

Making Everything Easier!™

ON24 Special Edition

Virtual Events

FOR
DUMMIES®

Learn to:

- **Create compelling virtual events**
- **Engage your audience**
- **Use virtual events to draw in even more leads**

Brought to you by

ON24

Ryan C. Williams



“Economic and environmental factors are driving increased demand for virtual events. Successful companies are decreasing their costs and expanding their global reach, while offering their customers, partners, and employees a more convenient way to access valuable information. Virtual events offer extended and enriched access to content and speakers, while delivering better metrics for better business intelligence.”

Kathleen Sulgit

*Director, Global Events & Operations, Corporate Marketing
Cisco*

“Virtual events — in which you truly replicate an event experience — are the most exciting Web 2.0 marketing opportunity. They deliver great results and, if you replace a real event with a virtual one, you can cut costs as much as 95 percent. While in-person events offer the benefits of face-to-face contact, virtual events also offer online opportunities for networking and chatting that enable a personal connection. Enterprises should evaluate their events strategies and develop a mix of physical, virtual, and hybrid events to maximize ROI.”

Sandy Carter

*Vice President, Software Business Partners
IBM*

About ON24 Inc.

The recognized global virtual events market share leader, ON24 provides webcasting and virtual environments for corporate communications and demand generation. The ON24 platform is a complete Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) cloud offering; no deployment resources are required. ON24 offers fully integrated, enterprise-wide solutions for applications ranging from training, user conferences, and company meetings to partner expos and trade shows. More than 750 organizations, including IBM, Cisco, CA Technologies, Merck, AstraZeneca, Fiserv, Credit Suisse, GE, and Oracle, rely on ON24. The company is headquartered in San Francisco, with offices throughout the world. For more information, visit www.ON24.com.

Virtual Events
FOR
DUMMIES®
ON24 SPECIAL EDITION

by Ryan C. Williams



WILEY

Wiley Publishing, Inc.

These materials are the copyright of Wiley Publishing, Inc. and any dissemination, distribution, or unauthorized use is strictly prohibited.

Virtual Events For Dummies®, ON24 Special Edition

Published by
Wiley Publishing, Inc.
111 River Street
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774

Copyright © 2010 by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana

Published by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Trademarks: Wiley, the Wiley Publishing logo, For Dummies, the Dummies Man logo, A Reference for the Rest of Us!, The Dummies Way, Dummies.com, Making Everything Easier, and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries, and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Wiley Publishing, Inc., is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY: THE PUBLISHER AND THE AUTHOR MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS WORK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ALL WARRANTIES, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION WARRANTIES OF FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES OR PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR EVERY SITUATION. THIS WORK IS SOLD WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PUBLISHER IS NOT ENGAGED IN RENDERING LEGAL, ACCOUNTING, OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. IF PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE IS REQUIRED, THE SERVICES OF A COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL PERSON SHOULD BE SOUGHT. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR THE AUTHOR SHALL BE LIABLE FOR DAMAGES ARISING HEREFROM. THE FACT THAT AN ORGANIZATION OR WEBSITE IS REFERRED TO IN THIS WORK AS A CITATION AND/OR A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF FURTHER INFORMATION DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE AUTHOR OR THE PUBLISHER ENDORSES THE INFORMATION THE ORGANIZATION OR WEBSITE MAY PROVIDE OR RECOMMENDATIONS IT MAY MAKE. FURTHER, READERS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT INTERNET WEBSITES LISTED IN THIS WORK MAY HAVE CHANGED OR DISAPPEARED BETWEEN WHEN THIS WORK WAS WRITTEN AND WHEN IT IS READ.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Business Development Department in the U.S. at 317-572-3205. For details on how to create a custom For Dummies book for your business or organization, contact bizdev@wiley.com. For information about licensing the For Dummies brand for products or services, contact BrandedRights&Licenses@Wiley.com.

ISBN: 978-0-470-90067-3

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Publisher's Acknowledgments

Acquisitions, Editorial, and Media Development

Senior Project Editor: Zoë Wykes

Editorial Manager: Rev Mengle

Senior Business Development Representative:
Karen Hattan

Custom Publishing Project Specialist:
Michael Sullivan

Composition Services

Senior Project Coordinator: Kristie Rees

Layout and Graphics: Christin Swinford

Proofreader: Jessica Kramer

Special Help from ON24:
Denise Persson, Tricia Heinrich

These materials are the copyright of Wiley Publishing, Inc. and any dissemination, distribution, or unauthorized use is strictly prohibited.

Table of Contents

.....

Introduction	1
About This Book	1
Conventions Used in This Book	2
How to Use This Book	2
Foolish Assumptions	2
How This Book Is Organized	2
Icons Used in This Book	4
Where to Go from Here	4
Chapter 1: Defining the Virtual Event	5
Making the Virtual Show Reality	6
Creating Your Webcast	7
Comparing and Contrasting	8
Chapter 2: The Virtual Event	11
Trading Virtual Spaces	11
Training without Needing the Train	14
Virtual Learning Solutions	14
Rallying the Troops with Internal Meetings	16
Chapter 3: Making Sense Out of Virtual Events	19
Returning on Your Investment	19
Generating Leads	20
Analyzing the Details	22
Appreciating the Fringe Benefits	24
Chapter 4: Starting Your Virtual Event	25
Planning Your Plan	25
Putting Together Your Timeline	27
Creating Your Virtual Event's Content	29
Recruiting Sponsors for Your Virtual Event	30
Promoting the Event	31
Chapter 5: Understanding the Best Practices for a Virtual Event	33
Bringing In Participants	33
Engaging the Audience	35
Targeting Appropriate Content	36

Using All the Data You Can.....	36
Going Global	36
Chapter 6: Putting Together Your Virtual Booth	37
Making It All Look Good	37
Staffing Your Booth.....	40
Chapter 7: What's the Next Step?.....	41
Following the Latest Trends	41
Keeping Your Webcasts Social.....	42
Chapter 8: Ten Great Use Cases for Virtual Events	43
Trade Shows	43
Sales Kick-off Meetings.....	43
Annual Conferences.....	43
Internal Training	44
Customer Training	44
Community Building.....	44
Partner Events.....	44
Virtual Marketplace	44
Employee Communication.....	44
Sales Support.....	44

Introduction

Today's business market demands that you save as much time and money as possible in order to keep your business afloat. Anything that adds value on top of that is great, but sometimes you just have to look at the bottom line.

Luckily enough, virtual events provide so much added value that you would consider them even if you didn't have to watch your budget. Virtual events give you the ability to bring together large groups of people over a long distance and give your attendees and sponsors a spectacular return on their investment. Toss in the fact that you can use the content from virtual events multiple times in multiple situations, and you've got an event that works best for everybody.

ON24 reports that costs for virtual events are 25 to 90 percent less than comparable physical events, and they return four to five times the amount of leads than those physical events as well. The bottom line, both financially and effectively, is that virtual events just work. And this book gives you the tools to make virtual events work for you.

