

Hybrid and virtual events

Engaging virtual audiences - a literature review

Marcus Lindqvist

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Marcus Lindqvist

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<p>Sammandrag:</p> <p>Till följd av COVID-19 pandemin, har virtuella och hybrid- evenemang blivit en del av vardagen för företag och organisationer världen runt. Virtuella deltagare utsätts dock för en större risk att bli distraherade, än de som deltar fysiskt i evenemanget. Det är också svårare att engagera virtuella deltagare. Denna forskning fokuserar på att finna strategier och verktyg som engagerar virtuella deltagare, samt presenterar metoder för att framgångsrikt streama innehåll. Syftet med studien är inte att finna sätt för att engagera deltagare som inte själv vill bli engagerade, utan snarare att förse en möjlighet att engagera sig och interagera för de som önskar att göra det. Metoden för denna forskning är en litteratur studie. Resultaten indikerar att en användarvänlig evenemang plattform, interaktiva verktyg, intressant innehåll, samt ett välplanerat och väl genomfört evenemang, alla påverkar hur engagerade deltagarna är.</p>	
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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual and hybrid events have become part of everyday life for businesses and organizations worldwide. However, virtual audiences face a much higher risk of being distracted and unengaged than audiences taking part in a physical event. This research focuses on strategies and tools meant for engaging virtual audiences and provides procedures for how to stream content successfully. The study does not aim to find ways in which to engage attendants who do not wish to be engaged in the first place, but rather how to provide opportunities to engage and interact for those who do. The method chosen for this thesis is literature review. The findings of this study indicate that a user-friendly event platform, interactive tools, interesting content as well as a technically well planned and executed event all affect the level of audience engagement.</p>	
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1 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Although virtual events existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic, their popularity and rate of use globally has grown exponentially during the past three years. The reason being simple, there was no other choice for those planning and executing events. The world is now slowly recovering from the pandemic, and physical events will surely be in high demand. That leads to the question, what will happen to virtual events? Surely working remotely and taking part in online meetings via Teams or Zoom will be a new standard for many in the workplace, but what about bigger events like seminars, product launches and conferences? The answer can lie in the hybrid events model.

A hybrid is a mixture of two very different things (Cambridge Dictionary). In the case of events, this means combining the physical and the virtual or online, thus creating a hybrid event. Using this model, event creators can cater to two different audiences, the one taking part in the physical event itself, and the one who taking part online. This means the event will reach a much bigger audience, have more attendees, create more revenue, and have a plan to fall back on, if the physical event is cancelled because of external factors.

When planning a hybrid event, it is important to realize that there are two events being planned, the physical and the online. Both parts are equally as important, and both parts need not only to create value for the attendees, but also need to be engaging. Engagement is particularly important for the online attendants, since they are only a click away from other distractions while watching from their computer. Only live streaming video from a physical event does not make for a successful, engaging experience for online attendees. Elements that provide engagement and interaction, have to be put in place. Events that are inherently online, know to invest resources and effort in creating quality content and engagement for their virtual audience. However, when creating hybrid events, there can be a tendency of focusing too much on creating content and value only for the physical attendants.

1.1 Motivation

I have been involved in the field of video production for around 6 years now. During that time, I have also witnessed the rise in popularity of live streaming video over the Web, as well as hybrid and virtual events. I have been involved in planning and executing said events and seen the positive results that businesses, governmental agencies and organizations get from being able to connect and interact with large audiences all over the world with no regard for geographical borders.

Today's technology makes it possible for almost anyone to stream live content over the internet. Combine this with a little bit of video production know-how, and you can achieve production value for live streamed video events that was formerly only possible on a big television broadcasting level.

There is definitely value in being able to stream live content over the internet or organize completely virtual events. For one, the organizer of the event is not bound by the limitations of a physical space, and hence the number of attendees can be much greater than with a physical event. We also live in a busy world and providing the opportunity to partake virtually from one's office or home couch can make all the difference. The rise of megatrends like sustainability affects the practices of many businesses and having people flying all around the world to attend conferences or fares is no longer the norm.

As an industry professional I see the potential of live streaming and virtual events, and I want to see the field keep growing and evolving. To ensure this one needs to understand what will make people take part and keep coming back to virtual events.

1.2 Research objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to present tangible ways in which to engage the virtual online participants of hybrid and fully virtual events, as well as providing them with interesting quality content. The research aims to provide tools and strategies for engagement, to make virtual events just as good as physical events in the case of attendee engagement. The research focuses mainly on events in the form of webinars, conferences, expos and corporate communications events. These types of events are not directly revenue driven but can definitely benefit from creating quality content that is engaging for their virtual audiences.

The research questions of the thesis are:

How to live stream content successfully?

How to engage virtual online audiences?

For the sake of this study, a successful live video stream is defined as one that lacks technical challenges in the form of video or audio problems affecting the end user, in this case the viewer.

Engagement is hard to define, but in many cases, it refers to the person in question being emotionally involved, committed, passionate and enthusiastic about said things (Truss et al., 2014).

1.3 Methodology

The qualitative methodology chosen for this study is narrative literature review. “The aim of a narrative literature review is to establish what is already known about the topic and to frame the review in such a way that it can act as a background and justification for the investigation” (Bryman, 2016, 90).

A qualitative approach is more flexible than a quantitative approach and is a recommended method when the aim is to get a deeper understanding of the subject as well as develop new knowledge in the subject (Bryman, 2016). Since the concept of engagement in and of itself is hard to measure with certainty or define in a broader context, a quantitative approach, where data and numerical information play a bigger part, would not have been justified. A quantitative method also requires a much bigger sample size and a lot more time and resources that I do not have access to.

To answer the research questions, this study will review literature in the form of e-books as well as online articles. Literary material used for the study has been peer reviewed to ensure validity. Electronic sources such as YouTube will also be utilized.

Since hybrid and virtual events are relatively new concepts, there is not that much outdated information on the subjects. However, because of rapid technological developments in the field of hybrid and virtual events, as well as video streaming, this study will aim to use fresh sources no older than 2015, to ensure the information is up to date. The following keywords will be used in order to find previous data and research; Hybrid, virtual, event and engagement.

1.3.1 Limitations

The research does not set out to prove that engagement in the form of interaction between for example attendants and speakers is always necessary to consider a virtual event successful. It accepts that some individuals do not wish to interact with others or take part in Q&A sessions or chat discussions provided by the event organizers. It does not aim to find ways in which to engage attendants who do not wish to be engaged in the first place, but rather how to provide opportunities to engage and interact for those who do. How to provide the same opportunities as with physical in person events, asking questions, networking and having a memorable experience.

Furthermore, whether an event is considered successful or not is dependent on the underlying goals of the event organizers and can be measured in a number of ways, the most common being number of attendants (Muukkonen & Putkonen, 2020). In this study, when discussing virtual events, the author is referring to an event that can be viewed online and or has online participants in the form of speakers or presenters. This is not to be mistaken with virtual reality (VR) events.

