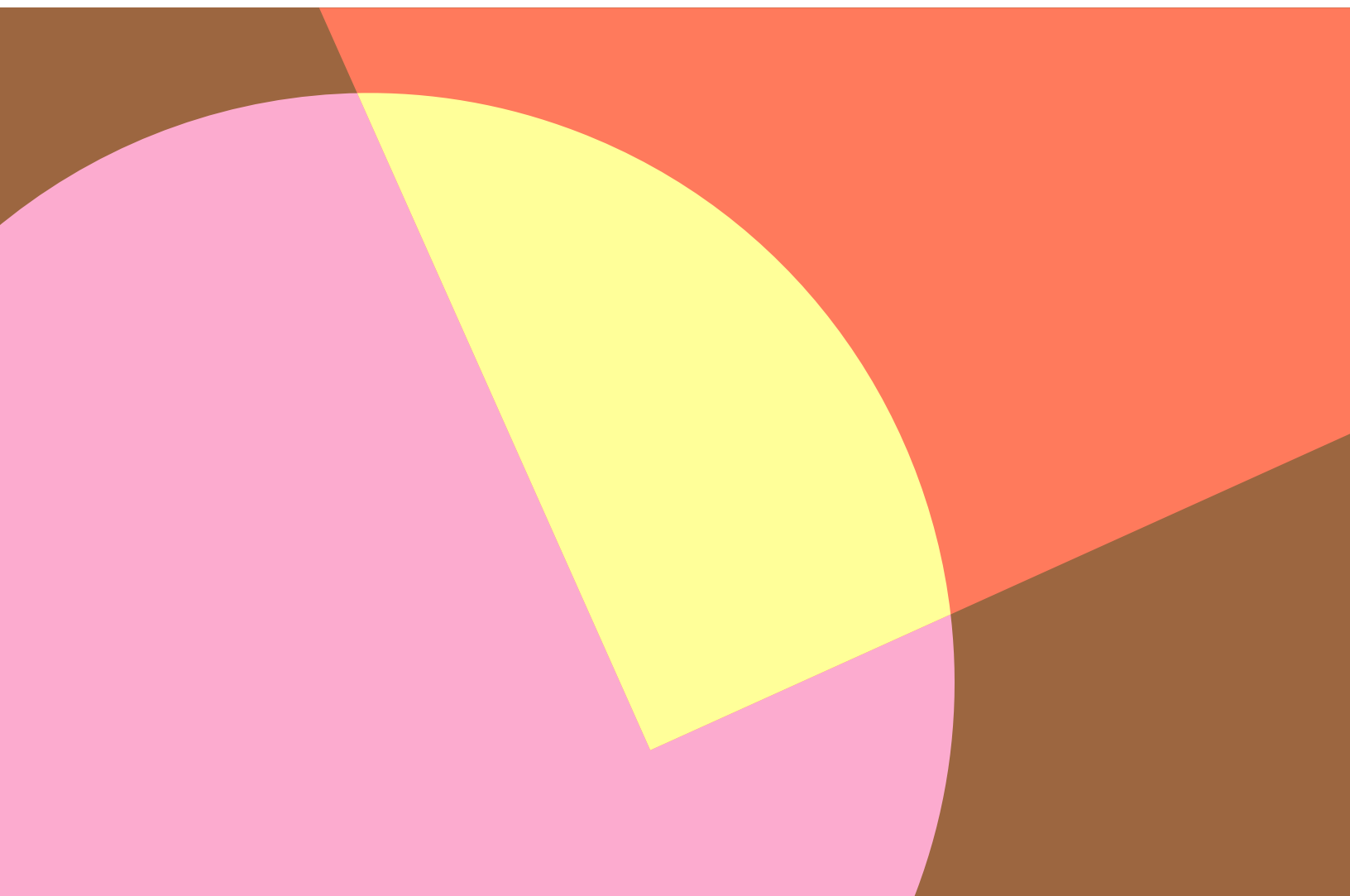


# How to Create Seriously Impressive Hybrid Events

A Guide to Building, Hosting & Rocking IRL + URL Events



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## About Splash

Splash is a next-generation event marketing platform designed to help teams build and host virtual, in-person, and hybrid events. Splash empowers everyone in an organization to easily market, measure, and scale their own branded, connected, and compliant event programs in ways that were previously impossible. Learn more on our [product tour](#).

# Introduction

The unknown can be a scary thing.

Case in point: When the pandemic first canceled all in-person events, having to learn everything we could about virtual events seemed like an impossible task some days.

But marketers, true to form, not only got through — they rocked the change.

So we should all breathe a little more easily knowing that a new kind of event is coming to town: hybrid events.

Before the pandemic, hybrid events weren't that common, universally speaking. But that's going to change quickly. In fact, a 2020 Splash survey showed that 79% of event professionals are planning for hybrid events as a part of their events strategy moving forward.

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**79%** of event professionals say hybrid events will be part of their events strategy moving forward.

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The reason: As the events industry continues evolving, so too must marketers. And without hybrid events, marketers risk missing out on their event goals.

