

Zoom's Guide to Hosting Hybrid Events

Want to host a hybrid event? Discover what it takes to create an engaging, interactive, and memorable hybrid experience with these best practices from Zoom Events.



Hybrid events may feel a bit enigmatic, as no two are exactly alike. But if you're envisioning a livestream of a conference room or a video broadcast of pre-recorded content, perhaps it's time to change your perception. A true hybrid event is an immersive, memorable, and engaging experience that unites both in-person and remote audiences. With the right planning and an understanding of the modern event landscape, you can implement a successful and meaningful hybrid event that can generate more ROI.

What is a hybrid event?

Imagine this scenario. You and some friends throw on your favorite team jersey and head to a local restaurant with surround sound speakers, wall-to-wall TVs, and 50 other fans who can't wait to watch the championship game. Later, you receive a text from friends at the

game and a FaceTime call to celebrate a score. Whether you realize it or not, you've just experienced a hybrid event. From watching live concerts and real-time sporting events at home, to participating in a company meeting while caring for a sick child, hybrid experiences are part of our everyday lives.

For organizations, hybrid events can be as effective if not more effective than in-person events and provide opportunities to expand your brand reach far beyond the walls of an expo hall or conference center. The ongoing success of virtual experiences have now catapulted hybrid events into the mainstream. In fact, 91% of event marketers believe hybrid events play an important role in future event planning.

Hosting a hybrid event, however, may not feel as simple as participating in one. To understand hybrid events better and decide whether they're right for your business, let's first break down the various differences between in-person and virtual events.

In-person vs virtual events

When you think of live, in-person events, you may envision traditional experiences such as:

- trade shows
- conferences
- continuing education classes
- social networking events
- business after-hours
- company meetings
- holiday parties
- customer or employee onboarding

These events are commonly used for businesses to meet in person, sell their products and services, and build long-term relationships and brand loyalty. Although travel is still not what it was before COVID-19, there are still benefits that come from meeting face to face. But event marketers need a well-planned strategy to create an engaging event that is worthwhile for audiences to invest in and attend.

Virtual events

With virtual event management platforms like Zoom Events, organizations can host a variety of successful online experiences, including:

- trade shows
- conferences
- continuing education classes
- social networking events
- business after-hours

- company meetings
- holiday parties
- customer or employee onboarding

If this list looks familiar, it's because modern technology makes it possible to host many of the same events online as you would in person. When the world shifted to virtual experiences, it became apparent that with the right planning and tools, marketers could host similar events remotely that would generate the same benefits, if not more.

In addition to sustainability and reduced cost savings for things like travel and event space rentals, virtual events enable businesses to host far bigger experiences online than they could in person. In 2021, Zoom hosted its annual user conference, Zoomtopia, remotely with 33,000 attendees from around the world as well as its most recent sales kickoff and first-ever hybrid [Zoomtopia experience](#) in 2022. With these benefits, it's understandable to learn that [63% of event marketers](#) plan to conduct the same number or more virtual events in the coming year.

In-person + virtual = hybrid events

The ability to host online content and simultaneously unite live audiences and virtual attendees mirrors [the shift to today's hybrid workforce](#). Just as employees can work from anywhere, the flexibility and freedom to choose where and how to attend an event is what makes hybrid events so attractive. Not only do they bridge the gap between audiences, but they're growing in popularity, with [event marketers planning to dedicate 37% of their budgets](#) in the next year toward hybrid experiences, more than the previous two years.

The basics of hosting a hybrid event

[Hosting a hybrid event](#) is more than just livestreaming your content to a virtual audience. Instead, the virtual and live aspects should be planned together, with opportunities for both audiences to engage with one another. Here's some guidance to help you get started.

