



HOW TO REBUILD YOUR EVENTS CALENDAR IN 2021 AND BEYOND

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Welcome

Welcome to Sleek's first ever white paper, published in association with *C&IT*. We have already been wowing clients for many years with successful events, and now we're launching the first in what we hope will be a valuable series of handbooks for anyone working in marketing and events.

The past year has been tough for most industries, but the events sector has taken an especially big hit. As a versatile and creative bunch, we've generally adapted to the many challenges thrown at us – and Sleek is no exception to the rule. This white paper offers a compelling argument for why events should continue to be a central part of your marketing strategy, with tips and resources for rebuilding your events calendar.

To give your organisation an edge over the coming year, we've also included events trends to keep in mind so that you can continue to provide forward-thinking experiences for your audience. And remember, Sleek is always happy to help with event consultancy or end-to-end project management. Let's make 2021 the year we all get back to what we love: creating exceptional experiences and face-to-face events.

Lizzie Burdge, business development & marketing director, Sleek

After the most difficult of years for the events industry, and ongoing uncertainty for planners, there is reason to hope for better things ahead. *C&IT* is delighted to be partnering with Sleek to bring you this whitepaper full of advice and ideas for evolving your events strategy with the changing times – whether that means live, virtual or hybrid happenings.

Get some creative inspiration by reading about a couple of the innovative virtual events Sleek has been creating for clients, and hear from their ops director Aron about how event agencies can help to support in-house marketing and events teams.

For those eager to get back to live, there's a best-practice checklist for putting COVID-safe measures in place. Plus, you'll also find a list of tech solutions to help cover your live, hybrid and virtual bases. Whatever the coming months hold for our industry, here's to recharging, rebuilding and reconnecting with audiences.

Calum Di Lieto, editor, C&IT



Why events?

After a tumultuous 2020, with the global COVID-19 pandemic putting most face-to-face interactions on hold, live events are finally back on the radar. As part of the UK government's roadmap, outdoor events for 4,000 people (or 50% of a site's capacity, whichever is lower) and indoor events for 1,000 people (or 50% of a venue's capacity) were allowed to resume from 17 May, subject to meeting COVID-secure requirements, with plans in place as this white paper went to print to remove all restrictions by 19 July.

Despite this more positive outlook, many brands are facing a myriad of uncertainties and challenges, including how to connect with their audiences, support their workforces or reposition their products in a world where customer perception may have shifted. Events continue to offer a powerful and effective marketing tool across all industries – so much so, that 84% of event

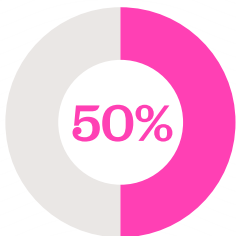
agents and 42% of event planners already have events scheduled to take place in Q3 and/or Q4 of 2021¹.

Whether your events are held in person, virtually, or you opt for the increasingly popular hybrid model, now is the perfect moment to rebuild your events calendar for 2021 and the years ahead. There are numerous reasons to build an event into your future marketing strategy, including:

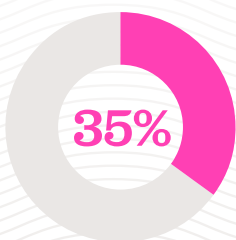
Brand awareness

Events help customers and prospects to both discover your brand and immerse themselves in its message through an interactive experience. They make your brand tangible by bringing it to life. People will remember and talk about a great event – whether that's on social media, in the press, or with other customers or people in your industry. Social media buzz and content sharing online can also help to reach audiences beyond the event itself, create opportunities to build multimedia content for future campaigns, and establish a brand legacy that lasts long after the event is over.

¹. MIA: UK Agent & Planner Research March 2021



Half of all executives believe that future events will have some virtual dimension⁴ and that...



