

Seeing Opportunity in Cancellation

Rethinking keynote content after coronavirus — a spectrum of possibilities from virtual events to on-location experiences that may produce better content than ever before.

Live events are literally against the law. Now what? Building keynote content for corporate events is a cornerstone of our business, and while the coronavirus-driven cancellations are nerve-wracking, I'm also excited to change things up. We have seen much of the industry accept the typical playbook for keynotes as a given, and now is the perfect time to challenge some of that.

Challenging Assumptions About Engagement

One huge assumption we'd like to challenge is that attendees love the content. After all, the houses are packed, events keep growing, and audiences rate the content highly. They love it! Right?

Not exactly. Let's do a thought experiment: if you take the exact same keynote content and put it online, would you have the same engagement? Our clients' consensus is no, they wouldn't, because every single client has told us that a virtual keynote can't have the same content — it has to be more 'engaging.' This is all the evidence we need to consider switching things up.

A Spectrum of Keynote Possibilities

Conservative End: Playing Make-Believe

Many virtual events have everything a real event would have — a conference center, lobby, breakout rooms, expo hall, keynote hall — except it's all digital. This is basically a webinar: utilitarian content with simple production value for a targeted audience. We don't think this rises to 'executive keynote' level. There needs to be more sparkle for top-level leadership.

Cutting Edge: Bring the Audience on Location

Keynotes are where smart people take what they have learned and bring that experience to an audience. But if there is no keynote hall, the medium of exchange is gone. We're not taking a luminary out of their element to meet an audience — we're taking viewers on location, giving them a direct connection to the content. It could be an incredibly interesting journey to have a thought leader be our guide at the robotics lab, creative studio, or factory floor.

Middle Ground: The Keynote Show

Take the medium as far as it can go, while still delivering what is ostensibly a traditional keynote. Record your speaker a few times, cut together the best footage. Take cues from television: have a second camera angle, add graphics, edit in cuts to keep the content moving. For complex ideas, use

explanatory journalism techniques — cutting from a talking head to rich, animated explanations.

Let's communicate more interestingly and effectively. Yes, it may require new skills like editing and animation, but these skills are in abundance. Get out of your comfort zone. Make a show.