


GOODBYE *2020* **HELLO** **2021**

**A GUIDE TO 2021 FOR TRADE
SHOW AND EVENT MARKETERS**



An illustration on an orange background featuring several circular icons connected by dotted lines. The icons depict various people in different settings: a woman walking with a bag, a person walking, a man in a suit with a briefcase, a man with a shopping bag, a woman with a phone, a man with a phone, and a woman standing. Some icons also include location pin symbols or signal waves.

GOODBYE WEBCAM. HELLO FACE TO FACE.
GOODBYE STAYCATION. HELLO TRAVEL.
GOODBYE VIRTUAL LEARNING. HELLO EDUCATORS.
GOODBYE NEGATIVITY. HELLO POSITIVITY.

If we have learned anything from 2020, it's that we can't predict precisely what will happen in a week, month, or year from now. While this new year will bring us a new set of challenges and obstacles, there is something we can do as we celebrate the end of this crazy year:

GOODBYE UNCERTAINTY. HELLO PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

We can't promise to know what 2021 will bring, but we can promise we'll remain up-to-date and well-informed of the challenges and opportunities our industry and clients will need to tackle. We've talked to our clients, connected with colleagues, and researched the trends we expect to see heading into 2021. Check out what we've learned so far.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1

PIVOT (cringe)
TO VIRTUAL

2

HAVE GREATER
UNDERSTANDING

3

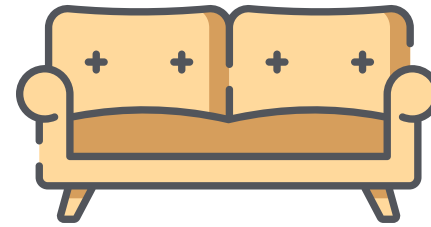
THINK DIFFERENTLY
ABOUT EVENT
ACTIVATIONS

4

BE READY FOR
IN-PERSON EVENTS
& TRADE SHOWS

PIVOT (CRINGE) TO VIRTUAL

Okay, we have all officially pivoted in some way; so we see no need to use this word for a long time... unless we're quoting Ross from Friends.



For most of 2020, exhibitors have been navigating the little known world of virtual events and trying to understand if they are a viable way to connect with their audiences.

Throughout the year, we've worked with our clients on a wide variety of virtual events and embedded technology, and the best way to make them impactful. We've learned a lot along the way and as we close the door on 2020, we have some expectations for the future of virtual experiences.

89%

of event organizers say even when face-to-face meetings resume, virtual elements will remain critical to their post-pandemic event strategy.

Source: Aventri survey of global event organizers

All-Digital Trade Shows

Associations and general contractors have had to forget about rigging, drayage, and forklifts to develop entirely new approaches to plan and execute their annual conferences in a virtual setting.

Associations across varying industries are taking their own approach to virtual or digital conferences by offering branded sponsorship packages and virtual trade show floors where brands can highlight their content to conference attendees.

In 2020, clients struggled to make the connection with trade show attendees virtually. They told us:

It's tough to identify the return on their investment because virtual exhibits and digital sponsorships lack effective tracking and reporting on visitor engagement

Attendees aren't visiting the virtual trade show floor

The content lives and dies within the event platform

Virtual conferences lack the camaraderie and networking attendees seek from attending in-person events

Hello 2021.

With all-digital conferences on tap for potentially the first half of the year, we suggest you:

Connect with association partners now and challenge them to guide and educate participating sponsors and exhibitors. Encourage them to elevate the value of their sponsorships and be transparent in what each investment level provides. To gain traffic and add further value to exhibitors' investment, suggest incentivizing or rewarding attendees who visit the virtual exhibit hall.

Instead of creating a digital replica of your trade show exhibit, create a virtual environment that brings your brand to life and engages your attendees with 360-degree immersive spaces. *For more ideas on this topic, continue to our next section!*

Put more emphasis on humanizing your virtual event experience to avoid further screen fatigue and meet attendees' need to have human-to-human connections. Consider live polling, face-to-face breakout rooms, sending swag bags, or incorporating trivia for some friendly competition.

Virtual Journeys

The virtual world is limitless. We are not bound by the confines of a typical trade show—square footage, sightline regulations, and the laws of gravity. Virtual opens the door to different ways you can approach storytelling and engagement with your audiences. But executing virtual with a purpose is critical to making it worth your time and investment.

