



Opportunity Amidst Uncertainty

Spinning Up Virtual Cons on a Shoestring

whoami

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So, 2020

- **It's a thing, right?**
- Travel cancelled
- In-person events cancelled
- Budgets slashed
- Lots of uncertainty about 2020-2021



As we start to reopen



No guarantees on future lockdowns



Vulnerable and global colleagues may defer travel



Many companies have no travel / limited training budgets



Virtual events are more important than ever before!

But virtual
events were
always
important!

- We just didn't notice if we weren't impacted by:
 - Family care issues
 - Budget restrictions
 - Travel restrictions
 - Time restrictions
 - ...



The Bottom Line

- Virtual and hybrid live-virtual events are important
- We should take what we've learned from the COVID-19 crisis and use it to enable and improve them

A large, textured orange watercolor splash shape on the left side of the slide, with various shades of orange and some darker spots.

I ran a free
virtual con...

- **The first week of lockdowns, I organized “PancakesCon” in one week**
- Full day security conference with two tracks
- 7 volunteers
- Next to zero budget
- ~5000 virtual attendees and viewers
- Some things went well, others didn't
- We learned a lot

I attended a bunch of virtual cons!

- Commercial and Community
- Migrated and Virtual-Only
- **Many** platforms and technologies
- Some things worked, some things didn't
- We're all learning as we go...



So... what
have we
learned?

Let's break it down:

Strategy (why, how, who, when?)

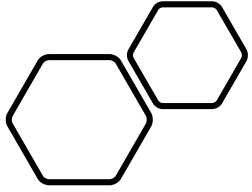
Logistics (organizational and
resource hurdles)

Tactics (technical and operational
details and gotchas)

Strategic Issues

- We don't know what our event **want to be when it grows up...**
 - Who is our audience?
 - What are our objectives in holding this event?
 - What is the timeframe for our event?
 - Is our event entirely virtual, or hybrid?





Strategic Solutions

Create

- Create an overarching theme and purpose for the event

Determine

- Determine if the event will be full virtual or hybrid

Identify

- Clearly identify objectives and how we will measure success

Identify

- Identify the target audience (demographics, needs, and backgrounds)

Propose

- Propose a time and set clear milestones and touchpoints

Decide and
specify

- Decide and specify who stakeholders and decisionmakers are

Logistical Issues

1. Inadequate (or surplus) human or technical resources
2. Inadequate budget for essential expenses
3. Inadequate reach (speakers, sponsors, or attendees)
4. Inadequate platform for broadcast and recording
5. Inadequate platform for social engagement
6. Inadequate moderation and facilitation
7. No plan to close the resource gap in time

Logistical Solutions



Identify and confirm available human resources



Identify and confirm available technical resources (and limitations)



Calculate target / projected budget (ticket sales / sponsors?)



Identify channels and timeframes to reach speakers and attendees



Evaluate technologies for broadcast / recording and weigh pros / cons / cost



Evaluate technologies for interaction and weigh pros / cons / cost



Clearly identify who has skills, desire, and availability to moderate

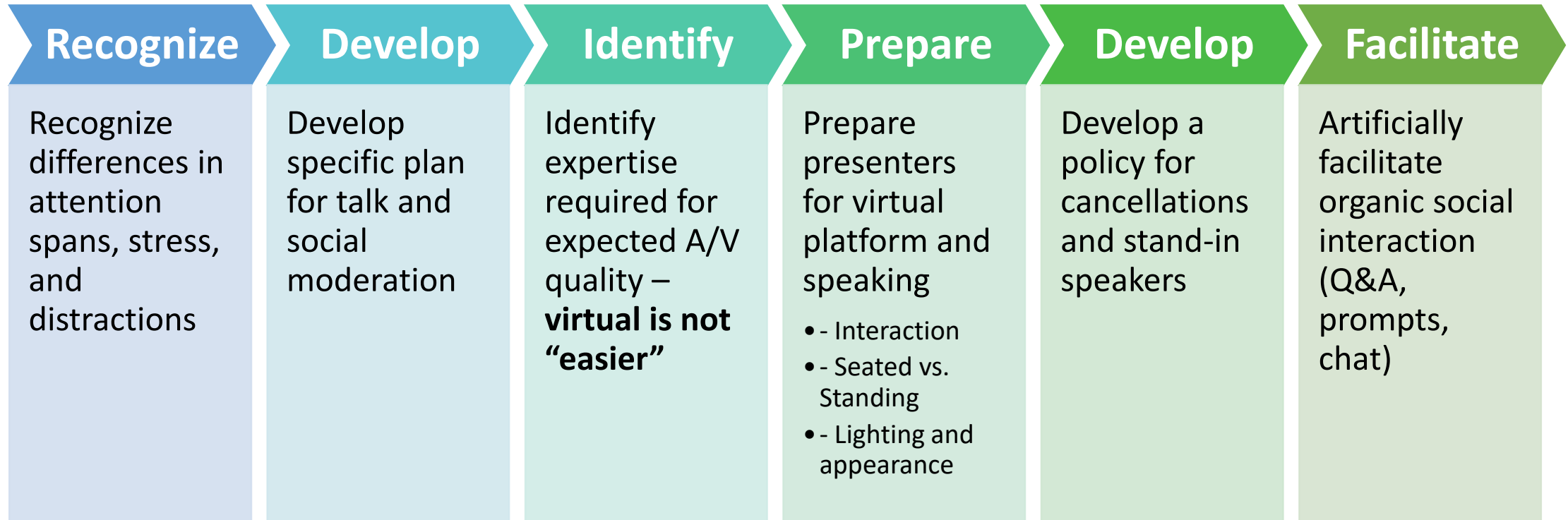


Quantify human, financial, and technology resource gaps

Tactical Issues

1. Failing to note differences between remote and in person audience
2. Failing to grab and maintain audience attention
3. Failures in moderation (talks run over, muting, trolls, poor Q&A, unclear directions)
4. A/V issues (compatibility, crashes, bad sound, bad lighting...)
5. Weak presentations in remote format
6. No-shows
7. Lack of organic social and networking opportunities

Tactical Solutions



But what if we have no budget?

- Strategy may need to be adjusted – be realistic
- Look into available free or low-cost resources
- Value and credit your volunteers
- Look into sharing resources with another conference
- Look into sponsorships, but know what they entail
- Biggest expense we found was a broadcast platform
- Needs remain, but manage expectations



Where Did We Go Awry?

- Tactics: we weren't fully prepared for a last-minute cancellation
- Tactics: speakers had two significant A/V issues that weren't caught in the green room
- Logistics: We should have better planned for the audience size expected and the available broadcast platform
- Logistics: We didn't have a good plan or necessary skillsets available to record and post our talks

What Went Well

- Strategy was good
- The time crunch was worth it
- Mixed format was a good idea
- Being adaptable was very important
- Good speaker logistics were hard work but integral (green room, etc)
- Clearly communicating with speakers and volunteers was crucial




Cool Problem-Solving from the Community

- Infosec Oasis added interaction by encouraging VR use
- Cons used popular social gaming platforms
- CTFs and villages add to programming
- Re-broadcasts reach a wider audience (with limitations)
- Conference apps are adding useful (and free) functionality like breakout rooms
- Providing opportunities for people to be heard and recognized is super-helpful!



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This is hard,
why should I
run one?

- Cybersecurity audience reach is unprecedented
- Many people were excluded from in-person events
- Many more will be now
- **It is doable!**



Questions?

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