vFAIRS

The State of Hybrid Events

2021 Report

Table
of Contents

1

Introduction

Early 2021 saw a sudden rise to fame for a new event format. The COVID-19 vaccine rollout early in the year brought new possibilities for event organizers. People had already gotten used to virtual events and these were great for increasing reach while lowering costs. But could event organizers keep them while also bringing back in-person events?

That's how hybrid events took center stage. Hybrid events gained a lot of popularity in 2021, offering convenience to attendees and boosting ROI for event hosts. But how successful were they really?

To understand this better, vFairs conducted the State of the Hybrid Events survey in Q2 of 2021. We asked event organizers from around the world how they felt about hybrid events. Through this, we were able to take a pulse on:

- How well they understood hybrid events
- How has their experience with hybrid event platforms been
- Whether hybrid events are truly top of mind for professionals across roles and industries
- Their perceived benefits and challenges
- Features professionals believe are most critical to hybrid event success
- What event professionals are expecting from the future of events

In this ebook, we'll be diving into these stats and understanding what they mean for hybrid events.

Who Were the **Respondents?**

The survey was conducted with event professionals from various industries and walks of life around the world to learn about the popularity of hybrid events and the concerns that come with this new format of events.

Most of these individuals described themselves as:

48.1%

Event professionals

21.2%

Marketing specialists

5.8%

Human resources

The survey respondents also belonged to different career levels and roles, with the top three being:

Managers	33.3%
Directors	25.9%
Coordinators/Specialist	18.5%
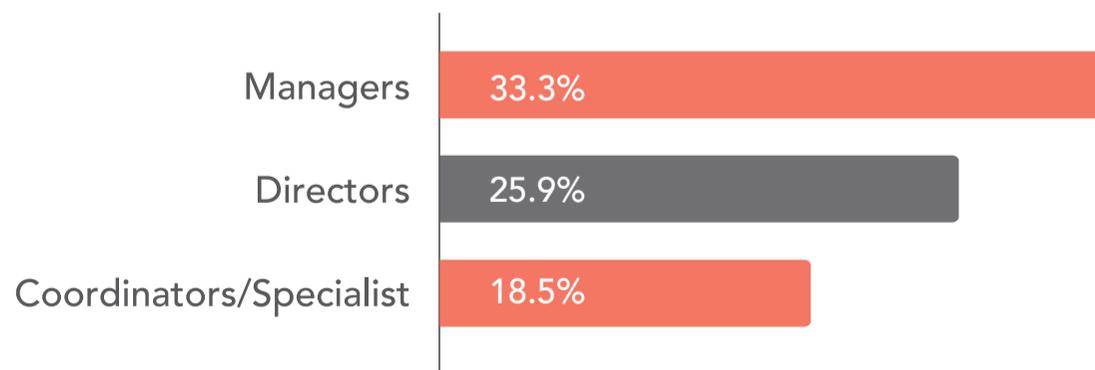
The top three industries that participated were:

- Education & art
- Event services
- Non-profit

13.2%

18.9%

3.8%

7.5%

17%

7.5%

17%

15.1

Education & art	▬	
Event services	▬	
Non-profit	▬	
Technology	▬	
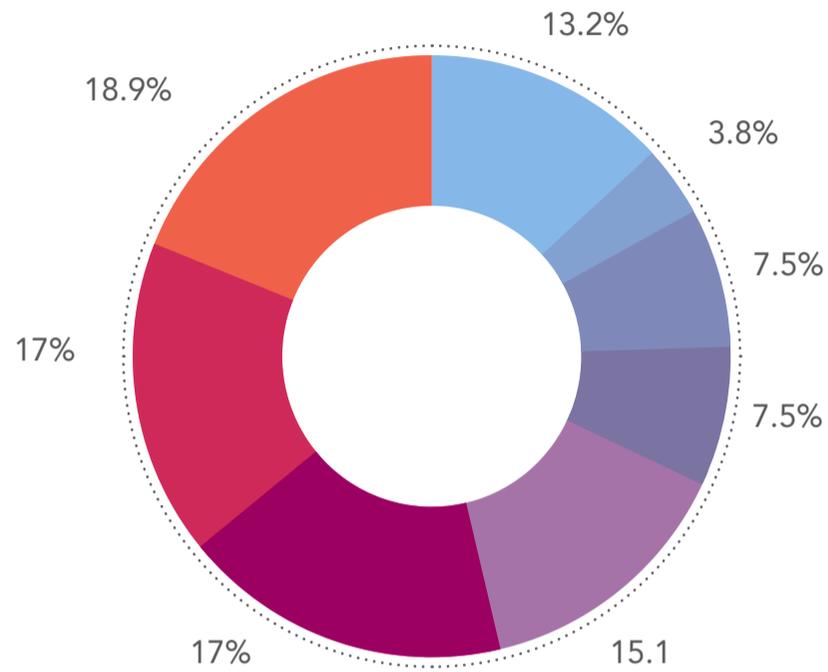
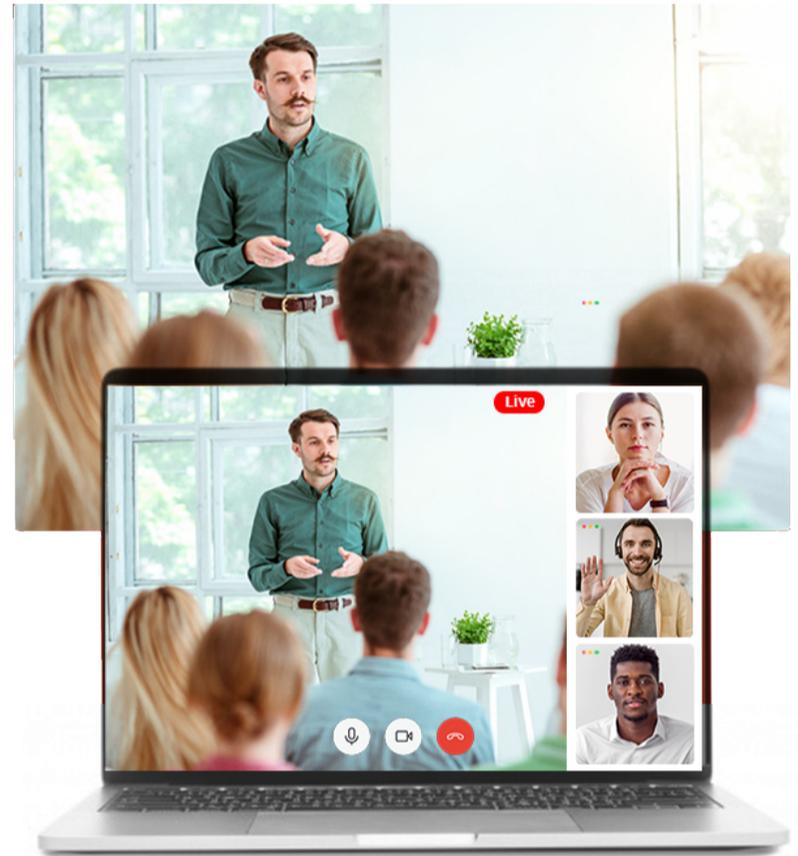|	
Healthcare	▬
Financial services	▬
Retail	▬
Others	▬

Others include government, agriculture, and the food & beverage industry.

What are
Hybrid Events?

50%

respondents reported that they're still learning what hybrid events really are.

That's why a Hybrid Events 101 is in order.

As the COVID-19 pandemic started to slowly ebb away in 2021, the world saw a new form of events gaining center stage. So many people had gotten used to virtual events but many still longed to network over coffee at a convention. That's how hybrid events came to be.

Hybrid events are physical events that are also hosted online. In this way, participants in the vicinity of the event venue have the freedom to attend the event in person while those from afar can simply tune in online. Both audiences can interact with the speakers and contribute to the events.

Moreover, by adding a virtual element to the event, event hosts don't have to restrict themselves to an event cap. They can theoretically host a limitless number of attendees from anywhere around the world, at a fraction of the cost of a massive physical event.

Hybrid events offer a myriad of other benefits to attendees, exhibitors, and organizers. We'll discuss this in more detail later in this ebook.

What is a
Hybrid Events Platform?

A hybrid event platform is a technology offering that enables event organizers to take their live in-person events online and host a limitless audience. It's software that hosts the virtual event and integrates it with in-person activities.

