



+

Webex Events  
(formerly Socio)

Delivering  
**OUTSTANDING  
EVENT  
EXPERIENCES**  
in the New Era of Events

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### EVENTMB STUDIO TEAM / SKIFTX

This report is brought to you by EventMB Studio / SkiftX. EventMB Studio is a boutique content marketing service that produces top quality digital content assets for market leaders in the event and hospitality industry.

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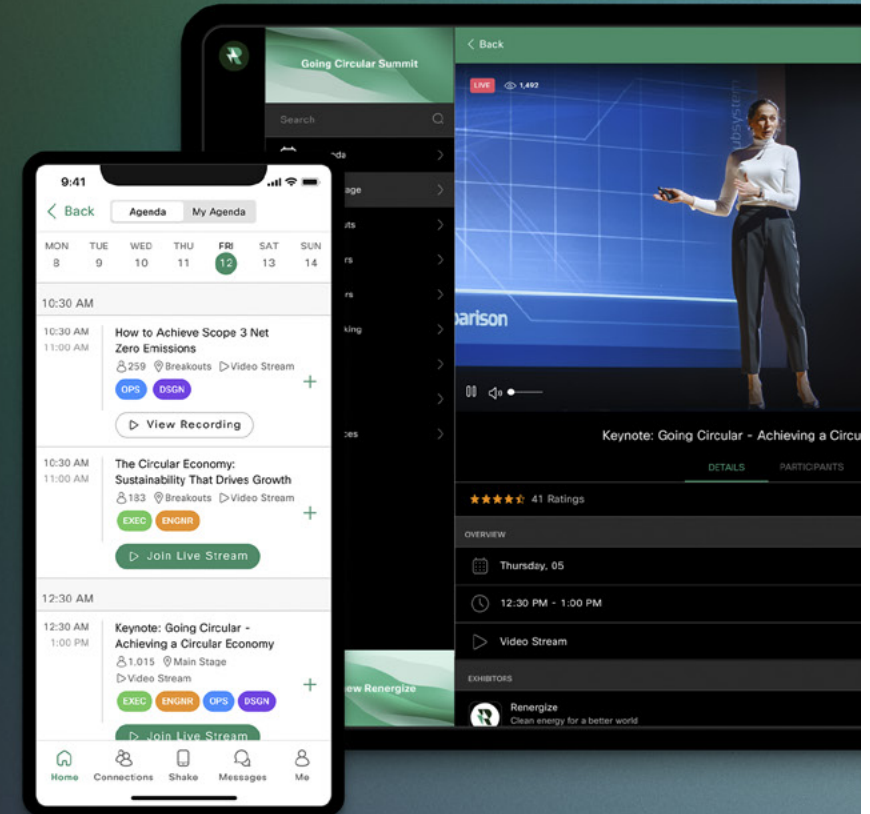
### WEBEX EVENTS (FORMERLY SOCIO)

Webex Events (formerly Socio) is an end-to-end event management platform that powers immersive virtual, hybrid, and in-person events. Webex Events supports multi-track events with custom virtual venues, mobile apps, live and on-demand streaming, registration and ticketing, interactive attendee networking and in-person solutions like onsite check-in & badge printing, lead retrieval & live display. Webex Events joins award-winning support with #1 ranked user satisfaction. [Learn more](#)

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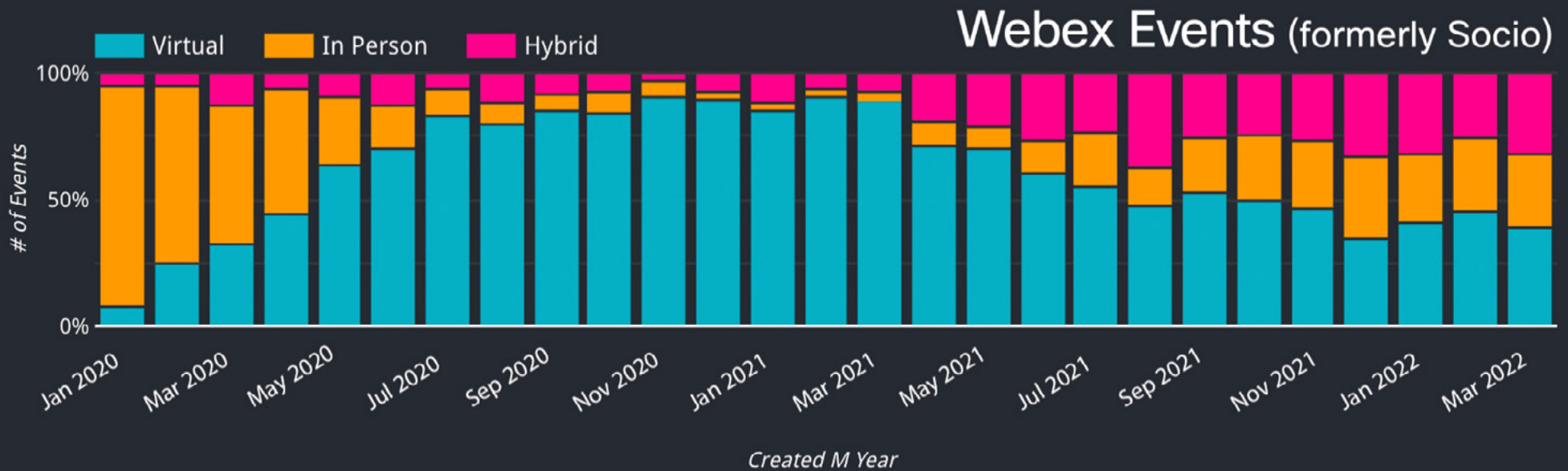
# INTRODUCTION

## We Have Entered a New Era, and There's No Turning Back. Here's How to Bring Your Events Into the Digital Age.

At a time when the uncertainties of the last two years are not yet fully behind us, some are still relying on virtual channels as a built in back-up plan if in-person attendance has to be scaled back. But as the industry increasingly returns to in-person gatherings, a consensus is emerging in the world of event professionals: The tech has proven itself to be far more than just a contingency plan.

Increasingly, event professionals are opting to include digital avenues for engagement, not only because it's the safest option, but because it provides a significant value-add for attendees, sponsors, and the entire spectrum of event stakeholders, who have become accustomed to the benefits that a fully blended experience can deliver.

How is the industry evolving? The proof is in the numbers. Here is a chart showing the event formats used by over 2,000 Webex Events (formerly Socio) clients across the past two years.



## WHAT DEFINES A SUCCESSFUL EVENT IN 2022?

It used to be quite straightforward: Events were typically considered to be either in-person or virtual. But this sharp division between the two formats ignores the fact that in-person attendees have long relied on tech to enhance their event experience. Mobile devices are now so central to our society that there's a word for the fear of going without them: nomophobia.

We use technology — quite literally — to navigate our environment, with instant access to tools that allow us to explore information and engage with each other even as we move from one location to another. Digital connectivity is now part of our everyday lives, and business events are no exception.

Arguably, event professionals are uniquely qualified to make the most of what technology now has to offer. Over the past two years, planners have been through a crash-course in virtual event technology. But if there is one top misconception right now, it's that "virtual" event tech is for online attendees only. Digital connectivity can be just as useful for in-person participants, and from the attendee's perspective, these labels don't even matter. All they want to know is that they have access to the tools that give them ultimate flexibility — engaging when, where, and how they want.

