



Digital Event Forecast

New insights as of February 8, 2021



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A NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CHIEF STRATEGIST

One of the most thrilling aspects of working in event strategy is movement. This industry cannot be stagnant for a simple reason — people and situations are constantly evolving. That's always been true, but the changes brought forth by COVID-19 magnified it to a never-before-seen level.

Yes, the profound and swift shift made by event strategists allowed corporate events to continue without in-person interaction; but it also drastically changed the future of event strategy and ushered in an entirely new approach to the profession. Despite all of the challenges we faced in 2020, that transformation is something I am forever grateful to be a part of.

Everyone in the industry should be proud of this truth: the changes we've made are here to stay. The adoption of digital events — and our collective ability to quickly evolve our strategies — has been so successful that they will certainly continue to play a role in the future of event strategy, even with the return of in-person events near.

As we approach the return to in-person events, the next step is understanding how to optimize digital efforts to reduce the onset of digital fatigue and create meaningful engagement with an audience that desperately craves personal interaction. **In this fourth iteration of our Digital Event Forecast**, we round out our year of data, analyze what those observations mean for you as an event strategist, and look ahead at how the future of event strategy is already evolving.

In addition to a focus on integrated event strategies, we continue to see the success of strategic monetization of events, largely in the form of curated VIP or upgraded experiences. Due to digital fatigue, attendees are eager to engage with people in a more intimate environment. This opens the door for creative combinations of free content used to promote brand awareness and premium content generated to indulge and engage with your audience.

We envision the prioritization of broadcast-level production standards, advancements in networking capability, and thoughtful sponsor engagement being some of the most important trends to the future of event strategy.

Looking into the new age of event strategy, we commend our colleagues for the outstanding advancements made under such tumultuous conditions. We're thrilled to watch those efforts unfold in 2021 and beyond.

Erica Spoor,
President & Chief Strategist
Impact Point Group | [ImpactPointGroup.com](https://www.impactpointgroup.com)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approaching the first anniversary of the pivot from in-person events to digital events, our team at Impact Point Group has compiled the fourth edition of the Digital Event Forecast. This audit investigates some of the most important adjustments the industry continues to make and provides recommendations and forecasts that event professionals can incorporate into their 2021 strategy.

The data audit and recommendations & forecasts sections build on the metrics recorded in the first three publications of the report and include events from March 2020 through December 2020. The case studies section investigates events that transpired between Aug. 7, 2020 and Dec. 15, 2020. Explore our findings through the rest of the report to learn more about the tactics we've seen event professionals put into action.

Event Evaluation Criteria

- **72 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 [page 28](#) of this report for the full list of audited events.

BY THE NUMBERS

Digital Event Audit



DIGITAL EVENT AUDIT: BY THE NUMBERS

In this edition of the Digital Event Audit, we conclude our analysis of 2020 events and give fellow event professionals a glimpse into the trends we are noticing. Throughout the year, the success of digital events continued to grow in terms of key measurement metrics, including attendance and engagement.

This growth is attributed directly to the innovative decisions made throughout the industry since last March. Now that our 2020 digital event tracking has concluded, we have a robust view of what the pivot to digital looked like.

Here's what unfolded, by the numbers.

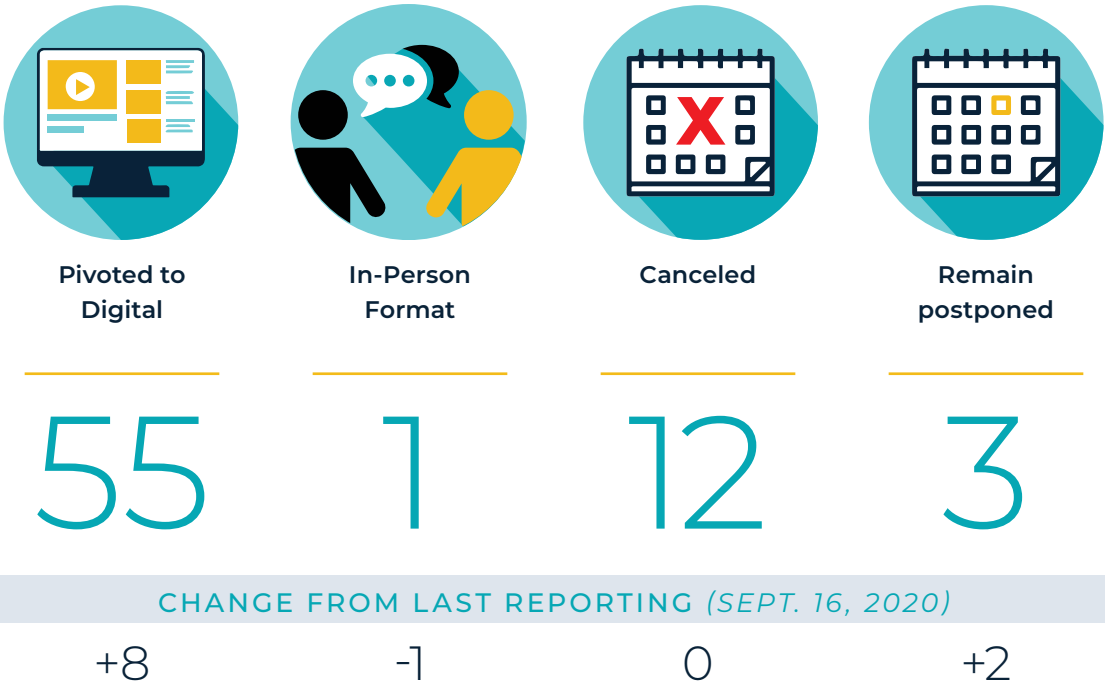
THE EVENTS WE'RE TRACKING

Of the 72 total events we tracked in 2020:

- 55 pivoted to a digital format
- 1 kept an in-person format
- 12 canceled altogether
- 3 remain postponed

We tracked 9 events in Q4 of 2020, all of which pivoted to a fully digital event. Less than 14% of the events we tracked canceled, further validating the swift response we noticed among event professionals.

