Digital Event Forecast

New insights as of September 16, 2020

A NOTE FROM OUR CHIEF STRATEGIST

In this third, updated version of the Impact Point Group Digital Event Forecast, we summarize the evolving recommendations of our expert strategists. These are based on emerging trends, successful pivots and examples of the creativity that's currently redefining our industry.

Though many large-scale events continue to be postponed or canceled, an overwhelmingly larger number have decided to persist. And to the victors go the spoils—or, in this case, audience share—as we are still seeing very high attendee and engagement numbers.

With each iteration of this report, we're tracking a collective shift, watching event strategists become savvier in this new, remote world. We are no longer putting lipstick on the proverbial pig by taking an in-person event and plopping it into a digital platform. There is a thoughtful transformation happening and the creation of content-rich, vivid, interactive experiences presented through a multi-channel broadcast and enjoyed best via a digital platform.

And it's time to look ahead at what next year may bring. I believe that we'll start to see in-person events resume—perhaps in late spring or summer—but these will come in the form of highly-curated, small events and experiences. We are seeing the emergence of charging for events, initially for deep-dive training and VIP experiences, but we're quickly watching this evolve to bigger price tags for entry and packages merging the digital and in-person experience. We expect to see more creativity when it comes to monetization in the coming months.

As ever, we're keeping our eye on the long-term, strategic impacts that so many in our industry must begin to navigate right now. And we remain inspired by teams and companies who, while negotiating crises, are also working to broaden the scope of what's possible.

Erica C. Spoor

Erica Spoor,
Chief Event Strategist
Impact Point Group | ImpactPointGroup.com

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has been more than six months since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the event industry continues to adjust and innovate in order to create meaningful, relevant brand experiences. Broad return of in-person events is still nine or 12 months away, at the earliest.

This audit and forecast—the third iteration of our findings—incorporates our observations and analysis of digital events since March 2020 and is informed with case studies and updated metrics taken from events that transpired between June 12 and August 6.

Read on for exploration, evaluation and forecast of our industry in transition and the various approaches we've seen to navigating an uncertain time.

Event Evaluation Criteria

- 63 events hosted by enterprise-scale technology providers serving a global audience

- Events that were originally designed as an in-person or live experience

- Most of these targeted events have a B2B focus

- Most were the company's flagship conference or event

- Most normally feature technical training

See the Appendix on of this report for the full list of audited events.

Summary of Recommendations

Adjust Your Strategy

Rather than applying the logic of an in-person event to a digital platform, take full advantage of the possibilities that an expanded digital environment offers to create meaningful experiences that align with business goals, quality sponsor integrations and myriad ways to engage with broad audiences.

Get Creative With Engagement

Event teams should think of engagement strategies that incorporate creative tactics for both live and on-demand experiences. We recommend introducing broadcast-style tactics into your engagement strategy to capture and entertain the audience. On-demand content extensions allow attendees to access content whenever (and from wherever) they want, equating to larger audience share and longer brand engagement.

Focus on Authenticity, Humanity & Awareness

We are living in a unique time when communities in every part of the world are experiencing fairly devastating circumstances. It's important to have a real-time pulse on what your participants are negotiating and tie that understanding into your event content and experience. Ignoring current events or appearing tone-deaf can come with significant backlash.

Gather Good Data

The value of collecting audience metrics (through registration, surveys and other digital measurements) is obvious, but consider a value exchange by providing curated experiences and personalized recommendations based on their responses.

Consider Participant Journey

We recommend having all event participants join from one primary platform and then leverage social channels or a mobile app in order to engage them in different ways. This has always been true for events, but remember that—especially in our new digital-only event climate—participants want opportunities to connect with others. Look for technology that supports those connection points and, importantly, is easy to use—you don't want to lose people before they even get to your content.

For more detailed explorations, skip ahead to the Forecast & Recommendations section on page 22.

Digital Event Audit

DIGITAL EVENT AUDIT: BY THE NUMBERS

Over the past six months, businesses have experienced massive change and discovered just how "non-negotiable" it is to remain agile during times of adversity—even massive technology companies are reliant on event and other functional teams that think quickly, creatively and work well together. All of which is vital when market survival is dependent on staying hyper-aware and responding quickly to the needs of your stakeholders.

In this digital event audit, we've recorded those decisions, innovations, technology selections and other trends that are transforming how customers interact with and experience brands.
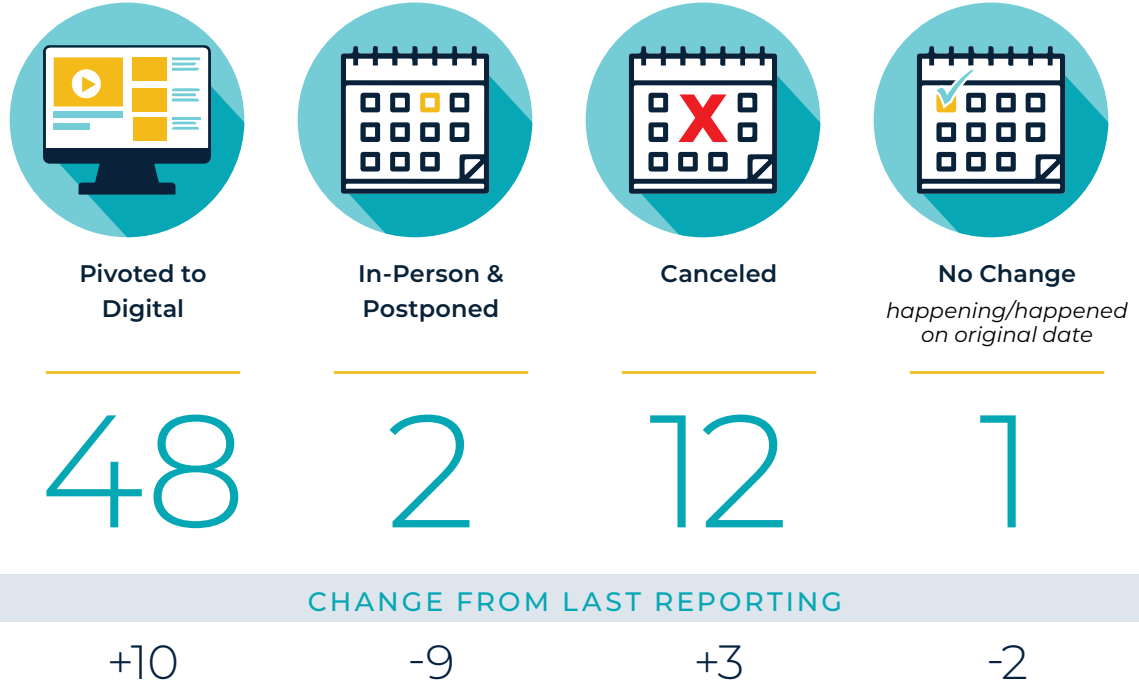
Here's what unfolded, by the numbers.

