



The Ultimate Guide to a Hybrid Event

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Introduction

People are becoming more at home in digital spaces. This includes virtual events. The pandemic, plus technological advancements, have forever changed the way you hold meetings and host events. Virtual events gained steam and witnessed accelerated growth in 2020. However, as the world begins to open infinitesimally, hybrid events will dominate in 2021 and beyond.

Event attendees are still wary of large scale in-person events given the current health crisis. Hence, allowing them to attend from wherever they are comfortable helps organizations reach a larger audience. It's also predicted that hybrid events will continue heating up while the pandemic cools down, as people begin to realize the benefits of hybrid events beyond our current circumstances.

Hybrid events will dominate in 2021 and beyond.





A note from the vFairs CEO

Hybrid events are shaping the future of the events industry at an exponential rate. The power they allow the organizer in capturing an audience is beyond imagination. They are the key to a whole new audience that previously was unfathomable! Here at vFairs, we are excited to see how it adds value to our customers now.

So, do you have questions about hybrid events? No need to worry. We are here to take you through everything you need to know about them. We're not calling this the ultimate guide for no reason!

Mohammad Younas, CEO vFairs



What is the meaning of **hybrid events**?

Hybrid events combine elements from an in-person event and a virtual event, i.e. inviting both in-person and virtual attendees. They provide each audience access to some or all components of the event. People with similar interests, working in similar industries, or sharing common goals come together to network, make new contacts, build leads, or share information. These events include trade shows, conferences, career fairs among a plethora of other event solutions.



Aatir Abdul Rauf

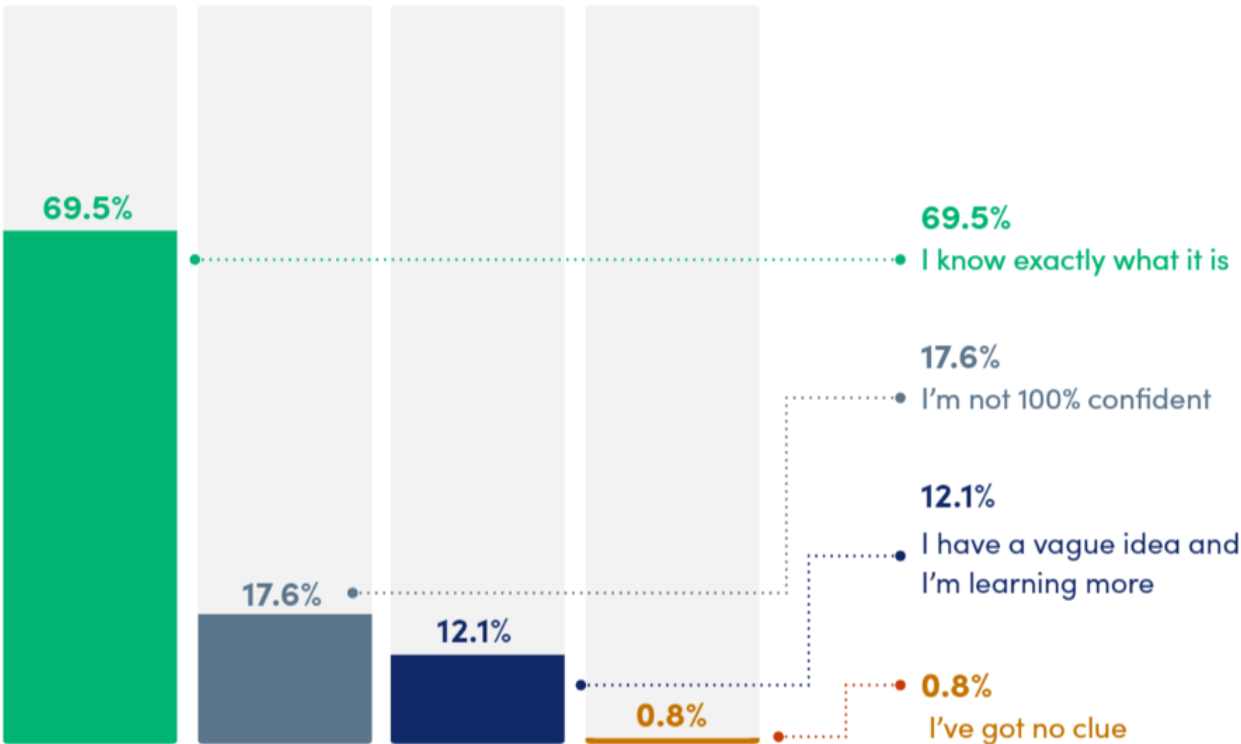
Director of Product Marketing

"Hybrid is going to be the 'best of both worlds' movement. It will afford organizers to retain the crucial human element of social meetings while still leveraging the unique benefits of pulling in a virtual audience."



Do you know what a hybrid event is?

A significant chunk of event professionals — a little over 30% — do not have a crystal clear idea of what a hybrid event actually is. There is confusion around the definition and structure of this model. It’s safe to assume that they also don’t know the value, challenges and steps to execute a successful hybrid event.



Physical vs. Virtual vs. Hybrid

Let's understand the difference between physical, virtual and hybrid events before we go on to decode the benefits and features of hybrid events.

Physical

Physical events are in-person events hosted in a physical venue.

Here audiences can:

- Chat and network face to face
- Develop relationships with fellow industry professionals
- Participate in live seminars and breakout sessions
- View products and services displayed by various exhibitors
- Give feedback on the event on ground

Hybrid

Hybrid events are hosted in a physical location and are broadcast out to a virtual audience.

The online environment allows you to:

- Host more exhibitors and attendees than the physical space
- Gamify your events through digital scavenger hunts, leaderboards, trivia
- Offer greater flexibility for the audience, and
- Invite top-tier speakers to present remotely

Virtual

Virtual events, on the other hand, are completely online. It helps you reach a global audience, plus provides an innovative and immersive experience to the incoming audience.

For example:

- Webinars, presentations, breakout session and all networking activities between attendees and exhibitors
- Product displays
- All event relevant resources, videos and content is available for attendees

Considering hybrid events are being called **'the future'** of events, they're worth diving into.