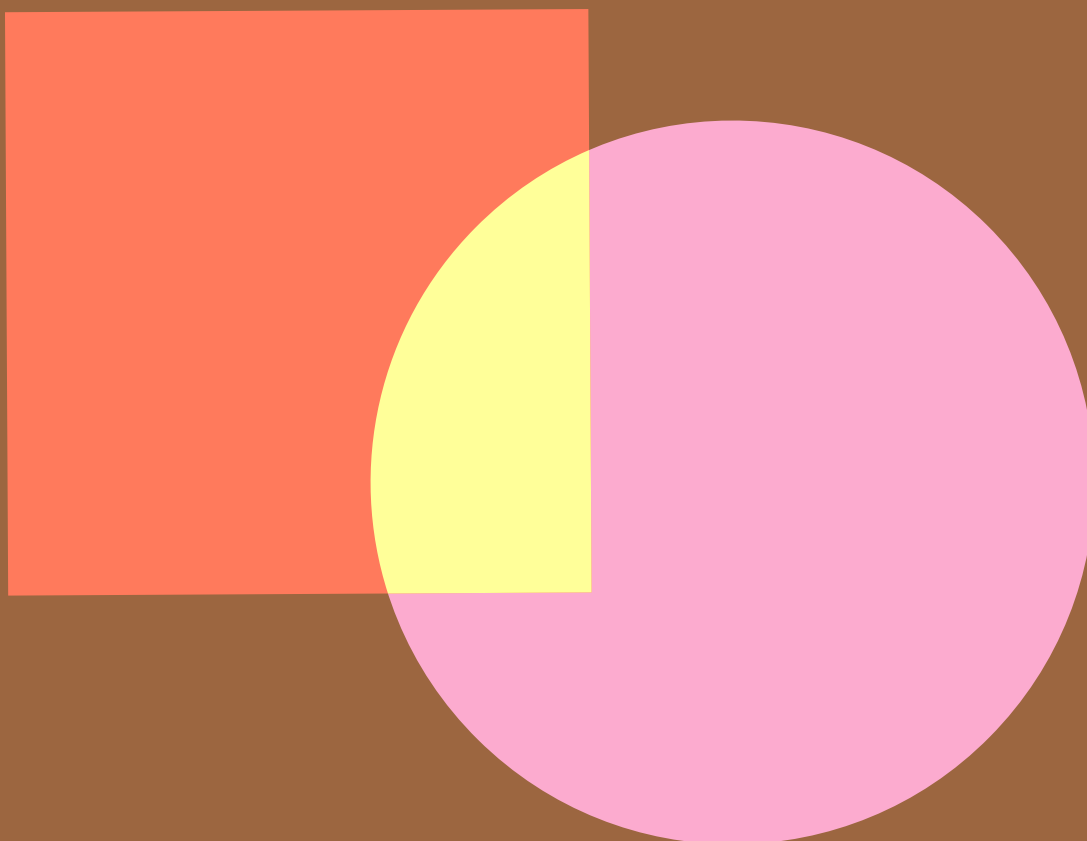
Sure, we're all eager to get back to a place where handshakes are acceptable and sharing stories over cocktails isn't dangerous. But not everyone will jump at the chance to reunite at in-person events. Hybrid events, on the other hand, let marketers reach everyone, whether they're more comfortable attending virtually or in person.

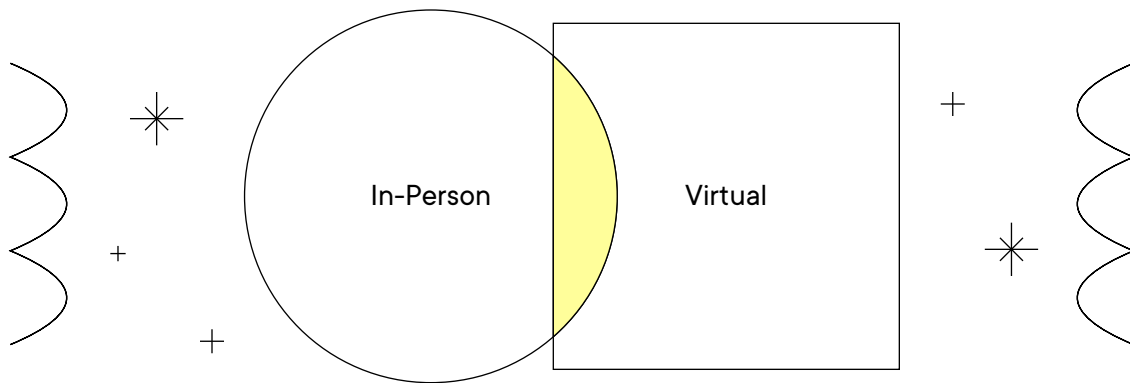
In this guide, you'll get a complete look at what it means to host hybrid events — from keeping best practices in mind to avoiding challenges to preparing now, even if hybrid events aren't on your radar quite yet.





# What is a Hybrid Event?





Hybrid events are part virtual, part in person. With the right strategy, nearly any type of business event can be transformed into a hybrid version: training events, product launches, field events, and even VIP events.

But remember: Offering both in-person and virtual options for your events doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing thing. There are situations where you might only host portions of your event virtually.

Like every other decision you make for your event marketing strategy, first make sure a hybrid approach makes sense.

The first question you should always ask: Will a hybrid events approach help me reach my goals?

