Virtual Events: A passing phase or the new normal?

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TechPros.

* All views expressed by our contributors represent personal opinions and not necessarily those of their employers.

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Up next: Introduction – Virtual Events: A passing phase or the new normal?

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Introduction

The economic impact of the global pandemic has transformed many sectors, but few more than the global events industry.

2020 has seen the cancellation or postponement of hundreds of events, from small breakfasts to huge exhibitions with attendees from all around the world. In a world where face to face meetings are increasingly rare, organisers are instead launching a new generation of virtual events.

Early adopters of virtual events have experienced higher attendance and engagement in some cases, along with lower event costs and quicker launch times. However, the virtual event space isn't without challenges. How can organisations create high quality content that will stand out in a crowded marketplace? What format of virtual event offers the best return?

What of the real-world event? Do live events have a future in the post-pandemic world and what does that future look like? How can virtual events best be deployed for internal audiences, customers and partners?

This ebook considers the impact of Covid-19 on the live events industry, and the potential of virtual events. We interviewed 20+ marketing leaders from the technology and IT services sectors to understand their experiences of hosting and attending virtual events.

Their insights have provided us with guidance on the challenges and opportunities of virtual events, and how marketing leaders can deliver events that drive engagement and sales, while offering a solid return on investment.

Up next: Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

It is hard to overstate the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in industries that relied upon big, in-person events to market to customers.

For years, industry events have been the standard way for businesses to see and interact with each other. The majority of business leaders report that real world events are critical to their success. It is estimated that the events industry brought $1 trillion to the global economy in 2017, offering an opportunity for executives to discover many potential solutions in a short time, as well as the chance to network and meet potential business partners in person.

While many event organisers have cancelled or postponed events in 2020, others have re-imagined their events in a digital or virtual format, incorporating webinars, video conferencing, live streamed keynotes and even digital delegate packs.

Companies such as Google and Adobe have moved entire conferences online, and it is likely that others will follow in their footsteps. Some observers believe that we may never see a return to the number and scale of physical events in the future.

The pandemic forced entire companies to switch to remote working, with millions of employees now working from home. The result has been greater willingness to adopt video conferencing and virtual meetings. A daily Zoom call is now a routine experience for many executives who would previously have shied away from appearing 'on camera'.

This has worked to the advantage of event organisers who report that audiences are more willing to engage with virtual events, particularly smaller events that offer the chance to network with peers and learn skills that will help their job performance or personal development.

For such events to succeed, marketers must take an innovative approach to creating high-quality, engaging content. There is a huge glut of virtual content available to businesses in 2020, and it is vital for virtual event organisers to stand out with high-quality speakers, slick presentations, and effective use of technology to keep the audience engaged.

Most observers believe that real world events will come back, but potentially in a smaller format, with many more 'hybrid' events that combine physical and virtual elements. In the post-pandemic market, certainly, only the highest quality, most engaging events will survive.

Up next: Chapter 01 - The Impact of Covid on UK Businesses

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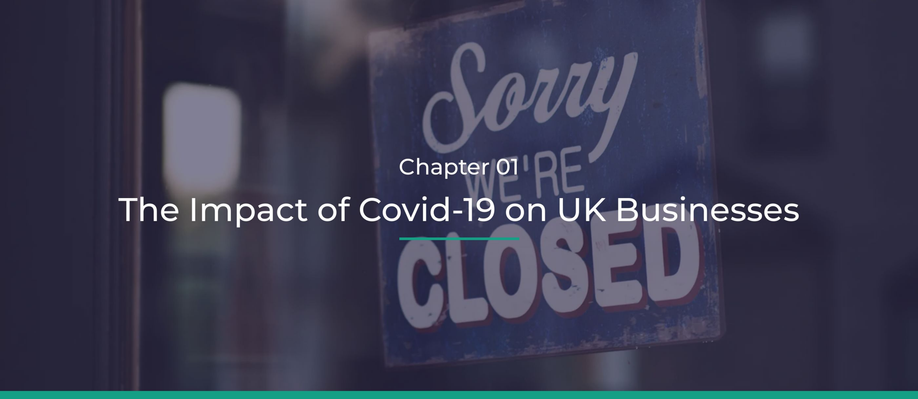

Chapter 01

The Impact of Covid-19 on UK Businesses

A huge proportion of employees in 2020 stopped going to the office each morning, instead working from their own home. According to data published by the Office for National Statistics some 4m UK employees are regularly working from home during the pandemic, with a further 4.7m working from home for some of the time.

What is striking about this situation is that many employees are now juggling childcare responsibilities with a home-based job. Employees without children may have other family commitments, or conversely may be isolated at home due to social distancing requirements.

While many organisations were already on a path to adopting more flexible working, the pace of change has been brutal, says Maria Jackson, director of marketing at Ingram Micro. "I think the broad-brush strokes of the new normal were already on the wall, in terms of working from home and flexible policies. What the pandemic has done, though, is push through years of transformation in a matter of weeks."

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Maria Jackson | Director of Marketing

In some cases, remote working has driven innovation and better relationships between colleagues, and customers. "The professional wall comes down when you're seeing someone in their front room, children running around, their partner in the background, making a cup of coffee," says Vaidyan. "What we found after a month or so of this was that we had quite a deep connection with customers and partners, because we're all in the same boat."

