

# MASTERING THE UNPREDICTABLE FOR EVENTS IN A DELTA-VARIANT WORLD



# INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 Delta variant cases are on a rise across the globe. It is now reported to be present in 135 countries. [More than 80% of new cases in the US are from this strain](#). The often changing safety-related restrictions and guidelines are forcing event planners to rethink their event strategy.

This feels like a deja vu moment from not too long ago. We may face the wrath of canceled events and an unpredictable future once again if our event plans don't factor in this new reality.

The good news is that you don't need to put a break to your event plans due

to the uncertainty. Your event strategy can still be deployed to deliver business results. Event professionals are pros at adapting and innovating. And we've all gained a great deal of collective learning in the last two years. The entire event industry has seen a shift and evolution like no other.

It's high time to put this cumulative knowledge into practice to immunize your event strategy from the Delta variant. Event planners must recalibrate, reimagine, and reinvent event strategies to stay relevant in these unpredictable times.

The show must go on.

# LET'S KEEP IT ROLLING WITH VIRTUAL



In 2021, not having a virtual component in your event strategy is equivalent to not having social media as a marketing channel. According to a study done last year, **66.5% of event professionals said that they plan to use hybrid as their go-to format even after in-person events resume.**

An event consultant was recently quoted saying, "...we have a nonprofit client who went from one fundraising moment a year at their annual gala to multiple fundraising moments throughout the year through a combination of virtual and small, intimate IRL events when restrictions allowed. They actually ended up exceeding their fundraising goals in 2020 by completely reinventing their entire strategy.

Virtual isn't a short-term fix. It is a long-term trend that will continue. The global virtual events market size was valued at \$77.98 billion in 2019 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 23.2% from 2020 to 2027, as per Grand View Research 2020.

Despite the rise of virtual events, few organizations have mastered them. One reason is that even for basic events, there are many ingredients needed for success, and even more so when the event is online. But there are always a few basic principles that when put to use increase your chances of success.

Virtual events can be boring or buzzing, full of awkward silences or amazing conversations. They can be anywhere on the spectrum - from blah, uninspiring, lackluster to engrossing, energizing, and lively. If you feel a little lost or overwhelmed when it comes to virtual events best practices, we've got you covered.

From Apple WWDC to Tomorrowland, some virtual events took the events world by storm. And we've uncovered a few best practices from such events that will set your event strategy up for success.



