

EVERYWHERE
EXPERIENCES

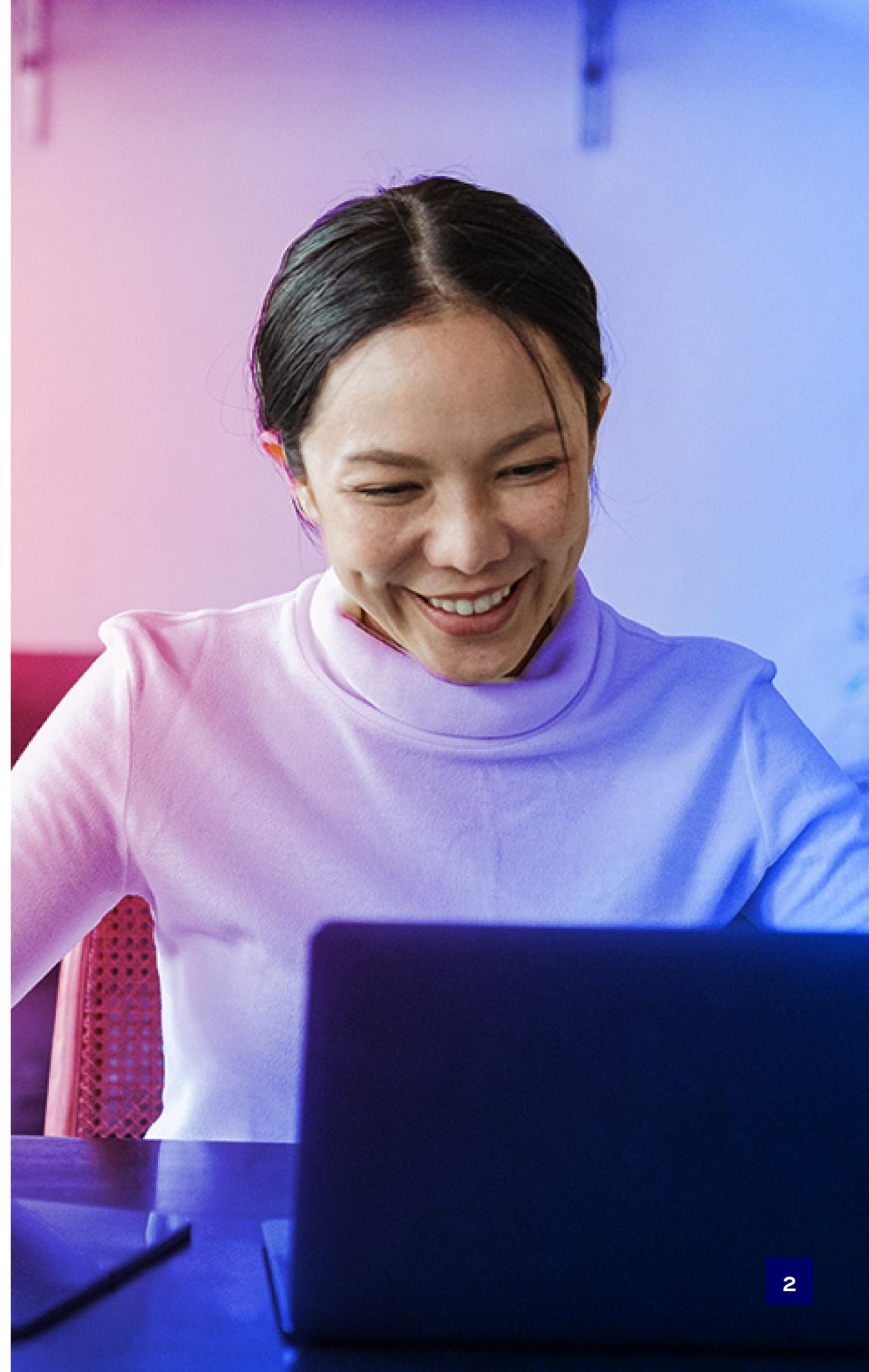
FROM *IndigoSlate* A ZENSAR COMPANY

CRAFTING POWERFUL VIRTUAL EXPERIENCES

Key findings and recommendations from our
Everywhere Experiences virtual events survey

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FOREWORD

Virtual events have become an increasingly popular way for companies to generate leads and build their brands. They're accessible and affordable, and they allow attendees to take control of their event experience. When you consider the advantages of digital, it's easy to see how virtual events offer the same—if not more—depth and variety as in-person events.

Leading technology companies like Microsoft, VMware, Salesforce, and Adobe have already shown how innovative they can be by crafting memorable experiences for their virtual event attendees. As brands shift to digital and virtual events grow, event organizers must explore new event marketing strategies that establish meaningful human connections.

