



# **THE POST-PANDEMIC PLAYBOOK:** Safety, hybridisation and innovation

# Why hybrid is here to stay

*The rapid shift to virtual events in 2020 demonstrated the remarkable resilience of event professionals to adapt, marking a key point in the evolution of the global MICE industry..*

The pandemic changed the way we live, work and communicate, and as a result, the future of business events will forever be changed. According to research by Bizzabo, the majority (93%) of event marketers plan to invest in virtual events moving forward, while an overwhelming 97% believe we will see more hybrid events.

Virtual events are here to stay, and as live events return, the hybrid model will be the next big thing. Hybrid formats, which combine face-to-face and virtual experiences, offer the perfect solution to easing corporates back into holding live events safely. They provide the excitement and shared experience of in-person events – which can be piloted with small audiences and gradually built up to larger gatherings as successfully demonstrated in Singapore – with the extended reach and improved ROI of virtual.

Offering the best of both worlds means your audience can choose to be part of the one they're most comfortable with. While virtual events will never replace live, connecting online is a convenient alternative – not just for now but even

in the future because there will always be part of the audience that cannot make the live event, for whatever reason, be that travel restrictions (which are likely to remain with us for some time), cost, family or work commitments etc.

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Dale Parmenter, CEO at DRPG, which has offices in the UK, Europe and USA, says that 2020 has shown us to what extent technology can support the world of events in the future. “The shift

to virtual and hybrid was inevitable and would have happened regardless of the pandemic. Issues such as climate change, as well as flexible working, were coming to the fore and pressurising the world of live events to adapt,” he explains. “With the many benefits of virtual events, it’s no wonder they were becoming a more popular solution to businesses’ communications needs. However, without Covid, it is likely to have taken longer for audiences and clients to fully embrace the phenomenon.”



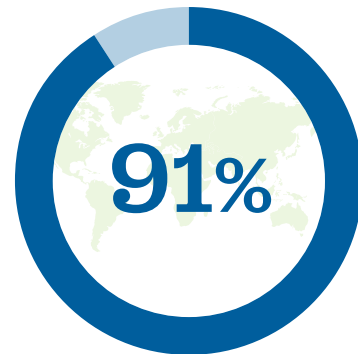
# Digital acceleration

There is no going back now. The pandemic has sped up the seismic cultural change the industry was already experiencing, according to UK agency OrangeDoor. “There is a taste for it now and this speed of change will not slow. Face-to-face will of course re-emerge at some point, but anyone who expects it to go back to ‘business as normal’ or a ‘new normal’ has failed to grasp the size and scope of the change,” the agency says in its recently released Events Industry Barometer 2021.

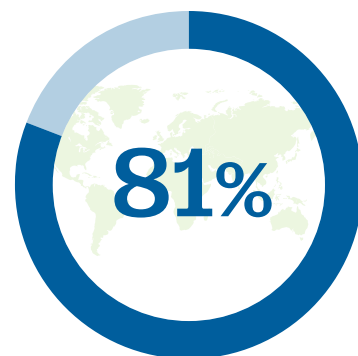
“As demand for hybrid events grows, organisers, venues and destinations will need to make sure they are hybrid-ready”

While huge learnings and advances have been made in virtual solutions over the past year, the hybrid model is still emerging for business events. In a recent survey commissioned by Singapore Tourism Board (STB), 91% of event organisers said they are looking to subscribe to a hybrid model, and of those, 81% shared that they are still learning and experimenting with it. Another survey revealed that more than three-quarters (76.5%) of event marketers have never hosted a hybrid event (Bizzabo, 2020).

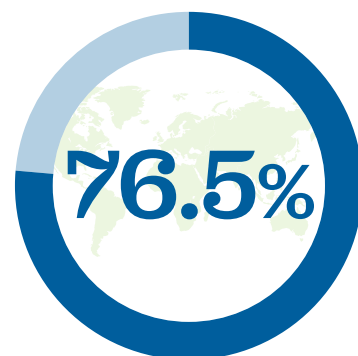
As demand for hybrid events grows, organisers, venues and destinations will need to make sure they are hybrid-ready. Collaboration and sharing best practice will be vital, and one destination we can all learn from is Singapore. Already established as a global leader in tech and innovation, Singapore is now leading the way in the hybridisation of events. Not only has the destination successfully staged a number of high-profile hybrid events, but it has also introduced the Event Industry Resilience Roadmap (IRR) to give organisations a blueprint for putting hybrid into action.



