



## ESG BRIEF

# Two Rules for Creating Engaging Digital Events

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**ABSTRACT:** The COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of multiple large, in-person customer and partner events. As businesses attempt to deliver similar levels of experience and engagement by transitioning to digital events, the results have been mixed. This paper combines some of ESG's early impressions and offers feedback with two simple rules to consider when creating digital events.

## Overview

2020 is different. Our ability, whether as analysts or as IT vendors, to engage with our peers, partners, and customers has been substantially restricted due to the realities of the current global pandemic. Business, however, must go on. In fact, businesses need the technological innovation offered by IT vendors now more than ever as they seek to reduce risk, streamline operations, and digitize their engagement with their customers.

For the IT vendors, though, few places represent this shift in the rules of customer engagement more than the current hiatus of large, in-person customer and partner events. The subsequent shift to digital events, instead of in-person tradeshows, has so far produced mixed results, though often better than expected given the circumstances.

ESG has gathered thoughts, critiques, and recommendations on what works as well as less-effective features for digital events thus far. This paper consolidates those thoughts into two high-level recommendations for IT vendors to consider when planning digital events.

## 1. Entertain and Engage as Well as Inform

The experience of a massive, in-person event produces a certain level of grandeur. The shift to a digital format loses much of that. When building content, assume that it must be significantly more exciting and engaging than it would have needed to be for in-person presentation. Some components of presentations that increase viewer engagement include:

- **Fewer, more powerful messages.** Every product person wants their chance to shine, but focus on the big-ticket items: the major, transformational advances. It's better to save the incremental updates for another day.
- **Zero buffering (or viewers will change tabs).** If a technology firm's keynote buffers, viewers will assume the firm doesn't have the best or latest technology.
- **Shorter more, engaging content.** Attention is easier to hold in person. Digital content must be clear and concise—less is more. But make it easy for viewers who want to learn more to access additional short content.

- **More conversations, fewer scripts.** In a similar fashion, conversations draw greater interest. Viewers have short attention spans, which get shorter when the host is reading from a script.
- **Exceptional quality for prerecorded events.** Leverage graphics, dynamic content, and other elements that entertain while getting the point across.

## 2. Assume No One Is Entertained or Engaged

Building engaging content is important, but remember that the environment has changed. Audiences are likely trying to work from home while juggling their personal lives in the process. For example, you may be tuning out the noise of other people in your household while reading this brief. Chances are good that viewers are multitasking, too, so presenters must:

- **Make content easy to identify and find.** Assume that everyone will need to watch a presentation more than once to understand the topic and make it easy for them to come back and find what they want when interruptions occur.
- **Include multi-type, snackable content.** Don't make the audience watch an hour-long keynote just to find the five-minute demo for the new technology they want to see. Divide content into specific topics with easily watchable and rewatchable pieces.
- **Make materials sharable.** Digital content can increase the size of the potential audience, so help attendees share content with their peers.
- **Work toward persona-based content.** CIOs, security professionals, IT admins, and developers all have different questions. Help them find specific answers.
- **Create "rolling thunder."** Participants likely didn't get the full message the first time, or the second; remind them, and follow up with added content, experiences, feedback, and commentary on an ongoing basis after the event.

## The Bigger Truth

Digital engagement is different, but that does not mean it has to be less effective. Remember you will not have your audience's undivided attention, so you must do more to grab that attention, hold on to it, and then remind them when that attention becomes lost.

For more information, videos, and other resources, please see ESG's [Reimagining Digital Events](#) webpage.

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