

# Living in a **hybrid** world



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Entering into a worldwide pandemic this past year forced an unprecedented shift into virtual events large and small.

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Though hosting a virtual event was certainly not a new concept in 2020, for most organizations it was something they had never tried before. Whether you like or dislike virtual, the necessity of engaging a distanced audience spurred an emergence of creativity and innovation as well as the revelation that online events could reach a **vastly greater audience** far beyond the traditional on-site event, with valuable metrics to prove it.

So now that vaccination is in full force across the globe and the hopeful potential of reassembling audiences face-to-face in some capacity is back in consideration for 2021 and 2022, how do we take what we have learned this past year and begin the cautious step towards uniting a limited live audience with their peers who still feel unsafe to travel?

## Enter **hybrid**.

Simply put, hybrid is the concept of producing a live on-site event in front of an audience who has traveled to a predetermined location and integrating it with a virtual audience that cannot attend in person for whatever reason. We believe it is safe to say that **the future is now and now is hybrid**, not just because COVID-19 has generated the undeniable necessity in this time to generate opportunities for both types of audiences but that there is a much greater, forward-thinking place for hybrid in the years ahead.

Research proves that on-site events are hugely effective and there is no question that attending a live event is largely preferred but think about the potential! At any given user event it is likely that only a small fraction of your customer base can take the valuable time to attend or can afford the spend. So why leave them out? Or perhaps you want to reward the top performing 30% of your sales force with an on-site event and the remaining 70% attends virtually? The concept of hybrid allows for **more capacity** spanning a greater internal and external customer base with trackable engagement as well as a valuable repository for event content.

As we approach the return to in-person gatherings, a number of production companies and in-house audio-visual providers are offering a seemingly hybrid solution. But just as with a live event, we'd advise you to consider which hybrid solution offers the best experience for your audience. To help, here are a few popular yet often times ineffective assumptions we're seeing:

assumption  
**1**

### **I just need a virtual stream for my general sessions.**

Setting up a camera and sending a feed out to your virtual audience means passive engagement. This is an antiquated tactic. A program feed of your sessions is important but how do you bring your virtual audience into the live proceedings? How do they participate in the





whole of the event beyond the general sessions? How do they feel like their voice matters from wherever they are? How are they included in the action?

## assumption 2

### **My virtual audience is not as important as my live audience.**

The first inclination is to put the majority of your efforts and budget into what occurs at the live event. It is important to keep in mind that there is a very high possibility your virtual audience may be significantly larger than your on-site audience – so why consider your virtual attendees as an afterthought? Create purposeful engagement using the tools and platforms introduced this past year. Organize and produce event content that integrates both audiences so they feel connected, respected and equally informed. And finally, produce an event that has the best interests of both audiences in time scheduling, networking, special guests and activities.

## assumption 3

### **My virtual audience will be the only attendees using the online platform.**

This is a false assumption but can certainly be the overwhelming result if proper thought and planning is not invested into the online experience. It is vitally important to think about developing an online experience that can be used by both audiences simultaneously. Just because I am live in the audience doesn't mean I can't be chatting with my virtual peers while we watch a particular session. The same Q&A and polling opportunities should be available to both audiences and online content can be just as valuable on-site as off-site. Virtual tradeshow or expo booths can be a direct compliment to on-site, in-person booths for access to both audiences and there are methods for recruiting an on-site representative to serve as the "eyes and the ears" of the virtual attendee. Think about the post-engagement opportunities through the online environment as well – certification, follow-up break-out content, recaps, downloadable content and more.

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All of these assumptions contain important items to consider and depending on how you choose to execute them, will make the difference between a successful and not so successful hybrid event.

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