To understand how businesses are reacting to this shift, Zensar and Indigo Slate, a Zensar company, commissioned a survey on virtual events. After surveying senior-level professionals across industries, functions, and departments globally, we've come up with key findings on how to best deliver compelling virtual events.

Together with the survey findings, we provide recommendations on how to create unforgettable customer-centric events based on our exploration of best-in-class immersive experiences.

As digital experience experts, virtual event creation is in our DNA. We hope the survey findings and our recommendations help companies and brands deliver unforgettable virtual event experiences now and in the future.



ABHISHEK VANAMALI

Chief Marketing Officer, Zensar

INTRODUCTION

Virtual events are here to stay. They require minimal overhead, they aren't constrained by location, and they enrich the attendee experience, allowing participants to get involved in a way that's most convenient for them.

Yet, organizations are struggling to effectively take advantage of the benefits of virtual events. Since the formats for virtual events are relatively new, conceptualizing and producing successful experiences comes with a steep learning curve. The challenge that event organizers now face is delivering seamless virtual experiences that meet expectations, engage and delight the audience, and provide data that can measure event effectiveness.

Indigo Slate surveyed senior-level professionals from industries including banking, accounting, finance, science and technology, healthcare, retail, education, and manufacturing to address this challenge. Our survey explored the shifting expectations of event attendees in a virtual environment and what event organizers can do to enhance the content and personal interactions at their virtual events for increased engagement.

Based on our survey responses, we've compiled a list of recommendations to help companies understand what attendees expect from virtual experiences and how to strategically enhance event production for more robust engagement—and, ultimately, an exceptional attendee experience.

THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL OF VIRTUAL EVENTS AND EXPERIENCES

Events have long been the go-to strategy for companies to increase brand awareness, find leads, accelerate sales, and generate revenue from ticket sales and sponsorships.

Why are events such valuable marketing tools? Because of human connection. Consumers crave rich, in-person experiences, and by attending events, they're able to build relationships through meaningful interactions. That's why when we had to adapt to rapid digitization due to the pandemic, virtual events became widely adopted by companies worldwide. They wanted to provide the human connection element to their consumers, and they realized it was still possible with virtual events.

Ninety percent of our survey respondents felt that virtual events increase engagement due to their convenience. According to 93 percent of respondents, virtual events are so appealing because they provide an opportunity to build meaningful professional relationships with anyone, anywhere in the world.

Virtual events are budget friendly, scale better than in-person events, and expand a brand's reach to a broader audience. Not only are they affordable, they also allow attendees to shape their own event experience.



90%

**OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS
FELT THAT VIRTUAL EVENTS
INCREASE ENGAGEMENT.**

With the right digital event strategies and technologies, organizers can design the entire event experience for optimal attendee interactivity and engagement. However, creating virtual events that are engaging, immersive, and unforgettable isn't always easy.

In today's connected digital world, marketers and event organizers often struggle to find ways to reimagine virtual events as meaningful experiences filled with networking opportunities, informative sessions, and ample takeaways. Simply recreating the in-person experience by taking offline elements and presenting them in an online setting just doesn't work.

Is it possible to deliver high-quality virtual experiences that leave the audience wanting more? The answer is yes, and the key is finding the right mix of planning, resources, and technology. It also requires experimenting with everything from event planning to content creation to delivery formats.



