

AN ENDLESS EVENTS PUBLICATION

YOUR VIRTUAL EVENT HANDBOOK

THE STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO PLAN
A FLAWLESS VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	01
CHAPTER ONE: BACK TO THE BASICS (& WHY IT MATTERS)	02 - 07
CHAPTER TWO: PRICING & BUDGET STRATEGY	08 - 21
CHAPTER THREE: ENGAGEMENT FROM START TO FINISH	22 - 41
CHAPTER FOUR: THE ART OF VIRTUAL SPONSORSHIPS	42 - 52
CHAPTER FIVE: LET'S TALK TECH (& WHY YOU NEED SUPPORT)	53 - 69
CONCLUSION	70

INTRODUCTION

In early 2020, the world as we knew it took an unexpected turn. With a pandemic sweeping the globe, and leaders urging citizens to stay home in an effort to contain it, the events industry was turned on its head. How could a sector that thrived in bringing people together and establishing powerful relationships survive a cataclysm like this?

But event professionals are known for their flexibility, perseverance, and impressive ability to pivot. These extraordinary traits, paired with the fact that we're living in the golden age of technology, made it possible for the industry to not only survive but also bloom. With the advent of virtual events, planners became game-changers.

As an industry, we were able to recognize that at this moment in time more than ever, people were starving for human connection. And thanks to the new paradigm and the technologies available, even professionals delivered.

The ins and outs of virtual events, however, might still feel foreign to many. Nay-sayers will always undermine their potential - but those are the ones who will be left behind. Sooner or later, with or without a pandemic, the industry would have to change eventually. As technology develops at an astonishing pace, and with universal calls for more sustainability, virtual events were bound to gain a lot more traction. And as we're faced with new challenges, it's up to us to show the public that we'll do everything in our power to provide stellar customer service, unique experiences, and unforgettable stories through the tools we have at our disposal.

This handbook will be your best friend as you explore the exciting world of virtual events. The Endless team has put together all of our collective knowledge about strategy, engagement, and technology in order to equip you with the tools you need to plan a successful virtual event your attendees will never forget.

Happy learning!

BACK TO THE BASICS

(& WHY IT MATTERS)

BACK TO THE BASICS

(& WHY IT MATTERS)

Before we dive into the nitty-gritty of virtual events, we urge you to first take a step back. It's very easy to want to jump straight into the planning aspects. But as a team who's been helping put together events for years, and who's been at the forefront of this seismic shift in the industry, it's important that we address a common pitfall.

Since they became the new normal, planners have been scrambling to create virtual experiences. Not because they want to, but because they don't have a choice. And this is a terrible mindset to have, one that impairs you in ways you don't even realize.

It's perfectly understandable to be fearful right now. Fearful that things will never go back to normal. Fearful that what made us love this industry is gone forever. And fearful that we can no longer dedicate our hearts and souls to bringing people together like we used to. But the thing about fear in this particular context is that it keeps us from being as extraordinary as we can be, the disruptors that we've always been.

Being ruled by this mindset makes us fall short of our intrinsic greatness. The virtual events we plan become a bandaid. A pale shadow of what they could actually be. The outcome of a passionless endeavor that only exists to replace what should have been a grandiose experience. And that will translate into the finished product, whether we realize it or not. But where can you go from here?

THE MAGIC OF STORYTELLING

There's no shame in admitting that we might have lost touch with our devotion to the industry. When livelihoods are threatened and everything we thought was certain crumbles beneath our feet, seeing the light at the end of the tunnel isn't easy. But as fresh as everything still is, it's no longer too early to decide what we want to do with the cards we've been dealt.

Let's take a step back and remember what's at the core of events. Hint: it's the exact same thing that's at the core of life – stories. Jimmy Neil Smith said that “We are all storytellers. We all live in a network of stories. There isn't a stronger connection between people than storytelling.” And if our purpose in life as event planners has always been to promote human connection and to foster powerful bonds, we can't forget about the importance of storytelling.

Now, storytelling has been a buzzword for years in the scope of marketing. But as Laura Holloway puts it, it's more than just about selling. Storytelling “is our obligation to the next generation. If all we are doing is marketing, we are doing a disservice, and not only to our profession, but to our children, and their children. Give something of meaning to your audience by inspiring, engaging, and educating them with a story. Stop marketing. Start storytelling”. Somewhere along the way, we forgot how to tell stories. We forgot why they're inherent to our professions. But it's never too late to start all over again.



There hasn't been a better time to tell amazing stories than right now. We're surrounded by forms of media and technology that would get us accused of witchcraft not that long ago. Yes, that's how far technology has come! And in spite of the fact that we've been using it for personal purposes, it somehow never crossed our minds that it could be harnessed in other powerful ways.

Up until this point, many virtual events that planners put together were nothing more than a quick-fix. Little to no thought is put into the design of the experience and the storytelling aspect. And very quickly, webinar fatigue crept up into the lives of people everywhere. So we urge you to wonder: with all the tools available, can't we do better than Zoom?



GET CREATIVE & DITCH THE LAZY MINDSET

In Chapter Two, we'll dive deeper into the topic of budget allocation. But for now, one of the most important things you have to remember is that a virtual event won't necessarily be cheaper than an in-person one. It can, but if you're looking to create an experience that will captivate your audience and make them come back for more, you can't settle for built-in cameras and microphones and call it a day. Ditch this misconception and let creativity take the driver's seat here. Let's go back to the tools we were talking about. Some of the ones you can invest in include:

Green Screens: A green screen is essentially a green background in front of which people and objects can move freely that allows for any other background to be inserted in the final image. It's often used in movies, and it can be a great ally to add dimension to your virtual event and help out in the art of storytelling.

B-Roll Footage: B-roll or B-reel is another tool that studios love to use in their production of television series and big blockbusters. This is supplemental footage that is intercut with the main visuals. Anything from insert shots to FX shots and stock footage applies.

Visual Media: This one is pretty self-explanatory. Everything from videos to images, paintings, and photography falls under the category of visual media.

All of these things can be used to create dynamic, visually engaging sessions and thoughtful content. It's time to start investing in these tools just like you would invest in a venue. Considering the current paradigm, this means leveraging capabilities of local broadcast studios with reduced staff or getting creative with the use of green screens and multiple cameras from home.

Because this is how you can support the narrative and the storytelling of the talking heads, thus birthing the riveting and electric environment that's so important in virtual events.

• *Einstein says...* •

People accustomed to high-end experiences in person will be expecting that same level of experience online.

But you don't have to rely solely on external tools to craft a compelling story through a virtual event. Many event pros might find it hard to get out of contracts previously made with venues. But instead of despairing and considering the deposits lost, let your creative bone guide you. Why not repurpose the space you already have in ingenious ways? You can organize a concert live from the venue and stream it, offering virtual audiences the possibility to be a part of a beautiful and hypnotic experience from the comfort of their own homes.

You can also consider incorporating emerging technologies. Every year there's talk about augmented reality, virtual reality, and mixed reality. And it hasn't quite materialized yet because mass adoption of these technologies is an issue we haven't been able to tackle. For instance, not everyone has access to VR headsets, and most still require a considerable dose of tech know-how to get with the program. However, there have been amazing examples of XR content, such as Katy Perry's performance on American Idol.

This isn't something that can happen overnight or be produced in a short amount of time with little resources. But if there is a time to start tackling these incredible technologies, then that time is now. Organizations with considerable funds and tech-savvy audiences can be at the forefront of XR content and propel it into the mainstream. VR, AR, and MR have the power to disrupt well-established paradigms and introduce audiences to fresh new ways of storytelling.

THE TAKEAWAY

The main reason why we started this handbook with a small lesson on storytelling and its applicability to virtual events is simple. We want you to remember why you're doing what you're doing. Storytelling will never die for as long as human beings exist. So keep in mind that this is what we do. We have the luxury to contribute to this magical bonding process and come rain or thunder, it's our responsibility to uphold it, foster it, and protect it against all odds. The best time to start investing in good quality virtual event production was yesterday. The second best time is now. Hold onto this mindset as we travel through the path of virtual event planning.





**BUDGET
& PRICING
STRATEGY**

BUDGET & PRICING STRATEGY

Okay, let's talk numbers. It's always a great place to start, particularly where the budget is concerned. It forces you to consider all of the moving parts of your event, what you want, and what isn't necessary. This means that while you're outlining your virtual event budget, you're also creating its skeleton, which you'll later complete with the meat and bones of sponsorships, entertainment, speakers, and technology.

And pricing a virtual event is something that gives many planners a few headaches. But don't worry - we have all the answers you could need. Let's jump into the math!

HOW TO CREATE YOUR VIRTUAL EVENT BUDGET IN 5 EASY STEPS

The key to creating your virtual event budget is to figure out all of the parts of the experience that have an associated cost. In the past, you'd have to consider all of the parts, big and small, from the venue to the catering. And it might be tempting to believe that there will be fewer things to include in your virtual event budget due to the differences in structure. Don't get carried away by this thought!



1. CREATE YOUR SPREADSHEET

Item

This is the column you'll refer to for each individual item in your virtual event budget. Be as clear-cut as possible and avoid jumping through hoops. If you want your budget to be as accurate as possible, list each specific item, and don't pile items together. For instance, say you want to put together the platform and registration technology. If you need to adjust your numbers during the process of planning, this can come back to bite you. The more accurate you are, the better!

