

Your Guide to Creating Awesome Online Conferences

A Practitioner's Perspective

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(Consolidated Guide; originally posted articles on <https://digitalartsnation.ca>)

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A project undertaken in partnership with



Land Acknowledgement: As organizations of provincial scope, we recognize that our members, and the local history and heritage they seek to preserve, occupy the lands and territories of B.C.'s Indigenous peoples. We ask our members to reflect on the places where they reside and work, and to respect the diversity of cultures and experiences that form the richness of our provincial fabric.

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Preamble - How to Create Awesome Online Conferences

The sudden rush to digital due to COVID-19 has made video meetings an anywhere, anytime reality for many in the arts and culture sector, and beyond. From online staff meetings to live performances delivered digitally, one-to-one and one-to-many video conferencing has proven its ability to keep us connected, keep us working together and keep moving forward.

Early in the pandemic response in March 2020 we saw quick pivots toward digital events and conferences. They made clear: event organizers, hosts and speakers – many relative newcomers to these digital spaces – needed to make the leap toward digital engagement, learning and interaction.

Taking online events seriously

The bottom line is: your digital conference or online event has real costs, requires different skills to produce and host well, and you have to figure out how to raise the revenue you need to make it sustainable.

Through Future Perfect, we have been researching and evolving a strong framework for a new breed of digital conferences which are more engaging, more accessible, more affordable, and minimize the digital divide that impedes communities with less access to high-speed internet from participating fully online.

The Project Team

The BC Museums Association and Heritage BC have embarked together on *Future Perfect*, an initiative funded by the Canada Council for the Arts' Digital Strategy Fund. This project was led by Inga Petri, Strategic Moves with invaluable support from Lynn Feasey, Points North Consulting, and Jason Guille, Stream Of Consciousness and Felicity Buckell and took place from July 2020 to March 2021.

Documents Available

There are a series of three documents available online at

<https://digitalartsnation.ca/digital-playbook/how-to-create-awesome-online-conferences/>

1. Your Guide to Creating Awesome Online Conferences
2. Case Studies – Design and Results of Online Conference 2020

<https://digitalartsnation.ca/digital-playbook/how-to-design-events-for-blended-audiences/>

3. A New Breed: Blended/Hybrid Conferences and Events

Why Do We Gather?

Let's acknowledge some of the challenges many conferences "in the real world" have struggled to solve:

- They tend to attract a fraction of their potential audiences.
- They are expensive and time consuming for participants and organizers alike especially when they require overnight travel.
- Keynote speakers and other presenters are notoriously inaccessible to attendees because they do not tend to stay beyond their scheduled presentation and Q & A.
- Panels have been fraught with difficulties: from not including voices from a diversity of people, to simply not delivering an engaging or cohesive experience for attendees.
- Those who attend *might* gain an insight or two, or add new connections to their LinkedIn.

In September 2020, we undertook an online survey of staff working in BC-based museums, heritage and cultural centres. Importantly, what survey respondents value about physical conferences often isn't what they actually deliver. This spells opportunity for online conferences – and for a new breed of in-person conferences as well.

"How important are these activities and events within a face-to-face conference to you?" (Scale from 1 to 5, with top box reported are "mostly" + "completely" important)		
MOST IMPORTANT	MID-FIELD	LEAST IMPORTANT
1. Learning from colleagues about their practices and challenges (75%) 2. Meeting experts for conversation and exchange of ideas (72%) 3. Workshops by experts (71%) 4. Time to get to know colleagues (68%) 5. Building their professional network (63%)	1. Keynote speakers (53%) 2. Facility tours (52%) 3. Q and A sessions (48%) 4. Panel discussions (47%) 5. Social events (45%)	1. Meals with conference attendees (39%) 2. Free, unstructured time (31%) 3. Awards gala (23%) 4. Exhibit area for suppliers (21%) 5. Entertainment (20%) 6. Fitness, morning yoga (15%)

(The survey had an email open rate of 62% resulting in 147 completes—a 33% participation rate—with a margin of error of +/- 7.2%)

To Confer: Exchange and Discussion

Before you begin to design an online conference, consider something more basic: **what precisely is the purpose of conferring together?**

Literally, **to confer** means to “exchange opinions”, “to have discussions.”

It does not mean to sit politely and listen to speakers espouse their ideas.

As such, we propose that conference hosts, moderators, workshop facilitators and speakers will be well-served when they deliberately build an environment for meaningful connections and interactions that support open discussions of ideas and exchanges of opinions, in short, an effective learning environment.

Connection and Belonging

At our core, human beings are social creatures. When we gather, we realize one of our rudimentary needs: the feeling of belonging and connection. Even those of us who tend toward introversion will admit to enjoying the warm, fuzzy feelings associated with genuine human connection.

Fundamentally, regardless of your formal agenda and identified objectives, in hosting a gathering you are fulfilling this basic human need; if participants come away without having gained any sense of connection or belonging, they likely will not feel fully satisfied.

Herein lies the key to designing awesome online experiences: to remember that, first and foremost, you are setting the stage for meaningful human connection, interactions and for learning to take place. It isn't about the keynotes and the speakers as such, but rather about attendees, their learnings and what actions they take moving forward.

Establish Your Goals

With this understanding, you are ready to define the goals and objectives of your particular gathering. Online conferences and face-to-face gatherings tend to have similar broad goals including:

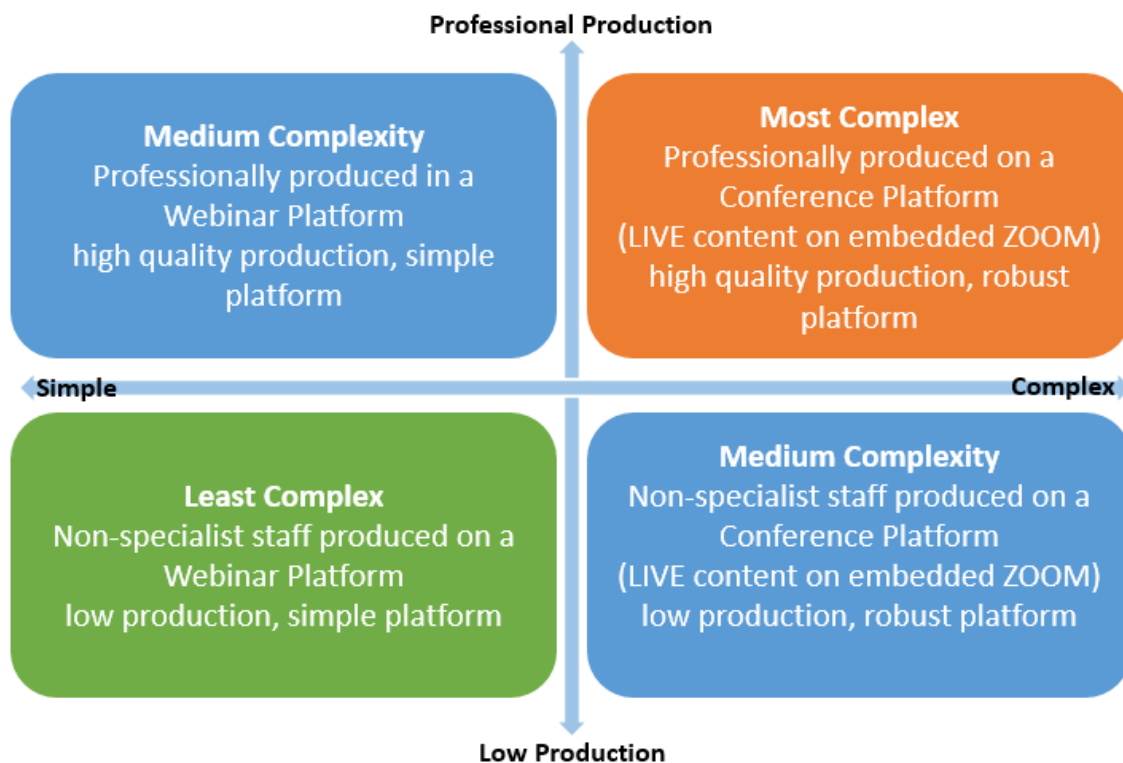
- to share information and provide an opportunity for discussion and exchange about common issues
- professional development, workshops
- networking and meeting colleagues
- working meetings to develop options and/or make decisions about actions moving forward.