MAJOR ASPECTS THAT VIRTUAL EVENT ATTENDEES BELIEVE HAVE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

**THE QUALITY OF
CONTENT**

30 percent of votes

**A SMOOTH AND
SEAMLESS EXPERIENCE**

19 percent of votes

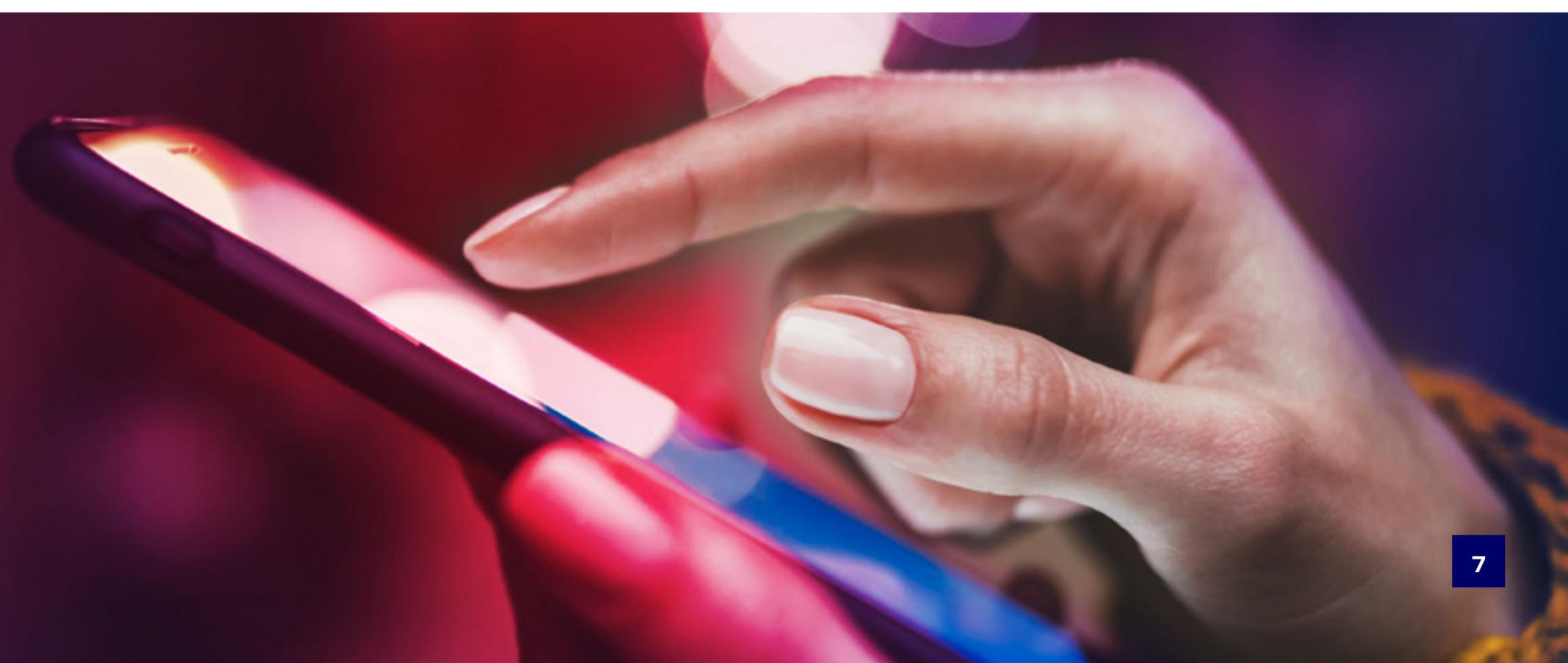
WHAT ATTENDEES EXPECT FROM VIRTUAL EVENTS

First, let's take a look at the demand for virtual events and the opportunities they provide.

THE APPETITE FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS IS STRONG

Event attendees have a clear idea of what they want to get out of virtual events. Above all, they expect a smooth experience that offers the best content with the highest levels of interactivity—similar to what they'd experience at an in-person event. Using the right digital strategies and technologies, event organizers can deliver virtual events that offer the same —if not more—depth and variety depth as in-person events.

A top finding from the survey was that demand for virtual events is strong as people crave opportunities to network, learn, and grow. **Ninety percent of those surveyed believe it's easier to attend virtual events than in-person events** because they're more inclusive, breaking down geographical and financial barriers.



THE IDEAL FORMAT FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

Eighty-three percent of those surveyed expect a virtual event to last at least two days. While 45 percent are most likely to attend a virtual event in the morning, 35 percent are open to attending in the afternoon during the workweek. According to 51 percent of those surveyed, the top reason for these preferences is the demands of their day jobs—demands that tend to increase as the day progresses.

Another interesting finding from the survey is that almost 80 percent of event attendees prefer live sessions to on-demand sessions. In addition, while 68 percent expect a live session to last at least 30–45 minutes, 30 percent prefer shorter sessions that are only 15–30 minutes long. This is understandable, as spending long hours sitting in front of a screen often leads to screen fatigue.

Moreover, since many event attendees join from their homes, the possibility of getting distracted by interruptions is a lot higher—a sentiment expressed by almost 52 percent of survey respondents.

Paying attention to attendee preferences like these and producing an event tailored to attendee needs can go a long way in making a brand memorable, generating marketing and sales leads, and bringing attendees back for future events.

WHY IS THE APPETITE FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS SO STRONG?

Seventy-two percent of the survey respondents seek training and skill development opportunities, and virtual events are a great way to provide just that. Since such events also have a broader reach, 60 percent of the respondents believe that virtual events are ideal for networking and connecting with communities around the world. Fifty-seven percent agree that events are the best way to learn about the latest industry news and insights.





Virtual events are also more convenient when compared to offline events. **Nearly one-third (32 percent) of the survey respondents believe that online events allow for better time management since no travel arrangements need to be made and no time needs to be taken off.**

Another compelling advantage of virtual events is that they drive engagement on social media. Just like in-person events, attending virtual events offers bragging rights, especially for high-profile figures from large technology companies like VMware (VMworld 2020) and Adobe (Adobe Summit 2020). For example, the hashtag #AdobeSummit was trending during the event, with participants posting their take on the content tracks they attended, discussing popular topics on Twitter, and sharing their enthusiasm for the event—just like they would have if attending the event in person.