Pre-event planning

Before you design your event strategy, ask yourself these questions:

- **Goals:** What do you hope to achieve with this event? Why should your audience attend?
- **Budget:** What's your budget? Virtual events don't typically carry as big of a price tag as in-person events; however, there are still new line items in your overall budget.
- **Technology:** Do you or will you have the right technology in place to host a virtual event? (i.e., live streaming platform, video conferencing software, cameras, audio and sound systems, microphones, monitors, etc.)

- **Bandwidth:** Does your venue have enough bandwidth to accommodate in-person attendees using the internet? This is often forgotten about and overlooked until the day of, so be sure to have a plan that can support high volumes of users and minimize lag time.
- **Staff:** Do you have the proper staff to oversee the virtual aspect of your event? (This is different from team members on the ground.)
- **Engagement:** How do you intend for remote and live attendees to collaborate and engage with one another or interact with speakers?
- **Event space:** Is your event space configurable to accommodate remote viewers, i.e., additional monitor set up or viewing areas?
- **Success:** What does success look like and how will you measure it? Is it the number of attendees? Viewers? Leads? Ticket sales? Meetings held? How you track these metrics will determine the necessary technology, staff, and budget you'll need to be successful.

Once you've answered these questions, it's time to create a plan that brings your audiences together. Not only do you need to consider the unique needs of both in-person attendees and the remote viewers, but you'll also want to be proactive about the ways they will connect with one another.

Give attendees a head's up

Hybrid events may have multiple audiences, but in-person and online participants alike will benefit from knowing what's expected or needed in order to have a positive experience.

- **Registration:** Set up your event registration by designating which sessions are for all attendees or specific to one audience or the other. For example, there may be an on-site after-hours social or an online-only breakout session that virtual attendees can access.
Pro tipEvent hosts can use Zoom Events to create separate ticketed tracks based on various criteria (paid, free, virtual, in-person, etc.) designated during event set-up. This enables hosts to distribute content to a specific audience, i.e., virtual ticket holders only.
- **Required technology:** Virtual attendees will appreciate knowing what technology is needed to access your event. Even if it's a simple reminder to update their operating system or video tips to get started with Zoom Meetings, participants like knowing what they need in advance.

- **Guest speakers:** If your hybrid event features in-person speaker(s), a little bit of guidance on how to interact with the remote audience will be much appreciated. To be truly engaging, the speaker should interact with both the live audience and include the virtual audience. From making eye contact in the camera, to following a live chat display, in-person speakers may need extra help to remember the virtual audience. Guest speakers don't have to be limited to in-person, however. One of the benefits of virtual events is reduced travel costs, so you may have more budget if hiring a virtual speaker. Make sure your virtual speakers also know where to look, how to engage with both audiences and understand the importance of clean backgrounds, adequate sound and lighting, and more.
Pro tip Check out our [ultimate guide for event hosts and virtual presenters](#) to learn more virtual presenting tips.

Keep your audiences engaged

Regardless if your participants are sitting behind a computer or live and in-person, they need to be engaged for an event to feel worthwhile. Real value comes from the opportunity to walk away with new connections, information, or skills, and requires intentional planning.

- **Facilitate meaningful conversation**

Don't limit conversation to just one audience. Participants need multiple opportunities to talk with one another as well as hosts and presenters. Encourage in-person attendees to participate in live online chats via their laptops or cell phones. For even more engagement, broadcast the live chat over a monitor display in the room for attendees to view, react, and respond to one another. This enables the virtual audience to feel connected and engaged with what's happening live.

Pro tip To have both your in-person audience and remote attendees engage with one another in a live chat format, reach out to our [Event Services team](#) for creative opportunities to bring both audiences together.

- **Double-check your technology**

Technology can make or break your hybrid experience. At a minimum, you'll want to have a virtual event management platform, streaming software that can adequately handle your video feed (we don't suggest free platforms as they can display unwanted advertisements during your event), sufficient internet/Wi-Fi and bandwidth to support the livestream, and a high-quality camera(s) and microphone(s) designed for streaming.

