

TAKING YOUR EVENT STRATEGY DIGITAL

Because the only thing that is constant is change.

As the COVID-19 epidemic began to take shape at the beginning of the year, few knew the impact it would have on our daily lives. Fast forward to March and it quickly became reality as businesses began to close, travel began to dwindle, and high-profile annual events were postponed or canceled entirely. In just two days, the NBA suspended the remainder of its season, the NCAA canceled the March Madness tournament, and the PGA Tour postponed its most-anticipated tournament of the year. Personal calendars also began to fall apart, as conferences, parties and seminars across the country were canceled – all with the important goal of flattening the curve and saving lives.

If your firm planned to host one of these now-canceled events, you aren't completely out of options – and in fact, you have a new set of opportunities at a time when we are all seeking connection and information. While there is no digital replacement for the Master's Tournament, there are many events that do lend themselves to a digital transformation. From industry conferences to team Zoom meetings, we are all finding new ways to *connect* instead of *cancel*.

TODAY WE ARE SHARING SOME OF OUR BEST TIPS FOR SUCCESSFULLY ADAPTING IN-PERSON EVENTS INTO DIGITAL EXPERIENCES.

EVALUATE YOUR OBJECTIVES

Whether your event can go digital is a different question than whether it should. Consider the objective of your event. (Or, if you haven't identified a measurable objective, start here.) If your goal is to introduce your new brand to the community or celebrate a firm milestone, digital might not be the best fit. On

the other hand, if your goal is to build connections with clients and prospects through educational content, that can still be done digitally with proper planning and execution.

CREATE AN ELEVATED EXPERIENCE

The draw of many events is where it will be and who will be there. Once those elements are no longer possible, your event depends entirely on the:

- **quality of the content**
- **extra steps you take to make it special**
- **consistency of your pre- and post-event communication**

CASE STUDY: An example of a perfectly executed digital pivot is a firm that typically hosts monthly "Lunch and Learn" events with compelling guest speakers. Once in-person events were no longer possible, the firm kept the same time and date of their monthly event and moved it onto a webinar platform. To create a similar experience, the firm had lunch delivered to all attendees. Not only did this create a moment of delight for their clients and prospects, but it also served as a nice reminder that the webinar was starting soon.

ENGAGE THE AUDIENCE

Human connection is often the missing element of an online event. Build engagement and connection early on by getting your audience involved. Welcome your attendees as they join and ask questions to set the tone and encourage interaction. For larger events that don't lend themselves to a dialogue, many webinar platforms have a Q&A feature that allows attendees to type questions that come to mind during the presentation. If you plan to have a Q&A session, have a few pre-written questions ready to go to avoid dead airspace and spark some dialogue.

PICK THE RIGHT PLATFORM

Digital event platforms can range significantly in functionality and features. Here are some options we've found to work well:

1. **ADOBE CONNECT:** Although one of the more expensive options at \$130 per month, Adobe Connect's ease of integration with Salesforce, its degree of customization and its document sharing feature make it a compelling choice.
2. **CLICKMEETING WEBINARS:** For the social media-inclined advisors, ClickMeeting Webinars can live stream your event via Facebook or YouTube. Pricing starts at \$25 per month.
3. **EASYWEBINAR:** Starting at \$78 per month, EasyWebinar integrates with WordPress, YouTube and MailChimp as well as other popular marketing tools.
4. **GOTOWEBINAR:** Known for its ease of use, GoToWebinar offers convenient custom registration, different presenter webcams, interactive polls and webinar analytics. Plans start at less than \$50 per month.
5. **WEBEX:** As a cloud-based platform, Webex has robust data security measures in place, making it a popular choice in the financial industry. Paid plans start at \$13.50 per month.
6. **ZOOM:** A commonly used platform among the newly working-from-home, Zoom offers HD video and audio, and attendee engagement features like chat, hand-raise and polling. Plans that allow for presenter-only view start at \$15 per month.

TEST, TEST, TEST

We've all been there when technological difficulties present themselves at the least opportune times. Don't let that happen to you during your event. First, test the platform with your colleagues, friends and family members who use different types of devices than you use. Poor sound quality is another common technological downfall, so do a test-recording to check the quality of your computer microphone. If you plan to do several web-based events, you may want to consider purchasing an inexpensive microphone and ring light to ensure you look and sound your best. Finally, we recommend having a hard-wired connection should you lose your Wi-Fi connection, and if possible, keep a backup computer on hand in case of emergency.

CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION

Most event best practices apply even in a digital format, albeit sometimes a bit more flexible. In an in-person event, we would recommend sending out invitations at least four weeks in advance. For a webinar, the more notice the better, but given the quickly changing nature of the market as it reacts to this virus, sending invitations a week or several days prior is acceptable. Like in-person events, following up a mass-email invitation with a personal phone call or message is always a thoughtful and effective way to encourage attendance.

Also like in-person events, following up with attendees after the event is essential for retaining clients and nurturing prospects. An easy way to follow-up is a simple email with a recording of the webinar, in case they want to re-watch a portion of it or share it with a friend who might find it useful. This also keeps the momentum alive for your next event.

Another benefit to the digital platform is that you can use the event as content for future communications. This gives your audience a real example of how you engage with your constituency, even if they were unable to attend the event live. Digital event recordings can be posted on your website, sent via social media and emailed.

LEARN MORE

You can find our guide to successful events [here](#). Or, if your firm is seeking more comprehensive support, the team at Wealth Matters Consulting has extensive experience in planning and executing events for wealth advisors. You can contact us [here](#) – we would be happy to help.

¹ Prices listed reflect current pricing at date of publication and are subject to change. Wealth Matters Consulting does not endorse any particular service or company mentioned in this article.