

Which Event Format Should I Choose?

The Comprehensive Guide

Fully in-person? Hybrid? Virtual? Single or multi-day? Monthly series? The explosion of new event formats has planners' heads spinning. Use this guide to evaluate each option — and find the format that's best for your audience.



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For the last few years, we've been limited to virtual events out of necessity. But now that in-person and hybrid events are coming back into the fold, event planners everywhere are again considering which event formats are best for their organizations – and their audiences – in the face of uncertainty.

As you consider your event goals for this year and beyond, you might be wondering: What kind of events best fit your business goals and audience's expectations? Fully in-person? Hybrid? Fully virtual? If you're fully virtual, do you want to host a three-day virtual conference or a series of 60-90 minute mini-events? Or do you roll out an event program featuring a mix of multiple formats?

Each of these event formats comes with a unique set of technical needs, costs, and impact on the attendee experience. And that can have big implications for your marketing and business goals.

So we consulted our BigMarker event production experts to help you select the right event format for your goals. What questions should you ask yourself – and what priorities should drive your event strategy?

We've focused on five event formats we're seeing our customers consider most frequently – and a set of considerations you'll need to work through when evaluating each one. But we know that picking the right format is only the start of your hard work. So we'll also give you the advice our experts view as the most important for success, no matter what event format you choose.

Ready? Turn the page to explore these five common event formats:

Option #1: Full-scale Multi-day Virtual Event

Option #2: Single-day Virtual Mini-Event

Option #3: Virtual Mini-series

Option #4: "All-in" In-Person Event

Option #5: Hybrid Event

OPTION 1

Full-scale Multi-day Virtual Event

Full-scale virtual events are typically multi-day conferences that include sessions conducted on multiple stages, and feature networking, round tables, experiential activations, sponsorships and exhibitors.

When should you host a full-scale virtual event?

Audience demographic

Virtual events can appeal to professionals of all ages, industries, and locations. If you have an Internet connection, you can get value from a virtual event.

However, while planning your virtual event, consider that some industries tend to be more tech-savvy than others. If your audience is less tech savvy, consider including extra instructions (like print documentation, video instructions or coaching) on how to log in to your event, use cameras, etc. just in case anyone has trouble tuning in.

Audience size and location

Consider this format if you have a large audience that is dispersed across the country/world.

Audience goals

Consider this format if your audience is interested in self-education and professional development, as well as building a global network. They want it all – and you can give it to them!

Audience breadth

Consider this format if you have multiple customer segments, which lends itself to multiple agenda tracks and content offerings.

Audience availability

Consider this format if your audience has a considerable amount of availability and/or a flexible schedule.

Team resourcing

Consider this format if you have a lot of content and speakers, as well as the financial and staffing resources to round out the schedule with networking, round tables, breakouts, etc.

How should I consider customizing my virtual event experience?

Look for ways to incorporate not just your logo and colors, but your brand's ideals and personality, into your virtual event. Here are the four most popular experiences our customers commonly include in their virtual events:

3D product demos

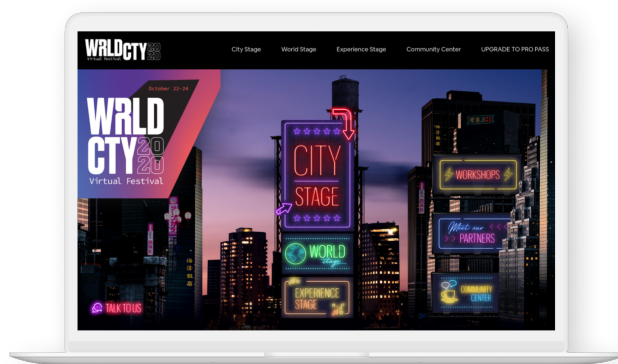
Attendees can use their cursors to manipulate a 3D image of the product in 360 degrees – and get a better feel for your product or service. Present this opportunity to your sponsors and you could sign some great event partners.

Expo booths

Drive event revenue by offering virtual expo booths to sponsors, exhibitors, and partners. Each exhibitor gets their own customized booth, where they can roll videos, talk to prospects, and schedule meetings either in advance of or during the event. You could also offer up expo booths to internal teams, so groups within your company can present on various products and initiatives.

Custom lobby

The virtual lobby is your event's main entryway or reception area. It plays an important role in navigation, helping attendees orient themselves and understand where they can go.



A custom 2D lobby with interactive hover states.

