EVENT MB

A Skift BRAND

2022 EVENT TRENDS

REPORT

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INTRO

Welcome to the 2022 Event Trends Report. In this report, we gather the most important and potentially impactful trends that we believe will be on the mind of event professionals in 2022 and beyond.

Trends are a staple of this time of the year, and there are good reasons for that. Beyond the catchy headlines that make them popular, they are born from deep thoughts about important topics. Trends force us to synthesize our thinking and predict what will have the most impact on the event industry.

Big questions remain as we grapple with comprehending the full impact of the Covid pandemic. Where is the event industry headed?

What will events look like in the future? How will societal changes impact the demand for events? All these questions seem more important than ever.

Trends are also milestones in themselves, and they can show us how far we've come. When we look at past trends that we have covered, it is always interesting to see which ones became a reality and which ones are not even worth considering now.

Ultimately trends help us prepare for the future, which may seem almost impossible right now but something we all want to do well.

To reach our 11 trends included in this report, we looked closely at the data we collected in our **State of the Event Industry 2021 Report**. In addition, we consulted with a range of event industry leaders and discussed what may lie ahead with our partners. This report results from the analysis carried out combined with having valuable conversations.

We hope this report delivers valuable and actionable insights to help you thrive in 2022.

Here's to a great year ahead!

CONTINUED UNCERTAINTY

BRAIN LABUS

Epidemiologist and Assistant Professor at UNLV

KAI HATTENDORF

CEO at UFI

Brian: Right now the conversation is focused on Omicron, but it's just an example of what we're going to continue to see over the next few years. As long as this virus keeps circulating, we will see new variants repeatedly pop up in the community.

We always want to know: Do they spread more easily? Do they cause more severe disease? And does the vaccine work against them? They'll likely spread a little more easily each time, but I don't expect hospitalization rates or death rates to change all that much. And I expect that the vaccine will generally work well. We would need a major seismic shift for the vaccine to stop working or the hospitalization rates to triple.

It's also important to remember that there's no evolutionary pressure for greater hospitalization or a higher death rate. That's not an advantage for the virus, so it doesn't select for that. It can go either way. On the other hand, being more contagious is an advantage for the virus, so we can expect a steady but gradual trend there. The first estimate I heard was that Omicron might be 500 percent more transmissible than Delta. That was never realistic. If it went up by that much, it would be about twice as contagious as the measles, which is the most infectious virus we know.

Some also question what would happen if it's much milder. If we do eventually get a variant that spreads more easily but is very mild, then we'll basically have a common cold that we don't need to worry about anymore. But it's going to take multiple mutations to get to that point, maybe 30 years down the road, and it can randomly go either way. That means we're going to need vaccines against Covid for the foreseeable future.

While the CDC is recommending booster shots, it still considers people with two doses to be fully vaccinated. It's important to remember that we're still struggling to convince half of our population to get vaccinated with that initial series. There are also huge global disparities. The fact that we're pushing for third doses when people in other countries can't get their first is really concerning. If half the world is not immunized at all, they're going to serve as the place where all these new variants emerge.

Finally, we need to remember that right now, Delta is still infecting and killing a lot of people. Parts of Europe and the Northeastern US are on the edge of running out of hospital capacity.

For now, event organizers should ask themselves, "What are the risks that come with bringing all these people together?" The benefits need to outweigh the risks, and maximum safety should be a priority. I recommend that attendees wear masks even if they're vaccinated. The vaccines make a big difference but they aren't perfect. If I can put a little piece of fabric over my face and that keeps other people from dying, that seems like a fair trade for me.

Kai: At UFI, the best we could come up with to escape that eternal crystal ball — and the ongoing threat of another variant coming along — is to think of this period as the in-between time. We're on our way to a new balance that we will encounter on the other side of the pandemic. In the business events space, we have to accept this kind of "stop and go" mode around business events.

Some events will go ahead in person, and some will have to be digital. The business model of global events will adapt accordingly by breaking down into regional events as a fallback solution. Modularity is one way to strengthen a brand by holding communities together, moving from only a few touch points to multiple touch points that are more varied across the landscape of onsite and online. As event professionals, we are well-advised to remind ourselves of one of our core strengths, and that is to be agile and adaptive.

However, the online model doesn't work for every event. Recent research showed a net promoter score of minus 51 for digital trade shows. Economically there is no business case for them. There is no solution that can replace physical trade shows because it's a many-to-many communication. It's different one-to-one, and it's different on the one-to-many side, which is more typical of congresses/conferences. Digital has a huge role to play here.

Over the next 10 to 20 years, it will have a comparable effect to the role that globalization played over the last 20 years. The big players in the events industry today are those who have been able to capitalize on the trend of globalization with the right strategic moves. The next 10 years will be all around the rise of extending that regional expansion into channel expansion — whether that's a metaverse, an online community, or an omni-channel model.