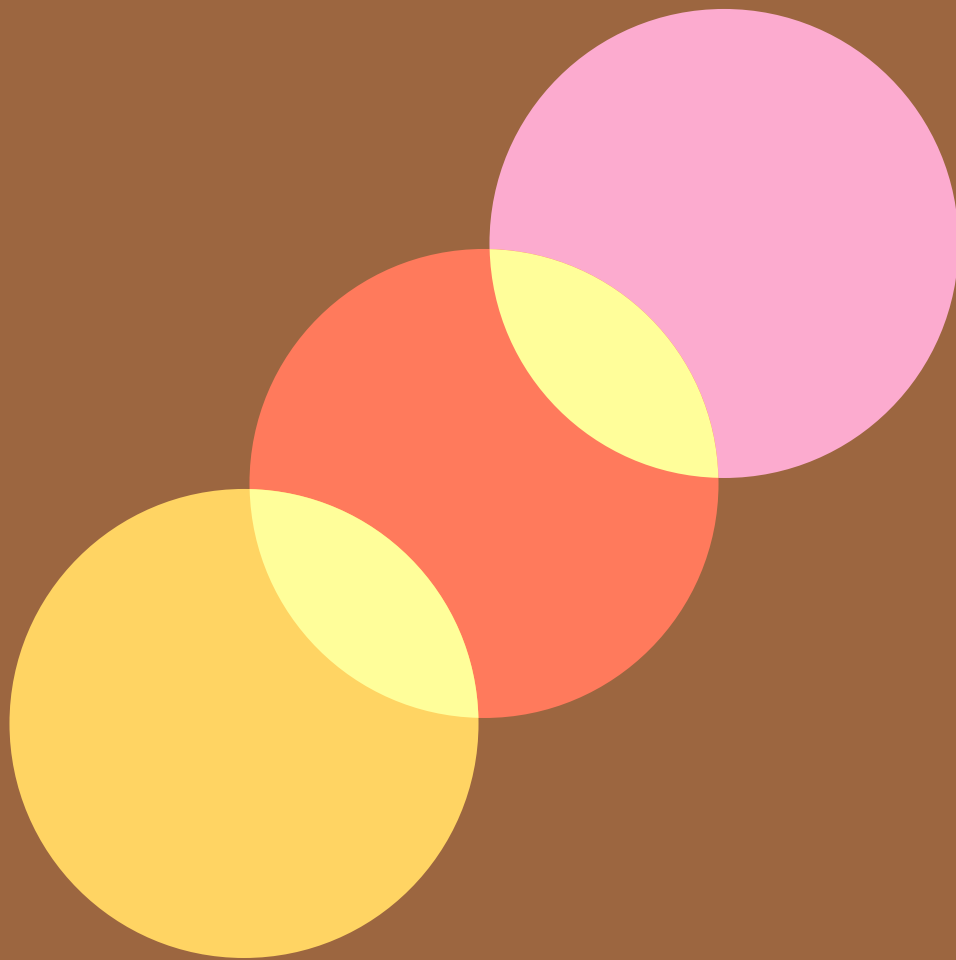


Map out your event marketing calendar, noting both your target audience and goals. Then, identify any dependencies should you choose a hybrid approach.





# Benefits of Hybrid Events



When Salesforce began live streaming parts of their annual Dreamforce conference, they wanted to give people who couldn't attend in person a taste of their massive event. Since then, they've continued to add more and more virtual components to the event, and each year (pre-pandemic, of course), their attendance rates rose.

Coachella, the music and arts festival that hosts 250,000 people, sold out in three days before they started live streaming the event in 2011. When they launched ticket sales for the 2012 festival, they sold out in three *hours*.

If these huge event programs can nail the hybrid event format, so can you. And if the results you just read aren't enough, here's more food for thought.

### **You Can Reach More People**

Just because Las Vegas found a way to host in-person events way before any other city doesn't mean people are running back to the Strip. And even when in-person events are deemed safe more broadly, that doesn't necessarily mean every single person you invite to your event will be ready to attend.

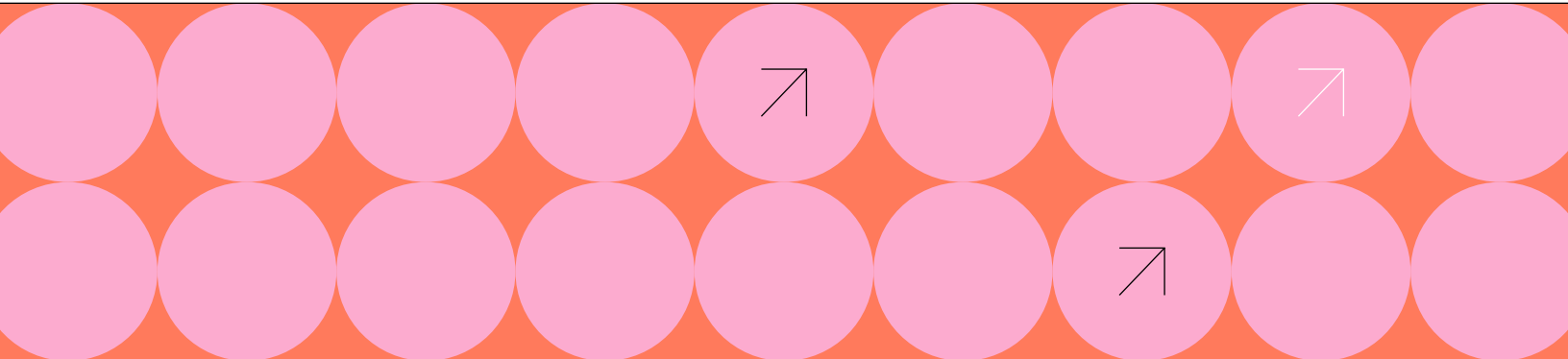
A hybrid events approach gives your audience the option to attend virtually or in person. This lets them choose whatever they're most comfortable with — and it also helps you reach the most amount of registrants possible since they're not limited by attending in person.



## You Can Connect with New Leads & Prospects

A hybrid events approach also helps you connect with people who may not necessarily be on your initial invite list, but who may benefit from seeing parts of your event.

For example, think about the events you host for current customers, like user groups. These can be really powerful sales enablement tools. Prospects want to know you can support them in various ways. By giving them access to a virtual event option at one of your user groups, you're showing them what they could expect as a customer and boosting their confidence in a purchase decision.



## You Can Increase Your Event ROI

We all know how much investment is required for in-person events. And sure, you'll still have in-person attendees at a hybrid event. But with a portion of your attendees tuning in virtually, you have the potential to cut costs significantly.

If all that's not enough, your attendees will appreciate the flexibility and customization you're offering with a hybrid event — and positive experiences result in a positive return.