Finally, virtual events make it possible to transcend borders and scale globally. With virtual events, marketers can attract a wider audience with attendees from all over the world. For instance, the Microsoft Build 2020 Developer Conference saw more than 230,000 registered attendees from different corners of the world versus just 6,000 at the 2019 in-person event.

HOW MICROSOFT PULLED OFF A COMPUTER SCIENCE CHAMPIONSHIP REQUIRING VIRTUAL TEAM COLLABORATION

Microsoft successfully held a virtual version of the finals for its Imagine Cup World Championship—a yearlong competition that challenges students from all over the world to team up and create groundbreaking apps.

Despite the challenges of coordinating six teams across three regions and busy, high-profile judges, the Imagine Cup World Championship was a huge success with record-breaking engagement on social media. The event is an excellent example of digital event planning, strategy, and production done right.

VIRTUAL EVENTS COULD PRODUCE A HIGHER ROI

Although many virtual conferences that were shifted from in-person events in 2020 didn't charge registration fees, that doesn't mean that all conferences must follow suit. There's still the potential to set a fair and affordable ticket price, as evidenced by our Everywhere Experiences survey.

CHARGING A FEE FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

Eighty-seven percent of those surveyed stated that they would have paid to attend the events they previously participated in. The sentiment also illustrates the importance of delivering high-quality, compelling content that keeps attendees engaged and coming back for more. Whether online or in person, people will always want opportunities to learn, network, and discover new trends within their industries.

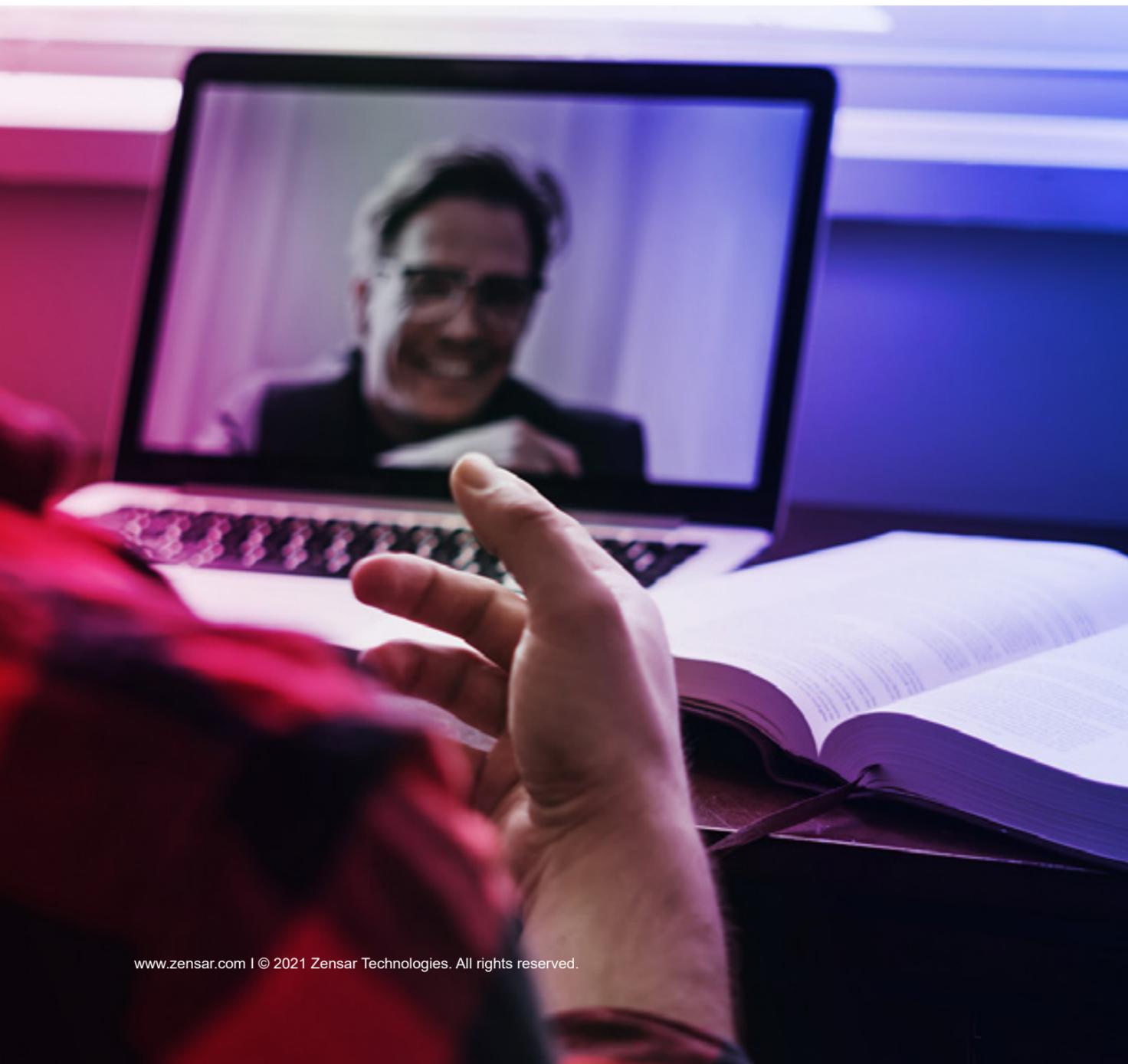
INCURRING MINIMAL OVERHEAD WITH VIRTUAL EVENTS