And let's face it: In-person attendees are just as likely to be distracted by their phones as remote attendees are to be distracted by their in-person surroundings. If you have a strong presence in both spheres, you have a better chance of keeping their full attention.

As we transition into a new era defined by intense competition matched by equally intense innovation, event success will often hinge on just how well organizers are able to harness the potential that new digital tools offer.

Some might be tempted to think that this means the technology should take center stage, but the reverse is true. Top-notch event tech should mold itself around the needs, interests, and preferences of attendees, while also serving the event's goals. The interface should be so frictionless that the technology feels like a natural extension of the event experience, enhancing the attendee journey and foregrounding the brand identities of sponsors, exhibitors, and the event organizer.

When the tech truly elevates the event experience, it creates advantages for all participants and reduces barriers to access. This approach means that the full blending of digital and in-person engagement will become second nature for everyone in the audience.

## THE TIME TO LEVEL UP IS NOW

After becoming accustomed to the features that digital event platforms can provide, attendees will look to see these value-adds carried forward no matter what format the event takes. Even in cases where attendees are entirely on-site, our expectations have evolved. Attendees want the option to submit questions to the speaker through their phones — or even to tune in from their hotel rooms. For some attendees, making the most of the in-person experience might even mean skipping a scheduled session in favor of an impromptu, face-to-face networking opportunity. For these guests, the option to stream a session on demand later can make the in-person experience that much more worthwhile.

In turn, sponsors benefit from continued access to rich attendee data. From every angle, it pays to offer attendees an experience that seamlessly blends the in-person with the digital. We are entering a new era for events. To offer the best of both worlds to attendees, sponsors, exhibitors, and other stakeholders, every aspect of an event platform needs to be leveled up.

This guide is designed to help you get there.



# RESEARCH

## EVENT PROFESSIONALS SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT: WHAT DO EVENTS REALLY LOOK LIKE IN 2022?

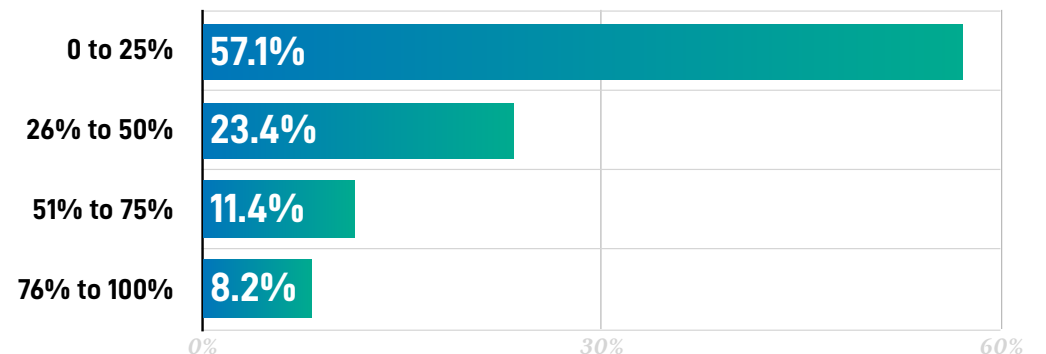
It's no secret that the last two years have been a rollercoaster for the event industry, full of peaks and valleys and that dreaded "p" word: pivots. Even as in-person events return in larger numbers, most would agree that the industry is still in a state of flux. Given this rapid change, can we be sure that our ideas about virtual, in-person, and hybrid events are more than mere speculation? To better understand the current landscape of events, EventMB sent out a survey to take the pulse of event professionals across the globe.

## 1.

## THE DYNAMIC DUO: IN-PERSON LEADS WITH HYBRID BY ITS SIDE

Perhaps unsurprisingly at this stage in the pandemic, only a small minority of event planners are relying primarily on a virtual-first event strategy: Only 8.2 percent of survey respondents expected 75 to 100 percent of their events to be fully virtual. In fact, a majority of event planners (57.1 percent) said that 0 to 25 percent of their events this year would be fully virtual. **In most cases where a remote experience is being offered as an option to attendees, it will be alongside an in-person cohort.**

Roughly what percentage of your events are likely to be fully virtual in 2022?

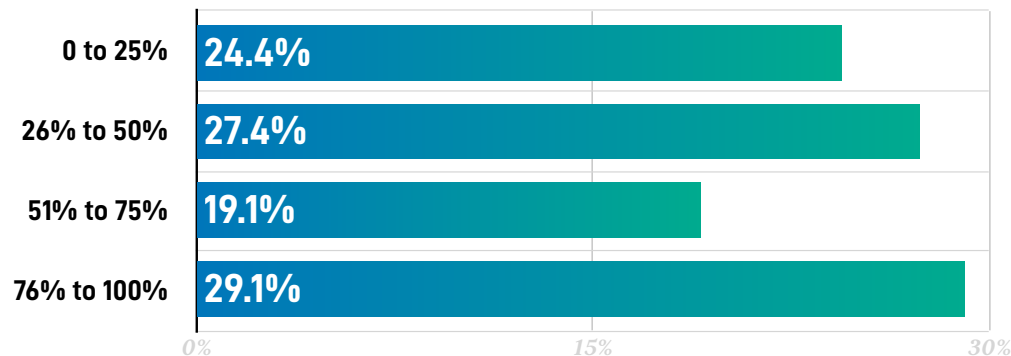


# 1. THE DYNAMIC DUO: IN-PERSON LEADS WITH HYBRID BY ITS SIDE

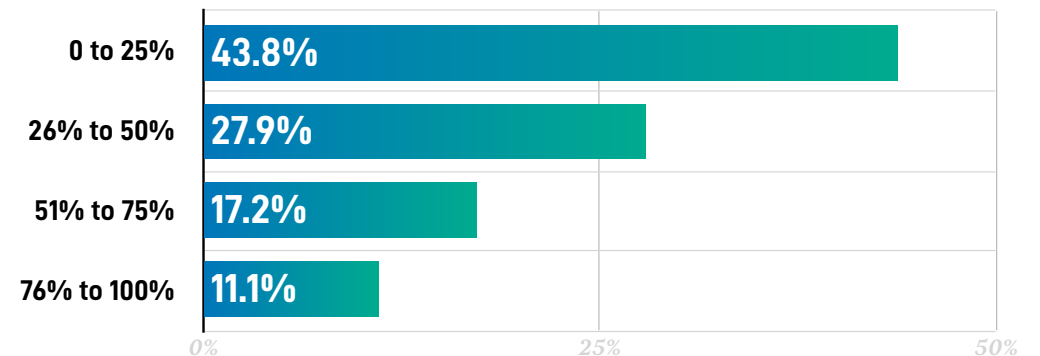
This does not mean, however, that the majority of events will be in person only. **Just 29.1 percent of survey respondents said that the vast majority of their events (75 to 100 percent) would be exclusively in person.** In fact, just over half of respondents (51.8 percent) said that less than half of their events would be fully in person.