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# How to do hybrid well



The best hybrid events have one thing in common: they treat both audiences – live and online – with equal importance ensuring everyone gets the most out of the event. Virtual event components are no longer an afterthought and must be strategically implemented to ensure online attendees have a purposeful experience.

“Sticking a camera, or cameras, at the back of an auditorium is not going to cut it. What our virtual audiences may miss in on-site excitement, we must make up for in exclusive content. This could involve interviews, pre-recorded videos and sequences the live audience will never see,” says DRPG’s Parmenter.

A study by The Streaming Network found that nearly 98% of attendees at a hybrid event were not planning to attend live, suggesting that hybrid events not only reach attendees that are unable to make the live event but can also attract an entirely new audience. Another study by MPI showed that after adding a hybrid element for

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their events, 23% of organisers said attendance was up in future years at their face-to-face event. This means that if you don’t get the digital element right, you could be losing out on new virtual and live attendees in future.

Hybrid is not about trying to replicate the live experience for a virtual audience but playing to the strengths of the two mediums, according to Cheerful Twentyfirst CEO Steve Quah. “You cannot provide the same audience experience, but you can get the same outcome, whether the objective be selling something, teaching something or motivating someone. There is one shared purpose but there are two approaches, two sets of media, and two different audience journeys,” he explains.

# The three Cs of content



**T**he journey for online audiences is heavily reliant on content, as it's the number one reason for attending virtually. In the IRR, Singapore advises keeping audiences engaged with the broadcast-style format that feature the three Cs of content – captivating, cinematic and compelling.

A challenge digital/hybrid events may face is that virtual attendees will be multitasking while tuning in to the event, and likely to be distracted. You can overcome this by carefully curating your content; sessions should be shorter where possible; use visual content such as motion graphics and animations; include interactive elements to make sessions more engaging; and feature cinematic content like viral TikTok videos, informative TED talks or Netflix specials.

Hybrid events enable the creation of a decentralised community where both attendees and speakers can collaborate and co-create. Utilising virtual breakout rooms, dedicated groups

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on social media, or live forums that exist beyond the parameters of the scheduled event can help to foster a collaborative spirit and generate more value for both attendees and sponsors. Meanwhile, digital content can create value even after the physical event is over. For example, videos and session recordings can be made available online and accessed on-demand, driving new monetisation opportunities.

The IRR features a plethora of other insights on community building, digital engagement, learning opportunities, defining practical outcomes and commerce as part of the 'Five Pillars of Hybridisation'.

# Technical know-how

Hybrid events require a lot more technical equipment, with an integrated event management platform, reliable digital platforms, streaming tools, cybersecurity and data protection among the essentials. From a practical perspective, there are many elements to consider. Parmenter says: “Will you be running one live location, or multiple hubs that need to be joined together? Will you need two-way communication where you have multiple global presenters, virtually appearing at the same time, on the same stage, using VR, AR or ER (extended reality)? What about time zones and digital infrastructure?”

“The Singapore Government has launched schemes aimed to spur hybrid technology innovation and adoption”

Not only is it critical to get the right creative and production team in place that have the necessary knowledge and experience, you also need to make sure that your suppliers are hybrid-ready. When selecting venues, organisers need to prioritise AV support, technology, and incredibly fast internet speed over square footage and number of bedrooms.

Smart hotels and venues are already building hybrid studios into their offerings in anticipation of the increased demand. In Singapore, Marina Bay Sands has created a state-of-the-art hybrid event broadcast studio at the Sands Expo and Convention Centre. Designed to accommodate a live audience of 50 people, the studio offers a three-dimensional stage fitted with an immersive backdrop, broadcast-quality live-streaming capabilities and hologram functionalities enabling speakers to be beamed ‘live’ into Singapore. The venue has successfully hosted a number of hybrid events, including the PCMA Convening Leaders’ 2021 conference in January (see case study on p7).

It’s not the only venue in Singapore investing in digital and hybrid solutions – the InterContinental Singapore has recently launched The Green Room, a state-of-the-art, purpose-built virtual and hybrid event studio equipped with full multimedia production facilities. And to help local MICE businesses and venues improve their competitiveness, the Government has launched schemes aimed to spur hybrid technology innovation and adoption, further evidence that the destination intends to be at the forefront of event hybridisation.



