ONLINE EVENTS TOOLKIT

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Organising your events online can provide many great opportunities to be more impactful, more resourceful and more sustainable.

Turning your event into a digital one has the potential to reach a much wider audience. By enabling the participation of those who normally wouldn't be able to attend, or physically be at one place at the same time, you can reduce accessibility barriers and create unique online spaces for speakers, guests and participants to interact.

It can also reduce the logistical burden on you and your team, and be a cost-effective alternative to achieving the aims of your event. Avoiding the travel of participants and speakers means that your event will likely be more climate-friendly.

However, organising online events can also bring its own challenges. It can be harder to get people's attention for a sustained period and to get participants to engage with you directly. That is why preparation and communication are key to make sure you and your audience are ready and know what to expect. This guide is intended to give you all the information you need to organise a successful online event.

Online events are a great way to reach a new audience

THE CONTENT

Before getting started it is worth asking yourself the question, is an online event the right way to go? Remember, there are often many other ways of engaging with your audience online. Take a bit of time to assess what your objectives are and whether they might be better achieved through other formats like videos, podcasts, blogs or social media campaigns.

If you go ahead with your online event, remember that the content will need to be specifically adapted for the format you are using. Don't assume, for example, that an activity you have planned offline will work online without making any changes to it.

To make your event engaging and relevant for an online audience, there are many things to consider:

- **How to manage and encourage audience interaction?**
- **How many participants should I aim for?**
- **How long should the online event last for?**

Any event works best when people can meet and discuss and engage with your ideas. Events that are interactive and encourage contributions from participants, mean that they are more likely to remember and share your message afterwards.

Being able to create a link between participants and speakers or organisers is key to any live event. Think about how you can engage with your audience not only during the event itself, but throughout the process. For example, you may consider allowing participants to propose questions to the speakers, collecting questions before the event, or getting participants to vote for their favourite question. When the event is finished you can continue to share useful information or relevant resources and encourage feedback among those who took part.

Other tools may be used to engage with your audience such as polls, games, questionnaires or call-to-actions inviting participants to take on next steps. Think about how you can spread moments of interaction throughout your event to maintain engagement and interest until the end.

Think about the resources that are available to you and what will get your audience motivated and excited! Remember that, both beforehand and once live, managing all the questions or comments coming in can be a big task! Think about having someone dedicated to the task who can share the questions with the moderator. Some software gives the ability to share them on the screen on demand. You can find more information about some of the tools to use below.

> "Don't wait until the event has started to get conversations flowing and to spark ideas"

Managing how and when people interact and engage with your online event more generally can also be challenging and needs some forward planning. One good way to ensure everyone can get the most out of your event is by giving clear instructions and guidelines. It is essential that everyone involved has the same expectations from the start, for example by providing a clear description and agenda for the event so that even participants who show up halfway through understand the format. This explanation can include whether and when participants can intervene, including information about how people can engage, for example on Facebook in the comment section, on Instagram in private message or by email.

It is also important that you share information in advance of the event so that participants are already aware of the structure, what's coming next and when it will end. It's a good idea to start your stream slightly earlier than your event is scheduled to allow you to build an audience before you start. This can be done through an agenda published upfront or shared on screen with key moments or topics to be discussed during your event.

The number of participants taking part in your online event should be directly related to the content and the type of engagement you wish to achieve. For example, if you're looking for your audience to debate and discuss, don't be afraid to organise smaller events. Other events aimed at raising awareness, educating on a topic or focusing on a few select guest speakers may be better suited for open to larger groups— just make sure the content and format is suitable for the audience you're expecting.

Also remember to be concise with your online events. If your offline events would last one hour, try making it into a 20-minute online event to keep the audience engaged throughout.

YOUR AUDIENCE

Who are you trying to reach with your event? In order to successfully attract the desired audience, think about which channels to advertise on and also when your audience will be available to take part in your event. What day of the week and what time your event happens can greatly affect the type of audience you will attract.

It can be difficult to maintain your audience's interest from the time the event is first advertised to when the event takes place. To make sure your audience keeps your event in mind and remembers to join on the day, have them sign up to your event in advance and keep them interested by sharing relevant information with them. It will help you know who is going to show up on the day to know what to expect and avoid losing attendees.

When you organise online events, especially larger events, online event participants can join in and leave in a click. It should not come as a frustration if few participants show up to your event. Take it as an opportunity to get your key messages across as often as possible to ensure everyone who attends takes away something from the event.

You want to reach as many people as possible, so make sure you consider barriers preventing certain people from taking part in your event such as the language you use or providing interpretation for the deaf community. Think of ways to make the content of your event as inclusive as possible by offering support, making the content available to those people with subtitles, making sure you read every question in full or answering questions and taking feedback and comments. Some software even offer the ability to have live, automated subtitles.

TECHNOLOGY AND SOFTWARES

The quality and professionalism of your video is key to ensure your audience stays engaged. One of the biggest failures in online events is when the presenter or speaker has poor video and sound. The best way to make sure it's going to go well is to test the video, microphones and internet connection multiple times before going live. You should also make sure you're familiar with the software and capabilities of your speakers and the team helping you.

Consider what software is going to work best for your format and also the software most accessible and familiar to your audience.

We've put together a list of the most popular options currently available that you may want to consider.

> The simplest option is normally the best option for a successful online event.