"Before the pandemic hit, most event organizers were narrowly focused on in-person events. Once they were forced to adopt virtual events last year, they realized how this medium overcame several shortcomings of a physical event while at the same time, had renewed appreciation for how irreplaceable face-to-face conversations were."

Aatir Abdul Rauf, Director of Product Marketing



Why Should You Host a Hybrid Event?

At any event, one of the main goals is to maximize attendee engagement. You want to create a space where participants can gather new information, and connect how they want to.

A hybrid event allows your audiences to participate in your event from wherever they are, from any device. This flexibility immediately offers multiple ways for your audience to engage and connect, making your event all the more enticing.

Beyond that, there are lots of benefits to hosting a hybrid event. Here are a few of the top ones:

1. Increased Attendance and Reach

Giving your audience the choice between attending events in-person or online makes them feel included, and will encourage them to join. Flexibility is the key here. Those comfortable with the physical event can participate on-ground while those unable to travel to the physical location, or prefer to attend from their homes can participate virtually.

Moreover, not everyone will be able to attend the event due to venue capacity, scheduling conflicts, or budget restrictions. In such cases, your audience can attend the online event, thus not forsaking the experience completely.

2. More Opportunities to Engage with Audience

With hybrid events, networking doesn't just take place in-person. You have audiences joining in remotely from various locations. A steady A/V system is the only requirement for a live stream. To keep them engaged with presentations, your online attendees can:

- join in the ongoing breakout sessions,
- participate in live Q&A sessions, and
- vote on live polls.

When they send in their questions, the moderator answers them live. Hence, engaging your online and onground audiences in live webinars simultaneously. There can be separate areas for in-person meetings, and another dedicated for cross networking between live and online audiences.



72% of corporations are interested in sponsoring a hybrid event



3. Attracting More Sponsors

With the increased reach promised by a hybrid event, sponsors also want to grab extra eyeballs.

72% of corporations are interested in sponsoring a hybrid event.

With flexible tiered sponsorship packages, there is opportunity to offer visibility both virtually and in-person. Pairing cross-media brand visibility with the ability to connect with online and in-person attendees increases potential reach and value for sponsors.

A few popular options you can offer sponsors are:

- exhibiting at your in-person or online trade show,
- showcasing their brand through in-person and digital signage placement,
- hosting presentations, webinars or panels,
- conducting breakout sessions or workshops,
- including a branded swag item in your event gift bag

This, added to the greater reach promised by hybrid events, creates a win-win situation for your sponsors.

4. Environmentally Friendly

Hybrid events reduce the overall number of people present at the actual physical location. A scaled down physical event inevitably reduces the carbon footprint and wastage of resources. With fewer people attending from out of town and content being hosted online, we see that:

- less transportation is required,
- fewer printed resources are needed, and
- food waste is reduced.

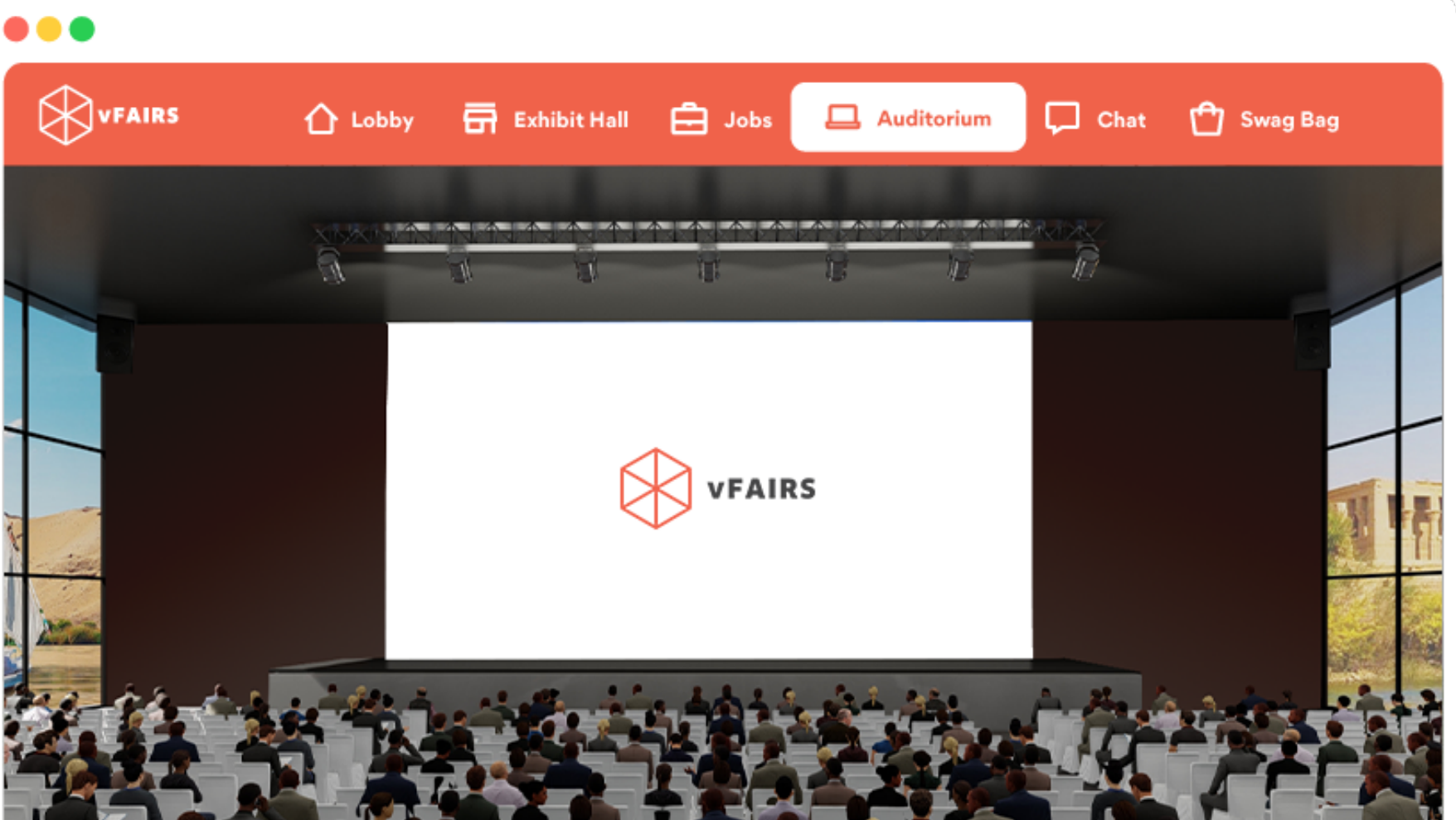
Overall, hybrid events offer an eco-friendly way to scale a physical event.