**This means that most event professionals are adding hybrid formats into their event mix, even if the proportions vary from planner to planner.** For 43.8 percent of survey respondents, hybrid events represent less than a quarter of their overall event portfolio, but for 27.9 percent, hybrid formats will take up 26 to 50 percent of their event mix. It's possible that some are reserving the flexibility of hybrid formats for their biggest, most important events — the ones they want to make accessible to the widest possible audience with an added "wow" factor.

Roughly what percentage of your events are likely to be fully in-person in 2022?



Roughly what percentage of your events are likely to be hybrid in 2022?

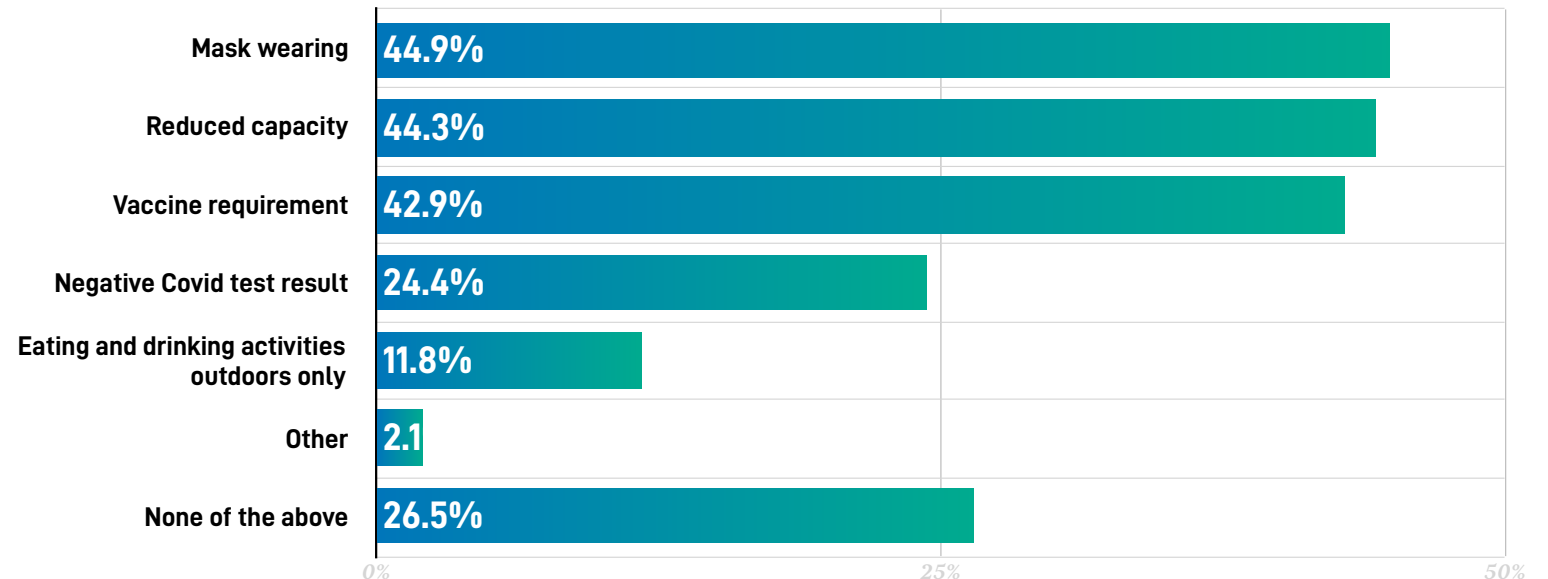


## 2.

## COVID SAFETY IS STILL A CONCERN

While opinions differ on what it means to live in a “post-pandemic” era, our survey results reveal that the majority of event professionals are still incorporating some Covid safety measures. When asked to select from a list of possible Covid precautions, **only 26.5 percent chose “None of the above”**. While this number reflects more than one in four event planners, it is still very much a minority position.

If you are hosting events with an in-person component, are you implementing any of the following Covid safety measures? (Select all that apply)



## 2. COVID SAFETY IS STILL A CONCERN

Perhaps most importantly, **44 percent are still hosting on-site events at reduced capacities**. Add to this the reality that some attendees are still reluctant to return to in-person events, and it may be some time before we see a full recovery of pre-pandemic attendance numbers — Europe's MWC 2022 was hailed as a major success for attracting 55 percent of its pre-pandemic attendee numbers, just as North America's NAB 2022 was celebrated for drawing 57 percent of its 2019 attendance level.

While it may be premature to make long-term forecasts, these high-profile examples do raise the question: Is 60 percent of 2019 attendance levels the new upper limit? How long will it take to get back to 100 percent? Will they ever come back in full swing, or have attendees begun to re-assess which events are worth experiencing in person?

In this context, **digital channels of engagement will be especially important as event organizers work to maintain and expand the reach of both newer and more established events**. Additionally, digital options keep events accessible to those who have Covid-specific health concerns about the safety of attending in person — which ultimately means your event can still tap into that “reluctant” crowd.

Among the small minority of survey respondents who chose “Other” for this question, the most frequent comment was that their Covid safety measures vary depending on the requirements of the destination or the venue — a reminder that in many cases, the event planner does not have decision-making power over what safety measures are enforced.

### 3.

## SIMULTANEOUS HYBRID EVENTS ARE THE NORM

While there has been a lot of buzz in the industry about “asynchronous” hybrid events that host their virtual and in-person components at separate times, **almost three-quarters of respondents said that both types of audiences would join their hybrid events simultaneously.**

So-called asynchronous hybrid events still represented a sizable share, with slightly less than one in four respondents (23.8 percent) saying that the two experiences would happen at separate times. A further 1.8 percent chose “Other” — with most explaining that their hybrid event line up included both simultaneous and staggered experiences.