About This Book

Use this book to introduce yourself to what defines a virtual event and makes them so useful. The chapters are organized to give you the information you need and then show you how to act upon it.

Virtual events are a relatively new form of connecting and exchanging information, so dive in and make sure you get as much information as you can. That free exchange of information defines the benefits of the virtual event, so why not get started now?

Conventions Used in This Book

The roadmap for this book is fairly simple, so just keep in mind these two pieces of advice:

- ✓ Every time I talk about an important term for the first time, I call it out using italics.
- ✓ Any URLs you see in this book will look like this: `http://www.on24.com`. Unfortunately, though, you can't click them. Type them out for yourself.

How to Use This Book

Open it and read it, I guess? Seriously, though, feel free to skip around and read the chapters in any order you want. Feel free to review the information as much as possible, too. It's a short book, but I'm still not going to require that you spend time reading material you already understand. Start from the beginning and read it all the way through, or start with the chapter that intrigues you and work from there. It's up to you, but I kind of like the whole book.

Foolish Assumptions

I'm going to assume you're familiar with the Internet and can navigate around a web browser easily. I'm guessing that you've also at least heard of the main social media channels and know their names, if not exactly how they work. Finally, I'm going to assume that you're interested in marketing and event organizing. Otherwise, why would you even be reading this book?

How This Book Is Organized

Like most books, this one is broken up into chapters. Here's a brief summary of how those chapters shake out.

Chapter 1: Defining the Virtual Event

This is where you find out what exactly goes into a virtual event. Get the basics under your belt and get ready to create your own virtual event.

Chapter 2: The Virtual Event

If the virtual event sounds good to you, this chapter details how you should go about making your own a reality.

Chapter 3: Making Sense Out of Virtual Events

This is the chapter to review if you have to convince yourself (or any manager above you) about the value of a virtual event. You learn about the cost savings and the knowledge gains that virtual events make possible.

Chapter 4: Starting Your Virtual Event

This chapter helps you schedule the lead-up time to your virtual event and make sure everything is in place before the big day.

Chapter 5: Understanding the Best Practices for a Virtual Event

There are many ways to put on a virtual event. This chapter makes sure that you choose the most successful ways.

Chapter 6: Putting Together Your Virtual Booth

This chapter goes beyond plywood and cheap decorations. You discover how to make your virtual booth look appealing and invite prospective visitors in to learn more.

Chapter 7: What's the Next Step?

Here, you get a look at the upcoming trends in virtual events and how to plan for the future. Once you see how successful your first event is, you'll want to throw more.

Chapter 8: Ten Great Use Cases for Virtual Events

You can use virtual events to accommodate a ton of events. I thought of ten, and this chapter fills you in.

Icons Used in This Book

You may notice some spiffy icons sprinkled liberally through this book. You don't necessarily have to pay attention to them, but here's what you'll find if you do:



This icon gives you a friendly reminder about information that's already covered. However, it bears repeating. Pay attention.



The knowledge in a tip might not be spectacular, but it certainly is helpful.



Don't fall into these traps! The warning icon identifies where you could stumble and keeps your clothes clean.

Where to Go from Here

Press on through the book and discover all that it contains. You can skip around, you can go from front to back, and you can keep it on your shelf for later review. It's up to you!

These materials are the copyright of Wiley Publishing, Inc. and any dissemination, distribution, or unauthorized use is strictly prohibited.

Chapter 1

Defining the Virtual Event

In This Chapter

- ▶ Defining a virtual show
- ▶ Examining the webcast
- ▶ Understanding what a virtual event is not

What goes into creating a virtual event? What makes such a thing stand out from any other activity on the Web? Two basic types of virtual events cover all the bases:

- ✓ The virtual show
- ✓ The webcast

However, those basic ingredients represent just the starting point for putting together your final product. Based on these types, you can add the content and information necessary to make a compelling virtual event.

This chapter tells you exactly what goes into a virtual event and compares it to some other options you may have heard of. You also find out what elements of a virtual event make it stand above and beyond the rest of the options. With the information in this chapter, you'll understand what goes into a virtual event and be ready to put together something that best serves you and whoever your audience may be.

Oh, and if that's not enough, you're also likely to get four to five times more sales leads than you would at standard physical conferences at a fraction of the cost. Sound good?

Making the Virtual Show Reality

A virtual show takes what would ordinarily occur in a large conference hall or auditorium and moves it online and onto whatever computers your audience decides to use. The virtual event carries the importance of a large event without the hassle of trying to put together a large physical production.

Even with all the travel options available today, making the long trek to a conference can be a hassle for any attendee. Luggage, transportation, the hotel — it's a huge inconvenience even for the most important meeting. And then there's the cost of all that inconvenience, both in money and in potential harm to the environment.

The virtual event eliminates all of these concerns. You don't have to bring everybody together in one large conference at a remote location. They can log in from whatever computer they want, whether they're in the office, at home, or at their favorite coffee shop while sipping a nonfat chai latte (or whatever suits their fancy). That means that somebody can attend a sales kick-off meeting and then actually get to the business of selling, instead of having to negotiate two missed connections and the wrong rental car in-between.



Saving on travel also means that you can reach more people than you can with physical events. Not everybody can afford the time off from work and the travel expenses associated with conferences and presentations. Why not take the knowledge and expertise delivered in that event and make it available via a virtual event? You've just taken your core audience and added so many more people to that pool.

Yes, that saves money for your attendees, but it also saves you money. Not only do you *not* have to spend time negotiating all the special rates and deals normally associated with a physical presentation, but you're also not on the hook for renting out a large hall in which to stage your presentation. You get to find the best place for your event, regardless of size or location, and send it out to your audience using the advanced tools available on the Internet. Do you want to add some special effects to your presentation? You can skip the boring slides (not all slides are boring — but you know the ones we mean) and light up the whole place with virtual

fireworks, if you want to. The tools are out there, they're easy to use, and you don't have to worry about burning down the building.

Creating Your Webcast

Whether you're using a simple PowerPoint presentation or implementing a fully functional video presentation tied into social networking components, the webcast makes delivering your message easier and more effective than ever.

Sending information from one to many

A webcast revolves around a central person or group, even if that group is spread out over several physical locations. You can stick to a predetermined agenda and use whatever technologies you want to present your message:

- ✓ Audio streaming with slides
- ✓ Video streaming
- ✓ Text-based chat
- ✓ Discussion forums

Not only are all of these tools available to you, but you can also make sure that people can take in your webcast even after the original event has passed. No longer do people have to hear how great a presentation was after the fact. You can share that presentation with anybody who has an interest and a web browser.



Speaking of web browsers, the webcast eliminates the need for proprietary software or hardware. You don't have to make sure that the people you're trying to reach have the same kind of tools you do and then hope for the best. Webcasts work across different browsers and platforms, meaning that just about anybody can take advantage of your webcast and take in your message without downloads.