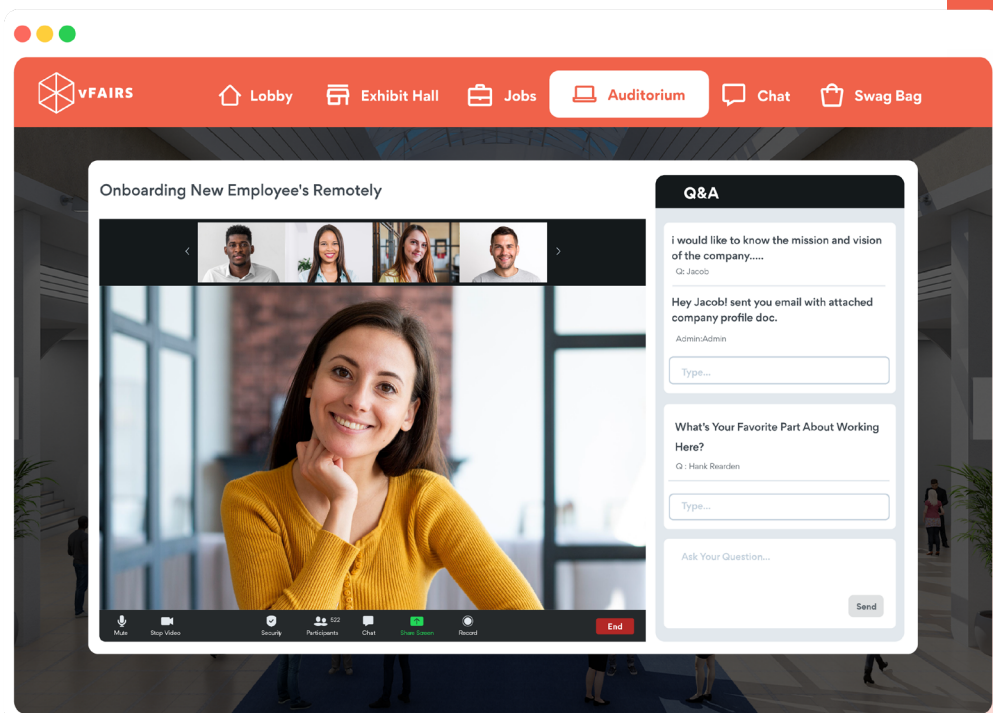
5. Easily Accessible Content

With an in-person event, your exhibitors have to print out resources. Time and money is spent on designing and printing numerous flyers, brochures and guides, etc.

However, online all content is available to view, download and print. Your attendees can save the resources to their devices. You can even email this content to attendees, and non-attendees after the event.

This includes saving, downloading or transferring video content which is not tangibly delivered to the audience in live events. Additionally, live presentations can easily be recorded and repurposed for further use after the event ends.





Virtual attendees have live audio, video and text chat tools at their disposal.

6. Effortless Networking

Virtual attendees have live audio, video and text chat tools at their disposal.

They can use these to connect with exhibitors and even fellow attendees. Moreover, you can build chat rooms where participants from the in-person event can connect with online participants. The virtual platform lets all your attendees:

- search attendees and exhibitors within the event,
- review suggested users to connect with based on their interests,
- ask questions and chat with you, your exhibitors or other attendees,
- create or join group chat rooms focused on a specific topic,
- request and schedule meetings,
- run group or 1:1 audio or video calls, and
- share files right from their device.

