

Hybrid Meeting Background

Below is a compilation of background content gathered from several articles from Cvent, Forbes Magazine, LinkedIn and Interprefy, to help IFDH understand Hybrid Meeting Issues when considering this option for future meetings. The points discussed below are not specific to IFDH, but only to be used as a guide for issues to be concerned with.

Have an onsite representative dedicated exclusively to your virtual attendees.

Your onsite attendees will most likely have someone on a stage or podium addressing them directly throughout the day. This can make virtual attendees feel left out or even further from the action. Solve this problem by having one of your event coordinators address just your virtual attendees. They can talk to attendees about their virtual experiences and introduce virtual-only sessions or networking opportunities.

Costlier, but Improved ROI

Hybrid events improve ROI by combining all of the benefits stated here. Delivering a hybrid event may not be less expensive than a traditional, in-person meeting, but the overall ROI it delivers makes it a top alternative.

Challenges

Challenge #1: Planning Two Events

When starting out with hybrid, you may approach it as planning two events instead of one. It's important that you keep a balance between the two event formats and ensure they are properly synced.

It's also important to create a unified experience. This means choosing the right platform that supports both meeting formats equally. Choose a platform and engagement tools that can connect your in-person attendees to remote attendees and your entire audience to the presenters equally.

Working with a hybrid event planning expert will help you choose the right event technology that supports your program goals without draining your budget. Don't be too experimental at the risk of attendee satisfaction and engagement.

Challenge #2: Setting Prices for Events

If your event involves ticketing, you may struggle with setting prices for both in-person and virtual attendance. If your aim is to create a unified event, you might not want to set different prices for in-person and virtual attendance. Instead, try a tiered approach. This puts the onus on the attendee to make the decision on the value of a particular event or experience.

Challenge #3: Connecting On-line and Onsite Attendees at All Times

Collaborating in event breakout rooms is one thing, but what about networking. With hybrid events, the challenge is to keep both on-line and onsite audiences engaged equally and maximum opportunities for them to connect with each other.

Working with a hybrid event planning expert can help you with ideas on how you can leverage the platform to create virtual networking lounges, incorporate tablets onsite for attendees to better connect to each other, use social media feeds and content to create discussions.

And what about meal breaks? There is a potential to lose your virtual audience during these times, since meals are often the best times to chat and network with other attendees. Consider your program flow to ensure that there is equal opportunity for both types of attendees.

Create separate content for your virtual attendees.

Some of your larger sessions, like your keynote presentations, will be viewed by both onsite and virtual attendees. For other experiences, though, virtual attendees simply can't participate as well as in-person attendees. For example, don't make your virtual attendees watch your onsite attendees at an interactive networking session.

How many sessions will you host per day?

You don't want to overwhelm people with information and content. Onsite attendees will be more likely to want to attend more sessions, as they traveled a great distance to attend in person. However, your virtual attendees will likely have a shorter attention span being in front of a computer screen.

One solution is to offer your virtual attendees fewer live sessions per day. Instead, offer more on-demand content that they can access at their leisure.

Include feedback from the audience.

Just conducting a hybrid event isn't enough. It's important to gather feedback from attendees to gauge success and identify areas for improvement. This can be done through surveys, polls or suggestion boxes.

The G20 Health Summit in July 2020 successfully blended virtual and in-person participation by providing certificates to all attendees and creating a voting system to gather feedback from both online and in-person participants. This helped the audience feel that their opinions were valued and appreciated.

In the physical event space, in-person participants can be more aware of their virtual counterparts through additional screens such as laptops, tablets, and other A/V tools that allow them to see and hear remote attendees.

Implementing Hybrid Meetings

Choosing A Provider

Successful implementation of a hybrid model goes beyond simply choosing an off-the-shelf platform. Instead, look for a provider that is an expert on hybrid meeting management and can help guide you through planning and delivering the entire event.

When seeking assistance, ask these important questions.

Is the provider an expert in hybrid meetings?

You need top-level event production expertise if you want to create a rich and memorable experience for attendees. Your provider should be well versed in all of the platforms and understand the how to leverage this technology to increase collaboration and engagement across the entire event.

Does the provider offer comprehensive and flexible solutions?

Ideally, you want to work with one provider that offers everything you will need for a successful hybrid event. This not only saves you time and money but helps ensure that all of the elements of your event work together seamlessly.

Engaging The Hybrid Audience

Keeping virtual attendees engaged during a hybrid event is paramount. Here are some tips to help keep things interesting and fun.