Such a solution takes care of broadcasting in-person sessions online, providing networking opportunities over the internet, hosting event documents and videos, and starting engaging online conversations.

But what features enable hybrid event platforms to accomplish this massive feat? Let's take a look.

1. Virtual lobby

Online attendees are always at a disadvantage of missing out on the complete event experience. But immersive virtual environments do a great job of mimicking that experience.

A virtual lobby welcomes online attendees to a realistic environment so they can feel as though they've arrived at a new place. All the while without having to move from that couch in their lounge.

These virtual lobbies are often customizable. They're also easy to navigate as they mimic actual lobbies with demarcated rooms and halls. In addition to this, it's important to have diverse avatars walking around the space to make for a more inclusive setup.
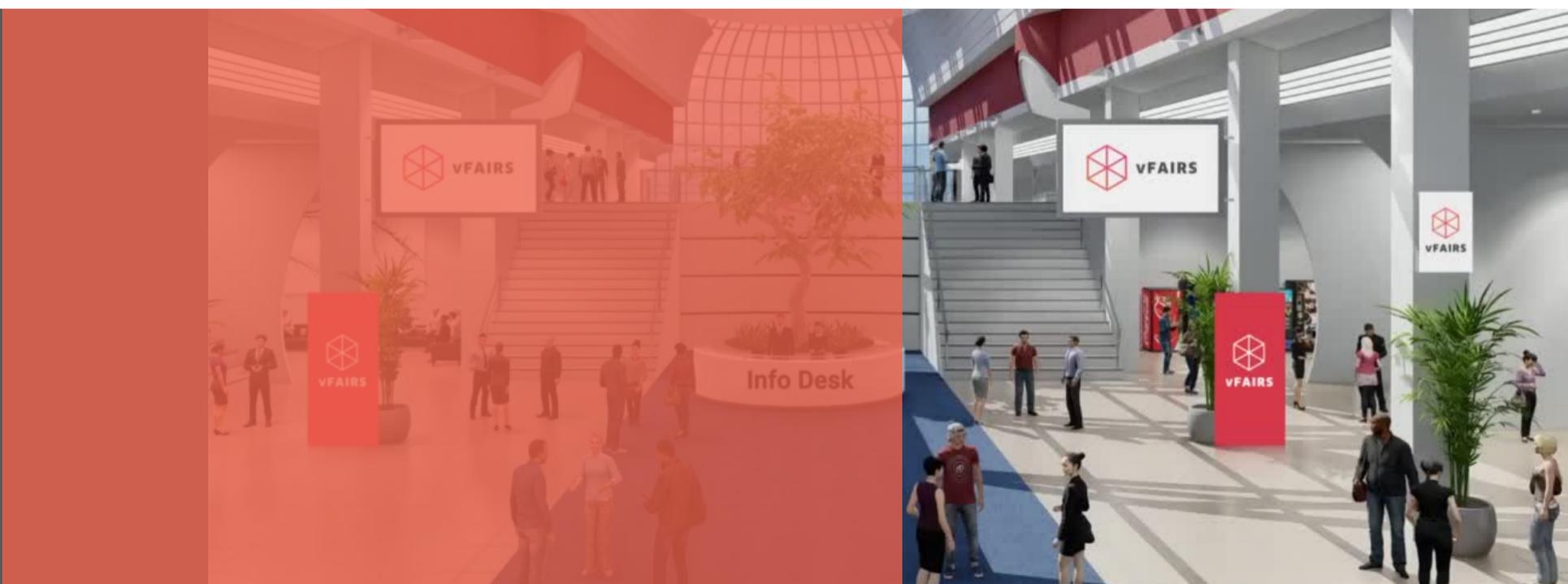
2. Virtual auditorium

Similar to a virtual lobby, a virtual auditorium also aims to mimic in-person events. It helps the host showcase all the same presentations shown to in-person audiences. Hosts can also use this to show entirely different sessions to the online audience.

Once the sessions conclude, the virtual auditorium also lets attendees view replays of the content. Hosts can also use it as a catalog of sorts for the online audience to pick and choose content that they'd like to see when they'd like to see it.
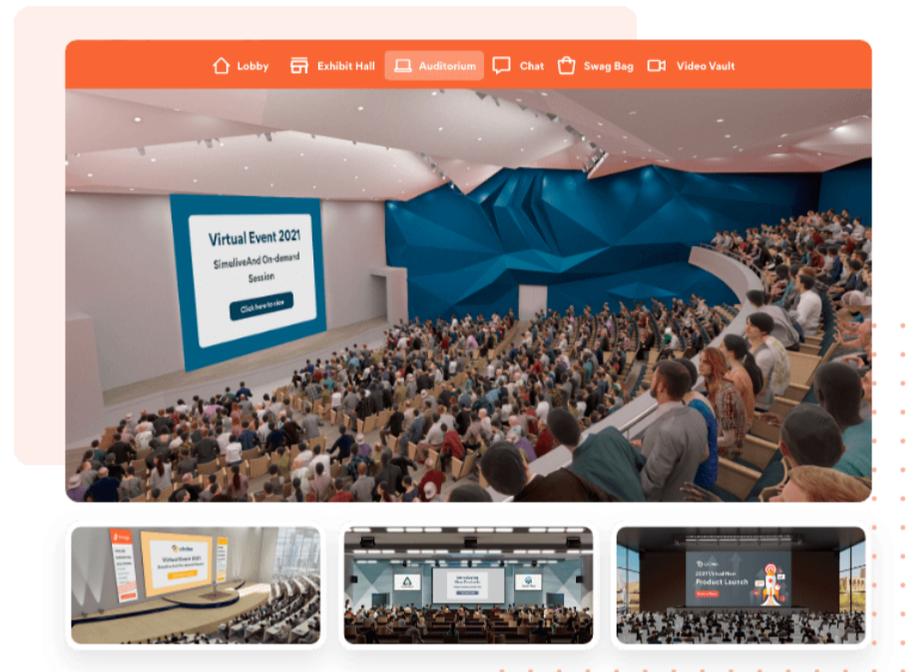
3. Virtual exhibit hall

Exhibit halls are a staple for tradeshows and exhibitions. Sponsors and event partners will promote their services at their designated booths. A virtual exhibit hall offers attendees a way to virtually walk through the floor, browse through exhibitors, and connect with those of interest.

At hybrid events, exhibitors can have booths on-site, on the virtual platform, or at both venues. This helps event hosts and exhibitors decide what they're most comfortable with. A booth exhibiting both online and offline is able to multiply its reach many folds.
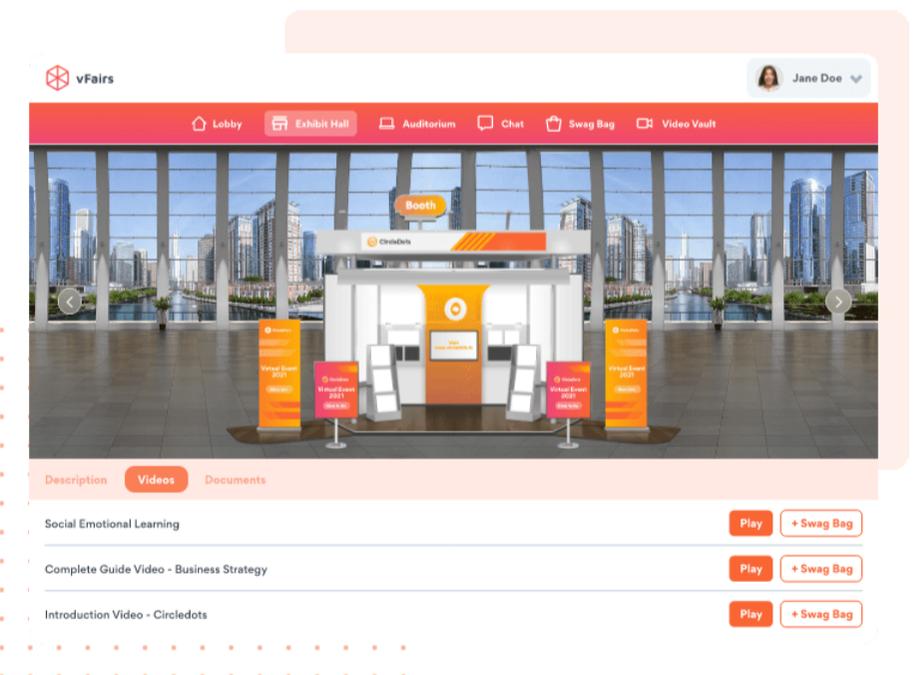
4. More sponsorship opportunities

With an online venue added to the agenda, event hosts can offer tons of different sponsorship opportunities to their sponsors.