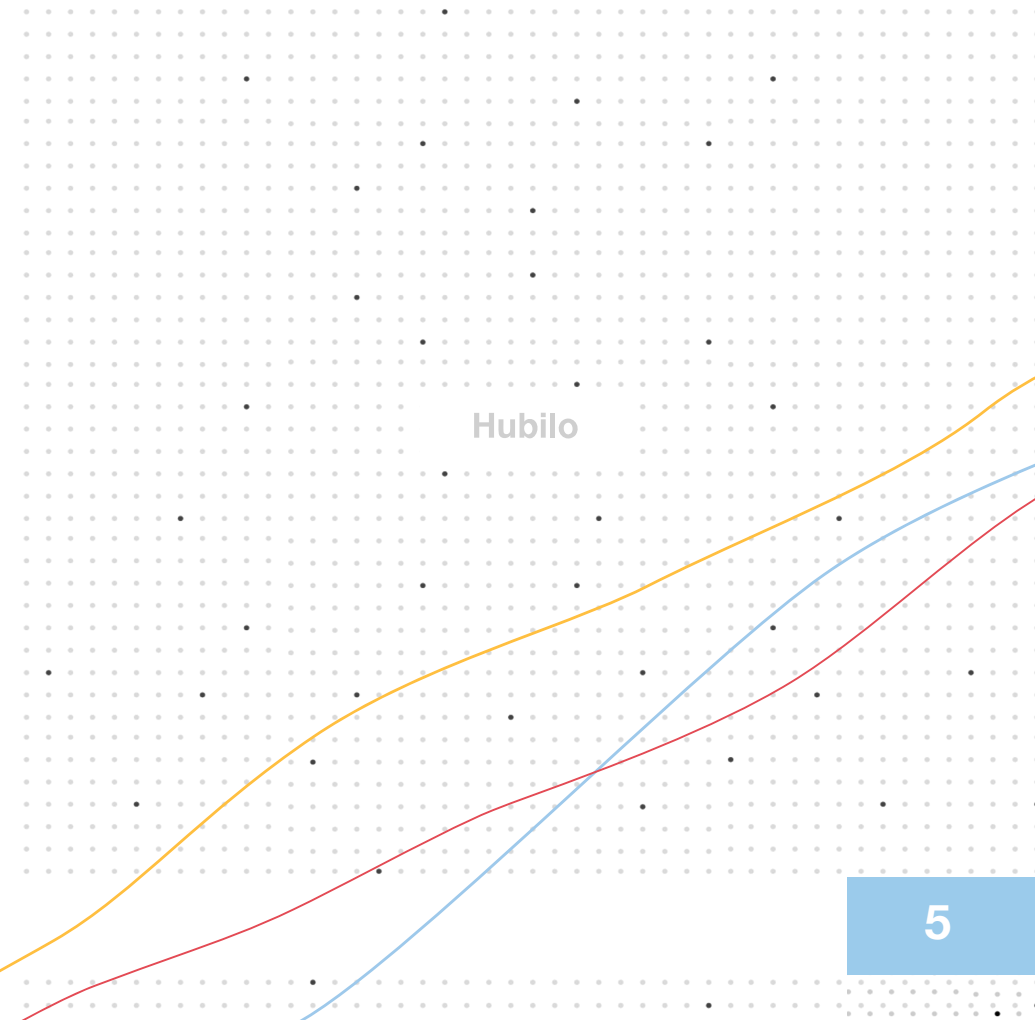
## 1. Use first principles thinking

Elon Musk has been vouching for [first principles thinking](#) for years now. Simply put, it is a way of thinking like a scientist - without any assumptions, without any analogies, and by starting with the most fundamental questions. It's a framework that drives innovation and new ideas.

When planning virtual events, don't try to replicate an in-person experience. Don't draw parallels and think of using old analogies. The new digitally transformed world needs you to reimagine events starting from scratch. Consciously avoid falling into the trap of - 'we've always done it that way'.

When Gainsight organized its annual Pulse event in 2020, it went virtual and [it went at it with a beginner's mind](#) and asked: "Should we do one day vs multiple days? Live or recorded? How do we provide digital networking? How should

we think about the sponsor/booth experience? Should the event be free or should it require a fee? How are we thinking about the experience for prospects and customers? We changed many of the key tenets of Pulse as we originally planned and kept others that made sense for the new format."





## 2. Create memorable experiences

Tomorrowland is one of the biggest EDM events in the world. It went virtual last year. The team wanted to “make sure festival visitors will be able to feel they are being part of something larger than their computer and their internet connection.” So, it created a virtual 3D island, named Pāpiliōnem, with special effects, fireworks, laser shows, sound effects, and much more for its over 2.8M attendees.

[As per their official website](#), it is “a magical island shaped like a butterfly featuring beaches, night skies, mountains, forest sunsets – with a true game feel. Festival visitors will be able to navigate easily through the island with a PC, laptop, smartphone, or tablet – you don’t need special VR goggles – and explore the entire festival site in an interactive way together with friends, experiencing all four seasons within a single day trip.”

While creating a virtual island isn’t feasible for everyone, creating novel, fun, immersive, and branded experiences should be your top priority.



### 3. Focus on engagement

Good attendee engagement is a KPI for most events' success. But let's be honest. It's a tough job to crack. Keeping attendees engaged at virtual events seems even harder. But virtual event platforms built for deep engagement can make highly interactive virtual events possible.

[Events. Reimagined.](#), Hubilo's launch to introduce a futuristic approach to events, is one such example. 8 sessions, nearly 2000 attendees, ~8000 profile views, and 3 hours later, we had a chat window that kept buzzing with conversation, and attendees that were brimming with excitement.