... 35% of virtual and hybrid events would require the use of a full-service agency.⁵

Generating qualified leads

Personal interactions should never be underestimated when it comes to generating sales leads. In fact, 95% of marketers agree that live events provide attendees with the opportunity to form valuable in-person connections in an increasingly digital world². But even in a virtual setting, face-to-face time adds a human element to a brand's presence, providing a one-on-one, distraction-free slot of time to capture an attendee's attention to sell and upsell your services.

Thought leadership

Establishing your events as a go-to resource for thought leadership, knowledge sharing and education will demonstrate your value and expertise in your industry. It's also worth remembering that 84% of event attendees say they have a more positive opinion about the brand, company, product or service that is being promoted, after the event³. Allowing people to gather and share ideas on subjects they're passionate about creates a sense of community, which will in turn be linked with your brand.

Understanding your audience

No marketer wants to feel as though their campaigns are being fired off into the void. An event provides a unique opportunity to gather data on the types of content your audiences are drawn to, how they interact with your brand, and what they want to know about you. This might be why 85% of company leaders believe that in-person events are critical to their company's success⁶. No other marketing strategy offers the same opportunity to communicate directly with your audience and understand their needs more effectively. Using an [events agency to assist with your marketing strategy](#) could provide additional insights and avenues to allow you to connect with your target audience.

2. [Aventri: 23 Event Marketing Statistics You Need to Know](#)

3. [Aventri: 23 Event Marketing Statistics You Need to Know](#)

4. [Marketing Charts 2020](#)

5. [AMEX Global Business Travel, 2020](#)

6. [Bizzabo Event Marketing 2020: Benchmarks and Trends Report](#)

Strategise: Future-proof your events

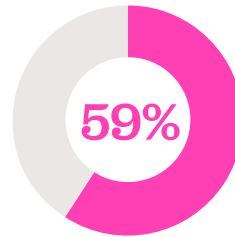
Whether you have events in the pipeline already or have allocated a budget for proposed events, you will understandably want to take precautions to future-proof them. Even aside from the pandemic, the past year has presented significant challenges for businesses, including adapting to updated supplier regulations around [Brexit](#) and getting to grips with new, more complex technology to facilitate remote working and virtual events. The good news is, there are several ways to ensure future events run as smoothly as possible:

1. Adapt your strategy

Supporting the development of corporate meeting and event strategies that are future-facing and take into account our 'new normal' might mean rethinking how you can run events effectively.

If in-person is a concern, you might need to think about redirecting funds to support your virtual or hybrid offering. Diverting marketing budget into tech solutions beyond Zoom, and thinking about elements that will help your audience enjoy virtual events as much as live ones, will be paramount.

For hybrid events you'll need to consider event apps, branded backdrops, high-quality cameras and microphones, and video-editing expertise. But you'll also need to invest in the live components that make a real difference to the in-person attendee experience, such as hospitality, live entertainment and suitable venues that offer a guarantee of safety.



The majority (59%) of event marketers believe a hybrid solution that involves both virtual and in-person events will be a key part of their 2021 event strategy.⁷

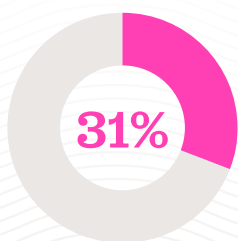
⁷ [Bizzabo Event Marketing 2020: Benchmarks and Trends Report](#)



2. Review and optimise events

Reviewing and auditing events that you already have on the calendar might seem counterproductive, but it can lead to ‘lightbulb moments’ as you look for opportunities to strengthen and improve the planning process. Looking closely at how your own events department and processes function, as well as the audiences you are targeting, can lead to more successful events.

You might decide that there is scope to take your currently planned live events online, or even switch to a hybrid event. In that case, you’ll need to think about which platforms are most suitable for your format and how they can be personalised, what networking opportunities might be available and how you can grab attendees’ attention if they are participating online.