Defining your goals and objectives specifically and the balance of various activities will help determine your content.

Here the planning process for in person and online conferences and gatherings diverges: how can your goals be most effectively achieved in the digital world, mediated through a computer screen, with all the distractions of an office or home office set up, while you design for authentic human-to-human interactions?

Weighing Complexity

There are a multitude of decisions every conference organizer makes to deliver the right online conference. This matrix provides a way of thinking about how best to deliver on your goals, for your speakers, for attendees and the best choices you can make to enhance your organization's reputation.



Consider whether a non-specialist you have on staff can successfully produce your event. As a fully self-produced event, LIVE content is streamed from hosts and speakers' homes or offices, using their webcams, and there is generally no cohesive intent to fulfill any particular level of visual or technical production.

Consider the benefits from professionally produced conference and whether the added costs are well invested. Your professional event producer or team of producers employs their online event design expertise to create a fundamentally engaging conference experience for participants. Production quality is elevated by providing speaker training; deploying professional videographers with cameras, microphones, lights, make-up kits and clothing advice to professionally shoot and produce speakers segments and other video components; creating a designed set for the HOST/MC and other enhancements.

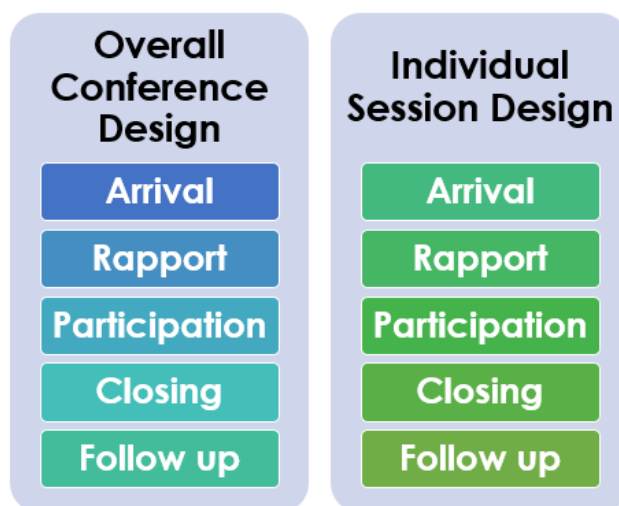
Platform decisions come into play when considering complexity, cost and benefits. Using a webinar platform, like ZOOM Webinar or Zoom Meetings can deliver a successful event. Speakers are live online, guests are live online, content is shared via "screen share." Registration is likely handled externally (via Eventbrite or other). Some 3rd party collaboration tools can be used as add-ons (Mural, SliDo) and others can be seamlessly integrated (Otter.ai). Moving to SOCIO, a full featured conference platform, retains all

the functionality of ZOOM because it is embedded for live content delivery. It also adds a number of professional add-ons, like receptions and social networking, sponsor recognition, trade show options; experiences you might expect from a physical conference.

Online Event Design

The design of the conference overall as well as each individual conference session should take account of basic human needs related to opening the conference/session (arrival and settling in), doing the work by establishing rapport and participation, providing adequate time for closure, feedback and post-event follow up.

Both the online conference overall should reflect this design as well as individual sessions. Coordinating moderators and panelists and ensuring everyone has a common understanding is achieved through a preparatory meeting and well-structured communications.



Insert the tangible

Introduce the physical into this otherwise digital experience. For instance, send something tangible by mail prior to the event, such as a swag bag, ingredients to prepare a special beverage or meal during a planned networking session, or gift certificates (also an opportunity to support local businesses and/or promote sponsors). Whatever you choose, have fun with it, and your attendees will, too. Most important building anticipation for the online conference or event can be crucial to securing actual attendance and active participation.

Production is a Team Sport

No matter which platform you choose, be aware that shifting from a physical venue to a digital one does not mean less work organizing necessarily. It does mean different work, new planning considerations and some new roles. In some ways it will be easier; in other ways it will require more preparation and there are different cost drivers involved beyond the platform costs.

A well-run online conference or event will take significant effort and skills on the part of staff and speakers, so make sure you have enough people for the tasks at hand. Over and above event producer, roles might include MC (or Chair, for introductions, and be the common thread/personality linking sessions), producer (ensuring smooth flow of technical aspects of the agenda), moderator (chat box, break-out sessions, etc.), and technical support for video production, presenters and panelists.

Quality reigns

Do everything you can to put together a first-rate production in your context (leaving plenty of room for being human as too polished can simply turn into boring). High quality sound and lighting are proving essential for maintaining audience engagement. Use a good headset microphone, ensure excellent sound, reduce shadows and make sure faces are well-lit, and consider presenters' clothing and background.

Select the Right Tools

There are myriad digital tools to help you host online meetings and conferences, tools that are evolving rapidly, continuously being developed and honed for an effective, dynamic digital experience. The trick is to match the content and activities on your agenda with the technology that will be most effective in helping achieve your goals.

First you must decide upon your platform. A complete online conference system (such as [Socio](#) or [HeySummit](#)) will provide ample functions and capabilities, but it will be more difficult to use for both the host and likely for the attendees. Video conferencing platforms such as [Zoom](#) (meeting or webinar), [WebEx](#) (online collaboration), [Crowdcast](#) (webinar), may be more familiar to users and event producers can create excellent experiences using these less complex applications. Ultimately, the stage you set for human-to-human interactions to take place will depend more upon your intention and imagination, than your chosen video conferencing.

To that end, a primary consideration in platform and software selection is accessibility, in a very broad sense, for both hosts and attendees. This entails looking at elements such as familiarity with software, ease of software download and installation, bandwidth requirements for video upload, and the ability for the platform to support true participation of attendees, taking into consideration language and other potential barriers.

The more detailed work of matching your activities with the right technology will comprise exploring available functions of the software, such as activity buttons (raising hand, applause, etc.), opportunities for chat, file and screen sharing, polls and quizzes, break-out rooms, recording options and integration of other applications.

In selecting your technology, keep in mind the needs of your participants, doing everything you can to create an environment that fosters human-to-human interaction. However, also give some thought to meeting the needs of other stakeholders, such as sponsors, funders, and your community at large.

A Comparison of Technology Options (September 2020)

Components	<u>ZOOM</u>	<u>SOCIO</u>	<u>Crowd-cast</u>	<u>Hey-Summit</u>	<u>Hopin</u>
OVERVIEW					
Platform Classification	Webinar or Meeting	eConference	Webinar	eConference	eConference
Pricing (1,000 seats)	\$1,860-4,520	\$3,500-6,500	\$500	\$2,000	UNCLEAR
Entry Pricing	\$20 / mo+	\$3500+/event	\$62/mo+	\$116/mo+	\$1,500/event
Work Across Devices	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Video Conferencing	NATIVE	VIA ZOOM	NATIVE	UNCLEAR	NATIVE
PRE-EVENT					
Conference Website	NO	YES	LIMITED	YES	YES
Built-In Registration	LIMITED	YES	YES	YES	YES
Customized Registration	LIMITED	YES	YES	YES	NO DATA
Event Management	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
Custom Branding	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
DURING EVENT					
Multi-Stage or Multi-Session	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Waiting Room/ Green Room	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Built In Schedule	NO	YES	LIMITED	3RD PARTY	UNCLEAR
On-Stage Speakers/Panelists	100	YES	6	UNCLEAR	6
INTERACTIVITY					
Chat	YES in Meeting; Q & A in Webinar	YES	YES	YES	YES
Live Polling	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
File Sharing	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Screen Sharing	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Reception/Social Networking	LIMITED	YES	NO	NO	YES
Advanced Networking	LIMITED	YES	LIMITED	NO	YES
Breakout Rooms	YES	YES	LIMITED	YES	YES
Whiteboard	YES	YES	3RD PARTY	NO	NO
Support for Meetings	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Community Forum	LIMITED	YES	NO	YES	YES