On the operational side, there are great solutions coming out of the digital ecosystem that improve the offering around the onsite experience and the additional potential for year-round activation. We need to bring these digital skills into the business on the decision-making level.

CONTINUED UNCERTAINTY

For now, the industry will benefit greatly from more standardization of vaccine records. The EU's harmonized digital certificates are enabling travel all across Europe. The US has several different kinds of vaccine documentation, but the EU model has been adapted by around 50 countries. Global harmonization will happen over time if the pandemic drags on long enough.

And when our industry comes back in full, the market will be bigger than ever. I'm sticking to the 2024 timeline globally for recovery. The recovery will not be driven by the traditional business model, but by the integrated business model of both onsite and online experiences. That growth will accelerate and it will be driven by those companies who adapt. It's too soon to say whether the current incumbents are flexible enough to evolve, or whether it will be new players — possibly even tech companies. To what degree will these kinds of ecosystems overlap? We will see some winners taking the lead over the next few years.

ASYNCHRONOUS IS IN. TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES OF TIME AND PLACE ARE OUT.

CATHY SONG NOVELLI

SVP Marketing and Communications at **Hubilo**

Asynchronous event experiences are in their embryonic stage, but they are the future. What crystallized the idea of an asynchronous approach was Marc Benioff, the CEO of Salesforce, and his vision for the future of Dreamforce. He wants to turn it into an "always on" event — similar to a news channel like CNN.

From an event industry perspective, one of our greatest pain points is that if we're not ready for an event, there is no moving the date once you've started promoting it — even if registrations are low. In the future, you would still go live, but it would be the first step in a longer journey.

For event planners, maybe that starts with creating two paths for attendees to choose. There could be a live US session and a live UK session on the same topic, with people from the local markets discussing it in their time zone. Marquee keynotes will be broadcast at a specific time, but they could be made available in a simulive format for different time zones. From there, there are bifurcated journeys that are on demand.

This model also gives event organizers the opportunity to continually improve their content. With each broadcast, you have a chance to hear from the community. Under the old model, we have a post-mortem after the event and learn our lessons for next year. But in this asynchronous world, it can evolve much faster. We need to think about events less as "one and done" and more as an evergreen and evolving mission.

With technology, we also get to rethink what the right format is for each case. A product launch isn't going to be asynchronous. You want to make

a big announcement to the world at 11 am PST. But let's imagine a sales kickoff. Historically, it's your one opportunity to gather your global sales team to get them unified, motivated, and trained. These event goals are ripe for an asynchronous model. Let your team access the educational content in their own time as long as they finish by a set date. Trade shows and conferences are also worth rethinking. What is the objective and is that best delivered in two days?

It helps the attendees as well. They might want to join your event, but they have a conflict. If it was originally set up with eight different time slots to choose from, they'd be more likely to sign up. Also, if there are five really interesting sessions running at the same time, an attendee can't go to all of them. An asynchronous approach solves that problem.

Pre-recorded content makes it easier to broadcast at multiple times, and event organizers benefit from maximum reach. It also means more — and better — data. If it is asynchronous and personalized, the data will come in segment by segment, region by region.

We are starting to see signals of what it's going to look like in 2022. In order to make it happen, what's core is creating events that enable community, real-time feedback, and analytics so that we can develop an optimized, asynchronous experience.

YEAR-ROUND EVENT ENGAGEMENT

PATRICK SMITH

SVP and CMO at **Cvent**

RACHEL ANDREWS

Senior Director, Meetings & Events at **Cvent**

Patrick: People put a lot of time into preparing for their events, and with this new digital landscape, planners and marketers have a great way to extend the conversation beyond a single event. All the hard work they have invested isn't just condensed into two or three days. Nothing can beat in-person, but increasingly, we want communities built around events.

With virtual platforms, you can have a meetup in advance of an event to get people excited about it and start building relationships. Before our CONNECT Conference in 2021, around 100 attendees formed an ad hoc group to meet online ahead of time so they could have a richer conversation once they met onsite.

This kind of pre-event engagement can even help to drive the agenda. Which keynote speaker do they prefer, and what topics are most interesting to them? You can get all this crowdsourced information. We have had surveys for a long time, but now you can turn it into a conversation with group chats and live polls.

After the event — whether it's onsite, virtual, or hybrid — you can share on-demand content so attendees can rewatch a session, or catch up on one they missed. And the more people are engaging, the more you're learning about them and understanding what their interests are. You get so much more insight than you do from a two- or three-day event. If you're a marketer, that's really important from a lead generation standpoint.

Even if people can meet in person or go back to the office, they'd still want to meet online because it breaks down barriers of geography and accessibility. And the more people embrace this community idea, the more we'll see interesting innovations pop up.

Rachel: Ease of use is the key reasoning that year-round event engagement is becoming a bigger trend. Before you would have to set up multiple registration sites, multiple event dates, and multiple in-person meetups. Now you can do everything on one platform.