OPTION 2

Single-Day Virtual Mini-Event

Sometimes, hosting a multi-day virtual event is simply not the right answer. Maybe you don't have the bandwidth to stop everything for three full days, or maybe your audience is super busy (or has a short attention span), and isn't willing to tune-in for that long. In either case, mini-events might be the solution you're looking for.

Usually taking place over a half- or full-day, mini-events include anywhere from 2 to 20 sessions, along with networking opportunities. With this structure, attendees can access thought leadership and personal connection – but don't get overly fatigued from the programming.

Some companies are even expanding on this format, turning a full-day mini-event into a global extravaganza, covering all 3 major geographies (Americas, EMEA, and APAC) with 8 hours of jam-packed content each, delivering a 24-hour global marathon event.

When should you consider hosting a virtual mini-event?

Keep these considerations in mind when you're thinking about a virtual mini-event:

Audience demographics

As with full-scale virtual events, mini virtual conferences have broad demographic appeal. That said, the pared-back format is especially effective for younger audiences (i.e., Millennials and younger).

You might also consider this format if your audience consists of freelancers, small business owners, or entrepreneurs. (Tech and creative industries in particular.) The shorter mini-conference format gives guests enough time to get settled and network if desired – without keeping them from taking meetings or accomplishing other tasks.

Audience size and location

Consider this format if you have a large audience that is dispersed around the country/world.

Audience goals

Their primary interest is in education and self-development. While some attendees may be interested in networking, the majority prefer to get their content and leave.

Audience breadth

You have one or two different customer segments, but not enough to fill out three or four separate agenda tracks.

Audience availability

Consider this format if your audience typically doesn't have as much disposable time (or income) as the virtual conference audience, as you're making a smaller ask of them to attend.

Team resourcing

Consider this format if you have a lot of content and speakers on deck, and want to focus your resources on additional event programming (like networking or round tables).

Business goals

Consider this format if your primary goal is to maximize lead generation. One day of content is usually more than enough to achieve that. Virtual mini-events are a great middle option for companies that want to connect with audiences but don't want to overstay their welcome with them.

What does a well executed virtual mini-event look like?

In 2022, Figma, a leading digital design platform, hosted Config 22, a 24-hour global customer conference across the 3 major geographies.

Why did they select the mini-event format? They were serving a super-busy audience of designers and product managers, so they had a hunch that asking for three full days of attention was a big ask.

Additionally, their audience was truly global, so they didn't want to host one 8-hour event, and force people from other regions to choose between waking up in the middle of the night or not participating. Figma was also focused on industry trends and wanted to include thought leaders from a wide variety of different companies pushing the boundaries of their industries with Figma.

All of these considerations led Figma to choose a 24-hour live event format, consisting of 3 x 8-hour mini-events – one for the Americas, one for the European/Middle Eastern market, and another for Asia/Pacific. Figma was able to provide each of its markets with everything they wanted without demanding too much of their time. They were also super tactful about content creation: by choosing hosts, developing their speaker list, and curating case studies with each geography in mind, Figma delivered a personalized, localized experience for each geography, which the audience certainly appreciated.

Whether you're considering a shorter 8-hour one-day event, or the marathon 24-hour format (caffeine strongly suggested!), be sure to step back and ask yourself where your audience is, and what level of localization is appropriate.

OPTION 3

Virtual Mini-Series

Large events achieve a large but sometimes fleeting impact on attendees. You have your audience's full attention for the length of the event, but once it's over, you might not see them for several months. Now imagine that you could host a smaller event once per week, building traction over time, week after week, month after month.

That's the idea behind a virtual mini-series. The company hosts one evergreen webinar on a specific topic once per week over a series of weeks or months. Rather than achieving maximum impact once per quarter, the goal is to gradually connect with attendees through a steady stream of live and on-demand content. This way, you can test and learn what content resonates best with your audience.

When should you consider hosting a virtual mini-series?

Keep these considerations in mind when you're thinking about hosting a virtual series:

Audience demographics

The virtual series is most successful for older audiences, particularly those in demanding executive-level positions. However, since virtual mini-series only take place once per week, virtually, they have broad appeal across all ages, genders, and industries, which is why we consider this one of the most inclusive approaches to events.

Audience size and location

Consider this format if you have a large audience that is dispersed around the country/world.

Audience goals

Consider this format if you have a very broad, global audience of especially senior-level professionals whose primary interest is in education and self-development. They don't need to participate in networking or prefer to do so in other areas. They don't have time to dedicate to an all-day conference, but they prefer to watch 1-2 hour segments on a regular basis.

