Producing Virtual & Hybrid Events:
A Guide

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grabyo AsiaWorks never.no OpenExchange

Contents

Introduction

Producing a live event, from a corporate conference, to an awards evening, or international exhibition, requires lots of resources, has many moving parts, and usually takes a small army of people to achieve.

From choosing the right location, organising a venue space, and securing speakers, to procuring equipment and attracting guests, the list goes on.

However, incorporating a fully virtual or hybrid production model to live events can streamline this process and remove many of the barriers to entry for organizers, talent, speakers and guests.

This report will explore how to deliver virtual and hybrid events using a combination of cloud technologies and remote production teams.

The report will cover the benefits and challenges of delivering virtual events, including:

- Increasing your audience
- Recruiting speakers, production crews and talent from across the world
- Working with remote production teams
- Creating an immersive experience
- Scaling your events

This report has been prepared using insights from across all areas of live event production.

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Grabyo is a cloud video platform that enables event teams to produce live broadcasts in a browser, integrate third party social and graphics tools and publish clips and highlights in real time for social and digital platforms.

AsiaWorks is a leading creative video agency, producing virtual events, campaigns, documentaries, TV series, and other content for brands, broadcasters, agencies and international organisations around the world.

Never.no's audience engagement platform, Bee-On, powers the curation of real time data and socially generated content – including polls, images and videos - for display alongside dynamic graphics onto live content.
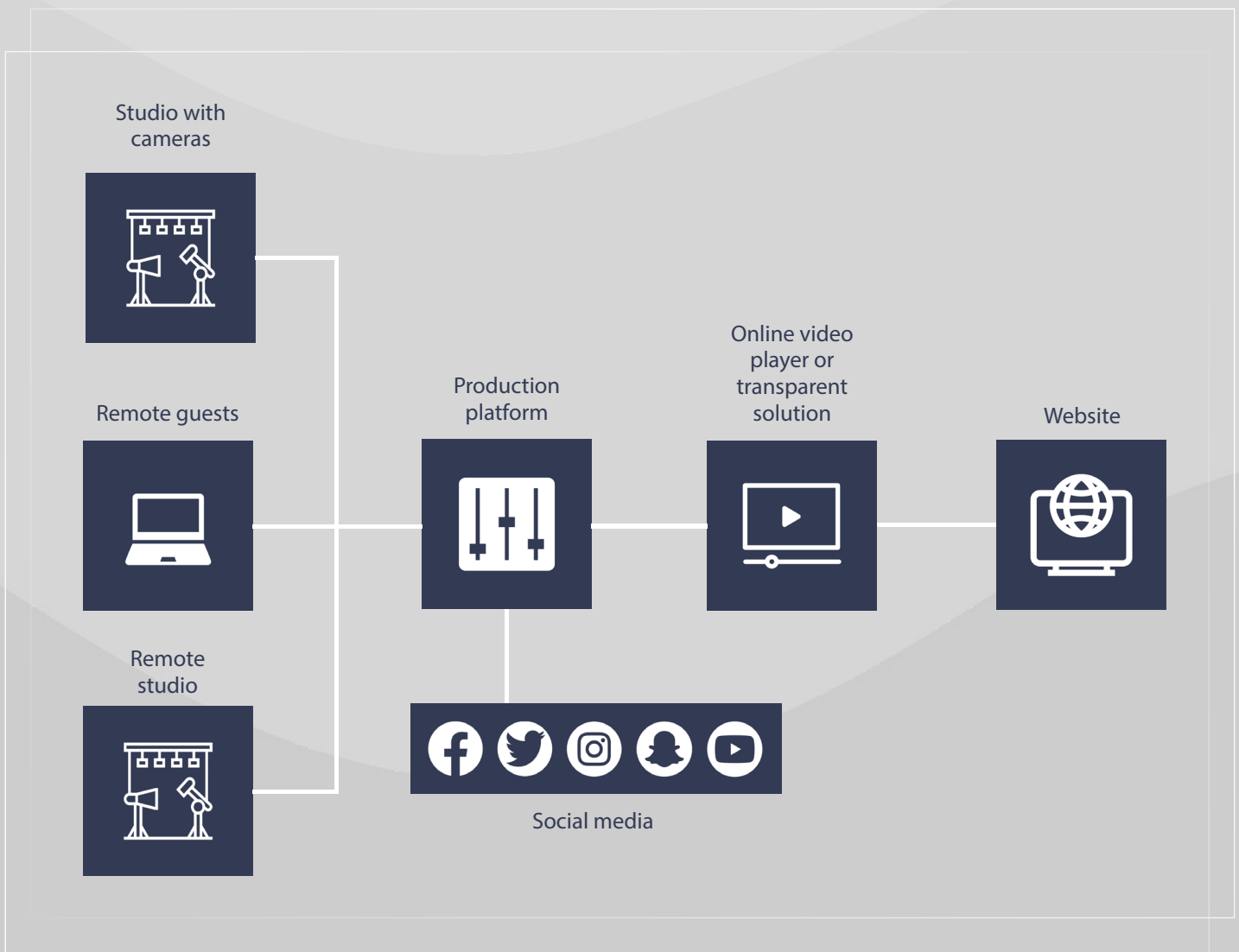
OpenExchange is the global leader in virtual investor event hosting and production, serving the largest financial services firms and public companies with its OE VIZION virtual and hybrid event platform and a worldwide team of video specialists.

