



STORY BY
IAN ANDREW WALSH
G1 GROUP

digital **V** live

IAN ANDREW WALSH asks whether events are likely to go the way of the dinosaurs?

I am often asked the value of a digital project vs. that of a live event or conference and whether I see events becoming obsolete or even necessary. I don't think that the bringing together of a collective group of people for a conference, incentive or product launch can be undervalued. But I do believe that digital is a means of ensuring that the communication of that experience can be extended before, during and long after the event has concluded.

In a live environment, the direct benefit of networking with fellow staff or clients and building on relationships is what helps us grow both professionally and personally. The immersion in a brand or experience of a client helps to better understand key messages that the event wants you to walk away understanding.

We are seeing the emergence of webinars, eLearning and virtual conferences to support internal and external communications that are not solely in a live environment whether due to time frames, budgets or the longevity of the communications.

A webinar can be the continuation of an existing live event that has been recorded and is available on line. Product information sessions can be made available at any time to a potential customer or staff member allowing them to obtain the information readily and in a timeframe that suits them. The next evolution could be to host a virtual conference, which would be to recreate the conference environment online. This can include keynote or plenary sessions, concurrent business sessions, as well as the exhibition floor and online meeting environment or chat rooms, which can be set up to link with existing forums such as LinkedIn groups.

An additional benefit to online is that



exhibitors and sponsors of the conference can see a continuation of their financial outlay for a number of months after the event, and provides more than one platform to engage and showcase their business and its services.

Virtual conferences are a growing trend within the marketplace, as it is believed that people only retain five to 10 per cent of information that they learn in a live training or conference environment. The virtual conference environment is a means to refer back to information already presented. It is also a means to allow international speakers who cannot attend your conference to be included, and who bring a greater variety of learning to the meeting.

It is not as straightforward as recording a session and putting it online. The content still needs to engage the online audience as it would at a live event, but you are not controlling the external environment, or potential distractions, so providing engaging content is key.

Also intellectual property rights from speakers needs to be discussed beforehand and resolved. Any online delivery of content should always have a login capability and there is generally a financial fee, such as a pay for view that should be included. This helps protect your information, and can also be a means of alleviating IP issues with speakers, as their fees can be negotiated to include online and live presentations.

Whether your business is ready to move an event to being online or not in the coming years may be something that ultimately does not become your decision to make. With the growing demand of online access increasing, I definitely believe that the combination of live and online platforms is the growing trend and would suggest you look to see how elements of digital communications can enhance your current events both leading up to the event and long after.

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