Here are a few examples:

- The virtual exhibit hall can accommodate more exhibitors than a venue with limited space.
- There's a video vault and resources section to promote services and marketing collateral.
- The lobby, auditorium, and networking lounge, all have spaces for ad placements. Event hosts can promote both their own brand and partner brands here.
- Games like scavenger hunts enable organizers to send more traffic to top-tier sponsors.
- Landing pages and emails can also be used to link up partner pages.

And so on. A lot can be done when an event goes online as well. And all this can translate into a much bigger event budget for hosts to play with.

5. Registration options

Hybrid events also offer greater registration options. Attendees can check in either online or at the venue - however they like. Certain applications have QR codes to scan at the venue for checking in along with an online landing page to log in through. These landing pages are also great for providing all event details in one place.
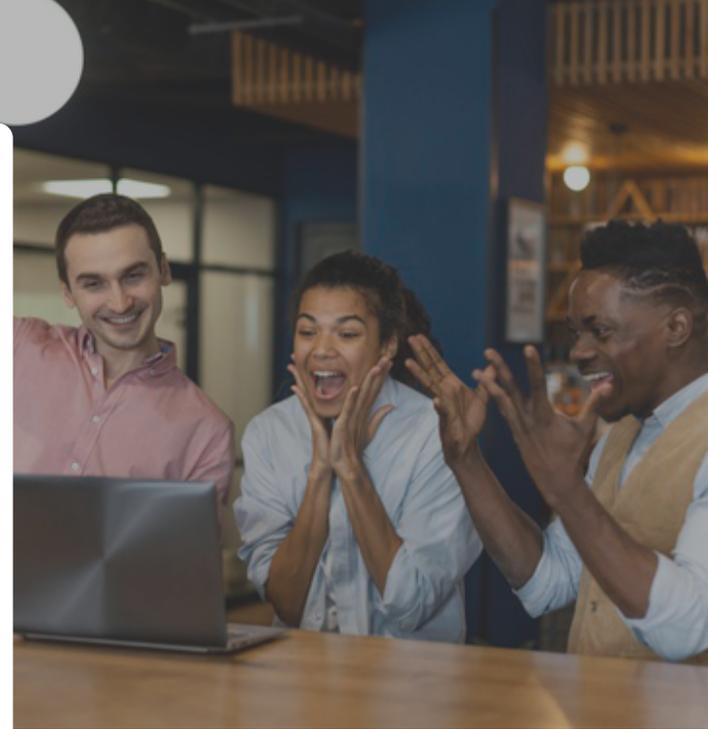
6. Networking & engagement

A lot of event-goers perceive virtual events to be unengaging. But hybrid event platforms aim to enhance the event experience, both online and offline. That's why they go the extra mile to make lots of networking options available, making it easier to connect digitally.

The networking options now popularly available are:

- **Chat:** instant messaging between attendees, booth reps, and even speakers.
- **Audio/video calls:** conventional audio or video calls for a more engaging experience.
- **Auto-matchmaking:** auto-paired conversations between people with similar interests.
- **Group networking:** group chats, audio calls, or video calls in a group of choice.

In addition to this, there are also a bunch of interactivity features that make attendees feel more involved and engaged. Some popular examples include:

- **Webinars:** speaker sessions that can be live, semi-live, or pre-recorded.
- **Live Q&A and polls:** the ability to ask questions and vote on polls to interact with the speaker in real-time.
- **Social walls:** event widget that sources all social media content related to an event in one place to boost excitement.
- **Photobooth:** like a conventional photobooth, attendees can take pictures, create gifs, and add to the photo gallery.
- **Games:** lots of options, varying from scavenger hunts, Kahoot!, spin the wheel, and more.

7. Reporting

Hybrid event platforms also provide event hosts the ability to measure event success. And physical events severely lack in this domain.

At a hybrid event, event hosts can compare online and offline registrations. They're also able to check the number of people who logged in or checked in at the event. The virtual aspect of the event brings a lot of data to the hands of organizers. This helps improve future events.
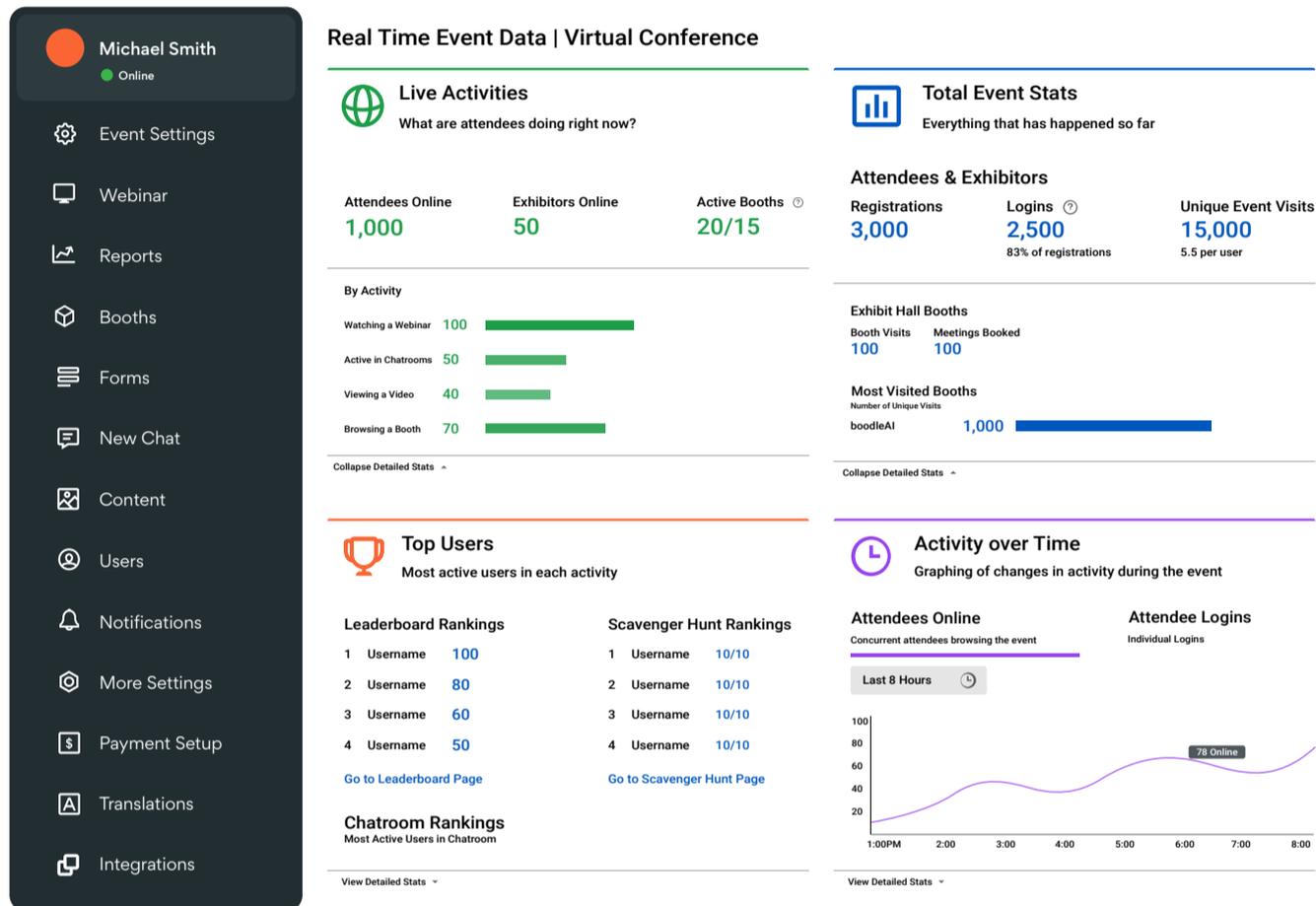
Some of the data points that event hosts can acquire from a hybrid event platform are:

- The number of people who registered and/or attended the online event vs the number of people who registered and/or attended the on-site event to better understand what the target audience appreciates.
- The number of booths visited, chats initiated, or resources downloaded to see what companies caught the most attention at the event.
- The number of visitors online at any given moment to identify peak hours.