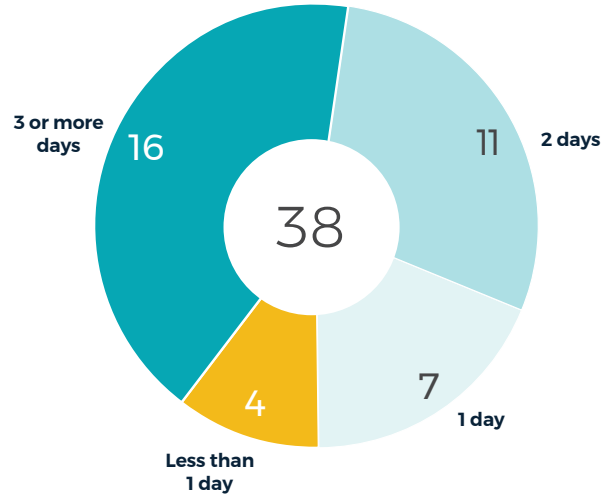
DECISION



**Reflecting events taken place through December 15, 2020.*

EVENT DURATION

Maintaining the trend from previous versions of our report, more events opted for multi-day experiences as we became more comfortable with digital events. In fact, all of our Q4 events spanned across multiple days, sometimes multiple weeks.



*Reflecting a subset of the total events taken place through December 15, 2020.

These trends correlate directly with event planners' efforts to increase engagement metrics in the digital space. Many events opted to combine simulative keynotes, performances and activities with expansive on-demand content journeys that kept audiences engaged for weeks on end. One extreme example of this came from AWS Re:Invent, whose total content offering lasted from Nov. 30 through Jan. 14.

CONTENT DESIGN

Live, Simulative and Pre-recorded Broadcasts — The extended length of events goes hand-in-hand with the combination of live, simulative and pre-recorded broadcasts. *Salesforce* showcased a unique format by holding a simulative keynote experience to kickstart the event before offering pre-recorded on-demand content journeys to participants two weeks later based on their specific engagements and interests during the opening session. Other popular live content offerings included musical performances and celebrity-hosted activities that fostered engagement and participation.

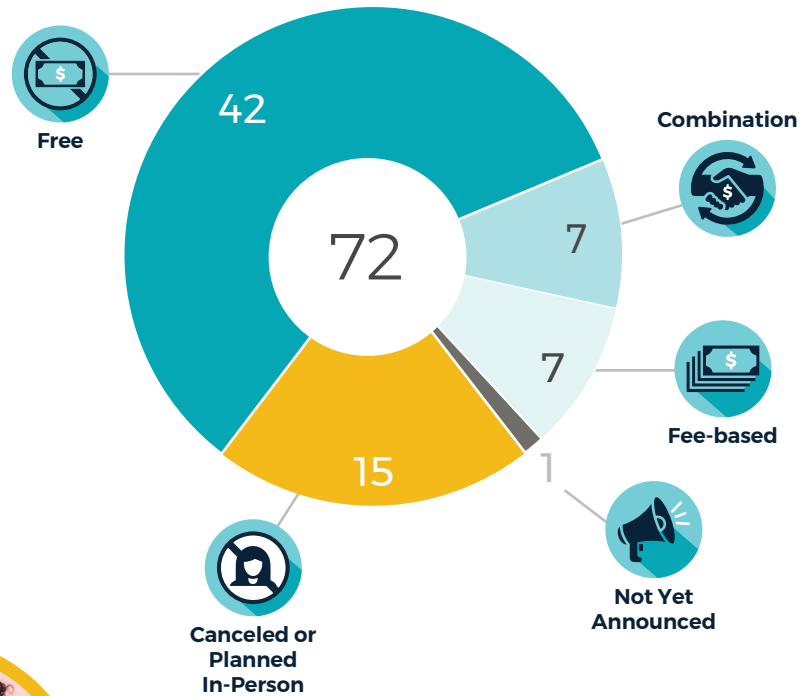
Customized Journeys — We noticed more events offering customized content journeys. The events that did this well offered easy-to-navigate agendas that attendees could use to craft their own schedule. This made the inherent impersonality of digital events more human as attendees were able to participate in events that interested them most alongside like-minded peers. Because audience members customized their experience, it also improved retention rates among participants.

Platforms & Technology — The customization of platforms continues to rise to keep up with innovative content design ideas and expectations. One trend we noticed in our latest round of events is the combination of common technologies to curate a platform built to satisfy your event's specific needs. *VMworld's* ability to stitch together elements from RainFocus, Brightcove, Pigeonhole and Zoom allowed them to customize a platform that held up to 80,000 attendees, more than 4x their in-person registration. Results like these signify that the digital platform will have staying power in the future of events.

COST

Registration Fees — In our latest audit of events, four events charged a fee to attend while four more offered a combination of free and for-purchase content. Over the course of the year, we saw 11 events charge an entry fee with 10 more including optional content for purchase.

We expect this trend of monetization to continue in 2021 as more and more events are realizing the success of VIP experiences that create a division between all access versus limited access. Attendees are more willing to pay for high-value content, including industry-specific trainings or certifications, limited-capacity workshops that drive actionable takeaways, 1-on-1 consultations and certification exam discounts.



**Reflects most recent event audit period: August 7 - December 15, 2020.*



“Prior to designing VMworld 2020, our team interviewed prospective attendees to understand what type of event content and experiences they would like to see at our event. This feedback led us to prioritize technical, broadcast learning over immersive experiences, which fit our direction and was ultimately a successful decision.”

Allison Crocker

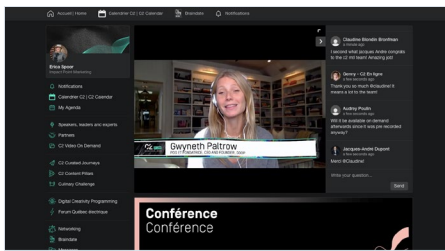
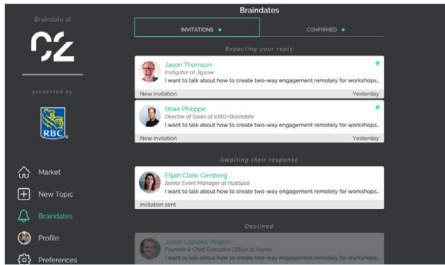
Director, Event Content
VMware


Case Studies





CASE STUDIES


C2 Online





- 
Original date: Native digital (online counterpart to in-person Montréal)
Actual date: Oct. 19-30


- 
Featured Event Format: Blended live, simulive and prerecorded


- 
On-Demand Content Extension:
 On-demand pass Nov. 1-30



- 
Reported Virtual Registration: Unknown

- 
Fee: C2 Online — \$150 early-bird rate (\$209 regular rate) +\$85 for on-demand pass; C2 Online + C2 Montréal Bundle — \$2,445; C2 Montréal Spring '21 — \$2,495

- 
Typical In-Person Event Registration: 7,500+*

- 
Technology Platform: Branded web platform

- 
Sponsor Integration: Sponsors were featured on the event platform

- 
What We Loved: Immersive networking opportunities, customized content journeys, user-friendly video player
- 
Areas For Improvement: Overwhelming amount of content, unorganized agenda, dark website design

If one digital event came the closest to creating an immersive networking experience, it was C2 Online. Industry professionals have struggled to recreate the networking opportunities that were readily available during in-person events, but C2 Online's use of “brain dates” stood out to our event auditors.