### **You Can Find New Event Sponsors**

Hybrid events can drive growth in other ways too. They're an opportunity to connect with people who may not be your target consumer, but who could play an important role in your future events — potential sponsors, for example.

Think about the last time you, as a marketer, considered an event sponsorship. Along with event goals, attendee demographics, and financial commitment, you likely also thought about the event overall, its vibe, and how it aligns with your company's mission — outside of what you can find on the event prospectus.

Attending the event in question is the best way to find out if there's a mutual fit. Offering a virtual option is a cost-effective way to share your in-person event with those who could be potential revenue streams.

### **You Can Reduce Event-Related Risk**

Things outside our control happen all the time, and marketers know this better than anyone. From a budget cut to a WiFi outage to a global pandemic, extenuating circumstances force event marketers to master backup plans.

Imagine that you had invested a large amount of time, resources, and money into planning an in-person event, only to have it unpredictably canceled. (Oh wait — none of us have to imagine that.)

A hybrid approach lets us pivot between in-person and virtual-only events should the need arise. When you have the foundation and requirements built for both experiences, you can more easily adapt without having to start from scratch.

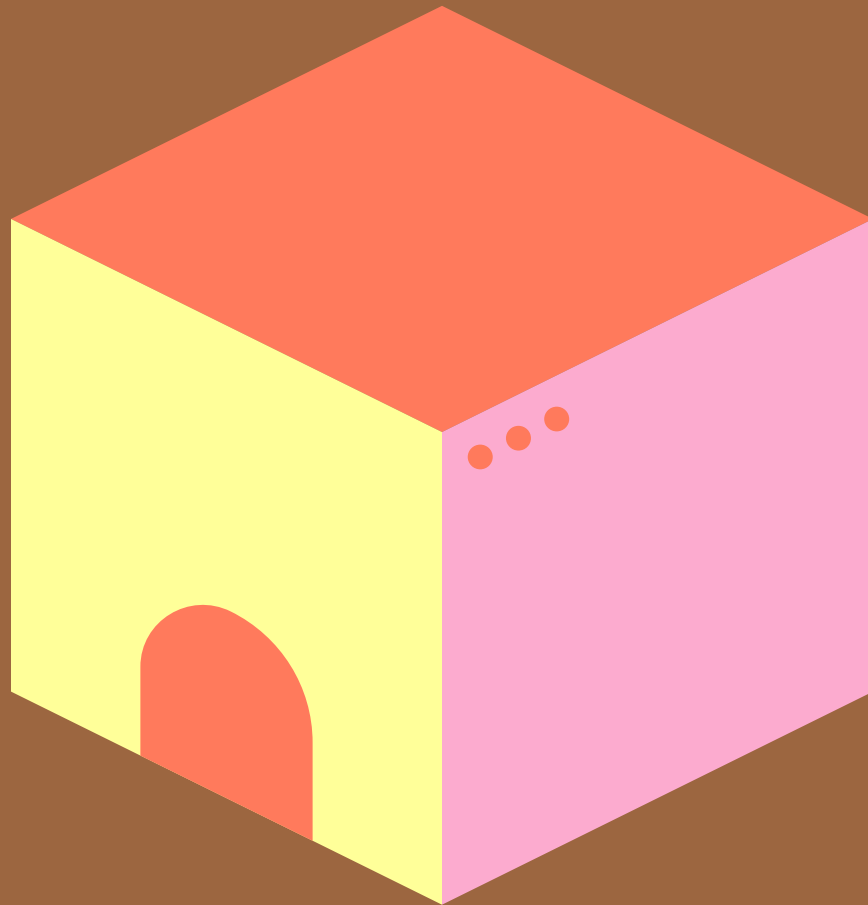
### **You Can Reduce Your Carbon Footprint**

“Going green” isn’t just a temporary campaign anymore. It’s a permanent movement that’s expected by your company’s customers, prospects, employees, and stakeholders. These sustainability practices should also be integrated into event marketing efforts.

And hybrid events support this. With a portion of your attendees joining virtually, you’re ultimately reducing production and shipping needs, staff and attendee travel, and even the single-use plastics used at most events.



# Best Practices for Building and Hosting Hybrid Events



In the evolution of our new normal, these part-live, part-virtual events are set to skyrocket in popularity.

And even though we might not be ready to host a hybrid event tomorrow, we need to start thinking about what they might look like. After all, you don't want to go through yet another overnight pivot, right?

So if you're not sure where to start, this is a good place. Let's dive into seven best practices that'll help you build and host effective hybrid events.

### **Make Your Attendees' Options Clear**

The fact is that, even when events are deemed safe, some people will dismiss invitations to in-person events. So the last thing you want is for your audience to assume your event is only in person. The same goes for the opposite. Some people will be over virtual events and itching to find their first in-person event, so you don't want them to think your event is only virtual.

This means you need to be clear in all of your event touchpoints that your attendees have options. Let them know on the event page, in the invitations, and in the social promotions that they can attend either live or virtually. And most importantly, make sure you capture their attendance preference in the registration form, so you can plan properly.

### **Think about the Virtual Experience First**

Your virtual audience will never have the attention span or level of engagement that your in-person audience has, which is why you have to consider the virtual experience first in all of your decisions.

This includes things that directly impact attendee actions, like activities, networking, breakout discussions, and Q&A. It also includes things that impact the overall experience or vibe: room layout, speakers, and event flow, to name a few.

Once on-site, there's one simple thing you can do to set the event up for success for both audiences. During your event introduction, acknowledge the virtual audience. Look at the them, welcome them (along with the in-person attendees, of course), and set expectations so both audiences know how this will all work.

### **Keep Your Hosts & Panelists On-Site**

No matter the event format, your hosts and panelists are everything. They should hype up and engage your audience. And you should keep them on-site.