Audience breadth

Consider this format if you have multiple customer segments related to your topic, which lends itself to creating multiple sessions or "episodes" as part of a series.

Audience availability

Consider this format if your audience is very busy. They might watch a session on their lunch break, but they're not tuning into your full virtual event.

Team resourcing

Consider this format if you have a wide range of topics and speakers at your disposal. But you prefer to secure big-name speakers on a less frequent basis, rather than filling out a full event agenda once every six months. You're also able to quickly repurpose the content generated by evergreen webinars to post on social media, podcasts, etc.

Business goals

If you want to maximize attendance, leads generated, and data captured from a single event, you need to pick the right date. But no matter what, some people won't be able to make it. When trying to optimize your event for demand generation, the virtual series event format is a popular choice.

What does a well executed virtual mini-series look like?

When the Wall Street Journal was extending their "Future of Everything" property into a virtual event format, it chose a mini-series as the ideal thought leadership format for its global audience of overscheduled business leaders. As senior executives, they had many demands on their time and more importantly, they had high standards for their speakers.

But unless you're hosting the Oscars or the Met Gala, it's impossible to get many senior-level business people – or the high profile speakers they want – together at once.

The solution? A virtual series composed of one 60-90 minute session every 3 weeks for 6 months, each with a different topic and guest celebrity speaker (like Maria Sharapova).

So while sessions were posted less frequently, each one was a marquee event. Thanks to the serialized format, guests could tune in to these sessions like they would their favorite podcast, on their own time and on their own terms.

The Wall Street Journal team supplemented this content with associated articles, podcast episodes and on-demand content to promote print and digital news product memberships, which further extended the shelf life of their event content.

How should I consider customizing my Virtual Mini-Series?

Incorporate your brand, logo, and colors into not just the session room, but your session's landing page, waiting room, emails, and on-demand recordings. Besides looking more premium, this creates a more cohesive and professional experience that aligns with your brand guidelines.



A customized session room, mobile pop-up and poll using BigMarker.

OPTION #4

“All-in” In-Person Event

You already know what fully in-person events look like. So let's get straight to the strategy.

When should you consider going “all-in” on an in-person event?

Keep these considerations in mind when you're thinking about a fully in-person event:

Audience demographics

Who doesn't love getting together in person? That said, fully in-person events are particularly valuable if your audience skews older and more traditional. That's because older professionals – say in the Baby Boomer or Generation X demographics – may value in-person networking and learning more than their younger counterparts, making fully-person events more effective for this group.

In-person conferences also make sense for professionals in nascent, passion-driven industries (think: biotech, cryptocurrencies, and Web3). In all of these industries, technology is developing rapidly, companies are forming and applying their product to solve new use cases.

Everyone in the audience is motivated to meet others in the space and can spend 3+ days taking in more industry knowledge – making fully in-person conferences a great option for those industries.

Audience motivation

Is your audience a passion-driven audience or a utility-driven audience? Because if you're hosting a fully in-person event, you're essentially asking your audience to travel across the country, and invest thousands of dollars, to hang out with you. So before you make that ask, you better be sure they're going to fill that time with valuable networking, education, and insights.

Audience size and location

Consider this format if you have a small and local audience that can easily commute or book travel to your venue. Or you have a hyper-passionate audience of professionals in a new industry, who are willing to travel wherever, whenever, to meet others in their space.

Audience goals

Consider this format if your audience's primary focus is networking and securing new business.

Audience breadth

Consider this format if your customer segment is very narrow, which lends itself to having your entire audience in the same session at the same time.

Audience availability

Consider this format if your audience can easily accommodate your event in their schedules, take time off, etc.

Business goals

Since it involves booking a venue and hosting several days of content, in-person events command higher ticket prices than their virtual equivalents. So in-person events are especially effective at generating revenue.

What does a well executed in-person event look like?

A small, targeted, local event for labels and packaging vendors in your region. For them, their biggest priority at an event is networking. They are craving to go back in person – and secure next year's business – ASAP.

OPTION #5

Hybrid Event

Now imagine that you could host one live event for your local audience, then stream it virtually to your worldwide base. This is the idea of a hybrid event. A hybrid event is any gathering that includes both a live and a virtual component, with different experiences tailored to each crowd.

That said, some hybrid use cases are more appropriate than others. Remember the passion-driven industries we talked about earlier, like biotech or crypto? Hybrid events are especially effective for these industries.