Watching and learning

Because you've made it easy for your virtual attendees to take in your webcast, they're more likely to stay engaged with your message. And, since it's a message that you get to plan and control, your message and brand stay consistent. Even after the webcast is done, you can push out your ideas for as long as you want to leave the information on the Web.



The on-demand availability of content is a benefit of all virtual events, not just webcasts.

That kind of time-shifting means a lot to both current participants and those who come in later. Current participants can review the information and better understand your message. The attendees don't even have to take notes if they don't want to — all the material is available online. The people who can't make the initial event will also get the full experience of both your message and the questions and interaction that came later. What a bargain!



That doesn't mean that the flow of information only goes in one direction. You can choose to make your webcast a simple presentation, but your attendees are going to want to ask questions and learn more. Why not tie in something to allow the attendees to communicate with you and each other? Let your audience ask questions, learn more, and ultimately add to the value of your presentation. That kind of interaction not only helps the audience that attended the event in real time, but it also makes the webcast valuable for those who had to miss the first presentation.

Comparing and Contrasting

Sometimes it's easier to show what a virtual event is by explaining what it's not. Take a look at the comparisons in this section and discover the differences.

Physical events versus virtual events

Physical events and virtual events share some common traits, and they ultimately serve to accomplish the same goal: to present your message to a specific and targeted audience. Both physical and virtual events use speakers and presentations to skillfully deliver that message, backed by their years of experience and professional credentials. Attendees of both kinds of shows get to learn important information and maybe even get to talk or interact with these speakers. No matter whether an attendee picks up a badge or logs in to a Web site, you know who showed up at the party.

However, those common traits don't tell the whole story. The differences between physical and virtual events are where you find the savings (both in cost and time) and the enhanced engagement benefits of a virtual show. In addition, the quality of the content is often better with a virtual event, since expert speakers can address a virtual audience from anywhere. For example, the Women's Leadership Exchange virtual summit featured a keynote by noted author/pundit Arianna Huffington, whose presentation was made from her own office.

The webcast versus the web conference

The webcast goes far beyond the scope of a normal web conference. Instead of just opening the lines of communication for a group of people to have a conversation or meeting, the webcast gives you the ability to deliver a planned, focused message to a targeted audience. A webcast is a branded experience that captures audience data and then provides reporting analytics.

Web conferences certainly make sense for certain applications, especially ad hoc meetings. Web conferencing is a powerful collaboration tool for geographically distributed teams that need to work together. Two-way communication among all participants is featured, with meeting control shared among participants. As a result, a web conference is more interactive than a webcast.

Webcasting is an integrated communications tool to support large-scale events. A webcast is structured and well planned by nature and typically addresses a wide, highly scalable audience.

The virtual event as opposed to the virtual world

It's important to note here that the virtual event is not a virtual world like Second Life. Nothing against virtual worlds — they can be great places to spend time and interact with new and different people. They take on a grand scope and work to create an immersive environment far beyond normal Web offerings, and are designed to totally immerse you, the user, in a different world entirely. However, when it comes time to conduct business, you probably don't want a huge number of distractions taking away from your message.



Virtual worlds make a large, immersive environment available to a vast amount of people. Individuals may be able to exercise a little control over small sections of the virtual world and restrict who can experience those small sections, but ultimately you're playing somebody else's game.

When it comes to your own business, you want an effortless virtual event that effectively presents your message and brand, giving your audience the information they need. There's time to fly around different islands and swap your avatar's clothes in a virtual world later on. For now, you've got a business to run, and a virtual event gives you the ability to deliver exactly the message you want to communicate in an easy-to-use environment that plays by your rules and doesn't require downloads.

Chapter 2

The Virtual Event

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ Using virtual events to make public impact
 - ▶ Training employees remotely with virtual events
 - ▶ Learning the virtual way
 - ▶ Putting together internal virtual meetings
-

The virtual event is a perfect solution for a wide variety of enterprise applications.

In this chapter, you find out how to make a virtual event work for the needs of your gathering. Not only is a virtual event a cost-effective solution, but it's also an effective solution overall.

Trading Virtual Spaces

This section takes a look at how you can use virtual events to bring your message to external audiences.

Because virtual events are powerful demand generation tools, they are most commonly used in sales and marketing applications. For example, the virtual event is ideal for reaching prospects at the beginning of the sales cycle. Marketing Sherpa even calls virtual events the number one research tool for business professionals.

Trade shows

Trade shows serve to bring together the best companies from all over to learn the latest information and get the newest products in front of potential customers with one big splash. You can take advantage of prime networking opportunities, share your company's message, and (maybe most importantly) sell your product to the world.

The problem is that, unlike internal corporate events, you simply can't make everybody who needs to be there show up. You're working with several different companies (some of whom may be competitors), partners, and customers to get them all in the same area at the same time to share their products and information. It's a massive undertaking, and you have to confront the challenges of time, distance, and expense.

Virtual trade shows eliminate those challenges and add the advantage of letting you reach those who might not have been able to attend even if you were throwing a physical event. Not that you can't also use a physical event in conjunction with a virtual event — the hybrid trade show lets you make a splash with a physical event and extend its reach with a virtual trade show to reach those who couldn't attend.



The advantages of a virtual trade show sell the event on its own.

Time

No matter when you schedule the virtual trade show, you can leave the event up and accessible as long as necessary. Time is no longer an enemy — you can get to the trade show whenever you can.

Distance

If you hold a trade show in one location, you're limiting the number of people who can attend. The cost of travel is just too prohibitive for some organizations, and that means your trade show might not present the entire scope of what's available. Take, for example, the annual National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) show in California and the Musikmesse show in Germany. Both are huge events that

draw manufacturers from around the world. Yet, despite their size and influence, you see products and manufacturers at one show that you won't see at the other. Imagine a virtual event where all these participants can gather and display their wares. That kind of scope just isn't possible in a purely physical event.

Expense

The aforementioned NAMM show takes up an entire convention center, and all the participants must pay to ship their goods to that center (which, of course, is also costly to rent out for the weekend). That's a ton of money, and it's not an expense that all companies can handle. The virtual trade show lets them share their product information without risking the expense (and potential damage) of moving their products around the world.

Industry conferences

Industry conferences serve to bring together the best minds in a particular industry to share their knowledge and techniques with their colleagues. Just as with trade shows, though, those minds can be separated by available time, distance, and expense. An industry conference without those participants just won't be as fulfilling as one where all the necessary people are present.

By making conferences inexpensive and available to all, you actually expand the knowledge beyond what would be possible with a physical event. In addition, you can take advantage of modern technology to provide recordings, archived documents, and even translation of materials to make sure that you get the fullest benefit from your virtual industry conference.