7. Adapting to Consumer Preferences

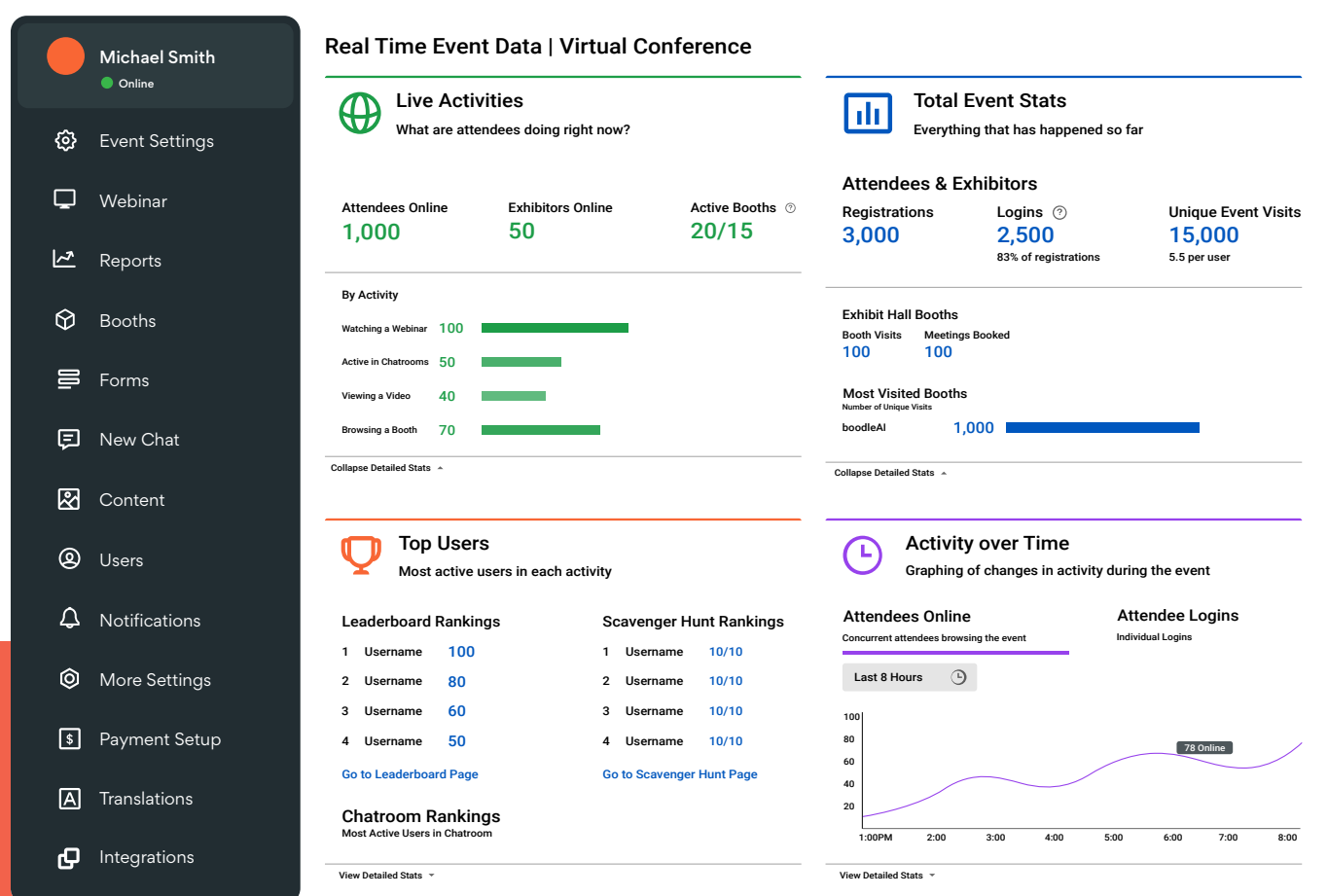
Audiences are digital natives today. They prefer flexibility. They might be jumping from one platform to another. In such circumstances, companies and organizations must be where their audience is. As COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, groups of people who are still uncomfortable with in-person events may still attend and participate virtually. In such cases, hybrid events cater to both sets of audiences.

8. Data and ROI

Hybrid events offer a greater return on investment (ROI) due to the increased reach and scalability of the event. More attendance, more views for sponsors and more sign-ups. This also directly translates to increased lead generation for exhibitors.

You get access to data that an in-person event cannot collect. At in person events, you can track the number of attendees, attendance rates, and maybe the number of people who attended particular sessions.

Hybrid events allow great insights into your audiences behaviour patterns and interests. Specifically for people joining virtually, hosts can easily track their digital footprints, helping them gain a greater understanding of their participants.



"We're constantly in a flux of embracing new technological trends and we have seen time and again, the early adopters usually win the race. Back in the 90s, the internet was thought to be a geeky fad but it quickly blew up to be a necessity. In the mid-2000s, companies were unsure about whether a mobile presence was a good-to-have but then smartphone apps revolutionized how customers interfaced with brands. Last year, virtual events were in the same boat. Those who adopted them quickly were able to maintain some business continuity and those who hesitated & waited for the lockdowns to come off ended up losing. Hybrid events will be no different. It's not a question about whether it will happen, it's a question about when."

Aatir Abdul Rauf, Director of Product Marketing



What Are the Features of a Hybrid Event?

There are some aspects of your hybrid event that will pave the way for unprecedented success. These features not only add value to your audience's experience but also build your credibility as an expert event host. Let's see which features of your hybrid event can lead you to victory.

1. Hybrid Presentations

You can broadcast your in-person presentations and webinars to your virtual audience, or you can broadcast remote speakers or participants to your live audience. Both audiences can also participate in moderated Q&A sessions.

2. Networking

Hybrid events offer plenty of networking opportunities no matter where your attendees are joining from. There are countless ways to merge the in-person and online experiences, fostering cross channel engagement. This includes:

- A hybrid networking lounge, where in-person and virtual attendees can connect
- Live text, audio and video chat tools
- Booking appointments with booth representatives
- Participation in online surveys and polls by both audiences

3. Multi-Device Accessibility

A mobile-friendly platform ensures you can host your in-person attendees on-site as the virtual platform provider caters to the virtual audience. They could be on the go, but with a mobile-friendly platform, they will easily be able to attend webinars, chat with fellow attendees and even participate in the scavenger hunts and trivias from the gamification feature.

4. Customer Support

Customer support is essential in an event that is catering to two venues; physical and virtual. Online audiences might face internet issues or sign-in problems.

Choose a platform that provides 24/7 customer support, and provides your audience with contact details of the support representatives.