What Features Are Delivering the Most Success?

Hybrid event platforms have a breadth of features now. There's everything from video chat options, webinars, live Q&As, breakout rooms, scavenger hunts, and much more.

There are also a bunch of different players in the market that provide a vast assortment of solutions. Every business can find a hybrid event platform that best fits their needs. But, what features are the most sought-after?

We asked our survey respondents to pick out features that are instrumental in delivering hybrid event success for them. Here's a look at their top three picks:
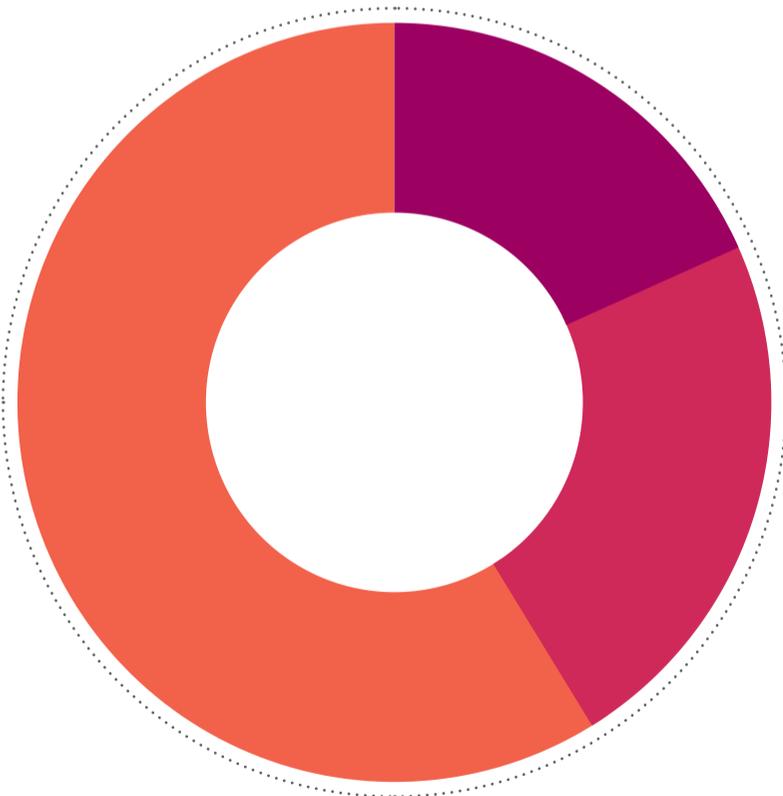
41.5%
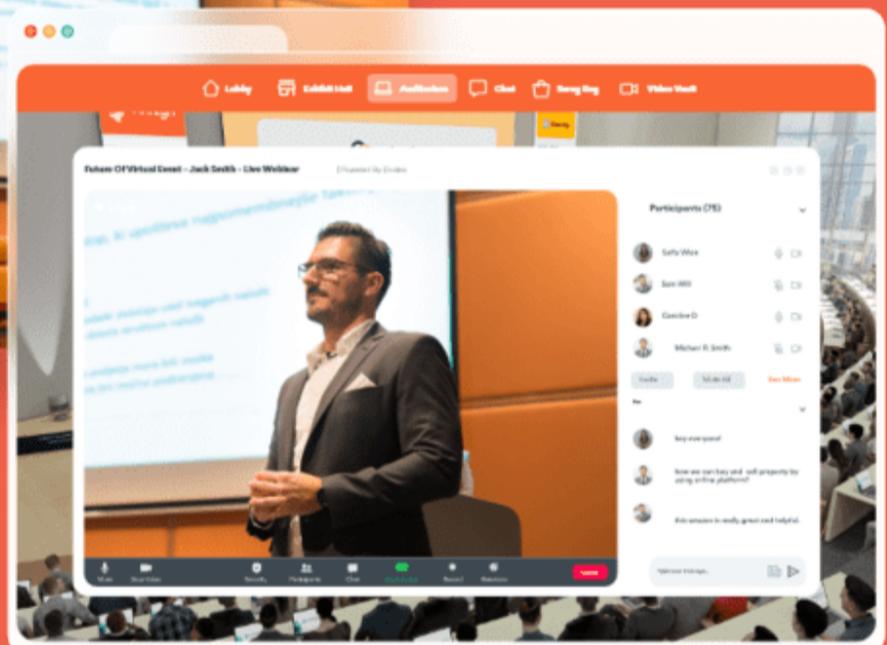respondents want easy integration between the live show and other applications.

15.1%
respondents want a wide span of networking features in their platforms.

18.9%
respondents look for lifelike virtual events.

The Rising Popularity of **Hybrid Events**

73.1%

of all event professionals are looking to host at least one hybrid event in 2021

Hybrid events are gaining momentum. 73.1% of all event professionals are looking to host at least one hybrid event in 2021, while 23.1% want to host over five hybrid events for the same year.

And it makes sense. Hybrid events offer convenience and cost savings to both attendees and event hosts. They also offer more sponsorship opportunities. With all event stakeholders benefiting, hybrid events are being touted as the new normal for events in the post-COVID era.

Types of
Hybrid Events

Light

Light hybrid attempts to connect users from across the world while keeping things simple. In this format, the physical event has a packed agenda with several activities like speaker sessions, games, breakout rooms, and so on. On the other hand, the virtual event only comprises a live broadcast of the speaker sessions.

Light hybrid events have been taking place even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional examples would be high-profile events such as the Oscars or the Super Bowl.

Sequential

Organizers often want their online attendees to be as involved in event activities as their on-site attendees. However, too many overlapping touchpoints can be hard to keep track of.

That's where sequential hybrid comes in. Both the physical and virtual events are stacked with features but take place at different times. Since the same agenda goes live twice, attendees can catch on-demand versions of the sessions they missed at the physical event.

Sequential hybrid events offer all the benefits of hybrid events without the complexity of integrating the virtual event with the physical event.

Complex

Complex hybrid is the most integrated hybrid event out of all three. In this format, the physical and virtual events take place simultaneously with their respective audiences connecting with one another.

This also makes for multiple avenues to network. Some examples are chat, audio & video calls, polls, Q&A discussion boards, matchmaking, games, and leaderboards. Some complex hybrid events also feature check-in and screen technology.

Event organizers need a lot more resources and staff to pull off a complex hybrid event. For instance, both the virtual and physical booths need representatives during trade shows. You also need to work with an AV production team to ensure that the physical event goes seamlessly.

Light

Execution Difficulty: Easy

Common touchpoints: Webinar sessions, Q&As, social media

Ideal for: Award ceremonies, film festivals, exhibitions, product launches, graduation ceremonies

Sequential

Execution Difficulty: Moderate

Common touchpoints: None

Ideal for: Hiring events, open days, education fairs, trade shows, networking events, training events

Complex

**Execution Difficulty:** Moderate

Common touchpoints: Webinars, Q&As, networking lounges, giveaways, exhibit hall, matchmaking, registration, social media