The InterContinental Singapore’s innovative Green Room is perfect for running hybrid events

# HYBRID CASE STUDY:

## PCMA Convening Leaders 2021

The Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) Convening Leaders' conference is one of the world's biggest gatherings of meeting professionals and suppliers, typically attracting more than 4,000 delegates.

For this year's meeting, which took place from 11-15 January, PCMA opted for a hybrid event model and partnered with the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and Marina Bay Sands to create a Global Broadcast Centre to host keynote speakers, expert panels and face-to-face experiences. About 300 delegates attended the event in-person, while a further 4,000 tuned in virtually.

“ This [hybrid] event brought hope to organisers around the world for the future and showed how the MICE industry can thrive in a post-Covid world ”

The partnership demonstrated Singapore's ability to host events safely and effectively through expert use of technology and Covid-safe protocols under STB's Safe Business Framework. Measures included Covid testing and infection control for every stage of an event attendee's journey from arrival to departure; limits on crowd density; social distancing; and ensuring a safe and clean environment.

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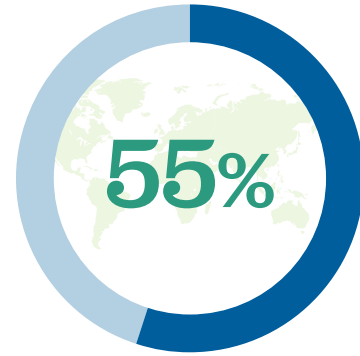
# Digital enablers: how to make events safer

The biggest barriers to the return of live events are safety and confidence. No planner wants to be responsible for delivering an event that turns out to be a Covid super-spreader, meaning safety will be a key consideration for the foreseeable future. More than half (55%) of event organisers report that safety is the biggest obstacle for resuming in-person events (Event MB 2020).

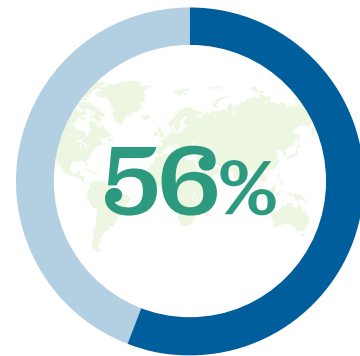
Cvent's 2020 Planner Sentiment and Sourcing Report: Europe Edition also revealed that safety was the top requirement for a return to in-person events, with 56% of those surveyed stating that "safe space" health and safety considerations would most influence their venue selection. Over half (58%) said they are struggling to reschedule in-person events in 2021 because of "insufficient health and safety protocols at venues".

Even for those organisers and venues that do have safety protocols in place, many in the UK and Europe have not had the opportunity to put them into practice due to government restrictions preventing events taking place. In these situations, being able to access best practice and success stories is invaluable, and helpfully, Singapore has plenty to share.

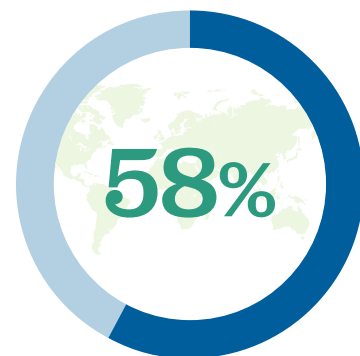
The IRR is packed with insights around hygiene and safety, safe distancing and emergency management and contact tracing, with handy checklists for organisers, venues and suppliers pre, during and post-event. The destination started piloting safe events as early as last summer, successfully hosting the 2020 IEEE International Conference on Computational Electromagnetics and Asia Pacific MedTech Virtual Forum 2020, both of which featured 50 on-site attendees with around 1,000 attending virtually.



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TravelRevive was a two-day hybrid event where close to 1,000 local and international attendees gathered to exchange ideas, bridge knowledge gaps and reimagine the future of travel.

# Safe Event Framework

These events followed STB's Safe Business Event Framework, which is based on holistic safe management measures including limits on crowd density plus infection control measures for every stage of an event attendee's journey. It builds on the "SG Clean" initiative, launched by the National Environment Agency to rally businesses and the public to uphold good sanitation standards and hygiene practices. In order to be certified for the "SG Clean" quality mark, venues, hotels, restaurants and other establishments have to go through a seven-point checklist covering things like the appointment of an SG Clean manager, temperature and health screening of employees and implementation of cleanliness and hygiene practices.