Description

Just typing the name of each item isn't going to be enough. The concept of being as specific as possible continues throughout the whole process. Including a description of each item is paramount, particularly if your event needs to be revised and approved by someone who isn't in the loop. In order to make them understand why certain items are absolutely necessary and what part they will play in your virtual event, you must describe them in detail.

Amount

Things can very quickly go downhill if you fail to account for the amount of each item you need for your event. While adding quantities of certain items can make your budget skyrocket, cutting excesses can make it go down. Either way, it's important that you list both the quantities you think you'll need and then keep updating the budget with the amount that will actually be necessary. This can also be helpful with future virtual events, by going back to what you thought versus needed in order to be more accurate with each new budget.

Estimated Cost

Chances are, you won't know the exact number that will be associated with every item. But just having a notion of what cost bracket you're looking at will go a long way in helping you realize what sort of virtual event budget you'll need.

Actual Cost

This is where you'll input how much each item actually ended up costing. Much like the expected versus actual amounts, the estimated versus actual costs will be valuable data for future virtual event budgeting and planning. Keep it as a reference, because it will come very much in handy for all the virtual events you'll be tackling!

2. PUT YOUR RESEARCHER HAT ON!

In order to get your estimated costs close to what the actual costs will look like, you'll have to undergo some research. If this were an in-person event you had experience with in the past, looking into that would be a valuable window. And if you planned other virtual events in the past, you should definitely do the same! However, considering how new this paradigm is in the industry, you'll probably have to dig a little deeper.

Examine Available Platforms

Technology is the number one thing you'll have to look into since that's where the bulk of your virtual event budget will go to - more on that in Chapter Five. When dealing with a virtual event, you won't have to account for the venue, the catering, and the AV. But you will have to account for your virtual event platform, which will be your stage, your breakout rooms, your meeting rooms, and everything in between.

So doing some research into all the platforms available can go a long way in helping you budget for your event. What features do they offer? How much do you have to pay to have specific things your event can't go without? There are dozens of platforms and tools to look into, so it's laborious work. But we still advise you to do the homework in order to have accurate numbers.

Talk To A Virtual Event Production Company

Putting on a virtual event is scary enough. Putting on a virtual event for the first time is just downright terrifying for those who have no idea where to even begin! This is why you should contact a production company. We'll dive deeper into why this is a good idea and one of the best ways to ensure the success of your event in Chapter Five.

3. CONSIDER EVERYTHING

Once you have a holistic view of your potential costs, you'll want to move on to the line items. This is when you should close your eyes and think hard and clear about the timeline of your virtual event. What are the things that can represent added costs as the planning process and the event itself take place? And don't just think about the big, obvious expenses like the platform! Consider the small details such as marketing and the shape of the event itself. Because at the end of the day, these small things will add up and cost you a lot of money if you don't regard them, to begin with.

Would you like to record the whole event?

Recording the event might be of great interest to you in order to create evergreen content and make the experience available for those who couldn't attend - more on that in a second. Would this be something you want? If yes, consider the cost that could be associated with it.

Do you need small meeting rooms or breakouts?

Do you want to recreate the experience of breakout rooms? Is it important to you that the virtual event includes a space where attendees can interact with each other freely?

Do you need exhibitor and sponsor activations?

Are you planning on having sponsors involved in the virtual event? How will you conduct these activations?

What will your marketing strategy look like?

You'll need to put a lot of effort into engaging with your audience pre, during, and post-event. How do you plan on doing this? Will it include ads or an aggressive social media campaign? How much will this cost?

Do you want someone to train your speakers?

Unless you've hired speakers that have previous experience with virtual events, chances are, they'll be somewhat clueless. And having a speaker who's a bad engager is a big no-no in the spectrum of virtual events! Will you consider having someone train them?

How many days and how many hours each day?

Just like with a venue, the cost of the platforms and tools you'll be using will vary depending on how long the event will last.

Do you already have a registration platform or will you need one?

If you don't already have a registration platform for your attendees, you'll need one – and that, of course, has associated costs.

4. ACCOUNT FOR WHAT MIGHT GO WRONG

Murphy's Law teaches us that anything that can go wrong, will go wrong. And we're not trying to be Debbie Downers here! We just want to alert you to the importance of having a "rainy day" fund. You never know what can happen, so you might as well be prepared in case something unexpected sabotages your virtual event.

Cushion the virtual event budget with Murphy's Law in mind – we recommend somewhere around 15%.

Consider your biggest and most volatile variable costs.

In case the virtual event gets canceled, how much could that cost you?

Overall, just consider all the things that can keep your event from going as you wanted, and plan for it.

5. KEEP THESE TIPS IN MIND

Get it done as soon as possible.

Budgeting for your virtual event is far from being a fun task, and as we mentioned before, it might seem quite scary. But the faster you do it, the faster it'll be done – and without a budget, you can't move on with the process of planning this incredible experience!

Outline the objective of your virtual event.

When your attendees logout at the very end of the experience, what do you want them to leave with? What do you want the highlight of the virtual event to be? The amazing speaker that presented awesome content and kept them engaged? The sponsor activations? The polls? Define this clearly and allocate the numbers according to your goals.

Be as detailed as possible.

The devil is in the details, after all! And the more specific you are, the better. Ignoring a detail that might seem small can very easily blow up the whole budget.

Be honest with your numbers.

It's not easy to look at the cost of a certain item if it's extremely expensive. It can actually feel like a punch in the gut. However, underpricing an item just to make the budget look nice will take you absolutely nowhere. The only thing that you'll accomplish is having more money fly away in real life.

Be curious and do your research!

The more you know about what you're budgeting for, the more likely you are to estimate costs correctly and stay true to the budget.

You're all in this together.

It's important that once the virtual event budget is complete, you share it with all the people relevant to the process of planning. Having everyone in the team be on the same page is always a good practice.

It's okay to spend money.

If you have enough funds, don't be scared to use them. We refer you back to Chapter One and the importance of storytelling here.

HOW TO PRICE YOUR VIRTUAL EVENT

One of the hardest things to do when it comes to virtual events is pricing.

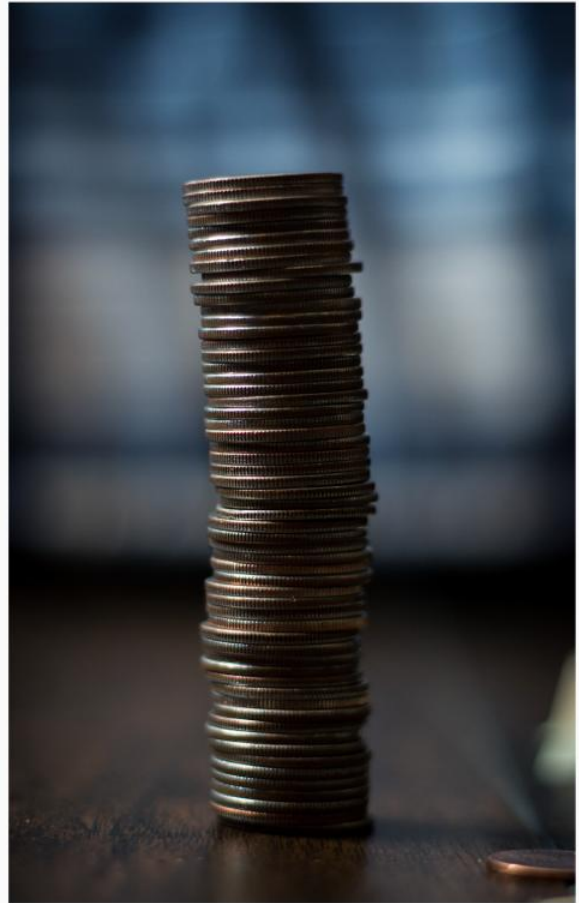
- **Should you charge the same you would for an in-person event?**
- **Should you just make it free, since it's the first time you're planning an event like this?**
- **What are other sources of revenue you can add?**

Deep breaths and keep on reading - we have the answers!

The Path To Profit

Much like you would do with an in-person event, you need to calculate how much your ideal price would be in order to turn a profit. This won't be new ground for you – assuming you've planned events before, you know how to go about this simple equation.

Because you don't have any historical data to draw from (unless you've put on a virtual event before) you'll have to carefully map out all of your costs. This will include things like speaker fees, entertainment fees, event platforms, the technical and production costs, and so on. By knowing exactly what your expenses are you'll be better equipped to calculate the return on investment of your virtual event.



It's also important that you keep the goals of your event in mind. What do you expect to accomplish with this experience? Are you looking to increase brand awareness? Increase sales? Generate leads? Only by knowing what the ultimate objective is can you successfully know what the metrics you'll be measuring are. Measuring the success of your event with accurate data will go a long way in helping you price future virtual events!

Research Is Key

Putting on a virtual event is scary enough. Putting on a virtual event for the first time is just downright terrifying for those who have no idea where to even begin! This is why you should contact a production company. We'll dive deeper into why this is a good idea and one of the best ways to ensure the success of your event in Chapter Five.

Finding inspiration from your competitors isn't unheard of. But this time around, we have a sneaky tip for you! Instead of checking out event pricing from other events, take a look at online course platforms. There are hundreds of platforms like this that offer courses and packages about everything and anything – sales, marketing, business, pottery, you name it!

A great way to get a benchmark is to see how these online courses are priced. Let's say you did your research and found that the average price for a five-hour course on crisis communication is \$350. If your virtual event will offer ten hours, along with extra perks and state of the art speakers and trainers, you can charge double or more – \$700 and above.