1.4 Previous research

As the virtual and hybrid events marketplace experienced huge growth since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, there has been a lot of research into what elements and strategies are needed to plan and execute successful events. The engagement of online attendants is considered crucial according to many previous studies.

A study made by Linda Nilsson at the LAB University of Applied Sciences in 2020, highlights the importance of prepping virtual keynote speakers, so that their presentations are suited for not only the physical attendants but also the ones taking part virtually. Furthermore the study claims that proper testing and technical preparations that ensure the smoothness of the virtual event, also affects the level of engagement of the attendants. Finally Nilsson concludes that there is definitely a need for engagement and interaction between all stakeholders when organizing hybrid events, but that further research is needed to understand which type of engagement best suits each stakeholder (Nilsson, 2020).

A study at Arcada University of Applied Sciences from 2021 by Essi Saarto, asks what elements a successful online event consists of. The study defines a successful online event as being 'successful' based on the participant evaluations and/or organizer experiences. A key finding of the study is that the option of networking and connecting with keynote speakers as well as other virtual attendants is considered important. Saarto also emphasizes the importance of proper technical preparations and the readiness to fix problems when they arise, but does not claim this directly affects the level of engagement of the attendants. Saarto states that in a virtual event, the responsibility of

the participants' social experience is more in the hands of the event organizers. A physical event space gives participants more freedom to walk around and experience spontaneously and this can be challenging to recreate virtually. It is therefore crucial that those who wish to interact and engage with others, are provided with the resources to do so by event organizers.

Another study at Arcada University of Applied Sciences from 2021 by Linn Autio, studies the virtual event users journey, and asks whether participant interactivity is considered important when planning and executing events. The study highlights the importance of keynote speaker preparations, content and professional host as factors that support the virtual participants engagement. Interactive tools in the form of chat and polls are considered good for engagement, because they are easy to use and accessible by all. Autio concludes that “Participant interactivity at virtual events is considered important specifically from the value bringing perspective. The importance is decided to depend on the event’s aim, target, and nature (Autio, 2021, 43).

1.5 Challenges in the virtual event space

Not everyone embraces the possibilities provided by virtual events and especially online conferencing. The COVID-19 pandemic even birthed a new term to describe the lack of enthusiasm for daily online meetings, Zoom fatigue, Zoom being an online conference software platform. Although staring at a computer screen for several hours straight will understandably cause fatigue for any person, researchers argue that it is not only the hours of screen time that causes the fatigue, but also the complexity of the interpersonal interactions taking place (Nadler, 2020).

Online interaction simply requires more concentration from us in order to absorb information. There is no possibility to effectively read body language or exchange a quick whisper with a colleague if we miss a vital part of information. An online video conference call or meeting also requires us to almost continuously stare at the camera, as a way of communicating to others that we are paying attention. This “constant gaze”

can be emotionally draining and uncomfortable. In person meetings on the other hand give us the option of momentarily staring out the window, glance at other colleagues in the meeting or somebody just walking by. But doing these things in an online video meeting can make other attendants think we are distracted and not paying attention (Fosslien, West Duffy, 2020).

There is a lack of empirical studies showing the psychological long term effects of everyday video conference usage (Fauville et al., 2021). However, studies in the field of social media fatigue are available and some parallels can be drawn between these two fields. Both are technology based and both affect the way in which we communicate with each other on a daily basis via video and sound. The studies performed in the social media field, conclude that informative and communicative overload due to excessive use of social media platforms in the name of interaction can cause mental exhaustion, anxiety and depression (Bright & Logan, 2018).

An argument can also be made that virtual events can never provide the same level of true human connection as in person events. People have more freedom to network and engage spontaneously when moving around a physical space and often build stronger emotional bonds during said physical events. The spontaneous factor is especially hard, if not impossible for a virtual event to successfully recreate. In the case of a conference or a tradeshow, one might have prepared a list of companies or persons they want to meet, but walking around the physical event they can spontaneously stumble upon something that catches their interest (Krause, 2020).

It is also crucial to realize that huge in person events are part of local economic ecosystems. So although virtual events are seen as good for the environment because of people not having to travel to conferences around the globe, from the financial perspective of local economies, the lack of in person events can be paralyzing (Krause, 2020).

2 TECHNOLOGY AND CONCEPTS

The following chapter will provide different concepts and terminology used in the field of streaming. The aim is to give the reader background and knowledge about the different elements needed for successful streaming.

2.1 Video streaming

The term “streaming” refers to delivering media in the form of digitally encoded files from a source to a player in real-time, without the need for the content to be stored or downloaded before it can be accessed and viewed. The process is similar to traditional television broadcasting, but the content is being delivered over the Web, instead of a television broadcasting network. The content can be live, pre-recorded or on-demand. Online streaming services like Netflix or Hulu provide stored on-demand video content, that when accessed, is delivered to the user at a controlled rate as if it were live.

Whereas conventional television broadcast systems provide a one- way channel to the viewer, streaming over the Web provides a bidirectional connection between the source and the viewer. This bidirectionality allows for more interaction between the source provider and the viewers. (Austerberry, 2013).

2.2 Live streaming

In recent times, the popularity of “live streaming” has grown exponentially. This growth is mostly due to big leaps made in different fields of technology e.g. Web, mobile and computer hardware development. The term “live streaming” refers to the delivering of live video content to the viewer with as little delay as possible. Live streaming functions by delivering video to viewers through different streaming protocols over the Web or wireless networks. The most widely used protocol being RTMP (Real-Time-Messaging-Protocol).

During the COVID-19 pandemic the popularity of streaming live content over the Web got even more popular, since it gave people the opportunity to stay connected despite the circumstances. Whilst many still associate live streaming only with social media and platforms like TikTok or Twitch, live streaming content provides many other applications and has given rise to the popularity of webinars, online conferences, as well as virtual or hybrid events in the field of corporate communications (Dacast, 2022).

2.2.1 Technical setup for live streaming video

The tools needed for live streaming are in essence very basic and with today's technology anybody equipped with a smartphone and internet connection can start a live stream. If however the goal is to provide high quality video and audio, professional camera and sound equipment should be used. (Dacast, 2022).

Equipment and tools needed to set up a quality live stream event

Video camera: In essence any video camera with for example HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface) or SDI (Serial digital Interface) connectivity will do.

Microphone: For best sound quality, opt for a XLR (External Line Return) microphone, which is the professional standard.

Switcher: When capturing multiple audio or video inputs a switcher is needed to mix the content before sending it out as one signal. Hardware switchers provide the possibility to mix between different audio or video inputs by the push of a button, but software based switchers are also available.

Encoder: Encoding refers to the compressing of RAW video files to digital files so that they are not saved as individual images but instead as fluid videos. Encoding also makes

the video format compatible with certain devices such as tablets or smartphones. Encoders exist as hardware or software.

Platform: The platform refers to the place to which the content is being streamed e.g. YouTube or Vimeo. This is where the content will be viewed.