The virtual venue

PART 1

Hosting a virtual or hybrid event space can be managed effectively even with teams dispersed across the globe. The first step is setting up the infrastructure for the virtual space of your event. Using cloud tools that are delivered as a software-as-a-service (SaaS) solution makes this easy: Many are plug-and-play, with the necessary frameworks in place to get events up and running quickly. Other services offer more configuration options and are optimized for more complex events involving hundreds or even thousands of pre-scheduled one-on-one meetings.

Studio with cameras

Remote guests

Remote studio

Production platform

Online video player or transparent solution

Website

Social media

The virtual venue

The benefit of using cloud-based platforms enables your production team to manage the event from anywhere. There is no need to have your entire production crew on-site. Cloud solutions support events with multiple production teams, engaging technical and creative talent across different regions who can design and localize the content for specific audiences in different parts of the world.

Virtual spaces allow you to customise and scale the event production to suit your audience. For larger events, audiences will expect multiple 'stages' or tracks for different types of content. You can create new virtual venues and manage the distribution of multiple live event broadcasts in the cloud simultaneously.

TAKEAWAY

Virtual event spaces are highly flexible and allow you to do more with less investment. You can create a fully branded or custom experience and scale it to the size you need. Using cloud-based tools, you can work remotely and collaboratively, removing the restrictions of travelling and the need for lots of staff on-site at the venue.

Building your agenda

Removing the need to be on-site for an event removes many of the limitations of traditional in-person events. Securing speakers to appear remotely, without the need to manage travel schedules or accommodation, opens up new possibilities to build your agenda and attract talent.

The equipment required to ensure high-quality audio and video contribution for remote speakers is minimal. Guests are able to join using their own laptop or PC, but this experience can be improved with event organisers providing microphones, lighting, and even higher-quality cameras to enhance their appearance.
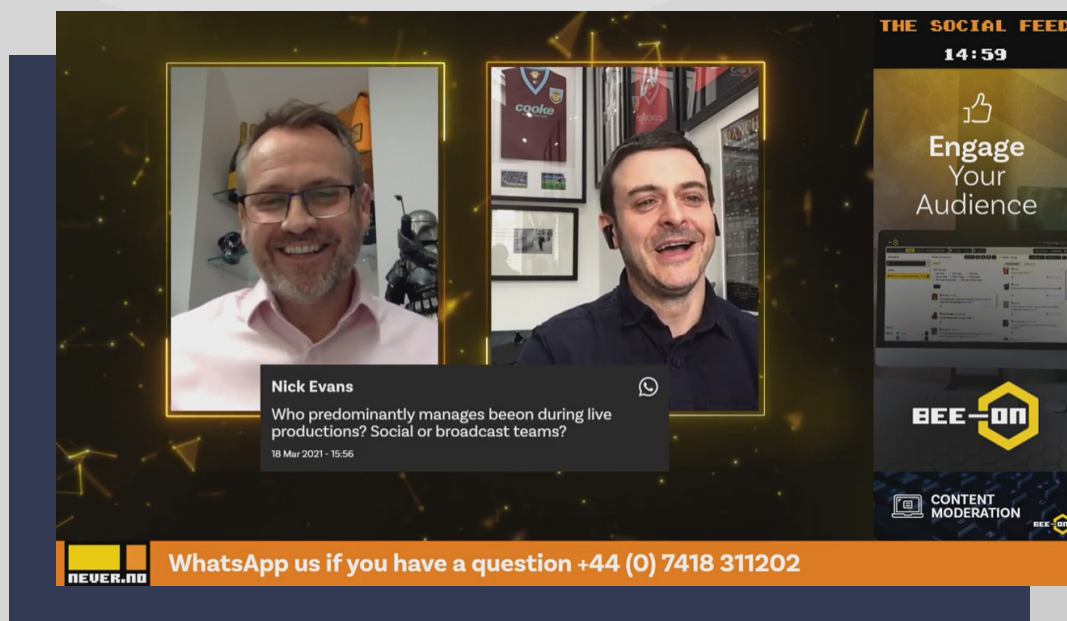
TAKEAWAY