This is, of course, a hypothetical example. But it illustrates how you'll want to go about creating a solid benchmark for your virtual event. It shows you how much an audience who is interested in a particular field is willing to pay to be provided with in-depth courses and seminars on the subject.

And chances are, some of your audience fits in that bubble. So put your scientist cap on and get researching places like Udemy to see what's up!

Consider A Subscription Model

One of the top concerns that come along with planning a virtual event is attendee engagement. Webinar fatigue is a thing and the chances that you'll keep your attendees hooked for as long as you would in an in-person event are very slim. We'll touch upon the topic of attendee engagement in Chapter Three.

But one thing that might work wonderfully is a subscription model. It can help both where it comes to pricing and attendee engagement! Subscription models are already popular with consumers everywhere. Why not use this to your advantage and turn your own virtual event into a subscription model based one?

Consider this: why not offer your attendees the chance to access a one-hour session every day for thirty days for \$100 a month? This way, you'll have your audience's undivided attention since you're only asking for an hour as opposed to six days back to back, five hours each day.

And this is just for live sessions! The great thing about this kind of model is that it can represent a continuous source of revenue for your company. Aside from offering live sessions, you now have an entire library of content in the likes of Hulu, Netflix, Disney +, and Amazon Prime that has been previously recorded. This means you can offer access to all of this existing content to your target audience. If it's something along the lines of educational content, they'll be more than willing to pay for it. Not only will you be bringing in continuous revenue from what could be considered a dormant source, but you're also promoting future live virtual events.

And let's not forget the repurposing possibilities that this offers. If you planned virtual events that included five sessions on effective sales tactics, why not put them together and sell them as a bundle? The perks are endless and represent a new world of profit-generating opportunities that wouldn't be possible with in-person events.

Different Tiers & Features

Who's to say you have to charge the same to all your attendees? Just because your event is going virtual, it doesn't mean you can't offer extra features that will make it more appealing, thus making people want to pay a higher price to have access to said features.

Above we discussed subscription models. A popular pricing strategy in services like that is to offer extra perks and tiering the prices accordingly. This is something that can easily apply to your virtual event pricing strategy.

Let's say you've decided on a fee of \$250 for the standard experience of your event. This will include access to the speaker sessions, breakout rooms, Q&A sessions, etc. But you're trying to figure out a way to offer your attendees something that will lead them to pay more. So you create a "Premium Tier" that costs \$350 and gives exclusive access to materials prepared by the speaker and an entertainment session post-event with a band (think something along the lines of a live stream). Awesome! But you don't have to stop there. You can add yet another tier, a "VIP" one, that will cost \$450 but offers the attendees all of the perks mentioned above plus a one-on-one session with their preferred speaker to get precious insights that weren't offered during the standard session. You can also throw a virtual goodie bag in there that includes something like a voucher for an online store selling something relevant to your audience.

Again, this is just an example. But if you know your event and your audience well, you'll be able to create these tiers that offer features your attendees simply can't pass up on!

Know Your Worth

Because virtual events are such a novel thing, making the first event free or extremely cheap seems like the best way to ensure people will actually attend. After all, you won't be able to offer the same experience you would in a "normal" event, right? So why would people bother showing up?

Wrong! The best advice we can give you on this front is don't do it. Remember that you have worth, and you are providing your attendees with a valuable experience that will enrich their lives in some way. Offering yourself for free or selling yourself short will do you no favors.

Will Curran, CEO of Endless Events, actually believes you should charge the same thing for your virtual event that you would charge for the in-person experience. "You're bringing something to the table that has value, and people will benefit from that value", he says. "You should always push for charging, and charging the same you would under regular circumstances. Your attendees aren't going to an event for the excellent catering – they're going because of your expertise because they believe their time and money are worth it. So don't convince yourself that charging less or not charging at all will help you achieve your goals".

Remember that the way audiences consume content has completely shifted in the past few years. The rise of Netflix, Youtube, and Twitch has revolutionized how audiences perceive live streaming. People will happily pay to get access to top-notch content they can consume through screens. So you can't be concerned about pricing something as low as possible to get people to show up. You're doing yourself and your organization a disservice.

If you truly believe in your worth, if you know you're offering something unique and valuable, why wouldn't you charge based on that? The right people will flock to your event!

• *Einstein says...* •

***Stop doing it for free.
You're setting a precedent in the minds of the audience
that allows them to devalue everything that you stand for.
And that's hard to change. Once somebody sees something
for free, you're not going to get them to pay for it.***

Attendees Paying What They Choose

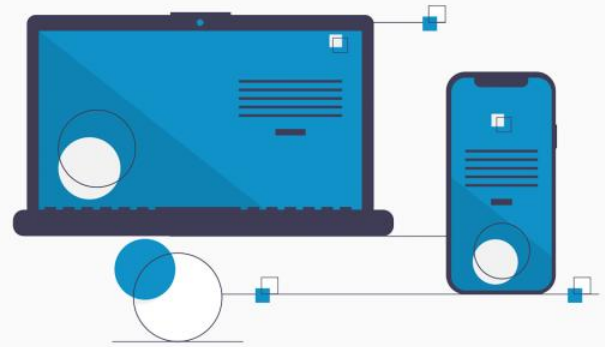
Another out-of-the-box idea you can go with is having attendees paying what they choose. This means that they will attend, and only after will they pay for the experience, based on the perceived value they got from it. While it might seem risky, you once again must remember your worth.

This isn't a completely new model either, and platforms like weshowup have cracked the code based on years of working as artists implementing this model. You'd be surprised by how much the audience can value what you give!

Find Additional Revenue Streams

The digital world offers a lot more possibilities than the good old in-person experience. For instance, you can consider something like affiliate marketing. Amazon has one of the best affiliate programs out there! Contemplate including links to relevant items sold on the website in your virtual event. For every purchase an attendee makes through that link, you get a referral fee. This is yet another amazing source of passive income.

Digital platforms also include the possibility of ad spaces. You can leverage this to your advantage by selling banner and pop-up ad space to potential sponsors of your virtual event. Sponsorships in the world of virtual events are an amazing source of revenue in themselves – aside from advertising, you can promote them through your speakers, slides, videos, social media channels, sponsored Q&A sessions, and more.



**ENGAGEMENT
FROM START
TO FINISH**



ENGAGEMENT FROM START TO FINISH

It's when the time comes to consider audience engagement that most planners feel like they've hit a wall. After all, human connection is the basis of our industry. How can you possibly replicate such a raw experience in a virtual environment? The answer is simple and it depends on three pillars: your speakers, the entertainment, and the engagement strategy pre, during, and post-event. Let's jump right into it!

THE SPEAKERS

A lot of the value you're providing to your audience will come in the form of your speakers. We already touched upon the importance of creating a story and telling it through exciting visuals in Chapter One. But a lot of the work will fall on the talking heads and the success of the event depends quite a bit on how they navigate the experience.

So that means that both preparing your virtual event speakers and being the one who does the speaking entails quite a bit of preparation and a series of best practices that wouldn't apply to in-person events. Below you can find our best hacks to ensure the success of virtual speakers and get that engagement

FOR THE SPEAKERS

Warm Up Your Instrument

You might not be a singer, but you are still an artist of sorts. Whether you're providing education, entertainment, or both, your job is to connect with people and to keep them hooked from start to finish. And yes, your materials are part of it, but we'll get to that later. The first thing we want you to consider is your voice – the instrument you'll be using the most.

Your voice will play a huge role in keeping the audience engaged and coming back to you. There's a fine balance between commanding and charming that you have to nail and to achieve that, those vocal cords of yours need to be in top shape. So stay hydrated, refrain from screaming or using it too much in the days leading up to the big day, and make good use of that magical and sweet substance called honey. It goes wonderfully with a cup of tea!

Prepare Your Background

During an in-person event, the set-up is something other people would take care of for you. But now that you're presenting from a different location than everybody else, you're in charge of your own background. And no, this isn't something you can just ignore! Seeing the person who's presenting speak against a background of piled boxes and old papers is an instant turn-off. Plus, it can be incredibly distracting and hurt your engagement right off the bat.

Make sure you keep it clean, simple, and organized. Like a wise woman once said, make it spark joy in those looking at it. A great place to seek inspiration is YouTube. Most creators put a lot of effort into this specific part of their video for all the reasons we outlined above. Hence, they can provide some cool and innovative ideas for your own background!

Do Your Research

At their core, events are, and always will be, about people. You're not speaking to the birds and bees or communicating with the spirits – you're addressing human beings. An audience that signed up to this particular virtual event because they want to learn more about a certain topic, acquire skills, and be on the receiving end of a valuable experience.

This means that the attendees come first. So you need to know as much about them as possible. What audience are you addressing? Why are they there? What are their pain points, and the content they would find the most useful? What kind of approach would they respond to best, casual, or strictly professional? Be very clear about what you want to communicate and make sure you are providing these people with the kind of content and experience they can relate to and extract maximum value from.

• *Einstein says...* •

The minute an event goes virtual, it's not a meeting, it's a TV show. And you need to think about it in those terms.

Be Mindful Of Your Materials

You know what's horrible? Pineapple on pizza. You know what's even worse? Powerpoint heavy presentations. But in all seriousness – and pizza topping preferences aside – this is the worst kind of self-sabotage you can incur. Remember that the medium through which you are addressing people has completely shifted. Virtual means a shorter attention span, high chances of webinar fatigue, and a greater need for something that will keep the audience absorbed.

