

Connectivity in Crisis: A Guide to Creating Online Events

Many financial services firms rely on business-critical ‘owned’ events to build relationships, share thought leadership and fundraise. In the past few weeks, we have been asked for guidance on how to convert an in-person event into an online experience and this guide is designed to help you with that. For example, how can marketing teams take a two-day investor summit and bring it to life via live streaming?

As we all do our part and learn to navigate our remote operating reality, we wanted to share our best practices and creative ideas to enable teams to produce events with business impact that also delight attendees:

01 Find the story

Take a step back from your original event — what were the three or four key messages you wanted to convey? Peel back the bulk of the content and uncover these priorities first. Then build a talk track or story board around these. As much as possible, also try to repurpose your original material — waste not, want not!

02 Help your presenters capture the audience

Most spokespeople have had media training and been on broadcast TV before, but few have spent time presenting to a computer screen. They will need a few tips to deliver the content well and in an engaging manner. First, just like a satellite interview, they should look directly into the camera, not at the screen. Second, good lighting is critical, as is wearing the right plain clothes and considering the view behind the camera.

03 Use the right technology

To successfully stream for two hours you need the right tech platform and bandwidth. We don't want any glitches, so get this right and stress test it beforehand. Some examples of proven platforms are:

LinkedIn Live — LinkedIn's Live offering allows firms to “go live” for up to four hours at a time and interact with attendees in real-time via the chat tool. A newer format of the platform, Lives, can help expand the reach of content. LinkedIn's algorithm tends to favor livestreams, which can also be promoted by your own LinkedIn page to expand reach.

YouTube Livestream — YouTube allows any channel to go live at any time, for any reason and is a great way to promote a firm's channel. Similar to LinkedIn, YouTube offers a live chat feature which defaults to “on” mode for all streams. All channel followers will be able to view the livestream, which can also be found on the YouTube Live main landing page, depending upon the number of viewers.

Preferred Videoconferencing System — The firm's existing videoconference partner should be considered for use in a scheduled, live consideration. Preferred and proven platforms include Vimeo Livestream with Studio 6, WebEx Events and WebEx Training Center, Zoom, Blue Jeans, Go To Meeting, and Slack.

04 Think creatively

Can you extend the life of the event before and after a live stream by creating supplemental videos? Shoot the videos remotely, have them edited professionally and keep them short — 60 seconds or less is good practice. Once you have created the content and to add to the audience experience, each video can be shared for attendees to watch in advance and/or after the event. If appropriate, repurpose timely content on social channels, especially LinkedIn. Use any questions/ comments shared in the livestream to inform future content creation, such as developing a blog post or video to present insights on key topics shared by the audience.

05 Involve compliance early

Seek approval for your content in advance from your compliance team and give them the time they will need to review the materials. Again, this team will also be remote in uncharted territory, so add a buffer.

Other Key Considerations

01. THE STORY

Understand what works online, and what doesn't: Such as panels! Take the topic and find another way to convey its key message in a shorter and more concise manner. Maybe ask one panelist to gather ideas and perspectives from the original group and build a short presentation. That way participants still get the range of perspectives in a tighter framework. Think about how this content could be translated into materials that could be used on the firm's social channels, such as blog posts, images, or videos.

Keep your keynotes: Inviting a big name to your event to delight your portfolio CEOs or investors? Don't cancel — instead ask them to make a preproduced short video with a tailored message and set of insights specific to your audience. Save this exciting content for the middle or end of the program — it will reignite engagement if it's waning. It could also live on your firm's website or be made available for the exclusive group of those who have registered for the site, allowing for email capture and continued communications.

Understand the need for brevity: Attention spans are shorter online than they are in-person. Given that your event is highly tailored to the audience, you can run between two and two and a half hours in length. According to Stanford Business author Matt Abrahams, audiences begin to lose attention after roughly 10 minutes of hearing from the same presenter.

Active engagement: To combat the aforementioned ten-minute attention span, we recommend live streaming the event to maintain spontaneity and authenticity. Field questions in advance and throughout to create live audience engagement, let them know that their question will be asked and alert them just beforehand so they know they are dealing with a human versus a chat bot. Pause for questions wherever possible, to maintain audience engagement for the length of the presentation.

Multimedia and interactivity: Use images, videos and live polls in the live stream content, and if possible, set up a chat feature to allow real time audience engagement. Encourage presenters to refer to the live stream comments and poll results during the sessions. Call out key comments or questions as they arrive in the chat, demonstrating the interactivity of the livestream and keeping audience interest level high.

02. PRESENTERS

Additional innovative uses of virtual events: Examples from our network

- Investor days
- Virtual fundraising
- Portfolio company engagement and support
- Internal new product demonstrations

03. TECHNOLOGY

Technology is amazing... until it isn't, so make sure all of the features you need are working. Record your practice using the recording feature of your tool and then watch and listen to learn what works and what you can improve. Run through it and then run through it again.

Adhere to best practices: The most successful livestreams feature clean, professional backgrounds and are captured with high-quality webcams such as the Logitech BRIO.

The IT crowd: Have your IT team available to deal with technical issues should they arise — also have someone from IT available to field any questions or technical difficulties guest may be having before and during the session.

Use 'dark' posting: Social media platforms allow for "dark posting" which means that only a precise audience will be served the content. To keep the gathering to the original invitee list, create a CSV file featuring all attendees email addresses and set up the dark post, so that it is served to this database only.

04. CREATIVITY

But don't forget the basics: A strong agenda will tell people what they can expect and provide a guide as to when the subject matter will change. Remember to factor in short breaks and manage transitions between content to ensure it's smooth. Without an MC to guide, the audience movement from one topic to another becomes more critical.

Advance team: Send materials in advance including any other long form content such as a backgrounder on the subject and bios of the speakers. This will allow presenters to get to the good stuff quicker. Advance materials also allow people to get excited and ready to engage with the event.

Promote the stream: Inform the attendees about the livestream by communicating with them via email or dark social posts frequently leading up to the event. Use calendar tools and reminders to drive attendance on the day-of.

05. COMPLIANCE

Remember to disclaim: Be clear on what you are saying/ promising in prepared materials as well as in live content. The access to an online event can be shared via links, so using disclaimer language is more important than ever.

Determine ability to comment: Ensure compliance is aligned with including the ability to comment within the livestream, as well as allowing the presenters to respond on-the-fly. Note that comments can be disabled if need be, but this will likely be detrimental to engagement.

Isolation is required to protect the most vulnerable members of our communities, but by thoughtfully demonstrating how valuable connections can still be made in financial services, we may just be able to create memorable moments of magic and positivity that will resonate.