The event platform allowed attendees to select topics they are interested in and schedule one-on-one brain dates with like-minded professionals. In the event management space, these topics revolved around curating memorable event experiences and energizing an audience. To further encourage networking, all masterclasses and workshops featured a live host or moderator. The platform also kept track of the contacts made for future networking opportunities.

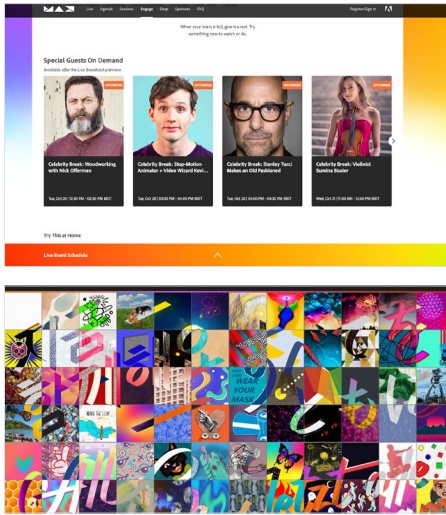
We also lauded the customization abilities that C2 Online provided its participants. Event registrants were able to curate their event experience based on topics that interested them the most. Some of these events incorporated celebrity engagement — Malcolm Gladwell and Gwyneth Paltrow, to name two — and included different activities, masterclasses and workshops that all encouraged collaboration and participation, something difficult to do in the digital realm.

With that said, the amount of content available was overwhelming to digest for many participants in the amount of time available. While we enjoyed how customizable the event experience was, it would have been useful to receive recommendations based on job function to guide the audience towards the experiences most suited for them.

*Source: C2 Online

CASE STUDIES

Adobe Max — The Creativity Conference



- Original Date:** Oct. 20-22
Actual Date: Oct. 20-22
- Featured Event Format:** Live/Simulive
- On-Demand Content Extension:** 350+ sessions available on-demand
- Reported Virtual Registration:** Unknown
- Fee:** Free
- Typical In-Person Event Attendance:** 15,000*
- Technology Platform:** Branded web platform
- Sponsor Integration:** Sponsors were featured on the event platform

- ➔ **What We Loved:** Creative engagement opportunities, community-focused activities
- ➔ **Areas For Improvement:** Lack of sponsor differentiation on website

The Creativity Conference, indeed. In terms of fostering creative engagement opportunities that connect a fully virtual audience, Adobe Max stood out in a massive way. The Creativity Conference took celebrity involvement to the next level by not just including them into the event plan, but also using their skills and time to create dynamic engagement opportunities for audience members. It started with Conan O'Brien's comedic introduction of Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen before delving into a woodworking shop with Nick Offerman and a mixology class with Stanley Tucci.

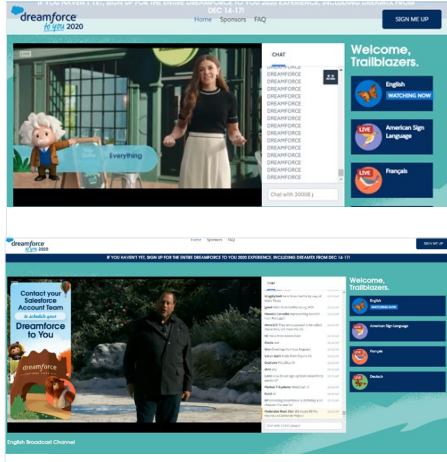
Adobe also showed that you don't necessarily need celebrities to promote engagement. Other activities included art walks throughout different cities, various arts and craft projects and gamification breaks that allowed participants to compete for laptops, cameras and other global prizes and sponsored giveaways.

We admired Adobe's ability to creatively unite its community. Adobe products were showcased in a creative way to highlight how they can be leveraged to have important conversations and aid in the dialogue surrounding racial injustice. Adobe also provided its event participants the unique ability to collaborate on a virtual mural that audience members added to throughout the three-day event, further fostering a sense of community despite the digital constraints. Adobe would have benefited from clear sponsor level differentiation throughout its website to allow participants to engage with sponsors of different tiers.

*Source: Forbes, October 2020

CASE STUDIES

Salesforce — Dreamforce to You 2020



Original Date: Nov. 9-12

Actual Date: Keynote Dec. 2; Trailblazer sessions Dec. 14-18

Featured Event Format: Live/Simulive

On-Demand Content Extension: On-demand sessions available

Reported Virtual Registration: Unknown

Fee: Free

Typical In-Person Event Attendance: 170,000*

Technology Platform: Branded web platform

Sponsor Integration: Sponsors were featured on the event platform

➔ **What We Loved:** Hyper-customized content journeys, innovative sponsor and celebrity integration

➔ **Areas For Improvement:** Unthreaded and overwhelming chat, minor technological delays

As its name suggests, Dreamforce to You 2020 accomplished exactly what it set out to do — curate a digital event suited for each attendee's preferences. Salesforce truly did execute an event customized to the viewer in a way no other event we tracked did.

The Salesforce team took a risk by holding an engaging keynote session two weeks prior to the follow-up sessions. This accomplished two concepts incredibly well: creating and upholding excitement around the event and giving attendees adequate time and resources to make the most of their experience. We loved how the variety of content included in the initial keynote — interviews between James Corden and Salesforce employees, interactive videos featuring AI bots, et al. — made the experience feel more like a show and less like a corporate event.

Following the keynote, attendees received curated content offerings via email that allowed them to sign up for specific engagements and craft their perfect schedule, an offering that stood out to our auditors. These sessions were separated into unique focuses, including data and decisions, engagement techniques, new trends and perspectives, technology and the future of work.

