going to have a perfect experience.

This is one of the hardest truths for most planners to accept: Not every participant is going to have a perfect experience. Even with the largest budgets in the world, with every piece of equipment checked and rechecked, streaming technology can fail, and you need to be prepared for at least a few disappointed customers.

While technology gets more robust every day, you can never guarantee 100 percent success, so make sure all stakeholders understand that and have plans in place to deal with those difficulties. Much like having a “rain plan” in place for an outdoor event, you need to have backup plans in place should any part of the technology fail.

5 VENUES AND BUDGETING

CHOOSING AN ONLINE PLATFORM

The analogy of an online platform being your digital “venue” works on a surprising number of levels. When we think about venues for in-person events, there are near infinite possibilities. Even narrowing it down to a specific brand—like Radisson Hotels—there are hundreds of locations, features and amenities to choose from.

The right venue for one group of attendees may not be right for another, and the value of the experience will depend on the target audience and what you’re trying to accomplish. In other words, which in-person venue you choose depends on the goals and objectives of the event and the value of the location to your stakeholders. So, it should be no surprise that when choosing an online platform, once again these are the keys to your success.

Most online event platforms have the same basic functionality—audio and video of presenters, panels and keynotes, along with their presentations. Most include feedback features, such as Q&A and chat, with many others adding live polling, online agendas with links to the various sessions, their descriptions and speaker bios. With so many common features, most platforms would be perfectly capable and functional for most meetings and events.

But just like finding an amazing venue can make an already great event even better, finding the right

platform can dramatically improve the attendee experience. Work with your stakeholders to find out what additional functionality and features may be important to them. Medical and scientific meetings often require “poster sessions” where researchers can present their works. Other industries might have their own requirements. Exhibitors may want an easy way to get attendee data into their marketing and sales software tools. Is networking a priority? If so, you may look for a platform that offers the ability for attendees to connect with each other afterward, or to set up appointments with vendors, exhibitors or sponsors.

Generate a “wish list” of potential features, all stemming from the goals and objectives of your stakeholders, and then find a platform that has as many of them as possible within your budget. Evaluate feedback from stakeholder pain points and keep an eye out for platforms that might have features or functionality that will help alleviate those challenges. Just keep in mind that the more features your platform has, the more confusing or overwhelming it may be for your attendees.

Just like you might need additional welcome staff for a large or complex venue, you may need a group of volunteers or a digital concierge to ensure your digital participants get the help and technical support they need. If it helps, think of online attendee onboarding as the minibus that’s taking your group to their amazing event destination.

COMMON EVENT PLATFORM FEATURES

- Video/Audio
- Attendee Chat
- Question Submission
- Attendee Polling
- Event Landing Page
- Event Agenda
- Basic Registration
- Branding and Sponsors
- On-Demand Viewing

ADVANCED FEATURES

- Advanced Registration
- Breakout Sessions
- Trade Show / Expo
- Mobile Viewing
- Day-Of Tech Support
- Subtitles/Interpreters
- Gamification
- Virtual Lobby
- Scheduling
- Silent Auction
- Mobile App
- Single Sign-On (SSO)
- AI Chat Bot
- Appointment Scheduling
- One-to-One Video Chat
- Two-Way Audio Chat
- Production Assistance
- Presenter Coaching

5 VENUES AND BUDGETING

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

There are a lot of budget variables that come with choosing an online venue for your event. Just as an event can take place in a field or in a hotel ballroom, the cost for an online event platform can range from literally zero to hundreds of thousands of dollars, depending on the size of your audience and the features and functionality you require.

There really is no magic formula, but here are a few things to consider.

- Expensive doesn't mean good. There are quality platforms available for almost any budget. Look for satisfied clients and a track record of good customer service.
- Be wary of "free." Platforms need to make money somehow. A free service may have crippled functionality, so that only the paid tiers have a good experience. Worse, free services may sell your attendees' data to marketers. If you're not sure how they're making money, chances are the product is you.
- Good production value doesn't have to cost a ton of money. Again, much of the equipment you need may already be a part of your audiovisual bid.
- Every session that needs to be streamed to the remote audience will require wired high-speed Internet access, so factor these costs into your in-person venue budgets.
- For remote presenters, quality microphone, light and camera kits can be built for less than the price of some table centerpieces at events.
- Even if there's no budget for remote audiovisual, spend time with your remote presenters to clean up their backgrounds, try out different microphone and headphone combinations and recommend better room and lighting options.



- Make sure your online venues are just as well staffed as your in-person venues. Sometimes people need directions on how to get to their digital breakouts. Have at least one person dedicated to monitoring the remote user experience, preferably offsite.
- Remember that time is an important commodity. Platforms that save people time may have benefits that outweigh the expense. This could be time saved for the planning team (inputting/exporting data), for internal stakeholders (easy exports of recorded content to marketing teams), for sponsors and exhibitors (easy import of contact data into systems) or for attendees (easy to navigate, easy to import networking connections).
- Ensure your budgetary decisions flow from—you guessed it—your goals and objectives. When deciding between similar platforms, which one serves these better?

5 VENUES AND BUDGETING

CHOOSING YOUR IN-PERSON VENUES

With all the technology involved in producing hybrid events, it's easy to focus there, and lose sight of some key points in selecting in-person venues. Ideally, you go into the site-selection process knowing that you're going to be producing a hybrid event, so you keep it top-of-mind when conducting site visits and negotiating contracts.

As mentioned above, every streamed session needs to have a high-speed, wired Internet connection. Frequently, these can be included as part of your venue contract but adding them at the last minute can make them quite expensive. Never stream to a remote audience using Wi-Fi or cellular connections unless the system is purpose-built for it. Sometimes temporary high-speed wireless connections are brought in for unusual venues or other specific purposes, but hard-wired is always the best option if it's available.