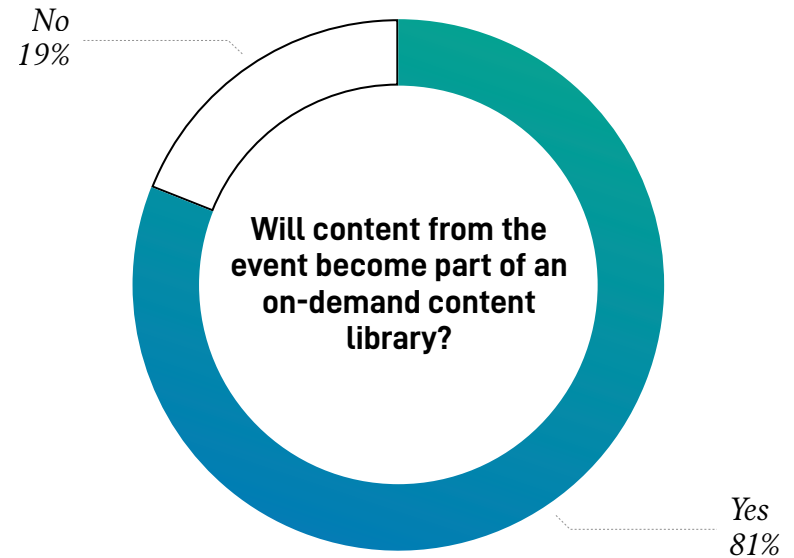
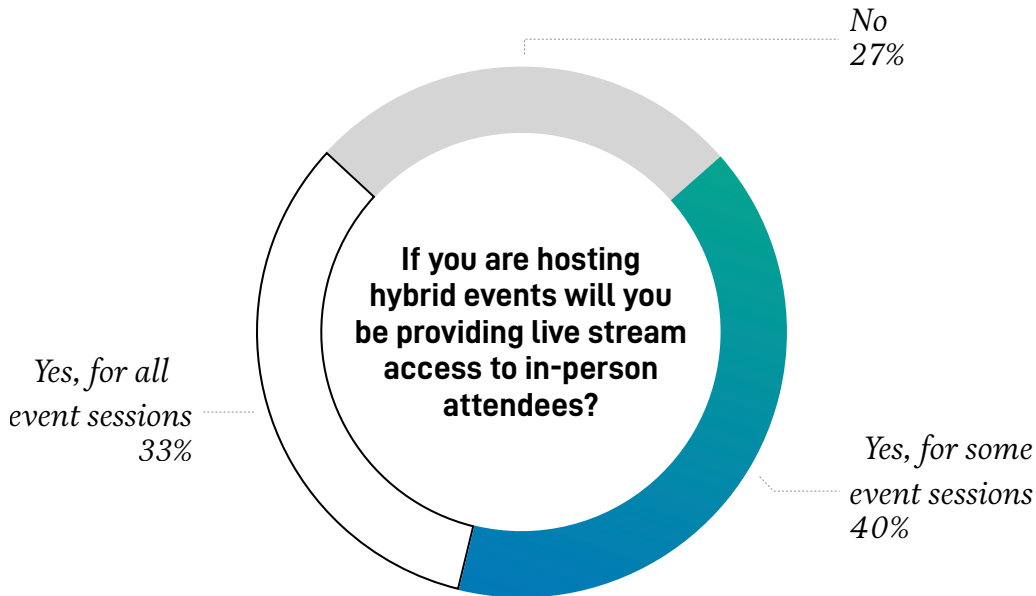


# 4.

## CROSS-POLLINATION IS ON THE RISE WITH LIVE STREAMS AND ON-DEMAND

If there's one thing that our survey proves, it's that digital engagement is not just for virtual attendees. A whopping **73.4 percent** of respondents said that some or all of their hybrid event sessions would be **available as live streams for their in-person attendees.**

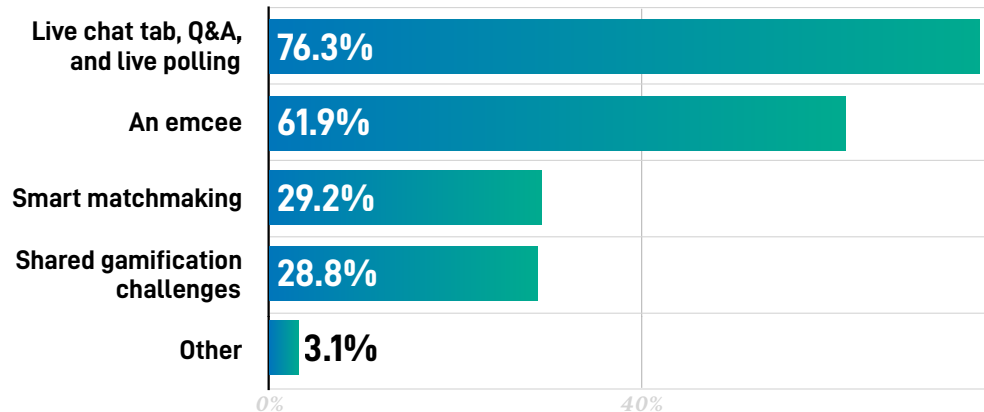
Additionally, **an overwhelming majority of respondents (81 percent) said that event content would become part of an on-demand content library.** An increasing number of event organizers recognize the value of providing ongoing access to event content — both for those who originally joined in person and those who participated remotely from the beginning.



## 5.

## CORE VIRTUAL TOOLS ARE TOP CHOICE FOR SHARED EXPERIENCES

How do you plan on bringing these two audiences together? (Select all that apply)



Hybrid events can take many different forms. To get a better sense of how event organizers are approaching the idea of a “hybrid” experience, we asked how they were planning to bring remote and in-person audiences together. With a range of features to choose from, we wanted to know how they were planning to offer attendees flexibility in terms of participating and interacting with one another.

The top answer was “Shared live chat tab, Q&A, and live polling” with 76.3 percent of respondents choosing this option. While these may be the most central engagement tools for virtual live streaming, it’s easy to see how they can add value for in-person attendees.

The next-most-popular answer was “An emcee to gather questions and comments from both audiences” at 61.9 percent — yet more evidence that it’s not just a question of the tech you’re using, but the way you’re using it to create opportunities for human-to-human interactions.

Among those who chose “Other” (3.1 percent) to the question on tools for shared experiences, a common refrain was that the virtual and in-person experiences were designed to be fully separate.



# BENEFITS

## 8 WAYS A HYBRID APPROACH CAN ENHANCE EVENTS IN 2022

## 1. EXTEND YOUR REACH

Physical capacity limitations are always a factor when considering a venue for an event. Even in situations where Covid-related restrictions have been pulled back, a venue can only accommodate so many people on-site at a time.

It goes without saying that including virtual elements in your events can help you overcome these limitations. **Done well, a great many more remote attendees can join and enjoy a comparable experience.** This means more connections, more possibilities for relationship building, and a significantly enhanced reach.

## 2. IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY

Over and above just bare numbers, hybrid events can align with the goals that many enterprise-level clients have begun to emphasize: accessibility and wellness.

The option to attend an event remotely opens up avenues to participation for attendees who may not have access to an adequate travel budget. It also makes attendance possible for people with health conditions that may inhibit their ability to travel or enjoy a three-day stay at a conference venue. **Remote attendance makes it possible for prospective attendees across a spectrum of different abilities to join in** and participate in the exchange of ideas that makes many events meaningful.

### 3. ALLOW PARTICIPANTS TO CHOOSE HOW (AND WHEN) THEY CONNECT

Blended events also offer the option for both in-person and remote attendees to engage with event content from wherever they happen to be. With on-demand access provided later, they can even participate at their own schedules. An in-person attendee might choose to take a much-needed wellness break, knowing that they can stream an important session at a later date — or tune in live from the privacy of their hotel room. A remote attendee might be pleased to discover that they can engage with two sessions that were originally held concurrently, with one (or both) watched later through an on-demand library.

In some cases, it's not even clear where to draw the line between hybrid formats and in-person events with digital add-ons. At hub-and-spoke events, for example, attendees at one of the satellite destinations might want to tune into a live streamed session from a speaker presenting at another location. From the attendee's perspective, it doesn't matter if the event is called "hybrid" or not; what matters is that they have access to the content they want to consume.

The benefit experienced by all attendees, regardless of whether they are in person or remote, is significant. In all cases, **it allows all attendees to take in what the event has to offer on their own terms.** Even for event organizers who don't want to stake a flag in "hybrid" event territory, it makes sense to record in-person sessions whenever the event's budget allows. Content can later be added to a video-on-demand library, or shared with remote attendees via a "simulive" experience — combining the convenience of pre-recorded content with the excitement of live interaction between participants in the chat.