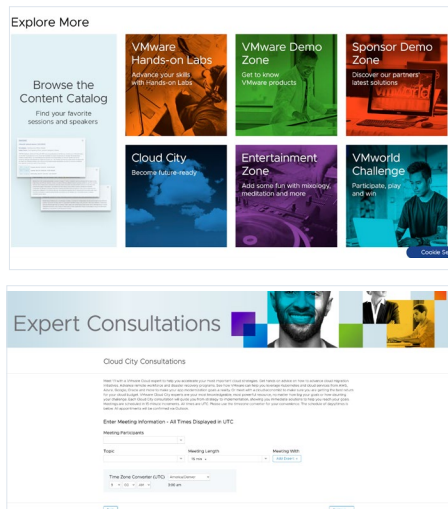
Dreamforce to You 2020 also approached celebrity engagement through a new lens. Salesforce took an unorthodox approach by partnering Snoop Dogg and Martha Stewart in a cookie decorating class. At the very least, this encouraged registration from participants who wanted to see how the partnership worked. Our auditors also noticed Salesforce's approach to sponsor integration change. The event included fewer sponsors than what we've been accustomed to seeing in the past, which actually made those sponsors and their content far more memorable.

The event's unthreaded chat made the functionality distracting, especially with global participation, and the main keynote was delayed due to technical issues.

*Source: Salesforce, December 2020

CASE STUDIES

VMworld



Original Dates: Aug. 31-Sept. 3 (VMworld US); Nov. 9-12, (VMworld Europe)
Actual Dates: Sept. 29-Oct. 1 (US); Sept. 30-Oct. 2 (APJ & Europe)



Featured Event Format: Digital



On-Demand Content Extension: Ongoing



Reported Virtual Registration: 156,000+ (US); 80,000 (Europe)*



Fee: General Pass — free; Premiere Pass — \$299



Typical In-Person Event Attendance: 23,000+ (US); 20,000+ (Europe)*



Technology Platform: Branded web platform using RainFocus, Brightcove, Pigeonhole and Zoom



Sponsor Integration: Sponsors were featured on the platform

➔ **What We Loved:** Strategic utilization of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), broadcast-like production standards, customized platform, multi-channel broadcast, live Zoom breakouts

➔ **Area of Improvement:** Unclear explanation of the premium offering
 What's the best way to create buzzworthy chatter around a digital event when people are increasingly fatigued by virtual interaction? That's a question plenty of event professionals pondered this past quarter, and VMworld's ingenious solution may become mainstream in 2021 — FOMO.

People want to be included in things; it's human nature. So when the fear of missing out on an exclusive offering is presented, it's likely to create a mad rush of registration. VMworld executed this perfectly with its premium event registration that offered more personalized, VIP experiences at a cost. To create that sense of FOMO, the event team promoted these experiences as one-time-only, encouraging registration for the limited-time offerings. That said, it was unclear what exactly the premium pass included, something the VMworld team admitted it could have done better. The digital format also improved the inclusivity of the event overall, allowing more people to attend than ever before.

Another area that VMworld excelled in is the overall production standards of the event. By sending production kits to speakers, and even inviting them into the studio to safely record their portion of the event professionally, VMworld's presentation was nearly flawless and flowed from speaker to speaker without interruption.

*Source: VMware, September 2020

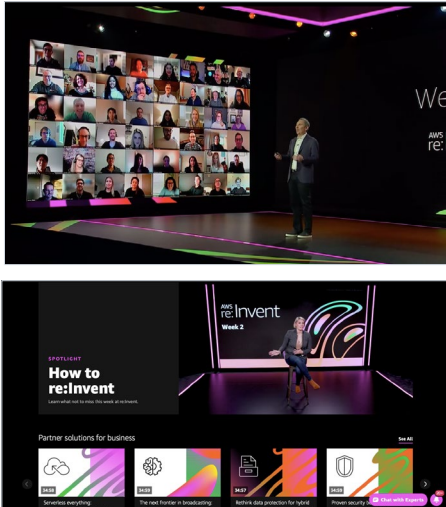
"50% of our attendees had never come to a VMworld. It was really a wonderful way to allow people who, often due to budget constraints, would never have been able to come — whether their job is not 100% based on VMware products, so justifying the in-person cost of attending is hard or they are currently exploring what VMware has to offer — so I think digital is always going to be that tool."

Allison Crooker

Director of Event Content, VMworld

CASE STUDIES

AWS Re:Invent



Original Dates: Nov. 30-Dec. 4
Actual Dates: Nov. 30-Dec. 18



Featured Event Format: Live



On-Demand Content Extension: Available immediately after original broadcast; also releasing new sessions in January 2021



Reported Virtual Registration: Estimated 538,075



Fee: Free



Typical In-Person Event Registration: 67,000



Technology Platform: Branded web platform



Sponsor Integration: Sponsors were featured on the platform

- ➔ **What We Loved:** Long-term engagement opportunities, organized content agenda, easy-to-navigate platform, extensive sponsor engagement
- ➔ **Areas of Improvement:** Unpolished chat capability, lack of community engagement

AWS Re:Invent focused on a long-term content strategy that helped achieved their goal of increasing attendance metrics among registrants. The event itself was promoted as a three-week experience that included live stream keynotes, live sessions and on-demand content available after the initial broadcast.

The AWS team took it a step further by releasing a second wave of content nearly a month later to re-engage its audience. Providing six-plus weeks of content, in addition to the accessibility of digital, resulted in a 10x increase in attendance rate compared to in-person registration.

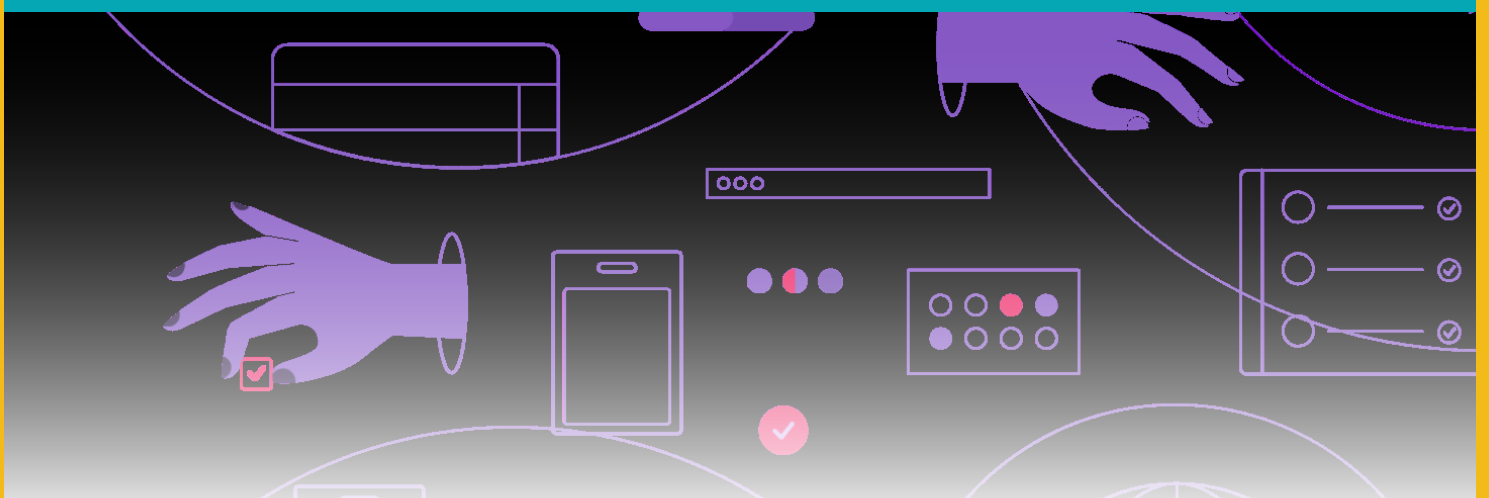
Keeping engagement and participation organized throughout an event this lengthy is no small task, but we were impressed by AWS' ability to do just that. The event site — which was incredibly attractive and easy to navigate — provided daily updates to attendees on their upcoming events to keep everyone organized. AWS also provided “How to Re:Invent” videos at the beginning of each week to give attendees an overview of the week ahead.

