



## How COVID-19 Impacted In-Person Events & How Businesses Adapted

WME Speakers connects you to world-class talent for digital and in-person events.

To learn more, contact our team today via [contact@wmespeakersbeta.com](mailto:contact@wmespeakersbeta.com).

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# Introduction

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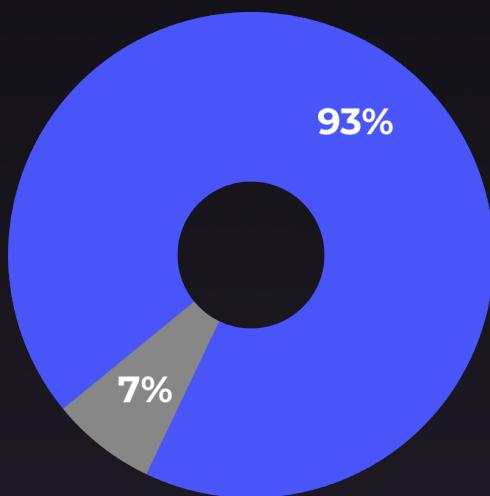
With the current COVID-19 pandemic, businesses across all industries are working to answer these questions: How do we recreate our in-person event or experience for the digital age? Is there an opportunity to create new digital events or experiences, while fulfilling social distancing measures?

At WME Speakers, we aim to inspire people and create entertainment for communities with our massive talent base. Now more than ever, we look forward to providing the same service, just virtually.

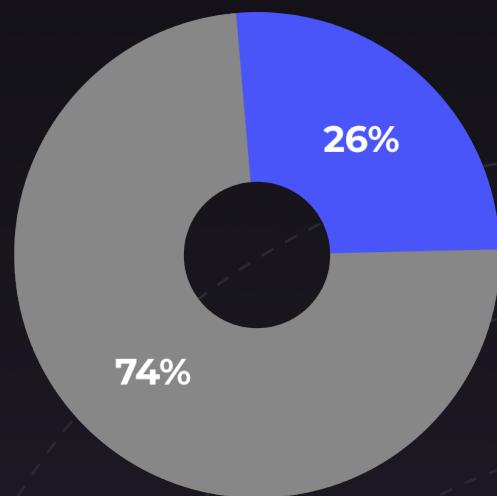
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Over 90% of event marketers plan to incorporate virtual events into their strategy.

**Planning to invest in virtual events moving forward?**



**Historically invested in virtual events**



(Source: Bizzabo, on their [blog](#) on May 2, 2020)

# Trade Shows & Conferences

**Trade shows and conferences, regardless of size and industry, were among the first to bring their experiences online amidst COVID-19's quarantine measures. These events provide vital networking and knowledge sharing opportunities for businesses, institutions, and niche industries through in-person connections. Altering the format to online-only experiences presented some obvious logistical challenges.**

**Take a look at some examples of how the biggest industry names remodeled their events as digital experiences.**

- Salesforce, Starbucks, The World Bank and International Monetary Fund, Nvidia, Adobe, TED, and McDonalds brought annual events online.
  - Tech giant Adobe moved their yearly [Adobe Summit](#) to a digital experience, featuring virtual sessions and talks from Adobe leaders, as well as A-listers like Tom Brady.
  - [Salesforce Connections](#), originally planned to be held in Chicago in April 2020, moved their networking event to a virtual experience. It will deliver a full program of inspiring and educational sessions at no cost to attendees.
  - The [5th Annual She-Suite Summit](#) was able to transform into a virtual summit in 38 hours without losing the core principles of the event.