### 4. START THE EXPERIENCE BEFORE THE EVENT EVEN BEGINS

Event tech can be an excellent asset for attendees even before the event kicks off. Giving registered attendees the ability to browse descriptions of sessions or meet-and-greets a week or more before **allows them to not only plan their experience, but to look forward to it.** Who wouldn't appreciate being able to arrange some of their in-person business meetings in advance? **Pre-event icebreakers also mean that attendees can expect some familiar faces at the event itself** — and with many experiencing heightened social anxiety in the post-lockdown era, it's hard to overstate the value of this reassurance. The buzz of anticipation, combined with the possibility of front-loading networking opportunities, enhances both remote and in-person experiences in a way that will propel engagement throughout the timeline of the event.

## 5. OPEN THE DOOR TO NETWORKING ACROSS AUDIENCE TYPES

To enhance the potential for meaningful and resilient connections to develop, consider providing both in-person and remote attendees with access to your event platform's key networking tools. These include features like a social wall, where registered attendees can like and comment on one another's photos and social media posts, or a dedicated and secure discussion board where attendees can share links and insights. These tools — combined with the possibility to schedule secure video chats between attendees — **harness the networking potential of many social media channels without the distracting or inappropriate elements that often come with an unfiltered public platform.**

## 6. USE GAMIFICATION TO BOOST NETWORKING

With event technology, there's also the potential to assign points for participation in networking activities as part of a larger gamification strategy. **Event games can build excitement and break the ice around networking,** and they can be a great tool for encouraging exchanges between different attendee groups in both virtual and in-person environments. For instance, Webex Events (formerly Socio), allows attendees to compete for the most connections formed over the span of an event, in this way engaging both in-person and remote audiences in a collective contest.

## 7. DRIVE ATTENDANCE TO FUTURE IN-PERSON EVENTS

As many firms commit to reducing their carbon footprint, it seems likely that **they will become more selective when choosing which events to send delegates to**. Research gathered over the past year — like the Explori Global Recovery Insights 2021 report published in partnership with UFI and SISO — suggests that many sponsors, exhibitors, and exhibition visitors may want to attend lesser-known events remotely before deciding whether in-person participation is worth the investment.

Offering the possibility of remote attendance to this category of potential participants makes it possible for them to engage with the event in a lower-stakes way. Even if they're investing less in their participation, you want them to feel like they're walking away with real value. **A truly impressive virtual experience will give them the confidence to invest in on-site participation next time.**

## 8. BEGIN BUILDING A YEAR-ROUND COMMUNITY

Some of the benefits that come with hybrid approaches may not materialize immediately.

**Hybrid formats are ideally suited to pave the way for purpose-built event communities, which often bring advantages that accumulate over time.** As a rising trend across industries and associations, the use of evergreen and on-demand content keeps purpose-built communities engaged year round. Remember: 81 percent of survey respondents said that they plan to include event sessions in an on-demand content library.

Because hybrid events require sessions to be produced for streaming, access to recordings is practically a given. Repurposing session content as evergreen assets is the natural next step.

The [AmSpa](#) event in Las Vegas, for example, might have initially introduced live streaming as a response to the pressures of Covid-safety needs and resulting capacity limits, but **the benefits extended well beyond the live event.**

After the event had wrapped, AmSpa was able to re-deploy the recordings as on-demand content — **with the added bonus of allowing attendees to earn any CE credits associated with these sessions at their own pace.**

# TIPS

## TIPS FOR MASTERING EVENT DESIGN IN 2022

Event technology opens new channels of communication between clients, attendees, and sponsors. To produce the best possible impact, event professionals need to plan for all phases of the event and to troubleshoot potential tech issues before rolling out new tools for event attendees. Careful attention in the planning stages will ensure a seamless and impressive experience that will enhance engagement before, during, and after the event.

# PREP THE EVENT

## COMMUNICATE A COMPLETE COVID SAFETY PLAN BEFORE THE EVENT

As we enter a new stage of the pandemic with its own ups and downs, most in-person attendees still want to know that their health and well-being are top-of-mind for event organizers.

Include information about what precautions will be in place in pre-registration promotion communications, using both social media and email drip campaigns. This should include clear information about your event's Covid safety commitments. For example, you can **build confidence by letting potential in-person attendees know that your event's Covid safety plan has been vetted by healthcare professionals.**

[AmSpa's](#) Medical Spa Show 2021, held in Las Vegas, made effective use of this strategy. Because their attendees were primarily healthcare providers and therefore among the first to be vaccinated, AmSpa's event was one of the pandemic's first in-person trade shows — and that meant the pressure was on to set the bar for health and safety in a Covid-19 context. For this reason, **AmSpa hired three epidemiologists to develop a comprehensive plan** that significantly minimized risk for attendees and staff at the event.

The AmSpa team also partnered closely with Wynn Las Vegas, their venue, to implement the plan. It's a good idea to coordinate with your chosen venue while developing your Covid safety plan — or use compliance with Covid safety measures as part of your venue selection criteria from the outset. **Be sure you can communicate to attendees how on-site hygiene measures and catering plans will meet industry best practices.**

**This will help your attendees know what to expect**, which can in turn encourage adherence once they're on-site. It also helps everyone avoid misunderstandings or confusion about the Covid safety plan as in-person attendees arrive at the venue. As a final bonus, it can **build confidence with remote attendees who might be considering in-person attendance at a later date.**

## ENCOURAGE ADVANCE ACCESS TO THE EVENT PLATFORM

Providing advance access to your event platform means that everyone is on the same page as they familiarize themselves with the interface, regardless of whether they'll be participating remotely or in person.

Even if your event will be spacing the in-person and virtual experiences out across separate times, it helps to use the same event tech provider to facilitate both experiences. That way the two audiences will have opportunities to connect both before and after their live event experiences.

For simultaneous hybrid events, early access to a shared platform can smooth channels of connection between both sets of attendees when the real electricity of an event — ideas, excitement, and collaboration — start happening.

There are a few ways to encourage early uptake among attendees. One is to offer access to exclusive networking activities and content prior to the event itself. Strategies to drive early engagement are going to be specific to your event, but could **include offering a CE-accredited webinar prior to the event that allows attendees a chance to familiarize themselves with streaming, chatting, and Q&A functions within the app.**

While remote attendees will likely be ready to experiment with these tools on the day of the live broadcast, in-person attendees are far more likely to participate in these channels if they've had a chance to play around with them during a pre-event webinar.

Depending on the event's profile and goal, it may be effective to launch a gamified networking experience prior to the event.



# DELIVER AN EXTRAORDINARY BLENDED EVENT EXPERIENCE

Alongside traditional site-specific event planning, hybrid approaches require a whole new way of thinking. Let's take you through them.

## MAKE SURE YOUR APP, WIFI, AND NETWORK CAPABILITIES WILL HOLD UP

When considering venue options for your hybrid event, make sure you have your specs in order. To be able to know what WiFi capabilities you require, you'll need to know what questions to ask your client and your venue's IT team.

