

Tips for Planning Large, Online Events

1. Start Planning Early – All of the wisdom of the internet dictates that if you are planning an annual, regional, industry conference, then planning should never stop. At the very least, you should designate 8-12 months to properly plan events, especially those with new elements like online presentations, ones with changing budgets, or that have scheduling changes.

2. Assess your planning committee's skill-sets up-front and lean on their strengths. Make definitive assignments that take advantage each person's particular set of skills. If you are lacking, it may mean that you need to take on additional, external partners.

3. Learn from other people's mistakes – One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, there are many examples of successful and unsuccessful virtual events. Learn from the mistakes of others by actively connecting with the people who planned them.

4. Require presentation facilitators – If you are having a guest speaker or presenter at your meeting or conference that requires technical abilities, require them to provide their own facilitator to run things like breakout rooms, whiteboard sessions, question and answer sessions and others --- you may find that your in-house staff does not have the technical capabilities to keep up.

5. Google It! --- If you feel like a technical aspect of putting on a presentation is over your head, Google it, watch a YouTube tutorial on it, whatever it takes, put yourself in the best possible position to be successful by building your own personal well of knowledge.

6. Pay extra for the tech support --- many online platforms offer technical assistance at an extra expense. It may be worth your while to invest in professional support, especially when putting on your first online conference or meeting.

7. Plan on having to technologically educate your attendees. This means knowing who will be attending well in advance and holding online training sessions in logging-into and using the features of your online



broadcasting platform. Do not simply send instructional emails and hope that attendees will open it – This is asking for trouble and a poor user experience.

8. Budget for the worst-case scenario. This means having a contingency fund to cover things like refunds in case of emergency cancellation of the event, designating money for technical assistance, possible employee overtime or flex-time for planning and etc.

9. Even when all things seem to be going according to plan, expect the unexpected. If an unanticipated problem should arise during your event, there is not much you can do other than think on your toes, troubleshoot quickly, and try to power through it.

10. Gather Feedback. The worst possible thing you could do is repeat the same mistakes twice. Don't be afraid to send follow-up surveys to all parties involved – speakers, sponsors, exhibitors and attendees. This should provide a first-steps guide in planning for next year's event and set you up for success. There's no better way to find out what was successful and unsuccessful than asking the people who were there.

