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Events of the Future

A Social Friendly Report - 2021 Edition

Covid-19 and how it has changed the events and exhibitions industry.

Looking at the way forward for events in 2021 and beyond.

The Future is Bright

The year 2020 has been a challenging year for everyone around the world. The events of this year were unprecedented and forced us to rethink, recalibrate and redesign our ideas and implementations. For the events industry and event professionals, this year has raised some vital questions. Changing the entire framework on which the industry thrives has become the need of the hour. From addressing the safety concerns of attendees, to the rise of digital and virtual events, the landscape for events and conferences has profoundly changed.

With news of vaccines to be released by early 2021, we are still uncertain about when the previously known 'normal' will resume in all our lives and any timelines proposed are mere hopes without a guarantee. Even after the vaccine has been widely administered, it will be a while before the stigma of events being the hubs of infection goes away. Venues and event companies alike will have to redesign event infrastructure in order to ensure the safety of in-person events while keeping the conversations going with virtual and online events.

There is however no doubt about one thing. Hybrid events are the future. Businesses across

the world have come to a realization that efficiency for the most part can be achieved by taking processes online, and the phrase 'time saved is money earned' has never been truer. Hybrid events will make sure those who are unwilling and unable to attend events in-person, can also be part of the conversation.

The year 2021 is going to be a year of reconstruction and resurrections, and for the events industry, it will mean embarking on a new journey that will define the future of events for many decades to come.

To learn more about how Social Friendly can help curate your virtual event and start meaningful conversations about your brand both offline and online, please visit us at **socialfriendly.in**



Akanksha Tyagi
Director,
Social Friendly



Macro to Micro

Moving forward, at least for the foreseeable future, hosting large events at fascinating venues will have to be forgotten. As we reconstruct and rebuild for 2021, the scale of events will change drastically.

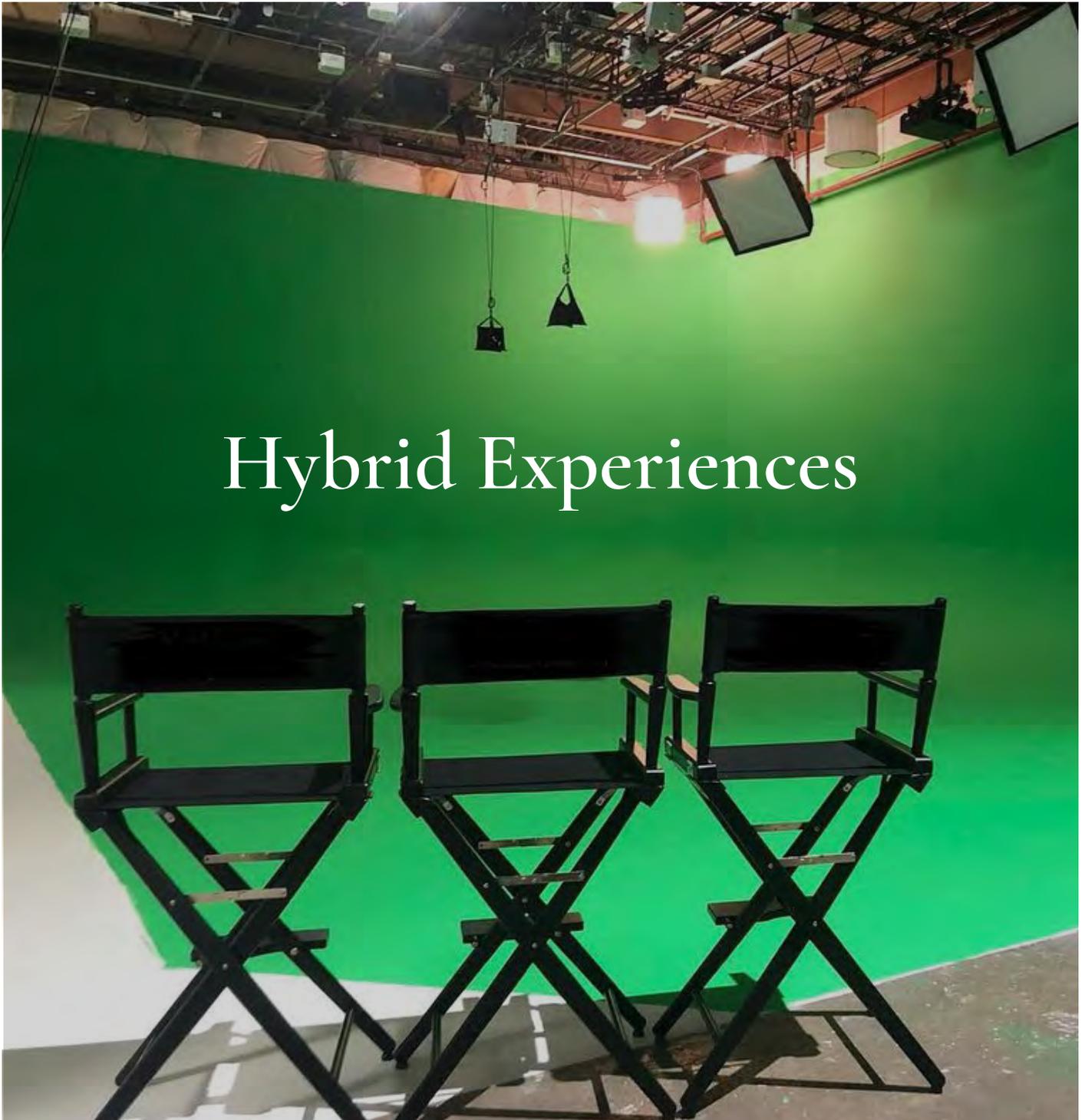
Hosting large-scale events brings with it a host of challenges. Albeit not impossible, but it will be extremely challenging to execute and not many of the current players are used to it.

