LOMA LIST

2021

THE FUTURE IS HYBRID

Creating Unique Event Experiences in 2021 and Beyond

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At the start of 2020, our team ushered in the new decade by launching the inaugural LOMA List: a report analyzing event marketing trends with a focus on creating sustainable and inclusive experiences for all.

The report posited that our progressive attitudes towards societal "norms" related to race, gender, the environment, and the economy would impact our event marketing and planning strategies in the years to come.

But by early March 2020, while our team prepared to launch a large scale, in-person conference in San Francisco, the threat of COVID-19 had begun to unfold all around us, eventually gripping the entire world, exposing socioeconomic inequities and crippling various industries, including our own.

Unsurprisingly, this past year, planners have shown great resilience in the face of so much uncertainty. Shared learnings, newly integrated technologies, and a steely determination to bring people together, propelled planners to forge ahead and create meaningful virtual experiences for audiences globally. After all, who better to understand the importance of adapting to changing circumstances – often with limited time and resources – than an event professional?

Now almost one year later, with a vaccine in distribution, a return to in-person events is within reach. Therefore, event planners must once again rise to the occasion, this time placing a heightened priority on new tools, processes and safety protocols, to create unique and inclusive hybrid experiences for both in-person and virtual audiences.

Our 2021 LOMA List will examine 5 practice areas for consideration when planning events in 2021 and beyond, and how each requires combining lessons from a pre- and post-COVID world to create the hybrid experiences of tomorrow.

1 TECHNOLOGY & CONNECTIVITY

2 CONTENT

3 BALANCE

4 SAFETY

5 BRIDGING THE GAP

1   TECHNOLOGY & CONNECTIVITY

TECHNOLOGY

In their annual report of top trending searches, Google reported that "Zoom" was #4 on the list of **Top Overall Searches Worldwide**, with interest at its highest point between the end of March and early April 2020.

The timing of this surge makes sense. By late March/early April, many businesses were scrambling to transition teams online and adapting to working and meeting remotely. Additionally, it was at the beginning of April when Zoom experienced a major security breach in which over 500,000 users' data was compromised. Fortunately, the company was quick to respond, rolling out a comprehensive 90-day plan which led to the launch of 100 new features created to address future security risks.

SEARCHES 2020

1. Coronavirus
2. Election results
3. Kobe Bryant
4. **Zoom**

> **"By late March/early April, many businesses were scrambling to transition teams online and adapt to working and meeting remotely."**

At the time of writing this report, Zoom remains highly-regarded as one of the best overall video conferencing services available, according to a Business News Daily report researching more than 30 reputable platforms.

Believe it or not, this report is not sponsored by Zoom. However, the boom of Zoom (yes, that was on purpose) illustrates a broader point. With the rise in usage of Zoom and other video-conferencing and virtual event platforms, we're now focussed on sharing tips on virtual etiquette and optimizing audio and video equipment to make great first impressions online. In short: we are invested.

Therefore, as in-person events gradually return, and they will, it remains imperative to continue to find ways to merge the physical with the virtual, creating hybrid experiences for audiences of all sizes.

DID YOU KNOW?

A **study** published in summer 2020 from the International Air Transport Association (IATA) found that:

65%

of US travellers would feel at risk attending live performances (e.g. theatres, concerts)

62%

of travellers feel they would be at risk of getting sick attending a conference

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THERE'S A PLATFORM FOR THAT...

If you've had to plan or attend a virtual event in the last year, you're likely very familiar with these four types of virtual experiences. Here's a summary of the best (or most optimal) use case for each:

VIRTUAL MEETING	Best used with smaller groups where collaboration is a priority, and interaction is possible between all participants (e.g., workshops, networking, product demos) through video, audio, and screen sharing.
WEBINAR	Generally intended for a larger audience, activating features like polls, chat, and Q&A functions to facilitate simplified interactions between presenters and attendees, though attendees have limited functionality of their own.
WEBCAST / LIVE STREAM	Designed for broad reach and using a one-to-many model in which a host presents slides/video to a large audience between which interaction is primarily text-based, similar to a webinar.
SIMU-LIVE	Allows the producer more control by pre-recording content for the event and broadcasting it as though it were live; may also feature speakers/moderators present in the chat to engage with attendees real-time.

The webinar and live streaming platform examples shown in the table above will allow you to successfully launch a variety of hybrid events. However, as audiences become more sophisticated in their understanding of these technologies, the platforms themselves continue to evolve in functionality and quality as well.

Companies such as EventMobi, Bizzabo, and Cvent are long-time players in the event tech industry and well-known to planners, largely because of the solutions they offer for in-person events; whether that be venue sourcing, registration, attendee management or mobile app & gamification design. It's no surprise then, that each of them have also been at the forefront of delivering virtual events on their respective platforms. These solutions take your standard webinar or video conference to the next level – offering opportunities for sponsors, integrations with other systems such as CRM management tools, attendee engagement, custom data and analytics solutions.