People in these fields have a lot of information to exchange and connections to make, so they're highly motivated to travel to the event. And because these industries are rapidly going global, it only makes sense to add a virtual experience to the live program so that people can access your event on the go.

But hybrid events aren't limited to passion industries: If you think a significant part of your audience won't be able to travel to your event, you should add a virtual component to your live event to make it more inclusive and accessible.

Important note: There's some variety within the definition of hybrid events. You might host a primarily live experience, with a small live stream added on. Or you might have only your VIP audience in person, with 90% of the participants tuning in virtually. Or you might strike a balance between these extremes. All of these are considered hybrid events — one size does not fit all!

When should you consider hosting a hybrid event?

Keep these considerations in mind when you're thinking about hosting a hybrid event:

Audience Demographics

Consider this format if your audience spans all ages, genders, and locations. Through hybrid events, you can reach your audience in the format that is most convenient for them.

Audience size and location

Consider this format if you have a very large audience that is dispersed around the country/world, but you have a sizable audience in a central hub, say, the city where your event is located.

Audience goals

Consider this format if you have a very large audience with a wide variety of event objectives. Some have the primary goal of meeting like-minded professionals, while also attending sessions, but others may be content to watch sessions and occasionally network.

Audience breadth

Consider this format if you have multiple customer segments, each of which you can serve with various topics.

Audience availability

Hybrid is most effective when there is a wide range of availability among your audience. While some may be able to commute to your venue every day from their houses, others may have obligations that prevent them from doing so.

Team resourcing

Consider this format if you have the financial and logistical resources to organize virtual and live components to your event. You can also accommodate virtual and live networking, and other social experiences at your event due to the event technology you will be using.

What does a well executed hybrid event look like?

GreenBlue is an environmental organization that develops information-sharing tools to help manufacturers communicate with each other along the entire product value chain. It serves a combination of major consumer goods companies like Proctor & Gamble, retail companies like Amazon and Target, and sustainability directors and VPs of many other Fortune 500 companies.

All of these organizations have big sustainability initiatives, like going carbon neutral by 2030 and improving their packaging and recycling programs. Reaching these goals requires considerable guidance and collaboration between all of these stakeholders.

That's why GreenBlue hosted a hybrid event called Sustainable Packaging Coalition (SPC) Impact in the San Francisco Bay area. Over the course of three days, this event united manufacturing and sustainability professionals to develop emerging topics and network with one another.

The hybrid event allowed interested professionals to network in person and exchange ideas face-to-face, while the virtual option opened the event up for people who couldn't travel to the Bay Area that week. This gave everyone what they need to have a successful, productive event experience – and increased GreenBlue's reach by 3x!

How should you consider customizing your hybrid or in-person event?

Our event producers' favorite ways to customize hybrid and in-person events are:

Large expo halls (500+ Exhibitors)

An advanced tagging and filtering system, enabling easier navigation of large Expo Halls with hundreds of exhibitors.

Matchmaking

An AI-powered matchmaking system to enhance networking by making tailored recommendations about who to connect with.

Immersive offers

An immersive pop-up offer template with a company looking to increase the number of calls/meetings generated through their events.

Badge printing

Print high-quality, highly-customized event badges in full color and with full branding control. By printing badges on-demand, you can accommodate changes to attendee names and other information on-site.



Print custom-branded badges for participants of each access level.

Wrapping Up

Now that you know the upsides and downsides of each event format, it's time to decide how each one fits into your event strategy. But what makes sense for you this month may not make sense next month or next year.

Maybe your virtual series attracts serious interest – and you want to expand into a half-day or full-day virtual event. Maybe you were expecting 1,000 people at your virtual event, but now you're forecasting 10,000 guests and 20 more sponsors. Or maybe you're set on hosting a hybrid event, but extreme weather or political unrest forces you to cancel your in-person experience.

Diversify Your Event Strategy

So more than having one plan, you need to be able to customize, scale up or scale down your event based on your audience's needs. Going forward, a robust event strategy will have a Plan A, Plan B, and a Plan C so that in any future state of the world, the show can go on.

That's why BigMarker is modular and customizable – you can buy different event offerings at different times without fear of being locked into a restrictive contract, so you can better manage uncertainty and reduce risk as you move through the planning process. You might get a hybrid event, then switch to fully virtual. Or you can mix and match modules, so that you can pay for networking at your virtual event, but not exhibitor booths, etc.

We know that event planning is a more complicated process than ever. And we're here to help you build your dream event, no matter what form it takes,