Choose rooms in the venue that will allow for clear, unrestricted camera angles and plenty of room for staging, lights and cameras. Having the heads of in-person audience members in the shot only serves to remind the online audience that they're viewing the event from the back row, rather than a VIP experience. Even a small riser can help raise presenters up to get a clear angle, so keep an eye out for low ceilings that might prevent this.

Cameras love light, so even if it might be a bit strange for a small in-person audience, having stage lights can dramatically improve the quality of the video. This is important not only for the remote audience, but also any possible re-use of the video as on-demand content, marketing or promotion. Far too often, video recorded during breakout sessions, receptions or other gatherings is rendered completely unusable due to insufficient light.



Remember, our definition of hybrid includes connecting audiences in two or more locations. When planning in-person experiences, it's possible you may have multiple venue pods at the same time. Each of these remote groups deserve a quality event experience, especially if they're paying to attend. This could include having similar audiovisual and room setups, snacks and beverages, catering, entertainment and bar selections.

As part of their reaction to the global COVID-19 pandemic, many venues—including Radisson Hotels—started upgrading technology in anticipation of an increase in online and hybrid events. They have upgraded their offerings with new technology, such as modern video-switching and audio equipment specifically designed to facilitate livestreaming. Others converted smaller meeting rooms, boardrooms and guest suites into studios that can be booked by remote presenters not wishing to invest in their own equipment. Many took advantage of the lack of in-person events to upgrade their Internet infrastructure, increasing bandwidth and upload speeds. While it was a good idea to do so before, it's now even more important to see if any of these amenities are available in-house during the site-selection process.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND DEFINITIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The success or failure of a hybrid meeting or event frequently depends on the same design strategies that can make or break an exclusively in-person event. Failing to fully understand the needs and wants of attendees, sponsors, exhibitors and internal stakeholders can be disastrous. On the other hand, a successfully implemented hybrid strategy can deliver in unprecedented ways, grow communities, facilitate networking around the globe, create lasting partnerships for years to come—and even drive traffic to your in-person events.

Setting clear goals and objectives for the event and knowing how you will measure success is just as, if not more, important than deciding which streaming provider or platform technology you're going to use. The old methods of lecture and slides may not work for a new, technologically savvy audience, but the right combination of creativity, engagement and designing for the “small screen,” can create hybrid experiences that surprise and delight participants for years to come.

DEFINITIONS

Most of the terminology used in this paper has been defined along the way, but here is list of common hybrid event words and their definitions.

Asynchronous: An information exchange that does not occur in real time. Attendees may want to ask questions or give feedback at a later time, like when watching a session on-demand.

Audience Response System (ARS): A tool that allows for interactivity between a presenter and an audience. Systems for face-to-face audiences combine wireless hardware with presentation software, and systems for remote participants may use phones or web polls for people watching



through players or the Internet.

Bandwidth: The volume of information per unit of time that a transmission medium (such as an Internet connection) can handle. Bandwidth is expressed in upload and download speeds in megabits per second (Mbps). Note that it is not megabytes per second, which is frequently said incorrectly.

Broadcast Event: An in-person event transmitted to remote viewers in offsite locations, with limited interactivity.

Connectivity: This is the state or extent of being connected or interconnected with others during an event through technology devices, social networks or face-to-face.

Content Capture: The act of recording content from a meeting or event for use or distribution later.

Content Repurposing: The process of taking intellectual property (videos, audio, images, whitepapers, etc.) created and distributed one way and using it again in a different or new way.

Encoding: The “encoder” is a computer or standalone piece of hardware that takes standard audio and video signals and converts them into a format suitable for transmission across the Internet. Some kind of encoder is always required when transmitting live audio and/or video across the Internet, though it may not always be obvious. For example, video chat clients have encoders built into their software.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Event Production: The making and/or staging of an event, which entails all the processes and equipment needed for sound, video, projection and creating a feed for recording or online streaming.

Hybrid Event: A meeting or event with at least one group of in-person participants connecting with remote participants in one or more other locations.

In-person Attendees: People physically attending a meeting or event.

Internet Service Provider (ISP): A company that provides its customers direct access to the Internet, either through wired or wireless connections. Both the in-person venue and the remote attendee need to connect to the Internet via an ISP. A venue is not generally considered to be an ISP, because they themselves require an ISP to connect their properties to the Internet.

Last Mile: The final leg of communications infrastructure between an ISP and its customers. For remote users, this is their local physical connections to their ISPs, as well as the fiber and copper networking infrastructure in their local areas.

On-Demand: Content that is available whenever a user wants to consume it, as opposed to live content in real time.

Platform: The digital “venue” where a virtual or a hybrid event takes place. The most common type of virtual event platform includes a web page where video, audio and slides stream, but it may be a self-contained application. Interactivity tools such as a chat and a Q&A functions are common. In many cases, platforms can be customized and branded.

Pod: A group of attendees who gather and participate as a remote component of a hybrid meeting.

Streaming: The transmission of data (video, audio, slides) over a computer network as a continuous stream in a format easily viewable by a user.

Streaming Provider: The company responsible for taking the video and audio feeds from the event and encoding them into a format that can be easily sent over the Internet.

Synchronous: A term describing content that is heard, seen and responded to as it is being



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Brandt is a technical producer, consultant and educator with more than 20 years of experience in the meeting industry. He has spoken at events and conferences all over the world (in-person and remotely), been published in numerous magazines and web publications and is consistently ranked among the most influential people in the event industry. Find out more at Brandtkrueger.com.



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