

Virtual events

A primer for marketing and event teams

Why we made this guide...

To give you our answers to many of your virtual event questions.

CGI Interactive has been designing presentations and event creative for over 30 years. We've evolved through many technology shifts and trends, and lately we've been hearing a lot of the same virtual event questions come up again and again. We've also been seeing many of the same challenges causing a virtual event to miss the mark or lack the engagement that was hoped for.

Planning an event of any kind is stressful so let's see if we can remove some of the barriers to making your event a success for you - and engaging for your attendees.

Enjoy!

Feels repetitive.

Inconsistent branding.

Presenters are siloed.

How do I make my presentation more engaging?

Where do we start?

How do I deal with multitasking?

Lacks energy.

How do deal with content?

Poor video quality.

We have so much content to communicate.

Where do we start?

Our humor is falling flat.

How do I know when to stop for my presentation?

My presentation feels very static.

What is the ideal length for my presentation?

Bad audio?

Reinforce your event goals with each decision

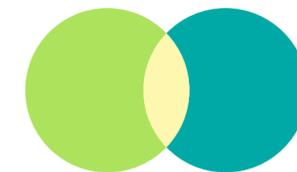
There are so many types of events, even within a single organization. The question is, how do you make sure that the decisions you make while planning your event provide the opportunities to reach your event goals.



Choose a platform



Brand your event



Create a content strategy



Prepare to deliver

Choose a platform

A platform is the virtual backbone.

Management tools are
important, but not at the
expense of the experience.

Choose a platform

As you explore platforms, ask these questions.



Customization

How much can you make the platform look like you?



Exploration

What is it like for the attendee to explore the event?



Engagement

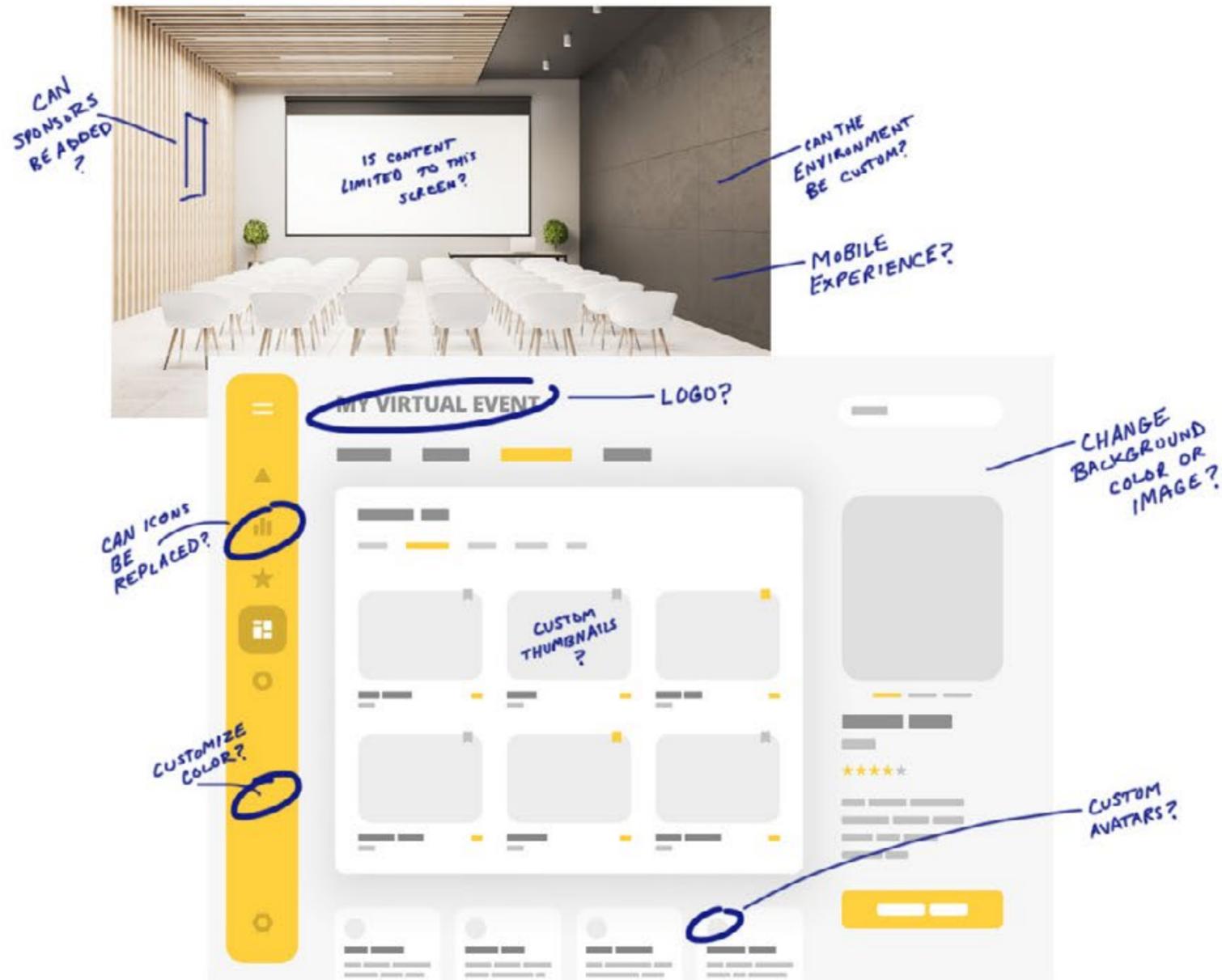
How does the platform promote active participation?

You want a platform that gives you options.

We've seen it many times. Our team is asked to come up with creative ways to brand an event and engage an audience, but platform limitations instantly eliminate the number of options. While management capabilities will play an important part in your decision, make sure you don't sacrifice the attendee experience.



Attend events that use your top platform choices. It's the best way to understand the audience experience.