It's with all of this in mind that you should build your materials. Take a good look at your slides. Are they too heavy on the text? Are they plain and boring from a design perspective? If yes, then something needs to change. The key here is to use your slides as a means to provide a visual representation and switch the focus from the talking head. Catchy titles, graphics, bullet points, engaging visuals, animated graphics...these are the things you should be looking for. No one wants to sit through a 2-hour lecture that consists of nothing but black and white slides with walls of text in it.

Have A Script On Hand

No matter how good you are at improv night at your local comedy club, we still recommend that you arm yourself with a script. There's nothing wrong with coming up with extra things on the spot, especially if they pertain to questions from the audience or something that will enrich your presentation.

However, the "just wing it" approach won't be your friend in this case. Having some sort of pre-planned map of what you're going to say, which slides/images/videos you're going to show, and the movements you're going to make is a big step to ensure everything goes smoothly. Plus, you're only human and you can't remember everything. There's no shame in using a script – only wisdom.

It's All About The Tech

If the planners of the event did everything they could to ensure the success of the virtual event, they probably hired a production company. And the job of this company will entail something along the lines of helping you set up all of your tech, and provide you with state of the art microphones, lighting, and camera.

However, if that's not the case, this part is on you. We advise that you make some research on high-quality microphones so that the sound doesn't suck (is there anything worse?). The same goes for the camera and the lighting since you want everything to be crystal clear. It might not seem important, but remember – you're trying as best you can to establish a human connection. Good tech goes a long way in helping with this!

No Distractions!

When it's showtime, you must be laser-focused. This means no pets, no people running around, no metal band rehearsing in your basement. If you live with other people, make sure you let them know exactly what time you'll be on and for how long. Preferably, they won't make use of the Internet in order to help your connection remain steady the whole way through.

Whatever has the potential to distract you or your attendees during the event, get rid of it. And that includes your phone, open windows, and a myriad of other things. You, better than no one, know your space. So clear everything up in time!

Energy, Authenticity & Passion

Remember when we said you were an artist? Well, this is where your Shakesperean vein will come in handy. In-person events already demanded that speakers be energetic and engaging. But with virtual events, that need is multiplied tenfold. You're in constant danger of losing the attention of your attendees, so commanding the virtual space like you would command a stage is something you need to do.

Sustaining an emotional connection in a virtual setting is hard, but it's not impossible. However, it does require that you display more energy, authenticity, and passion for the topic you're discussing than ever before.

A Story

Storytelling isn't only the essence of events, it's the essence of humanity. As we explained before, stories are what unite us - and we can't forget about the importance of storytelling.

Your presentation can't just be a busy succession of disconnected points. It needs a beginning, middle, and end, a satisfying conclusion, and an overall journey that captivates the hearts and minds of those watching. If you harness the power of storytelling with the energy, authenticity, and passion we just discussed, there are very few ways things can go wrong.

• *Einstein says...* •

***You want to add some life
and some personality and some spunk,
especially if you have multi different sessions of content,
to tie a thread all together throughout it all.***

Dress It Up!

We're not gonna lie – it would be pretty cool if we could attend virtual events in our pajamas. Heck, life, in general, would be a lot more comfortable if we could be in our pajamas the whole time. But there's a reason why we don't (and not just because it isn't socially acceptable).

Dressing up reminds us, and others, of context. And context is important because, once we're mindful of it, we act according to what is expected in that given context. So if during a virtual event we're always trying to achieve that human connection, to replicate the elements of an in-person experience, putting on some clothes really does help. Whether it's suit and tie or just a casual dress, make an effort to look good and professional, yet approachable, to your audience.

FOR THE PLANNERS

Coach Your Speakers

Event planners of this world must remember the importance of empathy. Just like virtual events are new to you, they are also very new to most speakers out there. If the virtual event speakers you approach need extra help, make sure you have the necessary resources to train them.

There are plenty of resources out there you can share with them, and even though they need to do their own homework, it's also on you to set them up for success.

Look At The Materials Beforehand

Just because you trust your virtual event speakers, that doesn't give you an excuse to be neglectful. A second pair of eyes is always appreciated, especially if you're dealing with something that is different and unusual.

Not all speakers will be familiarized with the best strategies for a virtual presentation, so make sure you take a look at their materials beforehand, with enough time to make alterations if need be.

Check Credentials

It also doesn't hurt to check the credentials of the speakers you're thinking about working with. Even though the advent of virtual events is still very fresh, some people might have previous experiences in similar settings.

Maybe they've done YouTube and live streams before, maybe they've spoken at hybrid events, maybe they're just very tech-savvy and know how to deal with the intricacies of virtual speaking. You shouldn't disregard those who don't have any of these credentials, but it's definitely a plus if they do!

Offer Them The Support They Need

Whatever resources your speakers need, do your best to meet their requests. We're not talking about a bowl of exclusively brown M&Ms being sent to their home – no one likes a diva. But rather things like non-sensitive attendee data and information, quality equipment, the schedule of the event, and so on so forward.



Hire The Right People To Help

At the end of the day, the best thing you can do for your virtual event speakers and your event as a whole is to hire a production company. When it comes to virtual event speakers, in particular, they can be a valuable resource.

They've been there and done that, so who could be better to train your speakers? To look at the materials and judge whether or not they're good enough? To equip them with state-of-the-art technology? The more you think about it, the more sense it makes! But don't worry - more on why this is a good idea in Chapter Five.

Help Them Practice

Clichés are clichés for a reason, and “practice makes perfect” is one you'll want your virtual event speakers to live by. Remind them of the importance of practicing, and offer to do a general rehearsal with them using the platform and tools that will be available on the day of the event.

THE ENTERTAINMENT

You have to ditch the idea that virtual events can't include entertainment. Because there's no better way to ensure people stay tuned in than to offer exciting and unique experiences alongside the educational content. And in times where physical separation is mandatory, we need to get creative. The concept of a virtual happy hour isn't new; you probably attended a handful of them yourself. But how about taking that experience and implementing it into your own virtual event? Here are some great ideas that we strongly recommend you add to the experience you're planning:

Make Cocktails Together

Alcohol and events have a tendency to go hand-in-hand. It's even somewhat strange to imagine a conference where people can't gather at the end of the day to have a drink together. And as long as things don't get out of hand, these can be some of the most memorable experiences people take away from an event. So why not try to recreate this in a virtual setting?



A great way to make this happen would be to invite a professional bartender/mixologist. Just like you'll have the speakers doing their thing from the comfort of their homes, you can have a bartender do the same! This person can host a 30-minute or 1-hour long session in which they teach the attendees how to make a series of cocktails with the things they have at home. Just imagine how much fun it would be to have your audience following a professional mixologist and attempt to make their own mojitos and margaritas. Do you hear that? Yup, that's the sound of people having a lot of fun together!

Cook A Meal Together

In the same spirit of making cocktails together, you can also have someone cooking a meal in real-time so that the audience can follow. Sharing a meal can be a fantastic way for people to bond and network during an in-person event. Sadly, there's no absolute replacement for this in a virtual event – but cooking together comes pretty close!

What's best is that, by the time everyone has their food done, they can sit down "together" and enjoy what they've prepared while talking about their favorite part of the virtual event, themselves, the dish, and so much more. These kinds of experiences truly go a long way in re-creating some of the most important aspects of an old school event.





Play Fun Drinking Games...

Drinking games are one of those things that never get old. They're fun and a good way to get people to lighten up and connect. Of course, we're not suggesting that you get your attendees to play "Never Have I Ever" – reserve that for the virtual happy hours you do with your close friends.

But there are still entertaining ways to play drinking games that don't go too overboard. "Two Truths & A Lie" is a good example, and it's an incredibly light-hearted way of having the members of the audience get to know each other better.

...Or Just Classic Games!

Games don't need to involve alcohol to be fun! There are plenty of cool options out there of games you can play virtually. For instance, a trivia session is both educational and engrossing. We've all had unforgettable nights playing a good old game of Trivial Pursuit, and there are plenty of choices out there to make it work virtually.

Other classics like Cluedo, Scrabble, Uno, Scattegories, The Game of Life, and more are all available digitally, allowing groups of people to enjoy the games they've known all their lives in a remote setting.

Put Your Own Spin On Show & Tell

That's right, Show & Tell is no longer reserved for classrooms! Back in the day, this was a small moment in time that allowed us to show some of our favorite things to our classmates. And maybe brag a little bit about our cool new lizard or a family heirloom that dated back to the Civil War.

Well, when it comes to a virtual happy hour, it can be just as delightful for your attendees! All you need to do is be creative and original with the categories you come up with. It can be anything from "show us your pets and introduce them to the other attendees" to "show us your favorite piece of clothing" or "the favorite picture you took from a place you love". The possibilities are nearly infinite, and people will get a kick out of showcasing some of their favorite things to each other.

• *Einstein says...* •

Limitations inspire creativity. But don't let endless limitations stop you from implementing anything.

Get Everyone To Follow A Tutorial

In the age of information, there's a tutorial for everything. And when we factor YouTube into the equation, there's pretty much nothing keeping you from learning how to build a computer from scratch. So why not take advantage of the fact that people, in general, are familiar with tutorials and seem to enjoy them?

Depending on the goals of your event, you can even tailor the tutorial you choose to complement the overall ambiance. Or you can just make it fun and suggest everyone follows a dance tutorial, a makeup tutorial, or a knitting tutorial. You'll know your audience better than anyone else, so think about what they'd like to do and see.