A whole new segment of venues and destinations that cater to a smaller group of people, keeping the experience more contained, will have a significant advantage in curating surprising and enticing experiences. Experiences which otherwise would not have been possible with larger audiences. And if executed well, these micro experiences have the potential to have a far lasting impact than large events and conferences.

Keeping a limited audience will also offer the

remarkable opportunity for events to be more intimate and exclusive, with the attendees fostering more meaningful connections. Events that had footfall in the thousands lacked the personalization. Using this pandemic as an excuse, it is now important for the event industry to re-define how people connect and network, physically and virtually alike.

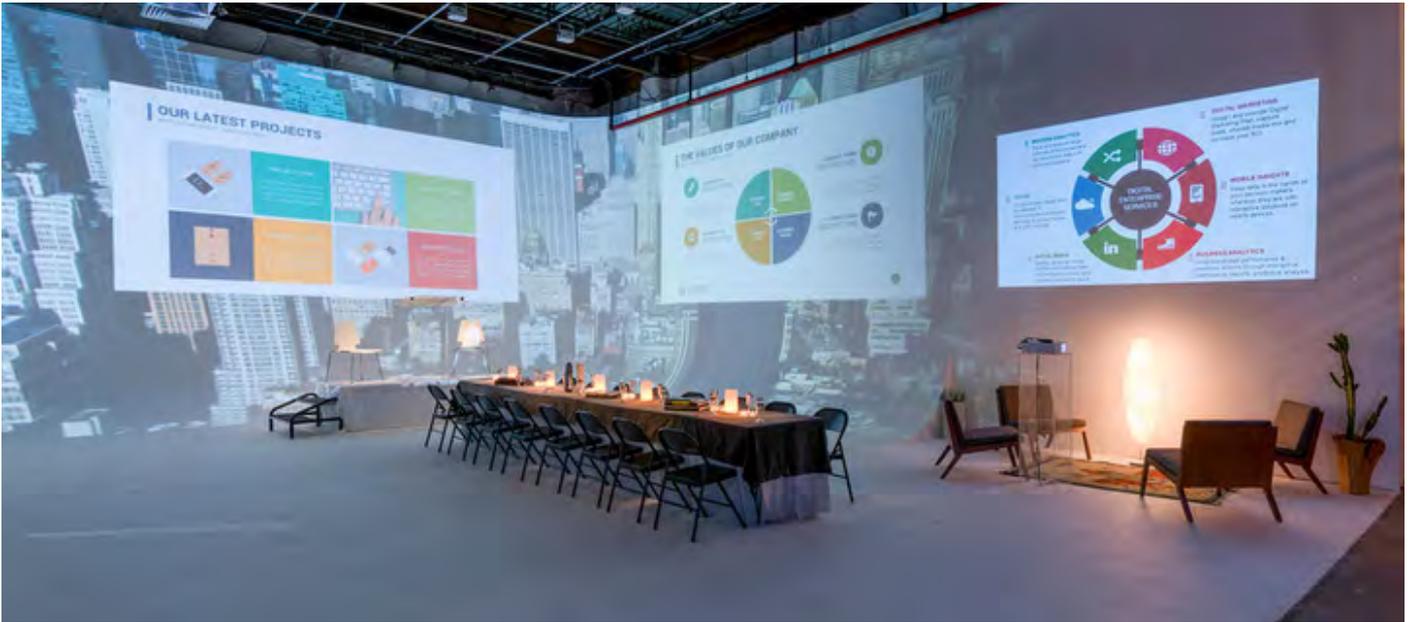
The year 2021 is projected to bring in “Niche” as a concept in an industry that once dealt with big numbers, be it audience or budgets. This necessarily doesn’t mean the revenues will be low, in fact projected otherwise. The key to derive success from newer formats will be through bringing out unique experiences. ‘Experience-driven Events’ will be the highlight of 2021. From a virtual tourism experience, to a seamless virtual conference, to quick and easy talent onboarding, the emphasis will be on minimal glitch and maximum comprehension in all sorts of events.