Throughout 2020, we saw a significant shift with marketers not wanting to use a 3D virtual booth, but rather wanting to create a robust and digital canvas taking attendees on a fully-curated journey. Virtual journeys have and can take many forms:

Immersive environments featuring products or services where they are intended to be used—whether a hospital, assembly line, or storefront.

Transporting attendees to far-away locations to explore cities and scenery – taking a break from reality.

Hello 2021.

Virtual will remain to be a part of marketers' event budgets and marketing plans. To get started, we suggest you:

Consider the type of virtual space that will make the biggest impression on your audiences. Think beyond a traditional trade show look for inspiration. Craft unique digital environments inspired by brand stories, campaigns, or data to create virtual journeys that are easy to navigate while feeling distinct from other online channels. These virtual experiences will be more memorable and educational, while increasing visitor engagement and dwell time.

Develop a virtual experience that is flexible and adaptable for other communication channels and sales tools (e.g. your digital sales toolbox, website, and social media). By showcasing the versatility, you will be more likely to obtain the necessary budget and showcase the return on your investment.



Invest in Digital Product Demonstrations

In 2020, Marketers quickly transformed in-person events to webinars, email campaigns, video conferences, and digital media to reach customers with brand messaging. But sales teams are still struggling to connect with customers and prospects in a meaningful way in the absence of a physical event when the products and services they are selling benefit from in-person testing, touching, using, or experiencing.

Hello 2021.

A product-focused virtual experience isn't impactful if your demonstrations fall short. To get started, we suggest you:



Research what truly makes your customers take action. This will guide the development of meaningful product or service demonstrations that answer your buyers' questions and curiosities.



Invest in the development of audio and video assets you haven't had time to create in the past



Embed 360-degree technology to further immerse your audience in the virtual space



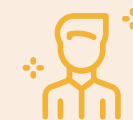
Use augmented and virtual reality to show your demos in virtual (but life-like) settings



Use a variety of clickable spaces with product details and videos within your digital environment



Stream live or prepare pre-recorded product demonstrations that highlight your products' superior and unique functionality



Use live or recorded interviews with industry experts and celebrities to create excitement and access

“You Can’t Manage What You Can’t Measure”

Virtual experiences open a window of opportunity for data and measurement. In 2020, we’ve learned that virtual events and exhibits are planned, built, and measured differently than in-person events. Even more, they require different resources, partners, and tools to ensure they are executed (and measured) flawlessly.

12%

of respondents who have hosted or participated in virtual events say they generated no value whatsoever.

Source: Exhibitor Magazine pandemic survey, November 2020

Hello 2021.

Virtual event measurement can be overwhelming to even the most savvy event marketers because they will need to adapt and integrate new digital measurements to be able to showcase the value of a virtual experience. To get started, we suggest you:

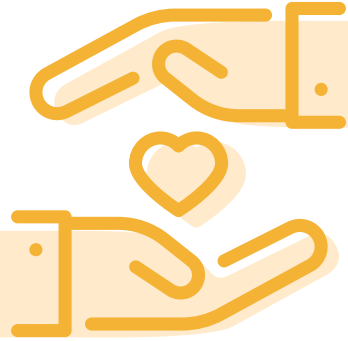
Use your virtual presence as an opportunity to set goals, collect data, measure impact, and report on insights and value gained

Identify the areas of opportunity to measure (e.g. attendees, engagement, post-event actions)

Embed and integrate tracking within all pre-, during-, and post-event materials to understand what content did and didn’t resonate with your audience

Gather data through surveys and polls before, during, and after your event to identify care-about and especially within webinar registration and live virtual events.

Use all the insights gathered to determine if they will play a major role in your long-term marketing strategy, even after in-person trade shows and events return.



HAVE GREATER UNDERSTANDING

With many companies having their employees work from home and unable to travel for the foreseeable future, human connection has never been more in need. Our clients are genuinely starved for contact with their audiences. Cordiality and kindness, more so than it used to be, will be crucial in your messaging and behaviors with clients, employees, and partners moving forward into 2021.

But that's easier said than done. Connecting and building trust with your buyers has never been harder. Now is the time to identify what is going to best help your customers going forward – practically and emotionally.

“The wealth of consumer data now available means brands can layer attitudinal and behavioral insights on top of demographic data to paint a far richer, more nuanced picture of *real people*.

More importantly, the internet has opened up new possibilities to connect and listen to customers.”