Make It A Theme

Themes are great and they make any party an instant success. How many times in your life have you attended social events that had a theme like “The Roaring ‘20s”, “Rock ‘n Roll Only” or “Disney Characters”? People get to dress up and take on certain traits from a given character, which tends to make for a pretty fun night.

Well, you can do exactly the same at your virtual event. Not necessarily during the general sessions, but when it’s time to get a little less serious. Suggest a theme that your attendees can make their own – they’ll change into something that fits the purpose, and you can even adopt certain elements of it into the promotion of your virtual event.

Book Clubs Don’t Get Old

A great option to bring attendees together according to their interests is to organize a virtual book club during the happy hour. The brilliant thing here is that you can suggest a handful of different books leading up to the day of the event, and when it’s time to have a fun discussion about it, people can join the virtual room where the book they chose to read will be talked about.

It’s original and a little less risqué than some of the other ideas here, but the spirit of bringing people closer together in the spirit of entertainment is still there!

Hire A Musician/Singer

A great option to bring attendees together according to their interests is to organize a virtual book club during the happy hour. The brilliant thing here is that you can suggest a handful of different books leading up to the day of the event, and when it’s time to have a fun discussion about it, people can join the virtual room where the book they chose to read will be talked about.

Music is wonderful, that's a fact. There's a reason why it's one of the most profitable industries and why people flock to stadiums to hear their favorite artists live. So why not hire a musician or a band to give your attendees a little taste of those sweet musical notes? Just because people aren't interacting, it doesn't mean they're not bonding – that's the power of music for you!



Create An Art Project

On the topic of creativity, let's consider some arts and crafts. Making art doesn't have to be reserved for people who've studied it for a long time and made a career out of it. More than anything, art is supposed to be fun and a form of expression for those making it.

Dance Party (& Other Exercises)

And concluding our list of virtual happy hour ideas is...a dance party! If your attendees aren't the shy type and already have a few cocktails in them, suggest that they get up and get moving. Just blast some music and let them break free from the soreness they probably feel from sitting down for so long.

Plus, dancing isn't the only physical activity you can include. Yoga classes, pilates, bodyweight exercises...it's a great way to promote health, and getting to work out with other people will do wonders for the audience to bond through the pain. The good kind of pain, of course!



THE STRATEGY

Event planners of this world must remember the importance of empathy. Just like virtual events are new to you, they are also very new to most speakers out there. If the virtual event speakers you approach need extra help, make sure you have the necessary resources to train them.

There are plenty of resources out there you can share with them, and even though they need to do their own homework, it's also on you to set them up for success.



Nurture Your Audience

We're all well aware that bombarding people with dozens of emails isn't a good idea. But staying completely quiet up until the day of your event won't do much for virtual audience engagement either. The best thing to do here is to find the sweet spot to nurture your audience.

Keep the hype alive by sending out relevant information about the event – who are the speakers? What cool features will you offer that make your event stand-out? Are there any changes the attendee should be aware of?

Keep the hype alive by sending out relevant information about the event – who are the speakers? What cool features will you offer that make your event stand-out? Are there any changes the attendee should be aware of? Craft an email and social media strategy that focuses on answering all of these questions.

Also, consider sending out physical badges, swag bags, and invites in the mail. Just because your event is going to be remote, it doesn't mean you have to completely give up the human touch!

Let There Be #Hype!

It's definitely a plus to get your attendees to engage with each other before the event takes place. And in the age of social media, promoting this kind of connection will be one of your biggest strengths. Why not create a hashtag relevant to your virtual event that the audience can follow on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and so on? Get creative with it!

Get Everyone To Check In

One of the best things about virtual events is that they open up a new realm of opportunities. For instance, now you can actually have people from all over the world tuning in! The best way to start the conversation and make your remote audience feel seen is to ask everyone to check-in virtually. Ask them their names, where they are joining you from, or to give you a Facebook-style status update. You want to warm up that chat room!

Once you have these "virtual badges", make sure your speakers or your virtual emcee acknowledge their presence with special shout-outs and a warm thank you. Remember that you're looking to re-create that in-person, human connection every step of the way.

• *Einstein says...* •

***If they have a poor experience at this event,
they will not come back even if you do
improve the quality for the next one***

Keep The Conversation Going

Chances are, you'll need a moderator for the chat room. This is the person that's entirely responsible for keeping a back-and-forth with the audience, answers their questions, and is essentially the link between what's happening on your side and on the side of the attendees.

The job of the moderator will be absolutely key in a successful virtual audience engagement strategy. They are the ones who have to stir up the pot every so often with questions that will create discussions, hence keeping the chat room alive and the audience happy and seen.

On the side of the speaker, you'll also want him to make the sessions as interactive as possible. Like we discussed above, make it short, compelling, and keep the audience interested. Ask questions, come up with polls and quizzes – anything that can win attention points!

Give Them Time To Breathe

Accept that your virtual audience won't behave the same way as your in-person audience and plan for this. You can't expect remote attendees to take part in a three-day-long conference with six-hour sessions each day, due to the many factors we've already discussed.

So make sure the schedule you prepared is followed as thoroughly as possible. Keep sessions to a maximum of 60 minutes, and give everyone time to get up, stretch, get a cup of coffee, and then come back (and remember to give them a reason to do so!).

Also consider that your attendees might just want a break from the sessions, but not from the event as a whole. Think about the possibility of creating private chat-rooms or virtual spaces where attendees can interact only with each other!

Gamify-it!

Who doesn't love a good game? A great step to add to your virtual audience engagement strategy is gamification. And if there's some sort of prize or validation waiting for them at the finish line, your attendees are probably going to love it. There are hundreds of tools available online to help you craft engaging and interactive games that will keep your audience from tuning out of the event.

Bonus points if you only announce the winner by the end of the event, so that everyone who participated wants to return! Friendly competition never ceases to compel people to join something. And it's also a great opportunity for the attendees to get to know each other and work together if they are put into teams!



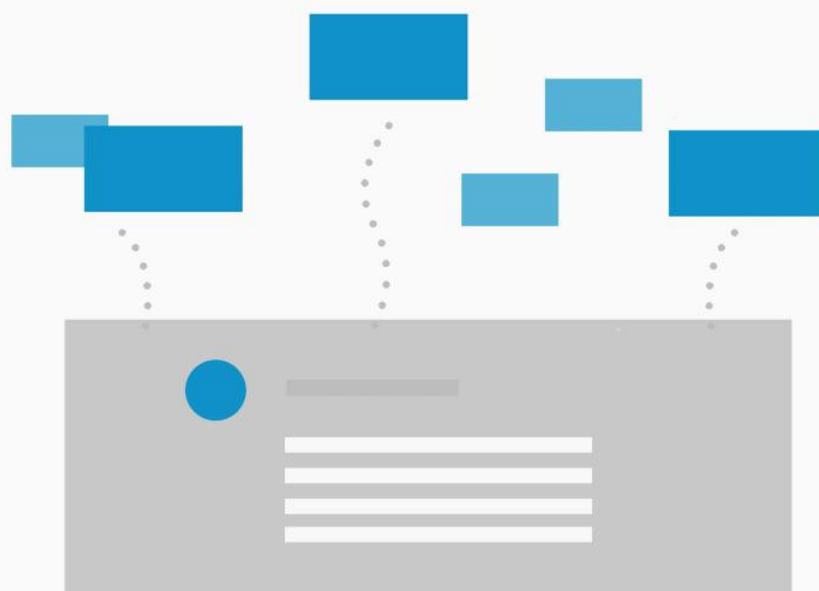
Don't Forget To Monitor Social Media

Especially if you crafted a complex social media strategy, keeping your channels alive throughout the event is a great idea. Plus, it's a whole new way to engage with the audience during breaks and announce to everyone what's been going on so far – maybe they'll be curious enough to want to join mid-way through.

Keep using the hashtag and encourage your virtual attendees to share their favorite part of the event so far. Chances are, some of your audience will want to engage through Facebook and Instagram too, so keep checking for updates and validate the actions you see. Screenshots, highlights, the most interesting discussions taking place in the chat-rooms...all of these represent an amazing source of content to keep your social media channels alive and your audience engaged, hyped, and wanting for more!

Ask For Feedback

Whether this is your first or hundredth virtual event, collecting feedback from the attendees is always a must. You'll want to know what went right and wrong from their perspective. Did they find the content engaging? How did they like the speaker? Is there anything else you could've done to make the overall experience better? Everything and anything they have to say is valuable information that you can use to consistently improve the quality of your virtual events – and, of course, the attendance. So make sure you ask your audience for feedback once the event is done and over with. And because not everyone is super keen on answering these types of surveys, consider offering some sort of reward for doing so. It will be worth it!



4

**THE ART
OF VIRTUAL
SPONSORSHIPS**

THE ART OF VIRTUAL SPONSORSHIPS

Sponsorships have been the industry's holy grail of revenue for years. They're a safe way to ensure money is coming through the door, and planners have dedicated a fair chunk of their time to perfecting the art of negotiating good sponsorship deals. That is, of course, up until the moment the industry saw itself facing an unprecedented challenge. Now that virtual events are the norm, and with hybrid events set to become increasingly more common, it's in everyone's best interest to learn about virtual event sponsorships. But where to begin? Is it even possible to entice sponsors within this paradigm?

Well, the short answer is absolutely. Sponsorships don't live and die in the scope of in-person events! On the contrary, the online world has the potential to offer even more reasons for a sponsor to want to work with you on a virtual event.