Professional development training, while not new, is now much easier to do pre-event because we have online options. If attendees have any pre-event homework or a certification to earn, they can complete it on an attendee hub. A lot of membership groups are using a basic registration level that gives people access to some of the main online activities, and a premium option for access to educational content or other kinds of high-value sessions.

Pre- and post-event engagement isn't necessarily new, but it's both easier and more impactful now. The organizer can even set up pre- and post-event networking activities. Through feedback, attendees will let you know if they want round table conversations or peer-to-peer networking in persona-based groups.

Attendees also like hearing directly from the event organizer beforehand. Share tips about what sessions or activities fit their interests best. Create an event around your agenda unveiling, a kind of conference preview that will prepare attendees for a better experience. It can also serve a promotional purpose, making it more attractive for people to pay money for the in-person event. And the engagement level will be that much higher onsite.
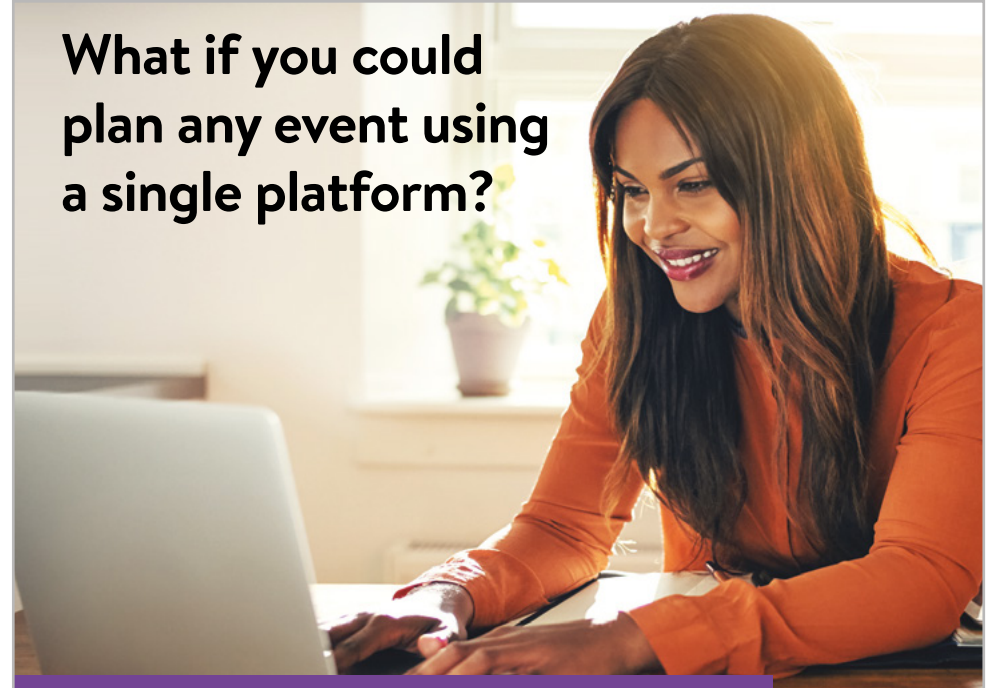
MACHINE LEARNING DELIVERS ROI

Prior to the pandemic, we got away with saying that we were using artificial intelligence, but really we were all using sophisticated algorithms. What virtual environments brought to the table is tracking and data like we've never had before. There is a clear distinction between what an algorithm is and what AI and machine learning are.

With an algorithm, attendees might fill out a questionnaire and then be presented with the results that they've been matched to. The results don't change over time. Machine learning might start by recommending 10 sessions, but the system is actually learning from what you click on and what you don't click on — and the duration you stay within each session. This applies to networking recommendations as well. Machine learning creates personas that are never cemented in concrete. They are constantly evolving and the platform has to look for positive and negative reinforcement.

That's where we have to fast forward in the industry, especially with the explosion of content. It used to be that when attendees went to an on-property event, they could consume 20 sessions at most over a four-day period. Now we have events with 500 sessions. The algorithmic approach to recommendations is no longer appropriate. We need to be smarter with the way that we custom tailor the experience, and that's what machine learning does.

Machine learning shouldn't just apply to tracks on sessions, but also job title, discipline, and interests. And it should work across the whole spectrum of platform experiences. For example, when attendees click on a networking activity on our platform, it will bring them into a room with their matching personas.

JOE SCHWINGER
Founder and Co-CEO at **MeetingPlay**

An attendee's network can also influence other recommendations. At a recent event, the "recommended by your network" sessions had the highest engagement. That recommendation was based on what the attendee's network was adding to their personal agendas. The customer anticipated that these engagement trends would be dominated by keynotes and big announcements. However, what surfaced was more targeted content much further down the funnel. And that means better ROI for exhibitors and sponsors.