THE EVENTS WE'RE TRACKING

Of the 63 events we are tracking, 48 pivoted to digital and 2 events kept their in-person format

or postponed to a later date. At the time of our last update, three in-person events were on track to occur as planned and now that number has dropped to just one (WEC Grapevine), with many others pivoting to digital.*

Almost 20% of the events in our audit have officially been canceled and have their sights set on the resumption of in-person events in 2021, including Gartner Data and Analytic Conference and Qualtrics X4 Summit.

DECISION

Pivoted to Digital	In-Person & Postponed	Canceled	No Change *happening/happened on original date*
48	2	12	1

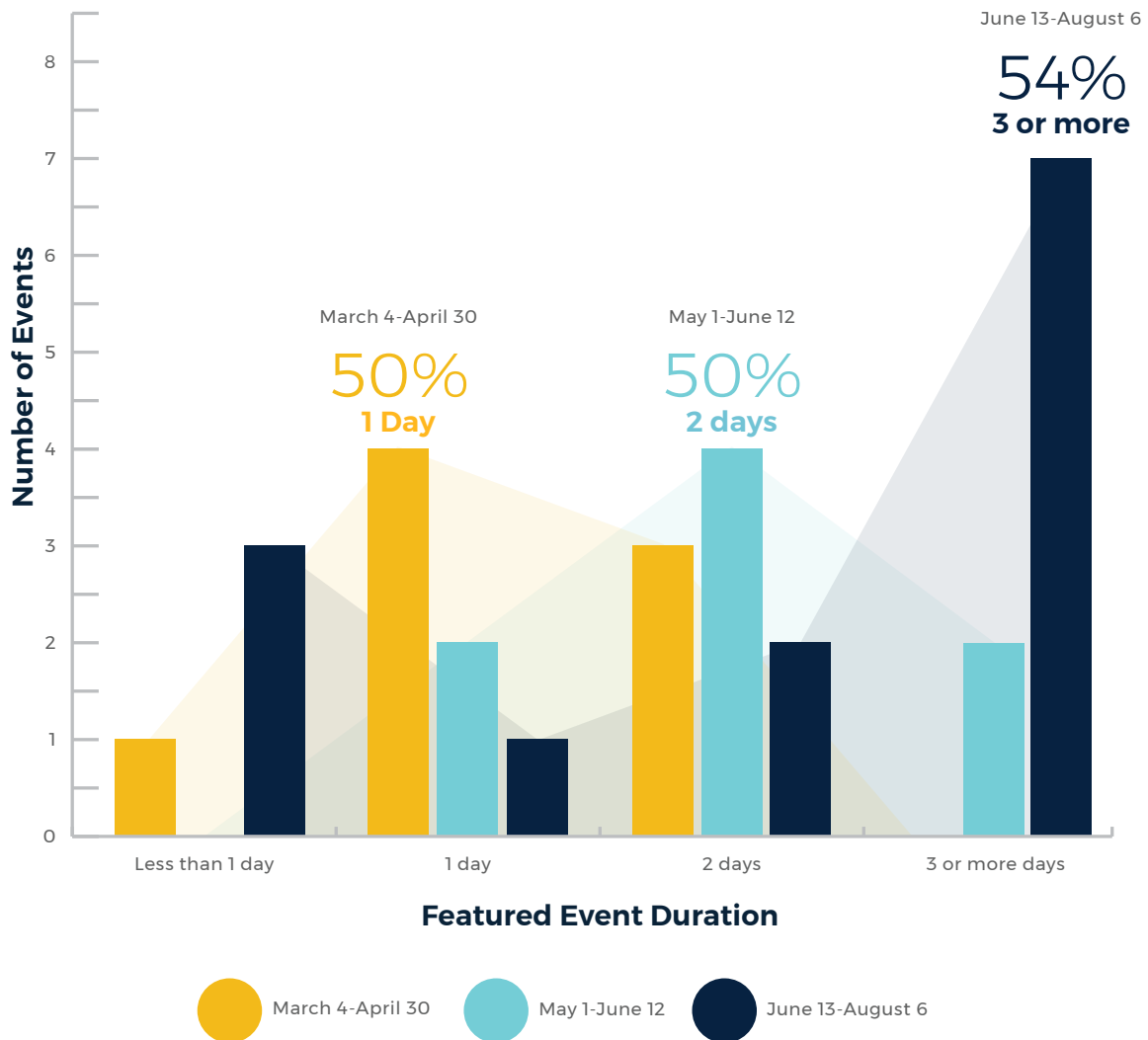| CHANGE FROM LAST REPORTING			
+10	-9	+3	-2

Reflecting events taken place through August 6, 2020

EVENT DURATION

In our observations, more and more events have lengthened the event experience—often pairing a featured event of three or more days with an on-demand content extension that can sometimes span several weeks. It's clear that event teams are focused on putting existing content to work and generate follow-on campaigns that bolster unique visits, view duration and engagement rates.

Bar chart titled "Featured Event Duration" with y-axis "Number of Events" (0 to 8).

- **March 4-April 30** — 50% 1 Day
- **May 1-June 12** — 50% 2 days
- **June 13-August 6** — 54% 3 or more

Legend: March 4-April 30 | May 1-June 12 | June 13-August 6

CONTENT DESIGN

Live, Simulive and Prerecorded Broadcasts—We continue to see many events present live or simulive experiences, with keynotes commonly presented live (or simulive) and breakout sessions being recorded in advance. The trend of using a multi-channel, broadcast-style strategy, coupled with a live host, continues to gain momentum and is helping to boost audience engagement and retention. Event teams are creating additional entry points and viewing options by making content available via the primary event platform, as well as on a coupled event app.

Audience Journeys—It's now common practice for event teams to gate their content in order to collect data from registrants, which then provides the option to suggest tracks and audience experiences based on those collected responses. We're also seeing more opportunities for participants to personalize their own agenda, adding specific sessions and keynotes into their schedule. Both Cisco Live and Google Cloud Next OnAir offered these types of scheduling tools.

"The shift to virtual has enabled teams to aggregate both physical and virtual event data and behaviors to deliver more personalized and curated content experiences to their target audiences," says **Brian Gates, SVP of Marketing at RainFocus.** "That personalization and relevance is what keeps attendees returning, year after year."

Keynotes—We've seen a continued decrease in the average number of keynotes, from 3.4 in our initial reporting to 2.7. Duration has decreased significantly, from an average of 60 minutes to 38.4 minutes.

