



CONTENT - BEST PRACTICE FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS!

FIVE MINUTES TO FOCUS

Owen Hills, Director and Executive Producer - etm productions

One thing's for sure - we've all had to adapt our event activity rapidly during these last twelve months.

One of the biggest is that whilst the "experience" of any event is important, content is still, and always will be King!

We've probably all seen a lot of research that has been conducted into online events and their challenges..

- Networking, interaction and engagement is still a priority for attendees. Of course the challenge is to make that appropriate in the digital world.

"CONTENT IS KING... FOCUS ON CONTENT THAT IS RELEVANT TO YOUR AUDIENCE... YOU NEED TO HAVE CONTENT THAT CAPTIVATES THE ATTENTION OF WHOEVER IS WATCHING. THEN ON TOP OF THAT, YOU NEED TO CREATE SOMETHING THAT IS ENGAGING AND CREATES DIALOGUE. IT HAS TO BE MORE THAN PASSIVE WATCHING."

LEON WINKLER
DIRECTOR,
INT. EVENTS AT UBISOFT

- Content is even more important in virtual events than physical. Truthfully those of us who are involved in creating content and working with speakers know there are times when we have to carry certain speakers during our physical events. But in the digital world there is no hiding place. Viewers stop watching in seconds on the small screen if you don't keep their interest. It's honest but brutal, and this realization forces us to critically challenge our content and formats for our events as never before.
- There have been some real wins with speakers. There's a much greater pool to draw from, with lower costs for the event. But speakers have needed a lot of coaching to adapt to a different style of delivery - more than speakers originally anticipated. Simple rules have been turned upside down as speakers adapt their skills to more of a studio broadcast environment.

Q: What challenges have you faced with online events?	%
Ineffective networking/interaction with other attendees	42%
Too much online content right now/overload	36%
Speakers not trained to present online	34%
The presenter didn't hold my interest	34%
I have too many distractions	32%
General technology issues	31%
Online content is just not a substitute for in-person learning at events	31%
Sessions too long	25%
Delivery formats were all the same/boring	25%
The content did not deliver what was promised	18%
No agenda provided in advance	16%
I wasn't given an opportunity to ask questions/engage	16%
Platform wasn't user friendly	14%
Sponsors/exhibitors not integrated into online program	13%
Content did not offer language translations	2%
None, no challenges or frustrations	6%

Source: EMP LLC

And talking of broadcast events, we have quickly learnt that this new media is much more than just doing the same thing as live, and streaming out via our platform of choice. Consider for a moment the number of boring webinars that you've been invited to join recently. It's hardly surprising we are witnessing the current level of webinar fatigue. Those that have grasped the nettle have realized there has been a radical and fundamental shift in our productions - and we believe that change is here to stay.

It's a new media for us all. Attendees watching on a small screen with an experience that is more akin to watching TV than attending a keynote. It's changed everything; planning; content; script writing; speaker presentations; production techniques; deadlines!! We've had to adapt to a model that's more like the broadcasting a show.

Virtual event content
requires a different:

Mindset

Process

Approach

You're developing content for a TV production, not a live event.

Your audience is NOT captive. If you bore them, they will leave.

Embrace the opportunity to create bold new formats and experiences.

Here's a summary of our thoughts:

- **Keep sessions and segments short, lively and fast-paced**

30 minutes virtual = 90 minutes live. There are no such thing as speakers and presentations, just on-screen segments that keep people engaged.

- **Embrace the format**

You have to compensate for the energy and engagement that naturally happens when you put 2,000 people in a room together. As a result, virtual event content has to be more planned, scripted, and produced.

- **Change your content development mindset**

Look for ways to push the boundaries. You have an opportunity to create your own documentary films, TED talks, talk shows, and reality TV.

- **Less is more**

Focus your resources to make sure every session is polished, relevant, and compelling—even if that means fewer segments.

- **Plan and prepare for a longer, more difficult content development process**

Content has to be finalized at least a month before the event. This is not an artificial deadline. Winging it is a disaster waiting to happen.

- **Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse**

- **Don't be afraid to mix business messaging with social activities. Trial different agendas and create different show formats**

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