



Passnotes

Best Practice in PR and Marketing



HENLEY GROUP INTERNATIONAL

Pivoting your event online: Why a successful event requires an agile strategy and intelligent content

With the return of physical events and exhibitions unlikely for a while, smart marketers are repurposing their budgets to create online events and the content needed to support them - indeed, more than 90% of organisers plan to invest in virtual events this year.¹

However, investing in virtual events demands a rethink when it comes to marketing and PR strategy. Marketers must embrace multi-platform and multi-format communication, and use content strategically if their online events are to be successful.

In 2018 1.3 million events were held in the UK.² As far back as 2015, exhibition and trade fairs were worth an estimated £19.2 billion in venue and destination direct spend.³

Fast-forward to 2020, and the impact of the pandemic on the events industry has been colossal. Event after event was cancelled across the world as the severity of the situation unfolded. Marketers have been forced to rapidly reassess their event planning and pause, pivot or cancel activity.

Many chose to pivot their events online – creating virtual conferences, trade shows, product launches and panel sessions. Indeed, appetite for sharing information, making connections and gaining insight means that, with the right format and planning, virtual events may reach a wider audience than any physical event could achieve.

Read on to find out how to make your online event a success.

Adversity brings opportunity

There is no doubt that in-person events will remain an important part of marketing activity, and will re-emerge as the pandemic eases. At the moment, even large-scale physical events such as the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos have been forced online.

However, this presents a unique opportunity for brands to get in front of a wider audience, and for event participants to access a wider variety of events that might otherwise be inaccessible to them.

Not only that, virtual events do away with costly overheads - freeing up marketing budgets to refocus on the supporting digital collateral, campaigns and creative work that makes an online event a success.

Making online events work

1. Identify key messages

Virtual events are typically shorter, or broken up into segmented sessions of varying formats. Marketers should therefore develop an overarching theme for the event before mapping out different tracks and topics.

The beauty of pivoting an event online is that it allows marketers the flexibility to try formats, topics and speakers that - due to budget restraints, for example - may not be a viable risk worth taking at a physical event.

Because individual sessions can be created to target specific audiences, online events can provide a springboard for a brand's move into a new customer base that may previously have been out of reach.

2. Make content work harder

A creative, strategy-led content campaign is vital when pivoting an event online - no matter its size or scope. Combining it with targeted public relations activity, to include interviews or opinion pieces, for example, strengthens a communication programme further. Marketers must think about who will access the content, and whether it is suitable for all or just sections of their audience.

Above all, marketers should include high quality, intelligent and useful content that is suitable for each audience segment.

3. Select the right platforms

The majority of the budget for a virtual event is spent on the hosting platform, while the second largest allocation of budget is speakers and moderators.⁴ At the same time, marketers must consider which promotional platform is best to amplify or host their campaign content.

For example, this could be a media partnership campaign, a sustained social media programme or an email marketing campaign.

Planning how, what, where and when content is published could make the difference to that all-important attendance rate.

4. Maintain the momentum

Building a library of content that can be used, repurposed and shared after the event will not only prolong its life but has the potential to continue to reach new audiences long after the event has ended.

In 2020, marketers scrambled to quickly recalibrate plans and pivot to online. Now, armed with this experience, marketers have a unique opportunity to leverage the flexibility and reach of digital events.

To find out how the Henley Group can support your organisation with strategic consultancy, PR and content marketing contact James Tate on james@henley.co.uk or 01491 570 971

Copies of other Insights and Passnotes, the Henley Group's guides to best practice in PR and marketing, can be downloaded at

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