If you couple the revenue from virtual event ticket sales with the amount saved from forgoing conference venue bookings, accommodations, meals, and flights, the ROI from virtual events is huge. Consequently, organizations can set aside a significantly higher budget to uplevel the quality of virtual events by investing in experiences, speakers, content, and other elements to make the event more attractive for the audience.

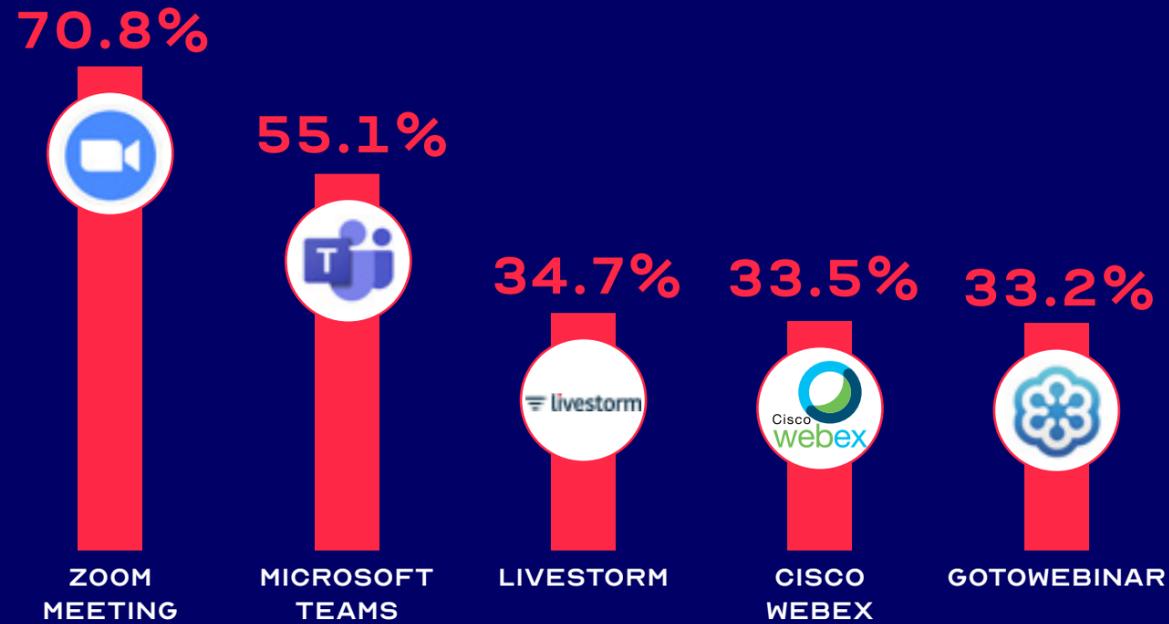
GENERATING NEW REVENUE STREAMS

The task of creating enticing events doesn't have to fall on the shoulders of event organizers alone. By seeking creative sponsorships and fun branding opportunities, organizers can add new revenue streams while ensuring that attendees are engaged in fresh, exciting ways.

The potential held by virtual events in generating leads and promoting brand awareness is immense—which is why virtual events should be a part of every marketer's lead generation and brand building strategy moving forward.



THE FOLLOWING ARE THE MOST POPULAR PLATFORMS USED FOR CURRENT VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENTS



VIRTUAL EVENTS RAISE THE BAR FOR QUALITY

Digital events make the entire event experience richer, simpler, and more convenient. For instance, rather than spending time figuring out the locations of breakout sessions and shuffling back and forth, digital event attendees save time by cutting straight to presentations. As a result, event organizers can allocate more time for audience engagement.

Virtual events also make it **easier for attendees to interact and network with speakers—a crucial demand from over 55 percent of our survey respondents.** Such interactions can be challenging during in-person events, as attendees must rush to catch speakers backstage immediately after their sessions while hustling through crowds of people.

Finally, online events can be more engaging with interactive elements like Q&As, fireside chats, AMAs, networking rooms, and more—a key request from 78 percent of our survey respondents. Such events also give the audience more control over shaping the overall event experience, which is expected from a majority (91 percent) of the survey respondents.

Yet, many online events fail to make any impact whatsoever. Why could this be?

