



7 WAYS TO DELIVER **ENGAGING** VIRTUAL EVENTS

In 2020, the Management HQ events team managed 112 virtual events.

That gave us lots of opportunity to adapt and learn to create well-attended, successful, profitable virtual event experiences for our client associations.

Our team quickly gained knowledge by participating in educational webinars and online workshops; meetings with event vendors; and discussions with colleagues and other industry pros.

OUR EXPERIENCE

Over the past twelve months, the Management HQ team has worked with clients to shift every major in-person conference and event to an entirely virtual event. We have strategically worked with clients on virtual event promotion and format, guided by the expertise of our event team members who understand the fundamental differences between in-person and virtual event experiences. And we have learned a lot along the way!

THE RESULTS

The results of these virtual events have been overwhelmingly positive. In many cases, events were more geographically inclusive, and attendance was significantly higher. For nearly every major conference, our client associations recognized either their pre-pandemic budgeted net income or higher.

BENEFITS OF VIRTUAL EVENTS

While many of us are aching to return to “normal” and visit with one another in-person, in many cases virtual events have produced unintended benefits that we may want to continue to incorporate into our new normal moving forward. Some benefits include:

Inclusivity and Accessibility. Virtual events may remove geographical, financial, and physical accessibility barriers to participation posed by in-person events.

Cost Savings and Value. Virtual events can offer sponsors and exhibitors more significant return on their investment, can provide a potential cost-savings to the event host, and can reduce the need for attendees to spend time travelling.

Customized Experiences. Having the ability to track attendees’ selections and participation during online events allows associations to customize future education and other member offerings for greater relevance and engagement.

“I was skeptical that NARA could offer a valuable experience virtually when the pandemic forced us to seek alternatives to an in-person seminar. However, our management team at Management HQ stepped up and through research and hard work presented our members with a fulfilling experience that offered timely and relevant topics, brainstorming opportunities and even a vendor forum.

This virtual experience has provided NARA with an additional tool for offering and sharing human care regulatory information. I look forward to what is next.”

- Debby Russo
NARA Board Member
2020 NARA Professional Development Chair



7 WAYS TO DELIVER ENGAGING VIRTUAL EVENTS

- 1 Create Intentional Ways to Build Community.** We've experienced success by combining traditional engagement techniques with the latest in technology. For example, use the chat, polling, and break-out session features available in most basic online meeting software. Provide links and worksheets in advance that participants can work through during the session. Use panels and multiple presenters to secure and retain participants' interest.
- 2 Plan for Distraction.** Understanding and accepting that participants have lots of diversions from your event competing for their attention allows you to be prepared. By allowing people to connect in smaller group sessions, creating fun networking opportunities like trivia, scavenger hunts, and social hours, and using interactive tools, you provide your attendees incentive to stay present and remain engaged.
- 3 Choose Talent and Tools Carefully.** A host, facilitator or emcee can make or break attendees' experiences. Take a strategic approach to selecting presenters and entertainers. Take that same strategic approach with the event tools you select. Consider how your presenters and technology tools can help you achieve your event goals within your budget.
- 4 Drive Value for Exhibitors and Sponsors.** Virtual events can offer a chance to achieve an even greater return on investment (ROI) than in-person events. Consider roles for exhibitors and sponsors to be event partners, thought leaders, and content creators. Benefits may include "booths"(web pages) in a virtual expo hall; personal online rooms for exhibitors and sponsors to make one-on-one connections and hold meetings; visibility for videos featuring sponsor products and services; games and incentives to drive participants to connect; virtual field trips or demonstrations; placement in "Thought Leader Lounges"; and opportunities to introduce session speakers. Provide event marketing campaign templates and opportunities to connect before, during and after the event.
- 5 Prepare Your Presenters.** Not all presenters are experienced in a virtual environment, so communication is key. Provide FAQ sheets, instructional materials, and guides for presenters to do their jobs well. Provide training sessions a week or two before the event including expectations, instructions, and reviewing any written materials they will need to be familiar with. Encourage presenters to use the same technology devices during dress rehearsal that they will use the day of the event.
- 6 Brand Your Event Beautifully.** Create and share branded PowerPoint presentations for presenters, session opening and closing graphics, and virtual backgrounds. Create and send "swag bags" in advance. This can further connect your event participants to your association.
- 7 Consider Logistics.** Attendees experience virtual events differently than they do in-person events, so plan accordingly. This is a great chance to be creative, do things differently, and even consider starting fresh. Consider how you can continue to offer favorite parts of the conference and incorporate new "wow" moments and features.

“I wanted to express appreciation on behalf of the entire ADEC Board for each one of you on the MHQ team and the part you played in the success of our first virtual conference. I appreciate your individual and collective expertise. Thank you for your guidance, effort, and patience and for helping us thrive as we move forward.”

- Dr. Peggy P. Whiting

President, Association for Death Education and Counseling

Professor & Coordinator of Counselor Education,
North Carolina Central University



SOME RULES OF THUMB FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

- Create shorter sessions than you would for in-person events, and consider expanding the overall event duration. 45 - 60 minutes is considered ideal for a session; this may shift a full 2-day in-person event to a 3- or 4-day online event with shorter sessions, shorter days, and more frequent breaks.
- Build frequent breaks into the schedule, planning for 15- to 30-minute breaks between sessions.
- Consider whether or not concurrent sessions are necessary. In a virtual environment, attendees tend to choose sessions that relate to them, and come and go as they please. If needed, limit concurrent sessions to a maximum of 5 at once.
- Take time zones into account, considering where in the world your attendees are.
- Offer recordings for increased accessibility.
- Ensure a staff member or moderator will be present in each session.
- Provide a “trouble number” – a phone number that presenters and participants can call if they have event-related issues.

As an association management company, we at Management HQ (MHQ) work with many organizations on dozens of events each year. While we share our clients’ uncertainty about the future, we aim to serve as a helpful resource to groups that are faced with difficult decisions.



We at MHQ serve associations that are determined to *thrive*. In fact, that is our mission.

Together we thrive.





WWW.MANAGEMENT-HQ.COM

(877) 834-5550

INFO@MANAGEMENT-HQ.COM