There's a general consensus that virtual environments are not as popular as they were a year ago. And actually the data shows that virtual environments are very popular, but they are more targeted. Customers are seeing an increase in the volume and duration of session attendance. It may be less people, but they are more engaged and converting at a higher rate. 95 percent of our customers have already signed up for hybrid in 2022.

A multimillion dollar event can bring in a gold rush of data. However, the technology best suits larger events. It's those with over 50 sessions or over 5,000 attendees that will see a great return from an investment in machine learning. Those that have invested are now able to use machine learning to build targeted marketing campaigns, which has been the holy grail for event marketers for years.

RISE OF THE BEST OF BREED EVENT TECH STACK

PIERRE METRAILLER

CEO at SpotMe

An event tech stack is several pieces of technology and products that you put together to create a digital event experience. This stack can include a series of tools, from registration, event marketing, and follow-up survey tools.

One of the things promised by many event tech vendors is an all-in-one platform. But in reality, people already have a clear idea of how they want to use technology to create an experience. So, while an all-in-one platform sounds good on paper, customers and planners have figured out that that is not the way they want to go — they don't want the whole suite.

Instead, planners are now taking this "best of breed" event tech stack approach. They use different technologies for registration, email marketing, live event engagement, on-demand content and content hubs, and other technology for community engagement.

We have seen a steady increase in this approach, particularly with mid to large customers, and it usually manifests with a direct ask. As a vendor, you tend to say, let me show you the whole package. What we're hearing from clients is that they want to see a particular integration with a tool or set of tools they already use.

One of the reasons this trend will be significant in 2022 is that people want to create unique and personalized experiences that are targeted and relevant to their specific audience.

To deliver great experiences, you've got to use the best tool for each element of an event. And to personalize an event, you've got to orchestrate those

different pieces of technology. At the same time, the personalization has to take place across the whole tech stack — this picking, choosing, and bringing together the "best of breed" tech is what creates a great experience.

People no longer tolerate mediocre events or technology. The level of maturity, understanding, and education of customers is huge and still increasing — which is great because it means we are becoming more professional and delivering better experiences. However, you will have a chasm where some planners don't feel as comfortable with tech as others.

Regardless, event professionals should care about this trend we are seeing now. They should have in-depth conversations with vendors and describe their desired user journey. This is different to a year ago when people used to ask about breakout room options or a mobile app. None of this is relevant anymore. It is the journey and your experience versus the features and capabilities.

This trend will impact planners as it means they need to shift from viewing an event from an isolated standpoint — a self-contained happening. Over the past year, I have seen that the new event planner is an event marketer too, they have often merged with marketing because the journey starts with CRM or marketing automation. People are slowly dropping the idea of all-in-one events and seeing new levels to building an event experience with event tech stacks.

RISE OF THE BEST OF BREED EVENT TECH STACK

The number one driver for this trend is how these tech stacks can create memorable events for participants. Another beneficial side effect of "best in breed" is it forces people to think from an integrated perspective. Having the data flowing consistently across all those different systems will give planners the ability to help you understand your attendees much more.

We also know there is a lot of uncertainty around 2022, and there will be some level of restrictions. Planners will ask themselves questions like who should they bring to an in-person event that will translate into the most return and who can attend online? This type of tech will help planners decide as events may become almost like a VIP experience.

In hindsight, we should have done this before. A lot of new technology will be emerging (especially those that involve SaaS), and best practices that were not in events but available in other industries, like open API and out-of-the-box integrations. This is a good development because the industry is now up to speed.

ENTERING THE GOLDEN AGE OF ON-DEMAND CONTENT

JELMER VAN AST

CEO and Founder at **Conference Compass**

As we witnessed the rise of virtual events driven by the Covid pandemic, content automatically came into focus. Whether content was created as pre-recorded presentations or captured through live speaker sessions, it was either prepared to be consumed at an event or the outcome of an event. Either way, the content was being created and captured.

Consistent content creation generates engagement because people want to consume content they are interested in. Content brings the right people together and becomes a tool for driving engagement. Attendees are keen to consume content on-demand and then engage with speakers about the content via Q&A, live chats, and community-driven micro-events.

We've seen customers designing their events around a series of afternoons separated by a week rather than two or three-day intense formats generally used for in-person-only conferences. The content delivery is now spread out, which is relevant because the event is designed to have an online platform for continued engagement. As the program ends for the day, attendees can watch the next set of on-demand content and prepare for the next session according to their schedule. This is similar to the flipped classroom model, where content is consumed online in advance of a session, then the live session is used only for discussion.

It is unlikely that people will engage with and create content for 18 months and then say, let's no longer do this. Customers have become addicted to the content, especially for science and medical conferences, where the science is embodied in recordings.

There's a natural trend to keep capturing and publishing recorded sessions because on-demand content will continue to engage viewers. Once you

have invested in the event, the on-demand content generates continuous engagement and more return on your investment.

