EVENT TECH
INNOVATION
REPORT

EVENT MB

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

MIGUEL NEVES

Editor in chief, *EventMB - a Skift Brand*

Keeping up with **what's new and what's hot in event tech** is no longer optional, it's our duty as savvy event professionals.

With in-person events returning in many parts of the world, it's important for all event professionals to grasp the full range of event technology currently available, be it for in-person, virtual or hybrid events.

To stay ahead of the game we must also understand how to make the most of the amazing technology we have at our disposal — all while keeping an eye on the technology that will be here soon.

That is exactly what we looked to do through our recent *Event Tech Innovation Summit*. This report presents the most important and compelling information from each session.

EventMB, a Skift brand, is committed to keeping you informed and inspired through our events, webinars, reports and more. To get all our research and the latest news in your inbox, subscribe *here*.

A VIEW OF THE FUTURE

We start by looking at exciting and relevant technologies that are emerging now or will be part of many events very soon. Next, we reveal how artificial intelligence (AI) powered personalization is going to improve the experience for attendees through matchmaking, smart content recommendations, and more.
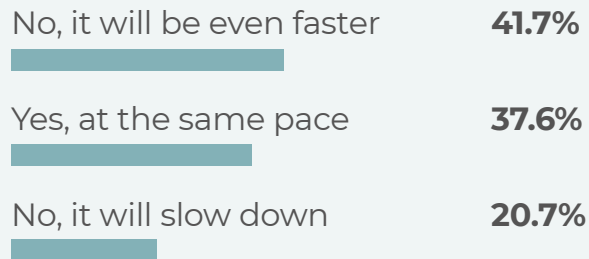
CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY THAT IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER

BRANDT KRUEGER

Owner, *Event Technology Consulting*

POLL

Will event tech continue to evolve at the same (2020/2021) pace post pandemic?

No, it will be even faster **41.7%**

Yes, at the same pace **37.6%**

No, it will slow down **20.7%**

Indoor positioning technology

Throughout the pandemic companies have invested heavily in data in their virtual events. As we start reincorporating our in-person audiences, they're going to want to get that same level of tracking that same level of data. They're looking to be able to track exactly where our attendees are in space as we go is the equivalent of when attendees login and we can track how long they watch something.

This type of data is something that's incredibly useful as we're continuing to increase our tracking abilities. It means we can focus on the hot leads, as opposed to the soft leads. We're no longer dealing in quantity, we're dealing in quality. The technology is not new, but we are now able to do much more in real-time. We can actually show, in real time, where people are and what are the hotspots.

The great thing is that there are benefits for attendees, which is how you get the buy-in. It

becomes Google maps for your trade show floor, making it easy to look around and, and be able to find things. Sponsors and exhibitors are also going to be able to integrate with their systems with rich data in a way that is useful for them. The end result is that this will help develop long-term sponsors and long term exhibitors.

Facial recognition

The opt-in systems that are available take data privacy very seriously, they are secure and are increasingly being accepted by attendees as part of a touchless experience. These systems make things incredibly convenient for attendees who can just scan and here's your badge, off you go.

Significant investments have been made in this technology and the infrastructure around it, bringing this technology closer to attendees. In fact these technologies are evolving past facial recognition to track attention and focus.

Exhibitors can use the technology to not only track how many attendees approach a booth but also what they look at and how they feel about it? The value to the exhibitor, sponsors, and the planners is immense. After all, how do we actually know that our stuff is working? But what is the value to the attendee? That is still an open question.

However, don't rush out to go buy a 5G device because you're barely gonna get the use out of it right now, just wait until it naturally becomes part of the upgrade cycle.
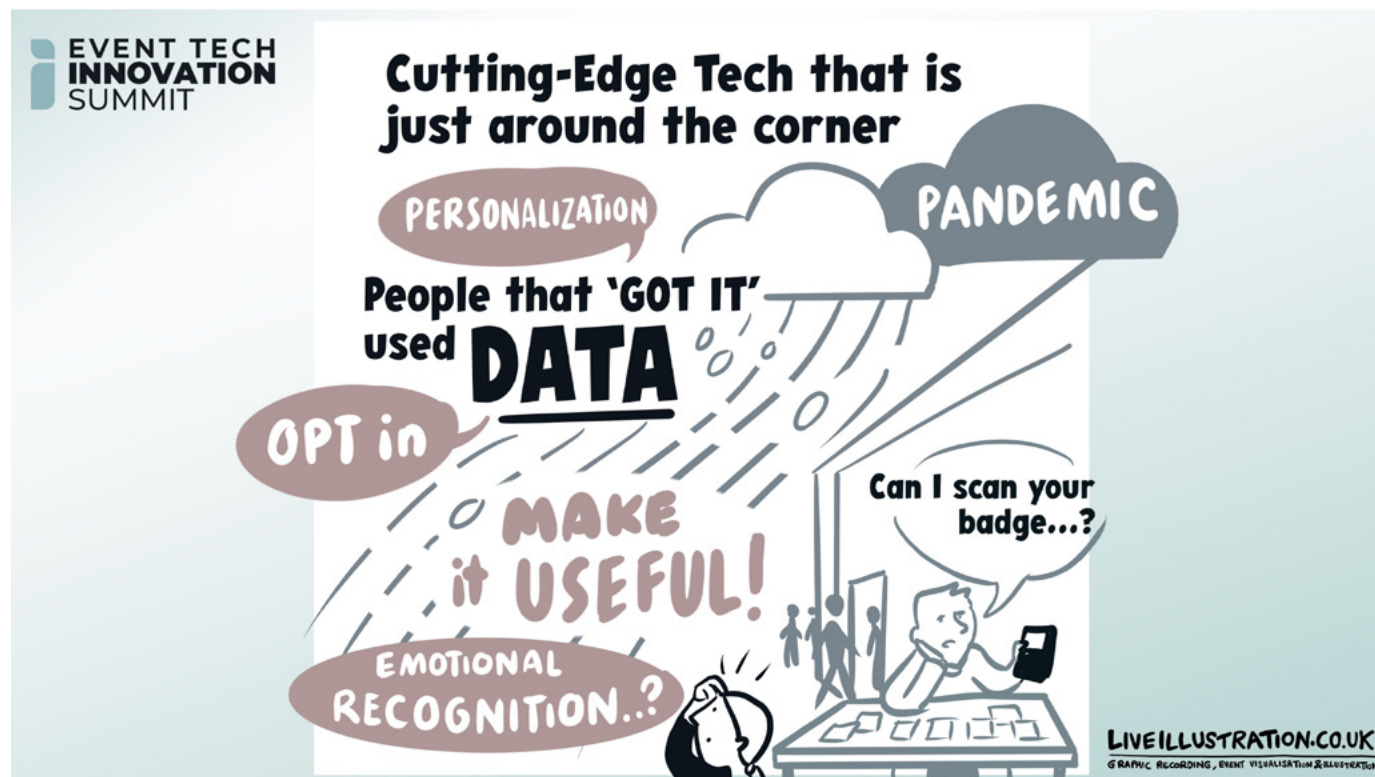
5G

This technology, depending on who you ask, it's either here or it's right around the corner. 5G is not just one technology, it's actually three technologies, all coming together under one package.