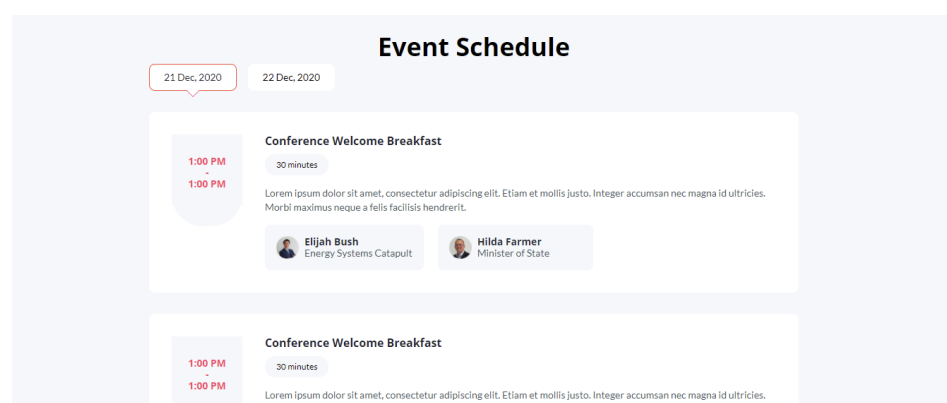
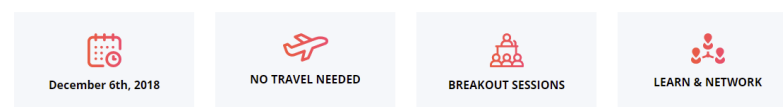
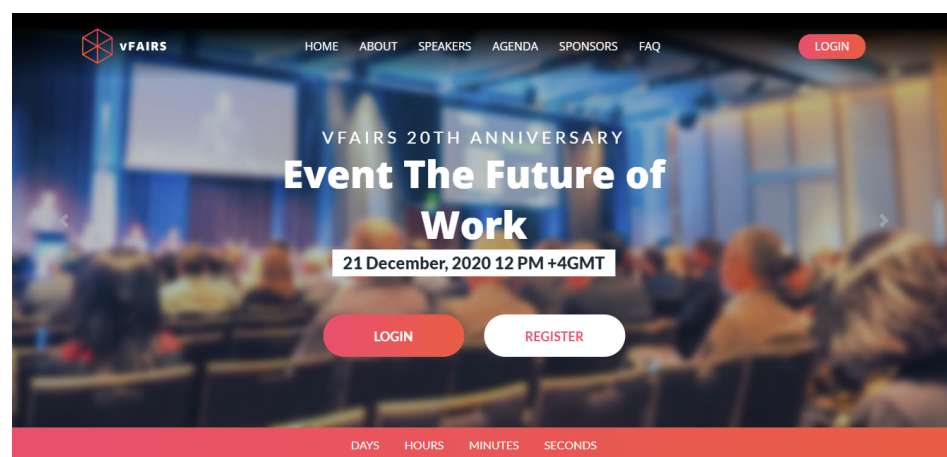
5. Data and Analytics

A comprehensive report for your virtual event is a must. Understanding how your virtual audience maneuvered through the virtual venue will help you understand and adjust your strategy for the next event.

Track your online attendees behaviors and combine it with your on-site attendee statistics to get a holistic view of your hybrid event.

6. Landing Page and Registration

Get a customized and attractive landing page designed to draw in your target audience, both onsite and online. This will also help you capture essential consumer data through registration forms.





7. Promotion

Your hybrid event might fall flat if you compromise on promoting it. Utilize channels such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to let people know about your hybrid event. Ask speakers who are coming to your event to talk about the event and its benefits on their social profiles. Use Search Engine Optimization (SEO) tools in addition to paid search campaigns on Google and Bing, etc. to further promote your event.

Use social media channels such as LinkedIn and Facebook to create 'event' pages to establish more organic reach for your event. Furthermore, enhance your event marketing through email automation and building tools that can help you reach your target audience in the most effective manner.

8. Sponsorship

Just as companies have adapted to the pandemic, and events have evolved from physical to virtual and now to hybrid, sponsors have also quickly adapted to it. By offering tiered sponsorship packages you can give your sponsors varied levels of exposure and awareness. Sponsors can host specific webinars or breakout sessions, or help you arrange giveaways or prizes for scavenger hunts, etc. thus creating engagement opportunities for your audience.

Questions to Ask Your Event Platform Provider

Your hybrid event serves a purpose. It is not only bringing like-minded individuals and professionals together, but also creating opportunities for them to network with each other. Your event facilitates conversations and connections. Hence, it is imperative that your virtual event provider keeps in mind the objective of your hybrid event. However, you must be on top of everything and must have the requisite amount of know-how on your event and its functionalities. Ask the following questions:

1. Do you offer free demos of your events?

Many companies will offer a free demo so you can understand what to expect if you choose them for your event.

2. Can you share some samples of past hybrid events you've hosted?

This will give you a good idea about how to set up your own hybrid event.

3. How do you manage in-person and virtual aspects of your event?

Both aspects will have to be coordinated and aligned so there aren't any last minute tech-based glitches.

4. How do you manage speaker sessions, networking events and breakout sessions between in-person and virtual events?

This allows both your in-person and virtual audience to participate.

5. How long does it take to set up the virtual event platform?

Understand how many weeks are required to set up the complete hybrid event, so you can pace yourself accordingly.

6. What security features are in place for the virtual event?

Prevent data fraud, potential viruses and crashing servers, etc.

7. Is the virtual event platform compatible with multiple devices?

People might be connecting from mobiles, tablets or desktops so your platform must be prepared for that.

8. How do you facilitate interactions between exhibitors and attendees?

Check which features and activities can boost engagement.