Internet connection: Streaming over wireless networks is possible but a fixed internet connection is recommended since it provides a more stable connection (Dacast, 2022).

2.3 Webinars and webcasting

A webinar is a seminar conducted over the internet. Traditionally webinars have consisted of audio-over-slide solutions, where the speaker or speakers are not visible on-screen. The audience has been able to participate and engage in the discussion via chat applications. One of the perks of webinars is that the software and hardware needed to create the webinar is cheap and readily available for almost anyone. A webinar is a great platform for internal communication or product training. (Chodor, 2021).

“A webcast is an online broadcast that takes place at a specific date and time” (Chodor, 2021, 26). Webcasts often include live video of speakers, slides, Q&A, polls, chat, panel discussions and possibly some sort of social media integration. Webcasts are bigger high production value online events with a broader audience whilst traditional webinars are more specialized and collaborative. However, both aim to engage their audiences in one shape or form, and both can in essence be executed as fully virtual or hybrid events. (Chodor, 2021).

2.4 Virtual events

“A virtual event is a meeting or conference that either was originally held as a physical event and moved to be online or was created to exist only online” (Chodor, 2021, 15).

Being solely online, means the attendants only way of accessing the event is via an internet connection from a computer or mobile device. Although the presenters or speakers might be in a studio or an event based physical location giving their presentations, there is no physical location for the event itself. (Chodor, 2021).

2.5 Hybrid events

A hybrid event is an event taking place in a physical location with both physical attendants, as well as virtual ones. Either the whole event or parts of the event, is being streamed online so that attendants can partake in a virtual environment online.

When planning a hybrid event, it is important to realize that there are two events being planned, the physical and the online. Both parts are equally as important, and both parts need not only to create value for the attendees, but also need to be engaging and provide quality content. Engagement is particularly important for the online attendants, since they are only a click away from other distractions while watching from their computer. (Chodor, 2021).

3 HOW TO ENGAGE VIRTUAL AUDIENCES

As previously stated, virtual attendants are more easily distracted than persons attending a physical event. It is therefore important to structure virtual events so that they engage not only the physical audience but the virtual one (Chodor, 2021).

In virtual events it is important to create as much interaction as possible. Interaction leads to being more emotionally involved, which in turn leads to engagement. This engagement will give attendants a better experience and the event will be more successful in achieving its goal, whether it be marketing and selling a new product, educational purposes or purely conveying information (corporate communications). Before thinking of how to best engage the audience the organizers need to identify the goal of the event. (Chodor, 2021).

In the wake of the pandemic in 2020, CRM (Customer Relationship Management) giant Salesforce made the decision of changing their format from an in-person physical event to a fully virtual experience, when organizing their annual World Tour event. The event featured live musical performances, pre-recorded videos and over a 100 live keynote sessions. All of the content was made available on-demand online after the event was over. The event was considered a success and yielded over 80,000 live stream viewers globally as well as 1 million views across the event's social media channels. In general, Salesforce and the event organizers used social media extremely well to engage the participants. One of the biggest engagement boosters of the event was a competition where participants were given 3 minutes to present and demonstrate an app they developed. The winner was then announced on Twitter the next day, keeping the audience engaged on Salesforces social media platforms until well after the event itself was already over. The company now offers the option to partake virtually in all its upcoming World Tour Series events. (Vinikas, 2020).

In the same year, digital solutions giant Adobe made a shift from in-person events to fully virtual for their annual Adobe Summit event. Although the company is a huge player in the digital space, this was the first time that they went fully online with said

event. The event consisted of keynotes, Q&A sessions, panel discussions, new product reveals in the form of pre-recorded video and celebrity appearances. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, a decision was made to shift from a physical event to a fully virtual one. The physical event already had 13,000 attendees registered and was expecting approximately 23,000 persons showing up. (Vinikas, 2020).

Because of time restraints, Adobe opted for using only pre-recorded content instead of live streaming keynotes or panel discussions. The company's approach got heavily critiqued for lacking the engagement factor and interaction that live streamed content provides. However, the upside was that the pre-recorded video content had high production value, was of high quality, and there were significantly less errors in transitions and connectivity problems then compared to live streamed sessions. Event organizers sent “recording kits” to all keynote speakers to ensure high quality picture and sound. The kits included Ultra Hd webcams and ring lights and microphones. Video editors meticulously went through the recorded material to ensure everything looked and sounded as good as technically possible. (Martin, 2020).

The event was deemed successful and more than 100,000 people attended the virtual event, which was considerably higher than the expected 23,000 physical attendants (Martin, 2020).

As we navigate the COVID-19 environment, we will continue to bring communities together through virtual events. I think we will see creativity flourish and each of us will find new ways to enable our audiences to engage and learn. I'm looking forward to exploring what's possible as new tools to support digital events continue to emerge. And, when physical events come back, I'm excited to see how the digital extension of events will play a larger role in event strategies.

Given more time, adding a live Q&A, moderated chats, office hours with experts, virtual coffee breaks, chat lounges, Braindate, and polling tools to the experience would have offered more engagement and networking opportunities for attendees.

Julie Martin, Senior Director of Corporate Events at Adobe

Based on the growing marketplace, it is safe to say that although virtual events now have a proven track record in the global event industry, many companies, organizations and organizers are excited to be able to produce physical events once again. At the same time, the benefits of offering the option to partake virtually, has not gone unnoticed. Many of the biggest global events are therefore switching or have already switched to the hybrid model for their events, and organizers like Apple, Microsoft, FinCon and TwitchCon are now heavily invested in creating exciting, innovative and engaging experiences for both physical and virtual event attendees. Interactive tools like Q&As, gamification or chat functions ensure the virtual attendants can engage and interact at the same level as the physical attendants. Quality media content with high production value and well trained professional hosts ensure the experience will be a memorable one.

3.1 Quality content

No matter how well a virtual event is planned and executed, without quality content it cannot be successful in engaging the audience. The content needs to be actionable and something that the people watching can implement, otherwise it is just noise (Hopin, 2021).

When speaking about quality content regarding virtual events, we need to consider two different aspects of quality. The first being the technical quality of the sound and video being seen and heard by the audience, in other words the production value. This can be achieved by utilizing the right technology as well as hiring professionals for each role, audio engineers, graphics operators and encoding technicians. (Chodor, 2021).

The second aspect of quality is the more subjective quality of the content itself, the messages and points of views that are being conveyed to the audience. Content is often the main factor when it comes to driving attendance, whether it be a physical or virtual event. (Hopin, 2021).

3.2 Interactive tools and strategies for engaging virtual audiences

There are several interactive tools that can be used to boost engagement and create memorable virtual experiences. Most of these tools have been available for almost as long as people have been holding online meetings and conferences. Although basic, these tools have grown more important since the rise in popularity of online virtual events, as organizers try and maximize audience engagement. The following chapter will provide descriptions of these tools.