Make a splash with public announcements

When you make a public announcement, you want it to have the largest impact possible. Do you want that impact to be felt by only a conference center full of people, or do you want to make it an event for the world?

With a virtual public event, you expand that auditorium to a much larger potential audience. Plus, you can schedule this event on a much shorter time schedule than you have to for physical events, meaning you retain an element of surprise and anticipation that physical events can't muster. Why not make the biggest splash possible and save some money at the same time?

Training without Needing the Train

Keeping your company running smoothly means making sure that your employees have the knowledge and skills necessary to perform their jobs effectively. It also means that your customers and users receive the training and know-how they need to adopt the latest techniques — and your products. With virtual events, you can share all the information you need to share with everybody whenever they need it.

With a virtual learning solution, you knock down the following three barriers:

- ✓ Time
- ✓ Distance
- ✓ Trainer availability

Once those barriers are gone, your virtual training doesn't simply become *as* effective as strictly in-person training — virtual training actually achieves several advantages *over* in-person training at a fraction of the cost.

Virtual Learning Solutions

You can set up your virtual training as either a *persistent* learning center, where prerecorded audio or video training materials merge with documents and other assets to be consumed on the student's schedule, or as an event that combines live presentations with your educational materials. Use whichever one fits your needs the best. How will you know? Just keep reading, gentle reader!



A live virtual event is recorded, so your live event can make an easy transition to a persistent training session, and you don't lose the knowledge or presentation.

Making the knowledge available

With virtual learning, you have many options to convey the necessary training to your employees or clients. The ability to transcend the problems of distance or time means that you can accomplish some important goals.

Remote expertise

No matter where the experts are, you're just an Internet connection away from them. Attending a virtual event ensures that you're learning from the true experts, not just the available experts from down the street.

Get all your employees in on the game

Just as you can get to the best experts, you can get to all your employees. High-speed networks and quality laptops are necessary tools for any employee working remotely, so you know that they already have what they need to get to the virtual learning event. Let them attend the event in real time or come to the persistent learning center on *their* schedule. Either way, you'll be sure that your employees have access to the knowledge they need (and you can even tell when they've been to those training sessions; see Chapter 3).

Learning and then learning some more

Whether you utilize an "always-on" persistent learning environment from the start or use a live event for training both in real time and for later review, the materials you create for your virtual training events remain effective for as long as the information contained within them is current. Depending on the speed at which your business moves, you could reuse these materials for months or years after their initial creation.



The video or audio you recorded of your expert can still educate or inspire your employees and/or your customers after the actual event has ended. You simply place easy-to-access files in your virtual classroom to make sure that they can learn from the teacher whenever possible.

Rallying the Troops with Internal Meetings

Depending on the size of your company and the distance over which your employees are spread, the number of meetings you conduct varies according to your needs. However, most companies have at least a yearly meeting to inform their employees about the state of the company and to let them know what's coming up in the next year. Add in sales meetings, important product launches, and regular team updates, and you've got a ton of gatherings to host.

How are you going to make all these meetings happen? By bringing them together with a string of virtual events that inform them at a fraction of the cost you might otherwise pay. Sound good?

Sales kick-off meetings

Companies host sales kick-off meetings for a variety of reasons. Annual or biannual meetings serve to keep your sales team motivated and give them the information they need to make their quotas. You also need additional kick-off meetings every time you launch a new product or undertake a new promotion. Salespeople make sure that your product ends up in the hands of your customers, so it's important to make sure that they have all the necessary information and desire to keep the sales coming in.

Because your salespeople need to keep selling to make sure your company stays afloat (and their commissions are at respectable levels), it's hard to pull them out of the field and get them in one location at a time. Not only do their busy

schedules make finding a common time to travel and conduct the meeting difficult (you might prefer to try herding cats), but that lost time also is time your salespeople could be out there selling your product. A virtual sales kick-off meeting saves that time and keeps your salespeople in their territory. You don't have to pay for travel or lodging, and your salespeople can head back out on calls immediately after the meeting is done.

One example of a successful virtual sales meeting is the Cisco GSX. Management reported seeing the same results as with a traditional sales meeting but at a tenth of the cost.



Just because it's a virtual event doesn't mean that you have to forego the advantages of more traditional gatherings, like recognition of your top sellers and the sharing and interaction that normally take place among your sales staff. Modern communication tools (like chat applications and social networking) let you keep the channels between your salespeople open (both during and after the sales meeting), and that kind of interactivity keeps the knowledge and experience flowing through all your sales offices.

Finally, the same advantages of a virtual classroom apply to your sales kick-off meetings. Want to make sure your sales force never lacks for current information or new strategies? Store the content of the sales kick-off meeting in a virtual training center to make sure that information is always ready to go. It could mean that a salesperson stays current on the latest tactics and strategies to make your product more appealing than the competition, or doing so could just make sure that all prices are accurately quoted. Either way, your information remains current and your salespeople get the tools they need to be successful.

You can make the kick-off event as elaborate and breathtaking as you want — you're already saving tons of money on travel, lodging, and other associated expenses. However, the most important benefit is that you're making sure that your salespeople are fully trained and informed, and that they can stay fully trained and informed no matter where they're located or how long after the meeting they go back to the material.

Internal corporate announcements

Your salespeople aren't the only employees that benefit from the enhanced education and training a virtual event can provide. Whenever you need to make a big announcement, the virtual event provides the same cost savings and information-sharing benefits that it does for the examples already discussed. You don't have to fly to your London and Singapore offices (or your regional offices, depending on your scale), and the information remains available long after the event is completed. The news may not always be good (although I certainly hope that it is), but the virtual event makes sure that you can share your information across long distances in the most effective manner possible while keeping costs down.

Chapter 3

Making Sense Out of Virtual Events

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ Realizing the return-on-investment for virtual events
 - ▶ Producing leads from virtual events
 - ▶ Tracking the results of a virtual event
 - ▶ Reaping the benefits
-

In Chapters 1 and 2, I bring to light some of the most important features of virtual events, but the value of virtual events goes beyond those concepts. The actual value of virtual events can be tracked using straight-forward numbers and statistics.

In this chapter, you get the hard facts about why virtual events both increase knowledge and reduce costs.

Returning on Your Investment

Logically, it makes sense that virtual events cost less than physical events because you spend less on physical facilities, travel expenses, and the other costs that go into bringing people together (refer to Chapters 1 and 2). But take a look at the actual numbers to see just how much you can save via virtual events (with similar or better results!).

Reducing your costs

Depending on the size and type of event you have planned, your overall savings can vary widely. However, research from ON24, a virtual event company, points to a 20 percent to almost 95 percent savings for virtual events over their physical counterparts. No matter how you look at the calculations, that's quite a bit of savings.

Realize, too, that the money goes beyond simple car rental and travel expenses. When the people planning the event don't have to travel and spend that time away from the office (and their homes), they can remain far more productive. You end up saving the travel expenses (which can represent half the total expenses for a physical meeting), and your staff retains their normal productivity. Quite the deal, isn't it?

