How To Plan For A Successful Virtual Society Event

Now more than ever, it’s important for members to stay in touch with one another. Considering moving your annual conference or event to a virtual setting? We’re here to help with a step-by-step planning guide to re-create your society event or conference in a virtual space.

Features and Functions

To help make for a successful event, choose an event platform that meets the needs of your specific event and audience. Virtual event platforms can range from basic to very advanced. Do your research and set up a meeting for a demonstration of the platform features with your team. Consider the following features:

1. **Venue Layout**
   Online event platforms such as Intrado, Bizzabo, Hopin and Attendeease have capabilities to include the following: Entrance, lobby, resource center, exhibit halls, networking lounge, forums, private office, collaboration rooms. Choose what makes sense for your specific event.

2. **Communication & Engagement**
   Chat, forums, social wall, Twitter board, polling, surveys, live Q&A, offline Q&A, gamification

3. **Access Control & Security**
   Role-based access control, location-based access restriction, content control, multiple security options

4. **Collaboration**
   Content sharing, one-on-one meetings, appointment setting, document sharing, breakout sessions, panelist/multiple speakers

5. **Registration & Messaging**
   Customizable forms, email notifications & reminders, calendaring

6. **Monetization**
   Paid content, paid access exhibits, sponsorships packages, content marketing, sponsored webinars, courses

Once you’ve chosen your platform, be sure to start building your online event and prioritize getting your site up and running so the audience can start registering for your event. Give attention to these three key parts:

1. **Microsite/Landing Page** – Your event microsite is the area where you will be posting information about the event (agenda, registration, links, speakers, session and all related promotional information). You’ll want to get this built out as soon as possible so that you can open registration. The landing page serves two purposes: It helps to freely communicate why people should care about this virtual event, and it helps you capture details of interested visitors. Your landing page should also include the following components:
   - Compelling headline
   - Date, time of the event
   - The event agenda (e.g. schedule of webinars, who is speaking, etc.)
   - A brief event overview so attendees know what to expect
   - FAQs
• Content and visuals that support your message

2. **Branding** – Branding and graphics are important to get done early, as you'll need them for all communications, the microsite and the venue. You will need multiple versions of graphics and sizes for email banners, social media, ads, and venue branding.

3. **Registration** – Setting up the registration form is extremely important no matter where you plan to host the registration link. Depending on which platform you choose, this may be a built-in feature available to you. Getting registration set up should happen before you start the invitation campaign. You will also need to set up an email confirmation so that your attendees know they are registered.

**Presenter Tips**

If you plan on having multiple speakers, it's important to plan exactly how their time will go. Rehearse. Run through slides and audio testing beforehand. Agree in advance on the scope and format of each presentation. Consider the following tips:

1. **Body Language**
   • Friendly face: Speakers are on screen the whole time so must not look bored
   • Modulate the voice. If it's flat the audience may get bored; Think about pitch, pace, pause and tone
   • Talking with hands helps convey enthusiasm and animation, and can also help focus thoughts and speech better
   • If you can stand while delivering your presentation, your voice will project better

2. **Don't Use Notes**
   • Using notes will take eyes away from the camera when presenting. If a few prompts are needed, stick them next to the camera or use the notes function in PPT

3. **PowerPoint Best Practice**
   • Slides should be used as a reference with visuals to accompany what you are discussing
   • Don't include text-heavy slides
   • Limit your presentation to 20 slides with a minimum font size of thirty points

4. **Use The ‘Mute’ Button**
   • If you are part of a panel session and are not talking, go on mute

5. **Be Attentive**
   • Don't multitask
   • Close all other applications
   • No phones
   • Don't eat or drink (other than water)

6. **Wardrobe**
   • Busy, bold patterns and noisy jewelry can be distracting, while blocks of white can wash you out
   • Simple clothes that are not too bright, too dark and don't blend into the background are best
Speaker Training And Rehearsals

When it comes to virtual events, it's very important to make sure you prep your speakers with not only the content of their presentation, but the technical aspects of your chosen event platform. One downside of going virtual is that when everything is online, there is more room for mess-ups than there would be at an in-person event.

1. Rehearsal #1
   - Go over the content of your presenters' talk and the key points you'd like to be covered
   - Discuss format, content and length of your presenter's talk
   - This can be done over the phone or via email if it's difficult for all the necessary people to be on a video call due to time zones, etc.

2. Rehearsal #2
   - Practice in the virtual environment
   - Do a complete run through of the presenter's talk, timed, start to finish
   - Discuss any questions that the audience might have and how the questions can be answered

3. Rehearsal #3
   - If necessary, a third rehearsal the week of the event can be helpful
   - If there is a panel, try to get all of the panelists to run through their presentations together to ensure a seamless flow

Help Your Speakers Create The Right Environment

Being aware of what your audience will see on camera is one more important part of hosting a virtual event. Knowing what things to look out for and remove from being in the camera view will keep people engaged and attentive for the Q&A.

1. Set The Room
   - Always consider the room you are presenting from
   - What's on the wall behind you? Is it appropriate? Distracting? Boring?
   - For a more informal audience, presenters seated on a sofa with a coffee table might work; Formal, try an office setting

2. Sound Quality Matters
   - Try to limit background noises as much as possible in the presentation room

3. Lighting and Position
   - Light from behind means the presenter's face will be in a shadow
   - In a room with a window, face the window to ensure light falls on the face
   - Make sure the camera is slightly higher than eye level, so speakers are looking up to it

Keep Your Audience Engaged

Virtual events offer plenty of opportunity to engage your audience in ways that in-person events may not be able to. Make sure to take advantage of some of these features where it makes sense for your event.

- Use the chat box for Q&A, and/or live Q&A
- Ask questions to your audience; use chat box for quick acknowledgements (👍 Yes 😊 Smiley)
- Run audience polls
- Create smaller breakout groups
- Include gamification
- Give your audience access to additional resources/documents/slides from the event