During 2020 and beyond, the value of virtual events and the reception to them from participants and the viewing audience has transformed the events industry. Virtual events and live streaming, which were seen as add-ons to the main event, are now a key pillar of the event experience and expected.

Hosting your audience

Virtual events can be viewed from anywhere, on any connected device. As the audience no longer needs to travel to a physical location to attend an event, the scale and potential reach of the event increases significantly. This audience growth allows you to redistribute the budget for venue space, food, beverage and services into creating a high-quality, immersive and entertaining virtual experience.

You are able to reach international audiences from a single location, removing many of the barriers to entry for your event. Many organizers are reporting an increase in audience size of as much as 50 percent or more for online events, due to the greater convenience and geographical reach gained by offering virtual attendance options.

TAKEAWAY

As virtual events become more commonplace, it becomes harder to stand out. Ensure you invest in creating a memorable experience for your virtual attendees. Don't view your virtual space any differently than you would a physical space - the added extras go a long way.

Production value matters

When organising virtual events, it is easy to get lost in the technology. Event organisers, lost in a sea of software, hardware, and different cloud options, can overlook perhaps the most important component of all: production value.

Audience engagement hinges on good production values, and a good production strategy and the right team behind it can make all the difference to audience retention throughout your event.

The key components to good virtual event production

AUDIENCE

Don't assume your audience will be actively watching everything. Create an event with content delivered in a way that matches viewing habits, consider drop-off rates, and promote your most valuable content.

TALENT

Engaging audiences through a screen is a specialist skill. For your big events, invest in specialists who have effective remote presentation skills, or engage actual "on-air talent" from the world of live TV.

STORY

An experienced event producer is crucial. They should be supported by a team of directors, writers, cameramen, editors and creatives who understand how to deliver compelling stories to captivate the viewer. This will elevate audience engagement and increase watch-times and word of mouth promotion for key events.

INTERACTIVITY

Polls and Q&A are an essential element to any virtual event, building interactivity and feedback into the production helps to keep remote audiences engaged. You must also consider how live data visualisations and other content sources such as viewer metrics, hashtags, social posts, quizzes, chat group comments and news headlines can be used to inspire conversation.

Working with a remote production team

The rapid evolution of cloud production services means that event teams can work together remotely, in real time, from anywhere in the world. For creative video agencies such as AsiaWorks, this makes the job of assembling production teams slightly easier, as everyone doesn't need to be in the same place at the same time.

The improvements in internet connectivity and the increase in the video capabilities of smartphones, laptops and video cameras means HD video can now be streamed at low cost, with very low latency across public internet. Home webcams, multi-camera studios and single-camera live locations can link seamlessly with each other during an event. This presents huge creative opportunities for production teams to engage the audience through live storytelling in multiple locations around the world. By removing the limitations of a single-location event, the options for content formats and structure can be more flexible than in the past.