At Ingram Micro, the marketing team has formed a stronger camaraderie, agrees Jackson, with the marketing team working to bring new ideas to market. "If you look at the 2008 crisis, those creative, industry-changing phenomena that came out of it like Airbnb and Netflix. We haven't come up with that yet, but there is a lot of energy about what we can do that is different."

This rapid change has obvious implications for employee wellbeing, as on the one hand employees may feel stressed, overloaded, isolated or overworked, on the other hand liberated and less stressed as there is no commute.

Some employees working remotely found themselves working longer hours, struggling to disconnect from their workload. Others found it challenging to focus on their work while also handling increased family commitments and home schooling for children. Then there are worries about the broader economy, job losses and furlough arrangements.

"The biggest change for me has been seeing how everyone was impacted in different ways," says David Llewellyn, marketing director EMEA at AppsFlyer. "I don't think we're even at the start of understanding the impact on people's wellbeing."

Alongside the impact on people, companies are missing out on the benefits of office-based collaboration. At software giant SAP, the team is missing out on informal meetings and impromptu conversations, says Jacob Vaidyan, the company's head of strategic industries for Industry & Value Advisory, UK and Ireland. "It's when you just meet somebody and initiate a conversation and ideas get formed. You miss that sort of unplugged moment when people are working from home," he says.

Of course, for many organisations, the pandemic has impacted demand. At Absen, an LED display specialist, live events make up a significant part of our business, says Alex Couzins, head of brand and marketing, Europe. "Due to the cancellation of events and festivals, we have seen demand for our screens fall – and we don't see that getting back to normal until 2021 or until government restrictions are lifted and public confidence returns."

While business is undeniably tough for the live events industry, Couzins sees the pandemic as an opportunity to drive innovation. Many of Absen's customers have pivoted from big physical events to hybrid virtual events. "Many production companies are building virtual studios using our screens to create big digital backdrops to deliver presentations and performances that can be livestreamed to anywhere in the world," Couzins says. "It looks very professional and we're seeing some interesting applications of our products during this time."

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Jacob Vaidyan | Head of Strategic Industries for IVA, UK&I

Up next: Chapter 02: The Impact of Covid on UK Business Events

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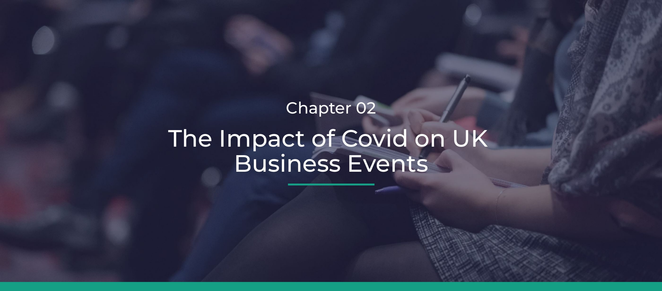

Chapter 02

The Impact of Covid on UK Business Events

The economic impact of the pandemic has been particularly felt in the events industry, with thousands of events postponed, cancelled or turned into online-only events. With coronavirus cases well over the 20 million mark, and global deaths now pushing toward 800,000, no one really knows how long this will last.

The mobile and app industry is particularly event-heavy, and 2020 kicked off with the cancellation of Mobile World Congress, the industry's biggest event. AppsFlyer had already taken the decision to withdraw, but it was only the first in a series of cancellations. Some event organisers were quicker to postpone or pivot, while others took a "wait and see" approach. "Some of the smaller event organisers were the ones who pivoted really quickly, while some of the more established businesses didn't have the same digital competency," says Llewellyn.

Innovate Tax's key product is tied to Oracle's ERP software, and so the software firm tends to attend Oracle events around the world to meet customers and drum up new business. When events move online, it presents companies like his with a challenge, says Carl Robinson, Head of Marketing at Innovate Tax. "At a physical event, people have the chance to visit a stand or happen across a keynote speech, yet those interaction touch points aren't as easy to achieve (or as effective) online," he says.

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Carl Robinson | Head Of Marketing

INNOVATE TAX

At telephony company 8x8, there are still a couple of physical events in the diary, but the company is taking a cautious approach to these investments, says Bee Hindocha, EMEA marketing communications director. "We need to be careful about how much we invest because in f2f events given the changing landscape; I'm not convinced we'll see the same level of engagement and footfall that we would have done pre-Covid anytime soon." she says.

Advantages of Virtual Events

Each year, around 2,000 customers attend a live event in Orlando hosted by networking company FS. After spending 10 months planning its 2020 event, the company had to cancel and turn its conference into a virtual event in less than two months.

It was a challenge, but one with encouraging results. Over 7,000 people engaged with the virtual event, far more than the company could have hoped to engage with face to face. "It's easier for people to attend events if there are no boundaries around time zones and geography," says Ed English, the company's vice-president of global field marketing.

Along with larger potential audiences, virtual events can also provide the opportunity to share content in different formats, to tailored audiences. As LED specialists Absen points out, virtual events can be fitted with high-quality LED screens and incorporate other technologies such as augmented and mixed reality, to create a more engaging experience for viewers. This can increase conversion rates, compared to physical events.

"We are also looking at doing smaller, more tailored events where we combine physical product demonstrations and 360-degree virtual tours of our showroom, but livestream these to our customers and tailor the content accordingly," says Couzins. "Physical events are not dead, we just need to deliver them in a way that is safe to do so in the times that we find ourselves in."