VIRTUAL EVENTS: THINKING BEYOND WEBINARS

There was a huge increase in digital events in 2020, with brands frequently fighting for audience attention. Now, although more invites for webinars and livestreams are being sent, attendees are only joining a small portion of these events.

Most events fail to meet attendee expectations because people still miss the aspect of human connection. Fifty-two percent of those surveyed felt that personal connection and networking opportunities are two essential elements missing from today's online events. In addition, 30 percent cited quality of content as a significant pain point they experienced in the virtual sessions they attended, whereas for almost 20 percent, it was the lack of a smooth and seamless experience.

Why do most marketers fail to deliver on the expectations mentioned above? Because they try to take an onsite event and replicate it for the virtual world. Such an approach is bound to fail.

Instead, they should start by asking themselves,

**“WHAT EXPERIENCE DO
OUR PARTICIPANTS SEEK
FROM THIS EVENT?”**



FOUR POWERFUL WAYS TO PRODUCE MEMORABLE VIRTUAL EVENTS

Carefully crafted virtual experiences can deliver more richness than in-person events—as long as they’re well planned, carefully conceptualized, and different from their in-person counterparts.

[Bob Bejan](#), the corporate vice president of global events, production studios, and marketing community at Microsoft, highlights the difference between in-person and virtual events.



Whereas in-person events are more theatrical in nature, virtual events require a cinematic approach.

Audiences aren’t captivated by an hour-long stream of a single camera pointed at a person on a stage. Instead, plan that hour in segments. Use multiple cameras and frames to change angles. You can create a dynamic experience for a fireside chat, even if your hosts are sitting six feet apart.

BOB BEJAN

CVP GLOBAL EVENTS, MICROSOFT

1. TRANSFORM VIRTUAL SESSIONS FOR A SUPERIOR EXPERIENCE

Organizers must start thinking about virtual events like live television shows if they want to reimagine the entire virtual experience. For example, while sessions like keynotes are important, organizers should think beyond long sessions and focus on interactive elements like interviews and video rolls to keep attendees interested and engaged.

HERE ARE A FEW WAYS TO CREATE EXCITEMENT AND ENCOURAGE ENGAGEMENT AT VIRTUAL EVENTS:

FULL IMMERSION STAGES

Bob Bejan cites daily talk shows as inspiration for producing high-quality sessions. Streaming shows, such as Patriot Act with Hasan Minaj on Netflix, effectively blend graphics with the space available to create full immersion stages. These stages not only tell the story, they also emphasize key talking points and draw the audience into the narrative, capturing their attention and keeping them engaged.

MIXED REALITY SESSIONS

Another way to craft unforgettable experiences is by offering mixed reality sessions. Since most experienced presenters rely on their presence and personality during in-person events to keep the audience hooked, mixed reality sessions let them tap into their strengths virtually to take the audience on an immersive journey.

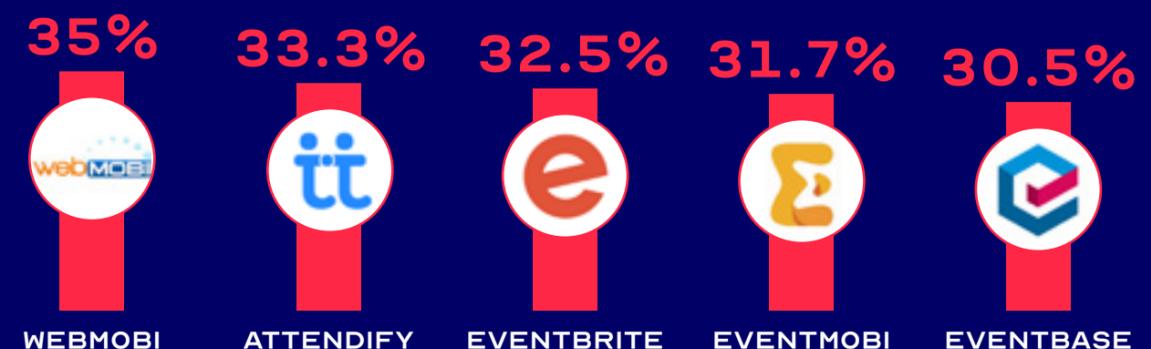
GAMIFICATION

Using an app for the event can make conference content addictive by giving attendees the ability to progress at their own pace and win points along the way. To increase content engagement, organizers can set up leaderboards, stacking attendees against each other and warranting a certain number of points to move forward and unlock new content.

CENTRALIZED STUDIOS

Centralized studios or virtual news desks can deliver smooth experiences while keeping the audience engaged. The hosts (moderators or emcees) can facilitate event and session intros, make important announcements, hold panel discussions, host live Q&As, deliver behind-the-scenes content, and more. This improves the professional quality of the event while providing consistency and keeping the various segments of the virtual event connected.