Average Number of Keynotes

Average Keynote Runtime

2.7

38.4 min

CHANGE FROM LAST REPORTING

-.7   -22 MIN

"The shift to virtual has enabled teams to aggregate both physical and virtual event data and behaviors to deliver more personalized and curated content experiences to their target audiences. That personalization and relevance is what keeps attendees returning, year after year."
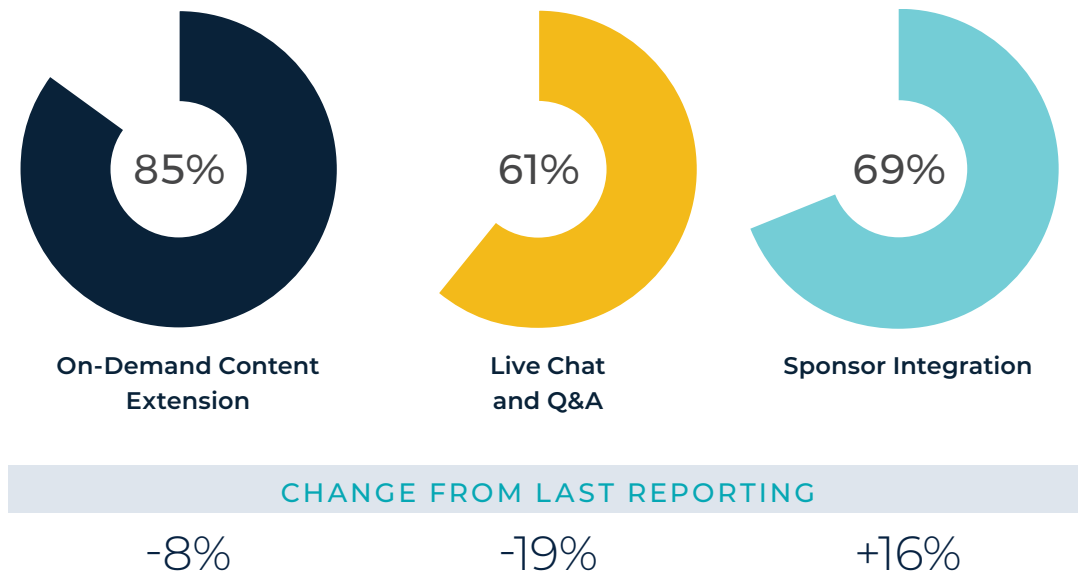
Brian Gates
SVP of Marketing
RainFocus

Interaction—Event teams continue to imagine new possibilities and opportunities for attendees to interact. Many featured live Q&A, in-platform and Twitter chats, networking and discussion groups as well as "ask-the-expert" sessions.

Virtual Trade Show or Exhibit Hall—Since we began our audit in March, only three out of 37 events featured a virtual trade show or exhibit hall feature. We had expected to see more use of this feature by now. As technology rises to meet the needs and demands of event teams, we'll likely see more ways of showcasing exhibitors and other revenue-producing partners.

Sponsor Integration—We were pleased to see much more sponsor integration with this group of events. Of the 13 we audited this round, nine featured some sort of sponsor integration on the website or within the event platform. SAPPHIRE NOW highlighted sponsors well, making it easy to find sponsored sessions during the event. Google Cloud Next OnAir integrated sponsors on the event platform and helped participants connect with them easily. We appreciate how Collision offered a 1:1 chat feature, in addition to a sponsor meeting scheduler.
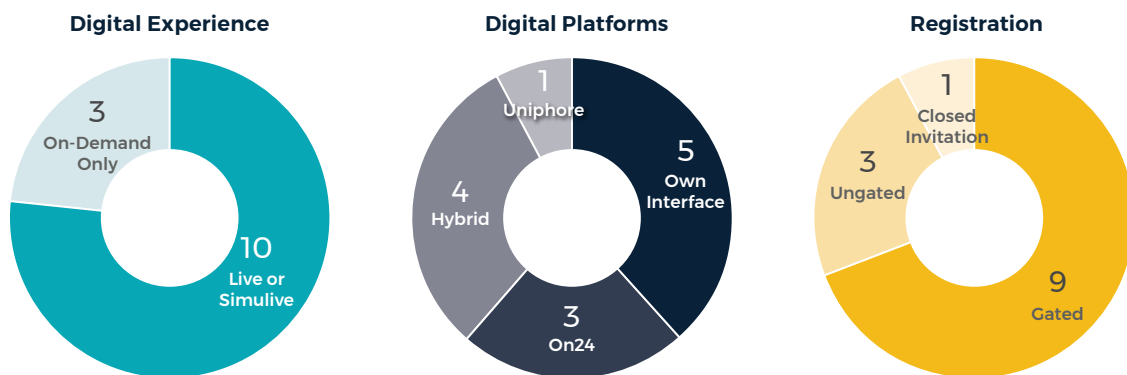
85%	61%	69%
On-Demand Content Extension	**Live Chat and Q&A**	**Sponsor Integration**

CHANGE FROM LAST REPORTING

-8%	-19%	+16%

COST

Registration Fees—The vast majority of digital events in our audit to date have been free. Half of those that did charge limited their fees to training and other high-level educational content. When events couple product promotion and information with expansive thought leadership, making all of that content free maximizes lead generation and brand awareness.

Free — 34
Combination — 6
Fee-based — 7
Not Yet Announced — 1
Canceled or Planned In-Person — 15
63
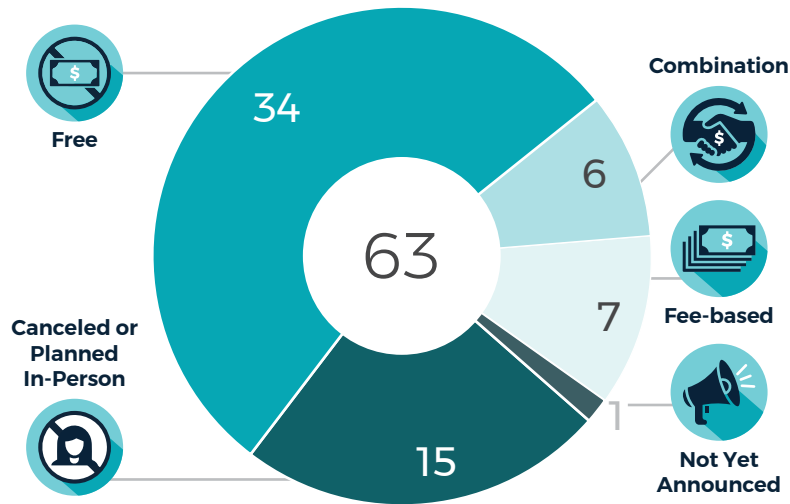
DIGITAL PLATFORMS & TECHNOLOGY

Platforms advertised as "turnkey" solutions, such as On24 and Intrado, provide easy templates to insert branding and quickly build out digital events, but we're seeing event teams continue to think broadly and create customized solutions that stitch together "best-in-class" technologies in order to present the experience they're looking for.