Source: Forbes

Customer Insights

While there is always a demand for customer insights, now is a time when we are relying on them more than ever. In 2020, business professionals in many industries and at varying levels had to develop entirely new plans to make the best of an atypical year.



Hello 2021.

To get an in-depth understanding of your existing and potential customers' wants and needs, we suggest you:

Use your market research teams to understand how consumer behavior is changing in your category and what customers expect of your brand and branded experiences.

Expert tip: start by understanding how your products or services can help your prospects. For example, how your product / service can support them in their job leading to greater pride and reward (extrinsic and intrinsic) for their daily work. Understanding their personal motivations and interests will help you connect better with customers in person and online.

Connect with other decision makers in your organization to determine why and how you should invest in each marketing channel, and what will resonate with your customers – right now. If you can't identify your target audience or measure data or results in a channel, think twice about investing your time and marketing dollars in those initiatives.



Staff Engagement Training

If you're a trade show professional who manages teams of event staff, there has always been a need to train and prepare them to properly engage and educate booth attendees. However, now may be the time to host training sessions to make sure they are empathetic and respectful when dealing with customers online and in person.

Hello 2021.

Due to the pandemic, everyone is at a unique point personally and professionally. Our responsibility as marketers is to showcase how our brand supports our customers, no matter where they are at. We suggest you start here:

Provide your (virtual or in-person) event staff with a list of expectations

Share customer insights with the sales and marketing professionals who will interact with your customers so they can connect and show empathy during their conversations

Be aware that the attendees your customers and prospects selected to travel for the in-person show are likely key decision makers. The conversations you have with them can make a significant impact in their evaluation of you as a potential partner.

Train your staff on cleaning, safety, and traffic flow protocols for in-person events and be sure to pass along all mandates from conference organizers or host facilities.

THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT EVENT ACTIVATIONS

The sudden shift to virtual events in 2020 produced mixed results in terms of attendance, experience, and satisfaction. On one hand, event professionals were able to reach an extended audience and measure digital engagement in ways they couldn't at an in-person event or trade show. But on the other hand, the lack of networking and inability to cultivate a true connection with peers and thought-leaders still lingers.

As in-person events gradually return and travel restrictions are slowly eased, we anticipate event professionals will be expected to create a combination of in-person AND digital events to reach all audience groups—whether it be virtually, within controlled environments, or hybrid events.

63%

**of respondents said they
will organize fewer events
for less than 500 attendees
in comparison to 2019.**

Source: ICE and Cvent's Annual Benchmark Report for corporate event planners,
August 2020

Fighting for Attention

Screen fatigue is real and we are all feeling it! Fighting for the attention of our virtual audiences and connecting with them in a meaningful way is becoming more complicated week by week and month by month.