3.2.1 Event host and keynote speaker

“A good anchor or a host is the one who drives the show and holds it all together” (Chodor, 2021, 124). Smaller events, like monthly internal communications gatherings, often utilize someone within the organization as a host, whilst bigger events, like webinars or product launches opt for using professional hosts. Whether it is a keynote speaker, a professional host or a non-professional hosting the event, they need to be provided with training and guidance to be able to actively engage and provide quality content for the virtual audience (Chodor, 2021).

Just because someone is a gifted public speaker, does not mean they are prepared in presenting to a virtual audience. The speakers need to have energy that transcends through the lens to the persons watching from their computer or mobile device. Opting for professional hosts when possible is always preferred, because their level of engagement is higher. When choosing a host for an event, considering their professional profile is also recommended. Although a host is always expected to have some level of knowledge about the topics being discussed, choosing a host with a background in finance for a webinar series about “The financial crash of 2008”, can lead to more engagement and higher credibility for the event itself. (Hopin, 2020).

In today's climate, many speakers are accustomed to presenting from home. They might not be comfortable using the technology involved (mics, camera or software), and should therefore always receive a technical walkthrough before presenting. This will ensure better quality of both sound and video. If the speaker in question will be giving multiple presentations over an extended period of time for a bigger event, sending them a “studio in a box” is a good and relatively cost- effective way to increase the production value of the event. The box can include for example a ring light, USB lapel microphone and a high- quality USB compatible webcam (Chodor, 2021).

“For people used to presenting to an in-person audience, speaking to a 100% virtual audience can be challenging. You can't make eye contact with your audience or read body language.” (Chodor, 2021, 119).

3.2.2 Q&A

Providing the virtual audience with the possibility of asking questions to presenters and keynote speakers is somewhat of an industry standard and should be an integrated part of all virtual events. When possible, the Q&A sessions should be run by a moderator who can vet the questions beforehand. At the same time the moderators function is to also keep the discussion going and on topic. In order to create more engagement and provide more value, separate Q&A sessions for the virtual audience of hybrid events can be organized. (Chodor, 2021) .

3.2.3 Chat

It is rare to have a virtual event without a chat box. The possibility for audiences to comment, discuss and reflect on the topics of a webinar is the most basic way in which to drive audience engagement for a virtual event. To ensure the chat does not go to waste, event organizers should have staff tasked with moderating the discussion, asking questions, providing answers to inquiries or taking notes for later Q&A sessions. The

chat can also provide the event organizers with valuable information in which way to steer the content in later upcoming keynote speakers sessions, if there is a topic getting a lot of interest and attention. The chat also functions as a feedback channel for the event organizers. (Chodor, 2021).

Event organizers can also give the attendants the possibility to ask questions before the event, for example as part of the event registration process. This gives the attendants a chance to start engaging before the event has even kicked off. The questions and data collected can even steer the keynote speakers' topics, since event organizers have a good idea of what the persons attending the event are interested in (Event MB, 2021).

Ultimately it is about making the attendants the star of the show and giving them the opportunity to steer the conversation via the interactive tools like chat (Event MB, 2021).

3.2.4 Polls and Surveys

Polls are a very basic tool for gathering general feedback about your virtual event, or about certain topics. Polls or surveys can be utilized to get feedback on topic-based questions, or on a broader scale for example at the end of the event in an all-encompassing survey that will give event organizers a big picture over the event's success (Chodor, 2021).

3.2.5 Theming

When creating an event in a physical space, the theme affects everything from branding elements, the tagline on the press release, decoration to the food and drinks being served. In essence, the chosen theme brings it all together and creates a cohesive experience for the persons attending the event. Just as the physical event, a virtual event should have a theme.

When creating thematic elements for a virtual event, we actually have more freedom than with a physical event, since we are not bound by the restrictions of a physical space. Nor do we have to consider labour or cost restrictions, at least not in the same regard as with a physical event. As an example, Mr Chodor (2021) tells about a client who designed their lobby for a virtual event, to resemble their gyms. This only took some creativity and graphic design. Mr Chodor (2021) points out that to do the same with a physical event, would require much more work and a bigger budget.

Furthermore, Mr Chodor tells of a virtual sales kick off that he and his team organized. The theme for the event was “Through the Decades”, and required attendants to dress up as famous characters from different decades. The same theme was utilized in webcast graphics, badging and all over design of the event. People dressed up as Axl Rose, the Fresh Prince and Kurt Cobain to name a few. The result was that the integrated chat was set on fire and boosted the engagement of attendants. (Chodor, 2021)

Creating a theme around your event gives you a chance to surprise your audience in a positive way. Although a theme might seem like a childish gimmick at first sight, when planned and executed correctly, it will capture the attention of your audience and keep them engaged, whether it be in the chat or on the events integrated social media platform. Give your audience something to react to and talk about. (Event MB, 2021).

3.2.6 Locations for keynote speakers and moderators

When shooting a movie or a Television series, the choice of locations plays a huge role in the quality of the end product, as well as the success of the movie or series. In fact, the location is often seen as one of the most important characters in a film script (Staten Island Film Locations).

The location should inspire and impress not only the director but the audience as well (CookeOpticsTV, 2017).

The same strategy can be used when choosing locations for your keynote speakers or roundtable moderators. Instead of having them just sitting in a boring office space backdrop, take them to locations that are connected to the topic or theme of the event. Transport your virtual audience to a location they would otherwise never be able to experience, for example an environmental event had their moderators set up at solar farms or biochar fields. This will give the audience something to get excited about and surely spark conversation, ideas and engagement (Event MB, 2021).

3.2.7 Gamification

“Gamification is the use of game design techniques, including game mechanics and game dynamics, to drive participation, engagement, and loyalty with an audience. To understand human desires and motivations” (Chodor, 2021, 73) .

The term itself has become a buzzword in modern society and is trending in many fields, most of all education (TEDx Talks, 2014). In gamification we take the elements used in game design, like challenges, competition, feedback, and utilize them in a non-game environment. The goal being to solve a problem or to engage the audience (TEDx Talks, 2015).

Naturally gamification can be applied to hybrid and virtual events, to engage the online participants. Badging and Trivia games are the two most common gamification tools used in the virtual events space. Badging, or attendee achievement badging, refers to attendants earning virtual badges when completing specific actions within the virtual event platform. Just like in a game, the attendant collects points, and a certain amount of points earns them a badge. The main goal of badging is to drive attendees to engage with content. Event sponsors can design and create their own badges and have full control over what specific tasks the attendant must undertake and complete to earn the badge. The tasks can include, downloading of specific assets from a sponsor booth, completing surveys or polls, attending sessions, participating in group chats or the number of sponsor boots visited. A game leaderboard, where attendants can follow the

amount of badges collected and compare themselves to other attendees, can create a healthy level of competition. Sponsors or event organizers can provide the winners with prizes related to the event. (Chodor, 2021).