Here are a few things that helped us take [audience engagement](#) through the roof and can help you too:

1. Define what audience engagement means for your event. Make it someone's job to drive it.

2. Work with experienced, high-energy event hosts. We co-hosted the entire event with [the Drag Taste](#) who joined us live from Lisbon and kept the virtual venue buzzing with excitement.

3. Make space for attendees to be 'actors' instead of 'observers'. Encourage conversations in the chat window, run interesting polls and contests, and ask questions during sessions that attendees can respond to.

4. Facilitate pre, during, and post-event networking options to encourage conversations and connections.

5. Craft an audience-friendly agenda. Plan insightful and intriguing content.

6. Use gamification to incentivize engagement. Plan some swag and surprise prizes for participation.

7. Master the art of personalized notifications. This ensures attendees know what's happening across the event and how to derive maximum value for themselves.

8. Host a fun party at your event. We stepped up our engagement game with some charged performances from the Drag Taste, a comedy act by [Richard Sarvate](#), and a magic show by [Johnny Wu](#).





## 4. Think mobile-first

For the last two years, more than 50% of the global website traffic comes from mobile devices. And in the US, out of 5 trillion web visits in 2020, 61% came from mobile. We know it's a mobile-first world. And we must adapt virtual events to serve audiences on the devices they prefer to use.

Apple WWDC set a great example for this that we can all learn from. Whether you chose to attend on an iPhone, iPad, AppleTV devices, or desktop, Apple ensured everyone had a consistent UX and content delivery.

No attendee should feel left out or be unable to access the entire event experience. Think about how your mobile audience will interact with your content? Are your networking options optimized to be delivered on mobile? What's the audience experience like while exploring lounges, breakout rooms, or virtual booths?

Adopting a mobile-first approach is even more important for hybrid events because your event app is the glue to keep your virtual and in-person attendees together.

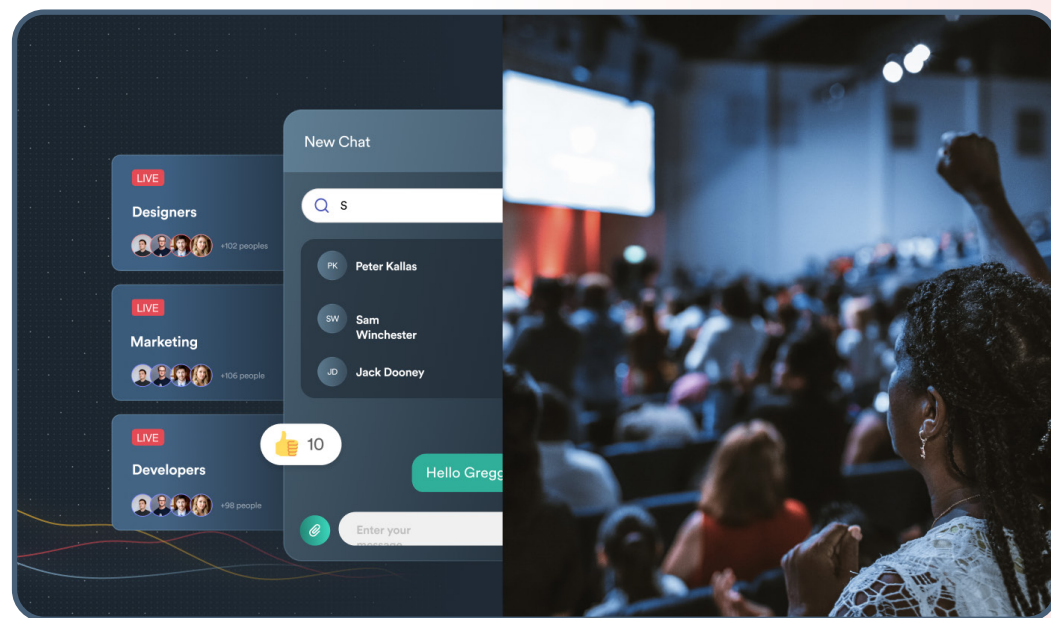


## 5. Go for shorter, crisper sessions

What makes more sense for a virtual event format than having shorter sessions? You don't need 40-minute keynotes or 20-minute talks. The shorter your session lengths, the more engaged and attentive your attendees will be.