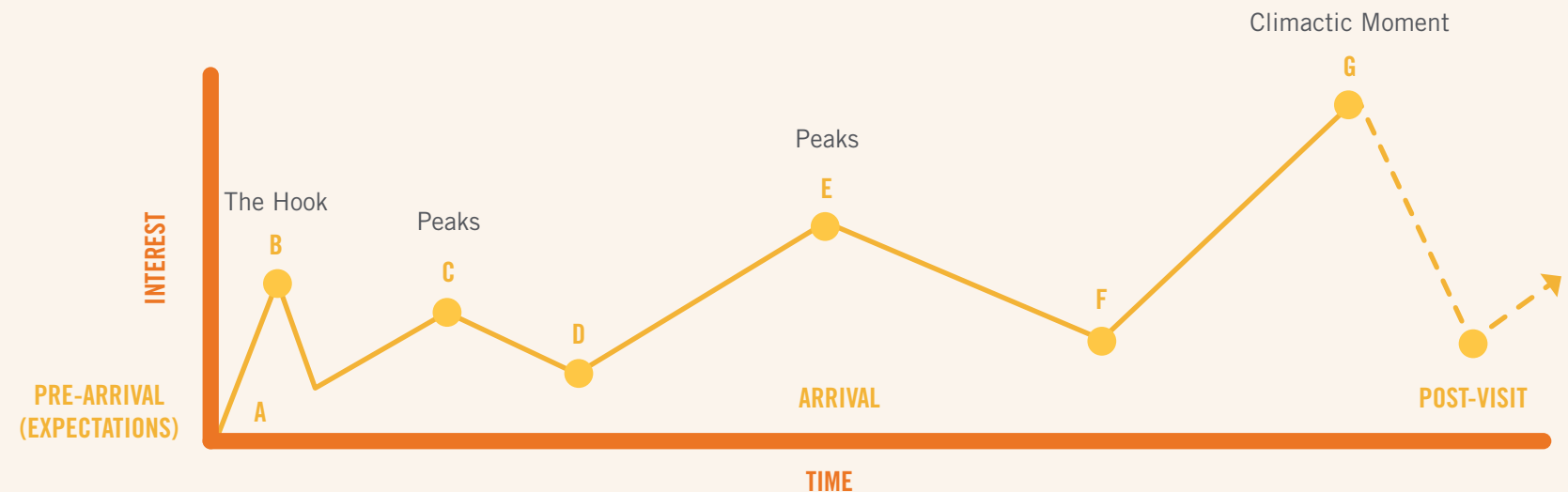
75%

of employees in the United States and close to a third in the Asia-Pacific region report symptoms of burnout.

Sources: FlexJobs Mental Health America Survey and Microsoft News

Hello 2021.

Unfortunately we anticipate there will still be screen fatigue and difficulties connecting with our virtual audiences in meaningful ways in 2021. But there is hope. We suggest applying the principle of the Interest Curve to your events. The Interest Curve* maintains: “The quality of an experience can be measured by the extent to which its unfolding sequence of events is able to hold a guest’s interest.” In other words, you should think about how your virtual event will unfold to keep attendees engaged minute-by-minute and hour-by-hour to give them the best online experience possible and have them leave your event wanting to engage with you again in the future.



The Interest Curve focuses on signature moments to maximize your attendee’s experience:

- Focus on the middle peak and the end moment to make the biggest impact during your virtual event
- Give the audience time to “breathe” during your virtual event – not every moment needs to have a high point, but make sure the event includes peaks and valleys.
- Consider how to communicate and set event expectations prior to their arrival, and make sure you have a plan after your virtual event to follow up with personalized touch points.

Hybrid Events & Activations

For the larger part of 2020, we were forced to rely on virtual events to connect with our audiences. Granted, in 2021 virtual shows will continue and when live events resume, we may still face safety protocols and limited event attendance, but there will be a shift in thinking and new (to some) ways to connect with audiences face to face.

Hello 2021.

This year brings an opportunity to combine the best of virtual and in-person events. Hybrid events are a catch-all and can take a variety of forms:

Small and local: Smaller regional or local events with fewer attendees and more personalized touch points provide comfort to attendees. Shorter travel, smaller groups, and additional opportunities to connect with attendees one-on-one will open the door to deeper connections and discussions.

Hybrid conferences: Due to various travel restrictions across companies, industries, and countries, associations will begin to offer in-person and virtual content/experiences to allow attendees to engage in the venue and format in which they feel most comfortable.

Hub and spoke: Even as in-person conferences come online, people may be wary of attending an event with thousands of other people. Hub-and-spoke events are an opportunity for a paradigm shift in event marketing. For example, an event with 1,000 attendees could be spread out over ten venues. Content is broadcasted from a central “hub” to regional “spoke” events. Within the “spoke” locations, guests can interact with each other, local hosts, but also with the “hub” in real time. Participants can also explore the recorded content on-demand after the event.

79%

**of exhibit managers
foresee hybrid events will
be a long-term change for
the trade show industry.**

Source: Exhibitor Magazine pandemic survey, November 2020

There is a lot of potential and a variety of solutions that can be created for your own hybrid event, but it boils down to what makes the most sense for your company, brand, and customers. To get started, we suggest discussing these questions:

Of your target audiences, do you know who will and will not travel? Issue a brief survey to gauge their comfort level to help identify what type of hybrid event may work for your company.

Where are your customers and prospects located? A local activation may be best if many of your customers are close to one another. If you have global clients, consider having more than one hub to stream live content for certain time zones.

Is it your goal to connect with existing customers or generate leads? Hosting a small, more personal event to increase your sales pipeline can come across as intimidating for prospects. If that is your purpose, be sure to provide clarity around event activations and agendas.

Should we incentivize attendees for coming to our event? Go above and beyond to let them know how much you appreciate them through pre-event communications, customized experiences during the event, and personalized follow up.

Does your team have the necessary resources to plan and execute both a virtual and in-person event? Hybrid events require separate content and experiences for in-person and virtual attendees. They may also require different planning teams or processes to achieve your vision.