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Alex Couzins | Head of Brand and Marketing, Europe

Absen

The immediate upside of a virtual event is that they are comparatively quick and cost-effective to create. This means companies can potentially host more events, and experiment with different event formats very easily. This year GE Digital has moved to virtual events and has run more than twenty webinars so far, comments Eliza Ward, senior director, global revenue marketing at GE Digital. To get these events up and running quickly, the company has partnered with third parties. "We pivoted very quickly, and we've done that with the help of trade publications and industry platforms, because they have an audience already," Ward says. "It's less of a lift on the marketing side when a third-party network handles the logistics, promotion and audience acquisition for us."

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Eliza Ward | Senior Director - Global Revenue Marketing

GE Digital

Moreover, 60 percent of a typical 'live' event budget will be spent on venue, food and entertainment. This means virtual event organisers can often afford to splash out on higher quality speakers who might not otherwise be available. This content can be shared with a global audience, says Jackson. "Rather than US-centric events we're seeing truly global virtual events where all countries can leverage fantastic keynotes, people that otherwise we would never have access to, in a small country."

One of the key benefits of virtual events is that attendance is often more predictable than with live events, with more senior customer contacts likely to attend without the need to find time for travel and accommodation. This flexibility means that engagement with digital events is typically higher, and so are conversions, says Sophie Jugheli, group head of marketing at Ember Group. "We have seen some great spikes in attendance compared to live events, and conversion from those digital events was at least 20 percent higher," she says.

Up next: Chapter 03 – Video Conferencing and Virtual Events

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Chapter 03

Video Conferencing and Virtual Events

The rise in remote working has helped many organisations to become familiar with video conferences and virtual meetings. For many years, adoption of these technologies has been low, but the pandemic meant that there was no alternative, says Vaidyan. "Change management is always the most difficult part of using any new technology but as Margaret Thatcher would have said, TINA - there is no alternative."

Since the company went fully remote, video adoption has rocketed and employees are more comfortable being on camera, says Hindocha.

This comfort is also seen among the company's customers, says Hindocha. Before the pandemic, 8x8 was due to sponsor a series of monthly speaker events featuring customer stories. Recruiting customers to speak at events was challenging, because guests needed to travel to the event, and some felt unsure they could keep an audience engaged in a live setting for one or two hours.

"Speakers are a lot more willing to join a 20-minute virtual panel," Hindocha says. "We are all sitting at home, craving a bit more engagement, and virtual events are a lot less commitment and time-consuming." Next month 8x8 will be running a virtual event with customers from John Lewis and Halfords who wouldn't ordinarily be able to attend events at short notice, she adds.

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Bee Hindocha | EMEA Marketing Communications Director

8x8

What makes a successful virtual event?

Many of the companies we spoke to for this ebook are now regularly hosting or participating in virtual events. Some of these are newly imagined versions of cancelled physical events, but many are new, allowing innovative companies to take advantage of the broader acceptance of virtual meetings and events.

In many cases, attendance at virtual events can be far higher than for a physical event, but only if the content is right, and the promotion is done well, Llewelyn believes. "We've seen events that had 400 physical registrations achieve 5,000 virtual attendees. If you're a live event organisation you need to be committed to try digital transformation very quickly because otherwise, this isn't going away in October, unfortunately."

The flip side of this trend is that many business executives are inundated with opportunities to attend virtual round tables, watch webinars or download video content. It is essential that organisations think carefully about what content to create, and what purpose it will serve. There is little benefit in hosting a global webinar with live Q&A if there is not enough capacity to answer those questions or engage with the live chat from the audience.

The pandemic prompted lots of similarities between company messages, Couzins adds, and it's more important than ever that content stands out. "Yes, we need to be supportive and help solve problems. But if that just means we're going to be like everyone else, how are we different? Just being all about 'these challenging times' doesn't help anyone and it's so generic at this point," he says.

Creating effective virtual event content means understanding the audience, and their current pain points. What information will be most useful to your audience, and what format is most likely to persuade them to engage with that content? Rather than bombarding an audience with a virtual slide show, Llewellyn says that his company has created a series of virtual 'fireside chats' that feature interviews with senior business leaders from the industry. "We might finish up with 10 slides on key takeaways, but the format has to be different to a live presentation," he says.

At F5, the company is regularly hosting and attending virtual events and video conferences with positive results, from webinar-based Q&A sessions to CXO networking sessions. These virtual round tables work particularly well in terms of engaging c-suite executives, says English. "Sixty minute virtual round tables are a format that I've seen gain a lot of traction with over the past few months given their minimal time commitment from an attendees perspective. Small bespoke sessions of 4 to 5 attendees focusing on a specific solution area provides greet peer to peer networking for the CXOs & the associated halo effect for us as a vendor is a big plus" he says.

These virtual round tables work particularly well in terms of engaging c-suite executives. Sixty minute virtual round tables are a format that I've seen gain a lot of traction with over the past few months given their minimal time commitment from an attendees perspective. Small bespoke sessions of 4 to 5 attendees focusing on a specific solution area provides greet peer to peer networking for the CXOs & the associated halo effect for us as a vendor is a big plus.

Ed English | Vice President - Global Field Marketing

The content created from these events can be packaged and used in various ways, since different audiences might have different requirements. For example, a live webinar might be used in a local market, but then packaged as a "simu-live" broadcast with a live Q&A for a global audience. Content can also be converted into on-demand video or podcasts. "The thing to be conscious of is that content needs to be compelling to get their attention. If it's not slick, concise and audience specific, you're not going to keep your audience," English says.