AWS maintained its history of successful sponsor engagement by offering four levels of sponsorships and selling out all available spots. Each level included different combinations of content and messaging delivered at key site merchandising placements in the platform that enabled attendees to connect with sponsors.

The event would have benefited from a more polished chat option. In most sessions, chat was only available for 1-on-1 sessions, and users were unable to see chats from other attendees throughout keynotes and other sessions, creating a lack of community engagement as a whole.

IPG Special Focus

RainFocus & IPG State of Events 2021: A Survey Analysis



IPG SPECIAL FOCUS

RainFocus & IPG State of Events 2021: A Survey Analysis

The State of Events 2021 Study was a survey analysis in partnership with RainFocus to uncover how enterprise organizations are approaching their event strategies for 2021. Respondents were asked about their experiences with virtual events, event plans and budgets for 2021, as well as other defining elements of their programs.



RainFocus is an end-to-end event marketing and management platform built from the ground up to capture, analyze, and harness an unprecedented amount of insights that significantly improve event performance for enterprises.

Demographics

Experience Type: 56% of the respondents manage business-to-business (B2B) events and experiences, 16% manage business-to-consumer (B2C) events and experiences, while the remainder manage a combination of B2B and B2C.

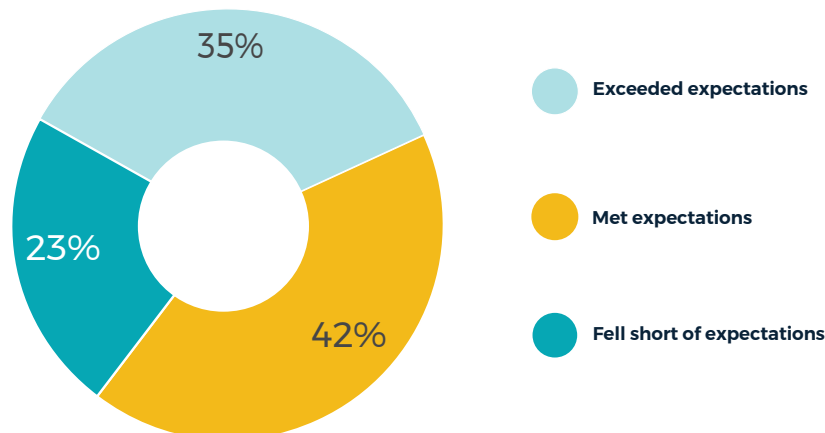
Vertical Representation: 51% of respondents are from Technology, 17% from Healthcare, 6% from Financial Services, while remaining respondents span Multi-Level Marketing firms, Media, Automotive, and others.

Employee Size: 34% of respondents are employed at firms with 10,001+ employees, 19% of respondents are employed at firms 5,000-10,000, and 28% are from organizations with 1,000-5000 employees.

Findings from the Study

Organizations made the pivot to virtual with mixed results. In 2020, many organizations made the switch to virtual events, while the results varied in terms of meeting individual expectations, most respondents said they were satisfied.

- 35% reported that their virtual events exceeded expectations
- 42% indicated that they met expectations
- 23% indicated that they had fallen short of expectations



Expanded reach with virtual. Virtual exceeded expectations for many organizations due to the expanded reach they had achieved. According to a separate RainFocus' 2020/2019 Global Event Management Survey and Benchmark, *most free virtual events saw an uptick of 4-6x the number of registered attendees* and the ability to reach audiences that were previously unknown, which was great for awareness. In fact, many indicated that they broke company records — raising their thought leadership, boosting brand awareness, gaining more leads and adding more contacts to accounts by lowering or eliminating event fees than they could have gained with a more expensive in-person conference. While many saw similar trends, others struggled with higher than expected attrition, inability to keep attendees' attention and difficulties with tracking.

Lower engagement remains a top concern with virtual. According to respondents, the biggest risk factor for virtual events is *lower engagement (39%)*, followed by *technology failure (28%)*. Other perceived risks include the inability to provide sponsorship value, lower ROI and loss of revenue. Many teams have seen a gap emerge in their end of funnel lead generation activities with tradeshow and industry or third party events failing to deliver the traffic in-person events once did.

Primary goals vary by delivery format. When considering goals for digital as compared to in-person events, interesting trends developed. In-person events weighted more heavily towards client engagement and retention goals where digital weighted more heavily towards brand awareness goals, which makes sense given the broadened reach.

Through the data and customer conversations, physical events will re-emerge with a virtual dimension. While many are still viewing future events as a binary decision of virtual or physical experiences, leading marketing teams are realizing it as the optimal combination of the two that will attract and engage their target audiences. Events now offer engaging personalized experiences with delivery environments that suit the preferences of every participant—which offers teams incredible potential to attract, engage, and convert on these audiences.

Brian Gates
SVP, Marketing & Strategy
RainFocus

Primary Goals by Format



Events budgets are expected to remain flat or decrease. 45% of teams are expecting event budgets to remain flat, while 34% expect a decrease headed into 2021. These near-term impacts may be the result of the struggle for event teams to measure and illustrate ROI for digital events. While many organizations have seen a savings this year with the shift to virtual events, most realize the lack of in-person events have left gaps in their event portfolios when it comes to generating new leads, accelerating sales and training their customers, partners and sales teams. So while most are planning for short-term reduced expenses, many expect their costs to increase, and budgets to recover, as in-person events resume.

