



The Ultimate Guide to Hybrid Events

A guide on all the best steps to help you host a successful hybrid event.



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— Introduction

Hosting events is in the midst of a revolution. Before the pandemic, physical events ruled the roost, last year we saw only virtual events being hosted.

The current trend is to host a hybrid event. What are hybrid events? How different are they from virtual events? Do you need special expertise and marketing? Are these events helpful?

The questions are many, and this guide aims at addressing the fundamental questions about hybrid events. We hope you find this book to be informative and instructive.

1. What's a hybrid event?

The pandemic has made us realise that we need not be physically present to participate in an event! First, we had virtual events, and the current trend is to host hybrid events. So, what are hybrid events? Hybrid events are those that have a physical or live event combined with a virtual one. In this event, the attendees participate in the same event at the same time, albeit at different places and using a different medium.

Hybrid events are interactive and help organisers reach a wider audience. Let us understand a little more about hybrid events.

A hybrid event is NOT:

- A live streaming event
- A share on-demand video
- An event where the virtual audience is given preference

A hybrid event IS:

- Using technology to host an event where both live and virtual audience can participate
- An event that treats both sets of audiences in the same way
- An event that takes into consideration the needs of different audiences.

Hybrid events require a lot of careful planning and unique content creation. Given that this is a new format of event hosting, there is a need for some understanding and information. This ebook is a concise guide about why what and how of hybrid events.

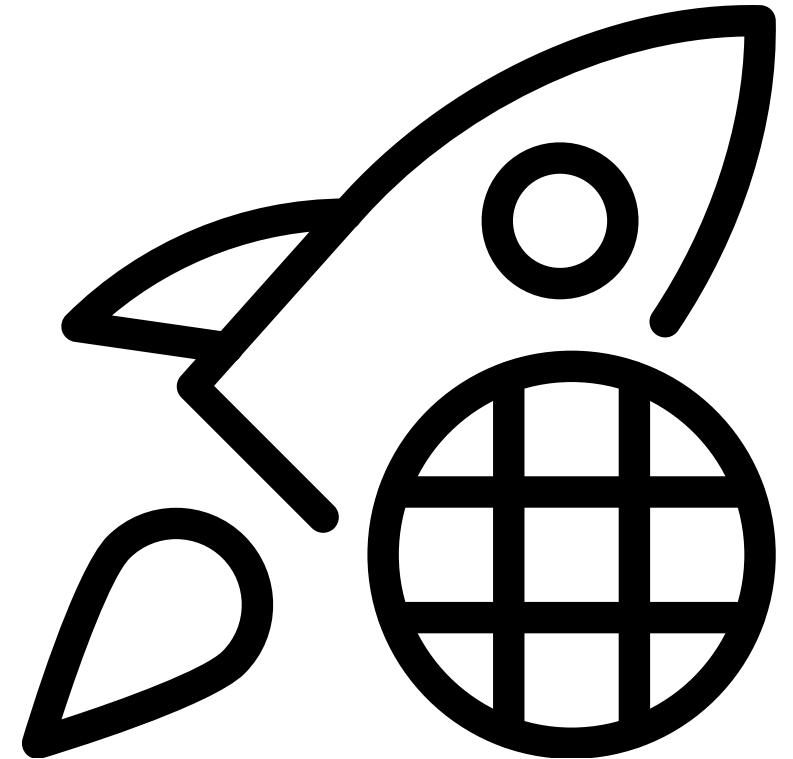
2. Advantages of hosting a hybrid event

Now that we have set the premise about hybrid events let us understand the value of hosting such events.

- **Increased attendance:** While virtual events filled the void last year, many people out there like the feel of a physical event. This year, physical events are making a slow comeback. But, many attendees still prefer virtual events for their comfort and safety factor.

A hybrid event can include both these kinds of participants, boosting global reach and attendance.
Why would you want to do that?