Keep it Live

Whenever possible, use live video instead of prerecorded content. If your presenters are live, they can make active attempts to connect and engage on-line attendees so they don't zone out.

Use a Virtual Facilitator

Virtual audiences need someone to help keep the on-line conversation going. The virtual facilitator is a conduit between the presenters, live audience, and the virtual audience. They are responsible for monitoring the chat, fielding questions, and providing feedback from the remote audience to the presenters.

Presenter Preparation

A successful hybrid event is not just about putting together a good agenda—it's also making sure speakers are prepared to deliver and engage in this new format.

In many cases your presenters are not professional speakers but instead subject matter experts who are needed to share their insights and knowledge on a particular subject. Some presenters may be hesitant to participate in a hybrid event because of a negative past experience. The more information, tips, process, and support you provide presenters, the more encouraged they will feel. Assure them they will have the proper A/V, technical support, and facilitation assistance to ensure a smooth session.

Host a Presenter Dress Rehearsal

A technical dress rehearsal will help presenters, A/V, and the tech support team work through potential problems and transitions before the event. During this meeting, every role should be familiarized with the platform from the vantage point of how they will use it. Review all of the interactive features and what to do in case of a problem. This training and practice will allow the event team to become comfortable in this environment.

If you have both in-person and remote speakers, hold separate rehearsals for them, as their requirements will be different.

Make Visuals Interesting

Remote attendees are primarily relating to the event through a screen. If the image on that screen is not moving and changing, they are likely to become distracted or bored. To hold their attention, keep the images on screen engaging and interesting.

1. Position cameras, so presenters are visible at all times. Use movement to enhance messages and be mindful of repetitive movements that may be distracting.
2. Consider including more slides and visuals than you would for a traditional in-person presentation, remembering some virtual participants may be using screen readers.
3. Use colorful and exciting images that tell a story, making them accessible and/or visible to online participants.

A/V Checks

Presenters in a hybrid environment need to be seen and heard. In some hybrid environments, they also need to see both in-person and virtual participants. Schedule rehearsals with speakers to test their slides, get comfortable with the technology, and understand where the cameras will be positioned. If the virtual attendees will be on screen at the back of the room, they should be prepared to address and make eye contact with this audience as well. Ideally, speakers should rehearse in the room in which they

will be presenting. If the presenter will be using internet connectivity, video, polling, or chat features, be sure to check that there is proper bandwidth and all technology is functioning prior to the event.

Virtual Participant Participation

How do you prepare remote attendees for the best on-line experience? First, let virtual attendees know how they will communicate, what type of interaction is expected (and appropriate), and when cameras and microphones should be on or off (muted).

When there is a transition to a breakout room, communicate how this will occur. The moderator can make an announcement or the presenter can put up a visual with instructions. At every opportunity, virtual participants need to be acknowledged, addressed, and interacted in a way that supports the objective of each event segment.

If interaction between in-person and virtual participants is encouraged, then both audiences need to understand how and when this will occur.

Security

Use Validation APIs

Integrated validation APIs can be used with client databases to ensure only validated invitees can attend. Many platforms have the ability to include passwords or whitelist company email addresses so that only those with a valid email can register and attend.

For extra security, you can implement a two-step validation process where verification is required via text or email before entry is allowed.

Use Waiting Rooms

Virtual waiting rooms help establish security by screening the audience before they become part of the event. Sometimes people register with guest computers or aliases, and you want to be sure that only the correct people are admitted, especially in private meetings.

Hybrid Event Outlook and Predictions

- 34% of event organizers expect to invest more in hybrid events in the next few years.
- 21% of marketers say they are procuring a hybrid event platform.
- 57% of respondents say they would rather attend an in-person version of a hybrid event than the virtual version.
- 72% of respondents believe they will get more value out of attending a hybrid event in person.
- 25% of respondents say they will host between 5-10 hybrid events per year.
- 38% of enterprise organizations say that combined costs related to the onsite venue, onsite and external A/V, and additional staff are the biggest hybrid event expenses.

The overall experience for both presenters and staff has been overwhelmingly positive. The hybrid model, primarily implemented under stressful conditions (some cities and states still weren't allowing travel), allowed higher participation and lower travel costs. While there were some technological glitches, the benefits of the hybrid event model became very evident.

According to Stratus, *"Managing the venue and the studio at headquarters, versus having everyone gathered in one large space, made it a little bit challenging, but we made it work beautifully. There were more staff needed (coordination and AV) and much more total staff time to coordinate both aspects of the meeting."*