Components	ZOOM	SOCIO	Crowd-cast	Hey-Summit	Hopin
1 to 1 Video Networking	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Gamification	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
BACKEND					
Installed or Cloud-Based	CLOUD	CLOUD	CLOUD	CLOUD	CLOUD
Mobile APP	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Digital Sponsorship Benefits	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES
APIs / Integrations	YES	YES	ZAPIER	YES	UNKNOWN
Email & Reminders	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Recording Capability	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Multistream	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
Post-Event Recordings	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Analytics	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Embeddable	LIMITED	NO	YES	NO	NO
INITIAL ASSESSMENT	Ratings (1 = poor to 5 = excellent)				
Ease of Use: Producer	5	4	4	3	3
Ease of Use: Attendee	5	4	4	3	3
Platform Stability	5	5	3	4	4
Overall Accessibility	5	5	4	4	3
Mobile Accessibility	5	5	4	3	NO DATA
Overall User Interface	3	5	5	4	3
Human Resources	4	4	4	2	2
Participatory engagement	3	4	4	5	5
Customer Service	3	5	3	4	3
Total Score	38	41	35	32	26

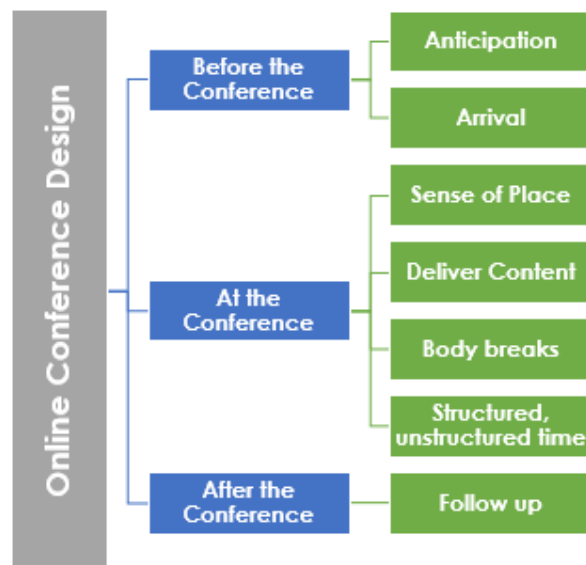
From Attendee to Participant in Seven Steps

Two of the most often cited elements of good conference and event design, digital or otherwise, are high-quality content, and meaningful participation and engagement on the part of the attendees.

The job of the hosts, moderators, facilitators, speakers and workshop leaders is to build an environment that effectively connects these two. The design must create the conditions to enable learning, allow new ideas to take root, and affect change in the participants, galvanizing them toward action.

In the digital world, we face the challenge of cultivating social behaviours while speakers and attendees are physically isolated, faced with the detachment that can occur when our experience is mediated through a screen.

How do we get our attendees to forget they are looking at a computer screen, and encourage deep human connection and interactions? How can we create a feeling of belonging and connection, as well as comfort and safety, mindsets which in turn enable true sharing and learning? How do we move from having passively listening attendees to actively engaged participants?



Designing a complete conference experience using all attendee touch points with purpose.

Step One: Anticipation or Sowing the Seeds of Connection

Just as in the case of in-person event planning, engaging your audience in the digital world begins weeks, even months in advance of the event itself. To deliver a human-centred experience, you must genuinely connect with attendees as full human beings from the get-go.

Once attendees have registered, keep in touch with them as the conference draws closer. Consider providing something tangible, real to help build anticipation, and to secure attendance. Tangibles could also be related to a specific conference session, such as sharing a recipe for making bread, and baking it in advance of the session.

It could be an imaginative tactic, such as asking attendees to think about a specific word or phrase and how it relates to their work, their desired conference experience, their hopes for the future ("what does 'this' mean to you in the context of your work?"). Using a collaborative tool such as [Miro](#), or a shared Google Doc participants could express their thoughts and view others responses and expand on them. Creating this kind of pre-conference activity can serve you well once the online events begin, as participants will already feel some connection with each other, have invested time into making their experience successful and gain greater commitment to attending and participating in the conference.

Pre-conference activities can be used to give profile to sponsors, to feature local talent, to prepare the attendees for the substance of the conference proceedings.

Step Two: A Sense of Arrival

Since participants won't be physically arriving at the conference, you should work to construct this feeling of arrival in the online space. This could be, for example, a link to a video/slideshow that 'signs' attendees into the waiting room for the official opening of the conference space. Be creative with it and make it fun. This is a chance to delight and surprise attendees.

Should it be possible to avoid holding attendees in the waiting room, you can create a casual coffee bar feeling before any conference sessions. It is a simple way to quickly build rapport with attendees.

Say hello, be personable, ask about from where they are joining, invite them to introduce themselves in the chat, get them acquainted with the platform functions, or use the favourite Canadian small talk topic: the weather.

The point is: when attendees show up, they are ready to be with you, or they want to figure out the technical set up.

Step Three: Create a Sense of Place

Establish a sense of the space the conference wishes to embody, prepare a high quality film for the land acknowledgement, highlight local arts and culture, invite an artist to perform as opening act to the proceedings to come.

These videos or stories can be used as touch points throughout the conference, drawing everyone into a creative space. These touch points can also be the place where important information is given about the proceedings to come; links to upcoming activities can be embedded into the program schedule with reminders delivered to each participant by email or within the community platforms that fully fledged online conferences might use.

Always keep in mind: you are setting a stage, or perhaps it is that you are building the vessel for your attendees to call home for a time.

Step Four: Deliver Content Effectively

The physical conference model tends to put experts on stages, creating a hierarchy which can lead attendees to be more passive recipients. True participation means being seen and heard. It can generate a feeling of co-creation and buy-in which gives participants a vested interest in outcomes.

Shorter, dynamic presentations that get participants actively thinking are highly effective. These can be pre-recorded or live, with the speaker then participating in or facilitating a follow up working session around that topic. Remember that production quality will have an effect on people's interest and attention. Make sure overall quality, sound and lighting are good, and give some thought to your digital staging and how things look.

Leverage technologies to ensure your attendees can actively engage in each session. This can be as simply as soliciting comments and questions in chat. Or it can involve smaller breakout groups so that

attendees can meet others, exchange experiences and discuss ideas and become participants in the online space.

Step Five: Structured *Unstructured Time* and Breaks

Any conference needs to be work to avoid “over-programming”. Participants dislike skipping conference activities as that can leave a feeling of missing out, or simply rushing from one session to the next, with diminishing return on their time investment.

Designing intentional spaces for breaks, creating structured unstructured times during the online conference is an important aspect of caring for the whole human being in attendance. They aren’t merely eyeballs or bums in seats.

Some breaks can be simply a break in the schedule; a chance to catch up with other commitments to get food or refreshments and take a body break.

Others can involve intentional guided movement breaks, giving eyes, mind and body a chance to recharge and reset. Participants can leave their video on or turn it off as they follow the movement facilitator, whatever makes them comfortable.

Scheduled networking sessions are another aspect of successful online conferences. Networking sessions can be unstructured, e.g. leaving a conference room open for casual hang outs or establishing several rooms that are arranged by topic. Networking can also be highly directed, such as using gamification techniques. Built-in features for networking on online conferencing platforms such as [Socio](#) include a social wall, serving as a private, in-app social feed. Socio’s mobile app also has a ‘shake’ feature which when prompted in a session, allows participants to ‘shake’ their mobile devices and exchange contact details/profiles, so that once people choose to be connected, they can then communicate directly with one another. These networking methods can also serve to promote sponsors.