We have also seen the rise of multi-dimensional platforms such as vFairs, MootUp, and virBELA. A recent Venturebeat article categorizes these more immersive platforms into two distinct categories:

2.5D

In a 2.5D environment, the user is provided with a selection of images and environments that are meant to imitate various spaces from the real word, as well as stock characters or avatars. These environments may include a tradeshow floor, a nightclub lounge, or a formal gala, for example.

In December 2020, our agency produced a **virtual fundraising gala** for the **Canadian Nurses Foundation** – the organization's first virtual event in its 10-year history. We worked with vFairs to create this experience, as the platform allowed us to create distinct virtual spaces (a networking lounge, chat room, sponsor booths, photobooth, auction) that allowed attendees to transport themselves into an elegant virtual gala venue from the comfort of home.

Photo Credit: CNF Nightingale MaskerAide

Photo Credit: MootUp.com

Taking the immersive experience one step further are 3D platforms. The experience here is avatar driven, which is the closest you are likely to get to recreating an on-site experience for your remote guests, as these platforms incorporate the use of VR headsets, such as the Oculus. Of course a headset isn't a requirement, but it's worth noting that there is research available that outlines the value spatial presence has on learning outcomes and memory, which is achieved by enabling users to enter these 3D environments.

3D

The answer as to which event type and platform is right for you, depends on your event objectives. In a **previous report**, we highlighted the importance of identifying event objectives above all else when pivoting to virtual. Your objectives will determine everything from what platform to use, the content you create, who you invite, and so much more.

In the case of a hybrid event, it is important to also consider the experience of your virtual attendees and how it compares to that of your in-person attendees when selecting a virtual platform.

SOME KEY CONSIDERATIONS ARE:

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Will your virtual attendees have the same capabilities as your in-person attendees to ask questions to speakers?
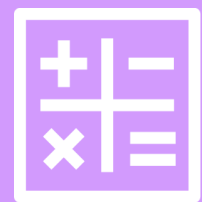
Provide feedback?

Network?

ACCESS

Some virtual platforms require no more than a laptop or tablet and an internet connection, while others require additional equipment (e.g. VR headsets) and downloads.

How does the barrier to entry compare between your two audiences?

COST

Are there cost implications for audiences to attend your event? (e.g., ticket prices) If so, how do these costs differ for virtual to in-person?

How will this impact their respective experiences?

EQUITY & ACCESSIBILITY

We discussed inclusivity and accessibility as a key pillar in last year's LOMA List, offering examples of how to make physical spaces more inclusive for your diverse audience.

The topic of equity and accessibility warrants its own more robust examination, and it is not the objective of this report to provide that examination. However, it is our objective to propose that virtual spaces, and the technology chosen to support them, are curated with the same critical eye for accessibility. **Here are some things to consider:**

What sort of accessibility features already exist within my preferred (or short-list of) platforms? (e.g., closed captioning, screen readers, keyboard shortcuts, translation)

What accessibility gaps are there?

Does the platform easily integrate with other solutions to fill those gaps?

Am I (or is someone on my team) familiar with operating these accessibility features and/or solutions?

Am I (or is someone on my team) familiar with the end-user experience of these features?

Understanding accessibility is a learning process and there is no expectation that you should know everything there is to know about creating accessible spaces online.

However, a great place to get started would be by reviewing this comprehensive list from Seattle-based advocacy group, Rooted in Rights.

CONNECTIVITY

Connecting remote and in-person audiences will emerge as a top priority for leaders across almost every industry, and planners will be the ones supporting. In a study conducted by workplace certification authority, Great Place to Work®, surveying 79 executives across 56 Fortune 500 companies, leaders reported the number of their employees working remotely rose from underline[16% to 65%] since the start of the pandemic. The same study highlighted that, post-COVID, remote workforces will likely be larger than they were pre-COVID, however, there will inevitably be those who return to work in-person.
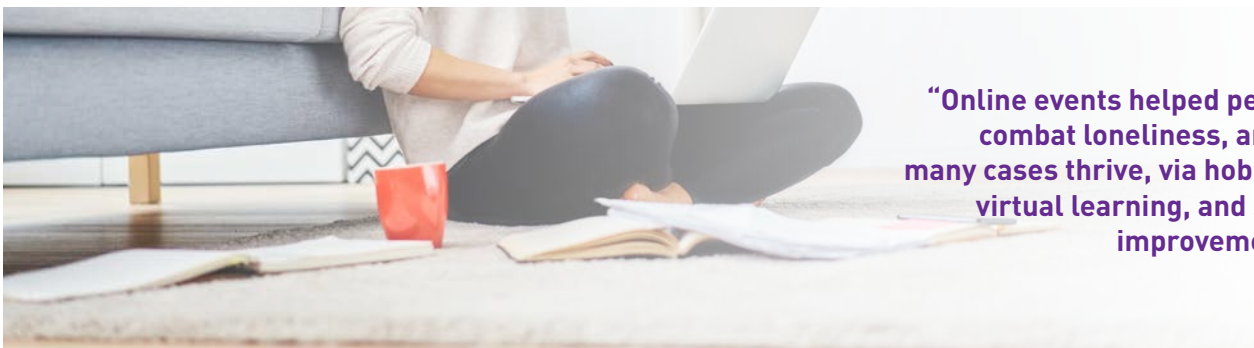
"Online events helped people combat loneliness, and in many cases thrive, via hobbies, virtual learning, and self-improvement."