Getting the point across, again and again

When you create a virtual event, that virtual event becomes a permanent part of your sales, marketing, and learning toolbox. You always have access to the presentations and materials from that virtual event, meaning that you don't have to reproduce the materials for different events. You can also repurpose those materials for different uses outside of the virtual event.

Combine those uses with the ability to use one event to reach your audience (instead of staging multiple regional events, for example), and the cost savings for a virtual event become even more compelling. You get similar or better effectiveness for multiple events based off a single event that you've already paid for.

Generating Leads

Obviously, there's more to a successful event than just saving money and delivering an exciting message to your audience. If you're trying to sell a service or product, you want to know how much more additional business this event can deliver. Of course, you're going to do what it takes to keep your existing

customer base. But business goes beyond maintenance, and a successful virtual event generates excitement and additional potential customers.

Knowing who's out there

ON24 research reports that virtual events generate four to five times the number of leads than a corresponding physical event. How? The answer is simple — because *it is simple*. All the lead has to do is give you an e-mail address or contact number, and you can take it from there. You already know the context for the lead, and you know exactly when and how that lead came into contact with your business. All of the guessing has been taken out of the equation, and you're left with (metaphorically, of course) a ton more leads than what you ordinarily might have gathered. Plus, you don't have to worry about losing their business cards.

That same research points to an average of 340 leads generated per sponsor. That's a tremendous response for any kind of event, and you're getting that kind of response at the bargain cost of a virtual event.

Finally, if you average the cost of a virtual event against the number of leads you eventually gather in, you'll end up with an average cost-per-lead of \$20 to \$30. Stack that against the cost you'd incur gathering a similar number of leads from a physical event — and, even if you could gather that many leads from a physical event, the cost-per-lead would be far more significant.



Virtual events hold their own in the overall number of generated leads, and you end up paying less for them. Good deal, eh?

Getting their information

It sounds a little juvenile, but you may not always get the most accurate information from leads at a physical conference (some joker always has to write a funny name on a mailing list, doesn't he?). The information may be accurate or incomplete, whether accidental or otherwise; it may be illegible; or you could simply lose the business card, as mentioned earlier. There's plenty that can go wrong.

With a virtual event, though, you always have a complete and accurate list of who attended, and you can quickly and easily get an exact account of who expressed interest in your product or service. These people had to register and sign in with valid contact information, and that information is stored for review either right after the event or much later. It may sound like a small step, but an accurate and sanitized database of leads means that you don't have to worry about false or incomplete information later on down the road.



The information you have is ready for immediate action, and you can be confident that each lead expressed interest in your particular product or service. It's a step above the normal return call or sales pitch — you already know exactly what the lead is interested in and can move directly to promoting what you have to offer.

Analyzing the Details

Physical events can be such a whirlwind. You've got a staff to manage, and audiences to deal with, and you're constantly interacting with the venue staff to make sure everything is available and ready. Who has time to check on how many people are in each meeting, how many people dropped by your booth, or even how many confirmed attendees actually managed to show up?



Virtual events take the guessing out of these numbers. Because of the technology that goes into putting on a virtual event, you can know exactly how many people attended your show. You can also break down those numbers into specific sessions and expressions of interest in different subjects. The ones and zeros that form the building blocks of a successful virtual event eventually add up to more profitable numbers for you and your sponsors.

Obtaining accurate measurements

Virtual events capture participant data and analyze it. Because you can accurately track who logged in for your virtual event (and any number of activities within that virtual event), you know exactly who showed up and when they were there.

Furthermore, you can tell what materials they viewed, what files they downloaded and took with them, and how they interacted with other people at the virtual event. This kind of information is invaluable for sales teams, and you get an accurate count every time. It's a lot better than bribing a coworker (or even a family member) to stand by a room or booth and count how many people go in. And even if you did, the virtual event tells you the names and gives you the information of those who did attend. That's the difference between looking up a name and hoping for the best versus getting the full amount of information on a qualified lead.

Consider the results delivered to Nielsen Business Media's Photo District News in their virtual event for photographers:

- ✔ More than 15,000 attendees per event (they threw two separate events)
- ✔ An average of five booth stops per attendee
- ✔ 1,200 1-to-1 chats
- ✔ Close to 7,000 webcasts launched
- ✔ Close to 5,500 location chats launched
- ✔ 22,000 documents opened and reviewed

Those kinds of numbers represent a huge amount of direct interactions and trackable information regarding potential customers.



The virtual event means being able to keep track of everything that happens.

Scoring your engagements with measureable marketing

The technology behind virtual events can score leads for you and provide lead qualification rankings based on any criteria developed by you or the sponsors of your virtual event. What does that mean for you? It means you've saved a huge amount of time and effort to get valuable marketing data.

Plus, that marketing data comes to you backed by accurate and measurable numbers that you can use to better target

your marketing efforts. You can see exactly what happens where and when, and you can better act on that information to target the right customer with your marketing efforts. That's a timesaver for you as well.

Appreciating the Fringe Benefits

It might not be a cost that you factor in to your bottom line, but the savings of resources made possible by virtual events further enhance the value of putting together such a production. Whether you're focused on running a green or carbon-neutral business or just want to save those resources for other tasks, the fact remains that you're using less fuel and consumable materials than a comparable physical event. No matter how you slice it, that's a benefit for you and your event's participants. Think of it as a little something extra for creating a compelling event in a way that saves time, effort, and money already.

Chapter 4

Starting Your Virtual Event

In This Chapter

- ▶ Putting together the overall plan for your virtual event
- ▶ Establishing a timeline
- ▶ Creating the content for your virtual event
- ▶ Getting the necessary sponsors
- ▶ Promoting your virtual event to both the attendees and potential sponsors

Now that you've decided to put together a virtual version of your next big event, it's time to actually plan it out. Events like CA World require attention to detail on both the physical and virtual sides, and that takes time and resources. The savings in time and cost work best when paired with compelling content targeted directly at the audience you want to reach. With the right plan, you'll be able to get exactly the results you want, which is what this chapter is all about.

Planning Your Plan

Your plan consists of everything you want to happen in your virtual event. This goes far beyond choosing the right keynote speaker and inviting a few industry names to show up and present their wares. You need to take into account all factors that go into creating a virtual event:

- ✔ Who is going to put together the technology necessary to present your virtual event?
- ✔ What is your theme or overall message?
- ✔ How are you going to pay for it?

- ✔ Who is going to create the content for your event?
- ✔ Who is going to sponsor the conference?
- ✔ How are you going to let people know about the conference?

And, possibly the most important question you have to answer is this one:

Who are you trying to reach, and what's the best way to reach them?

Find the answers to these questions, and you'll have the road-map to putting together an exciting and effective virtual event.