The bottom line is that imagination seems to be the most valuable tool when it comes to networking. But no matter how you do it, aim to keep participants connected within your main conference platform, cultivating your online event’s sense of place.

Step Six: Finish Strong

Just like each speaker’s session should be designed with a strong finish in mind, your conference should be wrapped up in a way that leaves participants feeling energized, that their time was well spent, they were seen and heard, and that they belong.

Some online conferences concluded with a highly produced show with performances, participatory entertainment like lip synching competition and a dance party. Others finish with a common meal and hanging out together. Others convene a conference wrap up session featuring a recap of key ideas and creating space for reflection by participants to help move them toward action. You are only limited by your imagination.

Step Seven: Follow up

Follow up is key to having a lasting impact, driving satisfaction and seeding participation at your next online event. Post-conference follow-up closes the overall experience. Online conferences and sessions

are often recorded and live transcripts are generated. This presents a new opportunity to share the recordings, to edit and publish the transcript, or to create a summary of proceedings or insights. Ideally, follow up activities are intrinsically useful such as guiding action planning, which can keep participants engaged for several months after the formal conference closing.

Accessibility and Inclusion

As an online conference organizer you have an awesome opportunity to create something far better than what we are accustomed to in the physical world.

The importance of paying attention to ensuring accessibility and inclusion for your conference or event is not unique to the digital world. What is unique, are the ways in which we can use technology to increase our efforts in ways that simply aren't possible, prioritized or affordable when hosting face-to-face events.

This article offers leading experiments and best practices to thoughtfully use digital technology to minimize barriers to attendance and participation while furthering inclusion of a great diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints from equity-seeking groups.

Going online, you'll find that you can reach new heights of participation not only terms of broadening the diversity of your active audience, but also the depth of their engagement. The digital realm is an opportunity to set the stage for greater equality and equity; it is a chance to put into action the values we hold about how we'd like our world to be.

In Canada, the following are generally recognized as equity-seeking groups:

- Indigenous, Black and other People of Colour
- Persons with disabilities
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Trans, Queer, Intersex, Two Spirit
- Women

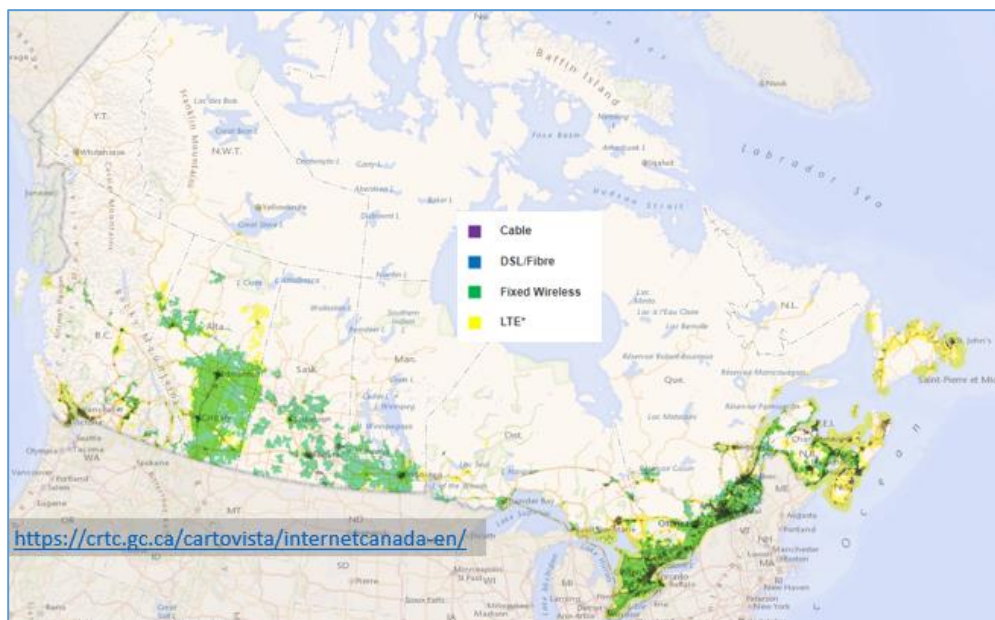
The Digital Divide is Real

As reported in [High-Speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy](#), "Canada faces a national connectivity gap. Rural Canadians face the daily challenge of slower, less reliable Internet access than those in urban centres." Further, rural and remote Internet service tends to be much more expensive for much lower levels of service than is offered in Canada's urban areas. Although efforts are being made to reduce this divide, 2017 reports indicated that only 37% of rural households, and 24% of households in Indigenous communities, had sufficient speed to access internet functions often taken for granted by those in urban centres, including high definition videos and the majority of cloud-based software applications.

This is a difficult barrier to navigate; in fact, the reality is that some folks just won't be able to attend your online event. But do make efforts to show your awareness of the issue, such as offering options for calling in, and providing documentation and content in advance, perhaps even by mail, and video links for downloading prior to the event.

When you are including rural and remote Canadians make sure your speakers are aware of ways in which they can present using tools that are light on download.

Also, quite often it helps to improve the overall experience to ask participants to turn off their screens for those times when rural Internet connectivity fluctuates.



The other obvious barrier affect anyone without access to the Internet due to economic and financial factors. For some online conference organizers it may be possible to create communal access points to boost participation among these groups of people.

In October 2020 Canada map of internet connectivity shows how most of the vast rural and remote regions of the country often lack current Internet connectivity. Additionally, when faster service packages are available they tend to carry a much higher price tag, and don't have the same features as Canada's urban centres.

Live Transcription

There are two basic options to allow users to read along the spoken content presented:

1. A person can be assigned with the task to Close Caption the meeting as it unfolds. This is an existing function within Zoom, for instance.
2. An AI-based application, like [Otter.ai](#) can be seamlessly integrated with Zoom, for instance, to create a live machine-generated transcription. Otter.ai allows for some training of the application to aid with more reliable recognition of technical language or names, for instance.

The AI-based live transcription will have some error rate, but in our experience it is a useful tool despite those errors. Errors can also be generated by the human close captioning provider; the reduce errors due to fatigue it is advised to use a team of people to provide this function when it is essential.

Should a speaker's presentation be available as a complete written text in advance that can be used within the live meeting to provide closed captioning as well.

Sign Language Interpretation

Hiring a sign language interpreter allows people with hearing impairments to participate. The sign language interpreter can work in both directions: signing the speakers, as well as verbalizing the signed comments from hearing-impaired participants. Those requiring interpretation can pin the Interpreter to appear in the main window of the video platform they use.

Respect for Diversity

Being mindful of the power imbalances to that exist for groups from different cultural and racial backgrounds is important in designing your online conference or event. Moving beyond tokenism and lip-service is an opportunity online conferences and events can seize.

Organizers, hosts and speakers should be mindful that the current terminology of BIPOC or IBPOC can make it appear as if the barriers are the same for Indigenous, Black and People of Colour. While there are shared aspects, they each have their own contexts and a more nuanced understanding among conference staff and speakers should be fostered. Some actions you can take no matter the context of your online conference or event include:

- **Land Acknowledgement:** Any online meeting takes place with people who live, work and play on Indigenous territories in Canada. Therefore, at minimum a meaningful land acknowledgement should be shared at the beginning of the proceedings.
- **Welcome ceremony:** Should it be possible to have a local Indigenous elder join the proceedings you can ask them to provide a welcoming ceremony or offer words of guidance for the online conference or event. Elders are paid or given an appropriate gift for their work in accordance with local Indigenous custom.
- **Authenticity:** Although referring specifically to news reporting when visiting an Indigenous community, Duncan McCue's note in [Reporting in Indigenous Communities](#) is a good general rule to follow: "Here's the bottom-line on Indigenous customs and protocols: if you're ever unsure about your interpretation of an Indigenous custom, or whether it's appropriate to participate in, write about, or record, a ceremony, dance or song, ask your host." This speaks to the ways in which

mainstream society can appropriate the experiences, the stories of others and retell them for their own purposes, without regard for Indigenous and other equity seeking people.