Digital Experience
3 On-Demand Only
10 Live or Simulive

Digital Platforms
1 Uniphore
5 Own Interface
4 Hybrid
3 On24

Registration
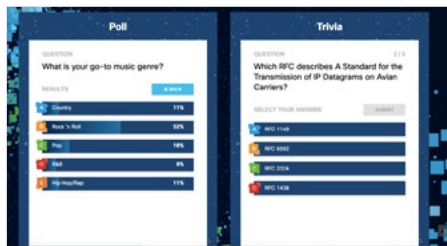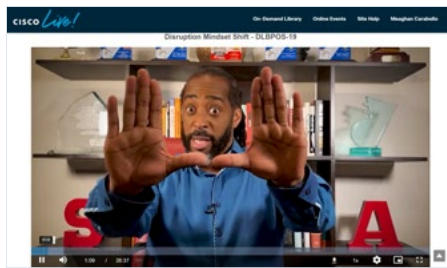1 Closed Invitation
3 Ungated
9 Gated

Reflects most recent event audit period: June 13 — August 6, 2020

Case Studies

CASE STUDIES

Cisco Live 2020

Original Date: May 31-June 4 ✓✓ **Actual Date:** June 16-17

Featured Event Format: Blended live, simulive and prerecorded

On-Demand Content Extension: Event content is available ongoing with new content released in July and September

Reported Virtual Registration: 125,000*

Typical In-Person Event Registration: 28,000**

Fee: Free

Technology Platform: Branded web platform

Sponsor Integration: Sponsors were featured on the event platform, grouped by sponsorship level

➔ A standout note on Cisco Live 2020 was the decision to pause their online event for two weeks in solidarity with #blackouttuesday and the Black Lives Matter movement. **Cisco Chairman and CEO Chuck Robbins** provided thoughtful remarks about this impactful choice. "Today, we find ourselves facing another pandemic," he said. "Not one that is new, by any means, but one that we must confront."

The opening keynote carried some of the same tone and messaging, including a compassionate, and thought-provoking address recognizing the many impacts of COVID-19 and racial injustice. Our event auditors especially enjoyed poet and inspirational speaker, Sekou Andrews' "Disruption Mindset Shift" keynote—it was relevant, inspiring and entertaining.

The Cisco Live team set the bar high in their use of live hosts, showcasing a variety of different host personalities and experts on each of their four channels. Registration was not required for viewing, so the company saw unprecedented views and participation. Cisco Live also had one of the easiest to navigate (and most visually appealing) platforms we've seen to date, making all of our switching between channels, social media links and the app feel seamless. Our auditors enjoyed the continuous play feature, allowing them to explore the site, while keeping an eye on the video feed. Live Q&A was integrated throughout the program, boosting participant engagement opportunities. The Cisco Live team also did well in leveraging their social media channels to continue the conversation, showcasing stand out quotes from speakers and sharing challenges designed to engage event participants. "Cisco was uniquely positioned to leverage our technology, networking and broadcast capabilities to bring this digital event to life, but determining how to scale down 1,000+ in-person sessions and activities into a digital event was a challenge," said **Kathy Doyle, Cisco Director of Global Customer Conferences.** "Ultimately, our team created a fully dynamic broadcast experience—leveraging quick pace and different channels depending on attendee interests. We designed the content and journeys to serve both loyal customers, as well as new audiences."

*Source: Cisco, July 22, 2020 **Source: Cisco Live event team*
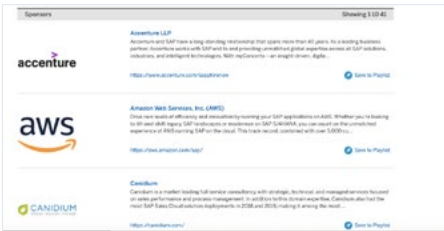
SAPPHIRE NOW Reimagined

Original Date: May 12-14

Actual Date: June 15-19

Featured Event Format: Simulive and prerecorded

On-Demand Content Extension: All content was available on-demand

Reported Virtual Registration: Unreported

Typical In-Person Event Registration: 30,000*

Fee: Free

Technology Platform: Branded web platform incorporating Virtustream, Periscope through Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube

Sponsor Integration: Sponsors were featured on the event platform with hyperlinks to sponsor videos

The SAPPHIRE NOW Reimagined team captured their keynote presentations in cinematic 3D Augmented Reality videos, studio-recorded from multiple camera angles. Presenters used polished 3D simulations to introduce and describe new SAP technologies, which helped to differentiate the virtual presentations from the traditional in-person conference experience.

On the first day of the conference, the event platform crashed and videos failed to load—likely because the platform wasn't built to support the amount of traffic the site was receiving. We were impressed with how quickly they released day-one content on Twitter, but their massive crash left participants confused and frustrated. All technology issues were resolved with no further snags during the rest of the featured event.

The SAPPHIRE NOW team actively engaged participants through social media with likes and comments. However, we did feel that the strategy used to highlight Porsche, a key SAP customer, lacked some sensitivity. While some participants may admittedly have enjoyed the virtual tour of SAP CEO Christian Klein's customizations of his own Porsche as a distraction from our current day challenges, we felt the move lacked understanding and awareness for those around the globe experiencing financial stress and other fallout related to the pandemic.

Source: Tech Republic, 2020
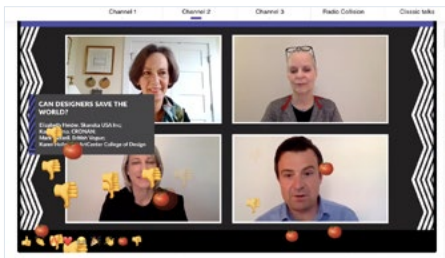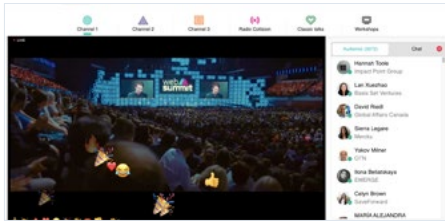
Collision from Home

 Original Date: June 22-25 **Actual Date:** June 22-25

 Featured Event Format: Live, simulive and prerecorded

 On-Demand Content Extension: Available to paid registrants

 Reported Virtual Registration: 32,000*

Typical In-Person Event Registration: 25,000**

 Fee: $79: single ticket, $158: 3-ticket package, $237: 5-ticket package, $23: on-demand content only

 Technology Platform: Web Summit proprietary mobile and web applications

 Sponsor Integration: "Partners" page allowed attendees to connect with sponsors directly

Collision from Home presented a live, broadcast-style event with multiple channel options, however, without obvious channel themes and a jam-packed, broad-reaching agenda, many participants commented in the live chat that they felt overwhelmed and confused with how to navigate the featured event. But the Collision team excelled in showcasing diversity among their presenters and including timely discussions around racial injustice and climate action. They had an interesting mix of sessions and presenters available on five channels (a mix of prerecorded content and live/simulive panel discussions), including some offerings that stand out among traditional tech conferences, like a masterclass on "calling out bias to enable change" and speakers with broad appeal outside of the industry, including Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Andrew Yang and Margaret Atwood.