The incredible download speeds are not possible inside a convention center, you're only going to get that outside on the street, but you are increasing the number of people who can get on these connections. What is reducing dramatically is the latency, so even though the overall speed is the same, the delay in accessing the data is much less.

We're not going to be fully rolled out in 5G anytime soon, but you're going to see incremental benefits over the next decade. That is going to help with bringing in remote presenters and remote audiences into hybrid events.

Live graphic recording by **Sally Pring** - *liveillustration.co.uk* - Twitter: *@livepens*

NEXT-LEVEL PERSONALIZATION THROUGH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

STEVEN YELLEN

Vice President, Product Strategy, *Aventri*

POLL

Have you used AI before?

YES **19.6%**   NO **80.4%**

How can artificial intelligence help to deliver better personalization?

Personalization equals value. If you can recommend a session I should attend, a sponsor I should meet, or a person I should network with, all of those things serve to create a better experience by letting me make the most out of my time and achieve my personal goals. Many tools can offer that to some degree, but AI just does a better job of using that engagement data with minimal lift from event organizers.

There are also other applications around security and facial recognition, chatbots, closed captioning and automatic translations, etc., which just improve overall effectiveness. But I think with personalization, the key factor is really that it gives the attendees a better experience.

How does that differ from platforms that don't offer AI?

Many computing algorithms help make decisions for people, but in the case of personalization and recommendation engines, AI differs in that it self-optimizes based on the results of the decisions it has made. Over time, especially with large datasets, the technology makes itself more and more accurate and proficient at making decisions.

For example, let's say your platform makes networking recommendations using job title, years in the business, and location as its matchmaking criteria, weighing each equally. An AI algorithm could then look at meeting durations and satisfaction ratings to determine how successful the recommendation was. If the longest, best-rated meetings were based on title matches (as opposed to location), the AI would know to weigh that criterion more heavily going forward.

When should you aim for an AI-powered feature?

Anywhere that you're programmatically making recommendations is an opportunity to leverage AI. We've heard a lot of people doing session and networking recommendations, matching attendees with sponsors to generate more qualified leads, etc. On the attendee side, AI can improve the value derived from pretty much any interaction with content or others at the event, and on the planner side, those in turn produce a better ROI for your stakeholders. It comes down to data management, and whether you feel comfortable and have the time to manually deal with all the variables when you make decisions, or whether you'd feel more comfortable having the algorithm handle that.

One objection could be that an annual conference, for instance, wouldn't provide enough data to make AI that useful. What should planners being sold AI services be aware of?

Provided that you standardize your asks to form criteria that are consistent with what others have already used, the AI algorithm will benefit from the entire event data ecosystem on a given platform, whether it's generated by your events or someone else's. But for that to work, it really is important to use a technology provider with a significant database.

Any final parting advice for our audience?

1. Focus on your goals, not the technology.

2. Whether you leverage AI or not, make sure you're measuring your success.

3. When it comes to AI, more data is better because it's what fuels the optimization. Go with somebody who has a large data set to leverage.

REVENUE GENERATION

We explore how to make the most of event technology to drive all-important leads for you and your clients. Then, three experts share their best advice on monetization and sponsorship, two related areas that continue to challenge event professionals, particularly in virtual events.

3 STRATEGIES TO DRIVE LEAD GENERATION WITH VIRTUAL AND HYBRID EVENTS

JOE SCHWINGER

CEO and Co-Founder, *MeetingPlay*

JENNIFER KELLOGG

CMP, Executive Director, *MeetingPlay*

How should event organizers optimize their demand and lead generation strategies with virtual and hybrid events?

JENNIFER KELLOG: We recently partnered with Corporate Event News to survey almost 3000 event organizers on the top virtual event objective and an overwhelming majority of about 75% cited lead generation.

Data is at the core of optimizing demand and lead generation, and you should track every action and interaction within an event — what pages attendees visit, what sessions they attend, who they network with, etc. Tracking actual behavior tends to tell a much deeper story than evaluations or surveys. How long someone remains in a session or on a page indicates their priorities and what their ultimate virtual journey looks like from start to finish, and this can help you segment and target your approach to deliver stakeholders the most qualified leads. Content consumption and downloads within the platform can paint a picture of what an attendee is truly interested in.

Can you elaborate on what metrics event planners really need to track, and which are the most important?

JOE SCHWINGER: Custom reporting tailored to event goals is gold to meeting planners and sponsors alike. When we first went virtual, sponsors were not thrilled. But many planners, sponsors, and organizers are not leveraging virtual's full capabilities by facilitating multiple touchpoints and then aggregating all the data. You need to track a combination of components together to create a lead score. In virtual events, 1+1=3 because someone who goes to a virtual demo and then downloads the slide deck is a highly engaged prospect that should be focused on.

Did they attend the demo? How long were they

in there? Did they favorite it to come back to it later? Is it on their personal agenda? All of those components together create a lead score, and that's the ultimate goal.

How does lead scoring based on granular data apply in a hybrid event where you can't track every movement?

JOE SCHWINGER: You need to leverage technologies that can bridge the gap and consolidate the data. We've had to rethink our sponsors on property and what lead retrieval actually means to them because now they're catering to multiple audiences. How can you glean data from onsite interactions? There, the mic or the video camera could become the lead retrieval device. How can planners leverage virtual to drive demand towards onsite events?

At the top of the funnel, you cast the widest net possible. The audience is qualified, but they may not be totally qualified. The reach and low commitment that comes with virtual makes it a nice, wide net to cast. As you move down that funnel, you're looking for more targeted leads and the highest conversion on them. The cost of a customer acquisition in a virtual environment compared to the on property is much lower.