To keep a virtual audience engaged, keeping the event momentum high is a must-do. Keep the event agenda moving at a good pace. Mix up session formats to give audiences a variety. And if you can deliver value in 5 minutes, do exactly that.

Talking of session lengths, [a WWDC attendee said](#), “I think the best change was the addition of smaller, more focused talks. I watched a 6-minute talk that was exactly what I needed for a project, and I can't see how a talk like that could happen at a live conference.”



## 6. Make your brand shine

One of the most effective ways to raise brand awareness and establish a connection between the company and its target customers is through events. Attendees should quickly link your virtual event with your brand when they log in. And this connection must be strong and consistent throughout the attendee's journey.

[Salesforce hosted its annual conference Dreamforce virtually in 2020.](#) It ensured that going virtual didn't mean any compromise on branding. From hearing about the conference on social media, the landing page, the actual virtual venue, the in-session look and feel, to the post-event on-demand content page - every touchpoint for an attendee screams Salesforce. Marc Benioff's speaking stage even features [Astro](#), one of Salesforce's characters.



While selecting a virtual platform for your event, ensure that you look for one with many custom branding capabilities. A generic platform just won't cut it.

- Make the event platform your own by adding your company's colours, fonts, and imagery.
- Spend time branding your landing page and customizing background images on the virtual event platform.
- Think about how best to integrate your brand in all the session livestreams.

## 7. Get social media to work for you

3.96 billion people, about 58% of the world population, across the globe use social media across different platforms. Social media serves many purposes - from event promotion, brand exposure, buzz-creation, attendee engagement to sharing valuable content with audiences post-event.

HubSpot, the marketing software company, cracked it well when it went virtual with its annual marketing conference [INBOUND 2020](#). A month prior to the event, there was a flurry of activity on social media. HubSpot invited guests to join its INBOUND Facebook group where attendees from around the world could connect, start conversations, and exchange ideas.

On Instagram, they posted frequently throughout the event duration. And their team created a variety of shareable content pieces about

learnings from the event, speaker highlights, session takeaways, etc. It made it easy for attendees to share about the event on their Instagram stories without putting in much effort.

Three social media best practices you'd want your team to follow:

- Engage with attendees pre, during, and post-event by posting interesting content on different social media channels.
- Create shareable and share-worthy content that attendees can repost. This will help you increase your event reach manyfold by turning attendees into virtual influencers for the event.
- Ensure your team engages (via likes, comments, shares) in a timely manner with all event related posts generated by users.



## 8. Make event content available on-demand

Take inspiration from [HPE's first-ever global virtual event](#) with 200+ sessions available on-demand post-event. Users can register to even 'relive the experience' in its entirety.

Making content available on-demand right after your event, helps you with four things:

- Open up a new lead generation channel for your business.
- Generate good-quality website traffic.
- Provide higher ROI to your event partners and sponsors.
- Increase brand awareness for months to come.

It is easier to do this if you have pre-recorded sessions. And it may take you a few days if your entire event was live. But you must plan to share your event content on-demand after the event. It will drive immense value for the marketing & sales teams and a higher ROI for event organizers.



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# WHEN YOU CAN, HOST HYBRID EVENTS



The ever evolving regulations and safety guidelines issued by leading health organizations do not mean that in-person events are impossible. You can encourage small and intimate in-person watch parties for self-organizing groups with similar interests and with similar levels of comfort for vaccinations and social distancing. Leverage this opportunity and support these local community gatherings of people with shared interests by offering to ship swag to their event, giving them registration pages, have food delivered while they're watching your event. It can lead to deeply meaningful conversations and loyalty to your brand.