9. Do you offer any accessibility features for the disabled?

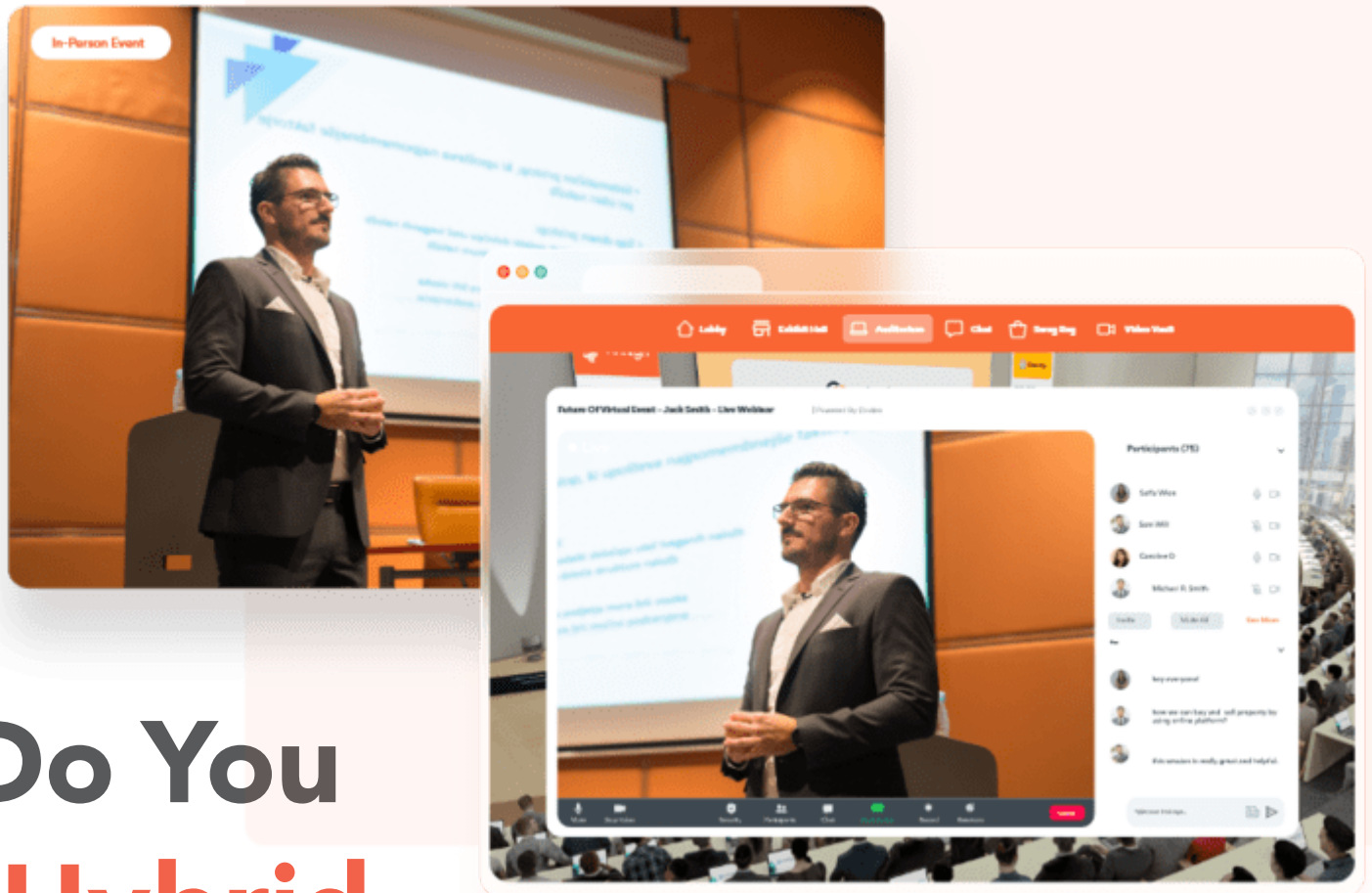
Look for features such as color contrast, text size adjustment, page narration, subtitles for webinars and straightforward navigation

10. What post-event reports do you provide? What are your reporting mechanisms?

Ask when and how you will get the post-event analysis.

11. Is there a readily available technical support team?

An A/V team is needed to coordinate on-site and virtual presentations, plus an on-site manager.



How Do You Run a Hybrid Event?

Hosting a hybrid event is easy given that you have a hands-on virtual platform provider taking care of all aspects of your event, plus a dedicated onsite team ensuring a seamless experience for the attendees. Here is your checklist on how to host a hybrid event:

1. Set your goals for the event, outline key performance indicators (KPIs).
2. Choose a virtual event platform provider.
3. Choose the onsite event provider.*
4. Outline speaker sessions, create schedules and invite respective speakers for the event (remote and in-person alike).
5. Create content for your landing page, exhibitor booths, or any guides, agendas or notes you want the incoming audience to have.
6. Actively promote on social media channels to get a large reach for your event, and leverage email marketing to promote to highly engaged audiences..
7. Connect with your virtual platform provider and the project management team to go through the event, test all aspects of the team to ensure there aren't any last minute glitches.

**vFairs works with your onsite event provider to set up live streams and any other technical requirements.*

What Should the Hybrid Event Content Strategy be?

Content is vital to the success of your hybrid event. You must bring your “A game” when designing the content strategy of your event. This encompasses tasks related to designing, creating and managing content throughout the conference hall and across all virtual channels.

Before you start creating and disseminating content, one important question must be answered...

Who are you talking to?
who is the target audience?

Do you understand their
needs and expectations?

Once you have answered this, you can begin outlining your content. The list below will help you get started in content creation:

1. Landing Page and Lobby

The first point of contact is the landing page. Use relevant information that hits the bullseye. Pay attention to:



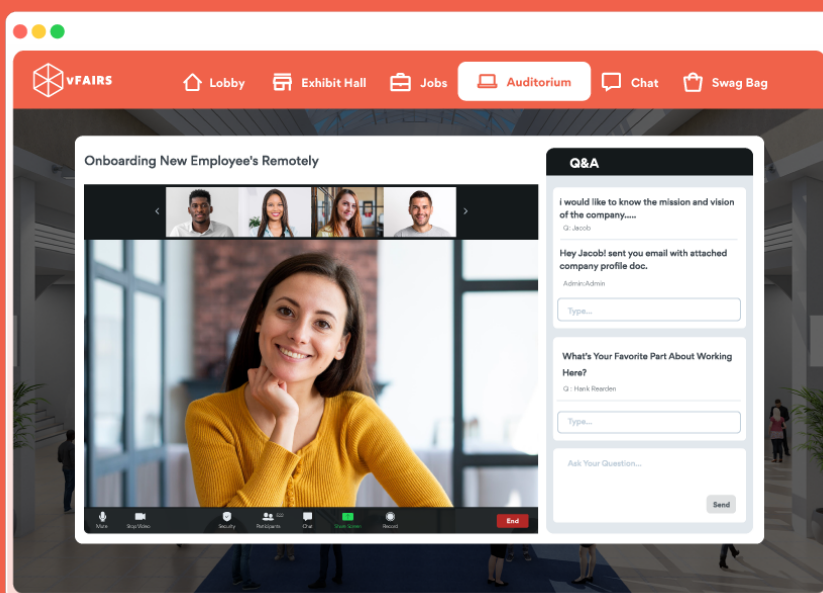
- Creating attractive visuals and catchy copy, event title, date, theme
- The images and video content being used
- The CTA; must be powerful and compelling.
- Colorful 3D animated lobby with a welcome video

2. Exhibit Booth



Exhibit booths, be it on-site or virtual exhibit booths, both must host content that successfully attracts visitors. Hosting interactive videos, and other useful resources is essential. The challenge is to create content for both physical and virtual booths in a hybrid event, which keeps both audiences engaged. Guide your exhibitors accordingly.

