A GUIDE TO VIRTUAL EVENT SUCCESS

Understanding the value of exhibiting and sponsoring online and hybrid events to drive results.

Welcome to our virtual booth, I’m happy to answer any questions you might have.

Sounds great, I am here if you need anything... just start typing below.

Thanks, I’m looking forward to viewing your capabilities.

Currently Online

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NEW CIRCUMSTANCES REQUIRE A NEW APPROACH

The business landscape has changed, but the need for an effective marketing strategy for brand differentiation remains. This is a whole new ballgame—which means we can’t rely on the old playbook for a win.

It’s clear that a new approach is the only way forward.
Trade shows and conferences have long been a keystone tactic for top companies and brands seeking a foothold in an industry. To maintain this lifeline, show organizers have quickly pivoted, leveraging technology to bring events into the virtual realm and reinvent the experience. They are finding new ways to allow exhibitors to gain valuable face time with customers and prospects, build strong relationships, boost brand image, stay on top of industry trends and connect with competitors and other industry players.

THE QUESTION
MANY ARE ASKING
RIGHT NOW:
CAN I MEET MY BUSINESS GOALS AS A VIRTUAL EVENT SPONSOR OR EXHIBITOR?

As shows make the transition from live to virtual—and move toward hybrid models in the future—you may wonder whether participation is a wise investment. In short, yes. According to Forrester Research¹, virtual events rank as the second-most important source of information considered by decision-makers when it comes time to invest in new technologies. And attendees are eager to connect: according to 6CONNEX the leading provider of virtual event solutions, networking was cited second only to education as the reason for registering for a virtual event.

Some may even argue that virtual events offer an even greater opportunity for lead generation. A recent poll conducted by Workcast², a leading virtual trade show provider, indicated that 60% of organizers found that virtual events and trade shows deliver more hot leads than physical events.

This guide will help you better understand the benefits of participating in a virtual trade show and best practices for success as an exhibitor or sponsor using this new model.

² Melissa Hugel, WorkCast, Virtual Events Vs. In-Person Events: Why You Should Host Your Event Online, August 2020, blog.workcast.com/virtual-events-vs-in-person-events
BENEFITS OF VIRTUAL TRADE SHOWS: WHAT’S IN IT FOR ME?

ROI
Consider the costs typically associated with exhibiting at a trade show: travel, lodging, promotional items, booth design. Virtual events greatly reduce the ancillary price of participating, making them a budget-friendly option for exhibitors of all sizes. The minimal investment required allows many more exhibitors to participate, increasing the value of the trade show on the whole.

Virtual events also deliver a more measurable result for exhibitors than is feasible with an in-person event. The ROI yielded by physical events is often intangible—or only realized over the long term. Because the digital platform allows metrics to be pulled directly on demand, a virtual event’s ROI is visible immediately. All attendee event activity is tracked and reported, so exhibitors are able to view metrics revealing where attendees spent their time (e.g., sessions attended, videos watched) to better understand their audience. Analytics may also be run based on the performance of specific exhibitor-supplied content. Drill down into how many attendees viewed and/or downloaded a piece of marketing collateral or watched a particular demo.

Another common challenge overcome by virtual events: collection and distribution of lead information. Through online platforms, data can be collected systematically and accurately, making it readily available for smooth lead capture. Results not only yield greater insights about the leads generated but about ways to enhance performance in the future.

SHORTER SALES CYCLE
In minutes, an attendee can be exposed to your service, see a demonstration, and engage in negotiation, greatly accelerating their journey through the sales funnel, which would have otherwise taken weeks.

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INCREASED EXPOSURE
Without travel considerations, particularly for international prospects, virtual trade shows and events are far simpler, and cheaper for attendees to join than live events. Without the additional overhead costs, companies are able to send more representatives to virtual events, boosting registration numbers and maximizing exposure for exhibitors and sponsors.

VISIBILITY
Virtual events are highly content- and value-driven. Attendees arrive seeking opportunities to learn about the products and services on display, and exhibitors can easily share material such as videos, photos, product demos, brochures, e-books and infographics to guide them through the consideration phase of the sales funnel and encourage lead conversion.