Looking ahead, the critical consideration for leadership teams, will be acknowledging the fears and anxieties in-person employees may now carry, such as the fear of becoming ill, caring for dependents, or commuting, to name a few.

As for remote workers, the stressors unique to this audience may include things like job security, career advancement, and feelings of isolation and loneliness.

> **DID YOU KNOW?**
>
> Loneliness has long been recognized as having a significant impact on an individual's health and well-being. Virtual events have allowed planners to expand the event landscape more dramatically than ever before, providing a resource and outlet for those seeking relief from isolation.

Fortunately, as highlighted in a recent study commissioned by Eventbrite, which surveyed 3,000+ virtual event attendees from Australia, UK and the US, "Online events helped people combat loneliness, and in many cases thrive, via hobbies, virtual learning, and self-improvement." In fact, 45% of users agreed that virtual events have helped them to feel more connected this past year.

Therefore, we must place a high value on forging connections between remote and in-person audiences, with the objective of addressing their respective fears and challenges. This might include monthly (or quarterly) "meet-ups" where employees can network and engage with colleagues and leaders just for fun – no work required. Meanwhile, leaders will have a platform to foster a new culture and increase morale between in-office and remote teams.

CREATING CONNECTIONS

In the virtual realm, it is difficult to organically create the connections you might have in-person with someone, particularly in the context of blending remote and in-office employees who may be meeting for the first time. We take for granted the non-verbal cues that allow us to have conversations and interact with one another, and we layer that with the distractions that arise from technology, whether those be Wi-Fi connectivity issues or competing priorities.

As we think about creating hybrid experiences in which some attendees will attend in-person and others will attend virtually, how do we support our attendees' interaction with one another so that their connection is just as meaningful as if they were all in the same room?

We offer the following steps to help your attendees create meaningful connections virtually. Note that your chosen event platform will dictate what your capabilities will be, so it is worth mentioning again that your objectives should be at the forefront of every decision you make.

1 **ELIMINATE BARRIERS**

Ensure that attendees have a variety of ways to interact so they may choose what is best for them (e.g., video calls, chat rooms, message boards, social walls)

Enable accessibility features, including translation, alternative text, and ASL captions.

2 **CREATE CONTEXT**

Rather than hosting open or general networking sessions, create chat rooms by topic so that your attendees can chat with others with similar interests, or perhaps experts who can lend support or guidance in a specific area.

3 **AMPLIFY VOICES**

Create spaces for smaller group discussions, allowing everyone in the group an opportunity to share thoughts and ideas, so that attendees can feel like their voices are being heard.

4 **ENCOURAGE FEEDBACK**

Enable attendees to provide real-time feedback about the event, with a dedicated team available to respond.

Real-time event support is something that is readily available to your physical attendees, whether they are looking for directions or asking questions at registration. Ensure that your virtual attendees have the same support when needed to eliminate disconnect.

5 **PROVIDE RESOURCES**

Distribute information that empowers virtual and in-person attendees to navigate their interactions with one another on their own. For example, send a list of the different chat rooms, indicate what accessibility resources are available, or share best practices for conducting video calls, to name a few.

Once you have created a framework for how you'll enable connections between attendees, it's easy (and more fun!) to build from there. For example, you might consider layering on a bit of gamification with apps like Backyard, or attendee engagement tools like Crowdpurr, Tribute and Snapbar.

These are just some of the many tools that allow audiences the opportunity to interact and have fun with one another on a personal level, further strengthening the bond your event framework has helped to establish.

Additionally, be sure to strike the right balance between curating discussions and meetings for professional purposes and enabling opportunities for attendees to just have unscripted fun. For example, you might let your audience guide their own conversations where there is no expectation to discuss business at all, or simply laugh and have fun by hosting hybrid happy hours or interactive experiences such as cooking demos.

Whatever you do, it is important not to underestimate this concept of developing an event framework for creating and strengthening connections between in-person and virtual audiences.

A recent McKinsey Quarterly article took a look at what a post-pandemic, hybrid workplace might entail. Citing examples from HP, IBM and Yahoo!, researchers noticed that "two cultures emerge," wherein, the in-person workforce becomes the more dominant culture and the remote workforce is often overlooked. Your event attendees are no different.