**“87% of event marketers said they have canceled—and 66% have postponed—events as a result of COVID-19.”**

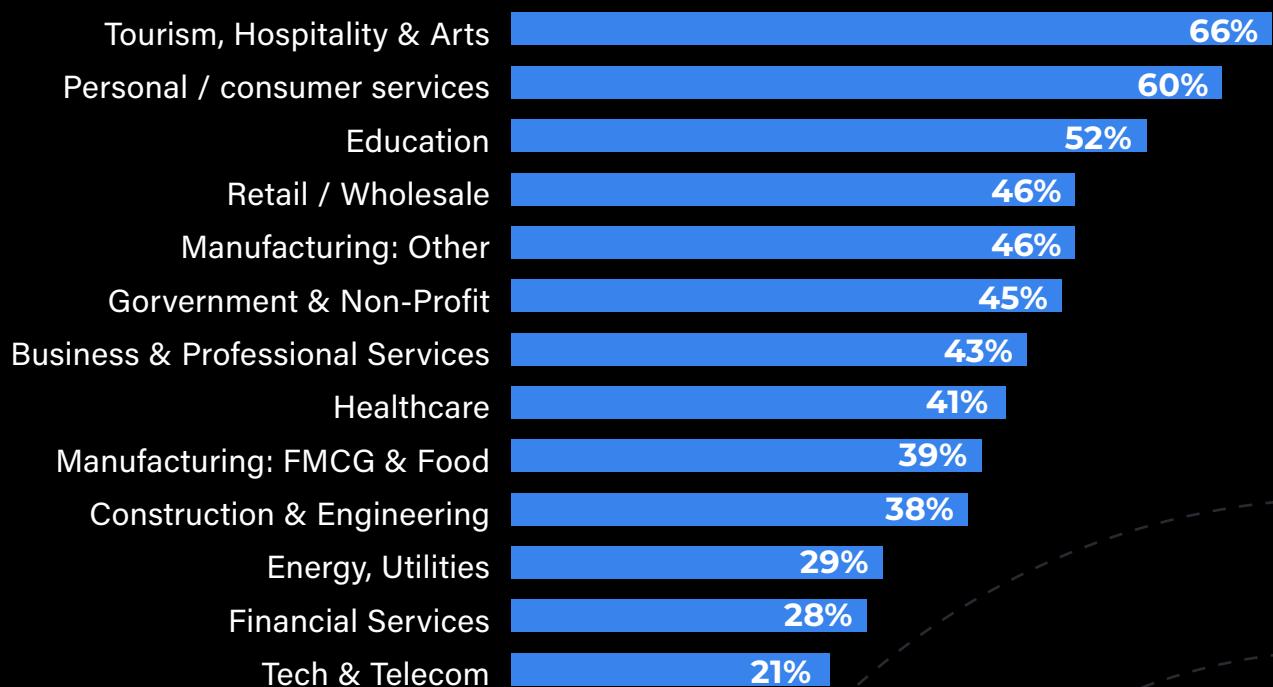
Source: [Event Marketer](#), 2020

# Takeaways

- **Put People First:** Businesses have a social responsibility to protect the public, but also the responsibility to uphold the integrity and spirit they originally promised with an event. Events and corporations can still shine; it just has to be online.
- **Pivot to Your Strengths:** Identify what defines the company or event. Consider its unique value and build upon them so you don't lose your vision.
- **Communicate Seamlessly:** Use every advantage available to deliver your message effectively, efficiently, and harmoniously.

**% of organizations experiencing at least “significant” disruption, by vertical**

(13th April - 3rd May 2020, Global Results)



(Source: B2B International on their [blog](#), May 2020)

# Digital Experiences

**Imagine the same immersive experience of a concert, stand-up comedy act, theatre performance, global fashion week, and more - but virtually and in the comfort of your home. These events connect people to their community through shared interests and having an alternative digital format prevents them from losing access to these experiences altogether. Some popular events that took place online instead include:**

- Fashion Weeks:
  - [New York Bridal Week](#) offered a virtual experience to attendees. Some designers recorded with their models on the runway and others provided web galleries.
  - [London Fashion Week](#) hosted a virtual fashion week on londonfashionweek.co.uk in June 2020 with interviews, podcasts, and digital showrooms.
- Musicians Providing In-Home Concerts and Livestreams:
  - WME partner, [Richard Weitz](#), wanted a virtual way to celebrate his daughter Demi's 17th birthday in late March 2020 when most of the world (and her high school friends) were self-isolating due to the Coronavirus pandemic. So, the resourceful talent agent booked his favorite Windy City piano man, Dario Giraldo of Chicago's Redhead Piano Bar, to entertain an intimate group of teens, family members, and close friends through Zoom.
  - [John Legend](#) held live-stream concerts and talked about how he came up with the idea on *The Tonight Show: At Home Edition*.