- **Higher engagement:** Hybrid events focus on higher levels of engagement. Organisers ensure that there is enough interaction between the guest and participants. Organisers can also include techniques like polls, surveys, and Q&A. These can be opened for both the audiences at the same time. Broadcasting the results in real-time can add some twist and keep the audience absorbed.



2. Advantages of hosting a hybrid event

Alternatively, organisers can also plan for different kinds of events such as a Q&A event or an Ask Me Anything. Such formats demand the audience to be interactive. Thus, hybrid events ensure that both sets of attendees are interested and involved.

- **Better sponsorship opportunities:** Since hybrid events have a better reach and more attendees, the chances of securing good sponsors is also high. Sponsors have better opportunities to interact and take advantage of both physical and virtual media.
- **Cost-saving and green event:** Since your event has some virtual attendees, the cost of travel and stay is saved for these attendees. Fewer people travelling also helps reduce the carbon footprint. So, hybrid events help in saving expenses and reducing the impact on the environment.
- **Generation of good data:** Experts believe that Hybrid events help generate extra or better data compared to a physical event alone. Since Hybrid events have a technological component too, organisers can generate better data. However, the quality of data will depend on the event platform that you use. Choose a platform that offers data analytics, as well.

3. Hybrid event ideas

- **Entertainment events and award functions:** These events are easy to organise and host. The Oscars can be considered as an excellent example of a hybrid event. On the same lines, one can organise award functions, stand-up comedy or a play that can be hosted on a virtual platform simultaneously. By including engagement features like a poll or emoji, these kinds of events are bound to be even more entertaining and successful.
- **Digital conferences:** In digital conferences, attendees are privy to tech insights, demos, they can network, and they can also interact with inspiring speakers. Such conferences are undoubtedly enjoyed in person. But, in the last year, they have been hosted virtually as well. Knowing that both the formats are successful, organisers can host them as a hybrid event and increase their reach and participation.
- **Product launch:** For years, Apple has been hosting its launch events as a hybrid event where product enthusiasts worldwide learn about their new products at the same time. Similarly, other product launches can also be hosted as a hybrid event.
- **Job fairs:** In these fairs, organisers can host a physical event where job seekers can meet and interact with recruiters. The same can be done virtually by creating virtual booths where virtual attendees can network and interact with the same companies. That gives recruiters access to a large pool of global talent and aids in quality recruiting.

4. Points to consider while planning a hybrid event

Hosting a hybrid event just because it's the current trend doesn't make much sense. One needs to analyse if hosting such an event will make a difference or not. Listed are a few points to consider while planning a hybrid event.

- **Should it be a hybrid event:** Think about whether you need to host a hybrid event. Will you reach out to more people? Will it increase visibility? Is there a need for the physical event/virtual event? Or will either one suffice? Will a hybrid event help in enlisting better speakers and/or sponsors? Finding answers to these questions will help you decide if your event should be hybrid, physical or virtual.
- **The number of attendees:** Decide on the number of attendees or your target for the event. Given the global situation, you may be able to accommodate a smaller number of attendees in your live event. Deciding the number of attendees will help you determine your profit margins, physical venue and online hosting partner.
- **Format of the event:** Out of sight, out of mind! Do not let this happen. Remember you have attendees who are out of sight but are equally important. So, select a format where both sets of attendees feel included and get an opportunity to interact. Include Ask me Anything, Q&A sessions, so there is an opportunity for interaction. Also include engagement features like live chat, polling, emojis, networking to make your event a success.

4. Points to consider while planning a hybrid event

- **Budget:** A hybrid event includes the cost of a physical and virtual event. Hence the expenses and overheads will increase accordingly. Chalk out a detailed budget, including all possible costs. If the event is a paid event, your detailed budget will also help you decide your tickets' price.
- **Selecting speakers:** Select a speaker who is comfortable with both real and virtual media. Talk show hosts and sports commentators often have the charisma and style to hold the attention of audiences. Your speaker should also be able to do the same. So, select with care.
- **Role of team members:** Being an event hosted across two platforms, you will need extra co-ordination. While one team takes care of the physical attendees, you could have another team taking care of the virtual attendees. Plan for helping hands who can manage in case of exigencies.