Having your hosts and panelists on a stage will create a more authentic experience for all audiences. If it's impossible for any of your hosts to attend in person, schedule a dry run so everyone knows their roles in how the event will play out.



**For your virtual attendees to engage, they need to interact through sense of sight, sound, and touch. Give them opportunities to become participants, not passive consumers.**

Daniela Plattner

Splash Community Leader

## Encourage Connection & Collaboration

Creating connections and collaborating with others isn't just for in-person attendees anymore. In fact, you should try to give your virtual attendees as many of the same opportunities you're able to give your in-person attendees. Here are a few ideas:

- **Enable a chat functionality** within your virtual event platform so virtual attendees can talk to one another during the event. Have someone from your team on standby who can ask questions and get conversations going.
- **Play matchmaker to connect attendees** one-on-one, no matter where they're watching. If you have two attendees, for example, who could benefit from a conversation with each other, introduce them. Just because someone is in person and the other is virtual doesn't mean they can't network too.
- **Make sure everyone can see each other.** Virtual attendees should be able to see the stage (hosts and presenters) and any presentation deck. If they can also see at least some of the in-person audience, that's great. It's also a good idea to display virtual attendees on a projector, so in-person attendees don't forget they're there.
- **Use social media to create conversations** among attendees, no matter where they're located. (Plus, it'll also draw the attention of those who aren't there.) If you're using a hashtag, for example, make that known verbally and on the presentation deck so all attendees know it.



## Use a Reliable Event Platform

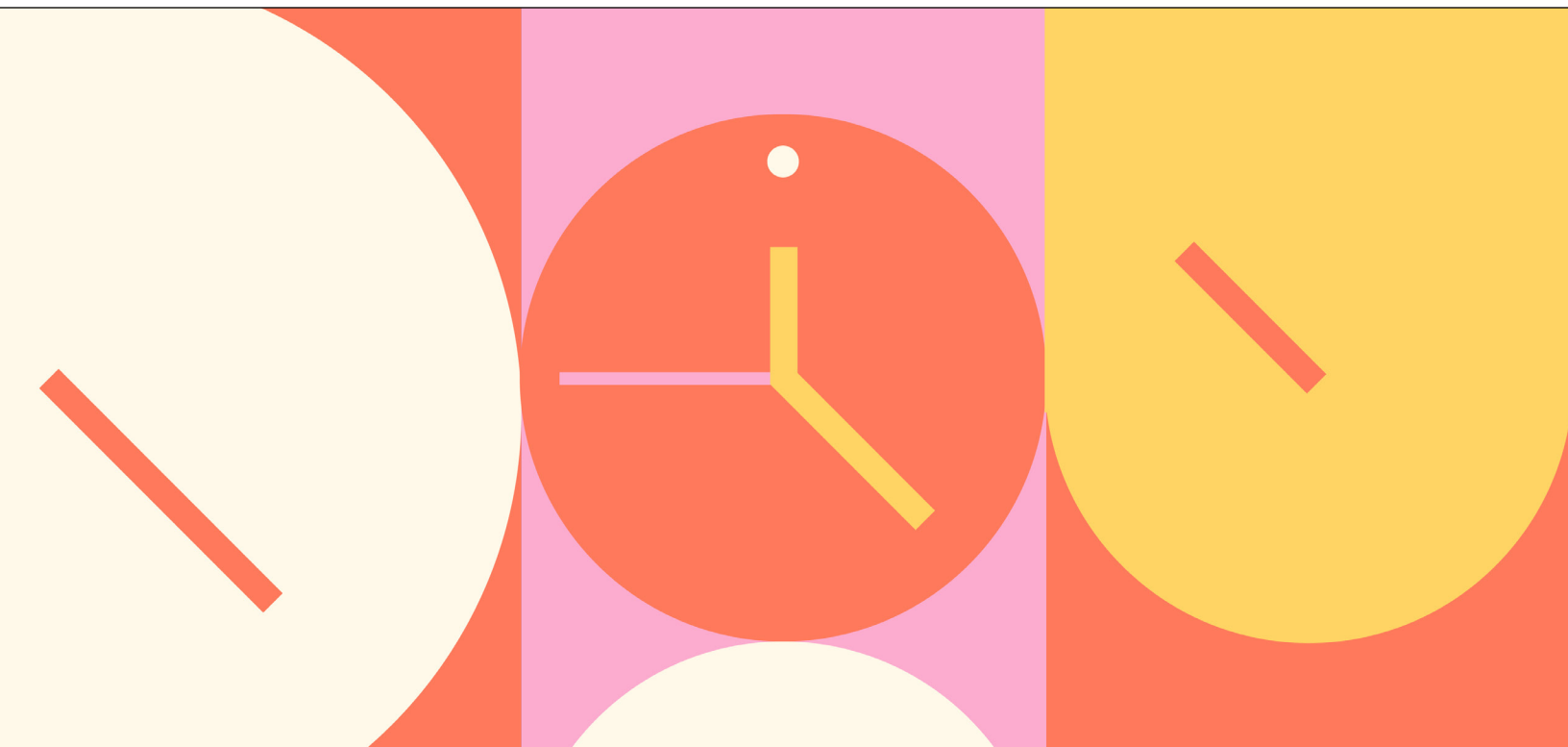
During a hybrid event, there's nothing worse for virtual attendees than feeling like a second-class citizen. That's why you need a reliable event platform that gives both the in-person and virtual experiences just that: an experience.

Think about one of your pre-pandemic in-person events. The event page probably included stunning, branded design elements woven through sections like agenda, speaker, and resources. When people landed on the registration form, it was equally branded and equally beautiful. And when attendees showed up on-site, they were greeted with branded signage, materials, and swag.