One issue that may pose problems for remote teams is real-time communication. This can be solved using cloud-based "backstage" communication systems and apps, which are comparable to comms systems for in-person events or in live TV production.
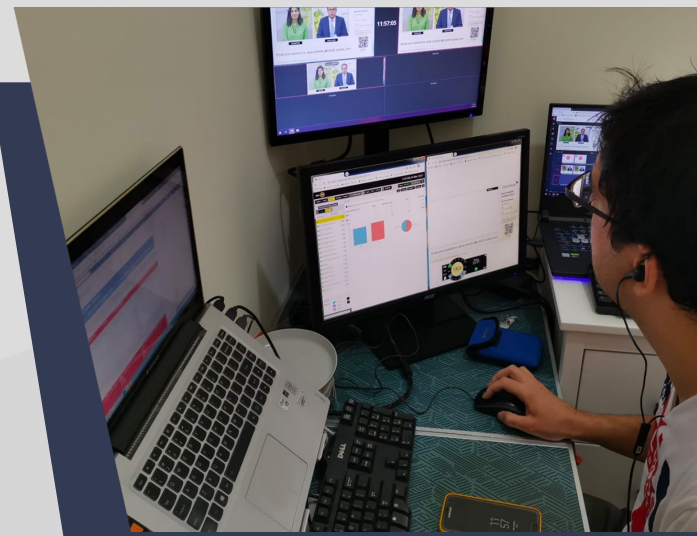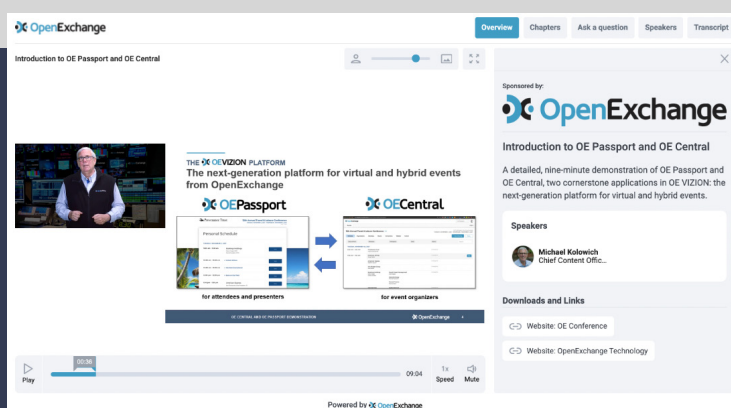
TAKEAWAY

Getting the technology right for virtual events is important, but a professional and creative production team will make your event look less like a Zoom call and more like a polished televised event. You'll keep your audience engaged and reduce drop-off dramatically. Leveraging the expertise of a team with live TV experience will bring effective and valuable strategies of audience engagement, content production, and promotion to your virtual event.

Choosing a streaming platform

The video experience for virtual events starts with the production set-up, but the choice of streaming platform is just as important for the quality of the overall experience. Choosing a generic streaming option may get your video from source to destination, but there are many new features available in advanced streaming platforms that significantly enhance the experience for viewers.

Here are some of the features to consider when evaluating video streaming solutions:

- Make the event accessible using only a web browser
- Instant availability of the event on-demand
- Presentation slides synchronized to the video stream
- The ability to join a session and watch from any point
- Options to collect and manage questions from the audience
- Speaker profiles and handouts
- An easily searchable content library
- Access controls to restrict attendance as required
- Deep, detailed analytics available on-demand

TAKEAWAY

As video streaming matures, the best streaming platforms have added features that augment the virtual event experience. As a conference organizer, it's important you choose a streaming solution that maximises the options for your event and the value for the audience.

Keeping eyes on the screen

Engaging a remote audience is one of the biggest challenges when hosting virtual events. Keeping the attention of your audience requires highly dynamic content. This can be in the form of visual displays using high-quality graphics and layouts, varied content formats and targeted subjects, and supplementing live sessions with 'B-roll' VOD and highlight clips from across the event. A production strategy that focuses on storytelling, utilising techniques from the world of live TV also helps to build a narrative that keeps viewers engaged.

Centralizing the production into a single workspace ensures you can maximize all of your content and assets to bring an extra dimension to the broadcast.

The key is to utilize multiple sets of graphics, video and layouts. You cannot afford to let the event broadcast feel stagnant or fixed for too long. Visualize event topics using video and imagery, and offer additional value with supplementary data and insights. Develop custom imagery and graphics to keep your brand at the forefront of your audience's attention and create a space for promoting event-sponsors and other partners.