Nearly a third of marketers (31%) believe that event marketing is the single most effective marketing channel.⁸

⁸ [Aventri: 23 Event Marketing Statistics You Need to Know](#)

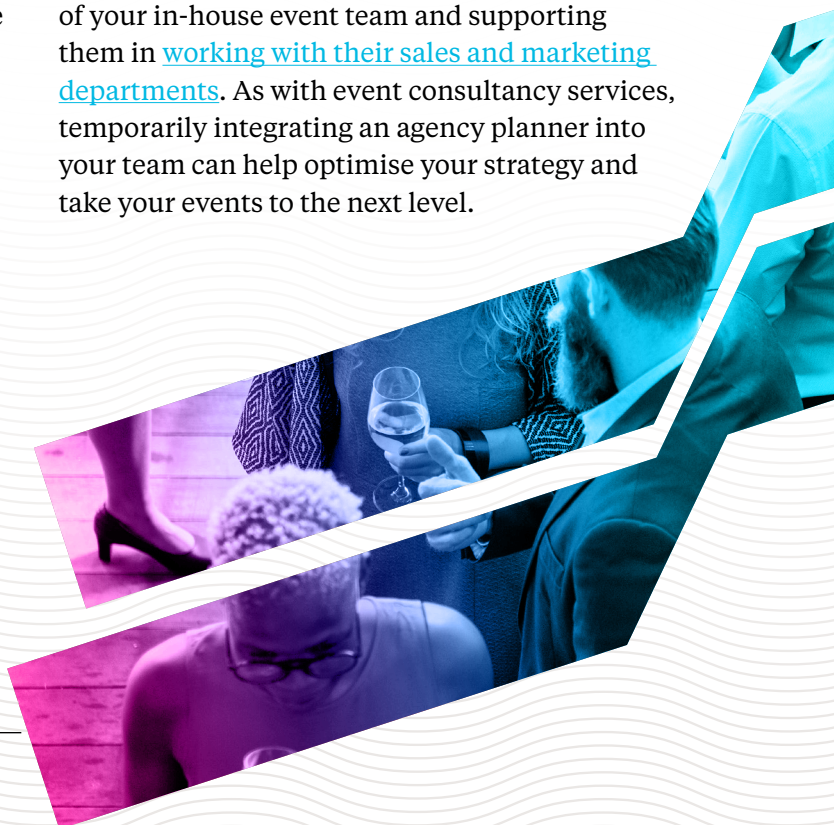
3. Invest in an event consulting service

Starting a conversation with event management consultants can help you with both reviewing and strategising planned and proposed events. This type of consulting should include an audit, which will make sure your events are optimised in terms of structure, budget and engagement in order to hit KPI and ROI targets. A consultant can guide you through different event styles, technology solutions, and atmospheric and experiential elements that will grasp the imagination of attendees. They can also help with engagement by assisting with the customer journey.

4. Integrate an agency planner into your team

With the rise in digital events, marketers are likely to become more involved in event planning, while planners themselves will be asked to step up to digital marketing and production. This means that integrating an agency event planner – either temporarily or on an ongoing basis – will allow for elevated creative collaboration and also open up new areas of expertise for your organisation.

Agency planners can be integrated at any stage in the planning process, working as an extension of your in-house event team and supporting them in [working with their sales and marketing departments](#). As with event consultancy services, temporarily integrating an agency planner into your team can help optimise your strategy and take your events to the next level.



Target: Identifying your objectives and audience

For any successful event, you need to understand its target audience. This is:

- specific people who will be interested in attending your event;
 - or people who will identify with your brand.
- But how do you start finding these people?

Set a goal

What is your event goal? Having clear, measurable objectives – that you can back up with any existing data you have – will help you determine the audience you want at your event. If you want to increase customer engagement, then naturally you'll target customers; but if you want to generate leads or raise awareness of your brand, then you should be looking outside your current audience but targeting similar customer profiles. Or perhaps you have a segment of the market you want to infiltrate; in which case, you should set your objectives once you've identified the specific type of attendee you are targeting.

Building a customer profile is helpful for both of these scenarios. This profile usually includes basic characteristics such as gender, age, occupation and location. But it can also bring in more nuanced and in-depth behavioural and attitudinal characteristics like personality type, goals and motivation.