Therefore, the ROI burden is much higher on property, so what we're actually seeing right now is onsite-only events that cater exclusively to pre existing customers looking for that personal one-on-one experience that you can only do in person.
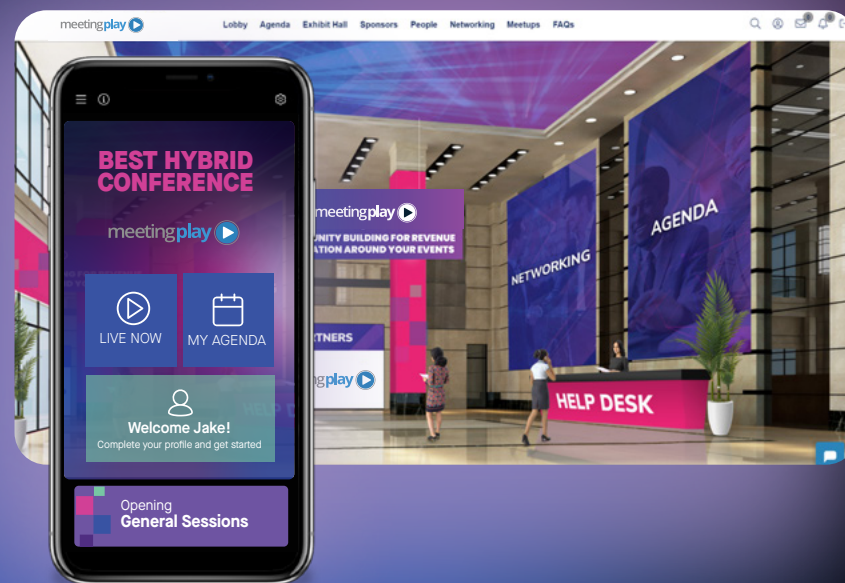
MONETIZATION AND SPONSORSHIP

KENEISHA WILLIAMS
Founder, *Black In Events Network*

BRENT BAROOTES
President and CEO, *Partnership Group*

WILLIAM THOMSON
Founder, *Virtual Event Campus*

In this 3x3x3 Bullet Point Session, three expert speakers share their three best tips on **Monetization and Sponsorship** of events in under three minutes each. There's no better way to get some fresh ideas on this key topic than by watching this short video.

View this session here *here*

STRATEGIC AND INTENTIONAL EXECUTION

When it comes to executing virtual events, all eyes turn to AV and Production. Only with a great service level can we be confident of success. We explore strategies with an on-demand focus that changes the way we work with events. We discuss diversity, equity and inclusion, and how it can make a real difference in leading our teams to success.

SERVICE LEVEL AV AND PRODUCTION SUPPORT: THE UNDERRATED PILLARS OF SUCCESSFUL HYBRID EVENTS

ANDREW PEARSON

CMO, *Socio*

More and more tech companies are offering AV and production support. How has Socio gone about this, and how do you see that evolving with hybrid events?

The pandemic necessitated the transition to entirely virtual events, and it turns out the event tech provider is in the best position to manage the virtual production. As we pivot to hybrid events that blend the in-person component with the virtual, we are evolving our service offerings to really be complementary to AV providers, which we're looking to partner with to make the process seamless. Finding that marriage of virtual production support and onsite AV support is really critical.

What do planners need to do in order to have more productive conversations about their needs when evaluating or selecting a partner?

I suggest budgeting a lot of lead time to evaluate AV partners, and be clear about your goals and your constraints. Get to brass tacks as early as possible. Don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions about all the equipment and the roles and responsibilities.

Don't underestimate the importance of having great AV partners and a virtual support team who know how to work together, who are familiar with each other's worlds. AV companies are starting to skill up on 'best of breed' event tech platforms, but since hybrid events are still quite new, not every company has done that yet. If you're going to go hybrid, select based on those that have done their homework.

Having done your own hybrid events, what other advice can you give those diving in for the first time in terms of execution?

At Socio, we like to make sure that everybody aligns around a common production schedule or run of show that depicts a play-by-play of the event,

when polls are being queued, who is introducing sessions or speakers — even camera shots. Do you want a lot of audience shots from your in-person event? Do you want wide shots for a full panel and then zoomed-in when individuals are speaking? How are you bringing in a virtual presenter onstage? Are they next to it on a small screen or part of the big live display?

Rehearsing with the tech that's actually going to be used is also really critical. We found that a rehearsal two weeks out and another one week prior is actually really important to identify some of the things you need to solve for.

Virtual speakers need support and rehearsals, too. The audio/visual dimension of the virtual speaker is important because they may be on a huge screen. What works on a small screen on people's desktops doesn't necessarily look good on a really big live display.

YOUR PATH TO VICTORY WITH EVENTS ON DEMAND

PIERRE METRAILLER

CEO, *SpotMe*

Do you see virtual events and event platforms as ongoing vehicles for content delivery and lead generation?

Buyers and prospects actively avoid your outreach, except when it comes to events. Decision makers go to events to learn and engage, with events and webinars in the top 5 of the most engaging content formats. And yet, event management vendors focus on event logistics, and miss the opportunity to execute events at a level that builds trust and relationships between the brand and customers.

How will this impact content design and programming?

I believe it will force many teams to start thinking more like media companies to understand the layers of potential that can be extracted from a single piece of content. For example, a keynote speech at a conference can be broken down into smaller pieces, aggregated into a quick binge-worthy recap, summarized in a blog post or explored deeper in an eBook, or repurposed in a combination of video, written, and design-driven content.. Audiences expect higher quality which means higher costs, so squeezing every ounce of value out of highly produced content becomes an absolute priority.

What are some key features and strategies for succeeding with on demand content and engagement?

First, you want to increase content quality with more editing capabilities and production values. Second, you need to boost content relevance with personalization and building responsive content tracks. And third, you will increase interactivity opportunities with micro-commitments and a pervasive engagement layer.

HOW DEI DRIVES INNOVATION IN EVENT TECH

ALLIE MAGYAR
Founder and CEO, *Hubb*

LISA VANN
COO, *MeetingPlay*

SANDY HAMMER
Co-Founder, *AllSeated*

XIAOYIN QU
Founder & CEO,
Run The World

How do you see DEI impacting your business?

ALLIE: DEI is an important part of every conversation. In our roles as meeting planners we create environments for people to succeed.We need to understand the diversity of environments in order to be able to get different perspectives. DEI doesn't just apply to gender or to race. We need to also be thinking about neuro-diversity. How do people learn? How do they engage in social situations? And then how do we create the environments and the structure to allow those people to feel included with our day-to-day as well.