TAKEAWAY

Virtual event audiences expect the same production values they would see at an in-person event. Hosting a large Zoom call or basic webinar will not keep audiences engaged for long and reduces the brand impact and positioning for your event.

Sparking audience interaction

Whether it's in-person, fully virtual or a hybrid event, it's important to engage and activate your attendees and delegates wherever they are. Audience participation tools are a useful mechanism to bring viewers closer to the event and make them feel part of the experience.

Use your social channels for a call to action and share responses in real time, or promote speakers, topics and questions during the event to build engagement. Polls are a fantastic way to gauge opinion. People love influencing live votes and contributing to the final result, offering opinions on hot topics, or impacting the direction of the narrative. Using a social engagement tool, you can run multiple polls across social media channels and aggregate the data into a consolidated live result.
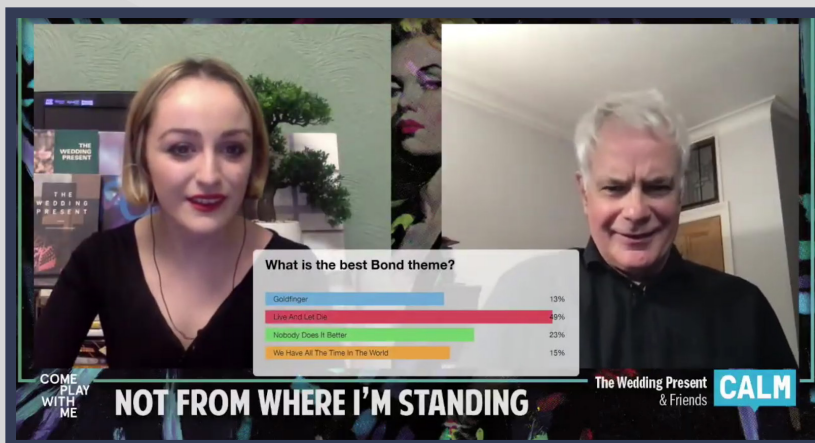
Twitter, YouTube, Whatsapp, Facebook, Telegram, or similar, are excellent platforms to create a two-way conversation. Invite attendees to share opinions across multiple platforms. You can then include images, videos and reactions from your audience, and drive questions and topical points for your host.

TAKEAWAY

Use cloud-based production and engagement tools to extend the reach of your content and create an active community that will organically enhance the overall experience for those involved. Feature your audience's interaction live during the broadcast and let them influence the narrative to make them feel part of your event.

Networking, one-on-one and small group meetings

Supporting smaller-scale, more intimate communication and networking for attendees is an essential part of many virtual events. These valuable meetings are an important source of revenue and value to the event.

As the complexity of the event format increases, with multiple breakout tracks, networking opportunities, and one-on-one or small group meetings, the more advanced the platform must be to support it. Each attendee's path through the conference is unique, which means that a personalized schedule is hugely valuable.

OpenExchange's OE Passport application provides each event attendee with an individualized agenda, visible on their smartphone or desktop. It shows both pre-scheduled meetings and general and breakout sessions options that an attendee can pick and choose from. Virtual attendees can move from session to session at the click of a button, and change their schedule on the fly.
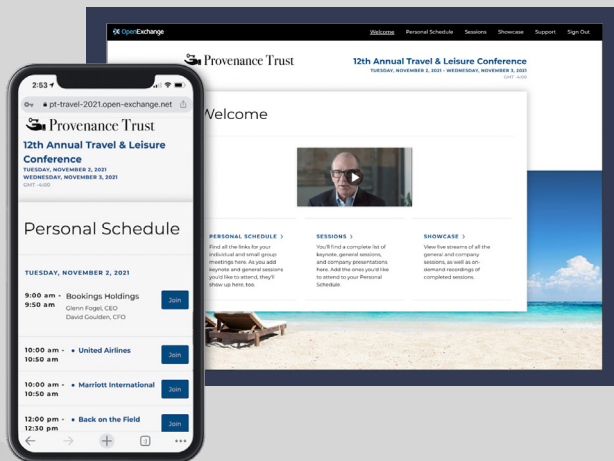
An important part of any event is meeting new people, trying new technologies, and finding new interests and products.