Mobile & Pop-Up Environments

Mobile tours and road shows aren't a new concept to some event marketers, but when your audience can't come to your brand, taking your brand to them is an enticing alternative.

Traveling environments offer sales and marketing teams a way to engage with customers and prospects they have not been able to reach in the past. They also help customers evaluate products or services in-person, in a safe and controlled environment.

45%

of exhibit vendors and suppliers anticipate an increase in corporate road shows as a result of COVID-19.

Source: Exhibitor Magazine pandemic survey, November 2020

Hello 2021.

As the comfort level and acceptance of meeting face to face with customers rises, we anticipate seeing more mobile marketing tours on the road. Whether you are thinking about a 48' custom semi-trailer or a tow-behind drop trailer, there are endless opportunities to design an experience and custom environment to tell your brand story and connect with customers, wherever they are. To get started, we suggest you:

Identify the intended experience you want your visitors to have, as well as what takeaways are crucial to their experience. This can help identify the size, scope, and transportation mode of your mobile activation.

Map out (literally) your ideal 'stops' based on where your customers and prospects are. Rank the cities based on the location of your VIP attendees so you can prioritize their stops.

Review your trade show property inventory for items that can be repurposed, then rent additional items for the duration of your mobile tour. The ability re-use components to save costs could support your business plan and allow you to invest those dollars in other aspects of the mobile environment, or add stops to the tour.



Marketing Environments

More than an office or a conference room, our workplaces and factories hold great potential for showcasing capabilities and telling your brand story to your customers and prospects. Throughout the year we have partnered with our clients to invest in their places of business to safely meet with customers and vendors, face to face, while they wait for in-person trade shows and events to return.

Hello 2021.

As you get a feel for your customer's comfort level with traveling and their openness to meet with you in-person, consider hosting them at your facility in a controlled, safe space. To get started, we suggest you:



If you were to give a tour of your facility, look at the customer journey within your office building and identify where messaging or branding may be lacking.



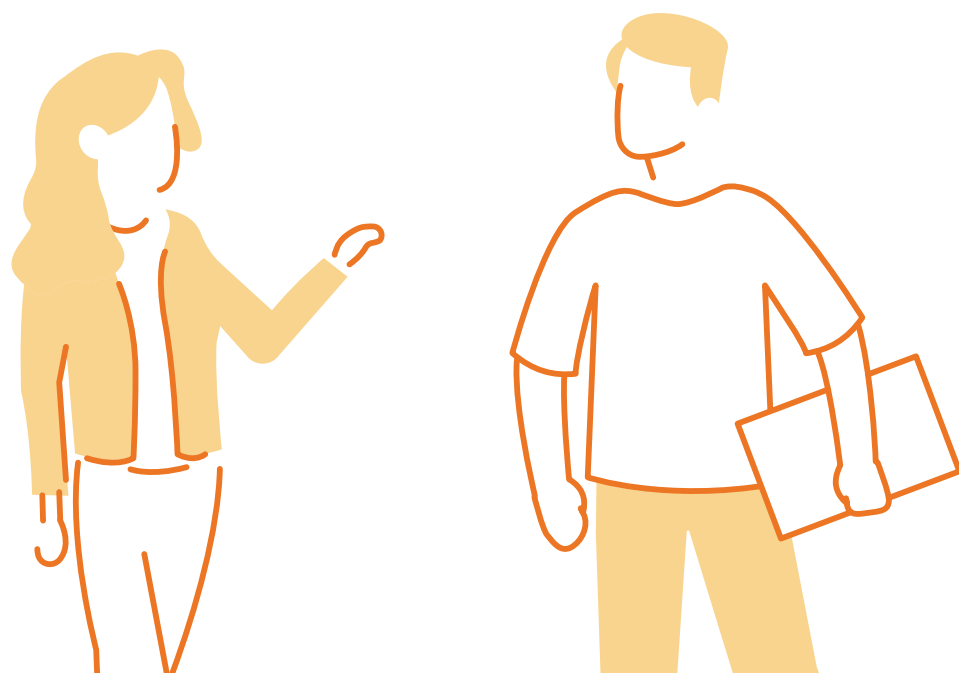
Does your place of business or showroom need to evolve to be COVID-friendly? Maybe printed materials need to be digitally accessible to your visitors, or interactive touch screens need to shift to recorded video content to avoid contact.