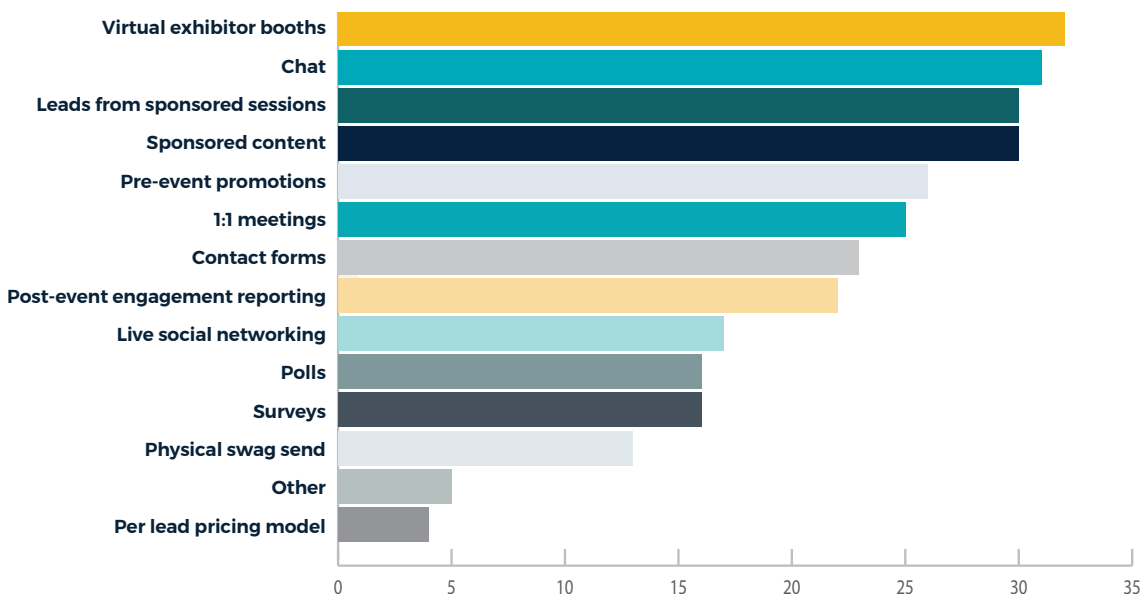
Tips and Tricks to Fight Virtual Fatigue

While organizations look to up the ante — balancing new experiments of engagement and production with the risks inherent in those experiments — organizations offered their own tips for combatting virtual fatigue. With any activity or experience, it is important to execute it thoughtfully and ensure it aligns with the overall event strategy.

Program/Agenda	Attendee Engagement
Live content	Swag kits shipped to homes
Offer a variety of content formats	Polling
Shorter program and sessions	Live Q&A
More “how-to” content	Chat between end-users
Small group calls	Gamification and giveaways
Big name talent or celebrities	Micro-segmentation
Additional breaks between content	More social interactions
Unexpected experiences (e.g. virtual yoga, cooking classes, wine tasting)	

Shared Tips to Maximize Exhibitor Value

Throughout the year, organizations have sought to enhance the value for exhibitors while creating meaningful experiences for attendees. According to respondents, virtual exhibitor booths, chat and sponsored sessions create the most value.



[Discover more about RainFocus >>](#)

Forecast & Recommendations



RECOMMENDATIONS & FORECAST

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.



Keep Your Strategy Agile



Incorporate New Engagement Techniques



Use Celebrities to Attract & Entertain



Invest in Platform & Technology



Develop Highly Curated, Personalized Journeys



Monetize Strategically



Create FOMO



Focus Measurement Strategy on Digital Data



Maximize Sponsor Engagements



Keep Your Strategy Agile

We're at a difficult-to-navigate point in event strategy. The return of in-person events is approaching, but we know those events will operate much differently than they did before the pandemic. The success of digital events has staying power, giving event professionals multiple avenues to create a successful, engaging experience.

✔ **Balance Short- and Long-Term Vision** — In an industry as meticulous as ours, it's easy to hyperfocus all of our attention on current projects without considering what's next. However, event planners must navigate the upcoming months confidently, knowing anything you build now from a digital perspective will be relevant in the future. Now is the time to accelerate your digital event roadmap and reinforce your event technology stack so it's able to accommodate both in-person and digital events. **Integrated events** will combine the best of digital and in-person, and it's crucial to build that into your short- and long-term strategies to ensure you are able to translate present success into future growth.

✔ **The Shift to Continuous Delivery** — One of the biggest transformations for many teams in 2020 was the pace of innovation and delivery. Event teams had to both reimagine existing in-person events and invent original digital events on the fly. This constant pressure led to a great deal of creative digital experiences. Many teams reorganized to reinforce and build depth in content, technology and marketing. Event teams will continue to experience shorter lead times and compressed planning cycles as we head into the first half of 2021. Event professionals will need to think about how to accomplish both digital and in-person simultaneously, likely with reduced budget and headcount.



Incorporate New Engagement Techniques

The success of corporate events hinges on engagement. With participants confined to a digital environment, though, finding ways to encourage engagement and ensure satisfaction is becoming more and more difficult. We've watched event leaders flex their creativity to combat digital fatigue and improve audience engagement through various activities and industry-related sessions.

- ✔ **Encourage Physical and Mental Breaks** — People need to do things in order to keep their minds fresh, active and engaged throughout an event. Interesting, useful masterclasses — like those hosted by C2 Online — provide thought-leadership level information that attendees seek. For more light-hearted, fun experiences, mixology, yoga and workout classes have all succeeded in engaging various audiences.
- ✔ **Prioritize Mutual Activities** — Collaborative activities allow attendees to feel part of something larger. Adobe Max accomplished this thoughtfully by incorporating a virtual mural that all audience members could contribute to throughout the event.
- ✔ **Rethink Chat and Q&A** — Chats and Q&As are a useful alternative to an in-person conversation, but how they are deployed impacts how much attendees engage. The addition of a moderator to monitor posts and spark conversation is key to keeping engagement strong. Audiences that have an established relationship with the host, such as user group members or returning alumni, will utilize chat more than the broad, public attendees.
- ✔ **1-on-1 Engagements** — Supplement your offering of group activities with personal, 1-on-1 engagements. Though networking is still difficult to accomplish in the digital realm, the incorporation of breakout sessions with like-minded people in the same industry is the next-best alternative. We expect this to be a bigger focus in digital event experiences going forward.