However, there is a right and wrong way to deliver content. You don't want to alienate either audience, online and in-person. You have to get the message across correctly. One way to achieve this is by splitting things up. We can first host a live event where you capture the content. Then, post-event, share the relevant content from different topics and breakouts.

Alternatively, content can be produced away from events, with viewers encouraged to engage with the content in their own time. Events can then take the shape of deep-dive micro-events spread out throughout the year.

Content from scientific conferences is deeply connected to published research. Events that generate high-quality on-demand content provide extra opportunities to help advance research for the organizations hosting them. In addition, discussion around on-demand content can provide valuable feedback for authors, which may help facilitate publishing in peer-reviewed journals, a fundamental goal for medical research.

There is a perception that now event professionals also have to be content creators, which can be intimidating. However, with this challenge comes the opportunity of being part of a bigger solution for associations and other clients — and of course, event tech is here to help.

Event tech can support the creation, recording, storage and publishing of content in a streamlined way. Event tech can add tremendous value by helping to support the engagement of online communities through on-demand content.
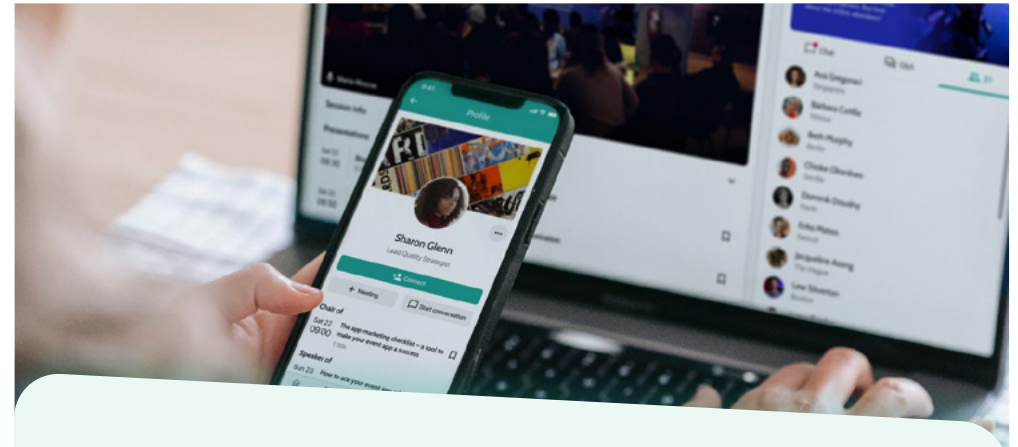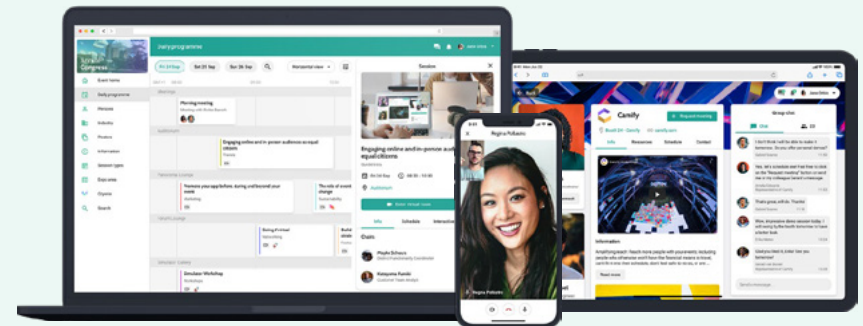
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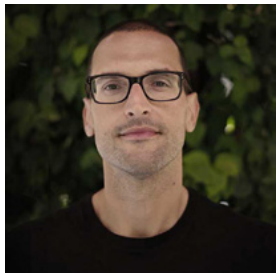
JULIUS SOLARIS

VP of Marketing Strategy, Events at **Hopin**

Event creators have more opportunities than ever to drive engagement through shared experiences. The adoption of virtual events opened the doors for planners to dig deeper into their decisions' impact on each event experience.