Before you communicate your IT needs, you'll need to know:

- ✔ How many on-site attendees you anticipate
- ✔ Minimum bandwidth requirements for your mobile event app
- ✔ How many concurrent live-streamed sessions will be running/made available to in-person attendees
- ✔ Whether or not on-site attendees are likely to stream event content
- ✔ API bandwidth needs for data transfer if more than one event tech tool is used
- ✔ IT needs for secure registration data to power automated check-ins



## TEST-RUN YOUR TECH BEFORE THE EVENT AND DEVELOP A SUPPORT PLAN

Whenever you're using event tech to facilitate attendee experiences and enhance sponsor brand awareness, it's absolutely critical that the experience is frictionless for the end user.

When partnering with an event tech platform and/or AV production teams, make sure that they have experience with hybrid event production. **Try to do at least one on-site test run before the event to iron out the glitches, and make sure that your buffering and video quality are up to speed both on and off-site.**

Make sure your event tech company provides you with on-site support for troubleshooting the day of.

Even when an app is working perfectly, there will be attendees with questions about how to navigate it most effectively. Work with your event tech partner to make sure you have **access to app-specific support as well as IT and AV production troubleshooters on-site.**

For instance, the Webex Events (formerly Socio) professional services team worked closely with the AmSpa team throughout the planning process for the Medical Spa Show in 2021. Just as importantly, they added an extra level of support by making sure the Webex Events project manager was on-site during the live event. This meant that the AmSpa team could refer anyone with questions about the app directly to a Webex representative, further streamlining the attendee experience.

## GET CREATIVE ABOUT ON-SITE VENUES

If you find a location with the perfect atmosphere, it may still be worth choosing even if it doesn't already come equipped with adequate WiFi. Consider hiring a third-party provider to set up wireless access points on-site. Offering in-person attendees a unique and buzz-worthy experience — both digitally and IRL — will have excellent knock-off effects like increased social media engagement and the likelihood of fuelling FOMO for your next event.

Hybrid events provide the ultimate flexibility in terms of venue size and the layout of your floorspace — **in-person attendees can even be broken up into smaller groups while still remaining connected through your event tech.**

As a prime example of innovative thinking, the UK's [MAD//Fest](#) event has long been known for its bold branding and outside-the-box venue choices. (It is, in fact, an event for marketing professionals, a subset of attendees with particularly high expectations when it comes to creative branding.)

For their first event in 2018, MAD//Fest built disruption and creativity right into their choice of venue by transforming the Truman Brewery in London into a site that leveraged its space to

encourage spontaneous connections between attendees. The organizers deliberately set out to reimagine the event from the point of view of the attendee in order to create a new social



experience — one built around enjoyment and human relationships as a fundamental aspect of doing business.

**The event space centered around an indoor garden, and reimagined vendor booths as pub tables.** Mini-lounges scattered throughout the floorplan (nearly twice the size of a football field) created the perfect space for friends both old and new to enjoy locally sourced food and beverages, and foosball tables were set out to further enhance connection through a spirit of friendly competition.

Partnering with Webex Events (formerly Socio) to create an event-branded app intentionally geared towards interactive socialization added even more value to the attendee experience, with features like the app's social wall, an event game, a festival map, and interactive agenda bringing people together digitally and in-person at the same time.

Choosing a venue that isn't a typical conference room can **inject a spirit of innovative play that will enhance the attendee experience and the event organizer's brand image** — not to mention the company profile of sponsors and exhibitors.

Unique venues and settings give your in-person audience an unforgettable experience. At the same time, they drive engagement from remote participants who may welcome a visual break from the monotony of talking heads as they dial into a live stream — and who may consider in-person attendance next time.



## LEAVE A LASTING IMPRESSION ON IN-PERSON AND REMOTE ATTENDEES WITH A STRONG VISUAL IDENTITY

Any successful event is marked by the memorable experiences it creates for its attendees. Event technologies open up a greatly expanded toolbox for curating touchpoints of connection with enduring returns for attendees and stakeholders alike.

This is where a fully customizable platform can really help to set an event apart. **Creating a strong visual identity that tracks through all print, digital, and social media branding is key to making your attendees feel like part of a cohesive experience.** If you establish this consistently, the visual identity of the event can be extended into the presentation of on-demand content, feeding into a long-term brand presence that will resonate with both on-site and remote attendees.

A platform with design customizations allows consistent event branding to **blend in-person and remote experiences into a distinctive event memory.**

At MAD//Fest, a distinctive color palette (yellow//pink) creates a strong visual identity for the event. This branding is consistent across the event's print and digital graphic design, including the displays projected using large on-site LED screens. As a result, the marketing professionals who attended—whether in person or remotely—will always identify their unique encounters at MAD//Fest with a collective experience of its brand activations.

Event tech that can accommodate a specific and recognizable brand is strategically critical for creating a community of shared experience between remote and in-person attendees.



# EXPERIMENT WITH NEW AGENDA FORMATS TO KEEP CONTENT FRESH

The notoriously low attention spans of online audiences have compelled event professionals to rethink the way they approach the relationship between presenters and attendees. The results of these experiments have generally been positive, a possible sign that **traditional event formats might also benefit from a little bit of disruption.**

The usual linear approach — a presentation that is followed by a Q&A period — is one that is ripe for reinvention, as the case of MAD//Fest 2020 shows.

When co-founders Dan Brain and Ian Houghton concluded that their 2020 event would need to be entirely virtual, they knew that they would need to create a digital experience that was just as stand-out as their previous in-person gatherings. While conventional wisdom dictates that virtual events need to be short, Brain and Houghton actually extended the length of their event — but broke it up into ultra-short micro segments.

The screenshot displays the interface for 'The 99 Club Digital Festival' (Jun 15 - 19, 2020). On the left is a navigation menu with icons for Home, Connections, and Messages. The main menu lists various event features: Live Stream, Agenda, Speakers, Sponsors, Attendees, Live Polls, Pub Message Board, Networker Challenge, Networker League, and Help Refugees Donate. The right side shows a 'Pub Message Board' post by Luke Wilcox, Content Director at MAD//Fest, featuring a hand-drawn infographic titled 'INNOVATION and GROWTH'. The infographic includes terms like 'ORIGINAL SIN', 'DEMOGRAPHIC SEGMENTATION', 'INNOVATION', 'GROWTH', 'FEAR INTO YOUR DECISIONS', and 'EXPERIMENTATION TO UNLOCK GROWTH'. Below the post is a comment from Lauren Spearman, Head of Social & Advocacy at MADE.COM, saying 'What a tasty surprise, thanks MAD//fest! It didn't last long at all 😊😊😊'. The interface is powered by SOCIO.

Thanks to careful planning and a partnership with Webex Events (formerly Socio) that enabled tight transitions, **they created a 5-day event with 700 speakers who each spoke for 99 seconds.** The rapid-fire format was technically complex, but the aptly named “99 Club Virtual Event” was so successful that the organizers opted to continue using digital channels for their next two events, MAD//Anywhere 2020 and 2021 — **with the latter hybrid event winning a UK Conference Award for Best New Event.**

To match your event goals with your team's technical capabilities, consider hosting smaller virtual events in the lead up to your big show. This can be an opportunity to test out new formats and evaluate their impact on audiences.