- **Representation:** Hire hosts, speakers, moderators who are Indigenous, Black and People of Colour to speak on a wide range of topic and issues, not merely those related to race or equity.
- **Different modes of meeting and sharing:** Be mindful of culturally specific methods of designing your online event. By way of a simplistic example, white mainstream culture tends to be comfortable with hierarchical events, where speakers are on a stage, act as experts and have the attention of attendees focused on them. In other cultural contexts, circles or roundtables that invite everyone's expertise and give everyone explicit space to speak and contribute may be favoured. In short, using a variety of modes of presentation and sharing experiences in the online event design, enhances active participation, enables learning and enriches the online conference experience for all.
- **Speaking time:** Pay attention to who speaks up and who doesn't in the online conference sessions. When you find that primarily people generally identified with the white mainstream culture in Canada take up lots of space, work to create space to speak and be heard for people from a diversity of backgrounds. This should be done without asking people to speak because they are black and to offer a black perspective.
- **Be yourself - consciously.** Don't apologize for who you are. Instead simply be aware of your relative privilege and how you use it. Each of us has experiences to share and contributions to make. When we join an online conference or event we want the content, the learning, the networking. be aware that for instance, as a white person sharing in a diverse group about your discomfort or feelings of guilt for having privilege simply asks listeners from less privileged backgrounds to take care of you emotionally. As an Indigenous, Black or Person of Colour who is not white you don't need to preface your remarks in any way to take care of the other listeners; you can simply make your comment, insight or contribution.

Multi-language Interpretation

Language barriers are one hurdle that may be somewhat easier to jump online than in person. For instance, Zoom, a popular video conferencing platform, has added a [built-in simultaneous interpretation](#) function, with nine default and up to five custom languages. Attendees can select the audio channel with the language of choice, with the option to mute the original.

There are an increasing number of cloud- and web-based online interpretation services available, offering professional interpreters and promising ease of integration into your online event platform. Any AI-based automated translation services are not usually of sufficient professional quality, at this time, to be seriously considered.

Safe Spaces

Online conferences and events should develop and share their online harassment policies with attendees as part of the conference proceedings. Providing basic ground rules for online interaction and participation including standards related to language, stereotyping and discrimination sets expectations and aids in creating safe space. This type of policy should include a mechanism by which to flag any inappropriate behaviour to the organizers or hosts with pre-defined protocols for rapid response.

Safe space can be particularly difficult to achieve when an open meeting link has been shared and anyone can log on to an online event anonymously. When using registration processes that require actual email addresses to receive a link the odds of inappropriate behaviour and prejudicial or discriminatory language diminish in many cases.

Providing a facilitated 'safe room', or rooms, can be an effective way to reduce attendees simply leaving from your event. Instead whatever issue they encountered can be processed real time, and this may in the end nurture deeper dialogue, reflection and learning at least for the affected attendees and the host or organizer. Safe rooms should be set up so attendees can come and go from them at will and not have to be assigned to them. They should be regularly promoted and normalized.

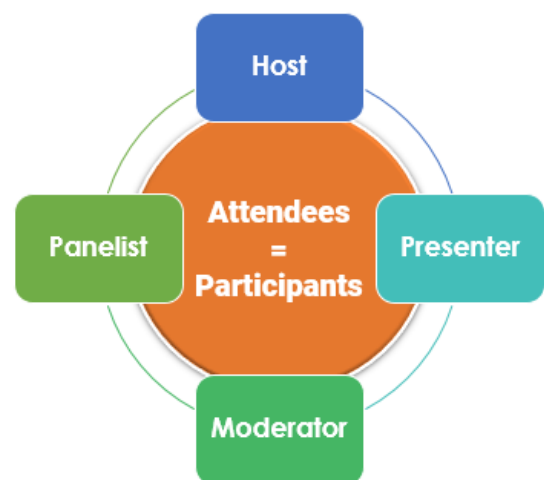
Essential Tips for Speakers to Achieve True Participation and Learning Online

When asked about recent positive experiences participants have had during online conferences, meetings and workshops, a frequently cited element is about achieving a sense of real human connection.

As conference host, moderator or speaker you should be deliberate in your work to build an environment for meaningful connections and interactions that create the conditions for effective learning.

The design of the conference overall as well as each individual conference session should take account of basic human needs related to opening the conference/session (arrival and settling in), doing the work by establishing rapport and participation, providing adequate time for closure, feedback and post-event follow up.

In the following pages we offer specific insights we've gleaned from our own practice as conference speaker and workshop leader, and from research as part of the Future Perfect project. We hope this article helps you create these conditions for learning and participation, or simply validate how you have been working already.



Place attendees at the centre of planning, conference and session design

ONE: It's Not About You; It's About How You Enable Learning

1. **Remember: the conference—the session or workshop you are leading—is for the participants.** It is about how you enable participants' learning. Your job is to create the conditions in which they can learn effectively. That means creating spaces for participation, listening and responding to where participants are at and helping them move to a new place of understanding or action.
2. **Forget your resumé!** You don't need to justify your speaking role with a long-winded resumé of past achievements. Brevity and salience is key to success online: Stay on topic and get on with the work attendees came for.
3. **Own the stage.** It's yours, without apology, for the time you have been scheduled. Owning the stage means using it well and respecting everyone's time: participants who came to hear you speak, organizers who need to keep all the pieces of the conference on time, speakers that follow you.
4. **Appearances matter.** Don't apologize, especially not about your space, your art in the background, the street noise. These "I'm sorry that..." apologies, like self-deprecating observations, require emotional work by participants, yet they add nothing to the success of the online session. Before your session, pay attention to your physical set-up, ensure your video and microphone work well; then make sure you're comfortable with the way you look on screen, use natural light from a window or use other light sources that are placed in front of you, never behind you.

TWO: Arrival and Building Rapport

In general, sessions that invite active participation work better than a talking-head, broadcast-style presentation. Here are some tips to help you design the conference and your individual session to focus on participant learning, rather than needing to "get through" all your content.

1. **Coffee bar, instead of waiting room.** A simple way to quickly build rapport with attendees is to make sure they aren't stuck in the conference waiting room prior to the start of the session; instead, give them a "Coffee Bar" experience. The point is: when attendees show up, they are ready to be with you, or they want to figure out the technical set up.
 - Say hello, be personable, ask about from where they are joining, invite them to introduce themselves in the chat, get them acquainted with the platform functions, or use the favourite Canadian small talk topic: the weather.
2. **Invite participation: early and often.** Building rapport—connection and trust—is directly related to successfully fostering participation and creating the conditions for learning. Rapport between attendees and presenters, and amongst attendees, cultivates a sense of belonging, of being seen and heard.



- Give participants a chance to speak or share something as quickly as possible once the meeting officially starts. Asking attendees to introduce themselves and whose territory they are on—either by voice when in small groups, or by using the chat function when the group is larger—is a simply way to turn attendees into participants. It is important to let them hear their own voice and get to know something about other attendees. This provides an opportunity for everyone to locate and use the chat box, so they are comfortable with the tool. This, in turn, appears to increase their likelihood of active participation as the session continues.
3. **Give instructions about using online conferencing functions.** The specific functionalities depend on whether a session is using a webinar format or a meeting format. In most of our work, we use the meeting format because it allows presenters and participants to see each other, and participants can be given permission to unmute themselves. Specific instructions for meeting etiquette go a long way to a great experience, for example:
- “Keep your camera on, if you like – it is great to see you. Do feel free to turn it off if that suits you better, or you have to do something unrelated to this session.”
 - “You can use the gallery view when I share my screen so you can see more people if you like.”
 - “I’ll mute you just to avoid a lot of cross noise from everyone’s environment, but you can unmute yourself and speak up any time.”
 - “Interrupt me! It is not rude to want to be sure you understand what I’m talking about or clarify or challenge something I say.”