Trivia games are a very basic and simple way to not only create engagement, but also ensure your attendees stay entertained between sessions or keynote presentations. Event organizers or sponsors can customize questions to have them connect to specific products or services being offered or presented at virtual events. Attendants earn points from answering correctly and can win prizes. (Chodor, 2021).

3.2.8 Event branding

First impressions matter and the attendee experience begins even before the event itself kicks off. Instead of just sending your attendees a simple link and having them end up watching your event from a standard YouTube or Vimeo video player window, take the time to build a customizable landing page where you can take advantage of branding opportunities for your own company or event sponsors. A landing page does not only offer your attendees a more visually pleasing cohesive experience for the event, but also makes navigating the event, finding keynote speaker profiles and other material that much easier. Especially larger events spanning several days, benefit from creating a landing page where everything is gathered. Everything should be easily accessible and just a few clicks away. Everything from the invitation link to the arrival lobby and keynote speaker name tags can and should be branded to push the agenda and support the visual message of the event. (Chodor, 2021).

4 DISCUSSION

The aim of this research is to present tangible ways in which to engage the virtual online participants of hybrid and fully virtual events, as well as providing them with interesting quality content. The study sets out to answer the questions: How to stream content successfully? How to engage virtual audiences?

First and foremost, the importance of a technically well planned and executed live stream as part of a virtual or hybrid event cannot be overstated. Since a live stream is by definition video being broadcast over the internet in real time, the margin for error can never be zero, because there is simply less control over the outcome than when broadcasting pre-recorded content. Mistakes and hiccups happen daily in for example national or international news broadcasts. To avoid technical challenges however, event organizers should hire industry professionals for each appointed task. The correct kind of technical set up should also be used and tested before the start of the event. Correct technology not only reduces the risk of technical errors but also ensures the best possible sound and video quality for the event attendees. Furthermore, the event organizers should be experts in how to tackle the virtual aspects of said event since the elements and strategies that work in a physical environment do not necessarily work in a virtual environment. As Saarto states, “online events should be considered as an event category of its own, instead of an online replicate of an onsite event” (Saarto, 2021).

Nilsson writes that overall smoothness of the virtual event affects the engagement of participants (Nilsson, 2020). This means that choice of platform and effective integration of interactive tools, such as chat or breakout rooms, is key. In essence, the event organizers together with the technical crew, should try and eliminate all extra steps like signing in, password protected sign in points and all in all overly complicated platform navigation. Having attendees watch a live stream directly from Vimeo or YouTube is fine when sending a simple one-way stream without two-way communication, multiple breakout sessions and spanning over multiple days. In my own experience, organizing these more comprehensive events requires building a separate landing page that can be modified to serve the exact needs of said event and thus create

a smooth and easy experience for attendees. In essence, when something is too challenging and difficult, people often lose motivation and move onto other things. As Chodor points out, virtual attendants are much more easily distracted and therefore an abundance of technical challenges paired with a poorly integrated platform that is difficult to use, will most likely affect the level of engagement of even the most eager participants. (Chodor, 2021).

To truly engage the audience, one also needs to offer them something out of the ordinary, something unexpected and something they have not experienced before. Putting your keynote speakers in interesting locations that the attendants would never otherwise have experienced is one way of getting their attention and creating a buzz as well as a natural discussion starter in the chat room. When we consider for example a movie franchise like James Bond or The Fast and the Furious, the locations that the story lines take us too are always cinematographically impressive and create a more memorable experience. In the same way, virtual events should take their audiences somewhere unexpected, instead of having them stare at a white wall behind the keynote speaker. This is not always technically possible to do live, but you can for example pre-record certain parts of the keynote and then have them continued in a live setting. During my own career, I have produced several virtual events that are a mix of pre-recorded material and live sessions. Combining these two different types of material seamlessly takes some technical know-how and skill, but when done correctly, the attendees really cannot tell what is pre-recorded and what is live. Pre-recorded material not only reduces the chance of technical problems but also makes for a more dynamic event that resembles a high budget television studio broadcast, more than a traditional PowerPoint presentation orientated webinar. As in the case of Adobes Summit event, that entirely consisted of pre-recorded material and was criticized for the lack of engagement, but on the other hand praised for the smoothness, production value and overall execution of the event (Martin, 2020). Research suggests that people are becoming fatigued with these traditional online type meeting setups and therefore it is crucial to offer them something new and unexpected in the case of content and production value (Chodor, 2021).

The correct preparations and planning should also be done by the event keynote speakers and hosts, as speaking to a crowd in-person is not the same as speaking to a virtual crowd. In the case of hybrid events, speakers have to be able to connect with the in person attendees as well as the virtual ones. Using professional hosts or speakers will ensure all parties feel engaged. A professional host is most likely also accustomed to technical problems that might arise during the event and can handle issues better than an inexperienced host, therefore ensuring a smooth as possible event for the attendants.

When choosing the host for the event one should also consider his or her professional background and try to match it with the theme of the event. Having previous knowledge of topics being discussed and presented by keynote speakers can lead to more spontaneous discussion and interaction during sessions.

Interactive tools are a vital part for all virtual and hybrid events (Chodor, 2021). It provides a voice and a way of communication for the attendants not physically present. So it is not a question of should we use them, but how to use them as effectively as possible in order to engage. Consider the chat during a keynote session for example. Of course the speaker cannot monitor the chat at the same time as he or she is giving their talk. Having a host or a moderator that keeps an eye on the chat highlighting interesting questions and views, gives the keynote speaker the opportunity to react and answer questions in real time, or even steer the talk in a certain direction that is most interesting for the attendants. This creates a sense of effective two-way communication and generates a good setting for participant engagement. Having a separate Q&A session scheduled provides a great platform for more intricate discussion, since most likely not all questions and topics can be addressed during the talk itself.

Gamification is a good way of tapping into the competitive urges of most people. As Chodor points out, games are inherently designed to engage and thus incorporating these same techniques into virtual and hybrid events will have the same effect (Chodor, 2021). Gamification can often be seen as an expensive endeavor with months of planning and weeks of coding software, but it does not have to be that complicated. I was part of organizing a charity virtual event for children and youth. The event consisted of a live session with a celebrity host in our own studio as well as several

pre-recorded talks and musical performances. In the studio we had a screen with a picture of a blurred face. Every time we came back to the studio from a pre-recorded bit, we unblurred the picture a little bit and asked the attendants to comment in the chat who they thought the person was. The host also dropped some clues once in a while. The three participants that gave the fastest right answer, then moved on to a lighting round at the end of the event where we did the same thing but only much faster. The winner then received a t-shirt signed by one of the bands that performed during the event. Our chat was on fire for the whole duration of the event and the kids absolutely loved it.

5 CONCLUSION

This thesis does not claim or set out to claim that in order to be considered a success, a virtual or hybrid event necessarily has to create a high level of participant engagement. At the end of the day there are a lot of people that do not wish to engage at all, even when provided the opportunity to do so. However, the assumption is that an environment where participants are highly engaged, is also an environment where a lot of discussion is undertaken, connections are made and new ideas are born (Chodor, 2021). Therefore, one might deduce that all events, whether it be business forums, educational conferences or corporate product launches, will benefit from high levels of participant engagement.