Use Celebrities to Attract & Entertain

Celebrities create excitement, it's that simple. Digital event professionals recognized this and used it to their advantage early, but we've seen some events take the next step in terms of engagement. Yes, hosting a celebrity as a keynote is a great way to build excitement and registration; now it's time to think about using those keynotes to engage with your audience.

- ✔ **Create Dynamic Engagement Opportunities** — Salesforce did this incredibly well by hosting a virtual cookie baking class with Martha Stewart and Snoop Dogg that encouraged participation. C2 Online and Collision offered exclusive chat opportunities with Malcolm Gladwell and Justin Theroux. These techniques can also translate to less well known (and less costly) speakers as subject matter experts in your industry. The trick is to find unique ways to let your audience engage in exclusive interactions with celebrities, speakers and experts during your event.
- ✔ **Take Advantage of Unparalleled Access** — Celebrities and musicians have never been more accessible than they are right now. With the majority of in-person tours, shows and other events canceled or postponed, celebrities are able and more amenable to participate in digital events. Take advantage of this access to offer and create intimate, interactive experiences beyond the concert and/or speaking engagement.



Invest in Platform & Technology

The need for a robust event technology strategy has never been more apparent than it is right now. Though inferior technologies may have sufficed during the mad rush to digital-only events, we are well beyond that stage. Events that utilize technology to its full potential are seeing greater success when it comes to attendee engagement and satisfaction.

- ✔ **Combine Technologies to Create the Best Experience** — Many organizations are utilizing different event technology platforms or solutions to suit individual event needs. Turn-key solutions are utilized for frequent, repeated and field-driven events or webinars and robust, customized solutions are implemented for large-scale events such as annual conferences, product launches and other high visibility, broad-reaching engagements. Events that are creating their own platform for their annual marquee conference brands or experiences are curating better experiences, both in terms of internal execution and attendee engagement. Not only does this allow strategists to incorporate everything they envision from a digital standpoint, it also improves customer satisfaction and ease-of-use.
- ✔ **Be Prepared for Technological Glitches** — Have multiple contingency plans in place so you can respond to technological glitches when they happen. We've seen event professionals save their event by having pre-recorded broadcasts ready to air when their initial plan failed. Make sure to test technologies with internal team members and scheduled speakers before going live.
- ✔ **Only Use Mobile Apps to Add Value** — Though it might seem like another way to engage your audience, mobile apps have yet to prove their value as they pull your audience away from the core experience. Unless a mobile app provides incredible value beyond the desktop and/or laptop experience, it may be an opportunity to reduce spend and complexity.



Develop Highly Curated, Personalized Journeys

In an environment that is becoming increasingly difficult to do so, one of the best ways to foster intentional engagement is by personalizing your audience's journey. When you give them the opportunity to participate in the activities and training that they're most passionate about, you can expect a more engaged audience and a successful event overall.

- ✔ **Offer Customizable, Easy-to-Navigate Agendas** — Successful digital events have found a great harmony between content that should be consumed as a shared experience and content that should be enjoyed on-demand. We recommend a combination of live stream or simulive experiences that encourage mass participation and personalized on-demand content journeys that allow participants to dive deeper into specific topics.
- ✔ **Host Thought-Leadership Breakout Sessions** — Giving participants the opportunity to sign up for thought-leadership breakout sessions with like-minded peers offers a layer of customization that they might not be used to during a digital event. Because these sessions are filled with people who actively choose to attend, they are likely to be much more beneficial. This is also a way to differentiate your event and stand out by offering something different than the audience may typically expect.
- ✔ **Enable Personalized Bios** — One effective way to encourage more successful networking is allowing users the ability to create personalized bios on chat that are accessible through a participant directory. This can create easy conversation starters and allow participants to engage with other professionals in their industry.



Monetize Strategically

Throughout previous publications of our Digital Event Forecast, the increasing trend of monetization has been impossible to ignore. Our opinion is that each event must decide whether to monetize based on their specific strategy and goals. Nearly half of the events we analyzed in this iteration successfully monetized their content in one way or another, showing just how valuable this decision can be.

✔ **Decide What Works for You** — For some companies, events are a massive aspect of their revenue-generating efforts throughout the year. Others use events primarily as an avenue to garner more brand awareness and create future customers. Decide what the purpose of your event is and organize your monetization efforts around that.

✔ **Gate VIP Experiences** — Monetizing VIP content continues to become more and more prevalent, and deservedly so. People are willing to pay for highly useful content, including limited on-demand offerings, specialized industry training, hands-on labs, 1-on-1 consultations and more. Continuing education credits are also starting to become a part of digital experiences. Use this to your advantage to offer exclusive VIP experiences at a cost.



Create FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)

The importance of promotion on the overall success of an event is becoming more and more evident. It's no surprise that the better an event is promoted, the higher the registration rate. We've been thoroughly impressed by some of the promotion tactics our colleagues have used to create FOMO and encourage registration recently.

✔ **Utilize Sponsored Promotion** — As event professionals become savvier with digital sponsorships, we're also noticing those sponsors playing a large role in promotion. Whether it be teasing content from the event on the sponsor's social channels or offering additional experiences hosted by the sponsor, this is an effective way to build excitement around your event.

✔ **Strategically Promote Live-Only Events** — A new strategy we were impressed by is the strategic promotion of live-only experiences in relation to audience members' fear of missing out. C2 Online did a great job of promoting some live experiences of their event as one-time-only, encouraging their audience to sign up for these live and simulive experiences that they would otherwise miss out on.



Focus Measurement Strategy on Digital Data

Digital events have given event leaders more access to data than ever before. Leverage this to your advantage by using data to compile comprehensive reports on your audience's engagement. This also allows you to craft your post-event survey in a way that provides the most useful insight for your specific needs.

✔ **Identify Relevant Metrics** — Different organizations, with different objectives, will need to identify unique metrics that matter most to them. Total registration and total session viewership are two key metrics. However, it's even more meaningful to gauge total time per session and to integrate "hand-raiser" opportunities to generate qualified leads. As digital events continue, event professionals are getting savvier about triangulating data sources so they can see what a participant watched, then compare it back with their interests and other demographics to identify patterns of engagement. Many are also creating their own digital engagement indexes, ranking various digital behaviors with a

point system before using predictive analytics to determine what to recommend for the next step in their journey, whether that's follow up from a salesperson or offering a piece of downloadable content.