Ideal for: Conferences, summits, trade shows, product launches

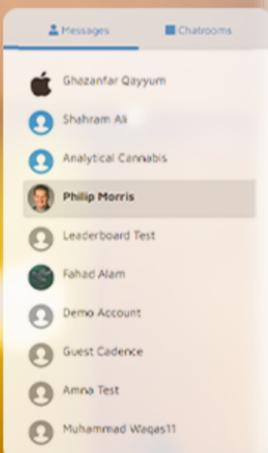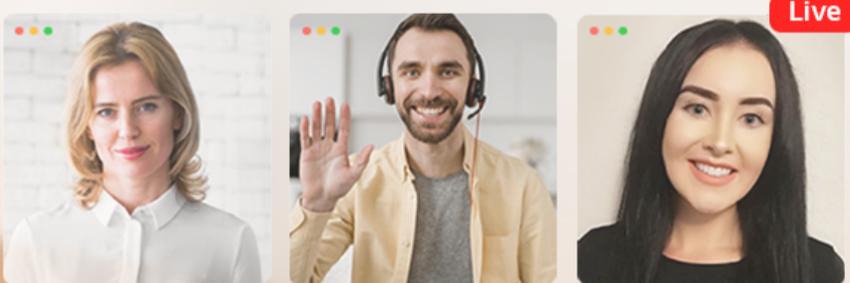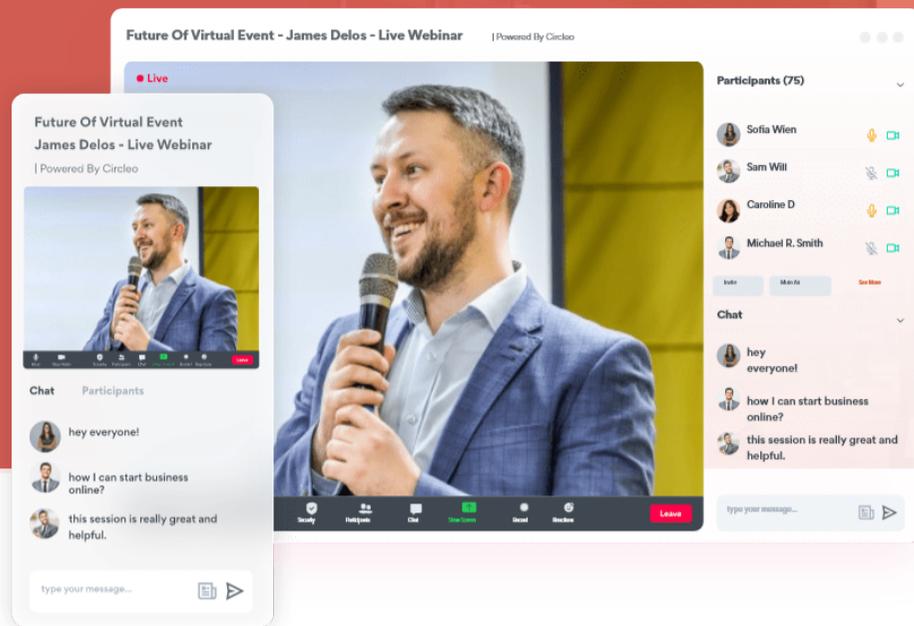# What Benefits Did Event Professionals See from **Hybrid Events?**

48.1%

of our survey respondents felt that hybrid events will be the most beneficial to their organization this year.

40.7%

11.7%

48.1%
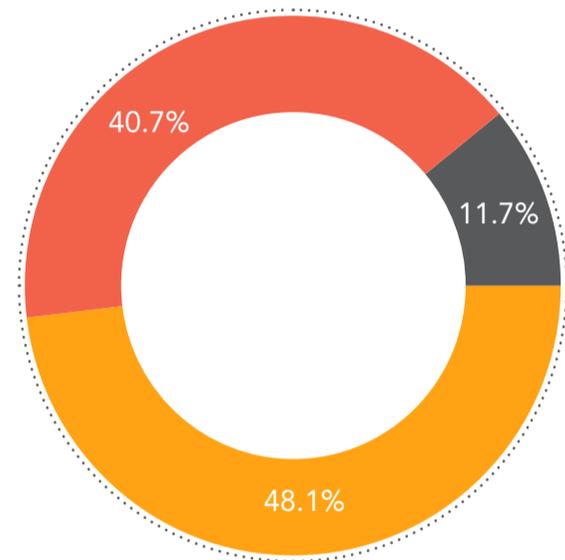
- Hybrid Events
- Virtual Events
- In-person Events

What are some of these benefits? While hybrid events have been shown to offer a range of benefits for event hosts, sponsors, and attendees, not all of these have yet been realized.

Live

Messages | Chatrooms

Ghazanfar Qayyum
Shahram Ali
Analytical Cannabis
Philip Morris
Leaderboard Test
Fahad Alam
Demo Account
Guest Cadence
Amna Test
Muhammad Waqas11

The survey respondents stated two main advantages of hosting hybrid events.

1. Increased attendance

Most event professionals saw increased event reach as the biggest benefit of hosting hybrid events.

People who were previously unable to attend an event of their interest can now do so via the virtual component. This takes the event far and wide, possibly bringing in people from several different states, and even from all over the world.

Thus, hybrid events enable companies to go global and reach a much broader audience than they could with just in-person events.

Moreover, event hall capacities aren't a problem with hybrid events as host companies can accommodate as many people as they'd like via the online portal.

2. Attendee convenience

Another key win that event organizers found is the control they offer to the attendees.

Hybrid events are a lot easier to attend. There's no longer the compulsion to travel to another city or drive to the venue even if attendees are close by. They save on traveling costs and commuting time, freeing up their schedules for other tasks.

# What are the Other Major Benefits of **Hybrid Events?**

Global reach and attendee convenience aren't the only two benefits of hosting hybrid events. As hybrid event adoption increases, here are four other benefits that will become prominent:

- Increase engagement by enabling networking between in-person & virtual visitors.
- Deliver live streams of physical sessions & consolidate discussion via Q&A & polls.
- Create digital sponsorship opportunities alongside physical event placements.
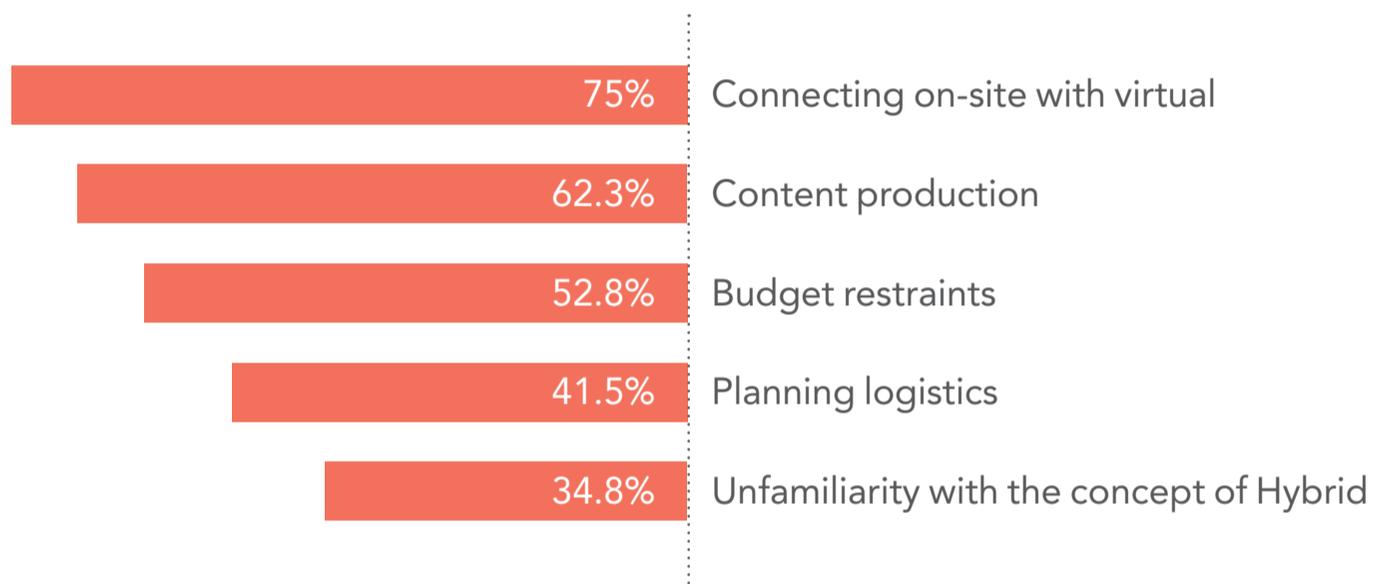- Measure engagement, turnout & ROI with detailed reports.
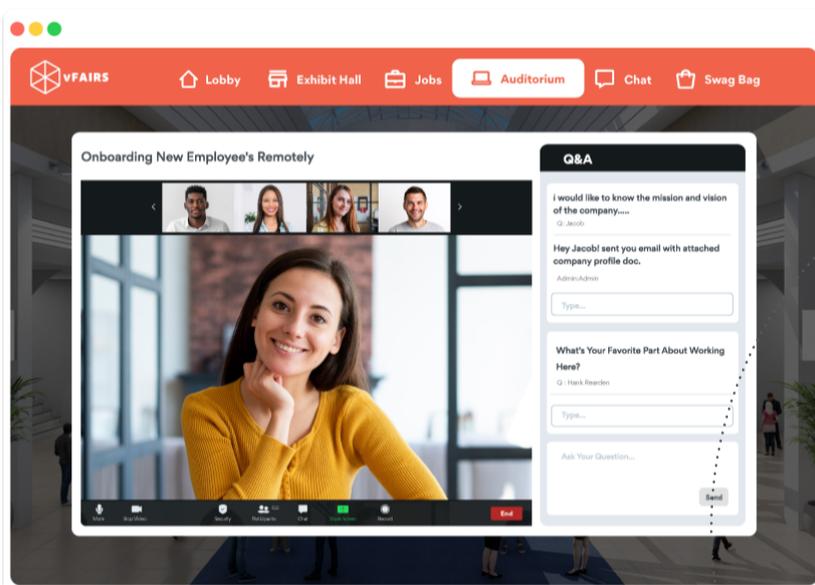
72%