Many options are available for this in a virtual event: special interest open sessions, virtual cocktail hours, professional speed-dating, AI-based matchmaking and more.

TAKEAWAY

At the heart of a successful event is an individualized experience for each person who attends it. Virtual and hybrid events should consider how to support both pre-scheduled and free-form meetings among attendees, speakers, and sponsors, and should use platforms that reflect the fact that every attendee will have a different schedule that suits their interests and needs. Networking requires more support in a virtual environment and technology can help to break down barriers and bring participants together.

Maximizing content distribution

Making your event more accessible to remote attendees helps to grow your audience. However, whether you're running a closed or open event, you need to ensure you are activating the right channels.

For open events, distributing across your website, event microsite and social media accounts is vital. The challenge of multi-platform distribution is ensuring the experience on each platform aligns with audience expectations. For example , video formats are different on each social platform, so video clips and live streams should be published in horizontal, vertical or square aspect ratios simultaneously.
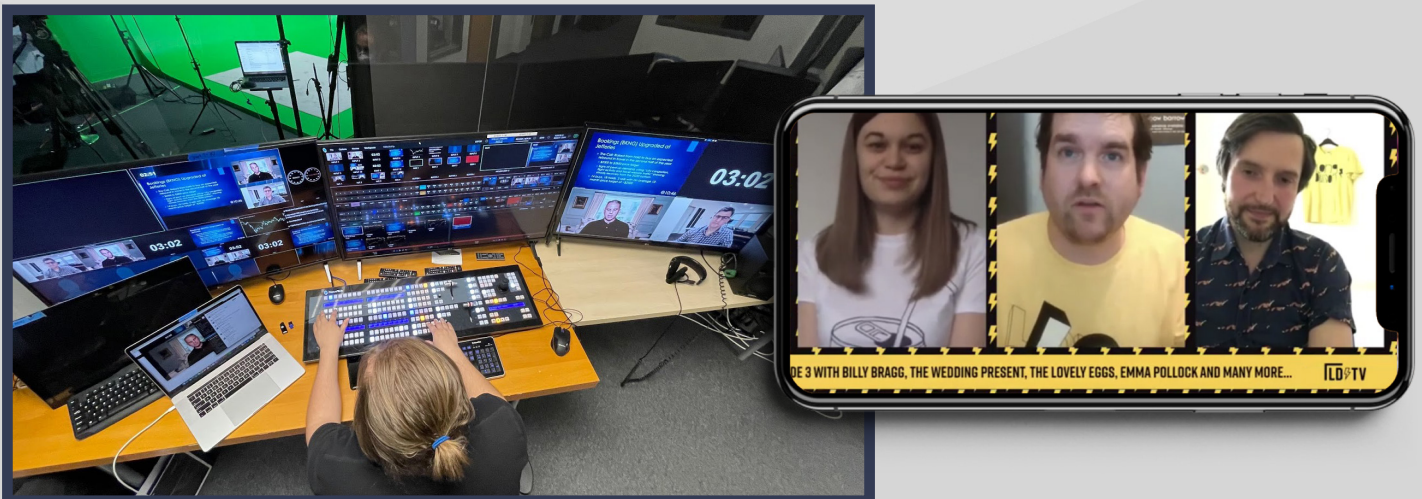
Content from the event is also valuable for event promotion and increasing registrations and attendance. Taking short highlight clips and publishing to social media platforms, live streaming segments of the event for free, or playing out key moments from sessions within an event, helps to build your content inventory and raise awareness.

TAKEAWAY

Maximize content distribution on your social and digital channels before, during and after your event. Use highlight clips and real-time distribution to promote your event, and deliver it live to the platforms your audiences use. Ensure videos are optimised for each platform, increasing viral distribution and earned media value for your brand.

Leveraging event analytics

A distinct advantage of virtual events is how individual components of the experience can be measured and improved over time. The best virtual event platforms provide data that answers the question: How is my audience engaging with the content?

Once an attendee signs into an event, each action or behaviour can give you a wealth of data that can provide valuable insights to employ during your next event.

Here are some best practices for data collection and analysis during an event:

BEFORE THE EVENT

Keep track of registration and collect attendee profile information

→

Evaluate the impact of pre-event promotion and measure effectiveness, reach and engagement.