THREE: Emphasize Human Connection and Substance

1. **Introduce the physical into the digital.** Part of what attendees miss in online conferences is the physical connection, the kinetic energy that comes with being part of a vital conversation. Find ways to introduce tangible, physical shared activities. Your creativity is your only limit:
 - making a cup of tea before the next session
 - sharing a favourite recipe and inviting everyone to prepare it to enjoy during your session
 - mail the conference registration kit and swag in advance
 - create a conference beverage with ingredients mailed in the advance swag bag so that participants can make it at home
 - fully produced galas and awards presentations, followed by expertly produced participatory entertainment like lip synching and dance parties
2. **Emphasizes substance.** Keep any introductory or biographical remarks short. Instead of using a typical presentation structure and lots of presentation slides, offer substantive content as quickly as you can and alternate between speakers view and sharing important visual aids.
3. **Be concise.** It is OK to speak shorter, engage more and create spaces for participants’ expertise, peer learning and sharing. The key is to design it into your session with purpose and clarity, and set adequate time aside. **Use digital tools for their strengths.** In online conferences, many sessions will be too large to allow participants to speak. But participation and connection can be achieved by using

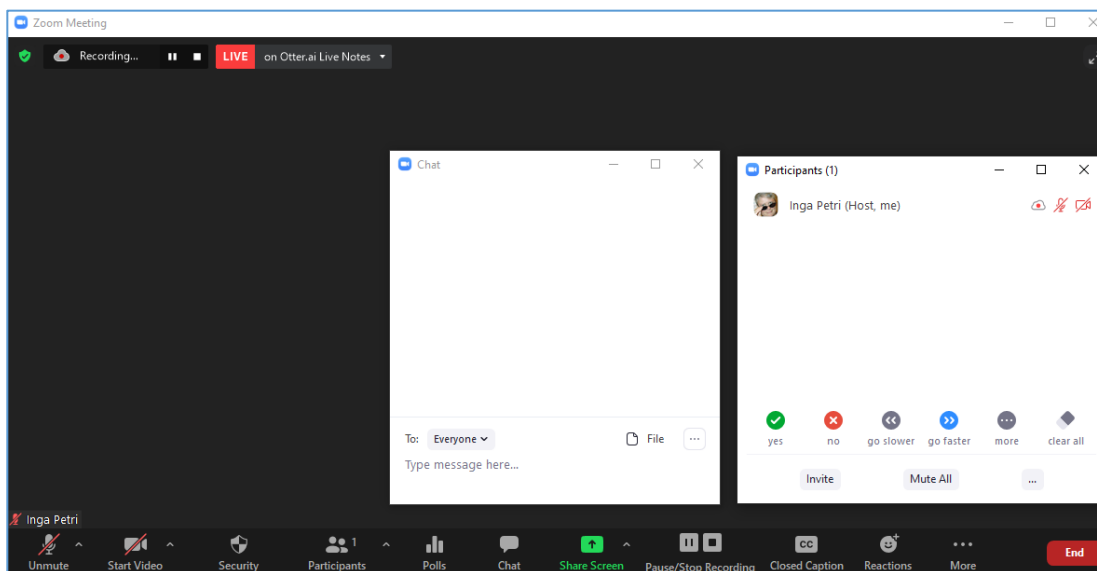
digital tools, both those within your preferred video conferencing platform and some that might be outside of it.

- There are easy **polls** (“Where do you live?” or “What sector do you work in?”) and there are difficult polls that require considerable thought. When using a poll, it is best to read the question out loud and narrate as results come in. This provides more time for folks to digest the question, and helps auditory learners and those having difficulty seeing the poll (e.g. because of the device they are using) still participate. Giving a warning before you close the poll is useful to get participants to finalize responses; once about 75% have responded you won’t receive much more within the time available. Share the results once the poll is closed to ensure everyone gets an idea of where participants are at.
- The **chat box** is a simple means to foster participation and have participants ask questions, share insights, ideas, concerns or links to information. Especially in large sessions having the host, or a moderator available to watch the chat and bring forward questions or comments is invaluable. Inviting people who comment in chat to speak to their comment whenever time allows is a great rapport builder, too.
- Well-designed **break-out sessions** offer a chance for conversation, networking and connection among participants, while also getting some work done.
 - It is important to give clear instructions without too many tasks: One broad but clear question for breakouts of 4 people for 10 minutes should be enough to stimulate meaningful conversation.
 - Asking participants to start with a round table in alphabetical order by first name is an easy way to get the conversation going quickly, and ensure every participant has the chance to speak and listen.
 - Before they head into breakouts, it will be useful to remind participant that “We are all equally important, so please keep to your time and allow everyone to participate equally.” The facilitator can drop in to various groups for a few moments to ensure participants are on track. From the main room, the host or facilitator can provide trouble shooting as needed, as well as keep time via broadcast messages to all groups. Hosts can also give individuals in breakout groups the power to record their breakout and upload the file after the meeting as a way of enabling report creation. This should be agreed in advance of the session.
- Real-time collaboration using **whiteboarding tools** (e.g. Miro, Jam Board, Mural) or **shared working documents** (e.g. Google Docs, Google Sheets) can be very effective in online workshops where a record of discussion is desired. These are tools that exist outside of the video conferencing platform. Facilitators need to be mindful that these external tools require screen space beside the zoom window. Participants may or may not be familiar with these tools, so be judicious about how exactly you expect them to be used, and ensure participants are able to do so successfully, i.e. without the technology itself requiring much time and attention.

FOUR: Finish Strong

Each speaker has their own style and preference for presenting and workshoping. Should you favour a presentation followed by a Q and A format, you can ensure that your session doesn't simply fizzle out when no one asks any questions quickly. In essence, an active Q & A translates into a strong finish.

1. **Silence can be productive.** Often, the online environment speeds up presentations and interactions. Moments of silence online can feel awkward. But when transitioning from presentation to soliciting questions or comments, it is important to give participants a few moments to gather their thoughts. As a presenter, moderator or host it is important to be comfortable with a few moments of silence, and not simply keep filling that space with your own words. Doing so simply keeps participants from fully forming their own thoughts and deciding whether and how to contribute to the session.
2. **Reflection spaces.** Moving from listening to speaking mode can work better when there is a purposeful structure to support that. An individual reflection space or a very small breakout group with one specific task is an effective method to seed an active and productive Q&A segment. The presenter can give participants one question to reflect on. It can be something as simple as "What is one thing that really stood out to you?" or something more complex like "What is one thing that you might want to implement in your organization?" or something else relevant to the presentation. 3 to 5 minutes should be enough reflection time and space for participants to gather their thoughts.
3. **Report back to begin Q & A segment.** Invite two or three participants to report back briefly on their breakout conversation as a way to solicit comments and questions, and create an active Q & A.



A typical Zoom Meeting window with mic and video option, security information, participant list, polls, chat window, screen sharing, closed captioning as well as an integrated live transcription service and Zoom recording at the top of the window

FIVE: Closing and Follow up

1. **Take time to close your session.** Participation is at the heart of great online conferences and conference sessions. So, it is important to find ways to thoughtfully close your conference session to honor the relationships that have been formed.
 - Leave about 10 minutes of the session for closing, next steps and thank yous.
 - When it is a small group, invite participants to unmute themselves and share a word or phrase that expresses how they feel after the session, a key take away or new action to implement.
 - When it is a larger group, ask participants to write in the chat box.
2. **Instant feedback.** Especially when using chat, speakers can get instant feedback by asking participants to share a key insight they are taking back; or something they learned in the session; or something they want to remember from the session.
3. **Next steps.** Let participants know when the next conversation will happen, when the next report will be published, when you will connect again. And deliver as promised.