DEALS & PACKAGES

First things first: unless you can confidently and accurately sell the value of your virtual event to potential partners, they'll have zero interest in working with you. And who can blame them? At the end of the day, sponsorships are a business relationship. If you're in it for the financial perks, sponsors need to get their money's worth one way or another. This is probably where things get hazy. You're well aware of how this goes down with an in-person event, but how do you go about virtual event sponsorships?

You're Not Just Planning A Virtual Event, You're Planning An Experience

Ditch the mindset that virtual events are boring and don't hold a candle to their in-person counterpart. If you don't believe in the value you're providing to your audience, how can you expect sponsors to do it? A virtual experience can be as enriching and exciting as your run of the mill event – and that's exactly what you need to sell to your sponsors.

This isn't just a Zoom meeting where ten people will be discussing the Geneva Conventions. No, this is a full-scale virtual event, with incredible speakers, talented entertainers, valuable resources, Q&A sessions, exhibitions, and more. There's clearly a lot of worth in what you're offering, so make them see it.

Harness The Power Of The Online Landscape

There's a reason why a handful of years ago, every company that wanted to stay afloat moved their efforts online. And no, it's not because all of the cool kids we're doing it (that's just TikTok). But it's because that's where their audience is, and the opportunities to create curated and personalized content are much bigger, while costs are significantly lower.

As such, sponsoring a virtual event means better leads at reduced costs. Digital advertising space allows for a myriad of options, including videos, banners, and logos. From this perspective, it's clear that it's in both of your best interests to make a partnership like this work!

• *Einstein says...* •

The good news about virtual sponsorships is actually that they can be much more compelling, much more interactive, and much more engaging.

Sponsored Speaking Opportunities Are The Real Deal

The notion that virtual conferences simply can't be engaging is wrong - here we refer you back to Chapter Three. With the right speakers and the best team behind them, speaking sessions can be as entertaining and valuable as the ones everyone is used to. It feels a lot more intimate, and attendees can react and participate in real-time, engaging in a waltz-like dance with heaps of potential for personalization on behalf of the speaker. So why not propose speaking opportunities to your sponsors?

Not only can this drive a lot of revenue for you, but it can also provide invaluable insights and warm leads on the sponsor side. It's a win-win situation if, again, you know how to sell it.

The Possibilities Are Endless

Further down, we'll share a ton of ingenious and lucrative ideas you can use. But right off the bat, the most important thing you have to keep in mind and communicate to your potential partners is that the possibilities are endless.

The virtual space truly allows you to have the creative freedom that physical spaces often don't. Think of it as a cinema versus theatre – they're both incredible, but the screen simply provides more flexibility. And the same goes for virtual events. Sponsorship activation can occur through email, social media, content, speaking opportunities, virtual exhibitions, videos, banners, matchmaking, food delivery...and much more. In many ways, it can be perceived as a unique opportunity. Make sponsors want to take advantage of it!

CREATING YOUR SPONSORSHIP PACKAGES

There are a couple of different directions you can go in when the time comes to take your sponsorship opportunities and put them in a nice, fluffy, irresistible package. The most common, and those we suggest you consider, are tiered packages and a la carte packages.

Tiered Sponsorship Packages

In Chapter Two, we mentioned tiering as a viable option. When applied to the event itself, this model would translate into attendees paying different prices for different features. And when it comes to virtual event sponsorships, it works the same way. Here's an example using fake numbers and potential packages:

Opal Package (Tier 1) – \$500

Sponsors that opt for the Opal Package will be promoted on the event's website, social media channels, and email blasts pre-event. During the actual experience, they will be featured on the feed and in several rotating banners throughout the course of the event. Additionally, sponsors who chose this tier will get two branded breakout rooms.

Emerald Package (Tier 2) – \$2000

Sponsors who go with the Emerald Package get access to everything the Opal Package gets, plus a speaking opportunity during the event. This can take many forms, including Q&A sessions, a 30-minute slot to promote their brand on the virtual stage, and sharing case studies, followed by discussion, with the attendees.

Diamond Package (Tier 3) – \$10,000

Sponsors who are willing to choose the Diamond Package will receive everything detailed in the Opal and Emerald packages, plus business and networking opportunities. This can take many forms, including, but not limited to, live demos, 1:1 interactions with a set number of attendees, data can be garnered from sponsor/attendee interaction, and sponsored lounge sessions.

Be clear about what each package offers the sponsor, and why the benefits presented are worth the price tag you decided on. The goal is to offer several packages that will attract different sponsors who have different budgets and goals to meet.

A La Carte Sponsorship Packages

These packages maximize the pool of potential sponsors you can attract. It essentially consists of offering a series of different opportunities, each priced individually, allowing them to pick and choose what better fits their needs and business objectives. An a la carte package can include everything we mentioned above, with the prices differing. For example:

A La Carte Package Options:

- Social media, email, and website promotion: \$300
- Banners and logos throughout the course of the event: \$200
- Branded breakout rooms: \$200
- 30 Minute speaking session: \$3000
- Q&A with the attendees: \$1000
- Live product demo: \$2000
- 1:1 session with the attendees: \$2000
- Data can be garnered from sponsor/attendee interaction: \$8000

These are only a handful of examples, of course. What you can offer your sponsors on your a la carte package will depend on the capabilities of your virtual event and on what you decide is best. If you're running low on ideas, don't worry. There's more below!

• *Einstein says...* •

The key at the end of the day is always the same. You need to see your sponsor really as a partner that you include in your events. So that you have someone that you can work with building your event and making it a success.

VIRTUAL SPONSORSHIP IDEAS

Incorporate Sponsors Into Your Event App

Event apps gained quite the momentum a few years back. And if you think they're no longer relevant in the scope of virtual events, then think again! Now that your attendees are no longer physically present, engagement becomes more important than ever, and an event app can go a long way in helping you out with this.

Plus, they can also be used as a tool to promote sponsors. Think about adding special sections, branded logos, and banners to your event app. You can even go the extra mile and make the entire app relate back to your sponsor by including their brand identity through colors and images. And if you're looking to promote your main sponsor, push notifications that remind attendees about sponsored sessions or offers is also a great way to do so!

Leverage The Power of Digital Ad Space

Now that you don't have a physical space that would allow you to promote sponsors the traditional way, you'll have to make do with the possibilities the digital world offers. But thankfully, digital ad space has become one of the most popular marketing tools in the modern world, something you can definitely use for your advantage.

There are several ways to monetize a virtual event, and digital advertising is one of them. So consider including pop-up ads and banners promoting your sponsors to your event platform and your live-stream. They can redirect the attendees to the sponsor's website or a specific page, thus offering the latter those sweet, sweet leads.

Include The Sponsors In Your Content

If content is King in the world of digital marketing, then it is the Emperor in the scope of virtual events. As we discussed before, low-quality content and unprepared speakers are a sure way to drive the audience away. But the importance of content doesn't live and die in this area – it can also be harnessed to promote your sponsors!

Before each presentation takes place, you can show attendees sponsored videos and intros. Or even better, go ahead and add their logos to the presentation slides. This won't be as disruptive as an ad thrown in the middle of a speaker's session, but still alerts the attendees' minds to the existence of the sponsor.

Employ Branded Breakout Sessions

The virtual version of your event can also include breakout sessions. This, of course, will depend on the capabilities of your platform, which is why we advise you to work with a virtual event production company - more on that later.

Make Sponsors a Part of Your Promotion Strategy

If your promotion strategy was already paramount with in-person events, then it becomes increasingly more so with virtual ones. Since your attendees won't actually have to move and make serious preparations to attend, they will need constant – but not overbearing – reminders of what will take place.

There's also room for sponsorship promotions here. Whether it's on your social media channels or email blasts, make sure you include sponsor materials at some point. This is not extremely different from what you would do with an in-person event – you just might want to be a tad more aggressive.

Use Your Registration Platform

The platform where the event will take place isn't the only one you can harness to promote your sponsors! Another vital part of the attendees' path leading up to the big day is registration. Since there's no other option than to employ a registration platform, consider adding a spot, banner, or add promoting your speaker somewhere on the webpage.

Offer Branded Speaking Opportunities

From a sponsor perspective, it doesn't get much better than a chance to speak directly to attendees. Banners, pop-up ads, and videos can easily be ignored. However, the possibility of being – virtually – face to face with the audience and introduce the company, products, or services can be quite appealing.

So why not offer your sponsors a branded speaking opportunity? It doesn't have to be too long and, generally speaking, it's one of the best ways to drive revenue on your side, since direct contact with the audience shouldn't come cheap.

Incorporate Sponsored Q&A Sessions

If you think a sponsored speaking opportunity isn't enough, you might also want to go ahead and offer your sponsors the possibility to have a Q&A with the audience. This way, not only do the sponsors get to be face to face with everyone, but they also get to interact with them on a deeper and more personal level.

Q&A's are extremely important in virtual events in order to make attendees feel seen and connected. So why not bring the best of both worlds together, by driving serious revenue and making the audience happy?

• *Einstein says...* •

Now is the right moment just to keep in touch with sponsors, to reach out to them still, and just get them interested in your events. Especially if you're planning to have virtual events because business goes on.

One-On-Ones With The Attendees

You can go even deeper where the sponsor and attendee interaction is concerned. If the goal of the sponsor is to ultimately find clients for themselves, nothing will replace the closeness of one-on-one interaction, even a virtual one. You can harness the data collected about your attendees and let sponsors choose a few selected people to chat privately with.