Believe it or not, you can still create this experience for your hybrid events — and not just for those attending in person. You can (and should) create an incredible event page for both types of attendees that drives them to a branded, thorough registration form. And with new embed functionality, you can place your Zoom event room directly into your event page so what your virtual attendees see is a fully branded experience.

## Accommodate Various Times Zones

One of the best things about virtual and hybrid events is that you can reach so many more people. The downside: Time zones can make things complicated, even if you're only targeting people in the US. There are a few things you can consider:



- **Pick a time that works** for the majority of your target audience. If most of your audience is located in New York, for example, you might decide to host your event around what's ideal for Eastern Time.
- **Host your event more than once**, accommodating ideal times for various time zones. If you have large audiences in San Francisco, New York, and London, you might decide to host your event at three different times.
- **Offer your event as an on-demand session.** You may decide to do this no matter what, and that's great. Make sure your content is evergreen enough to make an on-demand version relevant for a while.

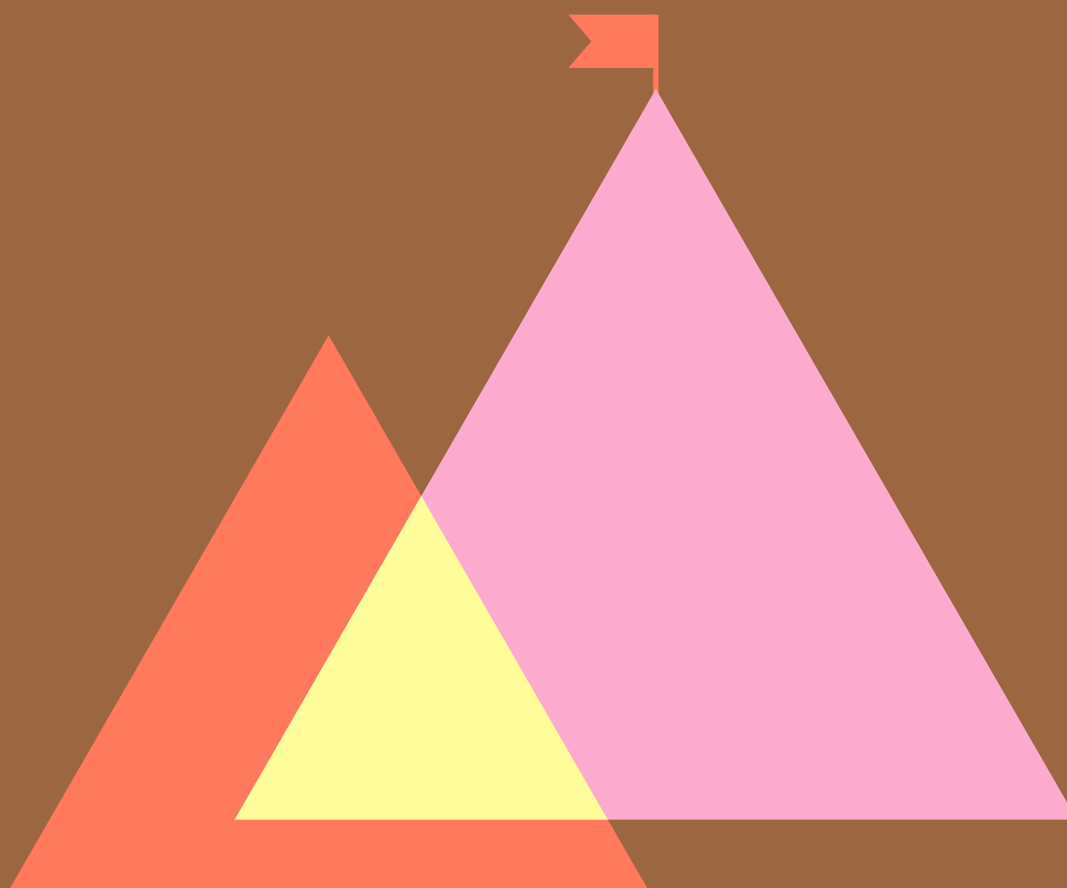
## **Dedicate Support to Your Virtual Attendees**

Let's be very clear. Your virtual attendees may feel left out during the event if you don't give them a thoughtful experience or acknowledge their presence. They see hosts and panelists speaking to in-person attendees, and they want a comparable level of engagement.

Luckily, there's an easy way to solve this challenge. By dedicating someone from your team to support virtual attendees, they get the attention they need and have someone they can go to with questions or feedback. Plus, this person can help jump-start conversations and networking in the chat.