Virtual events need to offer a true event experience, with high-quality speakers and pre/post-event delegate packs and follow-up. Events should serve a mix and match of content types, says Hindocha. "Hybrid event models may include a headline keynote with your CEO for 30 mins, followed by two days of content promotion, such as ebooks, on-demand sessions, and live streams they can log into if they fancy," she says. she says.

Up next: Chapter 04 – Early Adopters and the Future of Virtual Events

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Chapter 04

Early Adopters and the Future of Virtual Events

Virtual events were a necessity during lockdown, but the benefits of these events mean they are here to stay. Most marketers believe that the coming years will see more and better virtual events, giving audiences the chance to connect and build relationships without paying for travel and taking days out of the office.

Even if someone waved a magic wand and it was possible to switch back to live events, companies should not forget what their experience of virtual events has taught them, says Llewellyn. "I think we would definitely keep virtual events a large part of our marketing mix going forward, and I hope that other organisations realise how efficient they can be and integrate them with live event strategy. **It'd be a huge shame to spend a year upskilling in something just to forget about it and go back to the way we were.**"

I think we would definitely keep virtual events a large part of our marketing mix going forward, and I hope that other organisations realise how efficient they can be and integrate them with live event strategy. It'd be a huge shame to spend a year upskilling in something just to forget about it and go back to the way we were.

David Llewellyn | Marketing Director, EMEA

AppsFlyer

Whether events will be virtual or live in the future probably comes down to the purpose of the event. Some events happen because people want to generate revenue by taking sales, while other events are accelerating the pipeline, or to generate new leads. "I'm always interested in the rationale behind an event. What's the objective of the business and what's the value to the audience attending? Does it make sense to have a virtual event, or will I need a face-to-face element?" says Ingrid Strobl, Director, Marketing & Global Events at Graebel Companies. "Virtual events are attractive because everyone is online and they are low cost. If my goal is for the sales team to have influential quality conversations my preferred method would be to move to an in-person format. While virtual events can be a great way to generate high volume leads."

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Ingrid Strobl | Director, Marketing & Global Events

GRAEBEL

Early Adopters' Experiences of Virtual Events

When software company Puppet increased the number of virtual events it hosted, the company didn't just see an increase in the number of people attending, says Paul Heywood, the company's chief revenue officer. "We saw different people attending, people we hadn't engaged with in a year or more. This might have included people who were too busy or where their employer didn't allow them to attend physical events," Heywood says. "Off the back of that, we also saw new people engaging with us via our Slack channel, who had attended the virtual events."

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Paul Heywood | Chief Revenue Officer

puppet

Ingram Micro has found particularly strong demand for virtual events offering learning and development content, says Jackson. The company is offering a range of webinars, panel discussions and round tables alongside some more creative, fun events. This includes virtual escape rooms, where the virtual attendees are placed into a room with locked doors and are required to ask questions and solve problems to find their way out. "It's really fun, and brilliant seeing people willing to participate across the leadership," says Jackson. "People are much more comfortable now in virtual environments, and we've seen a 600% increase in the use of Microsoft Teams, across the organisation."

In many cases, companies are using this time to experiment on a small scale with various virtual event formats, identifying what management is required for each, and the relative benefits. SAP has begun experimenting with virtual video conferences and events on a small scale, using projects to gather audience feedback and look at ways to maximise the opportunity. "For us effective virtual events is about how do you deliver an amazing attendee experience while engaging with all the chat, using polls more effectively, incorporating audience questions into the content," says Vaidyan.

Up next: Chapter 05 - Calculating the ROI of Virtual Events

Keep reading →

Chapter 05

Calculating the ROI of Virtual Events

It is clear that organisations are increasing their adoption of virtual events, and we are beginning to see best practice emerge. As virtual events become part of our new normal, however, it is essential that we understand the costs and benefits of these events.

The costs of virtual events may be lower than for their 'live' equivalents, but they are still important. Many live events will require higher-profile speakers to grab the audience's attention, and there will be costs around video and audio production, creating livestreams and webinars, and promotion of live events through digital marketing, online advertising and virtual delegate packs.

It is also essential that marketing teams allow for comprehensive data analysis and follow-up after any virtual event. "Any virtual event campaign is only as good as the follow-up," says English. "You need to use that data to understand what attendees care about, to create key assets and collateral that can be shared with the right customer at the right time. It's vital to think about what 'after' looks like, even at the start of the campaign."

Ingram Micro is also investing in new Martech tools around social content, data compliance and other features to make sure the company can run high-quality video content across platforms for virtual events. The next step will be looking at how the company can drive and enable sales on the back of these tools, Jackson says. "It created a new virtual selling role for that guy who might have been out in the field, but now you need really good leads and insights into customers, and we're pushing that at a faster rate since the pandemic."

It created a new virtual selling role for that guy who might have been out in the field, but now you need really good leads and insights into customers, and we're pushing that at a faster rate since the pandemic.

Maria Jackson | Director of Marketing

Virtual events offer companies a powerful opportunity to capture data that can be used to inform marketing and drive sales. Knowing exactly what question a potential customer asked during a webinar allows for better follow-up, but only if that information is captured and shared. It's important to invest time into understanding and disseminating the data from virtual events to fully realise the ROI.