3. Webinars



When coordinating a hybrid event, the webinar schedule must be planned and sent out before the event. The schedule must align both the on-site and virtual audience. Webinars can be recorded and uploaded in addition to being live streamed for the virtual audience.

4. Promotion



Your content strategy must pay specific attention to your promotional efforts -- be it social media, websites, landing pages or email marketing. All channels must have carefully curated content with respect to their audiences. Provide your audience with information that will increase curiosity about your event. A strong call-to-action (CTA) will also give potential participants that extra nudge to sign-up.

What to Measure During and After the Hybrid Event?

Hybrid events seem to be the definitive way forward for the events industry. They are the perfect blend of physical and virtual events. A platform where people from a similar background come together to exchange ideas, experiences and learn from each other. As the host you want to encourage engagement between participants. However, there are other factors which can determine the success of your event.

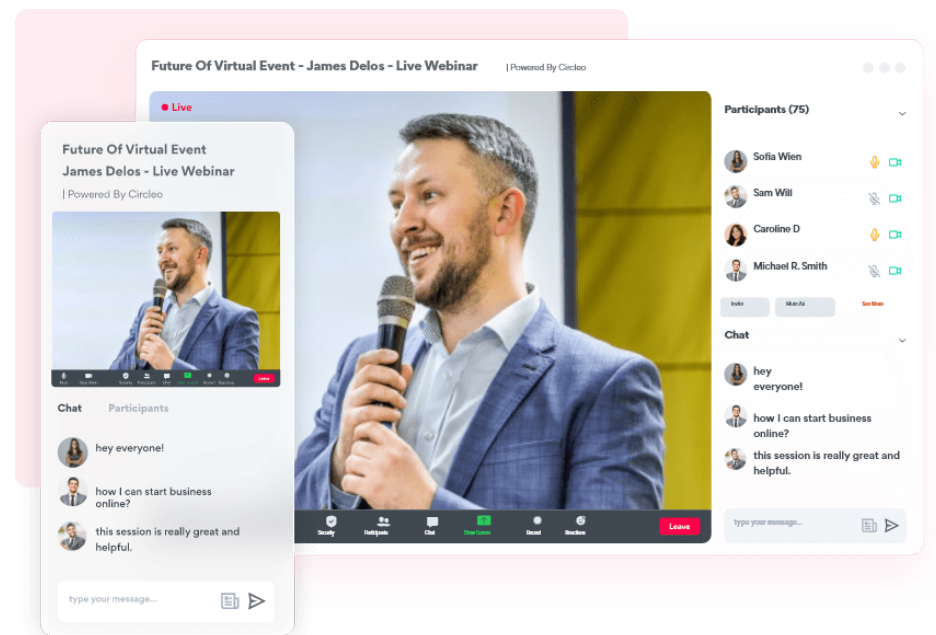
At the physical venue you can get a rough estimate of:

- Total registrations
- Number of attendees
- Number of people in a particular session/presentation
- Any sales, sign-ups or registrations

However, the virtual platform allows for a few more insights than a physical venue. For instance:

- Total registrations
- Number of attendees
- Exhibit booths visited
- Documents downloaded/ Videos viewed
- Time spent in the exhibit hall or in each booth
- Number of chats engaged in
- Total number of attendees in webinars
- Total number of attendees across webinars
- Individual user journeys

How Much Does a Hybrid Event Cost?



When planning a hybrid event you are essentially making arrangements for two venues - one physical and one virtual. Hence you must account for costs of those respective venues. Let us look at each individually:

Physical venue:

- Venue costs
- Food/catering/decor
- Equipment
- Parking facility
- Printed resources

starting at roughly
\$20,000*

Virtual venue:

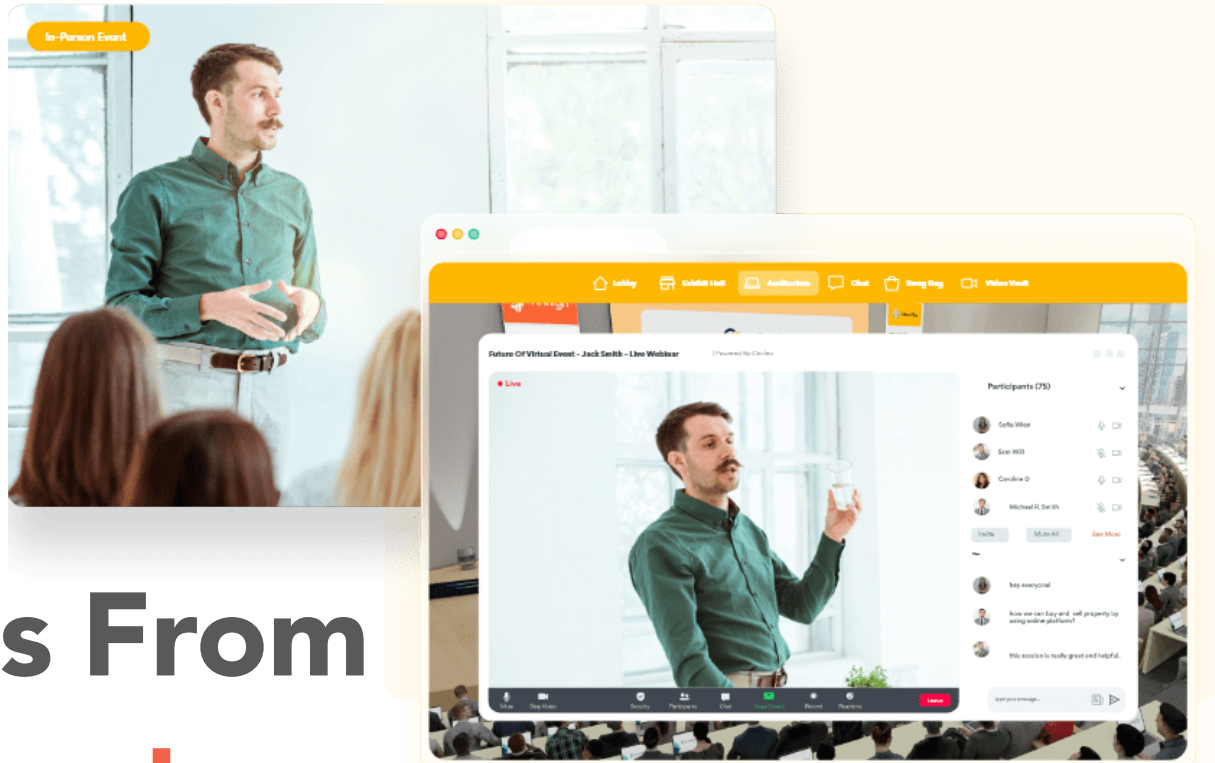
- Virtual event platform provider fee
- Content production (videos, documents and other resources)
- Third-party integration