In the past, it would be perfectly reasonable to invest more budget and resources into your in-person attendees, offering more variety in content or more exclusive experiences; but as the last year has shown, hosting virtual events and experiences allows you to increase your audience reach and improve engagement. So, in a post-pandemic world – no one gets left behind.
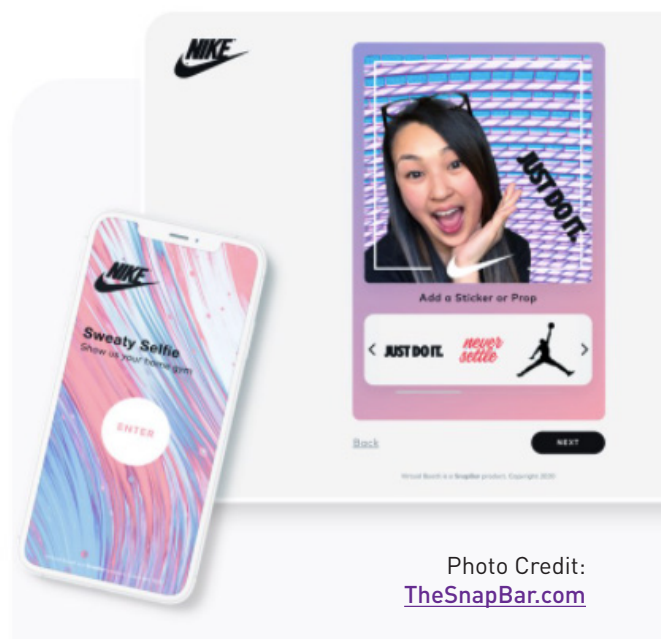
CUSTOM VIRTUAL PHOTOBOOTH

Photo Credit:
TheSnapBar.com

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2   CONTENT

In the same way business leaders must plan for a portion of their workforce to remain remote, event planners must also anticipate that a subset of their audience will choose to remain remote as well.

A Future Forum **study** commissioned by Slack, surveying 9,000+ knowledge workers, ranked the top benefits and the top challenges of remote working which we can reasonably apply to virtual events:

THE TOP BENEFITS INCLUDE:

- No commuting
- Saving money
- Improved work-life balance
- Less stressful work environment
- More time with family

THE TOP CHALLENGES INCLUDE:

- Unstable Wi-Fi or internet access
- Maintaining and building working relationships with colleagues
- Staying focused and avoiding distractions
- Feelings of loneliness or isolation
- Keeping up with what others are working on

Rather than making a plea to at-home audiences to walk away from the comforts they have come to enjoy, lean into them.

How can you channel the barriers (and benefits) audiences are contending with into opportunities for more creativity and engagement?

Here are just some examples:

BENEFIT / CHALLENGE	VIRTUAL OPPORTUNITY	IN-PERSON OPPORTUNITY
SAVING MONEY	Offer reduced ticket prices or more flexible cancellation policies or perahps tier your content so that virtual users only pay for what they want.	Offer travel and accommodation incentives for in-person attendees that are unrelated to the event. For example, ride share codes from the airport, room upgrades, or discount offers for local city attractions.
IMPROVED WORK-LIFE BALANCE	Create on-demand content that remote audiences (and in-person attendees) can enjoy at their leisure.	Ensure that your agenda incorporates ample break times with a focus on encouraging movement and/or rest. You might also offer different learning environments (e.g., hands-on workshops vs. keynote presentations) and healthy menus for improved brain function.
UNSTABLE WI-FI OR INTERNET ACCESS	Provide downloadable content and resources that users can enjoy without having to stream.	Provide a resource hub where your in-person attendees can access the same resources pre- and post-event.
MAINTAINING AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS	Develop a framework for networking and interaction within your program agenda (see section on "Connectivity" above)	Create dedicated spaces (e.g., small breakout rooms) to allow in-person attendees to have smaller, focused, discussions with remote attendees or to allow both groups to network, play games, and get to know each other. Or integrate an easy-to-use solution such as Brain Dates to help facilitate networking between guests.
FEELINGS OF LONELINESS/ ISOLATION	Provide remote attendees with a curated mailer, complete with event materials and swag. Let them feel part of the experience.	

REMEMBER, when delivering a hybrid event, the experiences do not have to be identical, they just have to be equitable.

MIX IT UP!

Another benefit to creating content for both in-person and virtual audiences is that you are also creating content for different learning styles. The most widely accepted learning styles are VARK (Visual, Aural, Reading/Writing, and Kinesthetic).

There is a long-held belief, particularly in the education system, that meeting the needs of an individual's learning style preference is important for comprehension. However, more recent research has come to show that, a staunch belief in learning styles can create a self-limiting belief in one-self. Therefore, providing a combination of style preferences is the way to go and even allows learners to improve skills that may need sharpening.