Innovative strategies often require careful planning, seamless live-stream functionality, and fully integrated engagement tools. **Experimentation, rapid content shifts, and interactive breaks may be essential to stay competitive in the new event landscape.**

It's equally important, however, not to overcrowd the schedule. It's not just the content that should be fresh, but also your staff — and your attendees. Both groups need some downtime to refresh and be ready to give their best. Breaks between sessions also give both in-person and remote attendees a chance to network and process content before returning, reinvigorated, for the next opportunity.

## EXTEND SPONSORS' OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT

A hybrid event strategy can offer sponsors several additional channels to connect with attendees and raise brand awareness over and above adding logos to event materials or sponsoring specific sessions.

**Dedicated video breakout rooms can broaden your sponsors' reach by facilitating in-depth connections with remote attendees.** And just as strategically-placed live display screens can reach a wider on-site audience, the most high-traffic pages on your event platform can be prime digital real estate for banner ads.

This can be further enhanced by offering sponsors the opportunity to present interstitial sizzle reels or branded overlays during live-stream sessions.

Perhaps the most compelling value-add that a carefully composed hybrid platform offers sponsors is the possibility of granular data capture that tracks the individual preferences of both in-person and remote attendees. **The rich data gathered by tracking attendee engagement can help sponsors target future outreach to where it will matter most.**



## LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY FOR A TRULY BLENDED EXPERIENCE

Making sure that remote participants enjoy comparable networking opportunities in hybrid environments has proven a tough nut to crack, emerging as one of the most complicated experience-design problems for event professionals.

The answer may lie in event tech platforms that have been designed with a mind to accessibility. When done well, digitally-powered events can provide tools that create a truly blended experience — in turn harnessing all the energy that a broader and more inclusive reach can present.

### ➔ SELFIE BOOTHS

Event tech can help to spark interpersonal connections by offering attendees a photo booth experience, allowing them to share selfies taken using their phone or webcam. Through the social wall on the event platform and live display screens on-site, new selfies can work to bring the personal presence of in-person and remote attendees together. **This side-by-side presence can promote a sense of collective belonging at the event.**

Even as a fully in-person event, the *AmSpa Medical Spa Show* in 2021 benefited from a large live display wall featuring selfies of participants behind the check-in desk. This design choice helped to build energy and excitement around the prospect of meeting new contacts.

### ➔ ATTENDEE PROFILES AND TOUCHLESS NETWORKING

If an event's platform is set up to facilitate digital networking with a mind to inclusivity, it can smooth the path for all categories of attendees to fully enjoy connecting with each other. For example, allowing attendees to create event-specific profiles allows both in-person and remote attendees to explore potential contacts; prompting attendees to fill in more details can be as simple as adding icebreaker questions to the profile template.

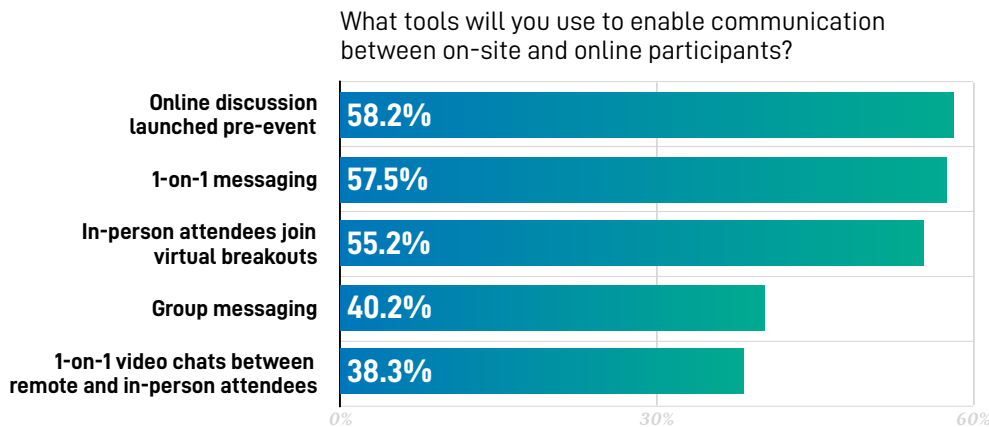
**This kind of digital business card has advantages for both categories of attendees.** Remote attendees can browse profiles before sending personal messages or requesting virtual meetings. In-person attendees can easily share contact information and other key professional information, even using touchless networking tools like Webex's "Shake to Connect" — whereby attendees can shake their phones to exchange profile information. Not only does this create an enhanced level of Covid safety, it also helps attendees to keep their in-person and remote connections in one handy location.



## ➔ VIDEO CALLS AND INTERACTIVE BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Event tech platforms can also facilitate one-on-one networking across categories of attendees. Some platforms enable attendees to schedule video calls with one another, just as some offer interactive breakout sessions for two-way video chats among groups of attendees. Both of these options offer an alternative form of “face-to-face” communication.

What is perhaps most exciting is that **many event organizers are now experimenting with giving both in-person and remote attendees access to these video chat tools.** In our survey, 55.2 percent of respondents said that they enabled both on-site and remote participants in their interactive breakout sessions. A further 38.3 percent said that their event tech enabled one-on-one video chats between remote and in-person attendees.



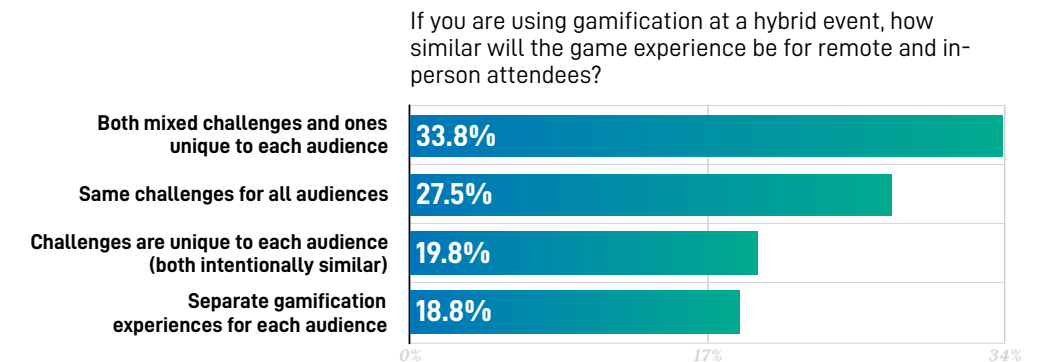
## ➔ GAMIFICATION

The potential for new gamification strategies is only as limited as your imagination.

For example, **offering extra gamification points to attendees who make connections across in-person and remote channels may be a way to encourage further cross-channel engagement.**

Additionally, offering in-person tickets to the next event as a prize is one way to drive gamification participation while creating buzz around the next event, even as your attendees are still enjoying what this one has to offer.

To get a sense of how event planners are approaching gamification in a hybrid context, we asked them how much overlap there was between their in-person and remote gamification challenges. **Only 18.8 percent said that the experiences would be completely different for the two groups, once again showing that many event planners are experimenting with ways to create blended attendee journeys across audiences.**



## USE EVENT TECH FOR AGENDA BUILDING AND WAYFINDING

A digitally-powered event experience provides enhanced flexibility to attendees, and allows them to create their own pathway through event content — whether by helping them to navigate the in-person venue, or to select their sessions in advance.