Understand your customers

Audience motivation is everything. Understanding why your audience would (or wouldn't) attend your event is central to the messaging you'll craft to nudge them into registering.

So-called design thinking can help here, particularly the concept of empathy mapping. By putting yourself in the position of a potential customer, you can start to empathise with their needs and desires, shaping your strategy around these and creating an experience that will resonate with them. This type of activity is useful because it can capture one particular customer, but also aggregate multiple customers. Empathy mapping also avoids the pitfall of designing for an ill-defined 'elastic' or generic user, who can mean different things to different people.



Empathy mapping

Says

Populate this section with what a user says during an interview or survey, based on exact quotes, eg: “I use this software everyday because it streamlines the way I work.”

Does

This quadrant captures user actions when interacting with your product, eg: which features they use the most.

Feels

Here you can identify user feelings, such as what worries or interests them, eg: “This product is too confusing to use.”

Thinks

This section will tap into things that your user is reluctant to share, eg: “This product would be better if I could see more specific data sets.” Think about what matters to them and what obstacles they face, based on the qualitative data you have.

Ultimately, [identifying your target audience](#) will be crucial to the success of your event. Agencies can assist with analysing your marketing data or data from previous events to help you to build your audience persona, so you can specifically target this group with highly effective marketing campaigns.

Build:

Planning checklist

Once you've decided on your objectives, your target audience and your event format – live, hybrid or virtual – it's helpful to have a checklist of all the different elements you might have to consider, so you can allocate resources efficiently and put a plan of action into place.

Budgeting

First off, how much budget do you have, and is there any margin to extend it, if the demands of the brief end up pushing you over? You might need to separate the 'must-haves' from the 'nice-to-haves' so that your vision for the event can come together successfully. If you want to provide refreshments or swag bags for virtual events, for example, remember there will be a shipping cost involved, too. For hybrid, you'll need to factor in the in-person elements, such as catering and

entertainment, as well as virtual ones, including broadcasting equipment, interactive technology and pre-recorded sessions. You should also budget for any advertising and promotion costs.

Comms strategy

This stage will be vital in pushing out compelling messaging and advertising on appropriate social platforms that are specifically aimed at the target audience you identified earlier. Getting this right means that attendees will be able to pre-network, ask questions and help build hype through their interactions, while anyone on the fence will hopefully be swayed by the buzz around the event. Integrating social media into virtual event platforms, or expanding its scope to enable delegate storytelling during hybrid and live events, add to a sense of investment and connection.





Project management

Do you have an in-house events team, or will marketing/sales be taking on the project? It's vital to set clear roles and responsibilities, as with big events you will likely need several people to manage the various tasks involved and dedicate a large chunk (if not all) of their time to bringing the project to life. You might want to consider outsourcing services such as venue finding, bringing in a consultant, or hiring an events agency to take on the logistical elements for you. Working with an agency gives you the option of outsourcing the end-to-end project management to experts whose full-time role is planning and executing successful events.

Bespoke event platforms

If you're going with a virtual event but want to avoid Zoom fatigue and go beyond basic functions, you may want to opt for a bespoke platform design with the ability to host interactive elements such as games, polls and networking. You'll need to figure out your objectives first, so you can decide which platform is fit for purpose and then optimise it to ensure that attendees get the most out of their online experience.

Agenda building

A great event agenda should provide relevant content, engaging activities and the chance for delegates to meet and chat. Customising and personalising the delegate journey should be part of this planning; for example, by offering optional sessions to suit their interests. If the event is taking place virtually, speaker and content sessions should be shorter and you should try to incorporate interactive elements such as polls. If you're looking for sponsorship opportunities, you'll need to design your agenda to enable this in an organic way, such as holding screens displaying sponsor logos between content.

The unexpected

Even if every little event detail has been planned, something unexpected could always happen. What's your contingency plan? Have you carried out an appropriate risk assessment? Do you have backups if tech fails? It's always good to have a graphic or video prepared that can be played during any technical hitches. A dedicated team member should be on hand at all times to troubleshoot issues, brief speakers and keep an eye on the schedule. Bringing in an external project manager can ensure all these bases are covered.