THESE ARE THE MOST POPULAR PLATFORMS USED FOR VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENTS



HOW CHRISTIE'S INTRODUCED A NEW, VIRTUAL AUCTION FORMAT FOR HIGH-END ART`

A great example of producing high-quality virtual events is [Christie's ONE global sale](#)—a live auction event that took place across four separate cities (New York, Paris, Tokyo, and Hong Kong) at the same time. Christie's had to engineer a compelling new auction format that engaged people who bought and sold high-end art.

The result? A first-of-its-kind live global auction relayed across four cities, with the four lead auctioneers seamlessly passing the gavel in real time across their virtual rooms. In each city, the lead auctioneer simultaneously took bids from buyers in the room, on the phone, online, and from the other three auctioneers who were doing the same at their respective locations.

Not only was the live auction event a record-breaking success for Christie's, raising USD420.9 million, but it also put the auction house on the map as an innovator in the centuries-old marketplace for high-end art.

ENTERTAINMENT AND WELLNESS ELEMENTS AT VIRTUAL EVENTS

Finally, just because events have gone online doesn't mean that event organizers must forego fun—virtual events often include live entertainment, fireside chats with celebrities, or virtual reality trips.

Fun-focused opportunities can improve the quality of virtual events by keeping attendees engaged. For example, including health and wellness activities—and minimizing prolonged screen time—in the age of remote work can be appealing to attendees (especially working parents), helping them unwind or take breaks.

Such activities support attendees in battling screen fatigue while keeping them energized and rejuvenated. Plus, weaving fun elements into events makes attendees appreciate the event organizers' thoughtfulness and creativity.





2. INVEST IN CONTENT FORMATS FOR A “WOW” FACTOR

Content has always been a core pillar of events, but it needs to be of even higher quality in the virtual format.

Inconsistencies in slide design, text-heavy slides, and long sessions without any interaction can make content quality seem bland. Investing in different content formats, such as video, audio/sound effects, and animations, are all ways to design a “wow” experience for the audience. **Ninety-eight percent of survey respondents echo this sentiment and believe that having a mix of content formats (presentations, video, interactive audio) is a great way to engage at virtual events.**

Most respondents (almost 80 percent) also showed a preference for live virtual events versus those held on demand—making it more important than ever to invest in speakers who can capture their audience’s attention and deliver engaging sessions through a screen.

98%

OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THAT
HAVING A MIX OF CONTENT FORMATS IS A GREAT
WAY TO ENGAGE AT VIRTUAL EVENTS.

3. INCORPORATE THE HUMAN ELEMENT FOR BETTER ENGAGEMENT

As we previously mentioned, the biggest thing missing from virtual events is the human element. This comes as no surprise given that attendees are physically remote and isolated from one another.

PERSONALIZED EXPERIENCES

One way to enrich virtual events is through personalization. There are several ways to introduce personalization for better engagement:

- A virtual event companion (such as a personalized event guide with an avatar) to assist attendees throughout the event, manage their schedules, and provide them with suggestions on sessions and networking opportunities
- A dedicated landing page customized for each attendee that acts as a dashboard to keep track of everything that's happening during the event
- A content tracker with session/workshop recommendations based on the attendee's profile and interests
- Exclusive meet and greet opportunities either before, during, or after the event with speakers on the same career track as the attendees

Another way to enrich virtual events is through real-time engagement dashboards that show trending sessions, social chatter, a live count of people on the event platform, and other aspects that bolster the feeling that the virtual event is “the place to be.”



NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

Ninety-three percent of the respondents are interested in networking with other attendees online. This is where a smart networking app could help.

For example, all the event attendees could be automatically registered on the app. Their experiences could be customized based on their profile, skills, interests, and expectations for professional networking opportunities. Once these experiences are set up, attendees could then choose the sessions they find most suited to their tastes. They could also swipe through other participants' profiles to quickly find people with similar interests and connect with them.

Another effective networking technique is ensuring that attendees have enough time to book one-on-one sessions with speakers and thought leaders at the event. **Our survey showed that over 55 percent of event attendees want to connect with thought leaders/experts firsthand.** A booking system within the networking app could easily take care of such arrangements, bringing the quality of virtual events to the next level.

A MIX OF PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL COMPONENTS

In-person events offer the excitement of picking up free t-shirts, stickers, bottles, books, and other brag-worthy swag. But just because the event is virtual doesn't mean you should avoid offering event swag boxes, gear, or other exclusive products to attendees. Adding physical aspects to the virtual with event kits (complete with badges, stickers, and event swag), beta product launches, virtual jam sessions, meal breaks with delivered food, and special sessions can break the fourth wall and add an element of exclusivity.

For Build 2020, Microsoft sent out stickers, lunch boxes, and virtual event badges to the first thousand registrants. The remaining attendees received digital swag, such as desktop wallpapers, Twitter headers, and Apple Watch faces.