Providing advance access to the event agenda allows both in-person and remote attendees to **ensure they register for the sessions with the most relevance to them**. Giving participants the option to pre-select sessions also makes it possible to send push-notifications that provide more context and create buzz in advance of targeted sessions.

Live streaming event content may involve a higher upfront investment, but it also means the creation of digital assets that will promote continuity for

engaged attendees between events.. **For remote attendees, embedding links to live-stream players directly into their personal agendas can streamline access to their sessions.**

In-person attendees will also benefit from wayfinding tools on their mobile apps. Would some of your attendees like to preview what's happening across the live venue? **Consider an interactive map that will show what's happening in any given room by linking to the relevant session details right inside the corresponding map location.** This handy tool for in-person attendees can't help but promote their increased engagement with the event's digital platform, and hopefully introduce them to all it has to offer.

# BUILD POST-EVENT ENGAGEMENT

Hybrid events may involve a higher upfront investment, but they also mean the creation of digital assets that will promote continuity for engaged attendees between events. It is this continuous community that will grow engagement incrementally (or, if you're lucky, exponentially) — and providing that community with a platform to grow from will be the ultimate value-add for your event brand and its sponsors.

## CREATE MEANINGFUL PATHWAYS FOR ATTENDEES TO ENGAGE WITH POST-EVENT CONTENT

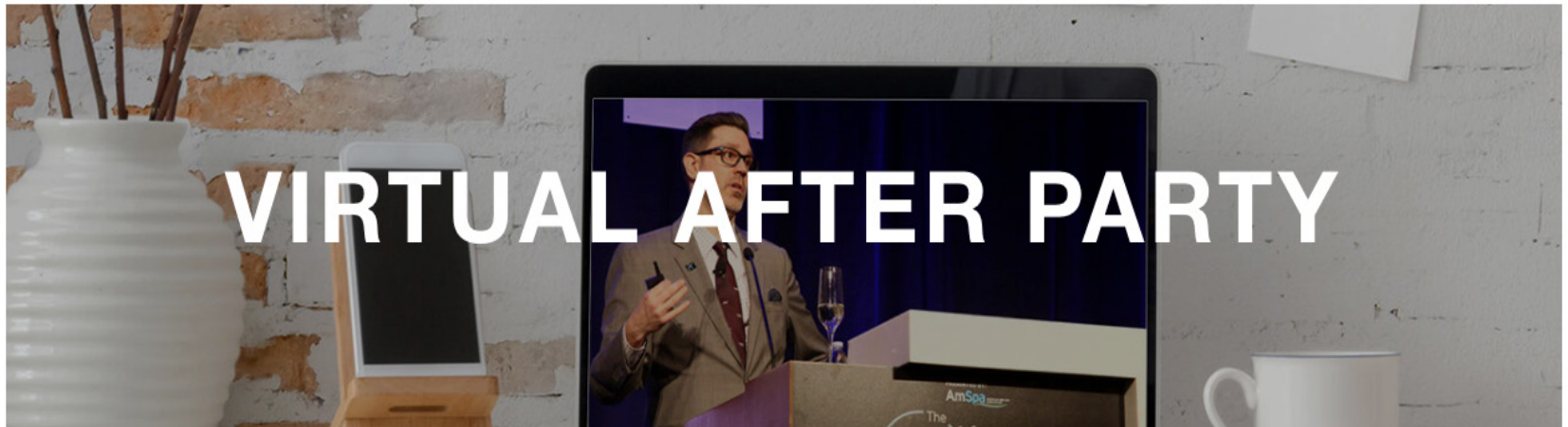
In a competitive information economy, thinking through how to produce assets with a mind to their online longevity can be an important part of your engagement strategy. Many event tech platforms offer ways to pave the way for year-round engagement and expanded reach after the event itself has wrapped.

Working with WebEx and their venue's production team, AmSpa was able to convert their live-streamed content into the AmSpa Virtual After Party, which also offered 28 additional pieces of content. Attendees — and people who did not attend, but purchased access after the event — were eligible to receive continuing education credits if they viewed the content hosted via the Virtual After Party.

It's also essential to ensure that any content produced during the event adheres to a high quality that is representative of the client/organizer's brand identity and reflects well on any associated sponsors. In turn, meeting this standard often means that content is sufficiently polished to be converted into long-term, evergreen assets.

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*Medical Spa Show 2021 Virtual After Party has been approved for up to 40 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™. [View full CME information here.](#)*

## CREATE CURATED NETWORKS THAT CARRY ATTENDEE CONNECTIONS THROUGH TO THE NEXT EVENT

Digital channels make it possible to collect data on attendee preferences, and the more engaged they are, the more you will understand their needs and preferences. With this in mind, the ability to evolve event experiences into year-round communities is worth considering.

The data collected from blended events can enable today's platforms to deliver powerful smart matchmaking, helping to forge connections across communities of interest rather than through simple happenstance

meetings. Community members can be matched based on their participation in similar sessions, which is a strong indicator for shared topics of interest, even if they haven't yet connected before.

Creating evergreen content and maintaining a digital hub can also offer an immense value-add to a sponsor who wants to make sure that they are connecting with potential clients that are most interested in their services.

# CONCLUSION

Attendee and exhibitor expectations have shifted, and not just because the last two years gave them new opportunities to experience events remotely. Whether it's using Uber to order a ride or Google Maps to find a new cafe, few parts of our lives remain untouched by hybrid technologies.

In this new era, effective event design means delivering the digital enhancements that attendees, clients, and sponsors have come to appreciate, solving problems that have limited both in-person and virtual experiences by creating a bridge between them. Choosing which digital tools to incorporate into an event platform starts with an understanding of the purpose of the event, the spectrum of needs that attendees may present, and the expectations of the sponsors.

To stand out in a competitive event market and reach the widest possible audience, a key differentiator can be professional AV, effective engagement and networking tools, and top-notch streaming capabilities. Further, for any event with simultaneous in-person and virtual components, these factors can be absolutely critical for ensuring that remote attendees experience the same level of quality and uninterrupted connectivity — opening up the potential for cross-channel engagement, which ultimately benefits all parties.

If you plant the seed for a compelling presence both on and offline, taking care to continually nurture both channels, the transition to a year-round

event community should develop organically. It's all about creating space for continued opportunities to connect and cultivate relationships long after the event itself has concluded.

When your event creates truly engaging experiences across all channels, both remote and in-person audiences will find a point of connection and feel welcomed into your event brand. While their experiences might not be exactly the same, there will be multiple threads of continuity, with just as much value delivered to both groups. As event professionals, our hope is that these connections will create a sense of common purpose that will build intention, innovation, and community — ultimately drawing longevity from a sense of common purpose.

As a case in point, MAD//Fest's organizers are now extending their online presence to include a year-round event community hosted on the Webex Events (formerly Socio) platform.

How did they get there? MAD//Fest has produced events across the full spectrum of formats: in-person, hybrid, and fully virtual. [Read the full story](#) to learn how MAD//Fest is delivering immersive events that drive ROI for their attendees and sponsors.

The future of events encompasses all the modes of engagement that attendees and other stakeholders have come to expect, and that means providing a mix of virtual, in-person, and hybrid event experiences. After all, events are fundamentally about connecting people. The more opportunities for connection that an event provides, the better its chances of long-term success.



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