Innovative features such as webinars, branded interactive booths, live chats, downloadable content and networking lounges also offer exhibitors the opportunity to get involved in a whole new way to maximize exposure.

Because virtual events typically accept only a small number of sponsors (five on average), compared with live events which can have up to 50, each sponsor enjoys increased visibility and decreased competition.

COMMUNICATION
Walking up to a booth can be intimidating. At a virtual event, it’s easy to break the ice. Additional studies done by Workcast 1 showed that 30% of people are more likely to speak to a person at a virtual booth than at an in-person event, and 47% are more likely to ask a question.

Communication is seamless: Virtual trade shows often integrate instant messaging, seminar technologies, AI-driven matchmaking and other means of communication into a single, smooth operating environment. Attendees feel less inhibited and time-constrained when asking questions or chatting with booth reps, allowing them to gather all the information they need without fearing they’ll miss a seminar or keynote speaker.


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WHAT STEPS SHOULD I TAKE TO PLAN FOR VIRTUAL EVENT SUCCESS?

Follow these best practices to make the most of your participation.

**BOOTH STAFFING**
Consider providing attendees access to upper management. While an exhibiting company’s upper management typically doesn’t attend live trade shows, virtual trade shows offer an opportunity to participate easily and discreetly. Consider a scheduled moderated chat session in the online theater or networking lounge.

**ENGAGEMENT**
Incorporate gamification into your booth to significantly increase and amplify your lead-capture ability. Host contests and activities like scavenger hunts to generate excitement and encourage people to network naturally. Many organizers use games to direct audiences to show areas that demand an increased attendance—often in return for rewards and incentives.

**PROMOTION**
Promote your presence via your company’s digital marketing channels, including both email and social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook. This can help encourage current and prospective customers to register for the event, which will allow your team to engage with them during a dedicated time.

**MARKETING MATERIALS**
Now is the time to invest in new marketing materials! Be sure you are using various forms of marketing collateral throughout the event, such as product images and videos, and downloadable content in your offerings to keep visitors informed and engaged.

**SPONSORSHIP**
Consider being a sponsor or host a webinar that aligns with your company to engage visitors on a deeper level. Sponsorships at virtual events offer an even greater opportunity to set yourself apart from your competitors and increase exposure to your target audience.

**POST EVENT FOLLOW-UP**
It is crucial to conduct a timely post-show follow-up while your leads are hot. In fact, many executives have stated that they expect an immediate follow-up after the show so that they can schedule a dedicated call to continue the conversation.

**INVEST WISELY**
Choose your events carefully, and come prepared to ask questions to the event organizers about the logistics before committing to a show. You will want to be sure that the software provider can accommodate your requirements and expectations.

**ANALYZE AND COURSE CORRECT**
With so much data readily available after an event, it’s important that you track and analyze key metrics like event ROI and leads. Gauge with your team and gather their feedback on what they felt could have gone better so that you are even more prepared for your next event.
WHY SAE VIRTUAL EVENTS BELONG IN YOUR MARKETING MIX

As the preeminent knowledge source in the mobility engineering field, SAE International® hosts over 30 highly specialized technical events each year, held in-person, virtually, or in a hybrid format that combines both options. SAE is dedicated to advancing the aerospace, automotive, and commercial vehicle industries—and continuing to keep the channels of communication and collaboration open worldwide.

Providers of materials, technology, services, and other solutions to the mobility industry seek SAE events for exclusive access to professionals across the entire spectrum of mobility, from engineers up to executives. Aligning your company with SAE can deliver that same direct access to forward thinkers, thought leaders and influencers driving of the future of mobility.

By becoming a virtual exhibitor or sponsor, you’ll gain valuable exposure on a grand scale to increase your market share—all while substantially cutting our costs and maximizing interactions with decision-makers in a safe, secure online environment.

This is not a time to get left behind—stake your claim on the mobility marketplace by participating in an upcoming SAE virtual event.

CONTACT US
To learn more about upcoming virtual and hybrid events, contact the SAE event sales team:
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