We'll see data-savvy event planners thrive in 2022 by utilizing insights to clearly identify the event type and the best programming options for optimal engagement. As technology continues to innovate, particularly for hybrid and in-person events, insights will be the main ingredient for successfully engaging an audience in 2022, regardless of your event type.
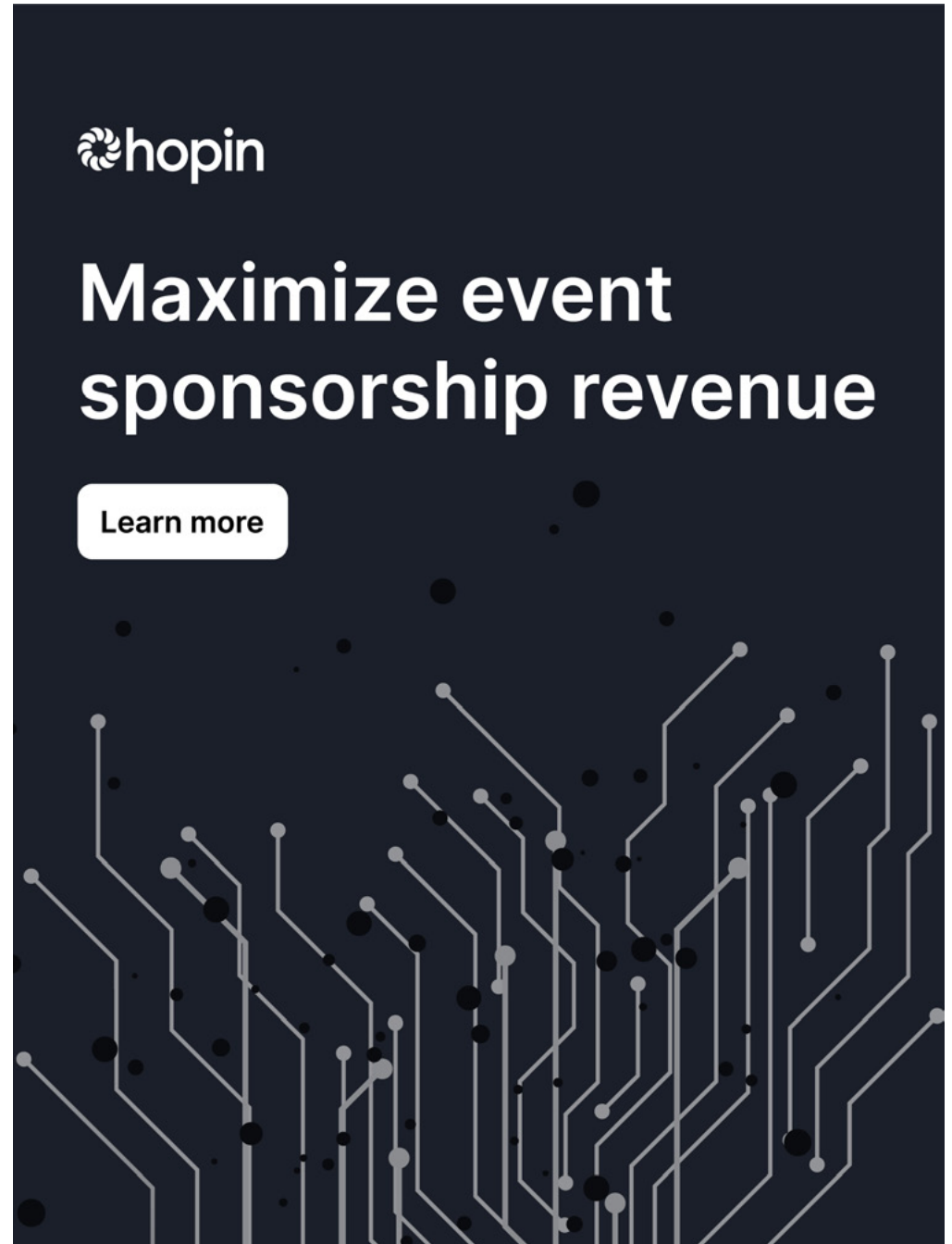
Regardless of event format, engagement is the metric that can predict the outcome of an event, yet engagement has been a pain point with planners. Engaged speakers, attendees and sponsors equal success. Platforms like Hopin have given planners more touchpoints to measure engagement than ever before. As we continue to develop insights across virtual, hybrid and in-person events, the better engagement will be. Ultimately, insights-driven decisions lead to more successful programs.

Insights-driven experiences are a massive shift for the event industry. Transitioning events to data-rich environments and embracing a hybrid event strategy could revolutionize the playbook of planning events. What if we had data to support better venue, content and sponsorship decisions? All stakeholders would enjoy the benefits of an insights-driven approach. For example, we believe entertainment/speaker selection is linked to more engaging events. But what if we planners could know precisely what content resonated the most or what activations led to better networking? Now we can know for sure.

The key is not to be afraid of experimentation. The first thing to do is to hit that analytics tab of your event tech platform and look at what generated the most interest in your attendees. What sessions were the most engaging? What sponsor activations delivered the most interest? What partners provided the best value? If your event was virtual, it's also essential to think about translating those critical learnings to your hybrid and in-person experiences.

Alternating in-person, virtual, and synchronous hybrid experiences offer substantial insight to serve our overall audience better. This strategy is needed to drive better decisions that ultimately engage our stakeholders.

The short-term objective of a more data-aware industry is to deliver better engagement. Yet, the impact of insights-driven events is more existential for the industry. Many recognize the impact of events, but often it isn't easy to translate excitement into results that decision-makers can quantify. Insights will help elevate events into tools that deliver tangible value to organizations; more importantly, measurable value.