93%
**OF THE RESPONDENTS
ARE INTERESTED IN
NETWORKING WITH OTHER
ATTENDEES ONLINE.**

4. ALLOW THE AUDIENCE TO ENGAGE ON THEIR OWN TERMS TO KEEP THEM INTERESTED

Virtual events must compete with other distractions that could make attendees drop off. That's why it's crucial to provide an experience that puts attendees in control and keeps them engaged. **Ninety-one percent of the respondents want the ability to control the platform environment, and a majority (95 percent) expect to be able to download content after sessions are complete.**

Marketers should ensure that attendees can make their voices heard if they want to participate—after all, the quality bar for engagement will only get higher as virtual events evolve. A great way to give your audience control is to design an event platform that allows the audience to switch views, engage in social media streams, submit questions, participate in Q&As and fireside chats, or go to other sessions.

Don't forget about the mobile experience either. Thirty-five percent of virtual event attendees engage in mobile platforms, making this important to include in your event technology strategies.

In addition, it's crucial to deliver a smooth experience. **Nineteen percent of the survey respondents felt the events they'd attended lacked this element.** One way to ensure a seamless experience is to support the event with moderators or emcees for each session to keep the conversation and interactivity flowing.

Finally, don't lose momentum as the event ends. Conducting surveys that gauge the event's success can be a great way to prepare for future virtual events. It's also vital to ensure that attendees have access to all event-related content, such as session recordings, Q&As, and presentations—and that they know exactly where and how to access them.



THE FUTURE OF EVENTS: ELEVATING THE ATTENDEE EXPERIENCE

We're in the midst of a generation-defining moment that will influence how we think about experiences in the years to come. Virtual events have transitioned from merely being a niche or digital engagement experiment to a mainstream strategy for brand awareness, lead generation, learning, networking, and discovering new ways for people to connect.

However, simply digitizing an in-person event isn't enough, and the competition is stiff, with almost every brand vying for your audience's attention. To stand out, companies must act quickly, have engaging conversations with their audiences via video, and create new, innovative content delivery formats that provide immersive, unforgettable experiences.

By going above and beyond, showcasing their expertise, ingenuity, and authenticity, organizations can create unparalleled virtual events and become leaders in delivering virtual event experiences that their audiences won't forget.



OUR METHODOLOGY FOR THE SURVEY

Indigo Slate surveyed hundreds of professionals across the US from all major industries and sectors. Here are some highlights of the methodology we used in our survey:

- Sixty-four percent of those surveyed were 35–44 years old, 17 percent were 45–54 years old, and 12 percent were 25–34 years old.
- All survey respondents were employed full time (working 40 hours or more per week).
- Most of those surveyed held senior positions within their organizations. Sixty-two percent identified as managers, 17 percent as directors, and 14 percent as CXOs.
- While 59 percent of those surveyed came from mid-sized businesses (100–999 employees), 41 percent came from large companies with more than 1,000 employees.
- Almost all industries—accounting/finance/banking, education, healthcare, manufacturing, science/technology, telecommunications, and pharmaceuticals—were represented.
- Nearly all areas—administration, consulting, customer service, engineering, finance, human resources, technology, sales, marketing, operations, and research—were represented.

If you're interested in learning more about leading-edge virtual events that can elevate your digital engagement strategy, help you craft stellar digital experiences, and build a loyal online community:

- **Contact us at experiences@zensar.com**
- **Visit us at [Everywhere Experiences](#)**

EVERYWHERE EXPERIENCES

FROM *IndigoSlate* A ZENSAR COMPANY

ABOUT EVERYWHERE EXPERIENCES

Everywhere Experiences is a white-glove virtual event and connections service. Combining the global reach of Zensar with the award-winning creative and consulting services of Indigo Slate, Everywhere Experiences offers human connection and end-to-end support for every touchpoint, from once-a-year marquee events to product launches to internal training and development. These experiences do more than replicate or replace—they create rich virtual experiences that provide all the depth, spontaneity, and personal connection of a physical event with the added benefits only digital can bring, delivering in-person moments from anywhere.

ABOUT ZENSAR TECHNOLOGIES

Zensar Technologies is a leading digital solutions and technology services company specializing in partnering with global insurance, retail, and IT organizations on their digital transformation journeys. Zensar is a technology partner of choice, backed by a strong track record of innovation, credible investment in digital solutions, and unwavering commitment to client success. Zensar's comprehensive range of digital and technology services and solutions enables its clients to achieve new business performance thresholds.

Corporate headquarters: Pune, India

Global offices: US, UK, Europe, and South Africa

ABOUT INDIGO SLATE

Indigo Slate, a fully owned subsidiary of Zensar, is a digital-first agency with virtual events written in its DNA. Its expertise in creating compelling content, stories, and professional video production helps clients build memorable and successful experiences for their attendees.

Corporate headquarters: Bellevue, WA