

Five Ways to Create Better Engagement During Virtual Events

Last Modified on 04/06/2021 2:55 pm EDT

From the AssociationsNow article titled "Five Ways to Create Better Engagement During Virtual Events"

As more associations convert [their in-person conferences into virtual ones](#) due to COVID-19, many are concerned about the ability to replicate the interaction, networking, engagement, and hallway conversations that are staples of face-to-face events.

On an ASAE webcast earlier this week called "[Tips and Tools for Creating an Awesome Virtual Event Experience](#)," the two presenters said it is definitely possible—you just need to be thoughtful and creative.

Here are five ideas that 360 Live Media Director of Experience Design Beth Surmont, CMP, CAE, and Matchbox Virtual Cofounder and CEO Arianna Rehak shared during the webinar:

Prepare your speakers. "It is extremely difficult to present to nobody," Surmont said. "A lot of speakers feed off their audience. So, the first time you present to no one, it is very strange experience and it can throw people off." That means associations need to talk to their presenters about what to expect—and also what they can do to deliver the best experience to attendees. If they'll be on video, that includes having a clean background ("think newcasts," she said), wearing clothing that is not distracting, and having front lighting.

Get your audience ready too. "It's very important to bring a specific level of intention to your virtual event to help your audience understand how they can have the best experience," Surmont said. Tell them how to engage. "For example, submit your questions here. Raise your hand this way," she said.

Surmont suggested thinking of engagement through four dimensions: physical, physiological, intellectual, and emotional. For the physical dimension, for example, consider where people are participating from and offer tips on how they can create the best environment for themselves: "Keep your door closed, or put a sign on your door so you won't be disturbed," Surmont said.

Build a virtual environment that's conducive to conversation. "While pre-recording sessions often gets a bad rap," Rehak said, doing so allows speakers to engage actively in the conversation that is going on while attendees are watching their session. "The speakers love this by the way," she said. "They are seeing their content come to life."

If you do go this route, Rehak recommends having chat animators who "create a positive conversational environment that signals to other that they can join," she said. "That can be as simple as being the first to say, 'Hey, really excited to be here and get started.' That will set the right tone."

Host virtual roundtable discussions. "If you want attendees to dive into a specific topic, you may want to consider video chat breakout rooms," Rehak said. "It's really a way for folks to meaningfully connect with one another."

To make this happen, have a designated facilitator in each room so the conversation stays focused and gets people talking. If your association is unable to provide multiple facilitators, Rehak suggest supplying each room with a list of guiding questions. "You want to give them a sense of purpose around their interaction together," she said.

Offer a little bit of fun between sessions. Create moments between sessions that capture people's attention. For example, you can provide additional content during breaks, such as meditation or a trivia game. Or if you have awards to present, consider playing short videos of the winners. "Really, the world is your oyster in terms of that you can offer attendees during these breaks," Rehak said.

What ideas have you implemented for introducing engagement and conversation during your virtual events? [Please share with us.](#)
