



Are Webinars Dead?

*How to Choose the Right Format for
Your Next Virtual Event*

Is a webinar the right solution for your next virtual event, or are you looking to do something different?

Use this guide to choose the format that will help you achieve your event and business goals.

2020 was a year like no other in modern times. Business travel shut down almost completely, and many of our traditional ways of doing business were forced to change.

The webinar was one of the tools that really shone in the initial phases of the pandemic, helping many businesses to stay in front of their customers. A tried and tested tool, it let businesses reach their audiences immediately, projecting their messages out to the world.

But as time went on, we all started to feel the limits of the webinar format: one-way communication, no sense of connection or community, why-watch-now-when-it's-recorded-anyway,

Is the webinar dead?

Not at all. But we've discovered there are different ways to communicate in the virtual world, and if you only consider webinars, you're missing a lot of possibilities, possibilities for real interaction with your audience. So let's have a look at the pros and cons of each of the main tools for online events - the webinar, the meeting, and the interactive virtual event - so that you can decide which one is best for your particular event.

When you're putting on a virtual event, three factors should guide your choice of format: content, connection, and community.

CONTENT

People will attend your virtual event if you're offering content they find valuable or interesting. This might be information or a topic that's interesting in its own right, such as a case study on a state-of-the-art installation or innovative use of technology. It can be a presentation by a highly respected expert or business leader. Or perhaps it's a talk by a dynamic speaker who is well-known for being edgy or entertaining. If you're lucky, you've got all three of those elements!

CONNECTION

In today's world, where in-person industry events have become rare, connection can be a vital part of a virtual event. In addition to providing participants with information they want or need, a virtual event can foster a greater sense of connection among industry colleagues. Because the level of connection varies across different formats, it's important to identify the appropriate or desired level of connection and choose the event format accordingly.

COMMUNITY

Creating a sense of community might be considered the most impressive achievement for a virtual event, as it comes closest to replicating the experience of attending an in-person conference, trade show, or meeting. In some cases, this is the true goal of hosting an event – not just creating engagement in the moment but building on interactions throughout various elements of the event to build a community around the event.

Today, the webinar, meeting, and interactive virtual event represent your three basic options for a virtual event. Read on to find out how each of these formats delivers in terms of content, connection, and connectivity – and how to choose the right format for your next event.

The Webinar

The webinar is a great virtual event format when your primary goal is to push out content. The main focus of the event is to offer information, largely through one-way communication.

WEBINAR

a live online educational presentation during which participating viewers can submit questions and comments
(m-w.com)

Webinars typically include a presentation, sometimes with slides or video, by one or more speakers. During the event, video and audio are off for all participants but the speakers. Most webinars conclude with a Q&A session during which speakers take a curated set of questions gathered via the videoconference platform's chat function.

Oftentimes, webinar participants experience the event alone, unaware of who else is on the call or how many other people are attending. They have few, if any, opportunities to speak. If the event is open to a wide variety of participants – possibly competitors, possibly strangers from different industries – then limited interaction and discussion likely is desirable.

Because you can organize and host a webinar quite quickly these days, you can use this format to share timely content with a large audience. The Q&A at the end gives presenters the opportunity to address participants' most common questions, and this slice of interactivity is what elevates the webinar above a prerecorded presentation posted to a video sharing site.

The Meeting

MEETING

an act or process of coming together: such as an assembly for a common purpose

(m-w.com)

The meeting is an excellent option when a greater sense of connection is an important part of the event. Content is important, but it's not the only reason for participating.

Appropriate for groups ranging from handful of people to a couple of hundred, a meeting on any one of today's popular platforms typically gives participants the opportunity to contribute. Though people may choose to mute their mics and turn off their video, only interacting when necessary, they can still see that they are part of a larger group – perhaps part of the same industry, association, or company.

Although participants may know they are joining the meeting with colleagues, and maybe friends too, they typically need to use an additional, separate, platform to connect with one another. They might opt to use text or email one another if they want to have a private discussion or communicate on a more personal level.

In most cases, the meeting format allows organizers or presenters to welcome guests personally as they join, carry on a dialog in the meeting chat, and highlight particular speakers or panelists.

Like a webinar, a meeting is an event you can put together fairly quickly. More complex meetings involving multiple speakers and multiple topics will require more advance planning and a greater degree of event-day coordination.

The Interactive Virtual Event

The interactive virtual event is an ideal format when content and connection are important, and when building or extending a sense of community is also a priority. (It addresses all three Cs!)

An interactive virtual event is held in an environment that typically features a main presentation area, or main stage, and a variety of meeting rooms that can be used for additional presentations, smaller meetings on focused topics, social and networking functions, product and technology demos, and more.