The live Q&A immediately following some sessions was particularly valuable—allowing participants to address questions to some heavy-hitter speakers in a much more intimate venue. We also applauded the "mingle" concept, which gave participants three-minute networking opportunities, as well as the "commercials" used to introduce the next panel, which showcased the Collision From Home event and set the stage for what was to come. One failing was the feature allowing participants to use emojis to express their opinions of presenters in real time—thumbs up, thumbs down and tomato. There were often so many emojis flying over speakers' faces, that it made it challenging for participants to view the video feed.

This was the only event in our audit that offered on-demand content to paid registrants only. Viewers arriving post-event could access the content for $23.

Collision also experienced platform issues, both with their mobile app and the web app event platform, Web Summit, the presenting company for Collision, reportedly built the proprietary web app within a matter of two months, which may have also been a factor. Nonetheless, participants were regularly disrupted or prevented from viewing sessions or otherwise engaging with the platform.

*Source: Collision, June 23, 2020 **Source: KPMG, September 2019*
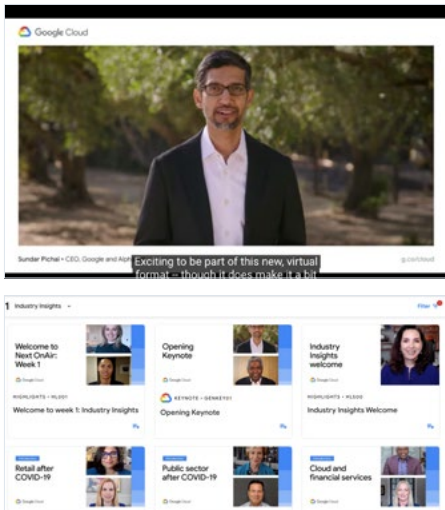
Google Cloud Next '20: OnAir

Original Date: April 6-8 ✓+ **Actual Date:** July 14-September 8

Featured Event Format:
Simulive and prerecorded

On-Demand Content Extension: Nine weeks

Reported Virtual Registration: Unreported

Typical In-Person Event Registration: Unreported

Fee: Free

Technology Platform: Branded web platform and YouTube

Sponsor Integration: Sponsors were featured on a separate page, grouped by sponsorship level, with a hyperlink directing participants to additional information, including white papers and other downloadable content. Participants could connect with sponsors directly.

➡ Google Cloud Next OnAir was launched as a nine-week event, with new, themed content released weekly each Tuesday, both live and on-demand. The future agenda was shared in advance, allowing attendees to plan ahead for upcoming sessions.

When the platform initially launched, there was so much content available that it was difficult to discern the intended user experience or journey. The Google team made adjustments after just one week, emphasizing the YouTube player integration, ultimately creating a platform that was easy to navigate. We appreciated the ability to filter the agenda by speaker in order to track favorite panelists and plan around their contributions. Another highlight was the weekly "Study Jam"—interactive workshops that offered instructor-led labs, certification resources and live Q&A sessions with experts. The games and badge opportunities engaged participants, helped them hone skills and continue to extend their brand relationship over time.

"Having a web/digital team that is agile allowed us to quickly adjust features to user feedback in real-time," said **Mark Ferrone, Google Cloud Events Content Program Lead.** "This helped increase engagement and visibility to program elements."

2020 Comcast Business Virtual Conference: The Future of Business

Original Date: September 24   ✓ **Actual Date:** July 23

Featured Event Format: Prerecorded with a live chat forum

On-Demand Content Extension: None

Reported Virtual Registration: 780*

Fee: Free

Technology Platform: ON24 web platform and YouTube

Sponsor Integration: None

→ The Comcast Business marketing team put the spotlight on the future of business for this division-wide forum. The virtual event featured pre-recorded videos, panel discussions, breakout sessions and a keynote address.

We appreciated the keynote from English celebrity chef and businessman, Robert Irvine, as he discussed the universal keys to embracing new customer expectations and how to navigate change to be successful. He used his own experience running a business and stories of his own activism to help others in need to showcase what it takes to lead your business to success through change and adaptation. Breakout sessions engaged Comcast leadership and partners in panel discussions. Participants were engaged in follow-on learning via educational opportunities and resources showcased on a separate page within the event platform.

In its original in-person event strategy, Comcast had initially set the goal of having 150 attendees and limiting it to just the Mountain West Region (Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico). After the pivot to digital, they exceeded these expectations by hosting nearly 800 attendees across six regions.

"It was crucial for us to stay focused on our overall goals of driving net-new leads into the funnel and accelerating opportunities to close for the sales team, whether digitally or in-person," said **Marina Antestenis, Director of Marketing, Mountain West Region of Comcast Business.** "We felt that the overall theme of the virtual conference, 'The Future of Business,' was timely given all the uncertainty impacting businesses across the country."

Source: Comcast Business marketing team

KUDOS

✏ Sensitivity to Current Events

At a time of economic uncertainty and social unrest, we were pleased to see immediate responses from events in our audit. Cisco Live rescheduled their launch date completely in an effort to bring awareness and support to social movements and its CEO tapped into some strong, emotional sentiments in his keynote. Collision featured thoughtful panels on both racial justice and climate change and Comcast Business threw its own spotlight on individual activism. There were also many events that referenced our shared humanity, tapping into empathy and compassion.

✏ Diversity & Inclusion

On a similar note, we are encouraged to see a large number of speakers from underrepresented demographics, including women and people of color. Collision and Cisco Live were intentional about this and it showed. Google Cloud Next OnAir showcased some fantastic conversations through a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens and shared how certain programs and applications could be leveraged with those causes in mind.