Hybrid Experiences

It is unrealistic to think that the experience we've all collectively gathered will not change the way attendees perceive and consume events moving forward. Event managers and attendees alike have become very fluent and comfortable with virtual events. 2021 is going to be the year when everyone starts to experiment with a hybrid model for events.

With remote working and lockdown restrictions, the resistance and barriers to change went right out the window. After a year of adapting to the virtual technologies, event planners are now well aware of the benefits and challenges that online events have to offer. For instance, a virtual format is more suited for a content or knowledge intensive event, with an option for viewers to view



the session on-demand.

Traveling to a different state or a country to attend a conference of a few hours is a waste of resources in this current scenario, not to even mention the environmental impact. People would prefer attending a faraway event virtually.

Continuing from the previous point, corporate travel is the foundation of the event industry. This is what brings in revenues and helps all stakeholders thrive. Moving forward, companies are going to be focused more on cutting costs and luxuries, and corporate travel, unless absolutely necessary, will be avoided.

With vaccines almost on the horizon, now is not the time to become reckless and carefree. It is expected that a substantial number of attendees would prefer a virtual event over a physical one to avoid contracting Covid-19.

Going forward, the priorities of event managers will be AV capabilities, technology and a good

internet connectivity, instead of venue size and food & beverage.

The hybrid events will need to be planned and crafted to suit two sets of audiences – one that is present physically and the one that is virtual, and the key to a successful hybrid experience will be to reduce the experience gap between the two to the absolute minimum.

The content and format for hybrid events will need to change. The tried and tested keynote, panels and plenary sessions will have to go and shorter, more focused and niche sessions will need to come in for making the event more successful.

Events will be spending more on AV and production of events, than food & beverage. The event experience will take precedence over any other aspect.



Safety Measures

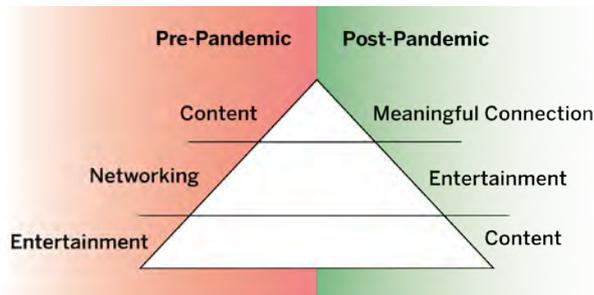
There is no doubt that in 2021, safety will be a key deciding factor for audiences about whether or not to attend an event. This is also linked to by when and to what extent vaccines are available and administered. But it is safe to say, for the foreseeable future at least, event managers will need to create a robust and failproof safety plan for live events.

The last thing event managers and brands want is for their events to become super spreaders. The success of events, in large part, will be measured in terms of health and safety measures put in place.