All virtual and hybrid events should offer the interactive tools needed for engagement and social interaction. It is then up to the end user whether they choose to apply those tools. Platform integration and overall ease of use is critical. Event organizers should in essence set out to eliminate all points along the event experience that can cause confusion and frustration among the attendees. Having a separate landing page for the event is a good way ensuring the end user has the best possible experience during your event. A landing page also allows the organizers to incorporate brand visuals, thus creating stronger brand awareness for said event.

Finally, an event is nothing without good, interesting content. If we want people to talk, we have to give them something to talk about. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online meetings have become a daily activity for many, and when taking part in virtual events, people are now expecting something more than just a split screen showing the keynote speaker and his or her slides. Developments in technology allows for creating television broadcast type live streams and events with reasonable budgets. These types of events are the next step in the evolution of the online event marketplace. In the future, new technologies like virtual reality and possibly even artificial intelligence will most likely be incorporated into virtual events, making them truly immersive, engaging social experiences mimicking that of actual physical events.

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6 SUMMARY IN SWEDISH

6.1 Bakgrund och introduktion

Virtuella evenemang har existerat redan länge men deras popularitet har ökat explosionsartat i samband med COVID-19 pandemin, eftersom organisatörer inte hade något annat val. Nu när världen sakta återhämtar sig från pandemin och återvänder till det normala och igen organiserar fysiska evenemang, kan man ställa frågan, vad kommer att hända med virtuella evenemang? En möjlighet är att hybrid evenemang blir allt mer vanliga.

Ett hybrid evenemang är en blandning av ett fysiskt och ett virtuellt evenemang. Publiken kan alltså delta fysiskt på plats, eller virtuellt via webben. Det är ytterst viktigt att organisatörerna inser att det egentligen är två helt skilda evenemang som måste planeras. Båda delarna är lika viktiga och måste skapa värde för sina deltagare, samt vara engagerande. Speciellt viktigt är det att engagera de virtuella deltagarna, eftersom de utsätts för en betydligt högre risk att bli distraherade av social media eller nyheter, då de följer evenemanget från t.ex. sina hemdatorer.

6.2 Motivering

Jag har själv arbetat i video produktions branschen i ca 6 år och har sett hur live streaming, virtuella, samt hybrid evenemang har blivit allt mer populära. Jag har även varit med om att planera dessa evenemang och sett positiva resultat från att organisationer, företag och statliga organ kan samverka med stora publikker utan hänsyn till geografiska gränser eller avstånd.

Dagens teknologi gör live streaming över webben ytterst simpelt, och det finns definitivt ett värde i att kunna göra det, samt i att kunna organisera helt virtuella evenemang. I ett virtuellt evenemang är vi inte bundna till en fysisk plats som begränsar deltagarantalet och behöver inte heller resa. Som proffs i branschen ser jag en hel del potential när det kommer till live streaming och virtuella evenemang, och vill därför se

branschen växa samt utvecklas. För att det skall ske, måste vi förstå vad det är som får personer att överhuvudtaget delta i virtuella evenemang.

6.3 Syfte och frågeställning

Syftet med denna studie är att presentera konkreta sätt, som organisatörer kan använda sig av för att engagera deltagare av hybrida eller fullt virtuella evenemang, samt sätt att erbjuda deltagarna med intressant innehåll av god kvalitet. Studien fokuserar för det mesta på evenemang som webinarier, konferenser, utställningar och företagskommunikations tillställningar.

Forskningsfrågorna är följande:

Hur livestreamar man innehåll framgångsrikt?

Hur lyckas man engagera de virtuella deltagarna?

För syftet av denna studie, definieras en framgångsrik live stream, som en som saknar tekniska problem i form av dåligt ljud eller video.

Begreppet “engagerad” är i sig själv svårt att definiera, men syftar ofta på att personen i fråga är närvarande, hängiven, passionerad och entusiastisk (Truss et al., 2014).

6.4 Metod

Den kvalitativa metoden för denna forskning är narrativ litteraturstudie. En kvalitativ metod är mer flexibel än en kvantitativ, då syftet är att få en djupare insikt, samt producera ny vetskap om ämnet (Bryman, 2016).

För att svara på forskningsfrågorna, kommer jag att använda mig av källor i form av elektroniska böcker, YouTube material samt webbartiklar. För att försäkra mig om att informationen är så färsk som möjligt, strävar jag till att inte använda källor material som publicerats senare än 2015. Följande nyckelord används för informationssökning; Hybrid, virtuell, evenemang och engagemang.

6.5 Avgränsning

Denna forskning strävar inte till att bevisa att ett evenemang måste vara engagerande för deltagarna, för att kunna anses vara en framgång. Forskningen strävar inte heller till att finna metoder för att engagera deltagare som inte från första början vill bli engagerade, utan snarare möjliggöra engagemang för de som vill bli engagerade. I samband med denna studie, syftar virtuell på “ över webben”, inte på virtuell verklighet.

6.6 Tidigare forskning

Tidigare forskning i ämnet påpekar att engagemang i samband med virtuella deltagare är en viktig del av ett framgångsrikt evenemang. En studie av av Lisa Nilsson vid LAB University of Applied Sciences från 2020, understryker att ett evenemang som är välplanerat och har ett bra flöde, också har en högre grad av engagemang då det kommer till deltagarna (Nilsson, 2020).

Essi Saartos studie från 2021 vid Arcada University of Applied Sciences, menar att mingel och möjligheten med att nätverka är en viktig del av ett framgångsrikt evenemang. Saarto nämner också att organisatörer har en större roll i deltagarnas sociala erfarenhet, då det handlar om virtuella evenemang. Det är därför viktigt att förse deltagarna med rätt verktyg för att kunna engagera sig (Saarto, 2021).

I en annan studie vid Arcada University of Applied Sciences från 2021, utförd av Linn Autio, skriver hen att interaktivitet mellan virtuella deltagare är viktigt, speciellt ur värdebringande perspektiv. Linn påpekar även att planering och väl förberedda uppträdare är en viktig del av ett välorganiserat evenemang (Autio, 2021).

6.7 Utmaningar i den virtuella evenemang branschen

Interaktion över webben kräver mer energi och högre koncentrationsförmåga än traditionell interaktion för att absorbera information. En ny term, Zoom trötthet, har fötts i samband med den ökade populariteten av daglig webbmöten, och syftar på att människor börjar bli utmattade av att stirra på sina datorskärmar dag ut och dag in. Webbmöten kräver även att vi nästan håller oavbruten ögonkontakt med våra motparter, för att visa att vi aktivt lyssnar på dem och är engagerade. Detta leder till att vi känner oss utmattade efteråt. Studier utförda i samband med den sociala media branschen, påpekar att informativ överbelastning inte bara leder till utmattning, men kan även orsaka ångest samt depression (Nadler, 2020).