**“68%**

**of event professionals (more than half) are looking for hybrid event technology that supports both in-person and virtual events.”**

(Source: [Bizzabo](#), 2020)

# Takeaways

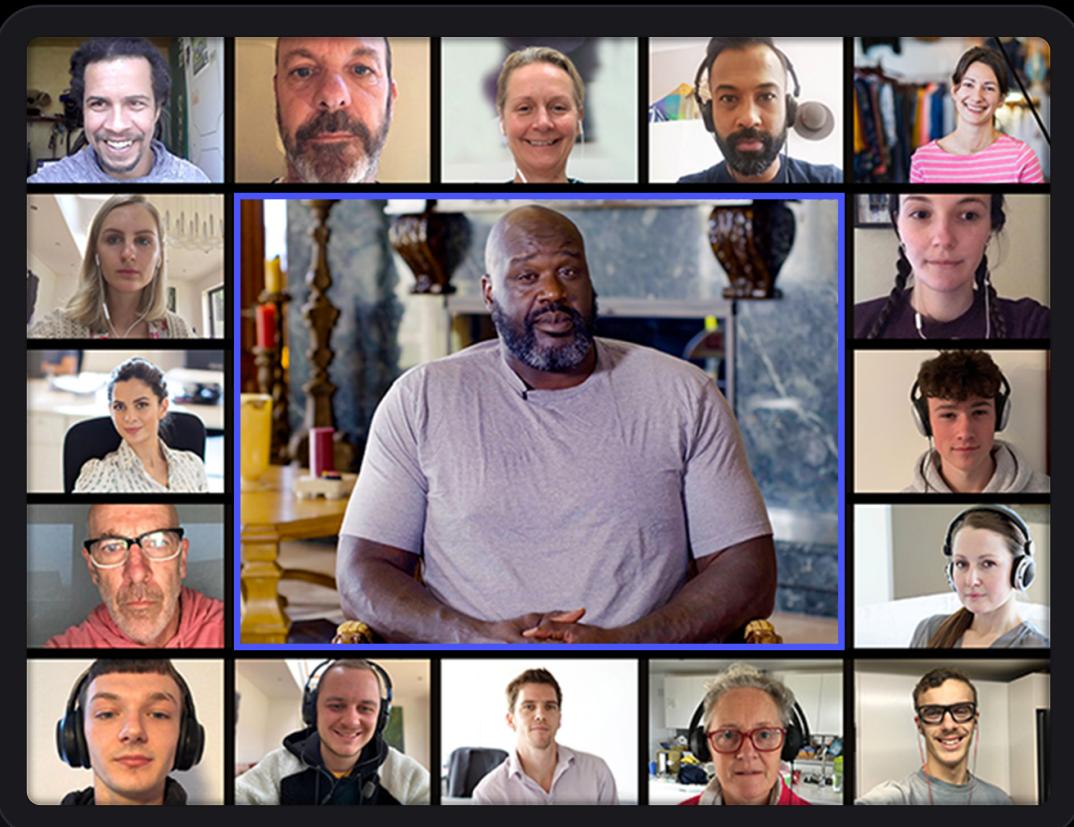
## Tips For Hosting a Flawless Virtual Event:

- **Provide Time for Attendees to Join Before Kicking Off**
  - It takes time for a large number of people to join any livestream. Fill this space with artist introductions, casual conversation, and current event discussions.
- **Promote the Event**
  - Share the event details through email and social media. If you plan to run ads, target them strategically and choose the right format.
    - According to Adobe, registrations tend to spike [two-to-three weeks](#) before an event so plan your promotions accordingly.
  - Create an event countdown in Instagram Stories. Create a Facebook event with all the necessary information attendees would need to know about the event. Create an event hashtag and encourage people to use it in posts. Consider listing your event on sites like Eventbrite and other places your audience will come across them.
  - Artists often double as Influencers—leverage their following to reach more people.
- **Prepare for Tech Issues**
  - Before kicking things off, test your Internet connection—and have talent do the same. If possible, run a rehearsal beforehand to ensure things run smoothly live.
  - Anticipate the issues people may have by preparing easy-to-follow guides

# Education

**Both traditional education institutions and new market participants have been rolling out new online classes and courses in a variety of broad and niche industries. Offering classes that feature prominent talent as experts can spark interest in learning that new skill even more. As people have gained more free time, they're interested in utilizing their time to sharpen their current skill set or learn something new entirely.**

- General Assembly, a private, for-profit education organization typically holding in-person classes, hosted [live streams](#) and offered [courses](#) throughout the pandemic to encourage learning, all for free.
- [Harvard University](#) offered a variety of their courses online for free.