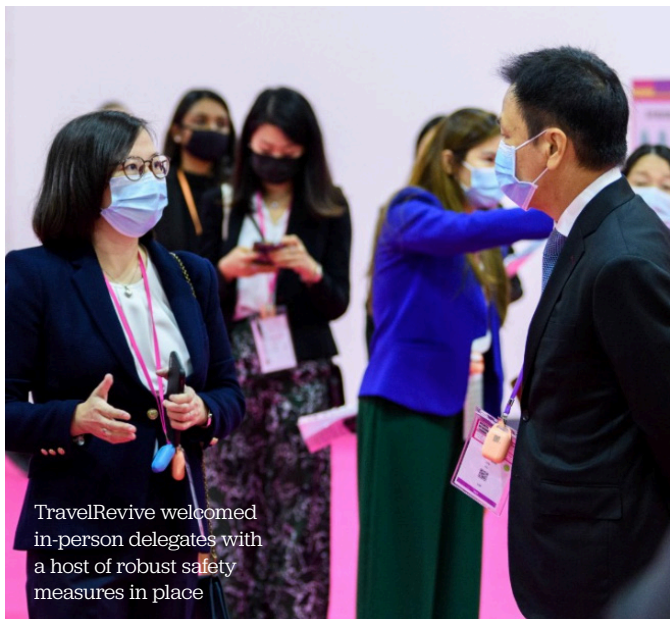
As well as supporting the hybridisation of events, technology can be a key enabler in making in-person events safer. For example, organisers can consider adopting technology to facilitate crowd monitoring and safe distancing alerts such as an RFID token that blinks red when people are within a metre of each other, and movement

tracking via beacon or Bluetooth technology.

Naturally, tech is at the heart of Singapore's efforts to make travel and events safer, yet seamless and efficient, from the use of contactless technology and cleaning robots, to the TraceTogether app and token (the world's first national digital contact tracing tool), and even robot baristas. In November, the destination hosted TravelRevive, pioneering a new prototype for safe business events, safe itineraries and digital enablers. Asia Pacific's first international travel trade show to take place during Covid-19, the hybrid event held at Singapore's Sands Expo & Convention Centre welcomed close to 1,000 in-person delegates, both local and international, across two days.

Co-organised by both STB and Messe Berlin, the trade show implemented rigorous protocols and innovative solutions to ensure the safety and well-being of participants including touchless technology, automated registration kiosks, plexiglass shields for exhibition booths and meeting pods that prevented droplet transmissions.

TravelRevive pictures courtesy of itb-asia.com. For more event pictures, go to [itb-asia.com/gallery-details/8](http://itb-asia.com/gallery-details/8)



TravelRevive welcomed in-person delegates with a host of robust safety measures in place



# Emerging stronger



There is no doubt that the global MICE industry has been among the hardest hit by Covid, but the crisis has also provided the opportunity to come together and better appreciate how MICE and events can be harnessed as a platform for economic, trade and business growth. The global events community has accelerated towards its digital future with years' worth of transformation occurring in less

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than 10 months, and we can't stop now. Only through continued innovation, the development of new skills and the creation of new business models, can we build back better and future-proof business events, as demonstrated by Singapore.

The destination understands that the MICE industry is a catalyst for economic recovery – it drives new knowledge and builds an innovation economy. On top of that, events professionals help build communities and create marketplaces for the exchange of business and ideas.

To ensure that the industry continues to enable economic growth, we cannot return to a business-as-usual approach. The pandemic has changed the world and the way consumers behave – and in order to emerge stronger, the MICE industry must change too.

# Visit Singapore

Consistently ranked as Asia's Top Convention City by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), Singapore is a global leader for business events.

As the lead government agency for the business events sector in Singapore, the Singapore Exhibition & Convention Bureau™ (SECB) is responsible for shaping and retaining Singapore's exceptional reputation as one of the world's best business events destinations.

A part of the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), SECB has over 40 years of experience in helping event professionals, meeting planners and incentive organisers from around the world plan and execute successful events in this vibrant island-city.

For more information, please visit:

[visitsingapore.com/mice](http://visitsingapore.com/mice)