VISUAL

AURAL

READING / WRITING

KINESTHETIC

CAN I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE?

Unfortunately, distraction plays a major role in how remote and in-person audiences receive content.

In December 2020, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS) hosted a virtual event in which they discussed the impact "today's fast-paced, fragmented lifestyle," has on our brain development, particularly as it relates to attention spans.

One of the panelists cited a project from Stanford where software was downloaded into the phones and laptops of participants, capturing screenshots every 5 seconds. After receiving over 2M screenshots across 1,000 participants, the researchers concluded that, "Every moment by moment, the average median amount of time you spend on any digital segment doing one thing before you switch and do something else is about 10 to 20 seconds."

Audience engagement is a critical factor in the development of content, online and in-person. What are some ways you can engage attendees outside of a Q&A? Perhaps a tool like Sli.do to launch polls mid-way through a presentation would work. Or perhaps gamify the experience by asking survey questions throughout captured by a leaderboard. These are just some examples of ways you can engage a virtual and in-person audience but dare to find more.

Distraction isn't a problem we need to solve anymore, it's a behaviour we need to manage. The best way to do this is – look squirrel!

> **HOT TIP**   Aim to **interact with you audience in some way every 7-10 minutes** during a presentation as it will keep them on their toes and help them to retain your content.

REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Choosing the right speakers and keynotes for your event is critical. They should resonate with your audience and align with your organizational values and deliver on your event value proposition. By providing someone with a platform to address the group, you are communicating to attendees this person's voice matters.

AT THE BEGINNING OF 2020, **ALMOST 2/3** **OF SPEAKERS WORLDWIDE WERE MEN.**

Gender diversity remains a huge problem when it comes to professional speakers across multiple industries, but most notably in the tech space. In a survey report released by tech company, Ensono, titled *Speak Up 2020 Redesigning Tech Conferences with Women in Mind*, the authors acknowledge this gap in gender diversity, highlighting also a gap in racial diversity.

If one-third of speakers globally are women, even fewer are women of color. Often, when racialized individuals are asked to speak, it's often on the topic of diversity, and worse still – unpaid. Ruchika Tulshyan, author of *The Diversity Advantage: Fixing Gender Inequality In The Workplace*, recommends setting goals and committing to a diversified line-up, citing an example from Lesbians Who Tech, who says their speakers are, "80% queer women, 50% women of color, 25% black & Latinx and 15% transgender and gender non-conforming."

If the challenges of 2020 have taught us anything, it's that change isn't always easy, but sometimes it's necessary. As we look ahead to new ways of creating and sharing information, let us ensure the voices we amplify are as diverse as our audiences.

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3   BALANCE

3 BALANCE

BEFORE WE CONTINUE:

STAND UP.	STRETCH.	INHALE.

Hold it for 10 seconds, and then exhale. You could even try out a quick one-minute Headspace meditation.

FEEL BETTER?

We now know that an improved work-life balance is an important feature of remote working for many.

However, striking that balance is sometimes easier said than done.

In our discussion on health and wellness in last year's LOMA List, we offered examples of different ways physical spaces can be adapted or created to support better balance between work and rest for your event attendees. As audiences return on-site, remember that they are returning with a heightened sense of anxiety. Allowing them opportunities to focus on wellness or simply have the space to unwind.

As for your remote audience, it would be incorrect to assume that those working from home are equipped to strike their own balance. In fact, it is quite the opposite.

3 BALANCE

According to data released by the National Bureau of Economic Research, the average workday is almost an hour longer, and internal emails as well as the number of meetings have all increased.

In addition to managing responsibilities and tasks familiar to workers, a rise in virtual meeting technology has delivered its own share of anxieties.

As planners navigating a post-COVID event landscape, we may take for granted how submerged we are in the world of technology. However, your average attendee may only understand the most basic tools and principles, and having to learn new platforms and skills is only adding to their stress.

The most common term you might hear is "Zoom fatigue," but it is much bigger than that and it's very real. An examination by experts in a variety of disciplines has offered a number of explanations for why we feel "Zoom fatigued." (see table above)

All this plus, you know, the stress of a global pandemic and balancing work and home life.

FEELING FATIGUED? THIS MAY BE WHY...

Impaired audio cues, which impacts our interpersonal perceptions negatively

Forced multi-tasking

Less eye-contact (which has been shown to improve connectedness)

Cognitive challenges

And more...

3 BALANCE

Do not let your event feel like just something else for people to cross off a never-ending to-do list. Help to restore some semblance of balance where and when you can for your attendees. Here are some examples for how you can better support remote audiences who may be struggling to do so on their own:

1 COMMUNICATE A SHARED PURPOSE.

Tell people why you want them to attend and what you want them to get out of the experience so that they arrive focused on a north star.