Customization

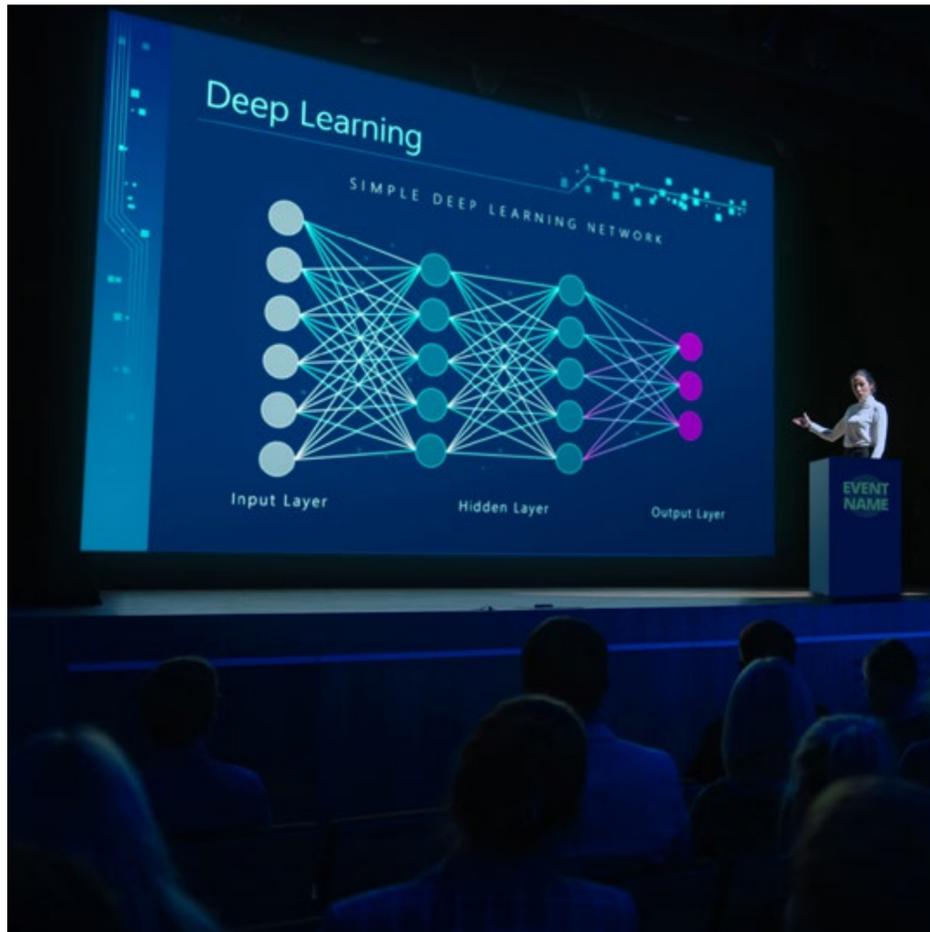
How much can you make the platform look like you?

How do you make your event experience memorable, especially when everyone is using similar platforms? It is important to see how much a platform can be tailored to your event and your brand.

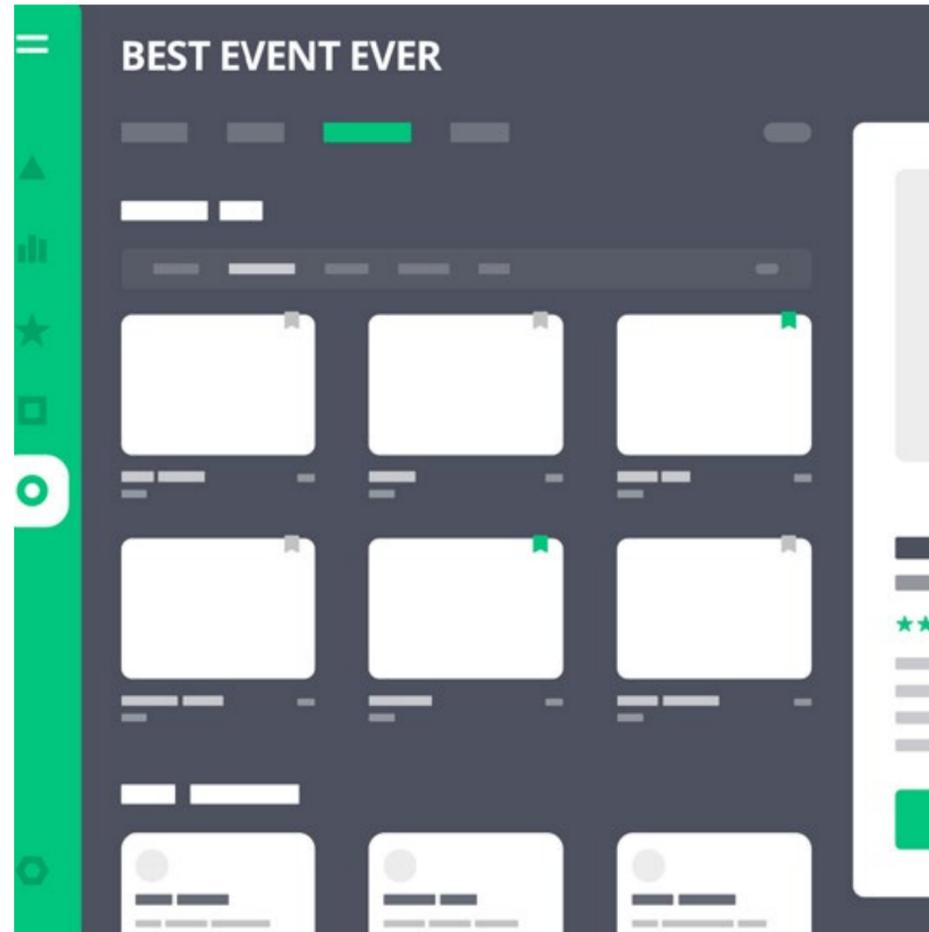
Platform customization can range from just adding a logo to rebranding the interface. We've found that many of the platforms out there hold their cards close and pitch a generic interface over showing example events. So, it can be challenging to understand how much you can customize. Ask to see examples that show how flexible the customization of the platform can be.