Reassure: COVID-19 safety measures

Although anecdotally we hear there is plenty of appetite for in-person meetings and events, many delegates will understandably want reassurance that all proper safety measures have been taken. COVID-19 has added to the long list of things you need to consider during the planning and delivery phases. And it's important to be well-prepared in case of any liability issues.

Returning to in-person will require a rethink of previous event logistics and how aspects such as lunch, networking and arrival times are coordinated. In addition to COVID-safe precautions, there are lots of best-practice guidelines which tie in with general CSR or health and safety considerations. The checklist below suggests how you can take all of these factors into account.

Pre-event

- Look at models for pre-existing events and identify all the things that will now need to be changed or modified.
- Work with venues and agencies that are aware of the latest COVID protocols and have plans for how they will implement these.
- Find out what measures the venue has in place (eg temperature checks, on-site COVID testing, etc), and what their procedure is if a delegate is suspected to be unwell.
- Conduct a risk assessment that takes into account the changing health-and-safety considerations, and check your liability insurance.
- Survey delegates to see how they feel about attending in-person, and whether this is a viable option for this particular event.
- Book out a venue with more capacity than you'd normally need to allow for social distancing.
- Have a concrete contingency plan in case the event needs to be taken online, postponed or cancelled.



During the event

- Set start and finish times that don't require delegates to travel during peak hours on busy public transport.
- Encourage attendees to use the NHS venue check-in QR code scanner on entry or keep a written record of their contact details.
- Stagger start and end times of individual sessions to avoid overcrowding, and book out shared spaces in the venue for exclusive use.
- Include a live linkup for any delegates that don't want to, or can't, travel to the event.
- Provide hand-sanitiser stations and wipe-clean surfaces for food consumption and remove miscellaneous objects which might enable contact contamination.
- Implement contactless payment and other methods to limit direct person-to-person contact.
- Digitise delegate packs and agendas or include these in an app, instead of using physical materials.
- Have an accredited event organiser on-site for the entire duration to ensure compliance.



Post-event

- Keep seating plans and attendee contact details for at least 21 days after the event, in case of reported illness.
- Report any confirmed illness to the venue and external suppliers.

This list is in no way exhaustive, and restrictions are evolving all the time. If in doubt, consider talking to an event consultant to help you to better understand the protocols you need to put in place to comply with venues and suppliers, or how you can integrate your own best practices with theirs. Event agencies will be keeping on top of government guidelines and advice from industry bodies, so can offer an expert perspective from within the sector.

Innovate:

Smart tech solutions

Technology can add bells or whistles to your event, provide pragmatic solutions to common pain points and even improve your CSR credentials, by making your events more sustainable. In the coming months or years, planners will need to harness tech to streamline both live and virtual experiences. Here's how you can take your event tech to the next level.



Contactless check-in

Although pilot events to date haven't required attendees to wear masks, it's reassuring to know that several developers are working on facial-recognition technology that can identify a person based on only the upper half of their face. This means that if masks are required at future events, faces will still be able to be scanned, for contactless check-in. The technology can even read facial expressions and body language to predict attendees' mood, elevating the quality of feedback.

Radio-frequency identification (RFID)

RFID chips are a practical and convenient piece of tech for in-person events in the pandemic era. Small enough to fit into wearables such as bracelets or badges, they can be used for cashless payments, as a replacement for physical tickets, or – perhaps most importantly – for tracking the behaviour and movement of attendees to harvest valuable data. They can quickly be scanned to speed up interactions and reduce queuing times, allowing for more effective social distancing.

Integrated translation

With the rise of hybrid and virtual, many companies are realising that there are almost limitless possibilities for growing their audiences. As reach becomes ever more globalised, integrating translation software in multiple languages into platforms makes events accessible to new and untapped markets. While English is widely spoken globally, customers value being communicated to in their native language, and those who are hard of hearing will appreciate closed captions.