5. How to choose a hybrid event platform

Apart from selecting a physical venue for your event, you will also need to find the right virtual partner. Some must-haves in your event hosting partner are:

- **Prefer online over download:** Having an event hosting platform that can be accessed online is always beneficial. That makes your event easily accessible.
- **Live streaming:** For your event to be called a hybrid event, you have to live stream. Hence, select a partner who can support live-streaming.
- **Networking:** Your virtual attendees also need the feel of attending a real event. Hence, select a platform that offers opportunities for interaction and networking.
- **Engagement features:** Engagement features are a non-negotiable while selecting your virtual events partner. The presence and use of this will have a direct impact on the success of your event.

Pro-Tip:

Ensure that your event partner is flexible and accommodating; if you are hosting your first hybrid event, there may be some anxious moments.

Having a supporting event hosting partner will reduce stress and help make the event enjoyable for all.

6. Creating content

Since a hybrid event combines two kinds of audiences, these events' content must be planned meticulously. Some of the points to be remembered while creating content for a hybrid event are:

- **Select the right topic:** It is the theme or the subject of your event that attracts audiences. So, choose a subject matter which is current, attractive and generates curiosity for the attendees.
- **Keep it interactive:** Interaction is essential for the success of a hybrid event. Both sets of attendees need to be addressed and engaged. So, while planning content always remember to use interactive tools.
- **Have some exclusive sessions:** You could plan for some exclusive sessions for both the attendees. While the onsite attendees interact with the speaker, you could arrange something exclusively for the virtual attendees. That could be interactions with industry leaders or a panel discussion.
- **Length of the event:** A long event without enough breaks can cause fatigue, especially among the virtual attendees. Remember, your virtual audience can leave the event at the click of a button. It will negatively impact your viewership and other parameters. So, plan for enough breaks between sessions so that it does not get monotonous and you can still hold your attendees' attention.
- **Offer video-on-demand for the virtual audience:** While attending the key sessions live will be mandatory for all attendees, you could consider offering the side sessions as video on demand so virtual attendees can view it at a time convenient to them.

Remember, like any other event, you will have to follow the golden rules of content creation and invest time to prepare.

7. How to promote hybrid events?

The promotion for a hybrid event is slightly different because the marketing team has to make it appealing for both the physical and virtual audience. They will have to highlight the advantage of in-person and virtual attendance. The team could also emphasise how they plan to synergise the teams and make the event more meaningful and productive.

Some of the strategies that can be used to promote a hybrid event are described below in brief.

- **Social media:** Use social media to your advantage. Promote the event on popular social media platforms. Combine the registration call with some insights. Tell your audience what they will gain from the event, highlight the speakers and some interaction opportunities. Also, remember to use hashtags!
- **Use speakers as influencers:** Leverage the social media presence of your speakers. A tweet or a mention on their website is a sure way to reach a wider audience.
- **Co-brand:** Host the event along with a sponsor or partner. When an event is co-branded, both parties promote it within their circle and among their contacts. Thus, you will be reaching out to a larger number of people.
- **Write a blog:** You could guest blog for a popular blog and use it as a platform to promote your event. You could also consider sponsoring a trade magazine to reach out to more people.