At Ember Group, we frequently run digital webinars using a platform called GoToWebinar and share the discussion points, which take place during the webinar internally, to help the sales team to understand what potential clients are interested in. "We then go further than that as marketers to create further digital campaigns around these webinars," says Jugheli. "We have gated content that lands on social media lens with PPC or Google analytics campaigns, and in the future, we will do more of that."

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Sophie Jugheli | Group Head of Marketing

Up next: Additional Insights

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Additional Insights

One positive is that organisations that were previously strapped for time are now prioritising technology improvements. Many leaders who were considering streamlining their use of technology, including CRM and Marketing Automation, are now committed to taking transformative action because their teams have more time and more flexibility to attend online calls and meetings.

Vanessa Hunt | Director at Vanessa Hunt Consulting

The impact on our hotel customers was immediate and so we knew that we had to shift gears. Our events were suddenly no longer about acquisition; they were about education, knowledge-sharing and support at a time of genuine need and uncertainty. Our first virtual series brought together 5,000 hotel delegates within two weeks.

Amona Kadiku | Marketing Manager, Events and Partnerships EMEA at SiteMinder

Generally, we will have small presentations with targeted people invited, followed by a Q&A session. We leverage that as a door opener to then follow up with those clients to gather feedback from the event and develop further dialogue with participants.

Tim Hatton | Head of Insight at AND Digital

At Ingram Micro, we hosted a virtual Webex event for our customers. We invited industry experts from Cisco and Ingrammicro to discuss how we can Navigate this new normal together as business partners and how we can support our customers in this journey. As part of the event we had a virtual escape room and a Gin and tonic tasting experience for our customers which was great fun.

Vaishnavi Shankara | CISCO - Senior Marketing Specialist at Ingram Micro

I don't think we will see an immediate return to live events at the same scale we are used to, even when a vaccine has rolled out. We will go through phases from fully virtual, an intermediate phase where there are COVID-specific rules and measures in place, to going back to the capacity we were used to in a few years' time. For the short term, this will mean fewer people, specific directional walkways and more sanitisers, which will create the need of running both live and virtual events at the same time in order to make the events financially viable.

Des Tapaki | Digital Experience Director at Principle & Honest

Humans are pretty agile at adapting.That's why we've survived. We've learned how to adapt ourselves and our family situations to cope with electronic meetings, not worrying if the dog walks in or if there are child wars going on because we all accept we're living real lives. The adaptability and speed of the change has been remarkable.

Robert Bean | Director at The Robert Bean Branding Co. Ltd.

Face to face events can be time consuming and expensive. Webinars and virtual events are seen as cheaper and easier, however, getting the content and technology working in harmony means that actually the time taken to put both together are probably about equal.

Roisin Rivers | Marketing Executive & Events, EMEA at NAVEX Global

I think physical meetings and events will always be an important part of sales and marketing, although virtual meetings have been a fantastic substitute, that are now very much part of how business will operate, there's a rush to finish the conversation and get to the next thing. In a physical meeting, there's more time to really build a rapport, and get under the skin of an organisation.

Stephen Lynn | Marketing & Events Director at Connected Places Catapult

I feel like we are working a lot more during lockdown. Because we are working remotely there is little or no separation between our personal and work hours. This also due to the fact we are working in mixed time zones, I have colleagues in Europe, South America and North America. Rather than being in the office and then being at home, it all blends into one.

Jade Maravillas | Global Head of Marketing Enablement at VTEX

We haven't had any events cancelled or postponed, they have all transitioned to digital. The content isn't going away, you're just moving the platform. The real selling point is making sure you have the right community, the right local and regional end users, and provide interaction through group chat, moderated Q&A sessions and so on. I think as a result our company will come out of this in a much stronger position because we've transitioned the business, rather than closing it down.

Paul Crew | Associate Vice President at IDC UK

We offer mobile, on-premise (Digital Transformation Centers) and virtual co-creation environments that create a neutral space in which we run fast-paced, highly-focused co-creation and co-design sessions with our customers and expert partners. Using Fujitsu Human Centric Experience Design approach, we review together an assigned business challenges from different perspectives, such as that of the human beings impacted, and the wider company purpose, before reframing them into a positive vision from which we generate more transformational ideas and solutions concepts that can lead to rapid prototyping.

We work at our customer's pace, enabling to further their vision, and to generate new pathways to achieve transformational outcomes for their organization and their stakeholders. We combine empathetic, rational, and pragmatic thinking to move faster from a set purpose to concrete achievements.

Sarah Carcour | Head of Microsoft Marketing, Global Marketing at Fujitsu

Up next: Poll Questions

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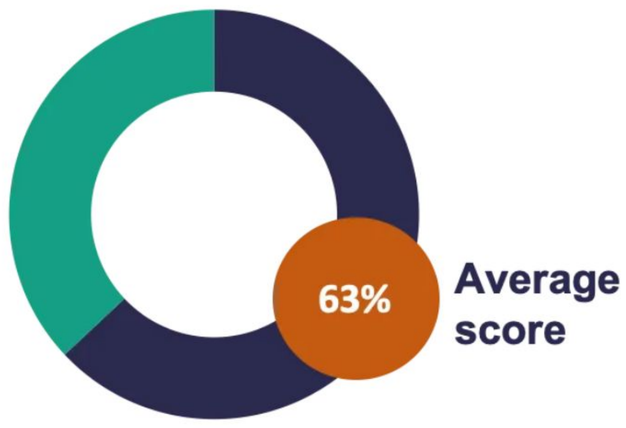
Poll Questions

Question #1

On a scale of 1 to 10 How likely will you be to promote Virtual Events in your organisation this year?