Two key characteristics of this environment are that participants can 1) navigate freely from room to room and 2) see which participants are in which meeting rooms or presentation areas. With these capabilities comes the possibility of the chance encounter – meeting up with a friend or colleague unexpectedly, just as you often have in the halls of a conventional trade show.

INTERACTIVE VIRTUAL EVENT

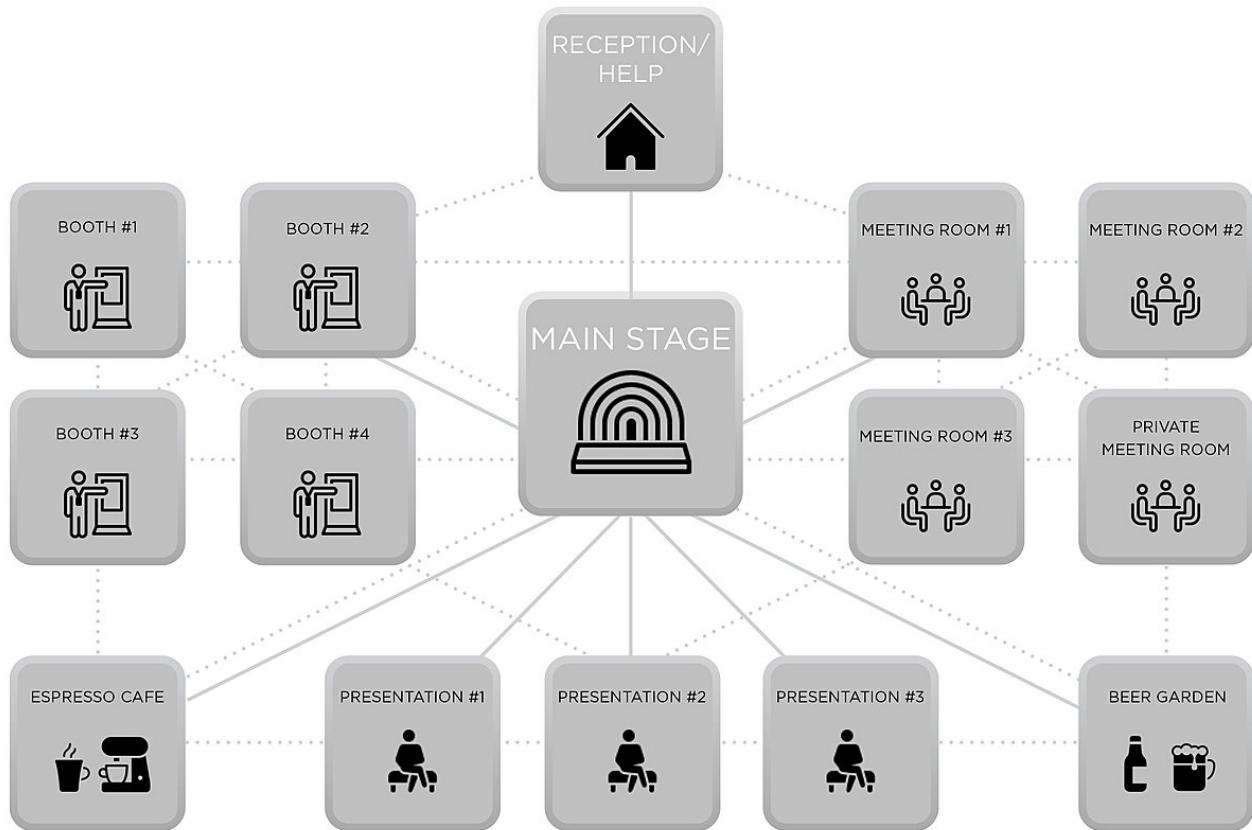
a live gathering on an online platform during which participants have the freedom to engage naturally with one another via video and chat across multiple themed or topic-oriented meeting areas

As an organizer, you can use this variation on an in-person event to extend the reach of your event to a much broader audience. Now able to attend virtually, without the time and cost required by travel, people from around the world can join in professional education, training, sales kick-offs, channel partner events, professional conferences, and any number of other events.

The interactive virtual event ensures that as participants gather around common

interests, they have the freedom to shape their own experiences through a mix of professional and social connection. Cumulatively, these interactions contribute to a stronger sense of community. When in-person events do return, this format likely will continue to provide value as a uniquely accessible and flexible environment in which to meet, connect, and engage.

Naturally, this type of event is made up of many moving parts and requires a more significant commitment of time and talent than does a webinar or meeting. In most cases an interactive virtual event calls for advance planning and promotions; coordination with presenters, and possibly vendors, sponsors, or exhibitors; and training of dedicated event staff.





If you're interested in learning more about
which event format is right for you,
we can help!

We can work with you to identify and
design the right format and features for
your next event.

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