of corporations are interested in sponsoring a hybrid event.
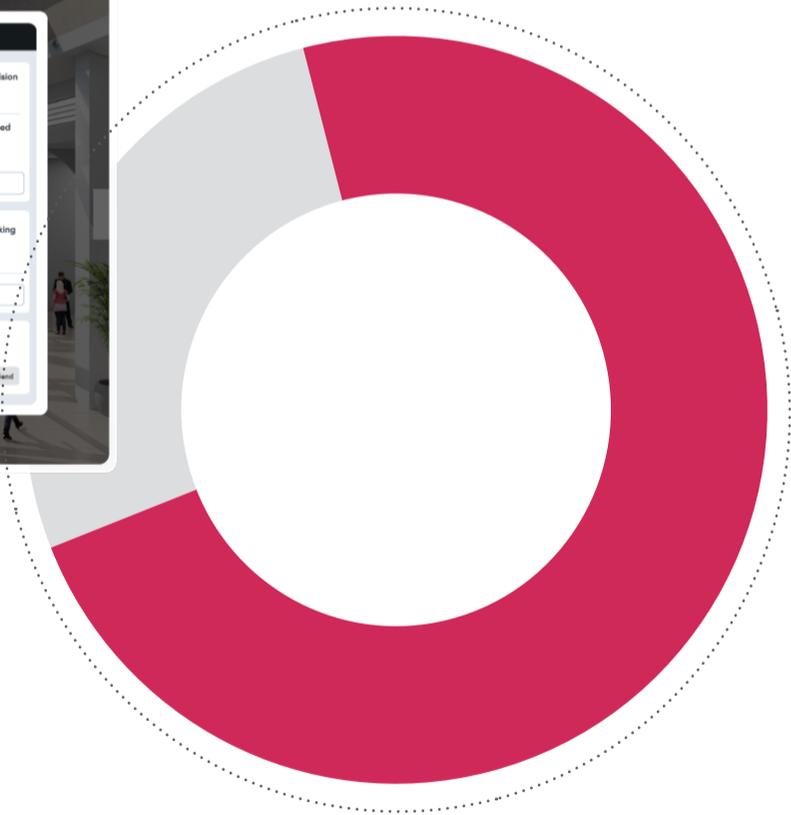
What Challenges did Event Professionals See With **Hybrid Events?**

We asked our respondents about the challenges they expect to contend with. Here is what the data said.

|	
75%	Connecting on-site with virtual
62.3%	Content production
52.8%	Budget restraints
41.5%	Planning logistics
34.8%	Unfamiliarity with the concept of Hybrid

1. Connecting on-site with virtual

75% of respondents found that bringing together their in-person audience with their virtual audience was the biggest challenge at these events. Often, the event experience for both sets of audiences is vastly different. Trying to offer them the same touchpoints can be a major challenge.

It's also important to note that while in-person audiences enjoy a lot more engagement and networking opportunities, online attendees tend to get overlooked. A major chunk of event organizers hasn't been able to realize the full potential of virtual events.

There are a number of reasons for these disparate experiences. Here are the most common ones:

- Relying on basic video conferencing tools like Zoom.
- Using virtual event tools that offer limited engagement options or have half-baked features.
- Being unable to connect in-person activities with online activities.
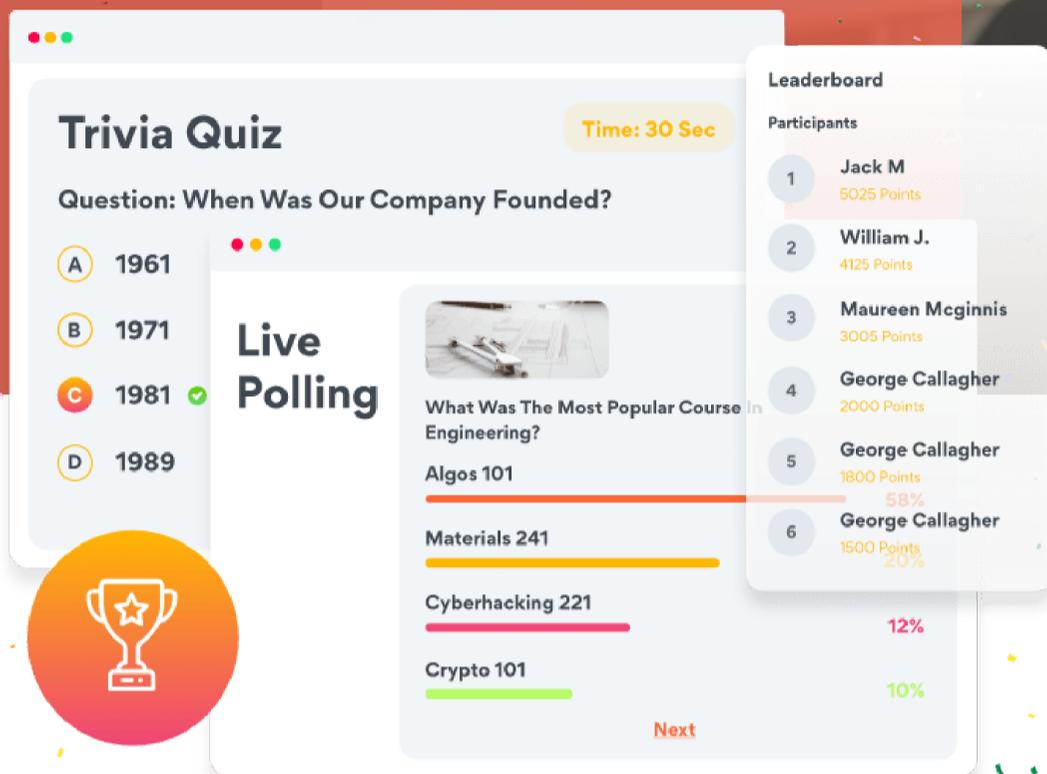
How can event organizers overcome this?

While Zoom may work for small internal meetings, hybrid events are often large-scale events that need more comprehensive virtual event solutions. It's important to opt for a provider that offers a virtual experience that's at par with the physical one.

It's also critical to look for a solution that provides easy integration between online and offline activities.

Zoom fatigue has gotten to all of us in the past year. So look for a virtual event platform that focuses on engagement features. These can be games like Kahoot!, scavenger hunts, trivia, polls, Q&As, spin the wheel, and so on. Breakout rooms and chat options help attendees network with others at the event, irrespective of how they're attending it.

A well-rounded hybrid event platform goes even beyond this. Event organizers are able to integrate their entire event tech stacks with the platform. For example, if they'd like to enroll attendees into the company's CRM workflows, they can connect their CRM software with their hybrid event platform. Then, data can flow automatically between the apps.

Our data also corroborated these solutions to the challenge of bringing together on-site and virtual elements. We asked respondents what their top requirements for selecting a hybrid event platform were.