Question #2(a)

If virtual events currently represent 10% of the global event's investment, how much do you think this will be (a) before a vaccine is found



Question #2(b)

If virtual events currently represent 10% of the global event's investment, how much do you think this will be (b) once a vaccine is found

Up next: Conclusion

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Conclusion

Searches for virtual event-related information on Google have increased 50-fold since the start of March 2020, showing there is a clear, growing demand for virtual conferences, webinars and other events.

However, organisations should not make the mistake of assuming virtual events are simply a cheap, fast alternative to their live events. The virtual event market is becoming increasingly crowded, and companies need good strategy, content and marketing to stand out from the crowd.

Events must be thoughtfully designed to encourage audience participation, ensuring participants feel the experience has been valuable. The three key questions any organisation must consider when hosting a virtual event are:

-Is the format right?

Senior executives often find networking a key factor in choosing which events to attend, meaning that smaller virtual roundtables may work well to engage the C-suite, while broadcast webinars can work well for panel discussions, product demonstrations and launches.

-How will your virtual event be promoted?

Virtual events should be promoted across multiple channels, with integrated digital advertising and social media promotion.

-What is the value to my audience?

Although the barriers to attending a virtual event are low, the barriers to not attending are equally low. Virtual event organisers must consider what concrete benefit attendance has to their audience, and ensure this is communicated.

How will success be measured?

The experts interviewed for this eBook agreed that capturing and analysing data from virtual events is vital. Understanding who participated, what questions they might have asked, and what topics they were interested in allows more tailored follow-up by sales, ensuring that virtual events deliver the best possible ROI.

Few organisations currently have all the skills available in-house to plan, deliver and follow-up on virtual events. Over the coming years, these skills must be built, either internally, or through partnerships with capable third parties that have proven expertise in creating engaging virtual events.

Tim Bond

CEO & Founder

networksunday

TechPros.

Find out more about TechPros Virtual Roundtable Events →

Up next: Featured Participants

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Featured Participants

Alex Couzins

Head of Brand and Marketing, Europe at Absen

Alex Couzins is the European head of brand and marketing at Absen, the world's leading manufacturer of LED displays covering all types of indoor and outdoor applications. Headquartered in Shenzhen, China, Absen employs over 2,000 people and has delivered over 30,000 projects in 120 countries. With 12 years' experience, Alex is responsible for managing Absen's brand and marketing activities in Europe and supporting its network of local distributors and system integrators. Alex has worked in the Audio Visual industry for the past 5 years after spending his early career at a leading brand strategy consultancy based in London.

Amona Kadiku

Marketing Manager, Partnerships & Events at SiteMinder

Originally from Vienna, Amona Kadiku commenced her career in travel 15 years ago as an agent at the Verkehrsbüro Group, the parent company of the country's leading hotel brand, Austria Trend Hotels. Working closely with the giants of distribution in this role, it was both here and through her three-and-a-half years at TUI Group, that Amona developed a strong knowledge of the hotel landscape. Moving to London in 2012, and after initially working within the content division at Expedia, Amona joined SiteMinder in 2014. Today, she is the company's partnerships and events manager for EMEA and the Americas, overseeing strategy and execution across both regions.

Bee Hindocha

EMEA Marketing Communications Director at 8x8

Previously shortlisted for 'Marketing Employee of the Year', Bee is a razor-sharp marketing leader, bringing over 13 years of industry expertise and knowledge. Working her way up the ranks, she is currently EMEA Communications Director at 8x8. Through her innovative thinking and fresh approach to content, PR and social media marketing, she focuses on driving brand reputation, as well as up-scaling demand generation efforts. During her time at Insight, she has led the transformation of Insight's client engagement strategy, across multiple countries, embedding several new digital platforms to create a superior customer experience. She has also spearheaded Insight's social selling and advocacy programme, resulting in a 24% increase in sales pipeline and 30%+ growth across their social communities. Outside of her passion for marketing, Bee enjoys being outdoors and sports with her two young boys, as well as some fine wine and dining when she gets the chance.

Carl Robinson

Head of Marketing at Innovate Tax

Carl is a Chartered Marketer with over 15 years' generalist marketing experience. Carl heads up the communications and marketing teams at Innovate Tax, with a personal focus on its agnostic tax services for multiple ERP systems. Carl has previously worked across a variety of different industry sectors - product and service - in senior marketing and bid writing positions. Carl is also a lecturer for the Chartered Institute of Marketing, teaching qualifications up to L6. He's also a Spanish food aficionado.

David Llewellyn

Director of Marketing at AppsFlyer

David is a full mix marketer with significant experience scaling high growth mobile technology businesses. Ex Shazam, Amazon, Skyscanner, FreeNow and Mobile Interactive Group, he now leads marketing in EMEA for AppsFlyer.