Audience Response System (ARS) software

An engagement must-have for virtual and hybrid events, ARS allows presenters and organisers to communicate with delegates through live polls, surveys, quizzes or Q&A sessions.

Interactive floor plans

Digital diagramming tools provide a snapshot of how events and venues can adhere to distancing and safety measures, while still allowing attendees to have an enjoyable experience. With an overview of the entire space, the delegate journey can be carefully designed to factor in bottlenecks and one-way systems, avoiding any pitfalls. Most importantly, interactive floor plans anticipate the attendee experience and give everyone involved in the planning process a sense of reassurance.

3D environments

Any event with a virtual element will need wow factor to hold delegates' attention. An immersive 3D environment with a range of visuals and special effects can liven up your sessions and capture the imagination of your spectators. Virtual studios can be customised or created bespoke to fit your brand identity. This option bypasses venue and cost restrictions to create a suitable virtual setting for any kind of event.

Artificial intelligence

AI can be used in a multitude of ways at events, from chatbots that can answer delegate questions, to software that scans a user's social media profiles and personalises their agenda accordingly. AI can also suggest which optional sessions a delegate might enjoy, or help them find out where they need to be next. Event apps with AI plug-ins are a simple way to gather this kind of data and create a bespoke experience.



Engage: The added value of an event planner

On the fence about partnering with an agency? Aron Bentley, operations director at Sleek, answers a few common client questions.

What event services is Sleek known for?

Sleek's focus is on cloud-based tech providers and this business has grown organically through advising and managing sponsors and clients looking to run their own large event. We're known for large-scale summits, bringing alive events for 15,000 people, along with managing health and safety, multiple sponsors and keynotes. We also offer event consultancy services and live, experiential sponsorship consultancy.

Have you diversified this offering while live events were off the menu?

Our focus moved to the virtual world and to executing digital events, from online hospitality programmes to virtual summits. We doubled down on content creation and concentrated on

enhancing virtual interactions and understanding virtual attendee behaviours so that we could improve the customer journey. This all means we can now offer clients more, in terms of production, filming and editing services. Recent experience means we're in a better position to unite virtual and in-person, to create hybrid events that are enjoyable and memorable for both sets of audiences.

What can an event consultant offer my marketing strategy?

We can really help with the ROI of time and money, target audience, sponsors and venue. We can also give you the bigger picture outside of your organisation, and target areas that are obvious to us, but perhaps not to every client. For example, we can help you avoid scheduling clashes with events in the same industry, booking the wrong type of space or not offering sponsors enough to maximise their investment.





Why should I invest in an event with an agency partner?

Events are often an afterthought once other bases, like advertising, have been covered. But we realise that events are part of a 360° marketing strategy. And it's a specialist area that PR agencies, for example, won't always have the right expertise in.

I already have an in-house events/marketing team – what added value do agencies offer?

In a word, resource. Clients often approach us because they don't have the in-house capacity. We have the headcount and time, plus expertise and skills that organisations might not have in-house, such as budget planning, as well as an extensive network of suppliers and contacts.

How else can agencies make my in-house team's job easier?

We can provide documentation, such as presentations, to be used at internal meetings to show what stage the event process is at, saving you time. We can also focus on all the logistical elements, freeing up time for in-house teams to push on with legal, sign off and other internal processes.

What specialist knowledge do you have that we might not?

Being creative is our business. Event management is about problem-solving and everything we do brings a creative twist or new solutions using technology, different materials or innovative approaches. For example, clients don't always think of brand awareness or generating leads as top priorities during the planning process, even though these are absolutely vital.

What was one of your biggest client challenges, and how did you solve it?

Clients are not always sure what they want. One of our biggest strengths is our adaptability. Recently a client came to us with a blank piece of paper, essentially, and said: what should we do? We broke down the event elements, consulting on and project managing even the smallest issues, to custom-build their event from scratch. We always work closely with clients to understand their individual needs – there's no 'one size fits all' here!