Live on social media

- **StreamYard**: allows to stream a video with multiple speakers on a Facebook Page, Group (but not to an Event), on YouTube and other platforms; it also lets you add titles and push comments from your social media on demand.

- **Facebook**: Facebook isn't normally the best platform to host your event, however many other providers, such as **Zoom**, allow you to stream to Facebook through their platform. Facebook is great to reach a bigger audience. Your existing audience will get a notification as soon as the event starts, and the video is available on your social media afterwards and can be reused on other platforms.

- **Instagram**: allows you to connect with your followers in real time for up to one hour. Once a live video has ended, it's no longer visible in the app, unless you share a replay of it to your story.

Conference softwares

- **Zoom**: proposes setup for conferences, webinars and meeting rooms as well as raising hand function, polls, for up to 100 participants and 40 minutes with their free version, and unlimited length videos with a premium account.

- **Skype**: now generates links for people to share and join in a conference without prior subscription. You can record a video of the event, which can be downloaded within 30 days and shared on other platforms.

- **ClickMeeting**: offers customised webinars and meetings, allows you to create different rooms, run pools, presentations and videos. It gives full administration control and up to 200 participants.

- **HowSpace**: is a virtual event space with different tools allowing online seminars, presentations. This solution is however expensive.

- **Discord**: is mostly used for chats while playing games but it can also be used to create meetings from small groups of ten participants to extremely large servers where thousands of people can connect in the same meeting and also, at the same time, in different meetings.

- **Google Hangout:** offers live subtitles and up to 25 participants who can interact all at the same time. Participants need Google accounts to take part.

- **Google Meet**: is easy to use, suitable for smaller meetings and allows screen sharing.

- **Messenger**: works well for group discussions and allows up to 50 friends to join from their phones or computers. They can choose to just listen in, join via voice or be on camera. Once more than 6 people are on the call, only the dominant speaker is shown to other participants.

Other educational tools

- **Mentimeter**: is a presentation software allowing interaction with participants. Recommended for quizzes, writing walls and word clouds from their phones while following the presentation.

- **Kahoot**: is a game-based learning platform for quizzes, assessments, etc.

- For more tools, visit **DigiYouth** website.

- **Mailchimp**, **SurveyMonkey**, **Poll Everywhere** and **Google Forms** are all great resources you can use to engage with your participants before, during and after your event.

PROMOTING YOUR ONLINE EVENT

Lots of organisations propose online events and it sometimes feels like a difficult task to get people's attention. Knowing your audience is the best way to be successful. Engage with your direct audience through newsletter, social media and website.

If your content is interesting and engaging your direct audience will help you by sharing your messaging. You can also involve your speakers and have them promote your event through their own channels.

You may also want to look out for partnerships. Partners could either help you out by simply promoting your event through their channels to their audience and crossposting your event from a Facebook page to theirs when it's live. Partners may also be involved directly, as co-host to your event, bringing different inputs and perspectives or taking responsibility for some of the organisational tasks.

"Build your reputation, organise professional events and listen to feedback. If people enjoy your events, they're more likely to be there for the next one"

Connecting participants with the event will also encourage them to show up. Organising polls or quizzes before the event will attract people to your event and generate discussion.

If your event is targeted for a wider audience, and you have the finances to afford to, social media advertising could be a good way of reaching new people. Facebook and Instagram are the natural platforms most dominated by young people and you can find more information here.

HOW TO PREPARE

Being prepared is important to making your event a success. Make sure you allow enough time before to meet with your speakers, familiarise each of them with the agenda and questions and the format of the event. If you have a key message you want them to get across in their answers make sure you tell them before you begin.
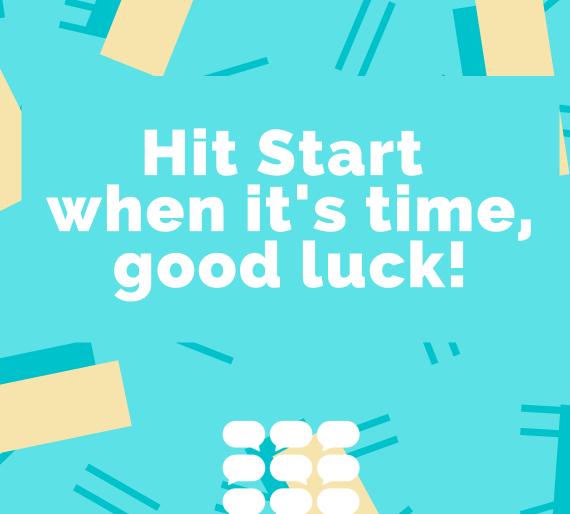
A good idea is to do a small rehearsal. You could ask one warm up question to get the speakers ready while also allowing you to check the connection, audio and video of the speakers. The Verge has recently released a handy video guide on how to get the most out of your home office equipment when taking part in a webinar, you can find it <u>here</u>.

And don't forget, it's not always going to go to plan. It's OK if the dog starts barking in the background or if your phone rings- just handle the situation peacefully, be transparent to participants and get back to your topic as soon as you can.

EVALUATION

The best way to keep improving your events is to ask your participants about the event. After each event take time with the speakers and team members to discuss what went well, what could be done better and what you can change for next time. Also, ask your audience for their feedback. Launch questionnaires, sample the audience and take their advice and ideas into consideration to make the best online events you can!

Hit Start
when it's time,
good luck!

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