- ✔ **Incentivize Involvement in Post-Event Surveys** — Give people a reason to spend additional time interacting with you after the conclusion of an event. You provided something of value that encouraged them to attend the event, but that doesn't mean they will stick around. Sponsors can help encourage participation in surveys through small giveaways or larger raffles. Typically it's your most loyal audiences and customers who will be inclined to take your survey, so focus efforts there. Another option is to offer varying levels of incentives based on their level of engagement throughout. For example, increase prizes for attending, staying the entire time, and completing a survey. The more they accomplish, the bigger the prize.
- ✔ **Prioritize Time and Ease-of-Use for Surveys** — Surveys must be easy to find and quick to complete if you expect full participation. Balance one-click questions with open-ended questions to respect the participant's time while still learning about their personal experience.



Maximize Sponsor Engagements

We advise event professionals to use fewer sponsors, thus fully maximizing the sponsorships in use. Nobody has yet solved the sponsorship conundrum brought upon by the pivot to digital, and we think this will allow savvy event leaders to optimize their promotional efforts.

- ✔ **Less Is More** — Rather than spend time and money trying to attract a large number of sponsors, partner with fewer sponsors and collaborate to customize new ways to highlight content and engagement more through the event. This will create more engagement opportunities and value for your audience members and improve lead-generation possibilities for your sponsors.



WHAT'S NEXT: OUR FORECAST FOR DIGITAL EVENTS

Identifying the Intersection of Digital and In-Person

Q We've discussed at length the fact that digital is here to stay, but understanding exactly how it will stay is still an unanswered question. Digital events have expanded event participation to multiple new audiences, including younger participants who are digital natives, those with mental or physical disabilities who otherwise would be unable to travel across the country, and those who are financially constrained by travel expenses and time out of office. At the same time, we also know that many event leaders are eagerly awaiting the return of in-person events; per RainFocus, only **15%** of surveyed event professionals are not planning in-person events for 2021. Those who find the best way to combine their digital and in-person efforts early will reap a number of benefits, including expanded audience participation, greater access to digital data, and the ability to integrate events into additional marketing campaigns. And while some are exploring the true hybrid experience — where one event serves both an in-person and remote audience — most are starting to shift more toward considering how digital and in-person events will coexist in their event portfolios going forward. They see the opportunity to continue using digital to acquire new audiences, and perhaps engage some of their loyal audiences in new ways, while understanding that digital events have left some real gaps.

Solving the Networking Conundrum

Q One of the benefits of pre-COVID events for many attendees was the ability to network with associates and thought leaders. In-person events allow people to surround themselves with brilliant, passionate and connected peers. While this has been missing to date in digital experiences, it's a huge opportunity for event professionals to differentiate their experience. From breakout sessions to facilitated networking, in-person settings make it seamless to start a conversation with thought leaders in your industry. Event professionals everywhere are attempting to recreate those experiences virtually, a task which has proved to be much easier said than done. We're starting to see planners and technology providers solve this with curated breakout sessions and VIP experiences to facilitate more conversations and experiences among loyal customers and allow for account-based marketing to drive increased sales, and we expect to see more of it during digital events.

High-Caliber Production Becomes Universal

Q Our world is so immersed in technology that it becomes abundantly clear when production standards are neglected. To combat this, some digital events have begun to adopt production techniques we are accustomed to seeing from talk shows and other live productions — outstanding technology, unique camera angles, engaging commentary, superb lighting and more. Viewers are so used to this type of production that they will not settle for less, and we predict the same to be true of digital events in the near future. This demand will force all



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

digital events to adopt high-caliber production in order to avoid falling behind the standards their audience expects.

Innovative On-Demand Content Offerings

- Q Event attendees prefer and expect the ability to view content on their own time and at their own pace. Because of this, event leaders must continue innovating their on-demand content offerings. Since the pivot to digital events, professionals have been forced to flex their creative muscles in terms of audience engagement and balancing live vs. on-demand content. We expect this to continue in the near future as the intersection of digital and in-person is cemented. These will include podcast-like audio sessions, content journeys curated by digital data and more how-to content to increase engagement.

Immersive Techniques Expand

- Q Combating digital fatigue will continue to be an ongoing battle for event professionals, and we expect immersive experiences to play a large role in that. Technology platforms are starting to catch up to the business requirements of digital events and are looking to solve the problems of how to engage attendees, capture their attention, and differentiate the experience. We expect to see more techniques being borrowed from TV and movie production, like the use of multiple cameras, creative editing of pre-recorded content to incorporate seemingly live elements and filming on location with limited studio audiences. During in-person events, it was easier for audience members to participate through conversation and reaction to what was happening live. To recreate that experience, we envision live simulation of audience members — similar to what the NBA implemented during the 2020 playoffs. These live LED walls will allow keynote speakers and/or entertainers to actively engage with attendees. We expect these types of enhanced “fan” or audience experiences to increase in creativity in the coming months.



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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](https://www.impactpointgroup.com/digital-event-strategy).

APPENDIX

72 events, tracked March 4 - December 15, 2020

Adobe

[Adobe Summit](#)
[Adobe Max - The Creativity Conference](#)

Apple

[Apple WorldWide Developer Conference](#)

Atlassian

[Atlassian Summit](#)

Atmosphere

[Atmosphere20](#)

AWS

[AWS Summit Online](#)
[AWS Re:Invent](#)

Comcast

[Comcast Business Conference](#)

C2 Online

[C2 Online](#)

Cisco

[Cisco Americas Marketing Velocity Live](#)
[Cisco APJC](#)
[Cisco Live](#)
[Cisco Live Melbourne](#)

Cloud Software Association

[SaaS Connect](#)

Collision

[Collision](#)

Cvent

[Cvent CONNECT Virtual 2020](#)

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](#)

HubSpot

[HubSpot Inbound](#)

IBM

[IBM Think](#)

ICMI

[ICMI Contact Center Expo](#)

IIOT

[IIOT World Days](#)
[IIOT World Developer Conference](#)

Microsoft

[Microsoft Build](#)
[Microsoft Ignite](#)
[Microsoft Inspire](#)
[Microsoft MVP Global Summit](#)
[WSL Conference](#)

Miro

[Distributed 2020](#)

Mobile World Congress

[Mobile World Congress MWC Barcelona](#)
[Mobile World Congress MWC Americas](#)

Meeting Professionals International (MPI)

[WEC Grapevine](#)

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 to You 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](#)

Slack

[Slack Frontiers](#)

South by Southwest (SXSW)

[SXSW](#)

Splunk

[.conf20](#)

VMware

[VMworld](#)