## Takeaways

### Ensure the Instructor's Lesson Sticks with Attendees by Following These Tips

- Be sure the talent is an expert in the topic being discussed.
- Have a PDF or short "study guide" of the speaker's talking points.
  - Share learnings (presentation PDF and recording) within 24 hours.
- Create an interactive environment that fosters learning.
  - Would advise against hiring talent that won't allow for open questions and commentary.

# Drop-In Meetings

**Including a household name to your meeting unexpectedly adds a nice surprise factor and keeps your team engaged and inspired. It's a unique way to thank your employees or get them excited about an upcoming project, event, or season. Outside of business, it can surprise graduates, give thanks to frontline workers, and whoever might need some motivation during these times.**

- [Barack and Michelle Obama](#) dropped in on a Zoom meeting of a town hall in Chicago to share some words of wisdom.
- [Will Ferrel](#) did a surprise "drops-in" on the Seattle Seahawks after the 2020 NFL Draft as a "new" teammate.

**The 611 Group published a whitepaper that explores the impact of COVID-19 on business and how marketers and advertising professionals anticipate how this will affect the future of in-person vs. online-only events. Here are some of their findings:**

## Likelihood that types of events will occur regularly in the future

Global virtual events with live video feeds from headliners speaking about big issues	62.3%
Virtual event designed to foster community and share thought leadership among defined groups of experts specialists	58.9%
Member only virtual networking gatherings designed to connect businesses with prospects	46.8%

(Source: [The 611 Group](#) in their June 2020 whitepaper, The Future of the In-Person Business Economy: Summary of Wave 1 Findings).

# Takeaways

## Stay Focused on Your Meeting Goals:

- Create a Game Plan
  - The surprise speaker should be prepared beforehand with background on the purpose of the meeting, who the meeting is for, at what point they're joining the meeting, and the message they'll convey.
  - Properly show the talent how they can join and practice the timing of when they should join the meeting.
- Make sure the talent fits the narrative being presented to the group.
- Ensure the group is focused after the meeting with a goal. The speaker will help them remember the meeting, but that shouldn't be all the group remembers.

# Entertainment

**Virtual engagements help people feel connected, even while they're social distancing, and provide a happy distraction.**

## Saturday Night Live at Home

- Episodes of SNL's 45th season included everything you'd expect from SNL, just at home. Everything was done virtually by the celebrity hosts, musicians, and SNL cast.

## Disney Family Singalong

- During a worrisome and challenging time, ABC wanted to lift people's spirits by broadcasting celebrities, such as Ariana Grande, singing popular Disney classics. Families were encouraged to sing along and just have fun.



## Takeaways

### How to Make your Entertainment a Fan Favorite:

- Encourage Engagement
  - Create a share factor. Seeing other people sing along to an interactive event that you're a part of helps everyone feel like we're in this together, from the cast to the audience.
- Foster Inclusivity
  - Hold an event anybody can join and participate in. Make sure captions and sign language options are available, as well.

# Best Practices Checklist

- **Create a clear marketing strategy** before, during, and after the event. This should include the right balance of communication about your event to potential attendees.
- As part of your communication strategy, **ensure that attendees have all the information needed leading up the event**. If changes occur, notify them at least 24 hours in advance.
- Create anticipation by sharing some behind-the-scenes moments through social.
- If an online event needs to be **postponed, cancelled, or rescheduled**, provide clear instructions and a new date for the livestream.
- **Create a waiting room experience on the day of the event so people can start joining in.** Take this time to establish the agenda to attendees before the formal start of the event.
- **Attendees love to get involved.** Add a level of engagement that makes sense for your event type, whether it's a poll or a sing-a-long. If you're allowing questions, make sure this is communicated at the start of the event.
- **Be ready for anything.** Sometimes there are technical issues, rescheduling needs, cancelations by guests, etc. Address this as early as you can and work with your team to resolve them quickly and effectively.
- **If you have special guests, make sure they have all the necessary information ahead of time.** Choose a moderator to introduce speakers and make sure they stay on topic and on time.
- Once an event is over, be sure to **send a recap and any additional resources**.

## **Get In Touch**

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WME Speakers brings world-class talent directly to you. Our high-profile speakers cover a wide range of industries and topics and are available for your upcoming digital or in-person event.

Find out more about how to get started. Reach out to us via  
[contact@wmespeakersbeta.com](mailto:contact@wmespeakersbeta.com).

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