Consider setting up your trade show properties in your building or warehouse to create your own temporary environment. This will give you freedom to control the space and the experience your guests have.

BE READY FOR IN-PERSON EVENTS & TRADE SHOWS

As a face-to-face marketing agency, it is comforting to hear our clients and other event marketers see the true value and impact they are able to make with in-person events. It gives us hope knowing in-person events WILL return. While it may be gradual and we aren't sure which trade show will be first, we are preparing in many ways for the big day, and hope we can help you too.



39%

of survey respondents indicated this downturn has made the value of trade shows and face-to-face marketing more obvious to members of the C-suite.

Source: Exhibitor Magazine pandemic survey, November 2020

The Safe Return to In-Person

We are continuing to hear how much our clients miss trade shows and the positive impact they bring to their company's marketing efforts on the whole. And in a recent Exhibitor Magazine survey, 87% of trade show professionals report their virtual events in 2020 resulted in smaller returns than comparable face-to-face efforts. Therefore, we are confident the trade shows and events we are passionate about will return in due time.

Hello 2021.

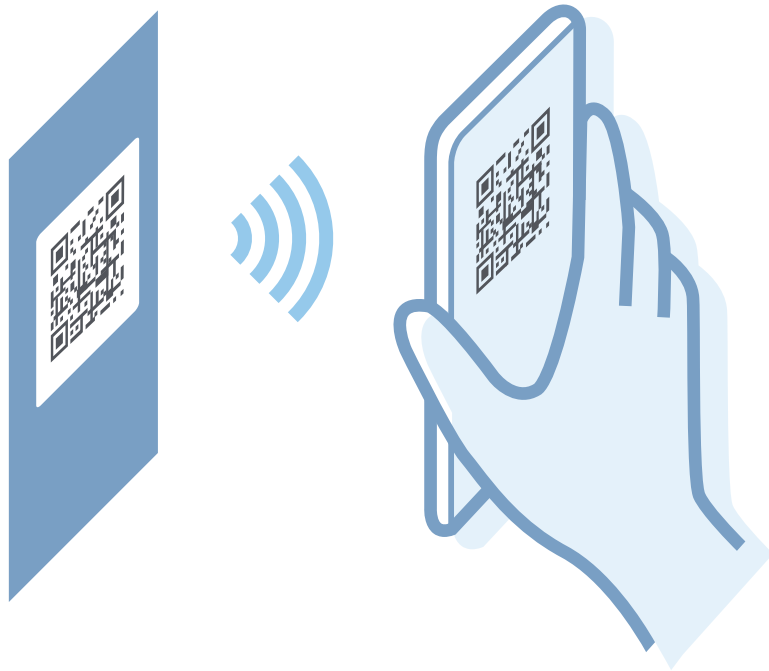
And as they do return, we will want to be careful not to fall into the muscle memory of trade show planning and execution, but rather to allow for outside-of-the-box thinking when it comes to the attendee experience.

To prepare now, we suggest you:

Make attendees and staff feel safe by explicitly showing and telling them how you are respecting hygiene and providing a safe environment (e.g. hand sanitizing stations, equip space with PPE, suggest handshake alternatives, encourage pre-scheduled meetings)

Incorporate non-porous materials that are easy to clean within high touch areas such as vinyl flooring, leather furniture, smooth laminates, and acrylics

Proactively instruct your booth staff on all hygiene protocols prior to the show and make necessary arrangements in the case of staff absences due to exposure.



Contact(less) Engagement

In 2020, we not only said goodbye to in-person trade shows, but all the excitement and snacks that go with them. No more food samples, photo booths, Plinko, race simulations, or touch screen trivia. While they seem secondary to many other things we are missing from trade shows, these light-hearted and enjoyable interactives serve a crucial purpose—connecting with audiences in a memorable way with the purpose of driving action.

Hello 2021.

Exciting and valuable interactives at shows will remain, but we need to think differently and deliver an intuitive experience in a touchless way that empowers audiences to easily engage. To get started, we suggest you:

For now, forgo physical giveaways and in-booth promotional or food samples. As time goes on the introduction of food samples and hospitality will increase, but that will take time. Consider applying cost savings to other forms of digital engagement.

Avoid shared tablets or touch screens. If you normally have communal tablets or monitors dispersed around your booth, consider alternative engagements leveraging attendees' smartphones and QR codes to access in-booth content and experiences.