LISA: It's a really important concept in terms of how we are able to create innovative products, how you're able to bring those products to our clients and to the audiences, and really make them meaningful and add value. We want to continue to grow our companies and grow our employees, and really be able to give more people more opportunities. And I think innovation and DEI are a really critical part of that.

SANDY: DEI is all about having great ethics running through your workplace. It's about getting your employees to show up every day without any fears and being their true selves. They need to be who they really are. We think a lot about that. We have offices all over and we truly believe in it. It's a major part of our creativity and it contributes heavily to our productivity. Before we bring people in, it's part of the onboarding. It's a very big, conversational piece.

XIAOYIN: This is a really personal topic for me. I moved to the US when I was 18 for college and when I first arrived I didn't speak English very well. This meant I had a very different experience compared to my classmates. In class I was so passionate to share my opinions, but it was really awkward for me. When I was saying something I didn't think it was resonating with many people. I remember how demotivating that was, it made me less willing to share my opinions. It made me less creative.

Now in our company, I'm thinking about this all the time. If we have a good environment that supports diversity, all of those people who are like me first arriving here will be motivated. They are so talented, but you risk not using their talent very well. That is going to cost you in terms of lost ideas, lost productivity, lost opportunities. This is something deeply personal. I've seen the value of how when I open up in an environment that's more pleasant and more agreeable,it is going to help the company and help me as well.

POLL

Is DEI an important part of your work conversations?

YES **76.8%**   NO **23.2%**

How does having a female founder make your company different?

ALLIE:As female founders we collectively can use our voices to change the conversation for those around us and to change our world. As a part of my career I've gone out and looked for venture capital and I'm incredibly proud that I've raised over 10 million in venture capital now, but less than 3 percent of venture capital funding actually goes to women founders, and that's down half a percent from last year.

There's a lot that we can do within our organizations as well, to inspire everyone to innovate within our companies, give them opportunities to make changes, to have an entrepreneurial mindset, and be able to create the world

that we actually want. So I'm incredibly passionate about taking ownership and changing the conversation and our day-to-day world.

SANDY: I find that people come to our company because there's a woman founder, women are very inspired by other women, and a lot of people are coming because of a woman co-founder. They'll say I'm so happy to be sitting in front of you. I really want to work for you. That's something that we have to empower the next generations to have a voice and make sure everyone has those opportunities.

LISA: It helps show that the company is open. It doesn't matter who you are, we have an opportunity for you. It's about what skills you have and what you want to learn. What do you want to contribute? What can you bring to the organization and what value can we add to you as an employee? It's really important that it's part of the core for us as part of our culture, not specifically that we're going out to hire X person. We want to grow broadly and have a lot of different perspectives so that we're not just narrow in what we're focused on.

XIAOYIN: We've always been a fully distributed company, so we're able to get talent from different sources. We have a bunch of different recruiters from different countries and different backgrounds. It helps when you already have a very diverse team and people tend to recommend the company to each other.

SANDY: We're a very international company and we hire where we see pools of talent. For example we have our R&D in Israel and our designers and 3D studio are in the Ukraine. We left behind the idea of having one office in one place and we decided to go look for where the talents lie and now we have an unbelievable pool of talent.

This also creates some language barriers, so we've set up a program where everybody who needs it gets English lessons. We have big company meetings but

if there are issues we have smaller meetings with a translator. This amazing diverse group of people in different time zones is a huge benefit for our company and its growth. It's given us a tremendous kind of edge to who we are as a company.

## What's your advice on how to create a diverse and inclusive team?

ALLIE: Remember that these types of topics are incredibly sensitive but they are some of the most important conversations we can have. Empowering people and creating an environment that allows them to have a voice starts at the top. We have to model what we want our world to be. I encourage everyone listening today, regardless of whether you're CEO or the person working the front desk, you have an opportunity to start to model how you want this world to be and to lead by example.

LISA: Know who you are and be who you are. That's how people are going to succeed and grow. So don't hold back, there's a lot of opportunity so that you can get what you're looking for.

XIAOYIN: Part of the challenge of being different is that you may not see a lot of role models, you don't see people who have the same background as you. For a lot of us, we don't have role models and I think that's okay because you're going to be the first of its kind, and it's going to be incredible

for you to motivate more people, so it's totally okay if you don't have any role models because that's where you shine.

SANDY: I'm a big believer in building confidence. It doesn't matter who you are, what race, anything, everything, every person needs to be built with their confidence. And then you have the ability to really do anything, be anyone and be very true to yourself. You have to find yourself, be comfortable with yourself and you're going to excel and succeed.
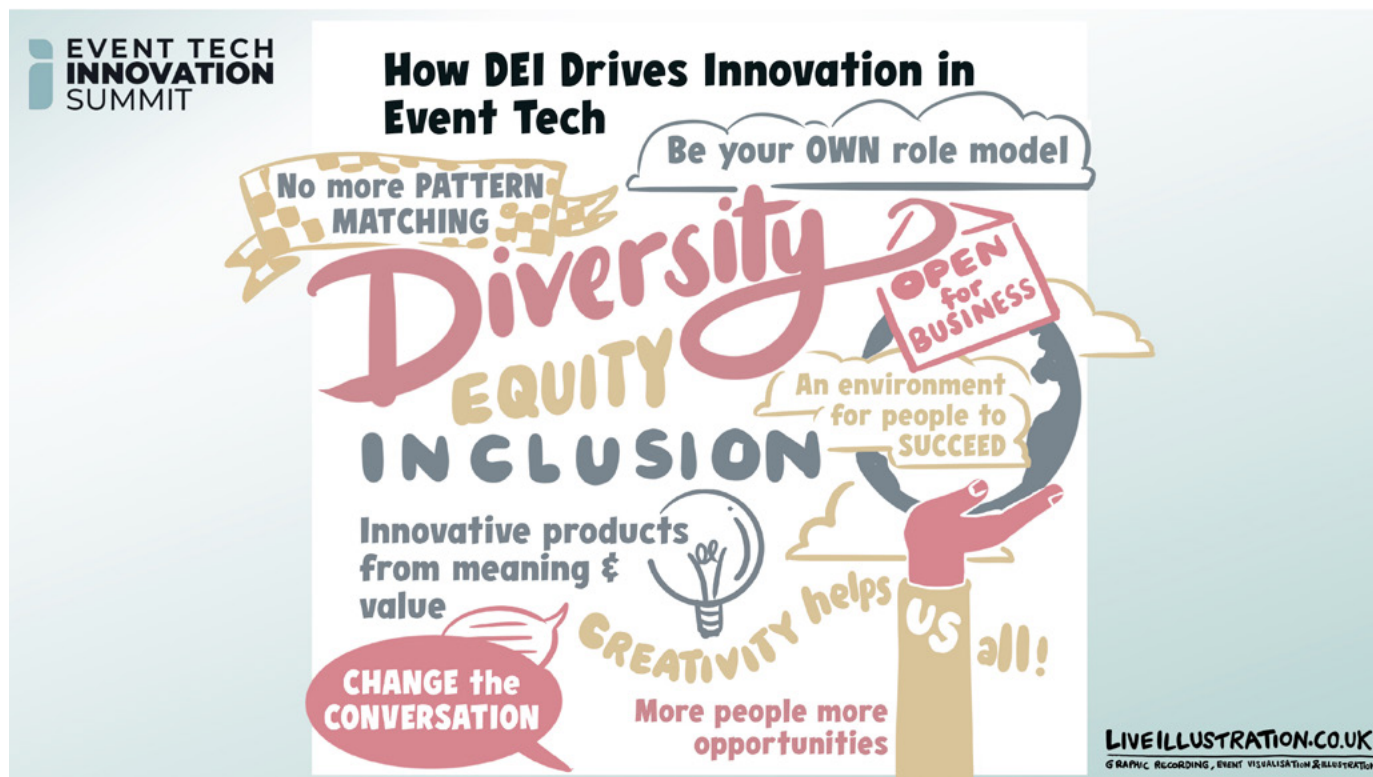
Live graphic recording by **Sally Pring** - *liveillustration.co.uk* - Twitter: *@livepens*