Customization

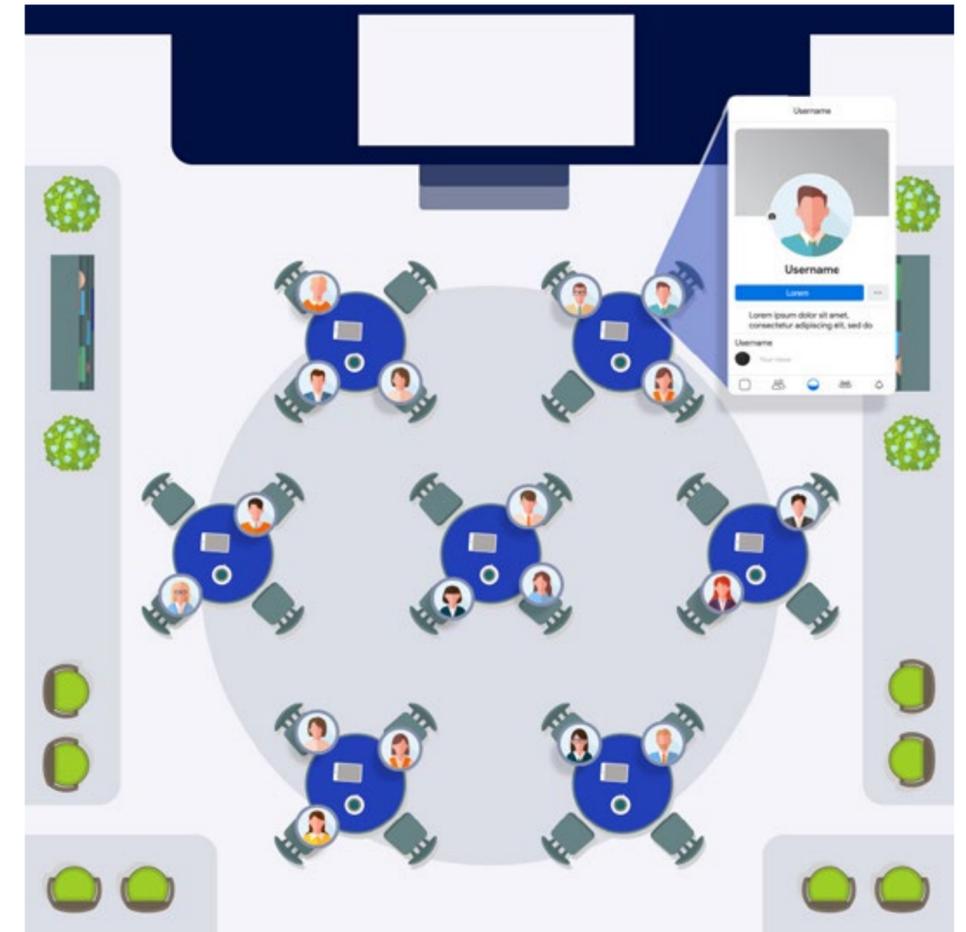
Many approaches and combinations.



3D environment



Simple interface



Networking

Exploration

What is it like for the attendee to explore the event?

Many events include a main stage, networking, breakout sessions, lounges, expo halls, and more. While these are great features, make sure the platform navigation is intuitive and the experience of exploring the event is interesting. As you move from page to page, do they all look the same? Is there any variety in the experience?

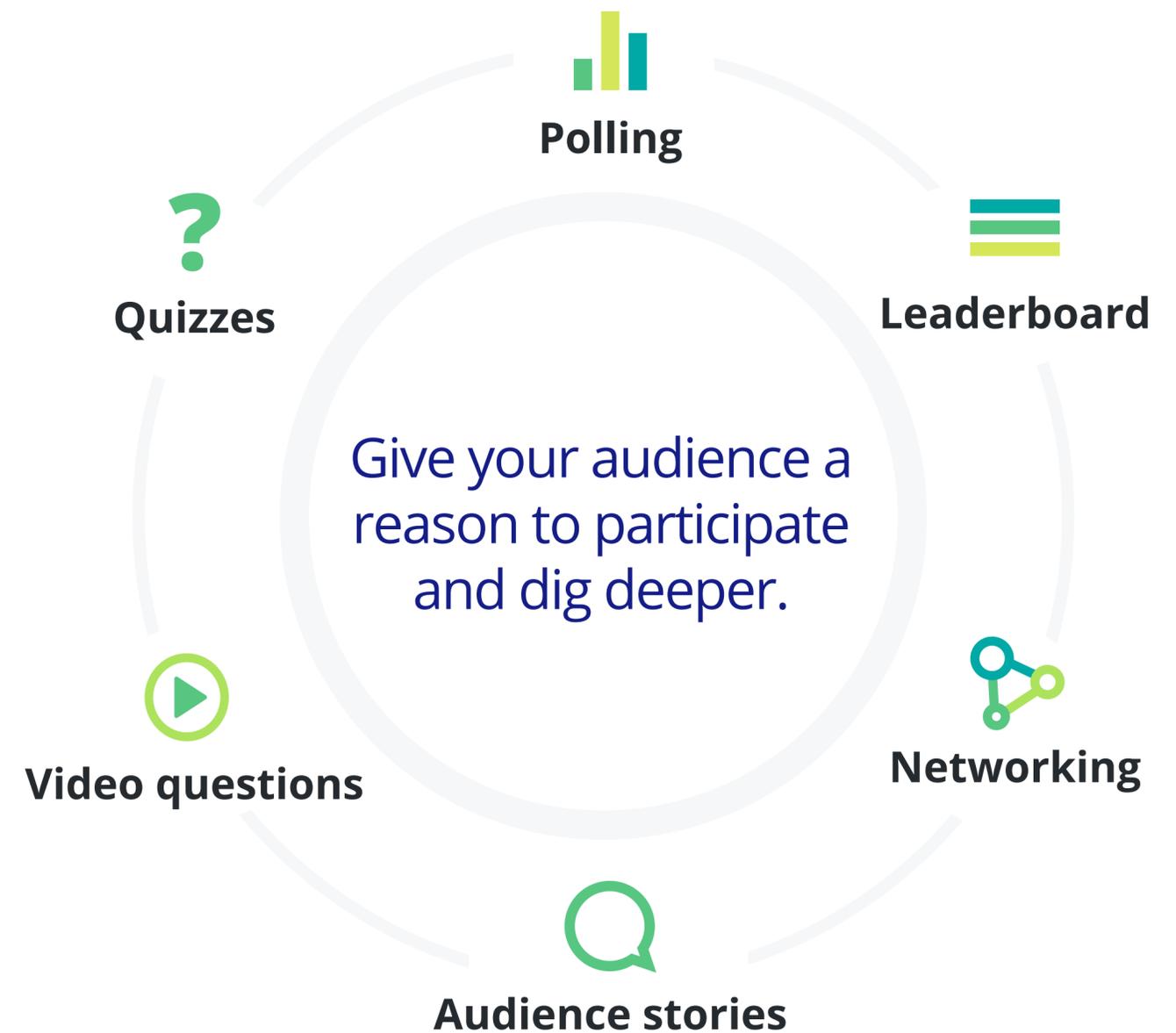
When viewing a session, there are many features that can be included. How distracting is the rest of the page? Are there ways to cross-link to related sessions? Can you include related assets for the attendee to explore?