41.5%

of respondents said that easy integration with the live show and other applications in their event stack is the most important requirement for a hybrid event platform.
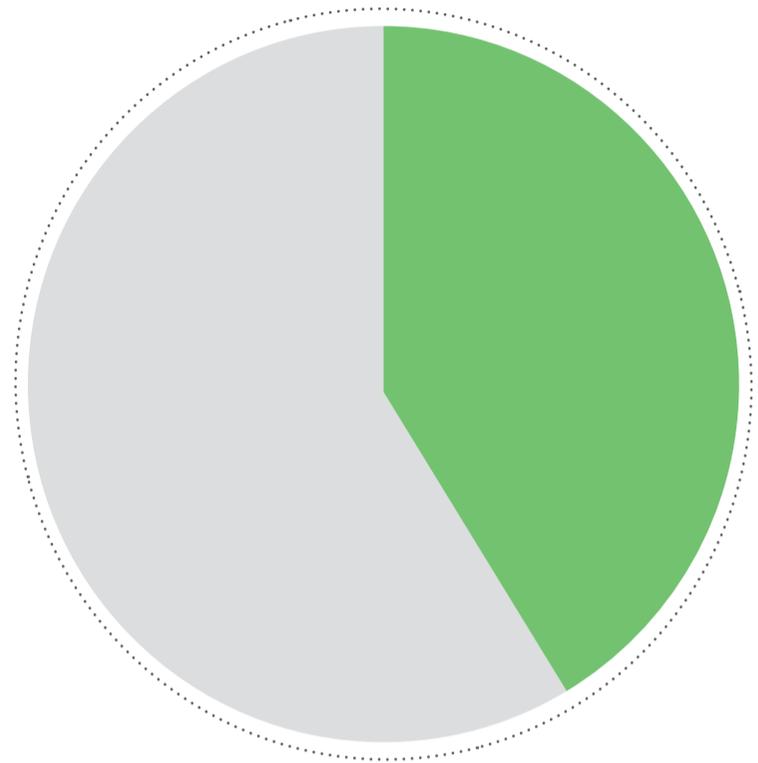
They also identified the three most important touchpoints where such integration between both online and offline audiences is important.

|	
Integrated Q&A participation for both audiences	68.5%
Integrated networking between both audiences	61.1%
Live streaming of in-person sessions	61.1%

2. Content production

62.3%

of respondents stated content production as the second biggest challenge to hybrid event execution.

Sometimes organizers bite off more than they can chew. They're hosting different sessions for both their physical and virtual audiences or creating different marketing collateral. And when it's time for the event day, it's just chaotic.
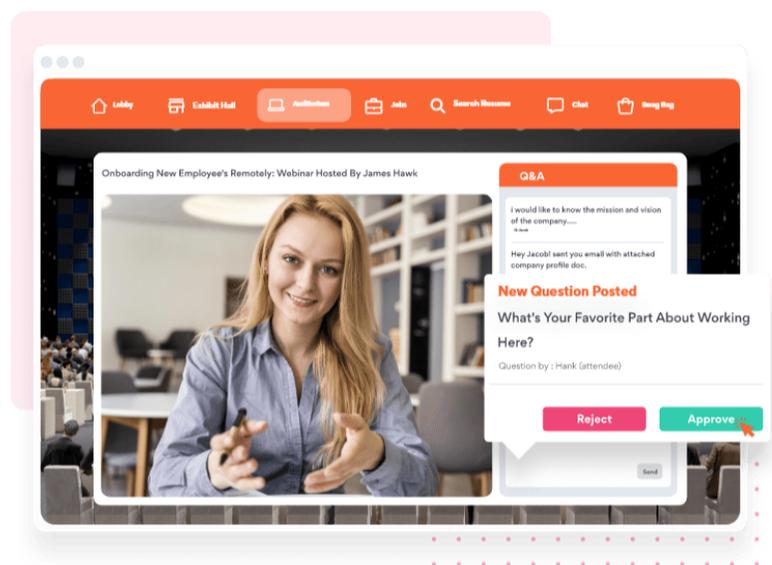
How can event organizers overcome this?

Every organization has a different content production capacity. That's why it's important to choose a hybrid event model that works best for the event host's needs.

Light hybrid events are recommended when there's limited capacity for content production. This format simply broadcasts in-person activities online, and lets virtual attendees participate via webinar Q&As and polls. A sequential hybrid event is another great option where the virtual component runs pre-recorded sessions from the physical event and takes live questions. Complex hybrid offers the same experience to both audiences but requires more support in terms of company representatives and technical assistance.

In terms of marketing collateral, hosts can use the same landing page for registering both their physical and virtual attendees. Tickets can also be processed from the same page. This helps reduce the amount of work for the marketing team.

Event hosts can upload the same PDFs on the virtual platform as for the in-person event. Videos are great to have on the virtual platform, but are in no way a must-have. Sticking to what works the best for the team is recommended.

3. Budget restraints

52.8%

of the respondents felt that their event budgets were a hurdle to successful hybrid events. They find funding both the physical and virtual events expensive.
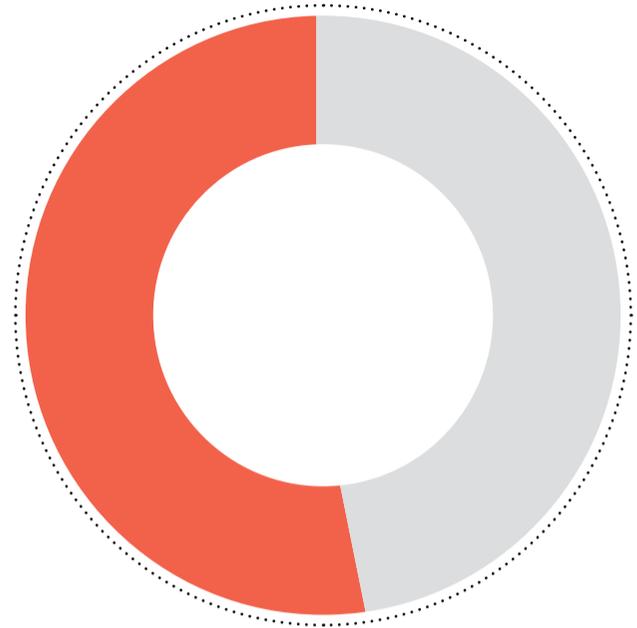
But if we compare the ROI that successful hybrid events bring, it's worthwhile to host one that's tailored to the total event budget.

How can event organizers overcome this?

There are multiple ways to tackle this problem. Here are the ones we find the most effective:

- Book venues early and be sure to negotiate the rent.
- Go for smaller venues and invest in the virtual component to host more attendees at a lower cost.
- Consider taking on more sponsors. Ask the hybrid event platform provider for more real estate for sponsors. Use this to expand the event budget.
- Keep the virtual event online for longer. This is much cheaper (a month on-demand period might even be free) than hosting a five-day event, where each day can cost about an additional 8000 USD.
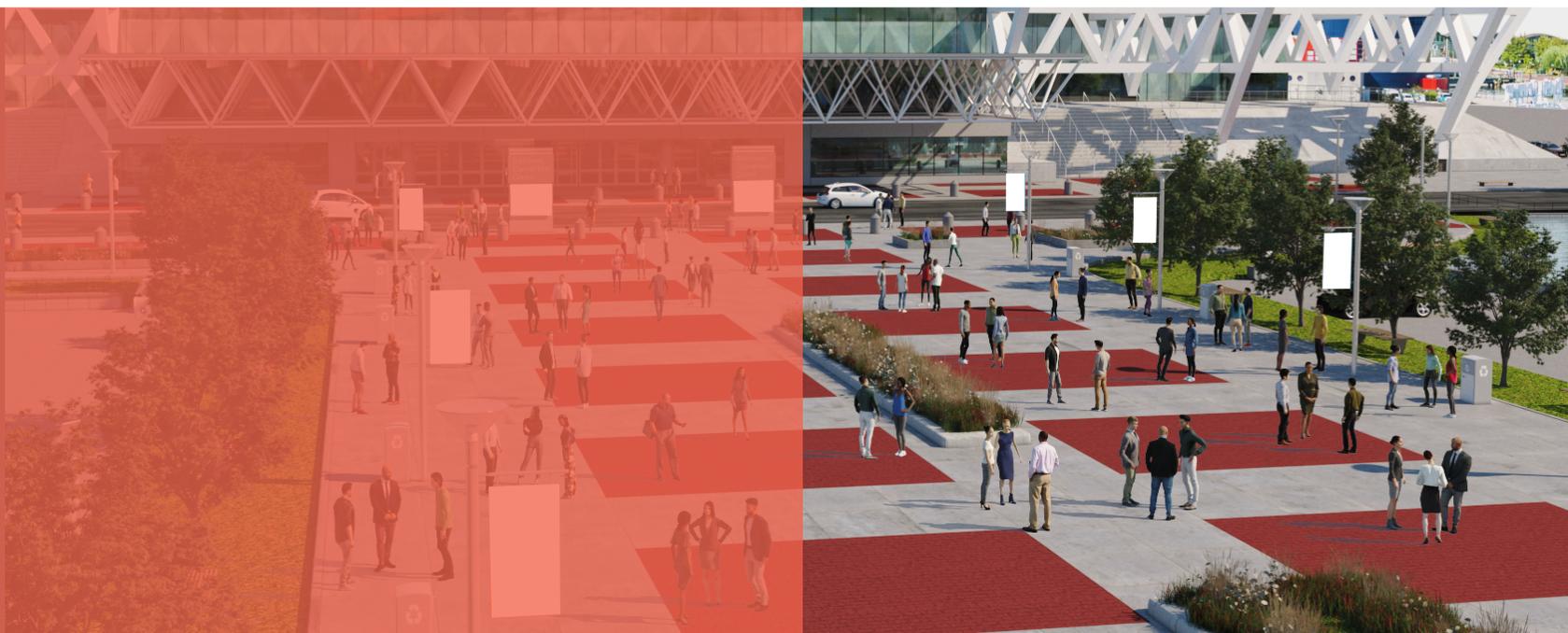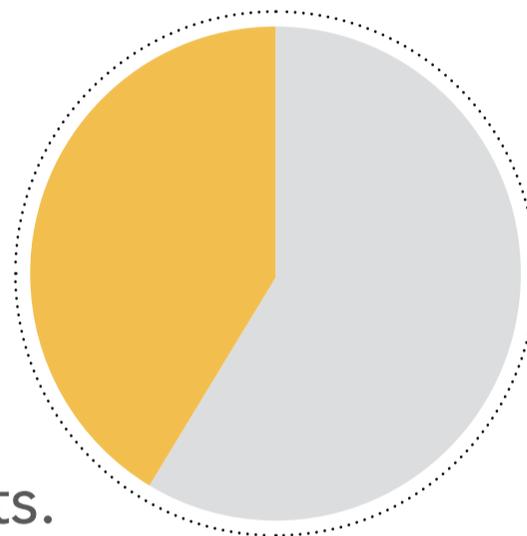
4. Planning logistics

