



Successful Event Planning Tips in a New Era of the Industry

Like celebrities, fashion and food, what's "in" one minute can be "out" the next. The same can be said for the characteristics of a premier event. But it's safe to say no one anticipated the seismic shift a pandemic would have on the way events are planned and executed. When COVID-19 first hit, events of all sizes came to a screeching halt. As the days stretched into weeks and months, they returned in virtual-only form. Now, the pendulum is beginning to swing back toward in-person events—but with a few twists.

After such a lengthy hiatus, the rollout of pre-pandemic activities has event planners and attendees alike excited to resume in-person events. They allow people to form stronger emotional connections, network and engage with peers more easily, and physically see or test a product—all things that didn't quite land the same (or at all) when delivered virtually. But, now there's pressure to have that extra "wow" factor to entice people to physically come to an event versus attending from the comfort of their own home offices. Hire Space builds on that sentiment by noting:

It's imperative that live events become more meaningful to encourage people to attend. Of those who do attend, their motive is largely due to the opportunity to engage with people face to face, which we've learned not to take for granted after so long apart. The thrill of being together and catching up with industry friends, coupled with the experience of watching fantastic content in person, is an extremely powerful driver for attendance rates.

Even with a desire to Zoom less and meet more, the benefits of virtual events have left an indelible mark on the industry: You can reach a broader audience, there's greater flexibility in scheduling—or rescheduling—the event, and there's an eco-friendly component that is appealing as well.

The advantages of virtual hosting have unsurprisingly resulted in an uptick of hybrid events—which are more than likely going to be a mainstay in the industry moving forward. In fact, according to EventMB's research, 63 percent of event professionals see their events becoming hybrid in the future. To that end, at-home participants want to feel like they're part of the group, experiencing and engaging as much as they would if they were physically present. This is another facet of event preparation and execution that planners need to account for.

Planning a top-notch event in a reshaped world may seem like a daunting mountain to summit—but it doesn't have to be. Whether you're bringing together 10 people or 1,000, in-person or hybrid, here are the focus areas to keep top of mind for successful events planning in this new era of the industry.

Don't Bust Your Budget: Understanding How to Divvy Up Your Dollars

Even with a renewed desire for reinstating in-person events, planners will still want to consider a hybrid model for increased reach and overall attendance. Some people may not feel ready to attend in person, while others may not be able to accommodate the full travel commitment but can attend the daily sessions during standard work hours. A hybrid structure provides everyone with an opportunity to participate in the way that works best for them.

However, facilitating the virtual component to an event can potentially strain the event's budget. Incorporating a hybrid component can tack an extra 30 to 50 percent onto the final bill, depending on the size of the event and any advanced technology needs. That's why it's critical to know the absolute ceiling of your planning budget and to find an event venue that will work with you to determine whether your event expectations can become a reality at the price point you're able to execute against. To further help understand costs, you'll want to know what resources and services your venue has on-site that will help defray external costs associated with having to hire outside vendors.



Hybrid Event Cost Considerations

- Accessibility to a professional A/V team on-site
- Production equipment and crew (including travel and expenses for livestreaming and recording of sessions to present/offer post-event)
- Virtual technology platform license and hosting costs
- Sales for virtual exhibits and sponsorships
- Marketing to reach an expanded audience (international attendees, those who cannot or will not travel to the event)
- Having a dedicated host for the hybrid audience



Bring the "Wow" Factor: An Inspiring Event Requires an Inspiring Location

No matter the size or topic of the event, there's an ever-growing expectation from attendees that your event will be served with a view—especially if a hybrid option is available and they could just as easily stay home. Consider what you need in a venue that will enhance the event for the in-person audience:

- Striking architecture
- Breathtaking views
- Tasteful décor
- Ample room sizes
- Dedicated meeting and/or coworking spaces

For virtual attendees, turning an in-person meeting into a virtual one takes more than simply telling people to sign up and "click to join." There needs to be uninterrupted streaming, crisp audio, and potential participation opportunities. If more robust technology and interactivity is needed, ask your venue if they have a studio or other dedicated space that can accommodate event engagement activities like:

- Online polling
- Live Q&A
- Advanced camera techniques (e.g., picture-in-picture view of the presenter and presentations)

Finding ways to deliver immersive experiences is a must to make a hybrid event memorable, so the little extras for the online audience will go a long way.

But those extras are important for the in-person attendees, too.

What's available to attendees outside the event proper is equally as important as the experience they receive inside. To make your meeting remarkable, look for a venue in a destination city that offers that "wow" experience from the very first impression. A vibrant dining scene, unique shopping opportunities and/or a distinct museum district that's only a few steps away means there's a little something for everyone when there's downtime and the ability to explore a new city.

Tech Specs

Monona Terrace has the digital infrastructure, technical expertise, full-time audiovisual staff, and meeting planning experience to be your partner in taking your meeting virtual.

- Dual 10 Gigabit Ethernet connections to internet using separate ISPs over fiber and wireless
- 40 Gigabit Ethernet building fiber backbone
- Gigabit Ethernet to show floor
- Redundant firewalls
- Redundant network core
- Onsite network technicians
- Voice (phone) service and support
- 45'x15' screen

Can You Hear Me?

Ensure the A/V Exceeds Expectations

You've found a venue that checks all the visual and budgetary boxes, but will the event be able to run smoothly within it? It's an understatement to say that A/V quality is a priority when determining a facility to host an event—regardless of it being in person or hybrid. The Professional Convention Management Association observed:

Virtual meetings held early in the pandemic were often stripped down, with a heavy focus on content and little entertainment value. But when the pandemic showed no signs of stopping in 2021, organizers knew attendees were battling Zoom fatigue. Virtual events had to fight for their attendees' attention, which gave way to high-tech virtual events ... to make attendees feel immersed in the action.