With the power of video streaming and virtual networking, you can bring in the best aspects of virtual events and engage with a far wider audience. Thanks to the flexibility and scale a hybrid format provides, you can now host multiple regional watch party events where local



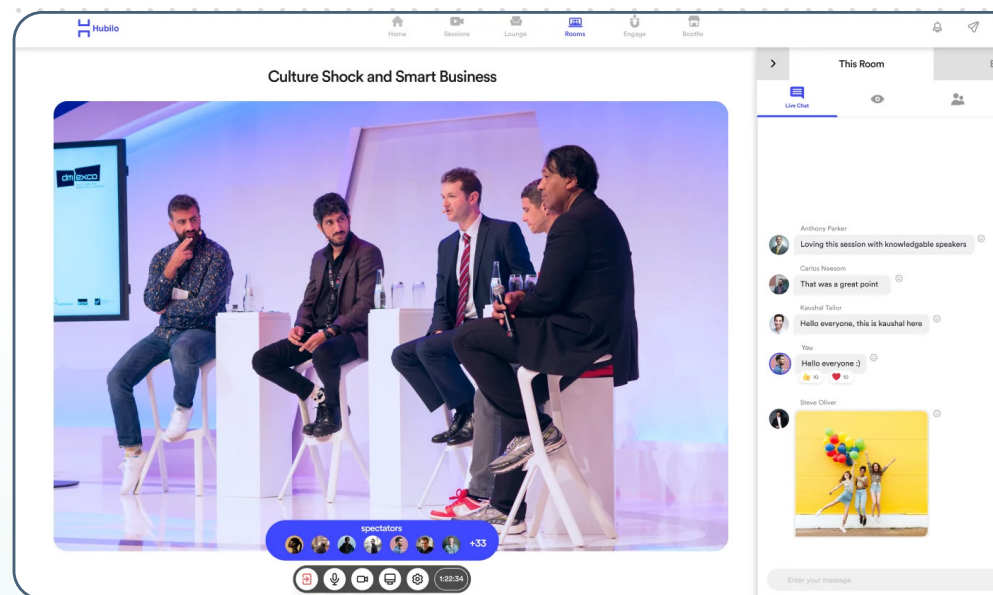
attendees can come together in person. And broadcast the content from all the regional in-person events to the virtual audiences through a single main event.

Such hybrid events create a more personalized experience for all the in-person attendees. Even the virtual attendees get the feeling of being a part of a larger, global community of like-minded people.

Associations and nonprofits utilize regional community events quite well to boost memberships and increase member engagement. A few tips that could help you manage local communities at events:

- Celebrate the uniqueness of each local community and encourage them to share it with their individual networks too.
- Create local community chapters and encourage them to embrace virtual networking to stay connected post-event.

- Host frequent virtual meetups to engage with the regional communities regularly and make them an integral part of your ongoing campaigns. This helps build communities with a high degree of trust and transparency.



# DON'T BE CONSTRAINED BY YOUR VIRTUAL EVENT PLATFORM



The virtual event landscape is super dynamic and evolving at a breakneck speed. And some event professionals are getting really creative to make the most of this opportunity. Adopting event best practices mentioned in this e-book and learning on the go will be critical in succeeding with your renewed event strategy.

In the virtual world, it's really true - if you can dream it, you can do it. Don't be constrained by technology, let it enable you. Choose a virtual event technology platform that empowers you to experiment with new ideas, makes your brand shine, gives you plenty of engagement options, and provides you with all the customer support you need pre, during, or post-event.

Get your creative juices flowing. And remember to recalibrate, reimagine, reinvent your events strategy. With a powerful virtual event platform by your side, your imagination is your only limitation.



## ABOUT HUBILO

Hubilo is the only all-in-one hybrid event platform built to drive engagement - and we do this with the industry's largest suite of engagement and gamification features.

Engagement on your fully branded event, backed by your designated full-time customer success team, ensures every event run on the Hubilo platform executes perfectly every time. All the enterprise security, integrations, and analytics you need - with the engagement and white-glove support you want.

Visit [hubilo.com](https://hubilo.com) to learn more.

**Book a demo**



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