Vissa argumenterar att virtuella evenemang inte någonsin kan medföra den äkta mänsklig anslutningen, som fysiska evenemang. Fysiska evenemang ger oss helt enkelt en större frihet att spontant nätverka och mingla med andra deltagare i evenemanget. Speciellt den spontana faktorn är svår för virtuella evenemang att duplicera (Krause, 2020).

6.8 Teknologi och koncept

Följande kapitel presenterar olika koncept samt terminologi som används i samband med video streaming.

6.9 Video streaming

Streaming syftar på att leverera media i form av digitalt kodade filer från en källa till en annan i realtid, utan media måste laddas ner eller sparas. Processen påminner om traditionella TV-sändningar, men skillnaden är att media levereras över webben. Det kan handla om en direktsändning, eller förinspelat material (Austerberry, 2013).

6.10 Live streaming

Live streaming syftar på att direktsända video över webben, med så lite fördröjning som möjligt. Att live streama video har blivit ytterst populärt i samband med utvecklingen av ny teknologi i webb och mobiltelefon branschen (Dacast, 2022).

Teknisk utrustning för video live streaming:

Videokamera

Mikrofon

Växlare

Kodare

Plattform för sändning

Nätförbindelse

6.11 Webbinarier och webcasting

En webinar, är en seminar som hålls över nätet. Traditionellt har webinarier bestått av någon som talar, samt en PowerPoint presentation. Publiken har kunnat delta med hjälp av chatten (Chodor, 2021).

Webcasting, är en sändning som tar plats över webben. En webcast består ofta av personer som håller tal, ppt-presentationer, frågestunder, chattar, paneldiskussioner och någon slags social media integration. Webcasting syftar på större samt dyrare produktioner med en vidare publik, medan webinarier är mindre evenemang med en mer begränsad publik (Chodor, 2021).

6.12 Virtuella evenemang

Ett virtuellt evenemang är ett evenemang som tar plats endast över webben och saknar ett fysiskt utrymme. Personer som håller tal eller presenterar, kan befinna sig i t.ex. en studio, men alla i publiken deltar virtuellt från sina datorer eller mobiler (Chodor, 2021).

6.13 Hybridevenemang

Ett hybridevenemang är en kombination av ett traditionellt fysiskt evenemang och ett virtuellt evenemang, d.v.s. publiken kan delta fysiskt på plats, eller virtuellt över webben. Vid planeringsskedet är det viktigt att organisatörerna inser att de måste planera två helt olika evenemang (Chodor, 2021).

6.14 Att engagera virtuella deltagare

I samband med virtuella evenemang är det viktigt att skapa så mycket interaktion mellan deltagare som möjligt. Interaktion leder till att deltagarna är mer emotionellt tillgängliga och således mer engagerade. Detta engagemang leder i sin tur till att deltagare har en bättre helhetsupplevelse och att evenemanget i sig upplevs som en framgång (Chodor, 2021).

På grund av läget med pandemin år 2020, beslöt CRM (Customer Relationship Management) jätten Salesforce att organisera deras World Tour evenemang helt virtuellt. Evenemanget bestod av musikuppträdanden, förinspelade videon och över 100 stycken personer som skulle presentera och hålla tal. Evenemanget ansågs vara en succé och gav över 80,000 vyer världen runt. Generellt sett, ansågs det att Salesforce lyckades väl med att engagera sina deltagare och en av deras mest lyckade verktyg för engagemang, var en tävling som pågick på deras sociala media plattform i samband med

evenemanget. Salesforce möjliggör nu att delta virtuellt i alla deras uppkommande World Tour evenemang (Vinikas, 2020).

Samma år, beslöt sig Adobe för att organisera sitt årliga Adobe Summit evenemang helt virtuellt. Fast Adobe har en betydelsefull roll i den digitala branschen, var detta första gången som de beslöt sig för att organisera evenemanget i fråga helt virtuellt. evenemanget bestod av tal, frågestunder, paneldiskussioner, produktlanseringar och kändis uppträdanden.

På grund av tidspress, beslöt Adobe att använda sig endast av förinspelat material, istället för live streaming. Beslutet mötte en hel del kritik, bl.a. för att förinspelat material inte leder till engagemang på samma sätt som direktsänt material. Dock, bjöd det förinspelade materialet på hög kvalitet och färre tekniska problem jämfört med live streaming. evenemangets ansågs vara en succé, med över 100,000 deltagare, vilket var betydligt fler än vad som hade väntats i fysiska deltagare (Vinikas, 2020).

Den virtuella evenemang marknaden växer starkt och flera stora företag har lagt märke till att det finns en hel del fördelar med att möjliggöra deltagande i deras evenemang virtuellt och fysiskt. Apple, Microsoft och FinCon är några av dessa stora företag som har insett värdet i denna hybridmodell.

6.15 Kvalitets innehåll

Det spelar ingen roll hur välplanerat och väl genomfört ett evenemang är, om det inte bjuder deltagarna på kvalitets innehåll (Hopin, 2021).

Kvalitets innehåll i samband med live streaming syftar på två olika ting. För det första måste sändningen vara av hög kvalite ur en teknisk synpunkt, d.v.s bra kvalitet på ljud och bild. För det andra måste innehållet vara underhållande och informativt för

deltagarna. Kvalitets innehåll är ofta den drivande faktorn för åstadkomma stora deltagarantal och tittarsiffror (Chodor, 2021).

6.16 Interaktiva verktyg och strategier för att engagera virtuella deltagare

Det finns en hel del interaktiva verktyg som evenemang organisatörer kan använda sig av för att engagera virtuella deltagare. Följande kapitel beskriver dessa verktyg.

6.17 Vård och föreläsare

En god värd är den som driver hela evenemanget. Mindre evenemang använder ofta någon från sin egen organisation eller sitt eget företag som värd, medan större evenemang anställer professionella värdar. Vare sig det handlar om föreläsare eller evenemangets värd, bör dessa vara väl förberedda och medvetna om hur de skall gå tillväga för att engagera den virtuella publiken (Chodor, 2021).

6.18 Frågestund

En frågestund där virtuella deltagare kan ställa frågor till föreläsare efter deras presentationer är något av en standard i den virtuella evenemang industrin. Om möjligt, lönar det sig att ha någon som fungerar som moderator i samband med evenemanget och således kan granska frågor på förhand. Moderatoren ser även till att diskussionen håller sig till ämnet och inte spårar ut (Chodor, 2021).

6.19 Chat

Idag är det sällsynt att ett virtuellt evenemang inte har en chat box. Möjligheten att kommentera, diskutera och reflektera, är det lättaste sättet att engagera de virtuella deltagarna. Det lönar sig också här att använda sig av en moderator som följer med vad som deltagarna diskuterar i chatten under evenemanget och således kan styra föreläsarnas presentationer i en riktning som publiken är intresserad av (Chodor, 2021).