✏ Engaging, Entertaining Content

Collision and Cisco Live's multi-channel, broadcast-style content gave us a taste for forward-thinking trends that we believe have staying power. Cisco incorporated live event hosts on each channel to help attendees process the previous session and set the tone for what was to come. Google Cloud Next OnAir's "Study Jam" interactive workshops paired with their "Cloud Hero" element provided a hands-on experience for attendees, with some fun incentivization to keep coming back for more each week. The slick cinematic quality of SAPPHIRE NOW kept us entertained and engaged.

IPG Special Focus:

A Conversation With Mark Ferrone, Google Cloud Events Content Program Lead

Editorial credit: OpturaDesign / Shutterstock.com

IPG SPECIAL FOCUS:
A Conversation with Mark Ferrone, Google Cloud Event Content Program Lead

The Google Cloud Next team announced in March 2020 that their three-day event, originally scheduled to take place in-person in San Francisco in April, would be postponed. In July 2020, the team delivered a completely reimagined Google Cloud Next OnAir experience, a content-rich, engaging and interactive nine-week digital event series.

Erica Spoor, Impact Point Group's Chief Event Strategist, connected with Mark Ferrone, Google Cloud Event Content Program Lead, to gather first-hand insights and reflections on tackling the audacious task of creating a multi-week digital conference experience.

Erica Spoor, IPG: What was the main objective in your event design—prerecorded, on-demand, with a nine-week content release schedule?

Mark Ferrone, Google: Our main objective was to drive demand generation, enrichment, education and engagement with new and existing customers.

Spoor: Which types of content or nine-week themes were the most successful and why?

Ferrone: We tracked the overall success of specific content based on people viewing greater than 80% of a given video asset. Several different types of content consistently performed well, including executive keynotes, industry keynotes, weekly solution keynotes, demos and breakouts that featured customers or were related to new product announcements.

We think these were most successful because our customers and partners were expecting updates from Google Cloud on the respective theme areas. Some of these session types did also receive more social media support than others, which contributes to higher view rates. We also saw consistently higher viewership and retention for shorter sessions, i.e. those under 15 minutes in total duration.

Spoor: What are the bigger challenges your team is grappling with right now?

Ferrone: The team is now working on discovering how to further surprise and delight our users, absorbing learnings and feedback to implement in future digital events. Like our industry peers, we're diving into 2021, planning with an eye on what a live event experience should look like and how digital events can be more personal and drive more community engagement. In addition, the team continues to focus on personal well-being, given the growing pressures of "new" always-on digital conference programming in a highly competitive enterprise IT sales environment.

Spoor: What new learnings came out of this experience for your event team? How will the experience change your long-term strategies or philosophies?

Ferrone: There were many new learnings and insights that came out of this effort.

First and foremost, digital fatigue is real. Attendees are looking for more opportunities to interact with each other, network and exchange best practices. Executive audiences seem to be more available to attend digital experiences and more likely to engage in virtual round-tables on compelling themes that are moderated by notable speakers or that include notable peers.

Having a web/digital team that is agile allowed us to quickly adjust features to user feedback in real-time. This helped increase engagement and visibility for program elements.

We also found that digital demos successfully drive engagement and provide a simplified way to communicate a specific tip, trick or how-to. These assets provided a break from the 'sit and watch' nature of breakout or keynote video content.

Our digital team successfully created a fluid video production supply chain (and schedule) that was able to feed a multi-week digital conference, in part by unifying video vendor partners behind a single vision.

We recognized that it takes time for subject-matter-experts and executives, who are regular speakers at physical events, to adapt to digital-first, broadcast-style, on-camera speaking approaches and techniques. More cycles will help improve appetites for more broadcast-style formats.

Another insight was that shorter on-demand content formats (less than 15 minutes), bolstered by social media promotions, perform better. Live scheduled content formats need the support of aggressive communications and social media efforts to compete with viewers' alternative choices.

And, lastly, team well-being is critically important. Digital requires as much, if not more, production rigor as a physical event. Furthermore, the number of people required to produce high-quality digital content, all of whom are being coordinated while being off-site, requires time, care and a delicate approach.

> "In the months to come, we expect smaller and focused events targeting specific audiences. The events would feature a blend of experiences, from traditional on-demand content that people can watch on their own schedule, to live engagements at specific times. Community building will continue to be critically important."
>
> **Mark Ferrone**
> Event Content Program Lead
> Google Cloud

Spoor: What are your thoughts on how this sentinel moment will impact the industry as a whole and what do you see for the future of digital events?

Ferrone: Attendee expectations are growing, coupled with more choices for digital engagement.

In the months to come, we expect smaller and focused events targeting specific audiences. The events would feature a blend of experiences, from traditional on-demand content that people can watch on their own schedule, to live engagements at specific times. Community building will continue to be critically important.

Whilst appropriate at the time, we don't anticipate featuring a conference show over a multi-week period again in the foreseeable future. This has influenced our thinking for an 'always-on' evergreen event series which was reflected in the consistently strong engagement level in the content over the nine-week Next OnAir program, combined with strong repeat attendance.

Forecast & Recommendations

FORECAST & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our research, collaboration with industry leaders and technologists and cumulative decades of experience with event and engagement strategy, these are the recommendations that will shape the event industry for the next months and years to come.

Adjust Your Strategy

Get Creative With Engagement

Focus on Authenticity, Humanity & Awareness

Gather Good Data

Consider Participant Journey

Adjust Your Strategy

Rather than applying the logic of an in-person event to a digital platform, take full advantage of the possibilities that an expanded digital environment offers to create meaningful experiences that align with business goals, quality sponsor integrations and myriad ways to engage with broad audiences.

☑ **Align to Your Business Goals—**Never forget your overall business and branding goals. You'll still want to clarify your objectives and outline a process to achieve them, but will have to think creatively about how to achieve reach, value and effectiveness in this new digital event world.

☑ **Design for a Broad Audience—**Digital events have a larger reach and tend to attract both long-time loyalists and newer audiences who are less familiar with your brand. You'll want to plan a journey for a loyal customer base that wants to indulge in deep technical training and may prefer the longer sessions. A general audience will likely be interested in thought leadership, innovative trends, company announcements and product roadmaps.

☑ **Partners & Sponsors—**These relationships will look different digitally, but with the viewership numbers we're seeing at these large-scale events, there is huge value for sponsors to be at the virtual table. There are also opportunities to forge new, out-of-the-box partnerships as technology takes us far and above what was possible in-person.

Get Creative With Engagement

Event teams should think of engagement strategies that incorporate creative tactics for both live and on-demand experiences. We recommend introducing broadcast-style tactics into your engagement strategy to capture and entertain the audience. On-demand content extensions allow attendees to access content whenever (and from wherever) they want, equating to larger audience share and longer brand engagement.