THE BLENDING OF THE HYBRID EVENT EXPERIENCE

Online event experiences have significant advantages in terms of the ease of use for event organizers and attendees. For example, they are easy to set up, deliver extensive and accurate metrics by default to organizers, and make connecting with other attendees a simple process.

Both event organizers and attendees are (now) accustomed to these advantages, and in-person events incorporate more digital elements than before the Covid pandemic. Everyone is looking for hybrid events to be as easy to access as virtual-only events. The good news is that with the extraordinary advance in event tech over the past 22 months, hybrid events can now benefit from comparable ease of use and thus the blending of the hybrid event experience.

The onsite experience of a hybrid event can start with a touchless check-in process that is almost as seamless as logging in online. Connecting with other attendees onsite can be done using the same technology as online, with the advantage of being able to schedule both virtual and in-person meetings. This process makes it easy to use and allows attendees to connect with others on their terms. With a vast array of customization options, organizers can also play an essential role in making connecting a smooth experience.

With the shared digital interface, hybrid events also bring people together more easily around content. The comments and conversations that are spanked during sessions are often some of the most meaningful. They can now easily continue and evolve after a session ends, regardless if those involved are onsite or online.
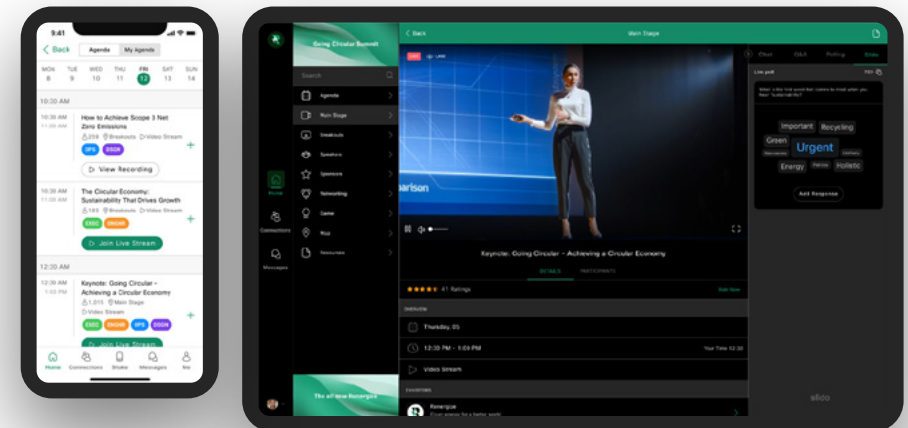
ANDREW PEARSON

CMO at **Socio**

Ultimately, the blending of the hybrid event experience means that hosting hybrid events becomes less about servicing two separate audiences and more about merging two types of technologies. Further, the merger of technologies means that attendees can choose until the very last minute when participating in an event or a single session in-person or online. Regardless of what they choose, they will have a positive experience and know they can always change their minds again.

Using an integrated event tech solution can be hugely beneficial in delivering truly blended hybrid event experiences. Planners don't need to worry about connecting different tools and keeping data in sync. Instead, they can focus on making the experience easy and as interconnected as possible for everyone involved, especially attendees and sponsors.

The future looks promising, as this approach to events allows us to bring the experiential side of virtual to in-person events while keeping the precise data collection and tracking that we find in in-person events.
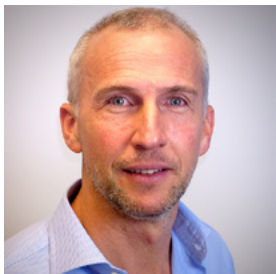
ESCALATING MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

The event tech space has been crazy for a couple of years now with massive valuations making the headlines. This has been driven by the exponential growth through the covid pandemic of both the new players and the providers that pivoted from in-person to virtual solutions.

Investors saw huge opportunities in investing in event tech, along with sectors like telemedicine, remote work or online education that have benefited from the covid pandemic. While some valuations are not reasonable, there continues to be excitement around event tech, even though business is still conducted 90% in person.

Some of the key agencies that previously worked mainly with physical events have developed tech that is now more valuable than the remainder of their business. This is exciting and some great tools can come from this. The good news is that there are still so many issues to be solved so there is no reason to believe that event tech development will stall.

The ten to twenty event tech vendors that are in or approaching unicorn status will continue to buy up the others as there is lots of capital available right now, and they will do so for a variety of reasons. These types of investments are driven by a desire to bring talented people into the fold, take ownership of complementary technology, or a fast way to access specific markets.

With all this change the landscape of even tech is shifting. Mergers and acquisitions can mean many different things for event professionals. On the positive side, new features and concepts are made possible with economies

MARCO GIBERTI

Founder and CEO at Vesuvio Ventures

ESCALATING MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

of scale. On the other hand, there may be a need to diversify the event tech being used when systems are sunset or development focus is elsewhere.