6.20 Opinionsundersökning

En opinionsundersökning är ett bra verktyg för att få generell feedback om ett evenemang, eller om vissa ämnesområden (Chodor, 2021).

6.21 Tema

Vid ett fysiskt evenemang är ofta hela omgivningen inredd enligt organisatörens eller sponsorernas brand. Ett välvalt och genomfört tema gör att hela evenemanget känns i sammanhängande. Liksom fysiska evenemang, bör även virtuella evenemang ha ett tema.

Då man skapar ett tema för ett virtuellt evenemang, har man faktiskt mera frihet än vid ett fysiskt evenemang. Vi är inte bundna av samma restriktioner som då vi måste planera och inreda ett fysiskt utrymme. Det är också kostnadseffektivare att skapa ett tema runt ett virtuellt evenemang.

Ett välvalt och skapat tema ger organisatörer en möjlighet att positivt överraska publiken (Chodor, 2021).

6.22 Platser för föreläsare och moderatorer

I filmer och tv- serier spelar inspelningsplatser stor skillnad. Man säger till och med ibland att platser och ställen kan vara som viktiga karaktärer i en film och skall inspirera regissören, men också själva publiken.

Samma logik gäller vid virtuella evenemang. Istället för att placera föreläsare eller moderatorer framför en tråkig vit vägg, för dem till en miljö som har att göra med evenemangets tema eller ämne och överraska således publiken med intressant innehåll (Chodor, 2021).

6.23 Spelifiering

Spelifiering innebär att vi använder oss av de element som används i speldesign, som t.ex. olika utmaningar, tävlingar och feedback, i en miljö som inte har med spel att göra. Denna spelifiering används i många olika sammanhang, bl.a. just i samband med virtuella och hybridevenemang, för att engagera deltagare. Deltagare kan t.ex. samla på sig brickor, på engelska “badges”, genom att komplettera olika utmaningar inom ett virtuellt evenemang. Precis som i ett spel samlar deltagaren poäng genom att utföra vissa saker i evenemanget och ett specifikt antal poäng leder till att hen får en bricka. Den huvudsakliga iden med brickor, är att deltagaren skall engagera med innehållet. Organisatörer kan också hålla en så kallad ledartavla där deltagare kan följa med och se vem som samlat på sig mest brickor. Detta väcker ofta till lite hälsosam tävlings drift mellan deltagare (Chodor, 2021).

6.24 Evenemang branding

Ett gott första intryck spelar en stor roll. Istället för att bara skicka deltagare en gammalmodig länk som tar dem till t.ex. YouTube eller Vimeo, skapa istället en hemsida där de kan följa med evenemanget. En hemsida kan är ett bra sätt att lyfta fram brandet bakom evenemanget, men gör också det lättare för deltagarna att hitta länkar, material och allt annat som evenemanget har att erbjuda. Speciellt större evenemang som räcker flera dagar, bör ha en hemsida (Chodor, 2021).

6.25 Diskussion och slutsats

Syftet med denna studie är att presentera konkreta sätt, som organisatörer kan använda sig av för att engagera deltagare av hybrida eller fullt virtuella evenemang, samt sätt att erbjuda deltagarna med intressant innehåll av god kvalitet. Forskningen strävar till att svara på frågorna: Hur livestreamar man innehåll framgångsrikt? Hur lyckas man engagera de virtuella deltagarna?

Som väsentligast anses, att en live stream i samband med ett virtuellt eller hybridevenemang, är välplanerat och kan genomföras utan större tekniska problem. För att undvika dessa tekniska problem, bör organisatörer anställa professionella personer för diverse uppgifter, samt reservera rätt sorts teknisk utrustning. Rätt sorts utrustning eliminerar inte bara tekniska problem, men bjuder även deltagare på bättre ljud och bildkvalitet

Nilsson skriver i sin forskning att ett väl genomfört och problemfritt evenemang, korrelerar till hur engagerade deltagarna är (Nilsson, 2020). Det innebär att organisatörer bör sträva till att deras evenemang plattform skall vara så användarvänlig som möjligt och eliminera onödiga steg, såsom inloggning och komplicerad plattform navigering. Baserat på min egen erfarenhet, kan jag konstatera att speciellt större

evenemang, som räcker ett flertal dagar, är en specificerad hemsida ett måste och gör det betydligt lättare för deltagarna att navigera evenamnet i sin helhet.

Att positivt överraska deltagare och bjuda dem på någonting som de inte har sett förut, är ett säkert sätt att skapa engagemang. Likt filmer som James Bond eller The Fast and the Furious, skall vi sträva till att föra våra föreläsare till visuellt imponerande miljöer, som våra deltagare kanske inte annars hade fått uppleva. Visuellt imponerande miljöer skapar ett mer minnesvärt evenemang.

Förinspelat material som sedan live streamas i samband med ett evenemang, är ett bra sätt att höja på produktionsvärdet hos evenemanget. Förinspelat material ger oss större kreativ frihet, eftersom vi kan spela in det i förväg, utan pressen av en direktsändning. Samtidigt eliminerar förinspelat material en hel del risker i samband med tekniska problem. Förinspelat material kan sedan sändas ut i samband med den direktsända delen av evenemanget och gör man det på rätt sätt, så vet inte tittarna vad som är förinspelat och vad som är live.

Väl förberedda professionella föreläsare, lyckas ofta engagera deltagare bättre än personer som inte är vana att tala till en virtuell publik. En erfaren föreläsare eller värd är också mer rutinerad med att tackla tekniska problem, om sådana uppstår.

Interaktiva verktyg, som chatt och frågestunder, finns till för att ge virtuella deltagare en röst och en möjlighet till att engagera sig. Dessa verktyg bör därför vara en integrerad del av alla virtuella och hybrida evenemang.

Denna studie hävdar inte att ett evenemang måste åstadkomma engagemang hos sina deltagare, för att anses vara en framgång. Det finns helt enkelt en hel del personer som helt enkelt inte önskar att engagera sig. Dock kan man antaga, att en omgivning som föder mycket diskussion och nätverkning, också är en omgivning där nya ideer blomstrar. Därför anses ett evenemang med mycket engagemang skapa mervärde, både för organisatörer men också deltagare. Alla evenemang bör därför se till att möjligheten och verktygen för engagemang finns tillgängliga. Därefter är det upp till deltagarna om de vill engagera sig.

Slutligen kan vi konstatera att själva innehållet är det viktigaste när det kommer till alla evenemang. Utan bra och intressant innehåll, spelar det ingen roll fast vi skulle ha ett annors välplanerat evenemang. Den teknologiska utveckling möjliggör att vi idag kan skapa livestreams och evenemang som liknar riktiga tv sändningar. I framtiden kommer även virtuell verklighet (VR) och möjligen artificiell intelligens att troligen användas inom virtuella och hybrida evenemang. Det betyder att vi i framtiden kanske kan skapa virtuella evenemang som verkligen påminner om traditionella fysiska evenemang.