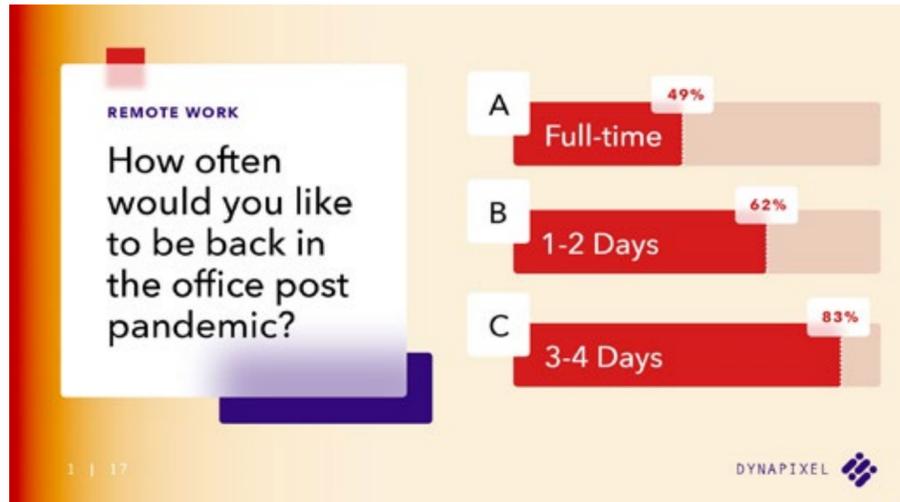
Engagement

How does the platform promote active participation?

Providing moments of interactive engagement is vital to keeping your audience tuned in. So, what options do you have that will include them in all the fun? Examine how interactivity works within a platform. If it doesn't execute these features well, they may go unused, robbing you of an opportunity to connect with your audience.

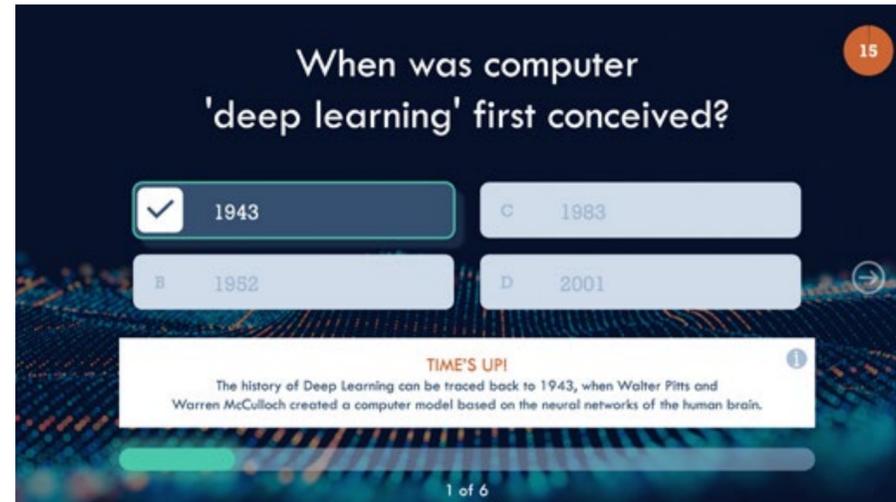


Engagement



Polling

A live poll is an excellent way to involve your audience. It can give you a pulse on their opinions and can even be used to shape your session if you are presenting live.



Quiz

A quiz can play many roles. You can use it to test knowledge and gain insights into your audience. It can also be a way to gamify your session, providing a good source of entertainment.



Leaderboard

You can gamify an event using a leaderboard and prizes that encourage your participants to visit virtual booths.

Engagement



Video questions

Have attendees submit video questions that you can share during live sessions. This is a great way to remind the audience that there is an audience!



Audience stories

Reach out to your attendees beforehand and gather customer stories you can include in your session. Some platforms allow you to turn on an audience member's video or audio to add them into your session. Pre-recording a customer is another option.



Networking

At an in-person event, attendees can meet new people to share ideas and learn. In a virtual event, how they network varies from platform to platform and can include social engagements like speed dating, lounges, and workshops.

“ One’s destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things. ”

- Henry Miller

Virtual events can help us explore new ways of engaging with an audience. Look for an event platform that gives you the ability to try new things and test new ways of bringing your event to life.

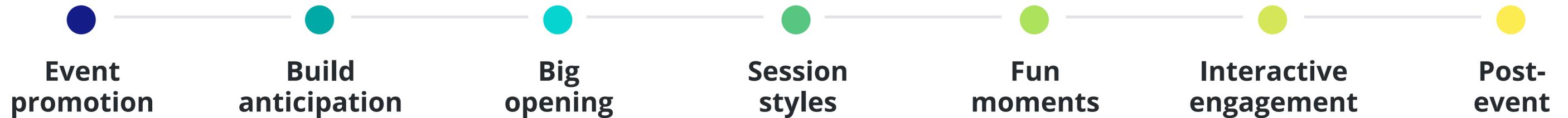
Brand your event

Create a cohesive, single event, not just a series of meetings.

**In a sea of virtual events,
be the memorable island
people talk about.**

A recognizable look for your event

Create an experience that is unmistakably you from start to finish.