What about COVID-19 safety?

We're closely monitoring government guidelines as well as industry bodies who are analysing what the latest changes mean, and we can offer a unique perspective from within the sector. We always have a plan B (for outdoor and wet weather options for events, say) and during the pandemic, we also have the option to take the event online.

How can you reassure decision makers that they're investing budget wisely in an uncertain time?

In our case, thanks to the strong existing relationships we have with suppliers and venues, they are happy to do us favours. They value us and have worked with us before, so they've softened cancellation terms to offer more security, and can move an event with no penalties. We are also flexible on cancellation fees and are open to discussing these with clients, rather than imposing rigid penalties.

Inspire: Case study one

Bringg Virtual Sales Kick-off

4 days, 10 time zones, one pair of engraved boxing gloves for the winners

Sleek helped Bringg start 2021 with a bang by transforming its sales team's 'Kick-off' knockout event into a virtual success story.

Objectives

To motivate, train and engage Bringg's sales team from around the globe via a virtual platform.

Challenges

- Creating a virtual event platform that could host both live and pre-recorded content, breakout rooms, attendee profiles, a live feed and a green room for speakers.
- Activities to engage attendees to interact with the content and each other.
- Avoiding 'Zoom fatigue' by breaking up training with fun activities to keep people interested.
- Keeping the 'knockout' theme central to the agenda with a competitive element to appeal to sales teams.
- Pre-event content filming and editing.
- Re-invigorate sales teams and arm them with new product and service knowledge, best-practice techniques and sales strategies.

The approach

- A custom-designed, Bringg-branded platform featured a personal profile page for each attendee to fill out with their picture, bio and social media links, plus a live news feed where they could post in real-time.
- A leaderboard introduced a strong competitive element, with points awarded for taking part in activities, posting to the newsfeed, answering questions in the training session or winning the quiz.

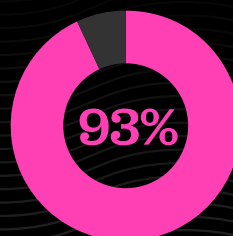
Results

- Sleek made an 11% saving on the event budget.
- 241 posts were made on the activity feed.
- 35,777 pageviews were clocked.
- 172 personalised event sessions were held.

Bringg says...

"Bringg had never before attempted to run a world-class Virtual Sales Kick-Off that would engage, educate and energise the global team, so finding the right partner to support such an event was critical. Bringg chose Sleek due to their experience in managing events such as this with other well-known SaaS companies. The Sleek team were with us throughout, helping us to execute flawlessly, and provide immediate real-time support when needed, as is often the case with virtual events! I can highly recommend the team, and will certainly be using them again in the future."

Tom Doyle, Bringg Area Vice President – EMEA



93% of event marketers plan to invest in virtual events, moving forward.⁹

Inspire: Case study two

SnapLogic Enterprise Integration Summit - Europe

35 speakers, 33 live sessions and eight event sponsors

Sleek custom built a virtual platform to help SnapLogic wow over 300 of its European prospects, customers and partners.

Challenges

Creating a bespoke virtual event platform to host a one-day conference which could:

- host 300 attendees;
- run multiple event tracks to allow delegates to personalise their experience;
- provide valuable attendee insights and engagement figures;
- offer strong virtual speaker functionalities.

The approach

- Sleek custom-built the CMS of the platform to align with SnapLogic's brand, content and creative.
- Creating event pages including the agenda, live stream, exhibition area, speaker pages, survey and activity feed.
- Branding the platform in SnapLogic colours and brand ID formats.
- Working closely with event sponsors to build the Sponsor Exhibitor space; uploading sponsor documents, content and contact details.
- Connecting a Twitter feed to the virtual platform using the hashtag #EnterpriseIntegrationSummit.
- Uploading event registrations to then build attendee profile pages.
- Creating a comms strategy to boost registration numbers, and encourage attendees to login a week before the event to populate their profiles and explore the platform.
- Keeping virtual sessions engaging and interactive with polling & live Q&As mixed in throughout.