Attending a meeting where the audio cuts out or the connection is constantly buffering is going to result in a significant drop in viewership—and a likelihood that your next event won't receive many sign-ups. The devil is in the details, and the following steps can significantly—and positively—improve your event:

- Consult with your facility coordinator to get a full understanding of details like lighting, internet speed and connectivity, and audio capabilities.
- Determine what A/V equipment your venue has on-site and/or if you will need to bring in supplemental equipment as part of your tech stack.
- Get to know the crew who will be helping to run the show. They will be the ones pulling the levers the day of, so make sure everything is set up for success—and that there's a plan B in place just in case.
- Provide key on-site individuals with a list of the platforms that need to be supported for both the in-person and virtual elements of the event well in advance, so everyone is comfortable with using them.

Knowing the importance of connectivity in today's high-demand virtual needs, Monona Terrace is one of just a handful of convention centers in the United States that offers Internet2 access. This allows sites attached to these high-performance networks to interact in ways not possible with "regular" internet. Additionally, there's a professional on-site team with knowledge across all key A/V needs to help you orchestrate your incredible.

Friendly and Flawless:

The Case for Prerecording Presentations

A common obstacle of hybrid events is the consistency of presentation quality, namely for those attending remotely. This has since spurred the trend of prerecording presentations (and not just for hybrid events!). Trying to simultaneously produce live and remote sessions can be cumbersome and costly, so prerecording sessions can help eliminate stress and real-time production issues. Planners are realizing the following benefits from strategically incorporating prerecorded sessions:

- Presenters are fully in control of the surroundings, minimizing distractions and ambient noises.
- The overall production value is enhanced. The presentation can be reviewed and edited prior to broadcasting it live, allowing for any mistakes to be removed or re-recorded.
- Presenters and the audience can enjoy the live event more. With the stress of delivering live content removed, presenters can be more active participants, facilitating discussions, answering questions and/or adding color commentary.
- If plan A is a live presentation but extenuating circumstances arise, having the presentation prerecorded and ready to go with the push of a button is a solid plan B.
- To keep the energy of in-person engagement, an option is to have the main presentation(s) prerecorded and then have a live Q&A to discuss the learnings.



Virtual Conference Platforms

Depending on the needs of your event, the right software features will help determine which platform to use.

Top functionality needs:

- Mobile accessibility for iOS and/or Android users
- Instant messaging/chat
- File sharing
- Screen sharing
- Breakout rooms
- In-platform A/V recording
- Polling
- Gamification

Most-used platforms:

- Whova
- Livestorm
- Airmee
- Communiqu
- Eventzilla
- Demio
- Zoom
- WebEx



Keep Concerns in Check: Shine a Spotlight on Safety

The health and safety of attendees has always been a top concern, but now it's more important than ever. Some people are ready to jump back into live events with both feet, while others are still dipping a toe in the water. As planners, it's important to help everyone who has opted to join in person feel comfortable. These days, enhanced health measures can no longer be an afterthought, but need to be factored into the event's planning and consideration phase.

One way to know a facility puts cleanliness at the forefront is to look for one that is GBAC STAR™ certified. It's the cleaning industry's gold standard and the only outbreak prevention, response, and recovery accreditation certification. In total, it is a 20-point program that enables facilities to establish and maintain a cleaning, disinfection, and infectious disease prevention program to control and/or minimize risk associated with infectious agents for employees, customers, clients, visitors, the community, and the environment. To earn the certification, facilities need to continuously demonstrate that correct work practices, procedures, and systems are in place to prepare, respond, and recover from outbreaks.

From a planning standpoint, there are other measures that can help safeguard the event—and more importantly—the health of attendees:

- Continue to follow the recommendations and current guidelines from the CDC, as well as the requirements of local ordinances. Promoting and adhering to these safety protocols will minimize the threat of spreading germs while allowing people the ability to convene together comfortably.
- Minimize unnecessary food handling through accommodated food service. Ask whether meals can be provided in individual boxes or via served buffets, greatly reducing the likelihood of contamination.
- Balance inclusion with safety by asking to see attendees' vaccination passports or other proof of vaccination. While potentially divisive, it may prove useful to ensuring your in-person event can happen.
- Communicate any and all safety requirements in advance to ensure attendees are fully informed and prepared.

Safety and fun are not mutually exclusive. It's possible to produce a remarkable (yet safe) event that people will talk about for months after.

The AV team at Monona Terrace is truly unparalleled ... supporting the hybrid components of our meeting at every turn. Really, everyone in our general session had to operate in ways that were outside of comfort zones and to adapt to new technology and circumstances. It couldn't have gone more smoothly thanks to the expertise, excellent pre-planning, and guidance of the Monona Terrace staff.

– Uniform Law Commission

Orchestrating Your Incredible

Hosting events isn't new—but what is new are the options for attendees and the ways the overall event experience is delivered. For seamless event planning and execution in an industry that has been turned on its ear, keeping these top takeaways in mind will be the difference between a hybrid event that's buzzworthy or ho-hum.

The Monona Terrace experience means you'll get access to a premier events facility where we can orchestrate your incredible. For more information on our capabilities, visit mononaterrace.com or call 608.261.4000.

"Orchestrating your incredible is our everyday." – Laura Maclsaac, Director of Sales