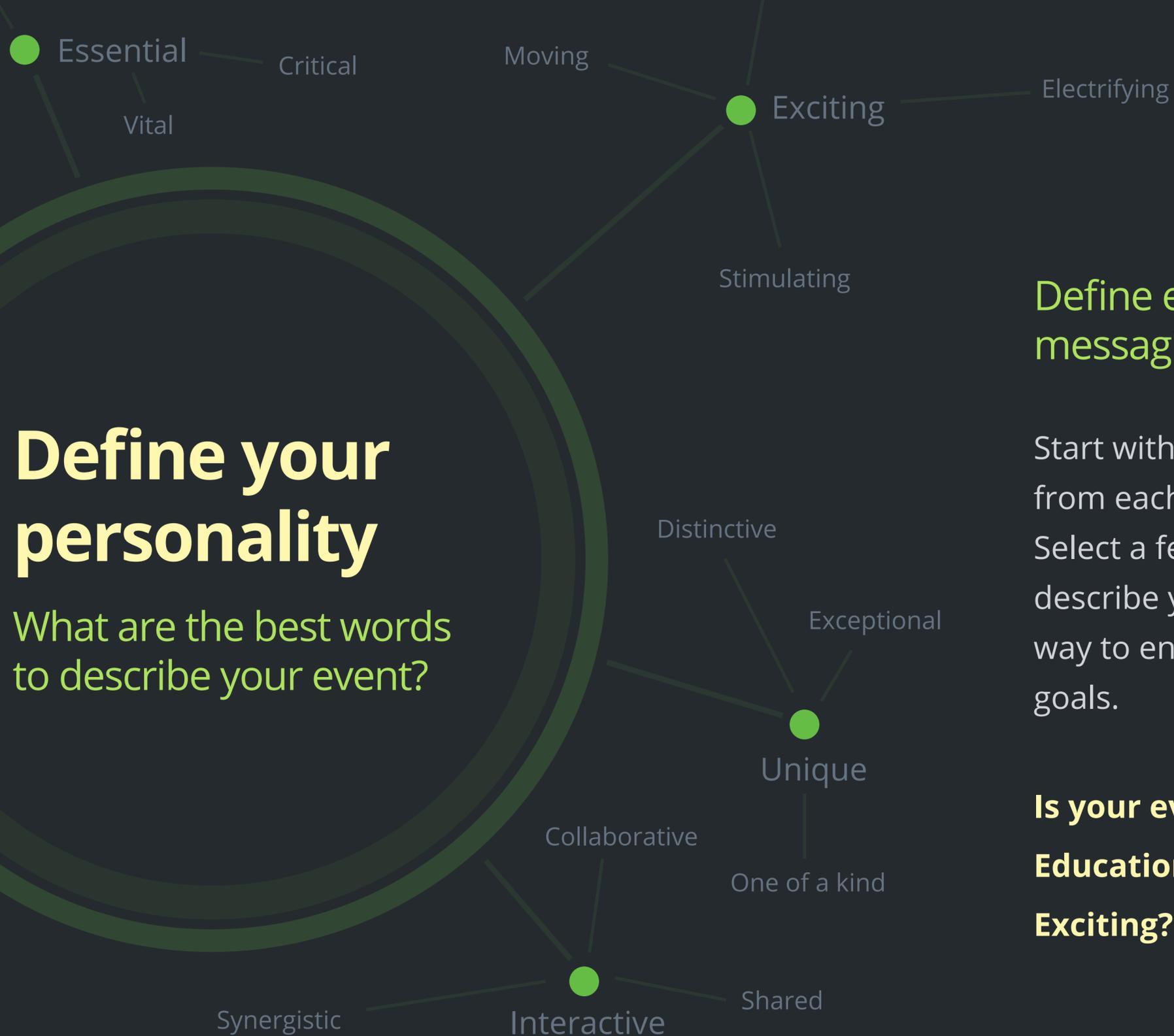


An event is a series of touchpoints that begins when you promote your event and continues through post-event follow up. To give your audience a professional, cohesive experience, aim for branding consistency across all of your

assets. There are many ways that you can use branding throughout your event. So, be sure to begin months in advance, in parallel with your communications plan.

Define your personality

What are the best words to describe your event?



Define event traits that your creative and messaging should be striving to reinforce.

Start with a list of words to describe your event. Web out from each of those words and write down related words. Select a few, carefully chosen words or phrases that best describe your event. You can now share this language as a way to ensure that all parties are driving towards the same goals.

**Is your event exclusive? Community-driven?
Educational? Inspirational?
Exciting? Flashy? Insightful? Enlightening?**

What can you brand?

Create an experience that is unmistakably you.



Promo videos

Build audience confidence and excitement by applying your brand to promotional videos and banners that build recognition and help them understand what they will gain by attending.



Landing page

Create a look for everything, from the style of speaker photos to the agenda and sessions. Then carry these design elements into the event platform and content to create a consistent look across your event.



Communications

Emails, banners, and social videos can all thread the brand together before, during, and after your event.

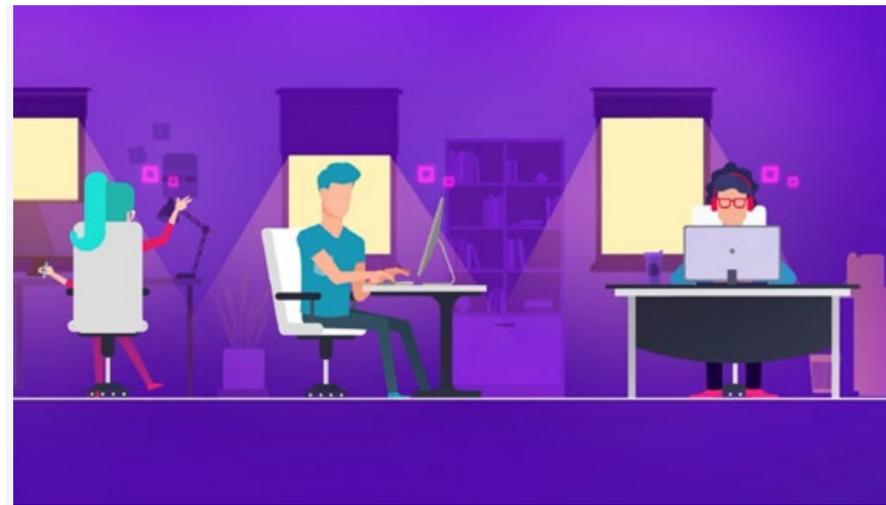
What can you brand?

Create an experience that is unmistakably you.



Platform interface

Attendees have seen your outreach and promos. Now it's time to make an impression. Push the platform to look unique for your event.



Intro / welcome video

Kick it off right. Ignite imaginations and set the tone and energy level with the music, motion, and excitement of an opening video.



Bumpers & interstitials

Just as in broadcast television, create branded interstitial videos that play between major transitions. These can just be fun animations or can provide updates on event information.

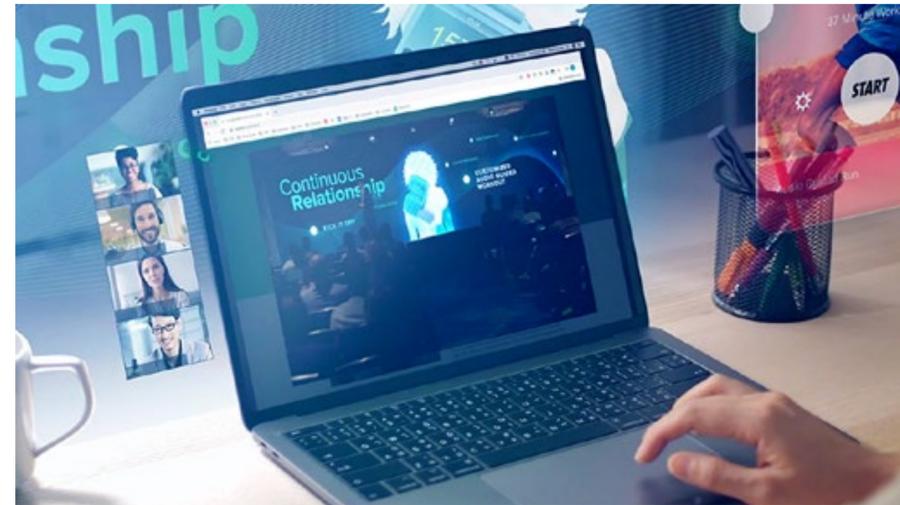
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Speaker layouts

Up your production game by creating interesting layouts for speakers and content. Use a mix of these layouts to create sessions that feel dynamic and keep your audience's interest.