→

Identify any special information for speakers that are needed to make connections on the day

DURING THE EVENT

Monitor the flow of the event, session timing, meeting status, and virtual traffic

→

Identify and fix trouble spots regarding either technology or attendee navigation

→

Evaluate the scope and cadence of networking and smaller-group sessions

AFTER THE EVENT

Diagnose what did and didn't work in the agenda

→

Evaluate drop-out rates from content sessions

→

Share "virtual badge scans" so speakers can follow up with attendees

TAKEAWAY

Event metrics and data insights from the most advanced virtual event platforms are incredibly valuable, both in executing a smooth-running show and in identifying ways to enhance the audience experience for your next event.

Producing a live event in the cloud

Grabyo and Never.no are fully integrated to give production teams an end-to-end solution for video production, live graphics and audience participation.

Using Grabyo Producer, an advanced cloud production platform, production teams are able to switch video sources, overlay graphics, invite remote guests and create scenes and layouts for events and live streams. Each member of the team is able to collaborate on the broadcast in real-time, from anywhere in the world.

Event producers can use the capabilities of Never.no's Bee-On platform combined with Grabyo to run live polls on multiple social channels and aggregate the answers into a single dashboard. Consolidated results can be displayed in real-time as an overlay in the live feed. You can also source, moderate, edit and display social assets - including images, videos, and comments from social channels that are created by your audience.
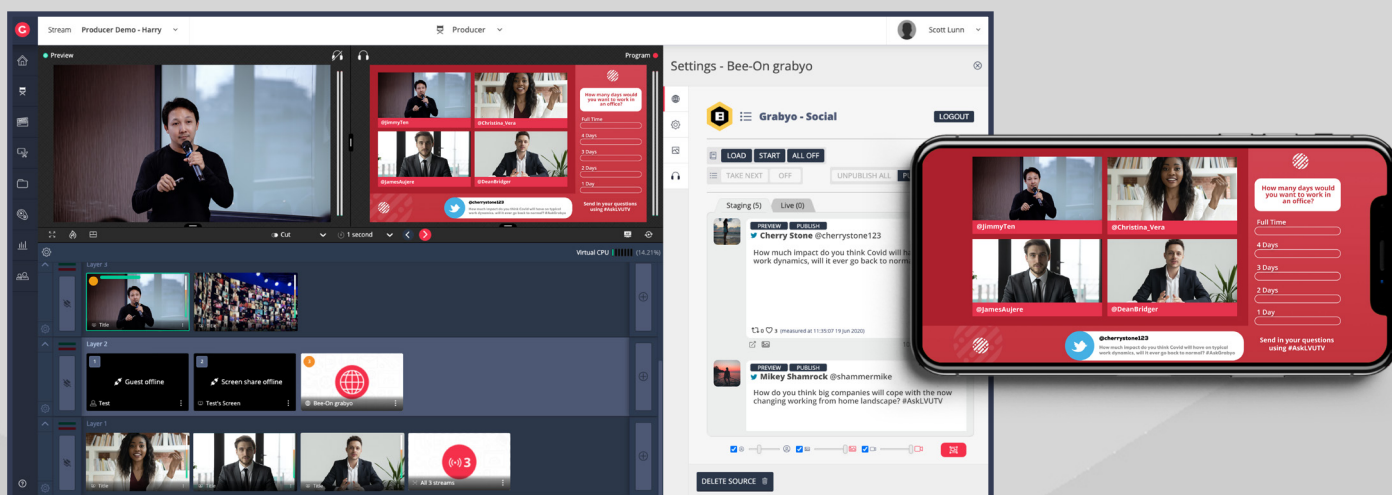

TAKEAWAY

Cloud-based platforms provide the flexibility and scalability required for event production teams to create engaging experiences without high upfront investment in equipment, studios or venues. The agility of the cloud enables you to set up and manage events in a short time frame, scaling services up or down depending on the size of your audience and your production needs.

Managing the virtual event

For in-person events, organizers have the option to walk the venue floor to gain a sense of how the event is going. It's vital to give organizers the same sense of visibility and control in a virtual event. Trouble spots with technology, or with content, need to be identified quickly and addressed.