starting at roughly
\$15,000*

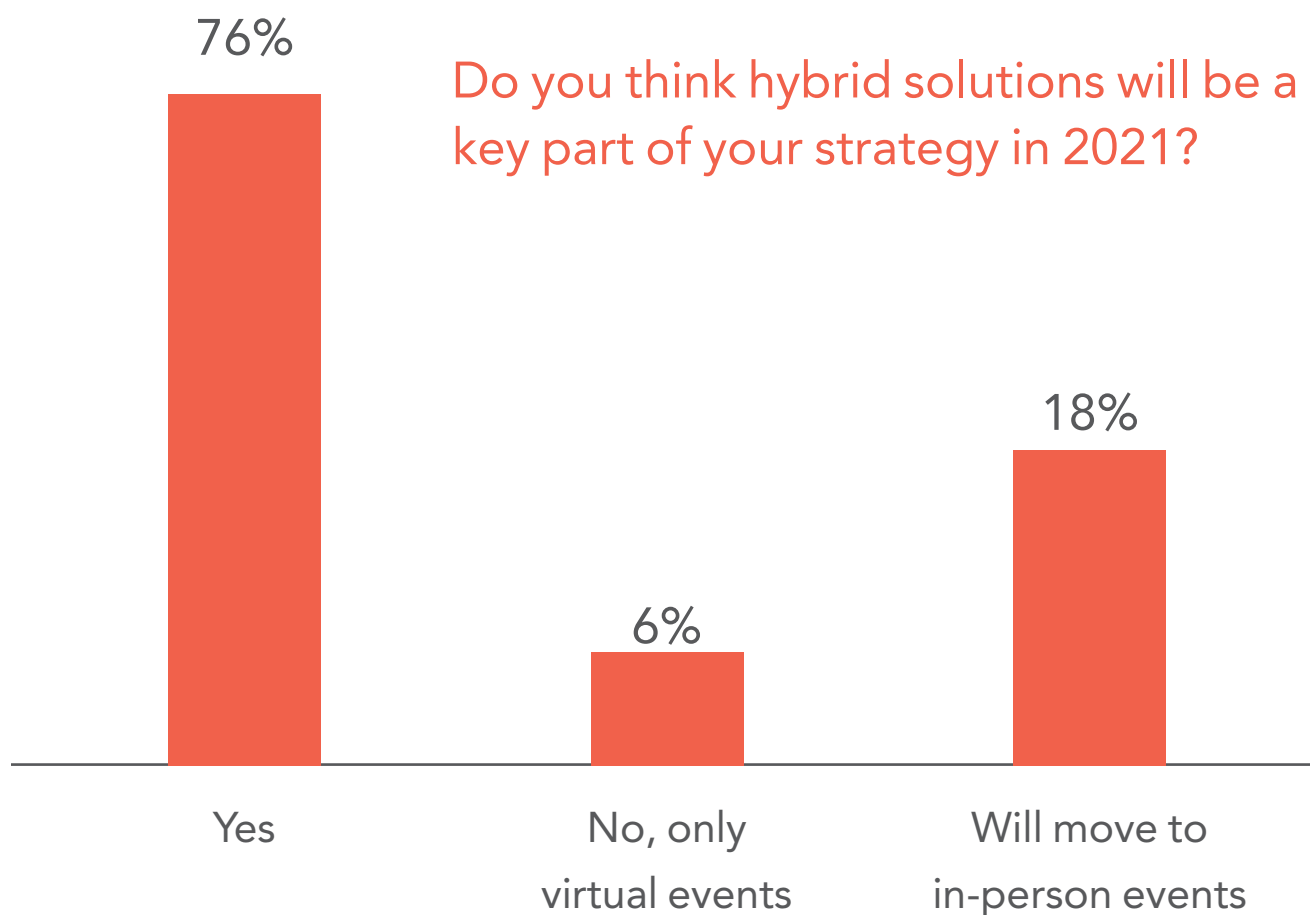
Total Cost: **\$35,000**

*cost is a rough estimate for an event of about 100 people. It may vary depending on the type of venue, decor, event management, catering, etc.

Key Takeaways From Hybrid Events



Hybrid events can very easily be deemed as the future of events. They are an exciting way to host future events as they allow a large number of people to participate in an event which otherwise would have been impossible owing to the restrictions of a physical venue.



According to a survey by vFairs, 76% of our respondents said that hybrid events will be part of their strategy in 2021.

"We're already seeing some confusion crop up about hybrid events. Sure, organizers have a vague idea of how it will be an attempt to fuse in-person and virtual experiences but aren't sure about how all those touchpoints will work. It's important that hybrid event platforms like vFairs step in and guide them to get them up to speed quickly, so that they don't lose out on precious time."

Aatir Abdul Rauf, Director of Product Marketing

1. Companies are already looking to solve business problems through hybrid events.
2. Key decisions made upfront will affect how your hybrid event plays out, including choosing the right provider.
3. Use data from onsite and online events both to understand attendee behavior and gain insights on which parts of the event were more engaging.
4. Align both onsite and online events, and make sure you are not running two separate events.
5. Facilitate interaction between online and onsite attendees.
6. Get sponsors on board and provide them with opportunities to maximize awareness and exposure.

So as we head further into 2021, let's adapt and move with the tide, embracing the future in full throttle.



Ready to Host Your
Hybrid Event?

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