Streaming Technology Equipment Kit for Speakers

Today, there are more and more people producing online events and conferences. Where once looking and sounding great on a Skype video call didn't matter as much due to its novelty, today's professional online environment demands a higher level of quality and greater attention to detail for streaming technologies.

We need our content to be a clean and professional reflection of ourselves, our work, our organizations.

The bad news is that it takes some time, intention and investment to reach a solid foundational level for producing high-quality online events and conferences. The good news is that it doesn't take as much time, effort or investment as one might fear.

With this white paper the focus is on small-to-medium size events and production budgets. These type of online meetings and events tend to be comprised of single speakers, usually at their home or (home) office, and often using video conferencing platforms like ZOOM (or similar).

Based on our day-to-day digital event production practices, we present options that empower you to make the best decisions around the technical equipment for your particular needs. We present options in a simple matrix:

1. Beginner
2. Intermediate
3. Advanced

Four Pillars

There are four technical pillars to digital event production quality:

Audio: We are spending more time working and meeting online than ever before. A quality microphone delivering clean audio is no longer a bonus, it's a must.

Video: It is in the quality of cameras where we can often make the most dramatic presentation improvements with quite minimal effort.

Lighting: Typically the most overlooked of the four pillars, paying attention to basic lighting can go a long way to a great looking presentation.

Internet: Given most of our online meetings and events are real-time and live, the best cameras and mics won't matter if your internet connection is poor.



Audio

A few quick pointers to help ensure your audio is clear, crisp & professional:

1. **THE MAGIC OF EARBUDS:** Don't yet have a good mic? Use the mic on your average earbuds; it is generally far superior to your laptop mic.
2. **ANTICIPATE THE INTERRUPTIONS:** Sometimes it's the furnace, or the door, the dog, the kids, the neighbour or the courier that interrupts your online events — think ahead and avoid interruptions.
3. **SILENCE YOUR DEVICES:** The most common background sound during an online meeting or event? Your other devices. Take a moment to put them on silent and make them all ssshhh.
4. **DON'T 'FIDDLE':** The noises you don't notice as a speaker, can be vastly amplified for us as listeners. Put the pen down, don't rock your chair, stop tapping the desk.

Microphones

- **Beginner: Samson Meteor Mic** Samson's Meteorite is the universal solution for capturing high-quality recordings on your computer. Small in size, big in quality.
- **Intermediate: AT2020** The Audio-Technica AT2020 is a cost-effective studio condenser microphone intended for high quality voice recordings and streaming.
- **Advanced: Blue Yeti Pro** Bring serious quality and clarity to your voice recordings with the Blue Yeti X professional condenser USB microphone.

Video

A few quick pointers to help ensure your video is sharp, rich & professional

1. **CAMERA FRAMING:** Get your camera up to eye level. This creates a much improved viewing experience, and increases relatability as well as retention.
2. **SIMPLIFY THE BACKGROUND:** Busy backgrounds are hard on the eyes and lead to distraction. Clean it up, clear it out, and let people focus on you. And, remember digital backgrounds usually cut out anything that moves on screen.
3. **THE SMUDGE FACTOR:** Use a microfibre cloth to clean the lens of your camera before each event. This small act makes a big quality difference.
4. **THE RULE OF THIRDS:** Your face should be in the top 3rd of the frame; you don't want a lot of 'open space' above your head but rather hold your space and create a pleasing viewing experience.

Cameras

- **Beginner: Logitech C922 Pro** The Logitech c922 Pro is arguably the most popular webcam on the market today. For about \$150 you can start streaming in 1080p!
- **Intermediate: Logitech BRIO** The most professional look you can get from a webcam. For around \$200 you get high dynamic range, amazing autofocus and 4K recording!
- **Advanced: Lumix G7** Ready to go pro? This mirrorless camera features a micro four thirds sensor and rich colours. A common choice for pro streamers.

Lighting

A few quick pointers to help ensure your lighting is warm, simple & effective.

These tips are especially important for black and other speakers of colour to ensure their webcams don't merely broadcast a silhouetted image, but a true and clear likeness.

1. **EYE LEVEL LIGHTING:** Often speakers use overhead lights, and it's just not flattering, because they create big shadows on their faces. Instead, place the lights at eye level and light directly from the front.
2. **DIFFUSED, NOT HOT:** You want a warm, diffused, balanced light on your face. 3 lamps with shades is better than 1 open bulb nearby.
3. **DARK = NOISY:** Most laptop and webcams can't handle low-light situations and will become very noisy/pixelated. Bring up the light!
4. **LIGHT THE BACKGROUND:** The speaker and their background benefit from different lighting. Light your face first, then use different lights for what's behind you.

Lights

- **Beginner: Viltrox L132T** The entry-level video light for self-produced online appearance. It has a low cost, high brightness and adjustable colour temperature.
- **Intermediate: Elgato Key Light** This is a professional studio LED panel with 2500 lumens, it's colour adjustable and app-enabled for PC or MAC.
- **Advanced: Aputure LS C120D II** Ready to go pro? The Aputure C120D II is a studio-grade light that boasts 5500K colour temperature and precise colour rendering.

Internet Connectivity

A few quick pointers to help ensure your internet is as fast and stable as possible.

1. **HARDLINE OVER WIFI:** Wherever possible, connect to your modem with an Ethernet cable instead of over WIFI. Stability of your internet connection will greatly improve.
2. **A DEDICATED CONNECTION:** When possible, use a dedicated connection that is not shared. Ask household members to disconnect their devices during important online meetings and events.
3. **CLOSE BACKGROUND APPS:** Common culprits for bandwidth usage issues include Dropbox, Netflix, Google Sync, Time Machine, email and other browsers.
4. **YOUR OTHER DEVICES:** Don't forget your other computers, tablets, smart phones, digital TV and streaming devices and equipment that also access your internet. For best quality, turn everything else off.

Financial Considerations: Cost Drivers and Revenue Streams

Although many standard conference expenses will be eliminated or greatly reduced by going online (e.g. travel, hotel, catering, printed material), some costs may simply shift, and new ones will be introduced. One cost driver can relate to simply requiring a different skill set and technical expertise to successfully run an online event.

The bottom line is: your online conference or event has real costs, requires skills to produce and host well, and you have to figure out how to raise the revenue you need to make it sustainable.

Platforms

The cost for the online video conferencing platform you select can vary from less than a hundred dollars on a month-by-month subscription for just the duration of the conference with a limited number of attendees to tens of thousands of dollars for large scale online conferences with thousands of attendees.

Costs depend on a variety of factors including specific features required, number of seats required, type and availability of technical support, and ability to integrate other software to enhance the experience.

A full-scale, professional, white-labelled online conferencing system tends to be packed with features and capabilities. Not only does this drive up the cost, but, if unfamiliar to attendees, it can also require added time and require a different skill set and know-how to run the interface and take advantage of all its functions.

Furthermore, you may be considering sign language and spoken language interpretation services, live transcription or closed captioning, or additional collaboration tools like whiteboards. Each adds incremental costs to pay for the use of technology as well as costs for training and human resources.

Production

While you don't have to think about audio-visual services for the in person conference, coffee breaks or meal service, some of the content of the online conference may entail additional costs:

- pre-recorded speakers videos (either recorded using basic technology like zoom or screen recording software or shot by professional videographers)
- producing welcome video or a land acknowledgement video
- pre-taped sponsor messages

Even if speakers or workshop leaders appear live, they may incur some costs by requiring online collaboration tools for their session to be effective.

Other production cost drivers can come from creating special fully produced social events like:

- gala awards with live / pre-recorded artist performances
- online dinner party where the ingredients are supplied by a delivery service in advance and the meal prepared in advance and shared while online
- a dance party with lip synch competition, performances, break out groups to mingle and meet random people cocktail party-style.

The exact costs will depend on the calibre of hosts or artists, the number of computers required, specialized software, staff to run the various aspects of the event.