Within OpenExchange's OE VIZION platform an application called OE Central gives real-time transparency to everyone who's working behind the scenes at a virtual event, ensuring that it proceeds smoothly.
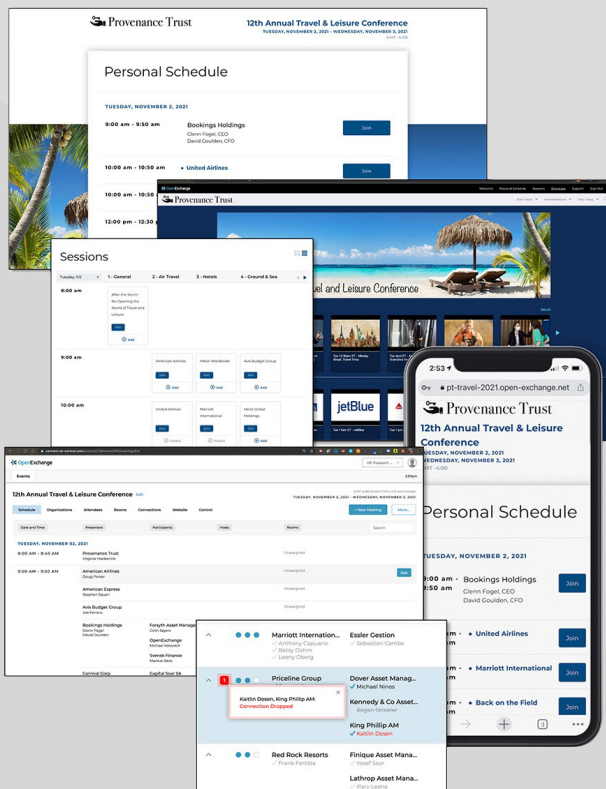
As a cloud-based platform, conference organizers can track where participants are in the virtual space and can make last-minute adjustments to schedules, which will be reflected instantly for attendees. A team of video specialists support organizers in pre-testing video conections, checking remote set-ups for speakers and making sure everyone's in the proper location in the virtual event space.

TAKEAWAY

In the effort to make an event look great for attendees, the need for real-time transparency and control for event organizers is often overlooked. It's important to give the event team up-to-the-minute information on the status of each virtual session and meeting space so they can keep the event running according to plan and deliver a world class experience for the audience.

Insights

"The events industry is going through a period of rapid transformation. We are becoming increasingly aware we do not need to travel all over the world to access the very best events and conferences. The tools are available for organizers to go above and beyond what is possible at physical-only events. There will always be a place for meeting face-to-face, experiencing events in-person, but all events can and should have a virtual presence moving forwards."

Gareth Capon,
Grabyo CEO

"Early in the days of the pandemic, event organizers were asking how their virtual events could possibly measure up to their in-person events. They soon found that they should be asking a different question: how can we use all the advantages of virtual production, from time-shifting to advanced visual storytelling to superior analytics to personalized concierge services to deliver a virtual experience that in many cases exceeds what is possible in a physical venue? That change in perspective has driven rapid improvement in the quality of virtual events. As a result, our clients are telling us that their major events will likely continue to offer options for virtual attendance, while their smaller events will remain fully virtual for the foreseeable future."

Michael Kolowich,
Chief Content Officer, OpenExchange

Insights

"AsiaWorks is in the business of using creative production to disrupt the often bland and underwhelming world of virtual events by harnessing tech, innovation and storytelling. Producing captivating video content that builds audiences is at the core of everything we do. The virtual event is not going away, and as live video specialists in this space, we see an exciting new era of creative opportunity for our business, and our clients."

Andrew Clark,
Partner, AsiaWorks

"Virtual and hybrid events, supported by cloud-based production and engagement solutions, are at the forefront of delivering a captivating experience for those attending in person and situated in remote locations. Event organisers are constantly looking to use tools that will enhance audience participation and create more touchpoints to connect and interact with other members, delegates and hosts. Clients working within events see there's a huge opportunity to feature attendees in the content and compliment the narrative, creating topical discussion, impacting live debate, and sharing real-time experience. Looking ahead, we see hybrid, remotely produced events being the norm - creating more sponsorship opportunities, ticket sales, and capturing quality content for use beyond the event."

Karl Kathuria,
Customer Solutions Director, Never.no