Just make sure everyone involved is okay with this, particularly the attendees. Ask them if they'd be comfortable being a part of it, and consider offering some sort of incentive that would make them go for it.

Digital Goodie Bags

Sponsored goodie bags have always been a thing in events. And just because the industry has shifted to virtual, that doesn't mean they won't be anymore! Digital goodie bags provide the attendees with more value than any standard tchotchke would. Think about it – how awesome would it be if sponsors offered exclusive online offers?

Think vouchers for online courses, Amazon gift cards, a free 30-day trial for a digital product or service, and so on so forward. Chances are, attendees will appreciate that a lot more than they would a branded mug or a pencil!



Include Surprise Home Deliveries

There are things that simply can't be replicated in the digital world, and catering is one of them. But if your sponsors would be on board, offering home deliveries to the attendees would be an incredible and very well welcomed surprise!

This could take the form of takeout food or maybe a nice bottle of wine for a virtual happy hour. The food packaging and the labels in the bottles could even be branded and include the sponsor's logo.

Add A Virtual Store

E-commerce is already one of the biggest players in the retail industry, so why not make that part of your virtual event? Adding a virtual store would be something very unique. Additionally, it would offer your sponsors the opportunity to showcase and sell their products, which means everyone makes an instant profit.

Include Sponsored Games

Obviously, the entirety of a virtual event can't consist of just speaking sessions. This is why gamification is becoming increasingly popular in this scope, as we mentioned in Chapter Three. And here's the chance to both keep your attendees engaged and offer yet another sponsorship opportunity!

Sponsored ice-breaker activities and games would be a fun, interactive, and personal way of connecting sponsors with the audience, as well as to provide the latter with an unforgettable virtual experience.

Create A Freemium Model

We already talked about virtual event pricing in a previous chapter, but here's a fresh new idea. Why not create a freemium model for your virtual event? This would entail that those who chose to could attend for free, as long as they agreed to connect one-on-one with the sponsors, watch a longer sponsored video, or even provide some sort of relevant data to the sponsor.

There are plenty of ideas you can throw in here, and asking your sponsors what they would prefer would probably be the best way to go. Bottom line is, people can attend for free, as long as they accept the conditions. Everybody wins!

LET'S TALK TECH

(& WHY YOU NEED SUPPORT)



LET'S TALK TECH (& WHY YOU NEED SUPPORT)

Now that we're approaching the end of your very own virtual event handbook, it's time we address the technology. If it was already important with in-person events, then it gains increased relevance within the virtual paradigm. And as we discussed, what you're looking at building is an experience - not a Zoom call. You want engagement, broadcast-quality, and the best tools available to help you out. A good platform alone won't do it. This is exactly why we urge you to work with a production company - and yes, there's a very big difference between the two.



IMAGINE YOUR VIRTUAL EVENT IS LIKE A CHAIR...

You bought it at a particular store that only sells its furniture in separate pieces. This means you need to put it together yourself. To do this, you'll need some nails. There's absolutely no way you can assemble your chair without them! And the same goes for your virtual event platform - much like the nails, there's no way you can throw a virtual event without one.

SO, WHAT DOES A VIRTUAL EVENT PLATFORM DO, AFTER ALL?

Obviously, a virtual event platform is an integral part of the entire experience. Remember, you still need the nails to assemble the chair. This platform is the place through which you, your attendees, your speakers, the sponsors, and the entertainment will connect. Much like an in-person event needs a venue where everyone comes together, a virtual event is inevitably in need of a platform where attendees can gather.

Just like venues, there are dozens of platforms available in the market. Some are simple and straightforward and offer minimal features. Others are more complex and allow you to include things like breakout rooms, polling, and chat rooms - all things that you should consider in order to further engage your audience.

But just as nails are a critical component for a chair's structure, the venue or platform used is only a part of the event experience, not the whole package. You still need the rest of the tools in your toolbox to assemble the chair, and you still need the AV, production, and catering to put together an in-person event. So, what does this mean for a virtual event? Well, it means you also need to have a virtual event production company on your side!

• *Einstein says...* •

***People think virtual events are worse than in-person events.
But that's because the production value sucks.***

HOW CAN A VIRTUAL EVENT PRODUCTION COMPANY SUPPORT YOUR NEEDS?

A virtual event production company will be your toolbox. Ideally, you'll want to look for professionals who've been in the industry for years and know the ins and outs of virtual events. At Endless, we've been there, done that, and have all the T-shirts to prove it. This is exactly why we know what is needed to create a successful and unforgettable experience for your attendees.

It helps you make the right decision platform-wise

As you've likely seen, there is no shortage of options to choose from. Virtual event platforms seem to be popping out of everywhere these days, which makes it even more confusing for planners to know exactly what the best solution is. This is where a virtual event production company comes in. The people behind the team have put effort into studying all of these options for you, and know exactly what each platform can do for your event. As such, once you meet with them and explain the vision you have and what you'd like for it to entail, they can match you with the solution they know will fit your needs better. No need for you to do hours of research and still be unsure of the choice you made – the virtual event company does it for you.

It will make an effort to repurpose past costs

It's very possible that your in-person event was canceled, and you're now trying to pivot towards virtual events. The problem here is, you probably already incurred costs associated with the in-person event you were expecting to plan. And you probably feel like you might as well say goodbye to that money.

Well, a virtual event production company will be delighted to sit down with you and learn about where you already spent part of your budget. And they'll be happy to see how you can repurpose some of it because there's obviously no need to reinvent the wheel on things like scheduling platforms, apps, and attendee management software. Instead, the team will look at how these things can be used in your virtual event, which means you won't have to part with the money you already put into the in-person event.

It will design the perfect anatomy for your event

Not all virtual events are the same. Even though it's easy to believe all of these experiences will inevitably look like the boring old webinar, having a virtual event production team on board will empower you to make the experience unique and as close to an in-person event as possible. Things like breakout rooms, small meetings, sponsor activations, and entertainment are still possible - and we've already proven that to you throughout this handbook. And a virtual event production company will know exactly how to make them happen, as long as you share your vision with them. This ends up tying in with the choice of platform we mentioned above, which is why we encourage you to hire the best people, instead of going with the so-called "all-in-one" platforms that offer no support, no direction, no production, and no tailored solution.

• *Einstein says...* •

***Having a producer that's calling the show,
like you'd have in-person, is what really helps us
stay on track and keep the pacing going.***

It can train your speakers and arm them with best practices

Speakers have their work cut out for them with the advent of virtual events. We mentioned this previously in Chapter Three, but it's always worth repeating. They now have to be more charming, engaging, and interesting than ever in order to hook the attention of the attendees. And this gets a lot trickier when dealing with the competition that comes in the form of children, dogs, Netflix, and so on. And many speakers have no experience doing virtual events, so how can they be expected to succeed? Well, a virtual event production company will offer you the option of assigning someone on the team to train your speakers one-on-one. This will include all the best practices associated with engagement, background, content, and the presentation itself. Setting your speakers up for success is setting your virtual event up for success!

It's a valuable backup that you'll wish you always had

When planning an in-person event, would you forfeit camera operators? Lighting experts? Engineers and sound technicians? All in all, would you risk planning an event without surrounding yourself with experts in their respective fields that assure a level of production excellence on all fronts? No, of course not! And the same is valid for virtual events. The paradigm might have changed for all of us, but virtual events are just as tricky, and call for production of their own. You still need people who know how to build a website and are comfortable with live-streaming technology. Specialists who know the best way to ensure audio, sound, and lighting quality. And most importantly, dedicated assistance in case something goes south. A lifeline and point of contact that will stick by your – metaphorical – side from start to finish.

All in all, a virtual event production company offers a holistic solution for your virtual event

Remember the chair analogy? Well, now you've probably realized why we present the event platform as an integral part of the process, and the virtual event production company as the entire toolbox. At the end of the day, the people you hire and surround yourself with will be concerned with choosing all the right bits and pieces to put together your virtual event, thus creating a tailored and customized solution that meets your needs, your goals, and perfectly aligns with your vision. An event production company knows exactly what screwdriver you'll need, which hammer will be the best, and what brand of varnish will make for the best combination in order to assemble the chair of your dreams!

WHAT DOES A VIRTUAL EVENT PRODUCTION TEAM LOOK LIKE?

When you do hire your production company, what will the team behind your event look like? What are the roles, and how do they come together to provide an unforgettable experience?

Everybody knows what an **account executive** is. This person is your main point of contact for everything, and they're the one who is going to be talking to you day to day, talking about your vision, your goals. And they're going to be establishing your scope and budget when it comes to the event.

Then, we move forward to your **technical director**. This is the person who gets all geeky and technical when it comes to everything. Technical producers are going to build out your proposals and quotes. So they're the ones who are going to source the equipment, source your platforms, source all the technologies that go into everything. Also, they're the ones who manage the entire technical setup. Make sure those integrations are working well, that you have exactly what you need on the tech side to achieve your goals.

Next up is your **project manager**. So, this is the person that's going to be working on your timeline. When it comes to events, we know that timelines get really condensed down and we tend to not have enough time to get everything done. So they're the ones who make sure the timelines are perfect. And they're also the ones who are going to work with you to provide guidance into the software and help you navigate the tools and understanding the tools.

Now that you have an idea of what the management side of a virtual event production team looks like, let's move on to the actual event. So, the things relating to the general session, main stage, content, and so on.

The first person that you have here is your **show caller**. This is the person who is going to be calling the show. Just like whenever you're watching broadcast television, somebody who's calling all the shots when it comes to the entire production.