Des Tapaki

Digital Experience Director at Honest & Principle

Digital Experience Director for Honest and Principle, with over twenty years of experience in the technology, customer experience and innovation areas, across a variety of sectors from automotive to technology and telecom to financial services and FMCG. Prior to joining the Principle Group, Des worked at FITCH as Digital Director and was responsible for running the digital proposition, leading key brand accounts and deploying a range of multi-territory projects for the likes of Nestlé, Lyrik & Co, Mercedes, Dell, adidas, Macerich and Sberbank.

Ed English

Vice President Global Field Marketing at F5

Ed English has 21 years experience driving strategic growth for complex enterprise solutions and services across multiple continents and industry verticals. A proven track record of developing brands and building teams and programs that deliver tangible business relevant outcomes.

Eliza Ward

Senior Director - Global Revenue Marketing at GE Digital

Eliza is an MBA-qualified B2B sales & marketing professional with 25 years of multi-industry experience. At GE Digital Eliza is Sr Director of Global Revenue Marketing covering the manufacturing software portfolio for the Food & Beverage, Consumer Packaged Goods and Automotive industries. Her key responsibilities include omni-channel demand gen with a strong focus on net new customer acquisition. Eliza is also concurrently a Non-Executive Director for a company that provides virtual reality scenarios and customised training simulators to the Defence industry.

Ingrid Strobl

Director, Marketing & Global Events at Graebel

Ingrid joined Graebel in 2019 as Director, Marketing & Global Events. She found her first event role within a global hotel chain where the appeal of event management drew her in and became the foundation of her career. Her experience includes B2B event marketing and logistics management for global conference organisations and leading brands such as Sitecore, Opower/Oracle, and Thomson Reuters. Ingrid is passionate about creating strategic event experiences that drive lead generation, customer engagement, and brand awareness. Always, with a keen focus on delivering tangible results. She holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Georgia State University and lives in London, UK.

Jacob Vaidyan

Head of Strategic Industries for Industry & Value Advisory, UK and Ireland at SAP

As Head of Industry Value Advisory (IVA), for strategic customers and consumer industries at SAP, Jacob leads multiple local and global teams of industry specialists and business strategists. He works closely as a trusted leader and adviser with the executive team internally, with Customers and the wider ecosystem to drive mutual success. To this role he brings a breadth and depth of experience working with leading brands from around the world across a range of industries particularly telecom, financial services and consumer industries, where he finds synergies between technology and business.

Jade Maravillas

Global Head of Marketing Enablement at VTEX

As the Global Head of Marketing Enablement for VTEX, the world's fastest-growing e-commerce platform (IDC, 2020), Jade works with the leadership, sales and marketing teams across North and South America and Europe. She manages a team of professionals that look after brand strategy and identity, web design, content marketing and digital asset management, split between Rio de Janeiro and London. Having lived and worked in Asia, North America and Europe, her previous roles span sales and business development, marketing, PR, partnerships and strategy in technology and lifestyle industries. She now lives in London with her husband and daughter.

Maria Jackson

Director of Marketing at Ingram Micro

Maria joined Ingram in April 2014, leveraging both local and global experience gained in senior marketing roles at Unify, formerly Siemens Enterprise Communications, latterly as its Director of UK Marketing. Maria works alongside Ingram's sales and commercial leadership team to drive aggressive market strategies, improve ROI for vendors, embed customer communities in the channel and leverage Ingram's unique business intelligence capabilities.

Paul Crew

Associate Vice President at IDC UK

Associate Vice President at IDC. Accomplished and professional Sales Leader specialising in management, scale and new business within the technology vendor and end-user base across EMEA. The recruitment and management of sales teams, devising strategic direction and support in the selling of advisory services, complex and multi-layered strategic and tactical marketing campaigns across the ICT sector into senior management, marketing, C suite.

Paul Heywood

Chief Revenue Officer at Puppet

Paul is responsible for accelerating Puppet's growth and overseeing the company's corporate development, sales and revenue management across the globe as its Chief Revenue Officer. Paul has developed a deep understanding of IT infrastructure, SaaS, cloud computing, and IT-managed service providers over the years, and has created and implemented the frameworks and methodologies required to further accelerate Puppet's growth. Previous to Puppet, Paul was the VP of worldwide sales and business strategy at Oracle under their Oracle Cloud Infrastructure Group. As a part of the leadership team at Dyn, Paul was able to create an exponential period of growth leading up to a significant acquisition by Oracle - prior to this acquisition, Dyn powered up to 20% of the global internet. Paul sits on the boards of both DevOpsGroup and York IE.

Robert Bean

Director at The Robert Bean Branding Co. Ltd.

Robert Bean has over 40 years experience in the brand strategy and communications worlds, having been instrumentally involved with Honda ('The Power of Dreams') BT ('It's Good to Talk') BMW ('The Ultimate Driving Machine') Homebase ('Make a House a Home') and countless others, from Glaxo/SmithKline to Debenhams, via Minute.com and Buzlins. He now runs his own consultancy advising CEOs and Boards on how to define and express their 'Single Organising Principle.' He's the author of 'Winning in Your Own Way, the new and a half golden rules of branding' and a magistrate at Westminster magistrates' Court.

Roisin Rivers

Marketing Executive, EMEA at NAVEX Global

Roisin Rivers is responsible for international events management at NAVEX Global, the worldwide leader in risk and compliance software and services. She has worked in the events industry for more than 14 years and has 12 years' experience managing events within the Technology sector.