Presentations

Carry your event branding through your presentations. A good brand will provide many possibilities so that the presentations look like they belong together but aren't all the same.



Presentation template

Not all presentations have the production level of the main stage, but they should still feel part of the same event. Give your teams a branded presentation template and slide layouts to work with as they build their breakout presentations.

So, you've got branding, what now?

If a brand exists, but no one knows about it, do you have a brand?

Depending on the size of your event, many teams of employees, partners, and sponsors are working hard to build out many of the pieces and sessions that go into event planning. It is important that these teams have an understanding of the brand and easy access to assets before they start building out content and visuals.



Review the brand with all teams



Provide easy access to a brand guide and assets



Create a consistency checklist



Define approval processes

**A brand is “what people say
when you’re not in the room.”**

- Jeff Bezos

If your event is new, decide what you want people to say about it and make it happen. If your event is recurring, try to get honest feedback to make sure that your event is what you want it to be.

Create a content strategy

Plan how to keep your audience tuned in and how to use your time wisely.

A memorable experience
takes more than a great
story.

The big picture

Put some stakes in the ground.



How do you break down the time you have with your audience? Well, there are a few considerations, and the answers to the below questions will serve as signposts to keep you on track

1 How do you want your audience to feel?

2 What do you want your audience to learn?

3 How will you truly engage with your audience?

Method to the madness

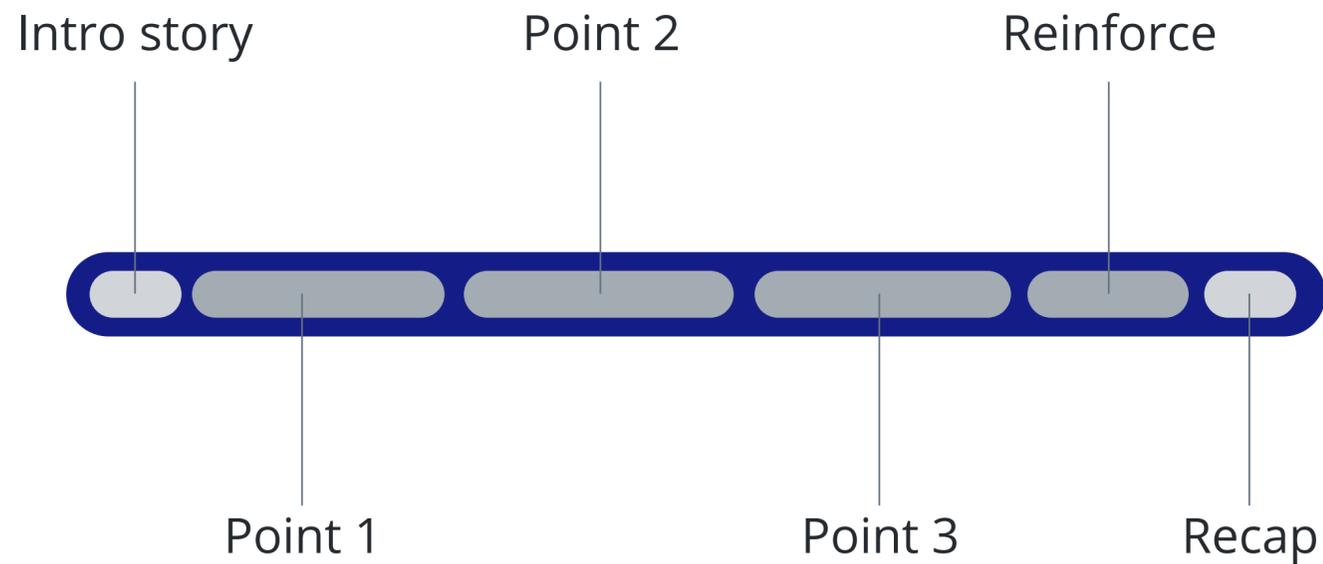
Building your content is an iterative process.

It helps to break things down into parts. You'll need to balance these three facets of your session or event. As you iterate through ideas, keep in mind that adjustments to one may affect your decisions for another. As you work, revisit your answers to the big picture questions to make sure that you're supporting your main goals for the session or your event as a whole.

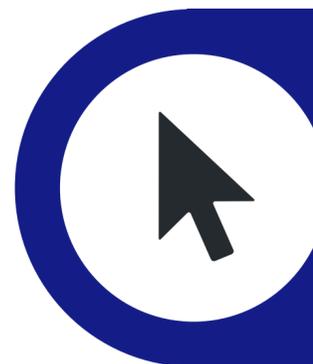


Message

Be concise and authentic.



Most people will only remember three things from your session. So, it's important to identify what they are and find the best way to make sure they shine. You want your audience to remember your message, not a random joke or unrelated story, so make sure you stay on point.

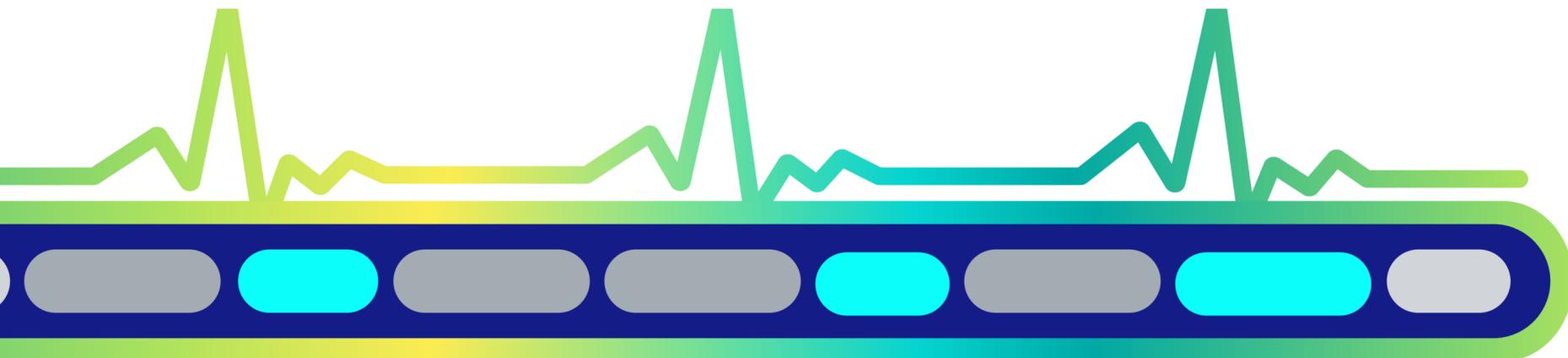


Remember you don't have to put everything in your presentation! Give your audience other assets to explore.