- **Cohesive Live & On-Demand Experiences—**Be selective about which sessions are shared during the featured event and those that are shared afterward as part of the on-demand content extension or otherwise. This will help temper burnout for audiences who have been experiencing digital event overwhelm and can appreciate the option of delaying or otherwise managing their viewing experience on their own time. Google Cloud Next OnAir offered nine weeks of brand-new content, choosing not to present a featured event broadcast, at all—a creative approach that kept their audience continuously engaged and coming back for more.

- **Take Cues From Broadcast—**Given the rising desire for more polished digital events, we recommend exploring collaborations with power partners like media companies that offer studios, talent and high-quality video production. Your team will need to create a strategy that centers on participant engagement, paying close attention to the entertainment factor and what participants can digest in a short period of time. SAPPHIRE NOW elevated their keynotes with augmented reality videos that immersed participants in new technologies.

- **Multiple Viewing Experiences—**Multitasking attendees want to play around with event features while still participating in sessions. We recommend offering continuous play features that will pop a keynote or breakout session into an independent and floating video frame. The Cisco Live event platform offered continuous play and, similar to Collision and The Apple Worldwide Developers Conference, also paired a mobile app experience that provided alternative screens and other thoughtful elevations to the audience experience.

- **Be Thoughtful With Timing—**Wait to post on-demand or replay content until after the featured event has passed. That will create a margin of time for benchmark tracking and create a more significant experience for those audiences who tune in live.

Focus on Authenticity, Humanity & Awareness

We are living in a time when communities in every part of the world are experiencing fairly devastating circumstances. It's important to have a real-time pulse on what your participants are negotiating and tie that understanding into your event content and experience. Ignoring current events or appearing tone-deaf can come with significant backlash.

- **Talk About Our Shared Humanity—**Cisco CEO Chuck Robbins struck an authentic tone in his keynote, managing to address the pandemic, racial injustice, the economic crisis and mental health. While we don't recommend that speakers dwell on crises, it is important that keynote speakers address them and for event teams to be sensitive to audience needs.

- **Be Timely—**Give your speakers the time and space to respond to world events and other real-time circumstances. Recording keynotes last will ensure that they are timely and relevant. The Cisco Live event team combined simulive content with live event hosts, so

they could prepare well in advance and yet still have the ability to insert fresh messaging. Collision and Google Cloud Next OnAir offered topical panel discussions that allowed audiences to explore and engage in discussion about current events.

- **Strive for Inclusivity & Diversity—**Consider representation when it comes to building your speaker and panelist portfolio. Reflect on the accessibility of your tech platform in the same way that you'd consider accessibility for physical spaces. Providing ASL interpretation and closed-captioning will extend your audience even further. Microsoft Inspire offered content in 28 languages.

- **Get Real—**We enjoyed when presenters showed the nature of their circumstances, recognizing pets and kids during live presentations. Don't try to cover up the reality of this situation. Instead, embrace it with humor and grace.

Gather Good Data

The value of collecting audience metrics (through registration, surveys and other digital measurements) is obvious, but consider a value exchange by providing curated experiences and personalized recommendations based on their responses.

- **Require Registration—**Make participant registration a must in order to collect valuable data, then use this data to tailor the audience experience to individual needs, wants and areas of interest. This makes it incredibly helpful for participants to navigate a sometimes overwhelming amount of content.

- **Apply Survey Best Practices—**Post-session and post-event surveys provide important feedback. Those events with loyal audiences are having success with emailing surveys pre-and post-event, but if you are launching a new event brand, issue your surveys in the platform during the experience to encourage higher response rates. We expect real-time polling to pick up and replace longer surveys as time goes on.

- **Employ Digital Event Metrics—**While surveys are still useful, we recommend augmenting with metrics, such as unique attendee views and duration of views as engagement measures. Net-new accounts can speak to event reach. And we're seeing more integration of lead generation into the experience, for instance, allowing attendees to request a sales person contact them or to schedule a follow up web conference meeting.

Consider Participant Journey

We recommend having all event participants join from one primary platform and then leverage social channels or a mobile app in order to engage them in different ways. This has always been true for events, but remember that—especially in our new digital-only event climate—participants want opportunities to connect with others. Look for technology that supports those connection points and, importantly, is easy to use—you don't want to lose people before they even get to your content.

- **Provide Variety—**Be sure to provide a mix of live sessions to simulate the rich, in-person experience we're all missing and on-demand sessions that can be viewed at leisure. Sharing the agenda ahead of time also allows participants to customize this experience before they attend.

- **Leverage Social Media—**Allow attendees to share their event experiences, create community and engage with the brand through social media channels. This will create buzz and excitement, but also will allow event teams to gather qualitative data and testimonials from participants.

- **Prioritize Ease-of-Use—**Make the platform layout user-friendly and easy to navigate, so participants can focus on interacting with content, instead of trying to figure out how to use the technology. Cisco Live and Google Cloud Next OnAir had standout platforms when it came to easy and natural navigation. Design the platform around the journey, not the other way around.

WHAT'S NEXT:
OUR FORECAST FOR DIGITAL EVENTS

Mounting Pressure on Event Tech—With six months under our belts, we're no longer "pivoting," we're creating new and unique event and engagement strategies. Yet, our creative strategies are outpacing our technologies and we're making due with platforms and web conferencing solutions that are stretching to meet our needs. We will be seeing more event teams think through their digital event strategy before finding—or building—a platform that makes the grade. Most of our clients seek the same key features: multi-channel streaming or content capabilities, breakout rooms, threaded chat with moderation, and better audience engagement, including access to experts, social integration, gamification and feedback mechanisms. And while we're making our wish list, as we seek to monetize our events, we also need more dynamic and effective sponsor integration and a simple way to gate on-demand or recorded content after the live experience. Who's up for the challenge?

Multi-Channel Broadcasts & Live Engagement—We're looking forward to multi-channel, broadcast-style events produced with studio-quality audio—it's clear that our creativity and conversation can no longer be confined to video conferencing platforms with restrictive interaction features and sometimes poor audio quality. As event teams get more comfortable testing boundaries and become more confident in the possibilities, we expect to see the broadcast strategy augmented with a return-to-live content and engagement. Think keynotes delivered in real-time (à la the State of the Union), on-air hosts and emcees, facilitated workshops and roundtables and other curated, live, and interactive engagements—even if it means taking on more risk.