Going virtual the right way

Virtual events aren't something you can just put together over a weekend. It takes a great deal of time and effort to put together the tools and technology necessary to stage a professional virtual event. Without the right support, you run the risk of losing your credibility and failing to inspire your attendees with an amateurish product.

Research virtual event service providers and communicate clearly with them about what you want to accomplish and what features you want to include in your virtual event. Remember that you need to work closely with these providers to ensure that the right amounts of resources (like project management, design professionals, and other services) are made available to your virtual event. You want everything to run smoothly, and you need the right partner with the right tools to make that happen.



You may also want to hire a consulting firm to examine the way you want to present your virtual event and make recommendations on the look and feel of the presentation. Again, this all depends on the size and scale of your event, but you definitely want your bigger events to look good and to transmit information effectively.

Take a look at other similar events (if any) and see what has worked in the past (and maybe what hasn't worked) and make that information work for you. You can learn a lot from the past.

How virtual do you want to get?

The amount of resources that you want to put into your virtual event makes a huge difference in the amount of time, effort, and cost you have to invest. If your event targets just a few team members or specific customers, you may not need to toss in all of the bells and whistles. If, on the other hand, you're launching the product that will forever revolutionize your industry and make you the thought (and profit) leader to follow for decades to come, why not splurge a little and make the whole production as grand as it can be?

The difference here, of course, is in knowing your audience and understanding what the best way to reach them entails. Virtual events give you the ability to specifically target individuals and groups with your efforts, and you should take advantage of those capabilities to make sure your message reaches exactly who it should.

Another type of event to consider is the “hybrid” event. A *hybrid event* is a physical event with virtual components, or physical and virtual events that occur at the same time. A hybrid event gives you the advantages of both types of events in a single package. You realize a better ROI by making material available electronically for additional learning and by attracting a larger audience from people who couldn't make the physical event.



No matter what path you take, keep in mind that the needs of your attendees dictate the right direction. Let them lead the way, and you'll have a successful event.

Putting Together Your Timeline

The timeline for a virtual event includes two separate phases:

1. The lead-up to the event
2. The events within the actual event



You need to build plenty of time into your schedule to allow for proper planning, creation of content, and the promotion you need to attract people to your events.

The lead-up

ON24 recommends a 12-week planning cycle to fully account for all the content creation tasks and promotion necessary. That gives you enough time to make sure that everybody involved has enough time to accomplish their tasks and put together a professional event.

That lead-up needs to include a content creation cycle and a content review cycle. That way, you have plenty of time to build the right content and let everybody see what's going into the event. The team can offer comments, insights, and advice, and you can be sure that everybody is on the same page when it comes to the virtual event. Within those 12 weeks, you should be able to account for all of the necessary processes.



Leave a little time in case of emergency or other contingencies. Your schedule should always take Murphy's Law into account.

The actual event

When it comes to the actual virtual event, bear in mind a few factors when plotting out the timeline.

Lead off with a big bang

The way you start your conference determines how the rest of the conference is perceived. Attendance for the first day of the event is usually when the most people attend, so it's your chance to make the biggest splash. Why do you think Apple always starts its events with a Steve Jobs keynote? It draws their audience in to the rest of the event. Put your most compelling content upfront for the maximum impact.

Open with the keynote

Don't let people wait around in a virtual event for too long before delivering your big news. You want to grab your audience immediately and draw them in to your virtual event. Your lead keynote should happen in conjunction with the opening of your event. Don't mess with a "soft" opening — get as much impact as possible.

Start the event in the middle of the week

People are at work on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. You don't have to worry about people taking long weekends if you schedule your event to begin on common workdays.

Take time zones into account

Your huge audience probably won't all be in the same time zone, so plan your opening at a time that's convenient for all involved. A 7:00 a.m. start time on Eastern Standard Time doesn't help those on the West Coast at all. You can also stagger times to repeat sessions for multiple time zones, if necessary.

Don't overschedule

If you have a lot of activities planned in your virtual event, be sure not to schedule those with overlapping interests at the same times. You'll minimize the participation and attendance if you schedule events that target the same audience at the same time. Let everybody get what they want out of your event.

Creating Your Virtual Event's Content

The content you include in your virtual event determines whether your audience wants to attend or not. If you create exciting content that motivates learning and drives your audience, you won't lack for registrations. These steps will help you identify what your audience wants and how you're going to get it to them.

What are they interested in?

If you make the content interesting and cover popular topics, you'll motivate people to register for your events. You need to know what piques the curiosity of your audience and how you can provide that information.

What do they do?

Find out what your audience likes to do (both on- and off-line) and how they spend their time. Tailor the event to present your content in a format familiar and comfortable to your audience. Engaging your audience goes a long way toward staging a great virtual event.

What motivates them?

Reward your audience for attending your virtual event with small tokens or awards for their participation. Take a service like Foursquare as your model — the location-based social network awards virtual badges when their users take certain actions or “check in” at certain locations. Whether you use virtual awards or more tangible objects, give your audience a little incentive to show up and (just as importantly) participate fully in your virtual event.

Recruiting Sponsors for Your Virtual Event

If you deliver the audience and the right content, the right sponsors (in theory) should line up to add their sponsorship dollars to your event. In reality, you still have to go out and sell your event to potential sponsors, but the promise of the right audience and content goes a long way toward making the sale happen.

Know who appeals to your audience and present them with materials that detail what’s going to happen with your virtual event. Include screenshots that demonstrate how the event will look, and offer hard numbers that show what your sponsors will get in return for their investment. Remember, they’re looking for the same kind of ROI that you are when it comes to virtual events.

Remind sponsors that they probably won’t have to send out a sales team, construct a costly booth that they might only use once, and worry about getting their materials to a remote location and back. The same advantages that make a virtual event work for you will make it work for them as well.



Be sure, of course, to remind your sponsors that virtual events offer specific data about attendees and reach a larger potential audience than physical-only events. Ask your virtual event partner to provide examples of sponsorship packages.

Promoting the Event

Once the event is planned and the sponsors are in place, it's time to let everybody know how they can participate in your event. The 12-week schedule gives you plenty of time to get all aspects of your promotion tools in place to properly publicize your event. Take a look at what you need to do to bring your event to the public.

Promote early and often

Start your promotions eight weeks before your event. The beauty of a virtual event is the ability to track your promotional activities — you know immediately what is or is not working (unlike a campaign for a physical event). This is called *campaign tracking*.

Tell your friends

Experts agree that about 70 percent of all virtual event registrations are the result of promoting to in-house lists. Plan e-mail blasts to your existing customer and prospect database. Encourage sponsors to promote to their customer and prospect lists, too.



There's a difference between promoting and being desperate. Don't push constant invitations to your prospective attendees; more than likely, they won't want to come based on your pushiness alone.

Get media involved

Use public relations as a primary tool for your promotion efforts. There are so many media outlets available now through which you can publicize your event. Develop a pre-event news release to help drive registrations.