ENGAGEMENT

The biggest challenge for planners in virtual events is how to keep attendees engaged. Three experts address this issue head on with a great selection of top tips. We also look at how high-quality video communication in real time enables a very different level of interaction and why this is so important.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

KATHRYN FRANKSON
Director of Event Marketing, *Informa*

TAHIRA ENDEAN
CITP, CMP,DES,CED,
Head of Events, *SITE*

LIZ KING CARUSO
CEO, *techsytalk*

In this 3x3x3 Bullet Point Session, three expert speakers share their three best tips on **Engagement Strategies for Virtual Events** in under three minutes each. There's no better way to get some fresh ideas on this key topic than by watching this short video.
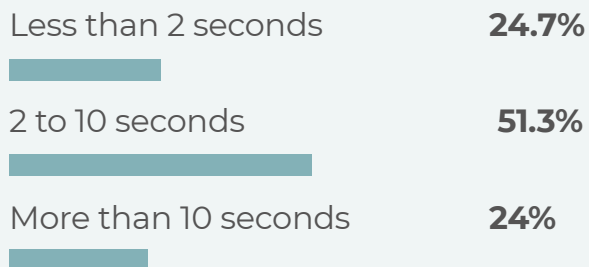

View this session here *here*

UNLOCKING ENGAGEMENT IN HYBRID EVENTS THROUGH REAL-TIME VIDEO INTERACTION

JELMER VAN AST
Founder and CEO, *Conference Compass*

Why is real-time video interaction so important?

We've always been about helping our customers create more engaging events. We work with the largest medical association conferences, ever since we started back in 2010, and for them video has always been for on demand access. That shifted with the pandemic. With the only way for our customers to hold conferences being online, real-time video is just a fundamental part of that. When we realized this we turned it into our mission so every part of our platform, including our green rooms, is powered by real-time video experiences.

It's not just about low latency, it's also about high quality video. This is what drives engagement, when we are able to bring across emotion and we can see people's faces when they use our platform. If the bandwidth is constrained the resolution may decrease but the emphasis is always on delivering real-time video interaction.

How can this technology help with hybrid events?

This technology is already very suitable for fully virtual events as you get immediate input from your audience, the sort of human interaction conference organisers are looking for. It's even more important when we move to hybrid events because any significant video delay is going to kill the engagement as the on-site attendees will always be favored.

This technology can really make hybrid events an inclusive experience where everybody can engage at the same level, wherever they are. It's possible to have group conversations where some people are on-site and some people are online. You can now have a complete choice of how you want to join a session.

If you really want to have the voice of the whole audience, even those who are not able to travel for budget or health and safety reasons, you can now include them with their voice and their input via polls for instance, at the same level as the attendees in the room.

It also creates simple overflow possibilities for anyone who is not able to enter the room. With Covid restrictions, room capacity can be much more of an issue, so allowing attendees to join from the lobby or another room is a great plan. They just open their laptop

or take out their iPad and jump into the session. They're going to see the video feed in close to real-time as what's presented in the room.

How does this affect networking opportunities?

Using this technology you can easily create one-on-one conversations that are similar to using FaceTime. The advantage for planners is that attendees get their own environment on a platform with technology similar to FaceTime built-in. It's easy for attendees to use this to connect with others who are on-site or online. It doesn't matter. Anyone can jump on a call without having to exchange phone numbers or email addresses all within the privacy of the event platform.

How can we prepare for these types of events?

In addition to an adequate AV setup for smaller sessions such as round-table sessions or poster presentations there just needs to be a camera and perhaps an extra screen for the online participants to interact with the on-site participants.

Most of the preparation is about asking the foundational question: What is the objective of your event? What do you aim to achieve? What kind of value do you add and who is your target audience? When you answer these questions you can design the meeting formats and fit in the technology, not the other way around. Don't start with technology!

In reality we're at the start of discovering all the opportunities. We've been talking about hybrid events where everybody is joining and participating in the same experience. We can also see other types of hybrid events where the online component is followed a few days later by an onsite component. If you experience the content before you can focus on in-person interaction when you're together and dive deeper into specific subjects.

