



Back onstage: A case for connection in live events

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In the year where all live events quickly switched from in-person to virtual (and boy, was that rapid switch fun!), one interesting development was the use of crowdsourcing to fulfill the need for connection while people were so far apart.

But let's **step back a moment.**

Way back to 2019 – can you even remember before 2020?

In-person events were everywhere and they were hot! Breakouts empowered attendees, evenings were loaded with fun activities and of course, lobby bars were packed to the hilt. Attendees enjoyed breakfast, lunch and dinner together as well as networking conversations with peers between sessions.

On stage in general sessions, company objectives were pursued: inspire attendees and drive results. Many events did this successfully through leadership keynotes, relying on key stakeholders to signal directional shifts and inspire change among attendees. But it was often difficult to find events with anything other than a top-down approach. If attendees were featured onstage, it was typically for winning an award and their time to speak was limited to maintain the overall event schedule.

If there was one thing missing in pre-COVID events, it was putting attendees on stage, giving them a chance to genuinely connect with the larger audience in a peer-to-peer fashion.

So... **what happened in 2020?**

What happened? We needed – no, we craved – and demanded connection. There was no lobby bar, no foyer encounters, no fun activities with fellow attendees. Suddenly the lack of attendees seeing themselves in what was happening onstage became obvious. Sure, we still needed to hear from leadership but attendees needed a way to connect with their fellow eventgoers.

So, what did we do? We put more attendees “onstage,” even if that stage was virtual. We created fun award highlight reels with crowdsourced videos from around the world. We had amazing and quick rapid-fire interviews of attendees and co-workers who had never met each other. We had chats, trivia, spontaneous interviews, Q&As and panels. We created videos with crowdsourced dance compilations, song compilations, the children of employees, employees’ home lives and more.

Attendees needed connection and we made it happen – even from hundreds and thousands of miles away.



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Where do we go **from here**?

In-person and hybrid events are back and people are jumping in headfirst. Everyone is ready to see each other in person. We all want to get back to those chance encounters at the buffet line!

But let's not lose sight of what we've gained: Focusing on attendees generated **great** results. By guests seeing their fellow attendees "onstage," they felt closer to the event. **It was their event versus something they passively attended.** They had a stake in the event and loved seeing each other join in with leadership.

When you think about your upcoming in-person and hybrid events, find ways to get your attendees "onstage." But here's the trick: attendees don't always need to physically walk onstage and speak. Yes, you can have attendees onstage in a panel, receiving an award or interviewing each other – all excellent ideas. But you can also borrow from the 2020 virtual event playbook and get some great videos ahead of time to share before, during and after the event. Show attendees in their home cities, consider videos of families and pets or share best practices from their working environments. Think about recording attendees, asking each other why they are excited about the upcoming event for a pre-communications hype piece. Or capture attendees discussing key takeaways on site for a powerful post-event follow-up.

The options are endless. Your audience will feel more connected to the event, their peers and ultimately your organization.

The goal: Let your attendees take the stage.

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