Don't forget about online media, including your own Web site. Feature your event on your home page and in your blog. Use social media to help spread the word.

Compelling content is compelling content

Whether the content comes from your event or your marketing department, the same rule applies — if it moves people, it works. Target the right audience and emphasize the benefits of your virtual event.

Let the professionals be professionals

Marketing and communications professionals have spent a lot of time training and executing promotional plans. Rely on their expertise to make your virtual event stand out as much as possible. Give them the materials they need, but let their talent and knowledge lead the way. You'll get better results when everybody does their job correctly.

Chapter 5

Understanding the Best Practices for a Virtual Event

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ Recruiting potential sponsors for your virtual event
 - ▶ Delivering compelling content to your audience
 - ▶ Including as much data as you can
-

In the previous chapters of this book, I talk about the different kinds of virtual events available to you and how to implement them. So which one is best for you? Whichever one directly addresses and engages your audience. If the event provides great content to your audience, they'll leave satisfied. The sponsors of the event will know that they reached their prospective customers with a good event, and they'll also leave satisfied. And, of course, you'll leave your successful event satisfied as well.

In this chapter, I cover the best ways to make a successful virtual event happen.

Bringing In Participants

Before you can have a successful virtual event, you have to attract both sponsors and attendees. These steps help you sell your event to both groups and provide the best possible event for both.

Selling to your sponsors

Because your event is virtual, you don't have to rely on photos of the actual location or vague proposals about the event and its associated activities. Show them a screenshot of the event and tell your sponsors that what they see is what they'll get. You can show them exactly what the attendees will see, what the exhibitors can display, and how both can interact with your virtual environment.

Be clear about the repeat benefits for attendees and exhibitors. Emphasize how repeat viewings mean that more potential prospects can interact with the virtual event's material and provide businesses with more leads.

If you're selling to small or medium businesses (SMBs), tell them how virtual events appeal to their demographic. Small and medium businesses don't usually have the personnel to spare for a physical event, but the virtual event gives them the chance to reach leads and prospects they might not otherwise be able to reach. Virtual events represent a great tool for bringing in more customers, no matter where the sales staff is actually located.

You might also mention that those leads come at a lower cost than physical events, which also appeals to the budget-conscious small or medium business (and that's pretty much all small-to-medium businesses at this point).



Your virtual event platform vendor can provide examples of effective sponsor recruitment activities.

Delivering to your attendees

Bringing in your sponsors is just one part of the puzzle. You must also draw in and interact with your prospective audience. Make sure that your attendees know what's coming up and why they need to participate in your virtual event.

- ✓ Tell the audience about the experts you're bringing in.
- ✓ Be clear and concise about the material you'll deliver.
- ✓ Emphasize the savings they'll realize by not paying for travel, lodging, or meals.

Spread this information in the information channels your audience consumes, and get your message out. This will help ensure a good number of attendees.



Encourage your attendees to spread the word about the virtual event they're attending. Make it easy for them to publicize on social networks like Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn. Remember that even if they don't buy in initially, the virtual event will always be there for resale.

Engaging the Audience

Once you have the audience for your virtual event, what are you going to do to make it worth their while? You make the content of your virtual event meet or exceed the time and money they invest in attending.

Knowing your audience means going beyond what they're interested in. You should also know how they prefer to learn and who they prefer to learn from. Recruit exciting and knowledgeable presenters to take part in your virtual event.

Whether you or your speakers develop the content, make sure that the content is

- ✓ **Interesting:** Does the content hold the attention of your audience?
- ✓ **Compelling:** Does the content motivate your audience to action?
- ✓ **Educational:** Does the content go beyond being merely informative and instead contribute to a greater understanding of the topic at hand?

Make sure your content stands up to repeated viewings. You want to make sure that the value holds up past the initial event. According to ON24, about half of all registrants view a virtual event upon its initial offering, while a quarter of those registrants view it on demand.

Finally, let the audience engage with the experts and with each other. This is a social world, and the access you get through virtual events should be made available to everybody.

Targeting Appropriate Content

Learn all you can about your audience, whether you use market research, a survey, or psychic research (we cannot verify the authenticity of research conducted by psychics, however). Use that knowledge to tailor the presentations and event to that audience. Video gamers will love hearing from the creators of Grand Theft Auto — police officers, maybe not so much.

Using All the Data You Can

You can get a great deal of demographic knowledge from your registrants and how they interact with your virtual event. Use that information to foreground events that most interest them and make sure that you can get as many people into that event as possible. Get as much feedback as you can, and use that information to tailor future events and nurture the leads that come out of the events.



Be sure that your exhibitors get the same information, too. They'll appreciate the tip.

Going Global

A virtual event is the ideal tool for reaching an audience that resides in multiple countries. The Elsevier Vaccine Virtual Congress shows just how a hybrid event can effectively bring together participants around the world.

The event brings together the global medical community to discuss viruses and the prevention of pandemics. Not only can all the biggest names weigh in on issues using real-time presentations and questions, but attendees can also communicate with their fellow experts and have access to that information months after the event. The content is even translated automatically to an attendee's native language.

Chapter 6

Putting Together Your Virtual Booth

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ Creating the look of your virtual booth, with an emphasis on content
 - ▶ Putting the best people possible into your booth
-

Just like trade shows are filled with booths demonstrating products or services, so is the virtual booth. The virtual booth, however, is available to a potential audience that in terms of magnitude is larger than that of a typical trade show audience. That's great for reaching people, but it also means that you have to include motivational, compelling content in your booth and staff it with the best minds available.

In this chapter, you find out how to put together a world-class virtual booth — because the world is precisely to whom you'll be presenting.

Making It All Look Good

Several different elements go into making a visual impact on your audience. You not only have to make sure that you make an impact, but also that the look draws your audience in and invites them to learn more about you. Take a look at the following elements and work them into your virtual booth.

The booth itself

Your imagination is the limit when it comes to the booth itself. You don't have to worry about the cost of materials or shipping those materials to remote locations — a pixel is a pixel is a pixel.

Your virtual booth is like a mini Web site, but it's not something you can just set up — you need to staff it with knowledgeable experts who focus on the key messages you want to deliver. Your booth is most effective when you push out the information you want to communicate in clear, simple ideas. Brand your booth and provide effective, compelling content.

Know what you want to do

The flashiest booth in the world won't help you if it doesn't help you accomplish your goals. The construction and presentation of your booth should help you accomplish a specific task, whether it's just drawing in a certain number of customers or getting a certain number of impressions about your newest product. Tell your designer or virtual event solution provider what you want to accomplish and make sure that information is incorporated in the design.

Keep the message simple

If you see a bunch of small text on a virtual booth when you first arrive, your eyes may well glaze over and you'll miss the point of what the booth is trying to accomplish. Your audience will likely feel the same. Make sure that the first impression your audience gets at your virtual booth is clear, concise, and motivational. You want to make them take notice and spend more time at your booth, and you're not going to accomplish that task with a complicated, muddy presentation.