2 ENABLE CONNECTIONS.

Refer to our discussion earlier about creating a framework for allowing remote and in-person attendees to build and strengthen connections with one another.

3 BE FLEXIBLE.

Allow opportunities for general discussions, browsing, or self-learning through on-demand content for both audiences.

4 INCORPORATE A WELLNESS BREAK.

Don't just list a 15-minute break in your agenda. Be intentional. Encourage attendees to get up, stretch, move, or simply take deep breaths. You might even share a live feed of your in-person audience participating in stretch together, which your remote audience can follow along with.

5 START AND END YOUR MEETINGS AND EVENTS ON TIME.

Respect everyone's time.

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4 SAFETY

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4   SAFETY

The health and safety of event attendees has always been paramount for all planners. However, the threat of COVID-19, and the constant new developments as each day passes, will require planners to think about precautions many have never incorporated before as we transition back to in-person events.

The protocols put into place for events, hybrid or otherwise, extend far beyond any meeting room or venue, as planners need to consider not just their attendees, but also vendors, partners and themselves.

IN APRIL 2020,

72%

of scheduled events were either cancelled or postponed.

AN INDUSTRY IN TRANSITION

By December 2020, multiple news sources estimated a $30B loss in revenue for the live events industry. This amount is staggering. What is even more, is that before there were government bans and restrictions on public and/or indoor gatherings, many force majeure clauses in contracts could not be invoked. In order to do so, your clause would have to specifically list something that could reasonably apply, such as an epidemic/pandemic or "act of government."

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4 SAFETY

As planners look to re-engage with venues and vendors for future events, it is important to take a fresh look at contract clauses and insurance policies to prepare for future potential disruptive events.

READY TO GO TO CONTRACT?

Below are some key considerations, as provided by MPI, to ensure your next agreement works for you:

Updating attrition clauses so that you may reduce your numbers should circumstances arise outside of your control

Purchasing business interruption and cancellation insurance

Asking vendors/partners to hold deposits in "escrow-style" accounts in the event their business is unexpectedly impacted

Introducing attendee waivers to limit liability

And **much more**

IN-PERSON SAFETY

It goes without saying that the onsite experience of future events will change.

Reduced capacities, 6ft distances between attendees, plexiglass walls, and hand sanitizing stations will be just some of the hallmarks of post-COVID events – at least in the short term.

If you're unsure where to start, collaborate with your venue partner. You will be pleased to know that many global hotel chains have created (and continue to update) a list of safety protocols they will enforce as group bookings return. Your specific event experience will determine what, if any, additional measures need to be taken.

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4 SAFETY

From a technical standpoint, Encore Global has created a helpful playbook for planners to re-imagine and re-design meeting rooms. In summary, the playbook explores four key tenets for safe meeting planning, which are:

MEETING DESIGN

Reimagining the event flow for safety and the space/resources required to execute

ROOM LAYOUT & TRAFFIC FLOW

Ensuring to maintain a safe distance for attendees

TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

Recommendations for which tech would support larger spaces as well as help hybrid events function optimally for both audiences
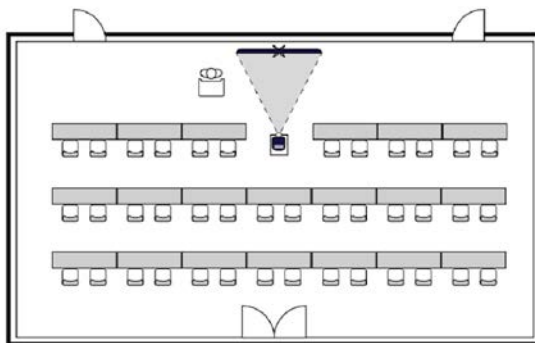
CLEANING REQUIREMENTS

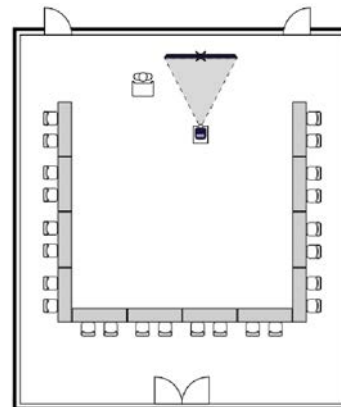Looking at "high touch items" and limiting the spread of germs

In their **playbook**, Encore Global provide these examples of what modified meeting room set-ups could look like:
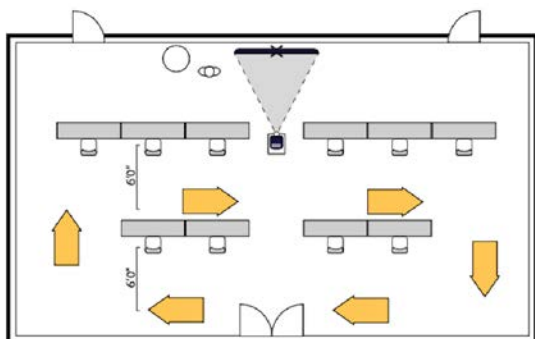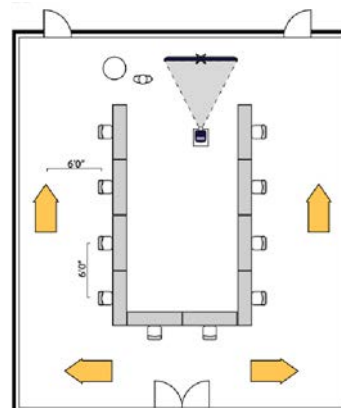
A traditional U-Shape set-up.