Incorporate a variety of scan-able codes to share resources instead of physical brochures and literature. Such as, scanning a code that drives attendees to a responsive website communicating with stations in the exhibit – eliminating the need to physically touch displays.

Leave your business cards at home and exchange contact information digitally.

COVID-Friendly Exhibit Spaces

Sadly, it's been awhile since we've seen our trade show booths set up and filled with people. Your booth components as you remember them may need to evolve or be reconfigured to abide by forthcoming state and convention center regulations. With the U.S. in varying levels of lockdown, broad national guidelines for exhibitions and events do not yet exist.

83%

of exhibit managers and suppliers anticipate new cleaning and sanitization measures will be implemented within the industry.

Source: Exhibitor Magazine pandemic survey, November 2020

Hello 2021.

As guidelines are issued throughout the year, there will be requirements all exhibitors will need to abide by. Based on what we are beginning to see, we have outlined some considerations you should plan for as you return to in-person trade shows:

Maximum Capacity: Due to social distancing, reduced capacity limitations, and lessened budgets, resist the impulse to downsize your booth space so your exhibit can still safely host a substantial number of attendees.

Dedicated Entrances and Exits: One-way traffic flow within an exhibit will likely be required; therefore, a single point-of-entry will allow for attendees to be properly directed. With that, additional barriers to entry may be required around the perimeter of the exhibit to ensure attendees do not enter outside of proper protocol.

Main Attract Features: Exhibition guidelines will likely prohibit gathered crowds, in the aisles and within the exhibit itself. Therefore, it may be strategic to position main-attract features deeper in the space as the peak of the attendee journey, where you can better control access.

Hospitality & Staff Hubs: Position these frequently engaged areas of the space in the center of the exhibit, with content pathways orbiting around it. This approach allows for access to the hub continually throughout the attendee journey, rather than only at one particular moment.

Traffic Flow: Prevent attendee bottlenecks within your exhibit. By featuring similar content in multiple locations along redundant paths, staff can help ensure no one area of the exhibit becomes too crowded.

Flexibility with Rental Components: Because budgets, plans, and trade show schedules are changing by the month, or even day, we anticipate a greater need for rental exhibits or components. Consider supplementing your existing properties with rental or representing your brand with all rental components to accommodate the atypical year and potentially reduced budgets.

As we eagerly close the door on 2020 and cheers to 2021, we can't help but recognize all we have endured and achieved, in what has perhaps felt like the longest year ever.

2021 will be another monumental year for event marketers, but in a better way.

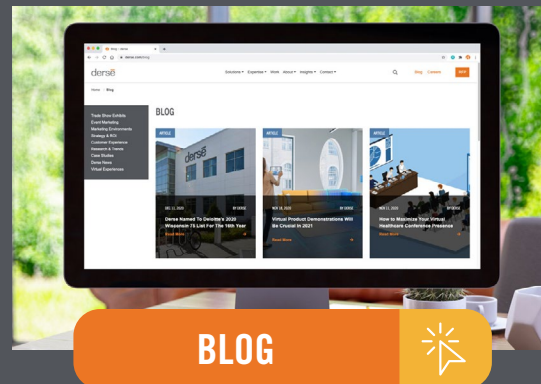
**WE CAN'T WAIT TO SAY HELLO TO YOU
SOON, AND HOPEFULLY IN PERSON!**



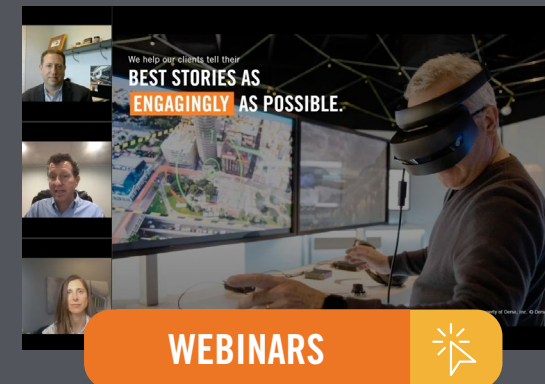
HELLO, AGAIN! WE'RE HERE FOR YOU.

As an industry thought leader we're here to provide relevant tools and resources so you can strengthen your leadership, tell your brand story as engagingly as possible, and drive program results.

Stay in the know through our variety of resources and monthly newsletter.



BLOG



WEBINARS



WHITEPAPERS



CASE STUDIES



NEWSLETTER