# Overcoming Hybrid Event Challenges

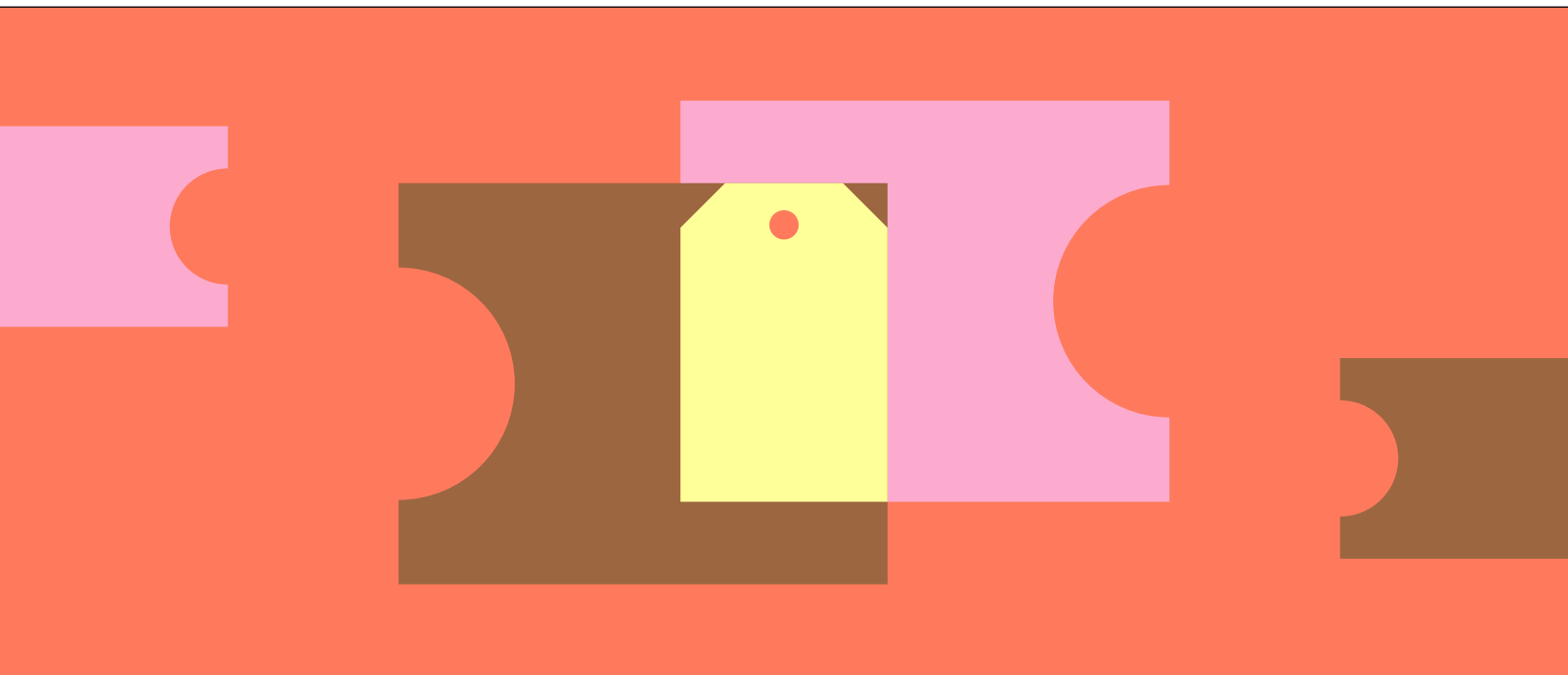


At this point, it's safe to say we've all been through a fair share of challenges. Whether or not you were comfortable with virtual events pre-pandemic, the quick shift was — if nothing more — a shock to the system.

Since most of us are likely to host a hybrid event, let's avoid going through that shock again by talking about a very important topic: hybrid event challenges.

### **Defining a Ticket Pricing Strategy**

When our industry turned to virtual events, many marketers chose to offer virtual events at no cost. Webinars have historically been free events (with exceptions), so it makes sense. But in-person events didn't always follow that same strategy, so this leaves us with a very important question: How do we price an event that is part-live and part-virtual?



This is a complicated question because hybrid events can take many forms. Even though you're hosting one event, it's always going to be two separate experiences. (This also means you might find it difficult to justify one price for the entire thing.)

### **Things That Might Affect Your Pricing Strategy:**

- **On-site costs:** If you have on-site costs, like food and beverage or venue costs, you may charge only in-person attendees to offset those costs.
- **Shipping costs:** If you have a mixology class in person, for example, and you also send kits to virtual attendees, shipping could affect how you charge.
- **Content attendees can access:** If you're engaging a well-known speaker, for example, you may decide what you're offering is significant enough to charge both audiences.
- **Whether people can opt in to parts of your event:** If attendees can build their own agenda, it might make sense to separate your charges.
- **Who is attending:** If you're hosting existing customers and new prospects, you might offer discounts or complimentary access for certain audiences.
- **If you have sponsors:** When sponsors take part in your event or advertise on your virtual platform, you may not need to charge attendees as much.

Our best recommendation is to consider various pricing tiers. Or you could let your attendees build their own package. Just remember: The more pricing tiers and options, the more complicated it will be to manage.

Of course, you may decide it's best for your company and goals to not charge for your event at all, which eliminates this challenge altogether.

### Meeting the Needs of Both Audiences

As mentioned earlier, hosting a hybrid event means you're running one event with two separate experiences, so being able to accommodate both audiences can be tricky. And although the content may be the same for both audiences, the way you present it won't be.

**There are four things in particular you can do to support both audiences:**

- **Test and test again with a reliable platform:** If your technology doesn't work properly, your virtual audience will inevitably feel like they're missing out, or worse, that they don't matter. And one of the main rules of hybrid events is to ensure your virtual attendees don't feel like second-class citizens.

- **Use a platform that prioritizes engagement features:** If you put your virtual attendees in a basic Zoom room or disable features like chat and Q&A, there's nothing for those attendees to do other than listen. No one wants that.
- **Choose hosts and speakers who have charisma and are authentic to your audience:** Your hosts and speakers can be the difference between average and amazing events (no matter the format). Their energy can single-handedly hype up your audience and keep them engaged — so choose wisely.
- **Dedicate support to your virtual audience:** If you can swing it, have one or more team members online solely to support your virtual attendees. This person can help spark conversations and networking, and can be your attendees' go-to for any questions or feedback.

### Thinking All Events Should be Hybrid

When we can safely get back to in-person events, many marketers will be tempted by hybrid events. And we can't blame them. They get people together in the same room, while also reaching the people who don't want to meet in person yet.

But not every event should be hybrid. As with every other marketing program, the format you choose should come down to your goals. If having everyone in one room (either in person or virtually) is important — or if your content won't translate well with two separate audiences — then it's time to rethink hybrid.