DATA AT THE CORE OF EVERYTHING

We look at simple ways to comprehend and master the use of data as well as make a case for planners to enlist data experts on their teams. We discuss data integration as a real challenge to creating a complex tech stack. We explore the very practical and impressive ways of using data in real-time that can be extremely powerful for organizers as well as exhibitors.
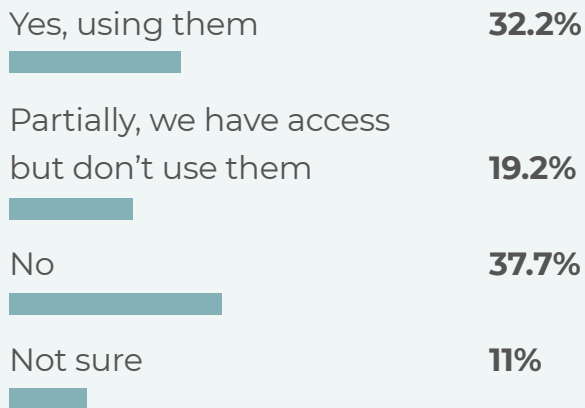
USING REAL-TIME ANALYTICS TO DRIVE GROWTH AND ENGAGEMENT

JONATHAN KAZARIAN
Founder & CEO, *Accelevents*

Are we looking at data differently in 2021?

Over the past year we've seen a convergence of event professionals, event marketers and growth marketers and data is being used in a fashion that it really hadn't been before.

Also we're seeing entire event programs change. Organizations that in the past would've had a couple of pillar events throughout the year are now running events at a much higher frequency. This provides extra opportunities to learn from and engage the audience.

How can we leverage data without it creating a heavy lift?

We need to get away from the idea of data being something that you look at after the fact. We can act on data in real time and impact events as they're taking place.

At an in-person event we act quickly when we see people who may need assistance. In a virtual setting we can use data to do the same, it enables us to be proactive and provide the best possible experience for our attendees. It's true that there is so much data coming in, but a lot of that data is best used on the fly.

We also use data to ensure exhibitors get the best access to leads by providing them with information about what attendees have viewed or downloaded on their virtual booth. This makes it simple to focus the conversation around that. Having that real-time data accessible to you as a seller or somebody trying to build a relationship is so powerful

We can also use data to help planners by showing them if speakers have logged in or done a device check. It's not really the way that people think about the analytics and the data, but it is a big piece of that real-time information.

How can we use data to address challenges of virtual events?

We can use data to check if anyone is having trouble on the platform, but if you're not monitoring that virtual event in real time, that's what leads to the bad experience. As they're only there virtually they'll find something else to do, so you really need to act quickly.

How can you apply this to something like membership growth?

Virtual events are an incredible mechanism for distributing educational content. The real-time data

let's us see when we have the most people on the platform and calculate the highest rates of engagement. We can then make an instant call-to-action to buy membership by pushing out notifications to people based on certain filtered attributes. Data tells you exactly who to push out that information to, and the right time to do it. We've seen tremendous success with organizations driving upsells within the platform.

Software user groups have been quite successful in using data in a similar way. They're able to connect prospects with existing customers so they can ask questions to an advocate. They can also be there to facilitate the conversations and drive the sale over the finish line all while syncing this information with their CRM.

How can planners make use of engagement data that is being collected?

They automate the distribution of data to exhibitors. If you define in advance what they consider a lead they are able to act in real time, which in turn leads to higher conversion rates.

We can build hyper-targeted virtual events without many of the limitations of in-person events. We have access to a global audience and so we can focus on the niche topics where people are going to get the most value. We can then reach out to the right people at the right time, based on the actions that they've taken throughout the events. We can track their learning experiences, networking opportunities, this is really how it translates into our ongoing growth engine.

How do you see future data-driven events developing?

Data is going to improve the general attendee experience. We can mitigate or eliminate the type of hiccups that happen in person and we're able to move faster. The other side of it is personalization. We can just create better experiences for people by being respectful of their time and using the data to have human conversations with people about topics that they're interested in.
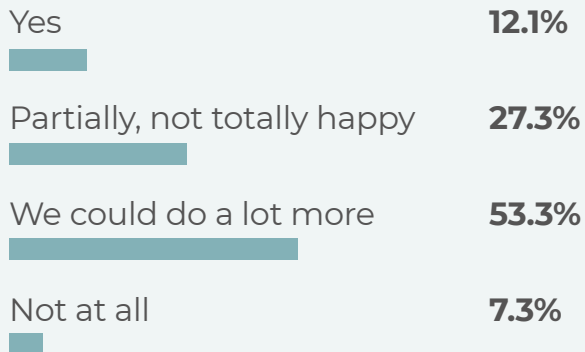
MICHELLE BRUNO, MPC, CEM, CMP

President, *Bruno Group Signature Services*

POLL

Are you happy with how you collect and analyze data from your events?

Yes	**12.1%**
Partially, not totally happy	**27.3%**
We could do a lot more	**53.3%**
Not at all	**7.3%**

DATA: THE VIRTUAL AND HYBRID EVENT GOLD MINE?

How can we improve the way we collect and use data?

Using a pre-event, during event and post-event framework is effective for thinking about data. In the pre-event period, you're formulating your data strategy. This is where you look at your event objectives, figure out what data points you want to collect in order to meet those objectives and then sketch out the execution of that.

During the event it's really about the mechanisms around collecting the data and centralizing where the data goes. Once you've collected all this data you need to have a plan for putting it into action. That is probably the most difficult part.

How can we improve how we collect and analyze data?

First of all, acknowledge that this is hard to do. It's relatively easy to get all the data in a funnel, on a platform or in a database, but actually parsing through the data points is difficult. Also consider that planners aren't trained for that. We're all about getting people to the event and keeping it within budget, but that's only two data points right there. In virtual events there are literally hundreds, maybe even thousands of data points, and we're just not prepared for that.

Furthermore, a lot of data is still siloed. Even though we attend virtual and hybrid events on a single platform, the data may be spread over other platforms and databases. Getting it in one place can be a challenge. There are now movements around standardizing data, but it's still hard to have the data organized so it can be useful.

Has the pandemic affected the way we deal with data?

Virtual events have created more data, but if we didn't know how to handle data before it's an even larger problem now. The good part is that the platforms are becoming more mature and the vendors are teaching us how to use data more effectively. We're also better at understanding the different kinds of data in a platform and an event.

We started by focusing only on data about how well the platform is performing, which is useful for assessing our return on investment on the platform, but not for understanding our audience.

We now regularly look at generalized metrics, where you can see that a percentage or number of people engaged in a session or answered questions during the Q&A. This generalized data, tells you the health of your virtual event, but doesn't give you information about individual attendees.

Now we're starting to use data to follow the journey of specific attendees. This is really useful to be able to convert attendees to leads or to make sure your employees are attending and actually learning something. To do this you need data points that are matched to specific people. This can be controversial because of privacy issues so not all platforms release this data to organizers, and not all organizers share this data with exhibitors and sponsors.