Planning for the Return to In-Person—We are human and humans crave connection. There is no doubt we will return to in-person events as soon as is safely possible. As the event industry rallies to define what resuming to events safely will look like from a physical and psychological safety, planning and logistics perspective, our focus is instead on predicting the types of experiences audiences will brave the risk of exposure to gather in person. We believe initially audiences will prefer smaller gatherings and highly-curated experiences that prioritize peer networking, facilitated conversations and exclusive access to products, solutions and experts. Standard presenter-led and sit-and-get content will largely continue to be delivered digitally. We're seeing an increased interest in facilitation services (despite tighter budgets) due to the need to curate productive and effective engagement and conversation. Highly-skilled facilitators will be key to creating meaningful live attendee interaction both digitally and as we all reacclimate to smaller, in-person gatherings.

Hybrid vs. Integrated—Through all of this creative experimentation, we're also exploring and defining what we mean by "hybrid event"—a term that we've all been using rather casually, but it's likely going to be what our work centers on for the foreseeable future. We'd like to rethink the word "hybrid" and exchange the word with "integrated" or "blended."

We don't think we're talking about inventing an entirely new "species" of event, or simply taking a traditional, in-person event and bolting on digital modifications and add-ons. The objective is an integrated, harmonious engagement experience that incorporates "in-person" and "digital" tools thoughtfully and intentionally for both the in-person and remote participants.

Creative Collaboration & Partnership—In our last forecast, we mentioned the need for intra-company collaboration between digital marketing and event teams. Now, we're expanding that super team to include creative collaboration with media or other non-traditional event supplier partnerships. The need for high-quality, multi-sensory experiences and visual storytelling will demand that we expand the supplier/partner ecosystem. Event teams will start to explore partnership and other creative collaboration with media companies, with the benefit of being able to access studios, talent, recording equipment, producers and video editors. As in-person resumes, event teams need to shift perspective from managing the masses at an onsite conference, to designing a highly-curated, even custom experience for small groups and audience sub-segments. This requires a completely different approach that will redefine the event planning agency function.

Monetization—Simply put, many more events are likely to begin charging fees—early analysis is landing somewhere in the ballpark of 20–30% of historical in-person registration price. "Freemium" models are emerging, offering some content—like keynotes—at no cost, while more technical content, series programs and on-demand sessions are offered for a fee. We recommend putting your consumer trend compass to use. Pay attention to what you buy as a consumer—we download paid apps without thinking, subscribe to multiple streaming services just to ensure access to our favorite shows, and tolerate ads on our podcasts because we love them so much. Event teams are wise to take the time to think creatively and long term about monetization and roll out pricing models thoughtfully. Not only will this ensure that we bring audiences along on the journey to paid content, but also allows for the flexibility to charge more or monetize new aspects of the experience or content in the future.

Appealing to a Broad Range of Audiences—As we continue to see digital registrations and conversions far exceed that of in-person events, event teams will be more and more sensitive about creating programming for a broad range of audiences. Executives and senior leaders, often an elusive audience to attract in person, are engaging more digitally because it's less demanding on their schedules. We're expecting American Sign Language (ASL) translations, closed-captioning language options and sessions offered at multiple times throughout the day—all efforts intended to reach a global audience. Further, diverse and inclusive programming will be critical to attracting and retaining audiences in the months and year ahead as our country continues to deal with divisive social injustice and racial inequality.

WHAT'S NEXT:
OUR FORECAST FOR DIGITAL EVENTS *(CONTINUED)*

🔍 **Native Digital Events—**More and more events are being conceived as completely digital from the start. Event teams are learning from months of experimentation and the next generation of events will look and feel a lot different from what we've been used to. We've figured out how to do them and they cost a fraction of an in-person event. Given this, we believe digital-only experiences will continue to hold a place in the corporate event portfolio even as in-person events resume.

🔍 **Reskilling Event Professionals—**We've been exceedingly impressed by the traditional event planners we've engaged with who are working hard to pivot their perspectives and skills during this digital-only time. And it's not easy. Most event planners thrive on the energy of seeing all the hard work come to life onsite. There's nothing like nailing the lunch rush or seeing a crowd flow out of a jam-packed keynote session. Some of the ways we've seen our clients and colleagues address this is by donning the mindset of a producer, thinking of show flows and storytelling instead of agendas and wayfinding. Others have leaned in on their project management super powers, delivering value by managing timelines, budgets and their internal people and processes. And others still have found a passion for the parts of events they've never been exposed to, like marketing and content. And for those who haven't yet found their groove with digital events, take heart, we're confident 2021 will usher in a return to the live, in-person experiences we all love so much.

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Impact Point Group can help you move fast—and intelligently—to redefine your engagement strategy. For more research, articles, and an overview of our Digital Events Strategy Workshops and Services, visit impactpointgroup.com/digital-event-strategy.

APPENDIX

63 events, tracked March 4-August 6, 2020

Adobe
Adobe Summit

Apple
Apple WorldWide Developer Conference

Atlassian
Atlassian Summit

Atmosphere
Atmosphere20

AWS
AWS Summit Online

Cisco
Cisco Americas Marketing Velocity Live
Cisco APJC
Cisco Live
Cisco Live Melbourne

Cloud Software Association
SaaS Connect

Collision
Collision

Dell
Dell Technologies World

DocuSign
Docusign Momentum

Domo
Domopalooza

EmTech
EmTech Asia

Enterprise Connect
Enterprise Connect 2020

ESports
ESports Summit

ESRI
ESRI Developer Summit 2020

Exhibitor
Exhibitor Live 2020

F5
F5 Agility 2020

Facebook
Facebook F8
Facebook Global DIgital Marketing Summit

Gartner
Gartner CIO IT Symposium
Gartner Data and Analytics Summit 2020
Gartner Security and Risk Management Summit

Google
Google Cloud Next
Google Global News Initiative Summit
Google I/O 2020

IBM
IBM Think

IIOT
IIOT World Days
IOT World Developer Conference

Microsoft
Microsoft Build
Microsoft Ignite
Microsoft MVP Global Summit
WSL Conference

Mobile World Congress
Mobile World Congress MWC Barcelona
Mobile World Congress MWC Americas

MSP World
MSP World

NetApp
NetApp INSIGHT Digital Event

NVIDIA
NVIDIA GTC Digital

Oktane
Oktane Live 20

Oracle
Oracle Code One
Oracle Modern Business Experience
Oracle Open World

ODSC
ODSC East 2020

Optimizely
OptiCon20

Qualtrics
Qualtrics X4 Summit

Red Hat
Red Hat

RSA
RSA Conference

SaaStr
SaaStr Annual 2020

Salesforce
Salesforce Dreamforce 2020
Salesforce World Tour Sydney

SAP
SAP Ariba Live
SAP Concur Fusion
SAP Sapphire Now

SAS
SAS Global Forum

ServiceNow
ServiceNow Knowledge

Shopify
Shopify Unite 2020 Developers Conference

South by Southwest (SXSW)
SXSW

VMWorld
VMWorld

World Education
World Education Congress