Design

Simple but evolving.

Design can help your message, but it can also hurt it. Your presentation's design should strengthen your brand, give visual cues that help your audience understand the flow of your story or session, and help them connect to your vision. Your message and visuals should help create a rhythm or pulse.



Provide variety

- Anecdote / Storytelling
- Visuals / Graphics
- Stats / Charts
- Timelines
- Quotes
- Demos

Liven it up with

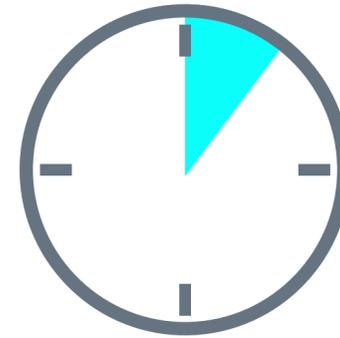
- Animations
- Video
- Cuts between presenter, slides, overlays, and a combo

Attention span

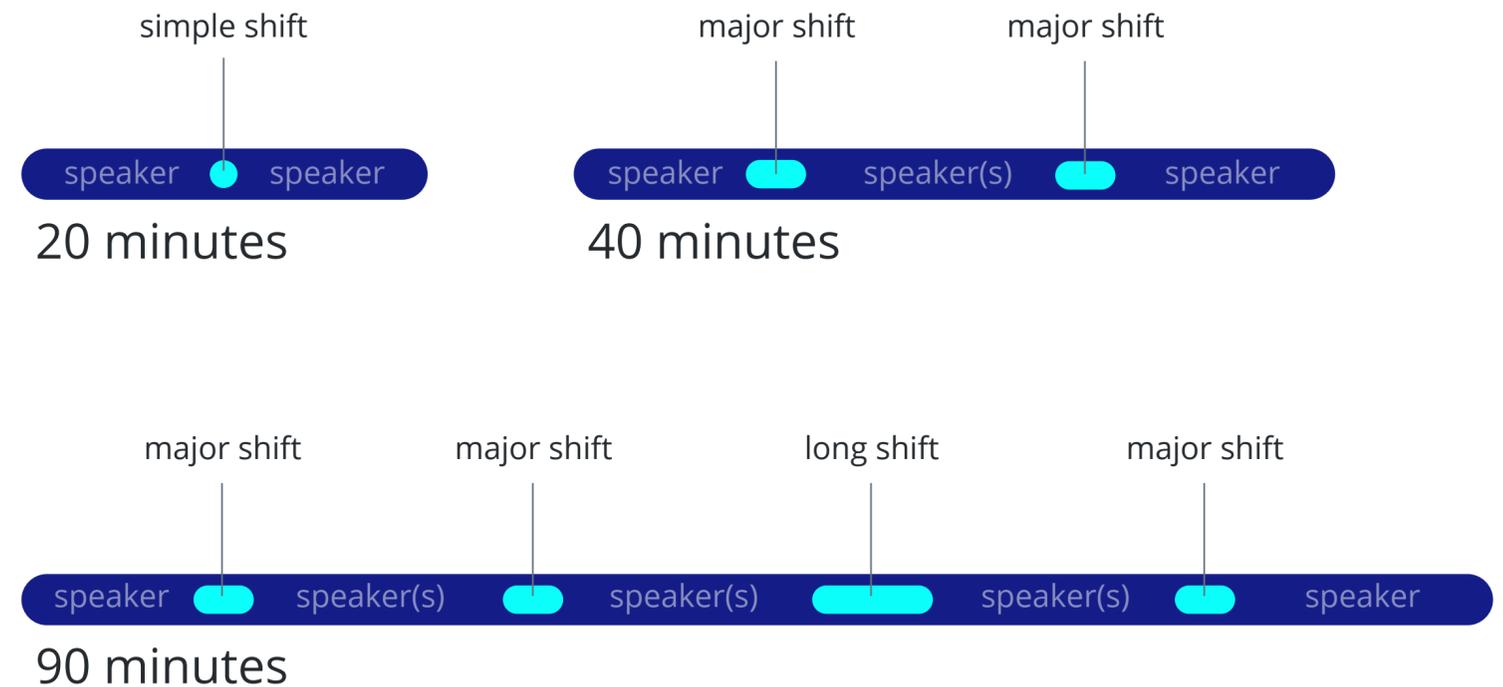
Outline the audience journey.

The goal is to not only convey your story in the most compelling way, but also to hold the attention of an audience that can choose to multitask during your session.

You'll notice that most TED Talks are 18 minutes. This is a perfect length of a presentation. Between the 7 and 10 minute mark make a dramatic shift in the presentation so you can keep your audience's attention. As the session's length gets longer, you'll need to add more elements and changes to keep things moving.