Results

- 333 attendees logged in to attend the event; 11% more than the target of 300.
- Over 600 event registrations were made.
- Sleek made a 40% saving on the event budget.
- Integrating a Twitter feature into the virtual platform activity feed allowed SnapLogic to build brand awareness on social media and create a community within the event.
- An on-demand video experience for attendees was created by Sleek post-event, so they can revisit any part of the day.
- A post-event report with detailed insights to help with lead generation and ROI engagement figures was provided for each sponsor.

SnapLogic says...

"Sleek became an essential part of the SnapLogic team when producing the Enterprise Integration Summit - Europe. Their expertise exceeded our expectations when it came to project management and all the intricate details that the team put into creating a personalised and engaging virtual experience. Their professional manner meant that we could focus on the content for the event and the actual planning became a simple, easy process for us. The event was a huge success and we look forward to working with Sleek again in the future."
Virginie Letessier, SnapLogic Marketing Director

Lead:

Trends to look out for in 2021

Hybrid

Hybrid is going to dominate event formats for the near future, at least. Hybrid offers the ability to host events at scale, with interaction between in-person and virtual attendees, plus recordings of content which can be repurposed later on. It bridges the gap between the best elements of live and virtual, and generates plenty of data to use in future campaigns.

Scaling down

Smaller but more often: this is the strategy businesses should be putting in place for their events in a landscape still dominated by the pandemic. This means hosting fewer guests at individual events, but scaling up the number of events you hold so you can still reach as many prospects as possible.

FOMO

With the rise of hybrid, businesses will need to get creative to incentive delegates to attend events in person. FOMO (fear of missing out) can be cultivated by building anticipation before the event with promotional social media teasers. The chance to rub shoulders with exclusive guests, a glitzy environment and the opportunity of serendipitous networking are also all draws.

Representation

In 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement made a global impact, challenging industries across the board to do better. Better representation of people of colour on panels, as content creators or as keynote speakers will be expected. This type of inclusion mustn't be performative, but part of a wider business investment in anti-racism work. You should also consider gender, disabilities and other protected categories when thinking about bringing diversity to your event offering – whether

that's through booking speakers or thinking about how the venue set-up, activities and content can serve their needs.

CSR

During COVID-19, many companies have been forced to significantly upgrade their virtual meetings technology while travelling for meetings and business events has been off the cards. The necessity of travel for business will continue to be challenged by in-house CSR departments. With an increased focus on carbon footprints, there will be discussion around how companies can offset the impacts of live events.



Tech proficiency

Marketers and planners will be expected to get to grips with a wider range of technology than before the pandemic, and this will go beyond knowing how to use virtual meeting platforms. Production and AV knowledge will come into play, with video that is created both in advance and live. Many event agencies have either mastered these skills over the last few months or created a new role dedicated to production.

Data and ROI

Virtual events have allowed for detailed data to be gathered and analysed, and marketers can now see in detail where the points of engagement or disinterest lie. This also means increased opportunities to demonstrate ROI to both internal and external stakeholders. With a legacy of successful virtual events, many sponsors will be more willing to throw their weight behind sponsorship opportunities where engagement and interest can be demonstrated.

Building trust

Businesses that created a narrative of positive interactions with customers during the pandemic will now be able to capitalise on that sense of trust. Events are a way to further showcase the alignment between brand messaging and the actions taken to maintain this trust, by turning them into causes or using them as a platform to speak to the values of customers.



Human connection

Lockdowns, distancing and restrictions on social gatherings all took their toll on people's sense of human connection. Event attendees are likely to crave a genuine connection with others over all other things. This could mean alcohol-free events where the focus is on providing space for meaningful professional conversations, or leaving more time for intimate one-on-one interactions.



Meet Sleek

Here at Sleek, we spend our days creating events that deliver the reach you need in the real world. We'll work with you to plan, create and deliver the unique event or experience you need to achieve your ambitions - then do whatever it takes to make it a tangible success.

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