The only way that we can wrap our heads around this whole issue of data is to look at the platforms, allow them to teach us what kind of data is available and choose the data points that are most effective in reaching the objectives that we've set out for our event.

## What is your advice for planners seeking extra resources to manage data?

What we're talking about is asking the C-level level to hire a data analyst. Unfortunately there aren't that many around that specialize in events, but larger events do have them. I would make the argument in a few ways.

1. Demonstrate what you can gain by having a data analyst, and making the data actually actionable.
2. Show what you lose by collecting data and doing nothing with it.
3. Make it clear that there is an opportunity cost to getting the data and not doing anything with it.

I don't think it's as difficult an argument to make now because, the buzzword of 2019 or 2020, and now 2021 is digital transformation, and the exhaust from every piece of digital technology is data. The C-level is well aware that there is a need to put someone professional in there to analyze the data and use it for predictive analytics and programming. There are so many other uses that it's not that hard of an argument to make.
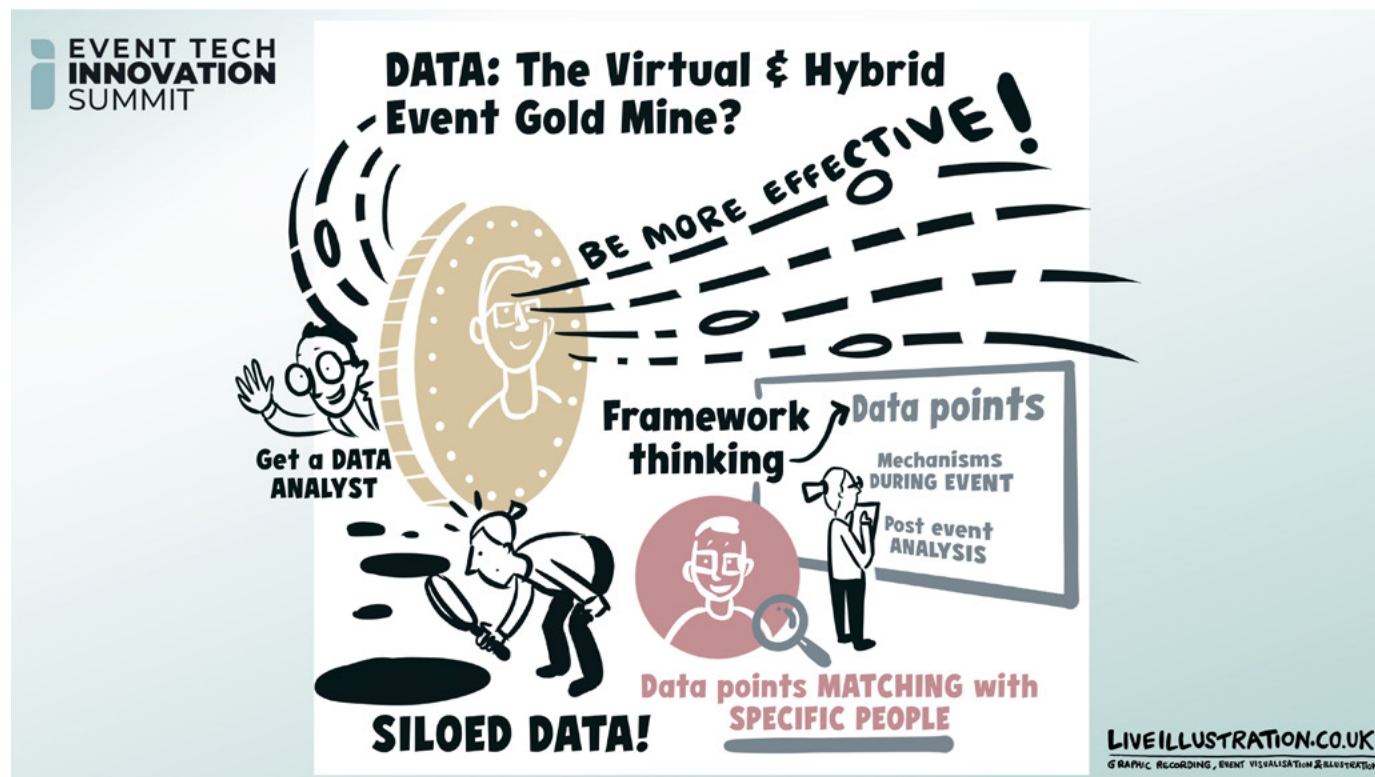
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THE CHANGING ROLE OF EVENT DATA

IAN WEBB

Head of Business Development & Strategy,
Eventsforce

How has the onset of services for virtual offerings changed the nature of event data?

Virtual events have had a big impact on the way organizers deal with their data. Our own research, conducted in May 2021, found that 50% of event planners are finding data management a lot more complicated today. The volume of data is the biggest issue as the majority of organizers are collecting more data through virtual events than they did with in-person events.

Virtual event platforms, apps and other online engagement tools all help organizers track attendee activity and behavior in a much more granular way than for in-person events. Stakeholders like sponsors and exhibitors are demanding more data from organizers to justify their investments. At the same time, attendees are a lot more concerned about what data they share online. The whole landscape is changing.

What do event professionals need to know in order to manage these new data sources?

First, have a clear strategy on what data is going to be collected and how this data is going to be used. Is it to measure success? Is it to create the reports your stakeholders want? Is it to make improvements to the way people engage and network? With clear objectives, you can determine what data you want and compare that with the data your tech systems provide.

Second, understand the time and resources you'll need to collate all your data, analyze it and compile actionable insight. Not doing this effectively is a real lost opportunity and it will create other problems in the long run too.

Third, always follow good data management practices. It will offer you that golden opportunity to learn what people want from your events. It will

help you build trust and loyalty with your audiences. It will also help your events stand out – which is especially important in the current climate.

What tools do planners need in order to collect and make sense of all the information, and to make better decisions for future events?

Integration is at the heart of the issue here. Our research shows that 40% of organizers are struggling to make sense of all the data as it sits on many different systems. This isn't going to become any easier with hybrid events either (75% of organizers are planning on running hybrid events in 2021-2022). Hybrid events combine two different experiences, with two sets of data for both virtual and in-person attendees. The more systems you use, the more time you'll spend collating and analyzing data collected from these events.