A traditional Classroom set-up.

A modified U-Shape set-up for reduced capacity.

A modified Classroom set-up for reduced capacity.

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TRAVEL SAFETY

Last, but certainly not least on the list of concerns for your in-person attendees is travel safety.

For some of your guests, attending your event may be the first time they've left their own neighborhood in over a year. Travelling pre-COVID always came with its own set of stressors, but everyone will need to pack their patience as protocols for travel in a post-COVID world will be different.

If your event requires travel, it is a good idea to send attendees a list of safety precautions for consideration prior to departure. Egencia has created a detailed checklist that is downloadable and can be adapted, depending on what your travel expectations are. Highlights include:

✈ Booking flexible rates that allow for cancellation

✈ Sharing travel itineraries with friends or family, in case of emergency

✈ Traveling with your own prepared meal

✈ Wearing PPE when traveling or taking public transit

✈ Reviewing a hotel's safety protocols before booking

Communicate the importance of your attendees' health and safety clearly and often, ensuring that they have a contact or resource to reach out to for any questions or concerns. Most importantly, let your attendees know they do not have to travel. The beauty of hybrid events is that everyone can be involved, even if from afar.

DIGITAL SAFETY

As you might have expected, an increase in virtual event platform usage comes with an increase threat to digital safety. We previously discussed the wide-spread security breach with Zoom, as well as their response and addition of 100 new security features. One year into the pandemic, digital safety is certainly top of mind for audiences and developers, so like any vendor or partner you might onboard to support your event, the first step is to ask the right questions.

READY TO GO VIRTUAL? Start by asking your event technology partner these 5 questions:

1 WHAT PRECAUTIONS ARE YOU TAKING TO PROTECT MY DATA?

2 HOW CAN I ACCESS MY DATA AND WHERE IS IT STORED?

3 WILL YOU OWN PART OF MY DATA?

4 HOW LONG WILL YOU STORE AND HAVE ACCESS TO MY DATA?

5 ARE YOU COMPLIANT WITH STANDARD REGULATIONS, SUCH AS GDPR?

Remember, the virtual event platform you choose for your hybrid event is as important as the venue you choose for the in-person portion. In whichever capacity you welcome your guests, they deserve to arrive knowing that they are safe and protected.

5 **BRIDGING THE GAP**

As we navigate the year ahead, the good news is, live events will be back. The better news is, with the increased familiarity with virtual events, the hybrid experience will provide events the opportunity to reach untapped audiences, become more inclusive and more creative. Here is how:

REACH

Your audience will not be limited to a time zone or location anymore. You can open your "doors" to a global audience, possibly for the first time.

INCLUSIVITY

Through accessibility features and multi-platform content delivery, you're engaging people who may require special assistance or support not previously available to them. You can also invite speakers from all over the world that may have been limited due to location or travel restrictions. This allows you to better diversify your speaker line-up and your knowledge base, enabling you to create content that better reflects your global audience.

INNOVATION

Through innovative technology, you will be able to bring your remote audience into the live meeting environment, engaging avatars as you would your in-person attendees.

Additionally, new technologies allow you to have increased access to data and analytics. Leverage that information to deliver more value to your event attendees and partners and ultimately increase your event ROI.

Of course, your remote audience are not the only ones who will be adapting. Although some may opt to return in-person, the on-site experience will certainly not be what they remember.

A HANDS-OFF EXPERIENCE

A key component of hybrid events will be minimizing human touch. Traditionally, planners and their on-site staff have a very hands-on role when it comes to tending to their guests. However, as we all do our part to "stop the spread," contactless tools will surely be a default in many areas such as hotel room check in, moving forward.

REGISTRATION

QR codes and RFID (radio frequency identification) bracelets are an easy-to-use and familiar tool for many planners, particularly large-scale conference and festival organizers. Instead of approaching a fully staffed registration desk, guests can simply tap a pre-printed code or their smartphone on a designated surface and be "checked-in".

If your event requires your guests to have any resources or collateral, there's no shortage of event apps you could leverage to push content directly to attendees' smartphones upon registration. Apps such as EventMobi or DoubleDutch will not only be able to support your in-person attendees this way, but their virtual event platforms allows for a seamless user experience for your remote attendees as well. On the flip side, upon registration of your remote attendees, you could launch a direct mailer, complete with lanyard, name badge and custom gifting so that they are part of the experience as well.