Although providing green room for speakers or safe spaces rooms may somewhat increase your costs because it requires contractors as event producers and technical support or staff as moderators), they will only be small incremental increase rather than major cost drivers.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools have begun to appear everywhere online, including in transcription and translation fields. It is important to watch their evolution as most aren't delivering the human-like experience or accuracy required for a professional online conference or event. However, it is clear that they will improve over time; it just isn't clear how much time that will require.

People

We may think of web platforms as existing in the cloud, but they certainly don't exist in a void: they usually require people to run them and use them. In fact, although their skillset will be quite different, just as many people may be needed for running an online conference as an in-person one. As well as an event producer (either a specialist company, an independent contractor, or train staff), you'll need, for example: chat box and breakout room moderators, audio visual and other technical support, someone to manage participant issues, and, if using them, interpreters and transcribers.

Speaker fees may be reduced in absence of travel time (normally rolled into their fees). However, you will need to spend time to ensure speakers have adequate internet, webcams and audio equipment to stream live, and look and sound good. If possible, budget for a videographer to work with your speakers for any pre-recorded material.

If your event involve hiring artists, have adequate performance fees built into your budget. You also need to remember that artists have rights to their performance and that you need to negotiate fees for any additional rights, such as rebroadcasting their performance.

Revenue Sources: Attendee Registration

It has been said that *free* is not a business model, let alone a way to secure online or hybrid conferences as a sustainable part of your activities or mandate. For some membership-based associations their annual conference is a pivotal part of their business model requiring more than a break-even scenario. Regardless of the old model, with the world having turned toward the digital realm in the age of COVID-19, it is important to fully consider the implications of the price of admission.

The Price of Admission

There are four major considerations around pricing your online conference or event:

1. value and perceived value
2. setting precedence
3. your expenses
4. participants' ability to pay

Value and Perceived Value

The amount you can ask participants to pay for your conference is based on their perception of value, which to some extent will be based on the price you charge. Pricing research has shown¹ for instance, that people think wine tastes better when it's more expensive, and a product is seen as having better quality if it has a higher price.

People aren't merely buying a commodity when considering your online conference. They are buying awareness of leading practices in their field, insights about the future, solutions to their problems, and they buy new connections to grow their professional networks. Show them the value you provide, and people will want to participate. Provide valuable, timely content delivered by great speakers and experts. Put time and effort into your event production so that attendees become active participants, and come away with feelings of connection and belonging; an excellent learning and networking outcomes.

Setting Precedence

For some online conferences, events or online collaboration goes back 20 year or so. But many others have been thrown into the digital world unexpectedly, and are finding themselves on a steep learning curve while putting together online events quickly.

Notwithstanding the internal realities and challenges, it is important to guard against not charging for events, just because it is new, or because you are unsure people will pay for it. When there is an exchange of value everyone has to take responsibility in a reciprocal way for their role in the relationship rather than succumb to the short term benefits of setting an unsustainable precedence.

Truth be told, we don't know for how long it will be necessary to gather online for all types of events. The again, we may find that we like it, that it makes professional development better and we may continue to do so even when we are able to travel and gather in person again. All to say, if we don't charge a price for admission now, however small it may be, it will be difficult to expect people to pay next time.

¹ <https://wendymaynard.com/the-surprising-reason-you-should-charge-a-premium-price-for-your-services/>

Your Expenses

There is no reason to abandon the basic goal of breaking even when shifting your conferences and events online. With conference revenues generally limited to the three main categories of sponsorship, public funding, and participant registration, it is no surprise that “solid registration pricing strategy is one of the most critical aspects of a successful conference.”² Your online conference cost money to put on; finding the right balance of your revenue sources is crucial for sustainability.

Participants' Ability to Pay

Recently, a general participant pricing rule of thumb has emerged. This rule of thumb says that it is reasonable to charge online events at 10 - 30% of the in-person experience, ‘10% for first time virtual events (such as through a member discount), and 30% for groups that have been producing virtual events for a while and have a good track record.’

Of course, your event is worth what it is worth. There are two main pricing approaches possible:

- You can use pricing strategies to target a certain type of participant, or to keep registrations to a certain level, as pricing functions as a barrier to attendance for some people.³
- You can use pricing strategies to create near open access based on your targeted attendees' ability to pay. To that end you can present pricing options to potential attendees to ensure everyone who wants is able to attend. This can be as simple as a note on the registration page that invites potential attendees to get in touch to arrange a lower or zero rate registration. Another option is to simply embed sliding scale options in the registration pricing online up front, such as: pay 100% of full registration, pay 75% of full registration down to 0%.
- You can also offer several choices for registrants, including optional sessions/days, and incentives such as early bird rates. The basic idea is to anchor value high, while using incentives to obtain a lower final price. It is also worth to offer savings for multiple people registering from the same organization.

If your event is fully funded by sources other than participants, be sure to clearly state that attendees registration fees are covered by the public funder or sponsors.

Sponsorship

Online conferences offers exciting new opportunities for sponsors from increased visibility, valuable data/metrics, increased return-on-investment, to direct engagement spaces that create greater engagement with, and value to, partners and sponsors as well as attendees.

² <https://www.eventbrite.com/blog/conference-registration-pricing-dsoo/>

³ [How to Price Your Virtual Conference; posted July 9, 2020 by K.C. Hopson & filed under Event Rebels Blog, Online Registration - Keys to Success, Virtual Events, What's New](#)

By collecting information through online registration (i.e. job title, company name, location, and interests, or planned spending), you can provide more specific information about the attendees to sponsors. This can be easily done within applicable privacy legislation.

Cultivate Meaningful Connections

For the attendee, traditional logos and sponsor recognition can feel like a perfunctory exercise in politeness. Within an online conference you can be far more creative, than placing logos on screens. And in so doing, you can create opportunities for networking, lead generation and lead qualification.

For example, a short video woven into the live online event (anything from a welcome video and body breaks to entertainment or live comedy acts), can go a long way to showcase authentic interest and alignment of the sponsor. Gamification methods are another way to connect attendees with sponsors, offering fun or rewarding activities while providing sponsors with direct interaction with potential clients, as well as the opportunity to collect contact information and other information.

There are many means to promote sponsors, such as links to their web presence in your e-news, highlighting sponsor profiles on your own web presence, emailing sponsor guest blogs/videos as part of your event updates, and social media take-overs. Sharing content with your online network, for example, on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, not only extends visibility to conference delegates, but also to a wider network across the province, the country, and beyond.

Extending Sponsor Value

Digital tools create opportunities for year-round support from corporate sponsors. This doesn't only develop their relationship with you, but also allows your sponsors the chance to cultivate more meaningful relationships and connections to potential new clients. Connecting sponsors and participants via your conference listserv (or registration) allows your sponsors/partners to share valuable insights, trends and news and information (white papers, statistics) to your attendee network.

Pre-event, physical swag bags delivered by mail can engage attendees with your sponsors/partners before the conference. This gives attendees not only a sponsor's memento, but can deliver useful information or simply feature a surprise and delight element that is highly valued. And most certainly, by receiving something tangible in the mail, your attendees will begin to anticipate their online conference experience differently and their commitment to attending may rise, too.

During the event, you can put together digital swag bags, or event packages (some platforms will do this for you), as a place where attendees can go for a variety of tools and messages.

And once the conference has come to a close, sponsor value can be extended driven by the shelf life of the captured event media. Posting video summaries, conference proceedings and so on. Sponsors and funders can gain recognition and value, through video intros, outros, sponsor slides, graphics and so on that can be integrated into post-event video-on-demand (VOD).

Case Studies – Design and Results of Online Conference 2020

There are a series of three documents available online at

<https://digitalartsnation.ca/digital-playbook/how-to-create-awesome-online-conferences/>

4. Your Guide to Creating Awesome Online Conferences
5. Case Studies – Design and Results of Online Conference 2020

<https://digitalartsnation.ca/digital-playbook/how-to-design-events-for-blended-audiences/>

6. A New Breed: Blended/Hybrid Conferences and Events