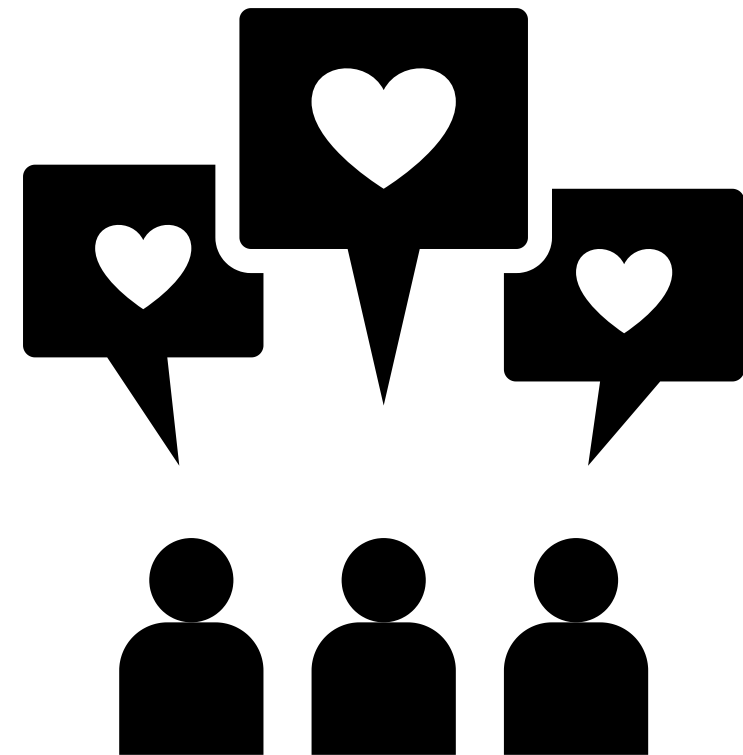
Apart from these, use other time-tested techniques like e-mail promotions or targeted lead generation to advertise and increase registrations for the event.

8. Engaging your audience

Engagement is vital for the success of any event. It is even more important for your virtual attendees because they may feel left out. Listed below are a few engagement strategies for your attendees.

- **Coffee-breaks and networking:** While your live audience will have an actual coffee-break and interact with each other, you could do the same for your virtual audience too. Create a networking space on your virtual platform where your virtual attendees can meet and interact with each other.
- **Gamification:** It is yet another way to garner interest and increase engagement. Gamification can be designed with both sets of audiences in mind. Experts say that gamification influences attendee behaviour, leading to better outcomes and boosting an attendee's emotional experience.
- **Mobile-app:** If you want to connect all your attendees (in-person and virtual) create a mobile app for the event. Apart from giving event details, the app can also have a chat feature where all registered attendees can connect.

Additionally, you can use popular features of engagement like Q&A, polls, surveys, emojis, chats etc., to keep your attendees engaged through the event.



9. Post event tips

Post-event actions for a hybrid event are similar to those that we follow for other events. They include:

- Sending thank-you emails along with survey and feedback forms
- Curating your recorded content and using it in your social media feeds
- Your curated content can also be used to promote future events.
- Offer content as video on demand so your attendees can revisit the sessions and learn more from them.

Also, do not forget to use data analytics to give you deep insight into your event, its success, audience engagement, sessions that were more popular etc. Use this data to your advantage and for planning your next event.

10. Challenges of hybrid events

If all the points mentioned above are followed diligently hosting a hybrid event is not a challenge. Nonetheless, there are some pitfalls that organisers face commonly, and these are elucidated below:

- **Hosting a two-in-one event:** Hybrid event is probably a new ball game for some organisers. But focus on creating one event with two experience and aim at striking a balance between your real and virtual audience.
- **Insufficient bandwidth:** Do not cost-cut or compromise on your internet connection. If connectivity is an issue, the virtual part of your event will be a complete wash-out.
- **Poor A/V:** Remember that your AV should be appealing to both the audiences. Invest in the right technology to host an engaging event.
- **Different time-zones:** Like virtual events, even hybrid events see participants from different time zones. Organisers will have to select a time that is suitable for all, and that can be cumbersome. One solution for this could be to offer a few sessions on-demand.