- Practicing social distancing at all times.
- Wearing a mask mandatory for the audience and organizers alike.
- Socially distanced seating plans and staggered food and beverage schedule.

- Frequent sanitization of the venue.
- Provision for on-site testing and event bubbles.
- Assigning a team to enforce rules and compliance.

Events that have incorporated these health and safety measures will stand out and have an advantage. For attending events, the feeling of safety and confidence will be paramount, and the event industry must engage in and prioritize safety, above everything else.



Traditionally, when planning for an event, planners have an event budget and a revenue target. The same logic applies for virtual events too, but the competition is fierce. The barriers to entry have not yet been figured out. Why would an attendee pay for attending an event, instead of attending a free one with essentially the same offering? Investing in a suitable and experience-focused platform, in digital production, in good speakers and moderators, and meaningful connections are going to be the differentiators. If you plan on spending peanuts, then your revenues are going to be just that.

This trend is going to drastically change the hierarchy of attendee needs when attending live or virtual events.

Creativity and execution strategy will take centre stage. Event content and featured speakers are not going to be the highlights of an event. Audiences now crave meaningful networking and connection. How events enable audiences to network, interact and connect, both physically and virtually, will be the decider for success.

For live in-person events and virtual, the décor, experience design and entertainment are also going to be important because after months of staying indoors, attendees will be craving for some recreation and relaxation as well.



Event managers and brands across the world have agreed on one thing – Engagement is a challenge with virtual events. So now the question arises, how does one define engagement for a virtual audience? And what is to be blamed for this lack of engagement – the event platform or poor event design?

Engagement in 2021 will have to be a mix of well-designed event experiences, with engagement opportunities crafted into the event itself and a virtual event platform that is able to deliver these engagement opportunities for both online and physical audiences.

Event managers will need to revise their plans and strategies when it comes to delivering an engaging event. Different and newer formats for online, offline and hybrid audiences have

to be devised to engage audiences on different interaction levels.

Strategies will have to be different for each of these audiences. Rethinking the event design and experience from scratch, especially with formats that were ineffective even before the pandemic – the keynote/breakout format or a session without touch points between an online or offline audience are going to enhance audience engagement.

Event technology and platforms need to be evaluated in terms of engagement features that they have to offer. Investing in engaging content delivery will also be important, especially online, to increase audience engagement and retention.

The Way Forward

With the onset of hopefully the last leg of this current pandemic, making way for 2021 involves a lot more introspection. The times when quick fixes were enough to solve issues are a passé. From now on and for a long time, perseverance and continuous recalibration will be the key to achieving success.

The event industry was one of the worst hit industries in the world during this pandemic but that does not mean its revival will be long and painstaking. With the right mix of creativity, technology and audience analysis, event organisers and planners can be back in business, delivering desired results like never before.

Technology will play a big role in every step of the way. The pre-pandemic world was getting ready for Virtual Reality and Artificial Intelligence based programs, this pandemic has pushed us a bit closer to bringing these technologies into effect.

Multi-platform and Multi-micro events will shape the structure of the events that will take place in 2021 and thereafter. Spaces that are

virtual and small physical spaces combined, will create the holistic infrastructure of the events from hereon.

Creativity is at its peak. Literally out of the box or out of the huge halls and stadiums thinking is the need of the hour. Events that engage the audience on a more personal and intimate level will have a higher engagement and success rate. Audiences have had a year of one-on-one experiences which were earlier not as common, so being seated amongst a thousand will not seem to be not as interesting as before. The shape of physical events will also have to inculcate changes to address the same.

Lastly, any format that is easy to bend, and easier to adapt, will be the format of the future. With a world so fragile and prone to pandemics, rigid formats are a thing of the past. The way forward is easy and interestingly more effective, if one has the insights and a robust value proposition.

We know events.

Events and meetings have become an integral part of all our lives.

We know how to make events work for your company, your attendees, and your brand. We curate experiences that matter - and we have the team, technology and network to deliver them. We'll help you get the most out of your events based on your goals and help align those with the value derived out of a single event or a schedule of events.

Our expertise is comprehensive - including in-person, digital and hybrid solutions. To learn more about how Social Friendly can make your event experiences better and memorable, visit us at **socialfriendly.in**

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Social Friendly Consulting
December 2020
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