Finally, it would be negligible to discuss opportunities for us to gather, without acknowledging the importance of conducting contact tracing. To start with, investing in a no-touch thermometer to check guests on entry should be standard. Depending on the format of your events, you will also need to consider continuing to monitor individual activity.

The previously mentioned RFID bracelets would be a great solution as they can track when your guests checked-in, when they left, as well as any area they visited (e.g., meal rooms, breakouts, etc.). Alternatively, you can simply pre-load key questions into your registration kiosk (e.g., Have you recently travelled outside X country?) and collect contact information so that, in the event of a guest reporting feeling unwell, you can address it real time and ensure the safety of all other guests and staff.

"A no-touch thermometer to check guests on entry should be standard."

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Restaurants and bars across the world quickly adapted to providing QR code menus for patrons and contactless food service – your caterer will likely be no different. Depending on the size and complexity of your event, a QR code solution may work for you. Allow your guests to scan a menu and enter their order on a tablet or kiosk. From there you can designate pick-up spots and efficiently work your way through the crowd. You may also offer boxed meals clearly labelling contents and allow your guests to pick up at their leisure. The key component in all of this, of course, is ensuring your guests have space to move around and are appropriately distanced.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

It has been addressed a number of times in this report, but it's worth mentioning again that as audiences return to in-person events, there's sure to be lingering feelings of anxiety around being in crowds again. Let your guests know you appreciate their attendance.

Personalized swag bags are a simple and effective way to show your appreciation, but it does involve allowing for the right amount of lead time. With a shorter turnaround, you might consider using push notifications or personalized calls and/or emails to recommend sessions to attendees or share resources you think they will value – this is a particularly suitable solution for remote audiences as well.

Many planners pride themselves on offering a white-glove experience. Although safety protocols call for social distancing and contactless engagement, do not lose your penchant for making your guests feel special, even if from 6-feet apart.

ASSEMBLE YOUR OWN 'EVENTGERS'

As any good planner knows, creating a successful event, hybrid or otherwise, requires bringing together an A-team. As highlighted this past summer, a rise in virtual events has led to a rise in and introduction of new roles to our industry.

EVENT TECHNOLOGIST

Many planners have taken on this role themselves, leading the sourcing and implementation of the appropriate technology to support clients who are either pivoting to virtual, or creating a hybrid experience. There is, however, no expectation for one person to be able to do it all. You would not expect your florist to also be your AV-tech, so if technology isn't your thing, it's okay to seek additional support.

VIRTUAL EVENT TECH SUPPORT

As some of you may know, Zoom offers professional services that will step in to help you adapt your program, or create new ones, most efficiently. Think of them as a personalized customer support line or IT desk you can rely on to troubleshoot for you. However, this role could be for anyone, from any platform, who knows the ins and outs of the technology you are using and can jump in to resolve issues as they arise with expert knowledge. If your team boasts IT professionals or tech-enthusiasts, allow them to immerse themselves in the technology and learn it inside and out so you can keep this resource in-house.

VIRTUAL EVENT PRODUCTION SPECIALISTS / TECHNICAL PRODUCERS

Depending on your program requirements and budget, hiring a Technical Producer could be just the thing to elevate your event to the next level. Think of this individual as a producer or director on the set of a film: they help you prep and cue speakers, direct the technical crew, monitor the script to call the show and a myriad of other things you didn't think possible.

VIRTUAL EMCEE / MODERATOR

It may feel like since moving to virtual, you have to take on more, but that's not true. A capable, professional, and seasoned emcee or moderator can be critical to the success of any event, in-person and especially virtually. Remember to keep your audience's needs at the forefront, and this includes keeping them engaged and keeping the program moving and on time, both of which are made even more possible with an emcee.

ONWARD

2020 was a year unlike any other, and it is quite possible that there will never be another one like it (fingers crossed). But there are lessons to be learned.

In the world of live events, last year taught us that we are capable of more than we ever thought possible, and reminded us how much our health and our happiness are dependent on our ability to come together and build meaningful connections out of our shared experiences.

As we look ahead in 2021 and beyond, may we never again take for granted the warmth of a hug, the applause after a powerful keynote speaker, a meal in a restaurant while surrounded by strangers, or the beauty of singing and dancing amongst a large crowd to the music of your favorite group or performer.

Ready to launch your hybrid event strategy? We would love to help!

Whether you are looking to transition an in-person event online or seeking innovative ideas to create brand new hybrid experiences, let us make your life easier. We can act as an extension of your team to support a specific element or take on managing the program from start to finish. We thrive on being a creative and collaborative partner.

CONTACT US and join the conversation on social by using #lomaagency and #LOMAList2021.

THANK YOU FOR READING!

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