One issue to carefully consider is data privacy. Data has always been at the core of events and will continue to be. The intersection with technology makes data even more of a valuable commodity, so it is important that companies are clear about their data policies, particularly as investments in this space also mean that large amounts of data change hands.

There is certainly a need for new business models going forward but within those new models face-to-face interactions will remain, simply because they are hard to replace, it's how you build trust. Event tech will continue to grow at a higher rate than traditional events and fulfill the need to be always on, to create meaningful touchpoints online, before and after face-to-face events.

Whatever the new models look like it is clear that communities are at the basis of events and investors are well aware of this. They know that face-to-face events were always in fact communities, but in the past, we were not activating tech tools to keep them going all year long. Event organizers can create events with a strong brand where a community is immersed for a specific period of time. While they can never really own a community, they can try.

MOVING TOWARDS THE METAVERSE

BRANDT KRUEGER
Owner of Event Technology Consulting

There are many views on what the metaverse is and what it will be, but most revolve around one of two concepts. The first concept is a virtual reality-based artificial universe where you can use a headset to do almost anything you want in an immersive digital way. There is also a concept of web 3.0 where the metaverse is the future of the internet, a sort of everything-verse that we will transition to from the current internet as we know it.

Some other buzzwords that we commonly hear, like crypto and NFTs, are also part of the web 3.0 everything-verse concept. The technology powering these concepts is impressive and incredibly fascinating, but we should remember that they are just tools. Most of these things will go through a process of maturing before they can become really useful to us.

Currently, video games are the closest thing we have to the metaverse right now. Just because they are games does not mean we should not take them and the technology that powers them seriously. Massive companies like Facebook, and Apple, are investing heavily in the metaverse, and more will follow. Facebook, now Meta, is just the most visible, and by changing its name, it has made quite a statement. Apple is also investing a huge amount of resources in the metaverse but it is working behind the scenes on the technologies that it hopes will power the metaverse.

The potential impact on the event industry may not be much initially. Early adopters will experiment and some will figure it out. Hosting events in the metaverse is really about deciding that an immersive online experience is the right venue for a specific event, and it won't be for all events. Still, had the Covid pandemic not happened a lot less event professionals would be

MOVING TOWARDS THE METAVERSE

considering hosting events in the metaverse. There is no doubt the pandemic has accelerated both the development of the metaverse and the event industry's interest in it.

As our focus on the metaverse increases, event professionals should not dismiss it. It's not just a cute use of technology. There will be a time and place for this kind of technology in many event strategies, so having an opportunity to experiment with it is key. There is no rush, no immediate need to pivot to the metaverse but we should also not miss opportunities to explore and learn from our own experiences on the metaverse.

For now, the potential event venues of the metaverse may be a little too outlandish for most business needs and visiting them requires a cumbersome headset that not many non-gamers have access to. Ultimately, the unlimited venues that the metaverse provides will allow for unlimited creativity and events are sure to explore this in the near future.

CONNECTION AND COLLABORATION FOR A HYBRID WORKFORCE

JURAJ HOLUB

Chief Meeting Designer at Slido

Everything changed in March 2020. All around the world, we went from a mostly physical office work setup to a full remote one and now many businesses continue to operate fully remote, or are at least are looking to have the capability of doing so when required. This has a tremendous impact on how we work as individuals, teams and whole enterprises.

The biggest challenges are collaboration, communication and maintaining a healthy company culture. Companies and individuals enjoy the extra productivity and lack of time and resources spent on commuting, but they also recognize the challenges when it comes to connecting people and having an effective culture of collaboration. So every company is trying to solve what the next stage looks like. Different companies are taking different approaches and it will take a while to figure this out.

Internal events and meetings will play a major role in forming the future of work. We might adopt new ways of asynchronous communication (such as video or voice messages), but that will only increase the stakes and importance of those meetings that we will host synchronously. Because it's in the meetings where we can manifest our culture, build our relationships and achieve amazing things. In the future work setup, hybrid meetings will have the power to level off the playing field, bridge any geographical differences and create a valuable experience no matter where you're working from.

Along with an increased number of internal events, there is also a need for these to be carefully designed. The truth is that managers think their

CONNECTION AND COLLABORATION FOR A HYBRID WORKFORCE

meetings are great, but participants disagree. The same format that worked, or not, for a mainly office-based team just won't cut it.

Going forward, meeting design skills are more important than ever. This type of design takes lots of different skills that are more about facilitation and listening rather than one-way delivery of content, a broadcast. These are mainly soft skills that are not part of any core curriculum in business schools. There is an important shift from content consumption to collaboration.

With the added challenge of remote workforces that may be spread over multiple time zones, there is a greater need for asynchronous communication. Technology helps but it is just a tool. The most important aspect is the design of the internal communication and the design of meetings, the latter is something that many event professionals already excel at. While they may need to adapt their skills for the demand of this new workforce, taking a virtual-first approach to meeting design and focusing on collaboration over consumption of information is a great start.

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