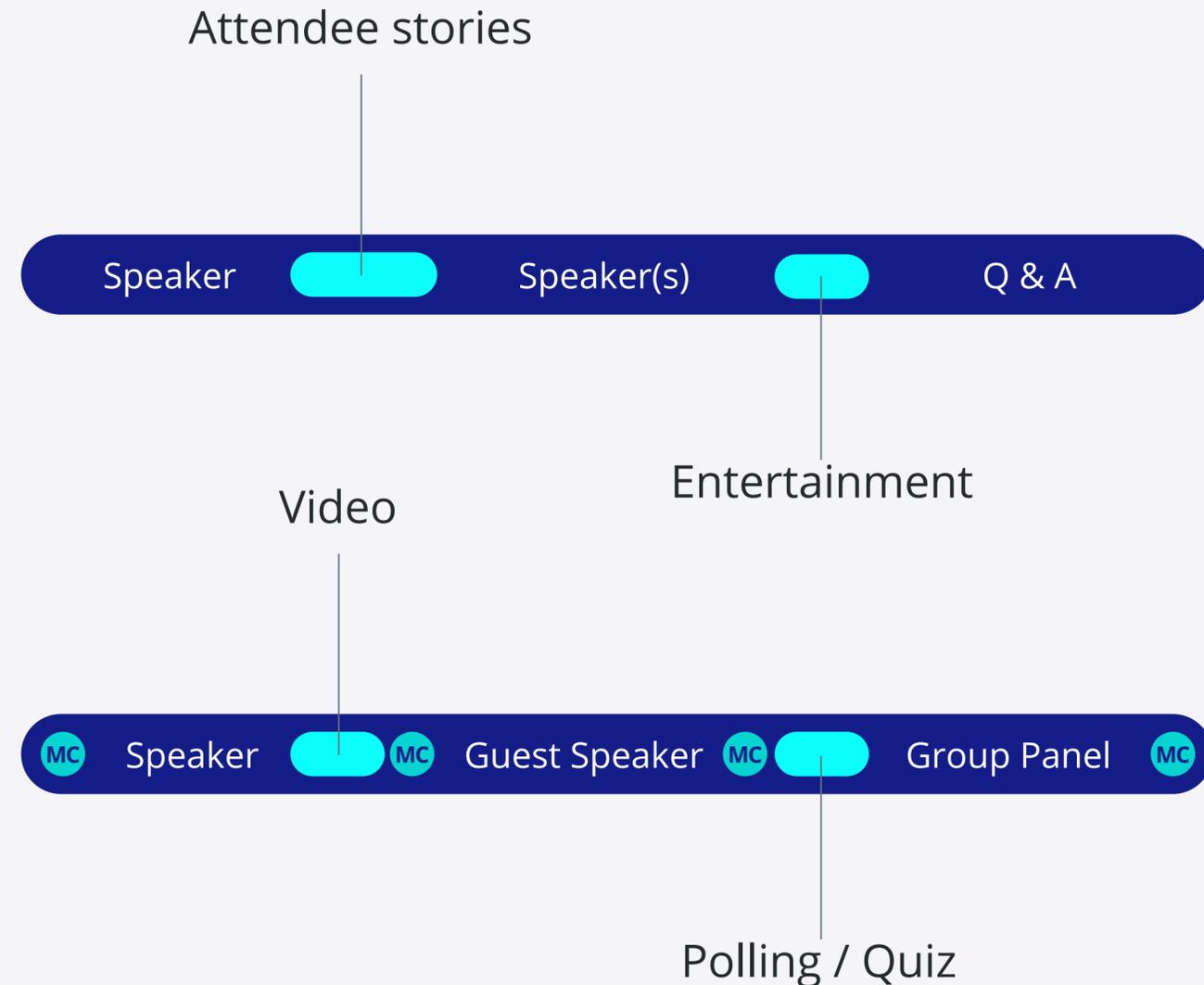
7 minutes
is about the average
attention span



Keep your audience engaged

Thankfully there are a handful of great ways to keep your audience engaged while still staying on point.

Remember to include perspectives outside of your own. Hearing from a 3rd party goes a long way to reinforce your message.



“The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon.”

- Brandon Sanderson

Use your presentation to answer questions but also to generate new ones. New questions spark conversation, and buzz around your presentation is a good thing!

Prepare to deliver

Give your audience nothing less than authenticity.

Being yourself is much easier when you aren't multitasking.

Delivery approaches

Choose an approach to create and deliver your speaker video and content.



Pre-recorded

The benefit of pre-recorded content is that it ensures that your delivery is exactly the way you want. Pre-recording gives you the ability to do several takes of your presentation so that you can edit together the best ones. You can post your content as an on-demand experience, so that your audience can watch when it's convenient to them or you can go with a simulive approach that streams your content at a certain date and time. This gives your presentation the appearance of a live session.



Live

A live session allows for an authentic delivery, warts and all. Authenticity goes a long way. It also allows you to gather reactions by polling your audience or including Q&A moments. Depending on your comfort level and your session's complexity, you may need a production company to queue your slides and video, just as at a live event. This allows the presenter to focus on presenting.



A bit of both

Another option is a combination of pre-recorded and live content within a single session. By recording presentations in advance, you're confident the delivery will be smooth. You can also focus on audience engagement during the presentation by having your speakers field live questions or even interact using chat.

Improve your production game

Just like an in-person event, use a production team to manage the show.



Look like a pro by creating a single stream of content, whether live, pre-recorded, or both.

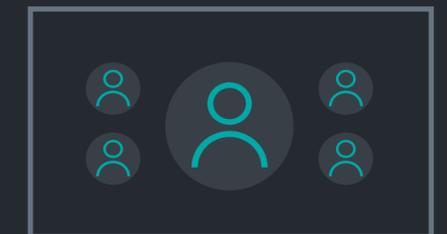
While a platform can support streaming content, it's important to look for a production partner that can set up that stream properly. This helps take the weight of cueing up videos and speakers off your shoulders so that you can focus on your other event goals.



Lower 3rd titles



Graphics



Speaker layouts

How to focus on presenting

Set yourself up for success.



While we're often on camera for meetings, once a recording or live session starts, you seem to experience a new level of stress. Get yourself prepared so that you can concentrate on presenting and not getting tangled up in the technology.

1

Technology set up

Figure out the tech early.

2

Recording checklist

Get everything ready.

3

Presenting

Deliver your best.

Technology set up

Figure out the tech early.



Level 1: Basic webcam

Recording through a meeting platform (Zoom, GoToMeeting, Webex, Teams) is an easy way to capture your video. The compression through the platform will lower the quality of the video.



Level 2: Better webcam and mic

A slightly higher end webcam and a lapel microphone go a long way to bring your footage to the next level.



Level 3: Production quality kit

A high quality camera and microphone will give you the best production quality from home. We can provide a video kit that makes it easy for anyone to use.

Recording checklist

Get everything ready.



Location

Find a quiet, well-lit place with a simple background to present from. Don't sit in front of windows.



Script or notes

Be sure to sit a few feet from your laptop so that it does not appear like you are reading. Place your script near the top of your screen, close to your webcam. Look into using a teleprompter if needed.



Plan slide emphasis

Plan which moments you want the slides full-screen and which moments you want the speaker full-screen. This can take the pressure off the speaker when they are not on screen.



Configure settings

If you are using a meeting platform like Zoom to capture your video, be sure that the person recording has set it to **pin the speaker**.



Water. Nothing helps you reset between takes better than a glass of water so have one ready.

Presenting

Deliver your best.



Practice, practice, practice

Rehearse your presentation so that it can come across authentic. The less you need to rely on script and notes, the more you can focus on presenting.



Don't be shy

Speak loud and clear.



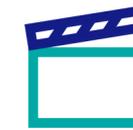
Say hello

Don't just dive into your presentation. Greet the attendees and be yourself. A little small talk makes you more authentic.



Don't rush

Be sure to pause now and again. It helps to give the audience a moment to digest your message.



Give yourself options

No one is perfect, so expect to do multiple takes. In between each take, hold up a white piece of paper for a couple of seconds to make it easy to distinguish takes when reviewing the video.

“ It usually takes me two or three days to prepare an impromptu speech. ”

- Mark Twain

Being prepared won't make you come across less authentic. Knowing your story well and getting your tech all set allows you to let those things go and be yourself.

Thank you!

And feel free to reach out with any other event questions, virtual or otherwise.

[Email us](mailto:events@cgiinteractive.com)

events@cgiinteractive.com