41.5%

reported planning logistics as a major hurdle to hybrid events.

The sheer idea of coordinating two events simultaneously is likely to strike fear into those who are unfamiliar with the types of hybrid events available to them.

Additionally, smaller teams may be intimidated by the idea of hybrid events, as they fear they might lack the human resources to execute properly.

How can event organizers overcome this?

There are multiple ways to tackle this problem. Here are the ones we find the most effective.

Work with a hybrid event project manager. Some hybrid event platforms come with end-to-end project management that makes sure everything is in order right from the beginning. This also makes it easier to meet deadlines.

It's also interesting to note that more than half of the respondents **(55.6%)** felt that the best strategy for procuring a hybrid events platform was finding someone who could help manage the live and virtual aspects of the event.

5. Unfamiliarity with the concept of hybrid

34.8%

of the respondents found a lack of understanding of hybrid events leads to an underwhelming experience with the event.
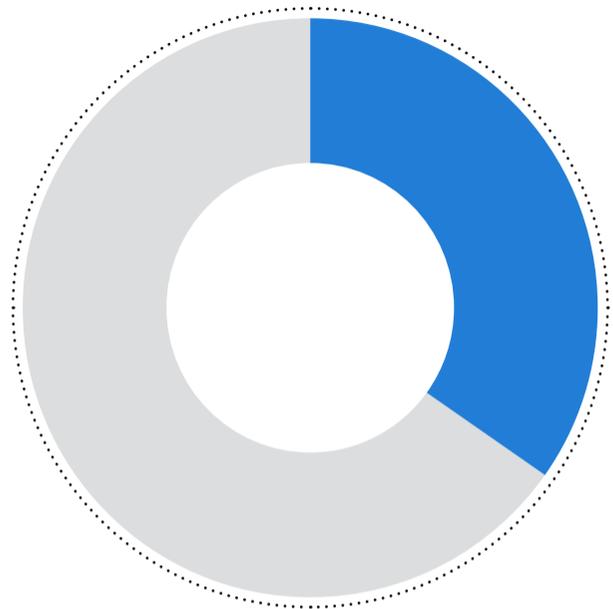
Since people are still getting used to virtual event platforms, these problems usually arise from:

- Virtual event platforms that aren't intuitive and thus, difficult to use
- Inadequate training for event hosts and partners
- Lack of help resources for attendees like navigational videos
- Lack of on-spot technical assistance

How can event organizers overcome this?

A hybrid event platform lowers the learning curve by being super easy to use. Look for platforms that match the in-person experience. Realistic environments with 3D event halls make it really simple for online attendees to find their way around.

On top of this, most event teams need extensive platform training. Make sure all the stakeholders are comfortable with the software. A provider that onboards all partners can make all the difference - be it training the host team, the speakers, or the exhibitors.

Event attendees can always use some extra help. This is why recording videos of a user navigating through the platform or providing guides for online attendees can make a lot of difference.

Things may still go wrong on the event day. So have technical support at hand at all times. Choose a software provider that offers 24/7 technical assistance.

The Post-Pandemic Era:
What to Expect

Once the COVID-19 pandemic ends, people will no longer be bound to host virtual events. They'll have the freedom to book large venues, invite people back, and engage in-person. So, what will this mean for events?

We asked our survey respondents. The results showed a shared dependence on both physical and virtual events. Organizations predict fewer virtual events in the future and more physical events. However, they see themselves hosting fewer physical events than they did prior to the pandemic.

This gives hybrid just the room it needs to dominate the future, and every 3 in 5 event profs think that's exactly what will happen.

57.4%
of event organizers think that hybrid events will dominate the future.

This was followed by 16.7% respondents placing their confidence in virtual events. Physical events weren't too far behind at 11.8%. Overall, the data showed immense confidence in hybrid events.

14.8%

57.4%

16.7%

11.1%
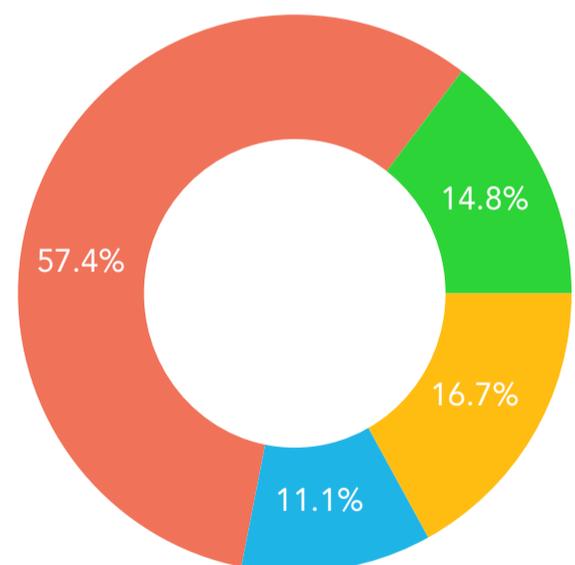
■ Virtual events will continue to grow

■ In-Person events will eventually prevail

■ Hybrid events are the future

■ I'm not sure/haven't made up my mind

vFAIRS   2021 State of Hybrid Events

Final thoughts

Hybrid events are going to **dominate the future.**

That's what we expected as 2020 was coming to a close. The State of Hybrid Events survey corroborated this as well.

Here is everything that we were able to draw from the survey.

- Hybrid events have been around for decades in the entertainment industry. Sporting events, award ceremonies, and talk shows have all relied on this format to reach global audiences.

- The COVID-19 pandemic enabled several other industries to adopt this model. Organizations around the world realized the benefits of taking physical events online.

- The return to purely physical events seems less likely. The world is still contending with new COVID-19 variants and no one knows exactly when life as we knew it will make a comeback.

- Hybrid events will continue to offer the best of both worlds while providing security, boosting global reach, and saving costs.

- Event organizers think that hybrid events will dominate the future of events.

Based on these takeaways, we expect hybrid events to be the go-to event format for the foreseeable future.

Ready to Host Your Hybrid Event?

▶

vFAIRS

(+1) 469-638-297

sales@vfairs.com

www.vfairs.com