Sarah Carcour

Head of Microsoft Marketing, Global Marketing at Fujitsu

Sarah is a passionate, strategic data-driven marketer driving growth of services and solutions across online and offline channels. Currently leading the global Microsoft marketing activities at Fujitsu with dynamic and agile programmes, creating impactful content and first-class customer experiences to deliver ROI generating demand for our businesses across the world.

Sophie Jugheli

Group Head of Marketing at Ember Group

Sophie joined Ember Group as Group Marketing Specialist in 2018, following a progressive career in marketing and customer experience. During her career, working for FLC as well as SME organisations, Sophie's responsibilities have included brand & organisational strategy, advertising and research, social media, content and digital marketing. Sophie's new role as Acting Head of Marketing involves developing and executing a clearly defined marketing and communications strategy, in a manner that supports consistent business growth and recognition of the Ember brand across channels and enhances brand equity and awareness.

Stephen Lynn

Marketing & Events Director at Connected Places Catapult

Stephen Lynn is Marketing & Events Director at Milton Keynes based innovation organisation 'Connected Places Catapult' (formerly Transport Systems Catapult). In his role at the government funded Catapult, Stephen has overseen the first UK public Demonstration of driverless vehicles and has created awareness of the countries' global innovation capabilities at events across the world. Prior to this, Stephen ran the marketing department for retailer 'Game' and spent over 8 years at Virgin.

Vanessa Hunt

Director at Vanessa Hunt Consulting Ltd

Vanessa Hunt has 20 years' experience of CRM implementation projects, as both a Training Manager and CRM consultant. She knows first-hand what can go wrong when you're ill-prepared and choose a CRM in a hurry. Vanessa helps you choose the right CRM for your organisation's needs. She guides SME businesses safely through the CRM selection process, working with you to capture your critical requirements and acting as your expert, unbiased evaluator. Vanessa develops a shortlist of CRM options for you and supports you in your relationship with CRM software vendors. The result? A CRM strategy that delivers the commercial results you want and fuels your business growth.

Vaishnavi Shankara

Senior Marketing Specialist at Ingram Micro

I'm a passionate marketer, lifelong learner and a Fitness enthusiast. Being the Cisco Senior marketing specialist at Ingram I believe in building trust with customers, stakeholders and our Cisco partners. I plan, create and execute effective marketing campaigns and go-to-market strategies across all Cisco architectures. Some of my idea projects include working with Sales leads on creating the "Smarketing team" and streamlining marketing-as-a-service for our reseller partners.

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Virtual roundtables - A format which works

When was the last time you made a business leader feel like they'd just had a great group therapy session? A well executed virtual roundtable event can do just this.

Historically, most roundtable events brought together seven or eight senior executives in person to discuss a specific industry trend or challenge. Participants would share their own challenges, experiences and ideas.

Whilst a good moderator can influence a positive outcome, these free flowing sessions were often exposed to strong personalities who spoke too much and introverts who remained silent.

The process of talking through how your organisation has approached a particular challenge can provoke clarity and critical thought. The challenge owners experience great value as a result of the ideas put forward by all participants. Conversations are stimulating, revealing and enjoyable and new connections are made. Sponsors benefit from market sentiment on topics that are relevant to their solutions as well as the positive experiences they have given to their participants - helping to progress current business opportunities should they exist.

Since the pandemic we have moved these roundtable events online. Whilst they lack the benefits of meeting and working with others in person (including the drinks and canapes we serve afterwards!), virtual roundtables are easier to implement, participants don't need to travel and there are no expensive venue or catering costs.

Take a look at some of the participant feedback (consistently averaging between 80% and 90%) from past events at TechPros.io.

Tim Bond

CEO & Founder

networksunday

TechPros.

"Great experience with the TechPros and Mindtree team, bringing together leaders from a very diverse background - **9/10**

Richard Mohr, Chief Technology Officer and VP of New Products, FMS at Ryder System, Inc.

"An inspiring exchange with exciting panelists that uncovered outside-the-box ideas on current topics - **8/10**

Claus Grunow, VP Digitalisation, Strategy & Coordination at Fraport

After experiencing a highly engaging format used by CEO membership organisations who met monthly, I thought the same format could work for a group of C-level business leaders from a similar industry sector or business function.

Sponsored by our clients, we started hosting one off roundtables in London at hotels and business clubs. Here's how they worked:

Each participant is asked to share a specific challenge relevant to the topic at hand. These are voted on and the two winning challenges are selected for discussion. The challenge owner gets a round of questions from the table to inform the group of the problem. This is followed by a solutions round. Participants must concentrate fully throughout the session, devising multiple questions and solutions in case others have put forward the same ones before it's their turn.

"I am impressed by the structure and openness of the participants in sharing their views on the much needed topic during these challenging times addressing employee engagement, digitization and empathy - **10/10**

Manikandesh Venkatachalam, Senior Vice President - Industry Leader Travel, Transportation & Hospitality at Mindtree

"A thought-provoking experience with tangible ideas of how to overcome a real challenge within our business, both for the now and in the future. It was beneficial to know that you were not on your own, with participants relating to the challenges that you were trying to overcome - **9/10**

Alistair Cochrane, Chief Development Officer at Whistl UK Ltd

If you would like to learn more about TechPros virtual roundtable events please email us on info@techpros.io or call +44 (0)207 754 3710.

You can also read a FREE eBook we recently produced - Virtual events, a passing phase or the new normal?

Read the eBook →

Find out more about TechPros Virtual Roundtable Events →

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