The next person is a **video engineer**. And this is the person choosing the camera shots. They're the ones tweaking the cameras to make sure they look good, the ones basically in charge of everything that's going to the live stream of your virtual event.

Following up is the **audio engineer**. This is kind of a forgotten position, but we want to make sure audio sounds fantastic when it comes to your virtual event, including on your microphones or your audio clip playbacks. So that's what the audio engineer is going to be there to do.

Then we have the **video playback manager**. This is the person different from the video engineer who is actually going to be playing back all the video content. When it comes to these virtual events, things like PowerPoints, video playback, custom graphics, lower thirds graphics, that's all run by the video playback engineer.

So, the next thing you need is a **producer**. This is the one who's going to work as the speaker manager too, to make sure that everyone's good to go. They're going to be handholding with the talent. And they're the ones who are overall going to make sure the production runs really smoothly when it comes to that main stage.

Up next is a **graphics operator**. They work in tandem with the video playback manager. And then last but not least is a **teleprompter operator**. When it comes to your teleprompter, you have all your notes there and it tells you exactly what to say. And the teleprompter operators are the ones who are slowly scrolling through those scripts, especially when it comes to virtual events.

Moving on to the last components of a virtual event production team! And they're all about the breakout rooms. These are smaller sessions. And when it comes to it, you still need a team.

The first person you're going to need is a **lead engineer**. This is the person who's in charge of all the breakout sessions, making sure they're all running well, making sure that the video conferencing software is working well, making sure everybody's mics are working well.

But you're also going to need a **speaker manager** for this. Somebody who's going to make sure that the speakers get into the rooms, that they're on time, they know how the tech works, all of that. So making sure that runs really smoothly!

And last but not least, you have your round tables. This is like your networking, your small group discussion. You're always going to need a lead engineer when it comes to these sorts of things, making sure that, for example, if someone can't get in a room, somebody can manage the entire round table experience.

HOW SHOULD YOU PREPARE BEFORE MEETING WITH A PRODUCTION COMPANY?

Going into a meeting with a virtual event production company unprepared will only drag on the process. The best thing you can do to start this journey off with the right foot is to be prepared. Much like you would do with an in-person event, there are things you need to somewhat solidify before jumping into a call. Here's what you should ask yourself:

STANDARD EVENT QUESTIONS

First things first, you have to remember that there are many things about in-person events that still apply to virtual events. So before meeting with a virtual event production company, start by asking yourself the general questions you would ask normally for any event:

- **If everything was possible, what would the virtual experience look like?**

Virtual events offer a lot of brand new possibilities. So imagine that anything was possible for your event, without technological or budgetary constraints.

■ What data are you looking to collect and track?

Think about what metrics you want to closely monitor throughout the experience. The number of attendees, sales, engagement, profit, new contacts – whatever is relevant to you and your organization.

■ What are you struggling with most planning a virtual event?

Assuming this is your first virtual event, you're probably struggling with several aspects. Think about them and write them down so you can present them when meeting with a virtual event production company.

■ What part of your event gives you the largest ROI?

Ideally, you'll be able to replicate the most profitable parts of your in-person event in your virtual event. So consider what they are and why they are, indeed, the most important!

■ What are the goals of your virtual event?

The same way your in-person events have goals, so do your virtual ones. What's the why behind it?

■ What specific organization goals will this event help you achieve?

■ What will attendees accomplish by attending your event?

Why should people take the time of day to attend your event? Compile a list and make it convincing!

■ Who are your attendee personas?

Define your attendee personas the same way you would in a regular situation. Who are they? What are their jobs? Their interests? Know exactly who you're trying to captivate with this event so you can relay the information.

■ Who is on the team?

Walk the production company through all the people who are involved in planning the event and what their roles are.

■ When is your event?

■ What do you have budgeted for your virtual event?

Giving the production company an idea of your budget is extremely important. This way, they know what will be and won't be possible for your virtual event. Think about how much you have budgeted for each individual chunk as we discussed in Chapter Two. If you're not sure, tell them what the number was for the AV and production section of your in-person experience.

■ What are the most important points of the show for your attendees?

These are the parts you'll want to go seamlessly. So it's paramount that you share the information with the people who'll be putting the event together!

■ What's the date of your event?

■ How many days?

■ How many hours each day?

Remember that you're competing for your attendees' attention in a completely different spectrum when calculating this!

■ How many viewers each day?

Estimate how many people you want to attend the event each day to accomplish your event goals – be as realistic as possible.

■ How many sessions?

■ What type of sessions?

General, breakout, or entertainment? Give as much detail as you can.

VIRTUAL EVENT PLATFORM

When meeting with a virtual event production company, you'll want to offer as much information as possible on this front. This is the only way to allow them to come up with the best tailored solution for you!

■ What existing event technologies do you already have for registration and/or networking?

Do you already have registration or networking tools? If so, share them so they can integrate them into your virtual event.

■ How do you want users to access the event?

Options include password sent to registration database, user and password login, Google/Facebook single sign-on, and more. Which one would fit your event best?

- **Do you want an expo hall or sponsor type of experience?**
- **Do you want small group interactions/breakout rooms?**
If you think it's important for your event to include virtual rooms where attendees can interact with each other, make it known to the production company.
- **Do you need a conference merchandise store or sales capability?**
- **Are there any CRMs or analytics abilities needed?**
General, breakout, or entertainment? Give as much detail as you can.
- **Did you have any evening entertainment or receptions to try and replace?**
Virtual events can still include entertainment, and by know you're well aware of this. If you'd like to include this in the experience, think about what you'd like to see happen.

● *Einstein says...* ●

Virtual events have been the most underutilized tool in our toolbox for a long time. It's fascinating how organizations have been drawing a bigger audience than ever before.

LIVE STREAM & VIDEO

Virtual events offer a brand new world of possibilities. There's plenty of choices but that also means there are things to consider you probably wouldn't have to think about when planning an in-person event.

■ What kind of content will you be presenting?

■ Will all your presents be in a single location or distributed?

Up to 8 presenters in a session is the ideal limit, so keep this in mind when deciding.

■ What resolution are you looking to do this in?

Video and audio quality will take the front stage at your virtual event. No one wants bad audio and visuals – that's a guarantee people will walk away! Give proper consideration to the resolution.

■ How many simultaneous rooms/streams?

■ Do you have a landing page(s)?

■ DVR/On-Demand Video Playback capabilities?

■ Record/store the whole event?

There is plenty of opportunity for evergreen content with virtual events (go back to Chapter Two if you missed it!). If you record the whole thing and then make it available on your website and social media channels, people will keep coming back to it, even if they didn't attend. Would this be of interest to you?

■ Do you need captions?

Do you think it's important to provide this feature to your audience? Keep going back to your attendee personas to get perspective!

■ Will you have multiple languages?

■ Will you have hard-line Internet?

■ What is the Internet bandwidth where you'll be streaming?

Good Internet connection is a non-negotiable in the scope of virtual events. So what kind of bandwidth are we looking at here?

PRODUCTION & STRATEGY

Strategy for a virtual event will invariably involve different skills than those demanded from an in-person experience. And the right virtual event production company will jump at the opportunity to help you with all of this! But first, consider the following:

■ Do you want someone to train your presenters and manage rehearsals?

Do you want help sourcing content that keeps someone engaged? Even amazing presenters can't do much with boring content. If you're not sure whether or not what you have planned is enough to keep attendees hooked, having someone on your side to help you source the right kind of content will be a good idea.

■ Do you need support in strategizing pre and post-event content and engagement?

Think about the pre and post-event strategy. Do you have one? Do you want one? And most importantly, do you need help with it?

MARKETING & ENGAGEMENT

Spend as much time as you can considering the audience engagement strategies and ask yourself these questions:

■ What networking opportunities would you like to have at your event?

One of the main reasons people attend events in the first place is for networking opportunities. Would you like to have this at your event? What would you want it to look like?

■ Do you want Q&A tools?

■ Do you want pooling tools?

■ What kind of marketing do you want to surround your event?

Marketing will play a big part in getting people excited about your event. How are you planning on creating hype and keeping it alive leading up to the event?

■ How do you plan on engaging attendees after the event?

Speaking of hype, that's something you'll want to carry on after the event. How are you planning on nurturing your audience after the event is done?



■ How do you plan on using attendee analytics?

The best way to measure the success of your event is by using analytics. Think about the metrics that would better demonstrate whether or not you accomplished your goals, and what could be improved for the next experience.

CONCLUSION

Congratulations!

You officially made it to the end of your virtual event handbook. How do you feel? Probably a little overwhelmed - that was a lot! But hopefully, you also feel more at ease. Because it was our goal with this guide to give you a single place where you can find all the knowledge pertaining to virtual events and ensure your first experience as a planner goes smoothly.

The main things we want you to remember are:

Never forget why you're doing this. Industry professionals are here to foster human connection and tell stories through all the amazing tools we have at our disposal - and we have many!

An engaged audience is a happy audience. Put a lot of thought into your speakers, your entertainment, your breakout sessions, and your marketing strategy. Virtual events can be just as fun and educational as in-person events, and it's up to you to make it happen.

Reach out to people who know about virtual events. Professionals like those at Endless are here to help you build an unforgettable experience.

And so we've reached the end of our exciting journey together. It's been a pleasure to help you, even if just a little bit. If you're ever in need of more content or production assistance, head out to our website - we'd be delighted to help!

Happy planning,

The Endless Team