Make clear and concise announcements on the face of your booth, and don't overwhelm your audience with information. Give them just enough to entice them into your virtual booth and once there, to ask for more information.

Give the audience what they want

Booths at physical trade shows often put candy and small gifts on their counters in order to tempt people to stop by and discuss a product or service. It's kind of hard to upload a water bottle, but you can still offer a small reward for stopping by. Have a drawing for a free iPad or Kindle, for example. A little incentive goes a long way.



You need to be clear who gets the prize and where the prize is applicable. Be specific about limits on prizes.

Knowledge above all

Prizes aside, interested parties stop by your virtual booth to learn more. Give them the content and information they need, and let what you're presenting stand on its own. You don't have to put a lot of flash, glitz, and glamour into content that is truly relevant. If you create the content to speak directly to your audience with clear and factual information, your sales job becomes tremendously easier. Put the right information in your booth, and you're bound to be successful.

Make sure people can find it

At physical trade shows, you can see the best locations to place booths. They're right in the middle of the biggest traffic patterns, and they draw people in with simple, motivational messages. These booths never lack for attendees. The booth off to the side or in the back of the hall, however, sees a much slower rate of traffic. Don't be that booth, even in the virtual world.



Virtual trade shows don't have set traffic patterns or better physical locations to help guide people into your booth. You need to build the footpaths yourself and guide attendees to where you want them to go. Know the tools and understand how to use them.

Staffing Your Booth

Your virtual booth demands some level of interaction to draw people in to what you have to offer. A simple one-way presentation just won't work. You need people who can answer questions and direct attendees to where they need to be.

Choose your staff based on their knowledge of the product and their ability to interact well with your potential customers. You might also want to include independent experts in your virtual booth to enhance your credibility and promote a more balanced viewpoint. Finally, offer the chance to meet people that appeal to your audience and make them want to visit your booth. You may not be able to offer an autograph session, but a quick chat with an industry expert or celebrity may help your booth go a long way.

Chapter 7

What's the Next Step?

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ Analyzing trends in virtual events
 - ▶ Integrating social media into virtual events
-

Everything changes, and the speed of that change increases exponentially when you're dealing with technology. Something new is always coming when you're talking about virtual events and digital communication — that means you have to stay on top of those changes and plan your virtual events accordingly.

This chapter gives you a better idea of what's coming up and how you can make those changes part of your plan.

Following the Latest Trends

Virtual events offer some history for you to review and use to forecast what's coming up. Here's a look at the latest trends.

Access on the go

Ours is clearly a mobile workforce. Soon attendees will be able to participate in virtual events from their mobile devices.

Save on costs

No matter whether the economy is up or down, saving money is saving money. Improvements in technology mean better and more inexpensive capabilities to add to virtual events.

Keep the engagement ongoing

Why end a conversation when a trade show ends? A virtual event lets you continue your connection to a lead and create a channel for communication. The same applies whether you're interacting with a client or members of a team that's spread over different physical locations.

Stay newer and better

The Internet doesn't revolve around cheap webcams and mics anymore. As technology improves, you'll be able to make better and more engaging virtual events. The (virtual) sky is the limit. Watch for video communication and interactivity and augmented reality.

Go global

Your audience will only grow as the world opens up to virtual events. Keep an international audience in mind as you plan your event.

Keeping Your Webcasts Social

Your virtual events can move beyond a booth or an announcement. Create a social experience around your virtual events to keep attendees involved. The more those attendees stick around, the more chances you'll have to communicate with them (and their friends).



Companies have integrated social media into their communication and marketing efforts, and virtual events must integrate those tools as well. Companies like Cisco and Ziff Davis Enterprise make use of social webcasting to integrate their webcasts with social media, and it's paying huge dividends.

Chapter 8

Ten Great Use Cases for Virtual Events

In This Chapter

- ▶ Taking a brief look at some practical use cases
-

In this chapter, I give you some use cases to keep in mind as you consider a virtual event. They're great examples of what virtual events can accomplish and how you can best utilize your resources in a virtual event.

Trade Shows

Show off what your industry has to offer with a virtual trade show. Virtual booths promote individual products and services, and scheduled events showcase great industry knowledge and best practices.

Sales Kick-off Meetings

Get your sales staff, both at the home office and remote locations, excited and motivated about your latest offering. Communicate all of the information they need and save a little money in the process.

Annual Conferences

These sessions help your users or customers better know your product. Not only that, but the virtual event lets them go back and review the information over and over again, leading to a more advanced user base.

These materials are the copyright of Wiley Publishing, Inc. and any dissemination, distribution, or unauthorized use is strictly prohibited.

Internal Training

Keep your staff up-to-date on policies and procedures. No matter where they are, you'll be able to reach them.

Customer Training

It's a tall order to gather all your customers together. Make the information available to your customers early and often. They'll appreciate it.

Community Building

The Internet helps connect people in different locations with common interests. Facilitate that connection with your own virtual event and let your attendees build the community from there (with your help, of course).

Partner Events

Invite your partners to share knowledge and best practices while providing a forum that facilitates team communication.

Virtual Marketplace

Put your wares out and let a marketplace the size of the entire connected world see what you have to offer. In a virtual event exhibit hall, exhibitors can sell what they show.

Employee Communication

Make sure everybody in your company gets a clear, consistent message by bringing them together at the same time using a virtual event. It's a great way to boost morale, too.

Sales Support

Offer your sales staff the information and support they need throughout the sales cycle. Use virtual events to make sure everybody has what they need to close the deal.

Use virtual events to engage your audience today!

What if you could cut out costly physical meetings and events, engage your company or event in even more meaningful ways, and bring in sales leads or prospects at four to five times your current rate? The virtual event is your key to realizing all these benefits at a fraction of the cost of physical events. And nobody has to fly standby or stay in a terrible hotel room to attend.

- **What virtual events are** — and how you can better reach your audience with them
- **How virtual events differ from physical events** — and how you can use those differences to enhance your ROI
- **How to choose a reputable virtual event vendor** — and get the resources you need to make a spectacular virtual event a reality
- **How to engage your audience with virtual events** — by creating content and including speakers that promote interaction and involvement
- **Discover the power of virtual events** — and use that power to enhance your business and your customer relationships

Ryan C. Williams is an author and coauthor of several books, including *Expert Podcast Practices For Dummies*, *Google Business Solutions All-in-One For Dummies*, and *MySpace For Dummies*. He resides in Indianapolis, Indiana.



Open the book and find:

- Examples of real-world uses of virtual events
- How virtual events stand apart from other solutions
- How to choose the best virtual event solution
- Ways to revolutionize your entire business with virtual events

Go to **Dummies.com**®
for videos, step-by-step photos,
how-to articles, or to shop!

For Dummies®
A Branded Imprint of



ISBN: 978-0-470-90067-3
Book not for resale