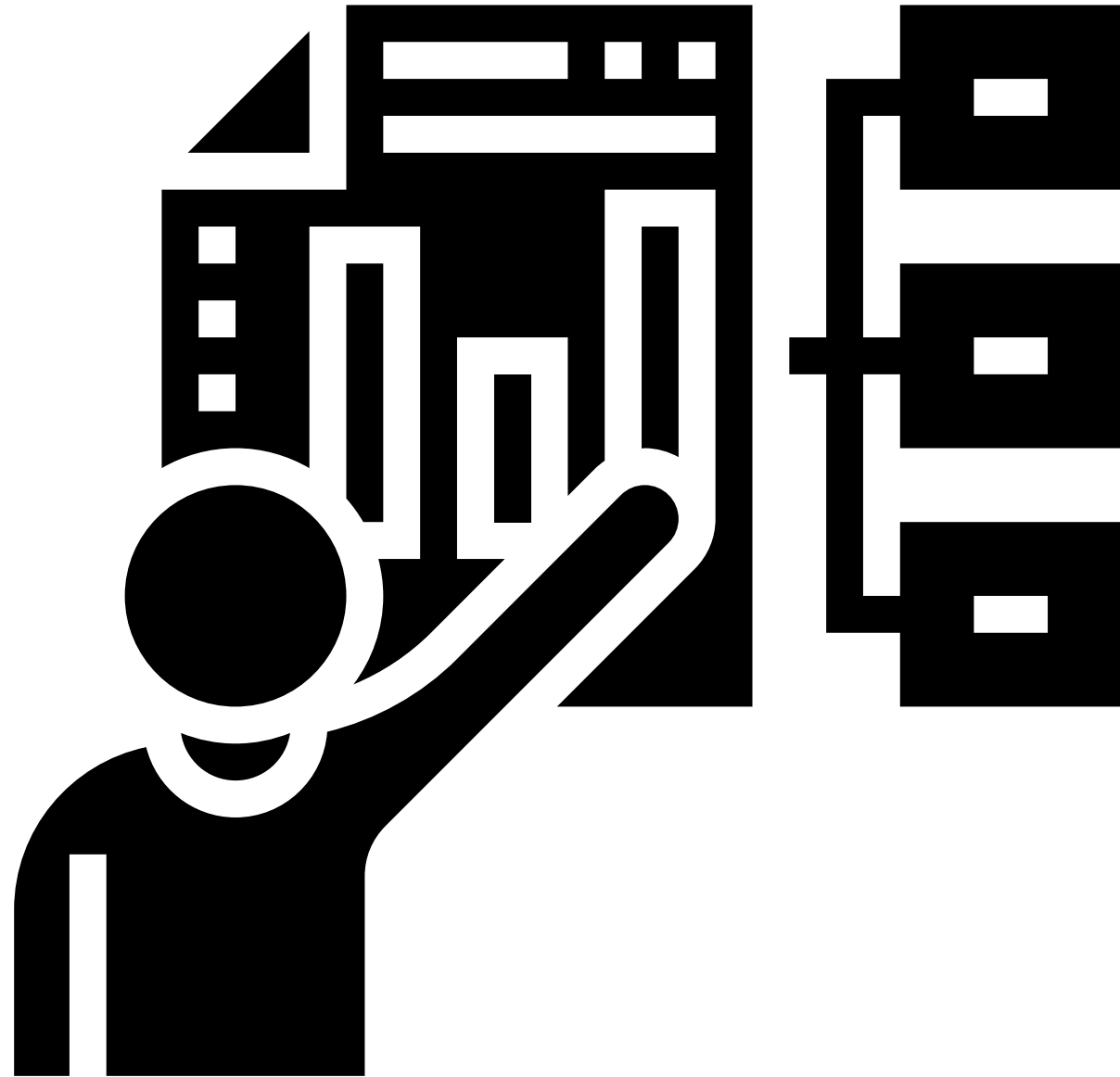
With proper planning and teamwork, these challenges can be easily solved, and you can host an engaging hybrid event.

Conclusion

These past few months have been nothing short of unpredictable. But we have all learned a lot from this experience. One of the most important lessons that we learned is to be prepared.

Incorporating virtual and hybrid events into your total event program will be a key piece of your event strategy as we navigate these next few months of the unknown. Live, in-person events will never go out of style, but it never hurts to have a backup plan.

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