- **Don't forget networking**

Networking is one of the biggest benefits of attending an event, so don't forget to enable networking for your virtual audience. [Zoom Events Networking features](#) include a variety of options to build your professional network with digital name tags and social profile directories. We suggest adding intentional time for networking into your agenda, be it an after-hours social gathering, keynote breakout groups, or an easy icebreaker so both audiences can chat, collaborate, and feel more at ease with one another.

- **Simplify Q&A**

Limiting questions to the end of a presentation can reduce participation and engagement if attendees forget their questions or are ready to leave and decide not to ask. Instead of waiting, encourage attendees to pull out their laptops and ask questions in real time via online chat (even if they're in-person). Conversely, choose a few (willing) members in the virtual audience to ask their questions live as yet another way to bring your audiences together.

Pro tip [Zoom Webinars' Q&A feature](#) and [polling tools](#) make it easy to collect instant audience feedback. With the Q&A feature enabled, attendees can answer each others' questions or up-vote and react to other participants' questions. For hosts who need to follow up after an event, Zoom enables you to download a report of questions asked for easy recall.

- **Extend your brand reach in the expo hall**

[Zoom Events Expo](#) brings the excitement of an in-person expo to your virtual audience by connecting sponsors, attendees, and booth representatives. Attendees can "walk" the expo floor, chat with reps at the booth, and see sponsor logos, product demos, and relevant content just as they would in person. Where brand reach was once defined by the size or location of your booth, virtual events allow you to extend your brand beyond a 10×10 backdrop to an exponentially larger audience.

Make your hybrid event memorable

VIP treatment

Memorable events are the ones that people talk about long after they're over. Extend your event shelflife and keep people talking by giving attendees a unique experience they can't get from watching the replay or reading a recap. Don't be afraid to unveil a new product, introduce a new service, or showcase an incredible company win. Planning to give on-site participants some company swag? Don't forget to send your virtual participants a gift bag as well. Look for opportunities to make all your attendees feel special no matter their location.

Content is key

It's easy to feel fatigued after your fourth video conference of the day, but here's a secret, it's not technology that fatigues you, it's the content. Binge-watching sports and complete TV series have become more common, so audiences are capable as long as the content is engaging. Hybrid events enable organizations to save costs on travel to afford well-known speakers who can draw a big audience from the comfort of their home or hotel room. Craft your event with high-energy speakers, sessions, and interactive content that includes times for breaks and networking.

Levelup your entertainment

When planning your favorite social activities, don't forget to let your virtual audience in on the fun. Love live music? Hire a band to play for everyone, remotely. Hosting a cocktail hour for in-person attendees? Plan a virtual mixologist lesson or wine tasting event for the viewers at home. Need to have two emcees? Why not make one virtual? Don't be afraid to inject some creativity into your favorite experiences to bring your audiences together.

Understand your technology

Even the best speaker will suffer if your technology malfunctions. Choppy video, poor lighting, and low-quality sound are some of the quickest ways to disengage your virtual audience and generate fatigue. Test your equipment in advance, or better yet, [hire an events consultant](#) to plan and manage your AV needs before and during your event.

Elevate your brand with the “anywhere” experience

Whether calling in from home, sitting in a boardroom, or watching a livestream with 10,000 other attendees, the modern hybrid event experience requires ubiquitous technology that can be used anywhere, at any time. Today's event goes no longer sit in an event space for an entire day. Instead, they watch the opening keynote from their hotel room; see a live demo in an expo hall; eat lunch with colleagues; and catch the closing remarks from their tablet at the airport. [The future of events is hybrid](#) and doesn't require audiences to be either-or. Rather, hybrid events provide an immersive experience attendees can enjoy from anywhere.

With the global webinars and virtual events market expected to reach [\\$4.44 billion by 2025*](#), (up from \$1.57 billion in 2020), now's the time to implement innovative and engaging event strategies that bring audiences together and differentiate your brand.

*This figure is from Frost & Sullivan research used in a Zoom report that can be accessed once downloading the report.



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