# Should Your Event Go Hybrid or Not?

Event	Try it Hybrid	Pass on Hybrid
Customer appreciation lunch	—	★
Panel discussion	★	—
Product demo	★	—
Training event	★	—
Field marketing event	★	—
User group	★	—
VIP event, like a ballgame suite	—	★
Internal event	★	—
Recruiting event	★	—
Workshop or hands-on session	★	—

## Connecting Virtual & In-Person Attendees

In person, your attendees will naturally start networking. Virtually, there are plenty of ways you can connect attendees with each other. But what about integrating your in-person and virtual attendees together? Here are a few ways you can get everyone to join forces:

- **Be a matchmaker:** No matter where people are watching, attendees want to network with others like them. You may have one attendee in person and another online who work in similar industries and could benefit from chatting. Make the introduction.
- **Get visual:** Make sure your virtual attendees can see the stage (including hosts and presenters) and the presentation deck. Bonus points if they can see (and feel part of) your crowd. If you can, display virtual attendees on a projector, so in-person attendees know they're there too.
- **Leverage social:** This is a universal place where attendees, no matter where they are, can create conversations. Use a hashtag, let all of your attendees know what that is, and start generating FOMO for those who aren't attending.

## Registering Everyone on One Tech

Before the pandemic, you probably knocked out an event page that featured beautiful, branded design elements. When people landed on the registration form, it was equally branded and equally stunning. And when attendees showed up on-site, they were greeted with branded signage, materials, and swag.

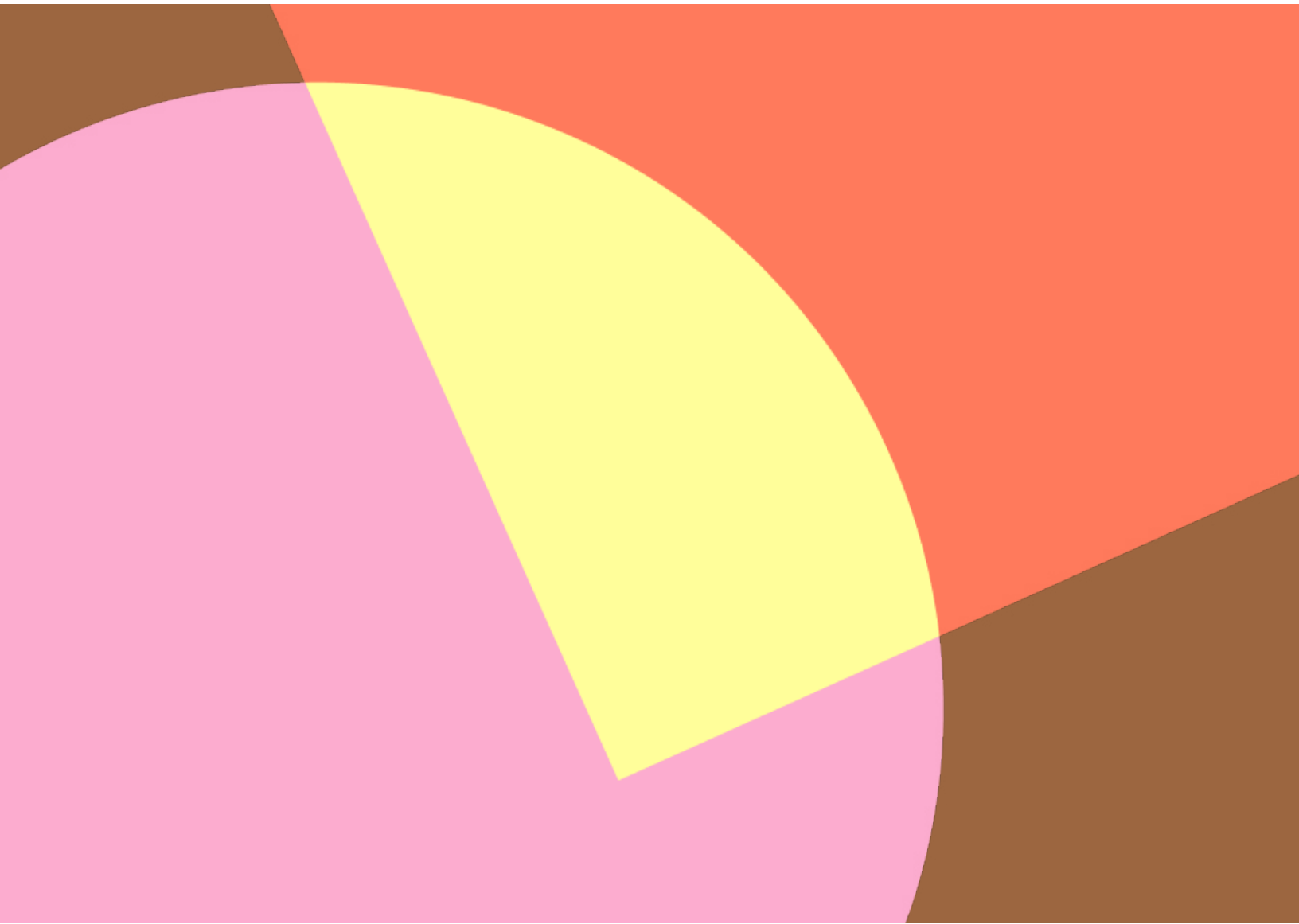
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**78%** According to a Splash survey, 78% of event marketers are using traditional webinar tools for their virtual events — but these weren't built for our agile needs today.

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What if I told you that you can still create this experience for your hybrid events? It's true. You can (and should) create an incredible event page for both in-person and online attendees that drives them to a branded, thorough registration form.

And with embed functionality, you can place your Zoom event room directly into your event page so what your virtual attendees see is a fully branded experience.



**Take charge of your  
hybrid events today.**

[Learn more.](#)

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