When investing in new tech make sure the tools integrate easily with your existing event technology stack or consider integrated solutions like Eventsforce. An integrated solution allows you to manage all your virtual and in-person data in one place. This can save you time in creating the reports you need and make it easier to understand how people are engaging with your events. They can also give you that big picture overview on all your events which is essential for success and growth.

CHOICES

We explore virtual event platforms that do things a little differently, be it 3D, VR or other solutions all while assessing the feasibility of using these platforms.

WHAT'S NEW IN VIRTUAL VENUES: 2D, 3D AND MORE

JAMES MORGAN PHD - EWD

Founder, *Event Tech Lab*

SHAWN CHENG, CMP DES

Project Manager, *MCI Group Canada*

ASHANTI BENTIL-DHUE

CEO, *EventMind*

What is a 3D environment and why should people try it?

JAMES: The 3D environments I call "game scapes" allow people to create and manipulate an avatar within a digital environment that mimics a physical environment. The game scape itself can be a branded, bespoke design with multiple areas like a booth area, a lobby area, and a conference delivery area with a stage.

The networking dynamic also changes quite a bit. The game scape allows for serendipitous networking that almost mimics that live experience rather than constructing the networking using attendees' likes and tags. You can also put things like photo booths in there as well as polls and other fun activities.

I think these game scapes are going to be of particular interest to investors as they look to grow with gen Z.

POLL

Have you ever tried an alternative format like a 3D or 2D map for your events?

YES **35%**   NO **65%**

Some platforms focus on two dimensional representations of physical spaces. How are they trying to change the game?

SHAWN: There are a few different companies in the market that use "proximity chat" on a map-based virtual platform, which means you can basically go into a flat, 2D space and walk around to meet people. When you get close to another person's icon or graphic on the screen, it starts a conversation.

My understanding is that it can be a good solution for events that include poster sessions as people can actually walk to a poster board, talk to the presenter, and then virtually walk away to move on.

## Do you think these platforms offer material advantages over broadcast-based virtual event platforms?

ASHANTI: This is about whether it serves your event goals while respecting your bottom line. How easy is it for your team to implement, and once you get it set up, will people find it both useful and easy to use? A key benefit of broadcast-based platforms is that they are simple and familiar.

A lot of smaller companies are prepared to be more hands-on with supporting the setup and overall experience for attendees and speakers because, if the events team were left to themselves, they may not have the skill or resources to execute a positive experience. How do you get from A to B if you don't have in-house resources or the support from the platform?

How do you get buy-in for an unusual platform?

JAMES: It's got to fit the purpose of the actual event. If you're doing an exhibition or a product launch, how do you immerse people in that experience? And more importantly, how does that cause behavioral change? Being strategic about how you use different platforms to elicit that behavior change process is really important.

ASHANTI: Ultimately, this is a technology purchase. Decision makers may not be tech savvy (or even from the events team). You need to focus on their priorities when you try to get buy-in. How much does it cost? How much use are we going to get out of it? Who needs to be trained on it? How long will it take to integrate that into our current working practice?
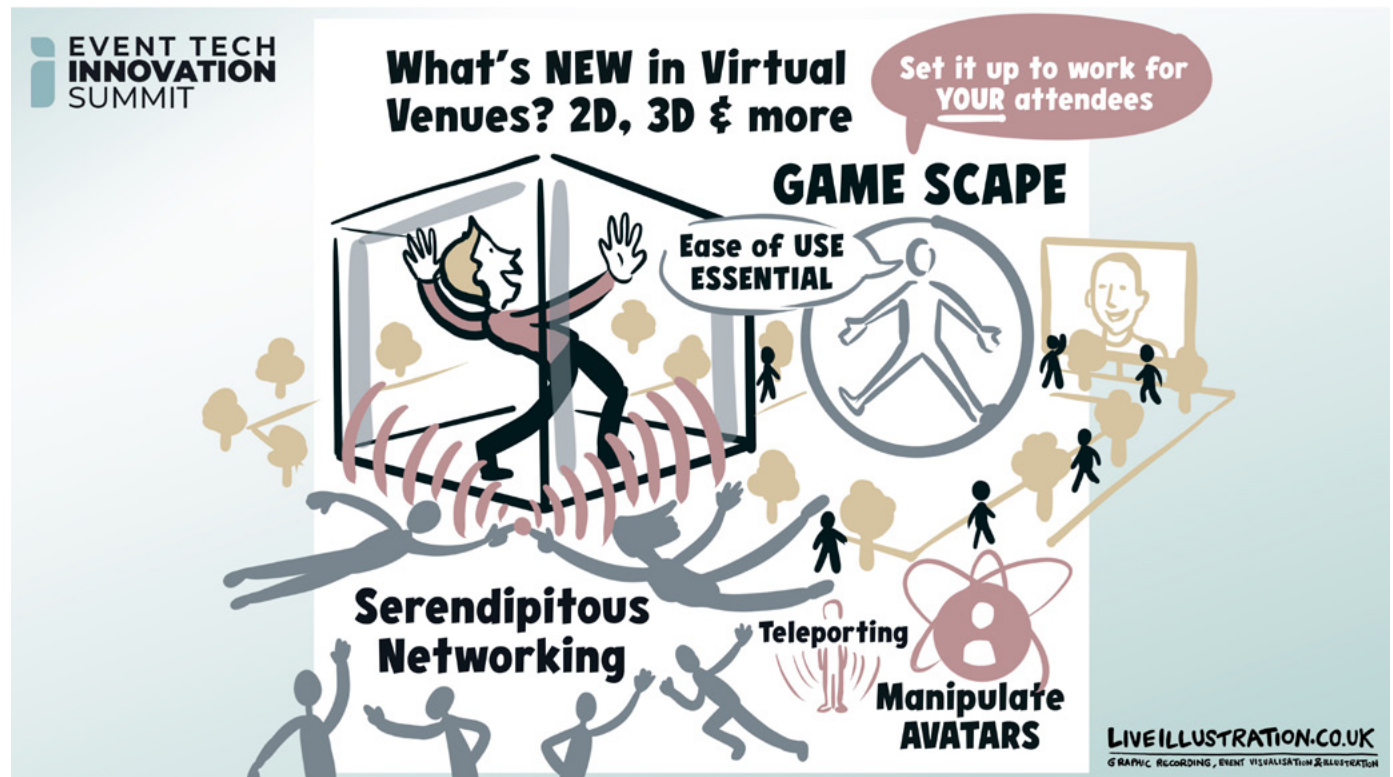
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