



# I THINK YOU'RE ON MUTE...?

How to run better online events

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# INTRODUCTION

Online meetings are nothing new – teleconferencing, GoToMeeting and Skype have been around for ages. For a long time they were considered a poor relation to meeting face to face, but the COVID pandemic changed everything. The old rules do not apply any more. Now even the most ardent technological refuseniks have learned how to Zoom. Just the fact that ‘Zooming’ is now a verb like ‘Googling’ speaks volumes.

At first online meetings were a necessity – a way to keep things ticking over until things got ‘back to normal’. However, as time has gone on it’s become obvious that holding events and meetings online has some distinct advantages, but also some definite disadvantages. And there are specific challenges unique to online events which are taxing even experienced event managers.

This guide brings together some of what we have learned from running online events big and small. We hope that it might help you maximise the benefits of virtual engagement, while avoiding some of the pitfalls.



# 1. START WITH ‘WHY?’

Online events seem easy – surely you just set up a meeting link and you’re good to go? But like all event management, the devil is in the detail. Events which run so smoothly you can’t see the cracks don’t happen by accident, they happen by design. Well, design, and a whole flock of frantically paddling event management swans. As experienced event organisers we have found that the volume of work involved in running quality online and in person events is similar, it is just different.

So, the first step is to think carefully about why you want to run this particular event online. There are pros and cons to running an online event and it’s important to consider whether you’ll achieve your aims, or whether it would be better to wait until it’s feasible to have a face-to-face meeting, or consider something different entirely like a blog, video series or podcast.

It is also crucial at this stage to consider your audience. Are they confident accessing online events? Do they have good enough technology and internet access? Would an online event be better or worse for them than a face-to-face event? What will their experience be like?

This list of pros and cons of online events might help you to make your decision. Perhaps you can think of some other pros and cons from your own experience.

## PROS OF ONLINE EVENTS

- Potentially larger/more varied audience
- Global reach, drawing in contributors from other countries/perspectives
- Potential environmental benefit with reduced travel
- More inclusive for those who use assistive technologies
- More accessible for those who can’t travel for to financial, health or caring reasons
- Potential cost savings with no room hire, catering etc. to pay for
- Some people find it easier to engage online, e.g. via chat, than in person
- Easier for people to dip in and out of the parts they are interested in
- Breaks down barriers between speakers and audience
- Sessions can be recorded for future use

## CONS OF ONLINE EVENTS

- Easy to get carried away and try to do too much
- Audience commitment/attention more variable
- Loss of informal interaction and natural conversation
- Not everyone has good internet speeds or suitable technology e.g. webcams
- May need specialist technical or other support
- Harder to create a sense of occasion and community
- May need to pay for software, hardware and/or hosting to run the event
- Less flexible with no room for error with links, timings etc.
- Some people find it harder to focus and engage online and are intimidated by the large audiences and technology
- Being online for long periods of time is more tiring than the equivalent time face-to-face

## 2. CHOOSE YOUR FRAMEWORK

So, you've decided that an online event is the right option for you – what next? For a real-life event you would book a venue and that would then impose some structure on the event. For example, if your venue could only seat a certain number of people, or was only available on a certain date then those are concrete limitations that you would need to work with.

### BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR CAPACITY

With online events it's easy to think that you don't need to worry about capacity – the sky's the limit! The truth is that, without limits, it is easy to get carried away and try to do too much. Or to put off making hard decisions like restricting the number of speakers. In reality you do have limited capacity. For online events your limits are the time available to organise the event, the size of your team, your budget and your level of expertise. Your choice of platform may also impose some limits of what you can do (e.g. for Zoom you might be restricted to 300 participants).

We recently learnt this the hard way. We helped organise a large multi-day online conference which had numerous sessions all running at the same time. At the start the timetable was loose and flexible, but when the details were pinned down it became apparent that there would be 8 concurrent sessions which meant we would need 8 separate Zoom accounts and 8 producers. But we hadn't considered the time needed to set up sessions with presenters before the audience arrived. This time overlapped with the previous sessions so, at times, we might actually need up to 16 Zoom accounts and 16 producers!

So before you start to choose speakers or invite proposals it is absolutely crucial to consider what is manageable for your team. Here are a few things to consider

- Decide on the start and finish times and any blocks of time within this. Make sure you allow for breaks – at the very least a 15-minute break every 90 minutes, preferably much more
- If you want to run parallel sessions, consider how many video conference accounts and producers/chairs/facilitators you have access to
- Bear in mind that the team running the event will need breaks too so may not be able to do back-to-back sessions
- For a large event, make sure there is always at least one member of your team who is not focussed on running the event so is available to check emails and answer the phone during the sessions
- Check the limits of the platform you are using e.g. basic paid Zoom accounts are often limited to 300 people
- As well as the work involved in running the event on the day there will also be a lot of administrative work beforehand. For example, advertising the event, entering details into spreadsheets, contacting speakers, handling enquiries and registrations, preparing and checking the programme, setting up and checking all the links. Consider who will do this work and what information and support they will need. Do you need to bring in extra help? If so, when?
- Do you have the capacity within your team to manage the technical side of running the event? Will you need extra training or would it be better to buy-in professional help?
- What is your budget and how can you spend it to bolster your capacity, provide skills or equipment you are lacking, or improve the experience for your audience?

So whilst a small team can manage a one-off webinar, even if it is for a very large audience, if your event becomes more complex, with multiple speakers and different sessions, then a much more coordinated approach will be needed.

## SYNCHRONOUS OR ASYNCHRONOUS

If your ambitions outstrip your capacity you might want to consider whether you need to run the whole event in real time or whether some elements could be pre-recorded or static. In the biz this is referred to as synchronous (happening in real time for everyone) or asynchronous (elements which can be accessed at any time). Having some asynchronous content can be a great way to make the most of the time your participants have together, prioritising interaction over just sharing information. It can also be really helpful for people in different time zones or just people who can't participate fully in the live event for whatever reason.

Examples of asynchronous content include pre-recorded audio or video presentations, preparatory or follow-up reading, a chat forum, polls/ surveys, or a collaborative online workspace (like a Padlet or Jamboard – more about these later). Asynchronous content can also be a valuable way to extend the life of the event, allowing information to be digested, relationships to be cemented, and next steps to be progressed.

## TO RECORD OR NOT TO RECORD?

Whilst on the subject of asynchronous content, one of the most common questions you will get is whether the live sessions will be recorded. On the face of it this seems like a reasonable request and an easy one to action – you just click record on Zoom, right? But we would urge caution. Here are some things to think about before you hit that record button.

- What are you going to do with the recordings? Where are you going to host them and how are you going to share them?
- Who is going to edit them (they will need editing, even if it's just trimming the start and end)?
- Who will have access to them and for how long? Will the recordings be publicly available or password protected? Can you restrict downloading or sharing? Do you really think people are going to go back and watch them? Is it worth all the effort for just 1 or 2 views?
- Do you have informed consent of all the participants including audience members? If not you will need to edit out any audience questions. Even if you do have consent, do the presenters really want their presentation on YouTube for ever and ever?
- Consider any ethical or confidentiality issues. If speakers are presenting unpublished or work-in-progress they may not want it to be publicly available. There is also the chance of presenters making off-the-cuff comments that they later regret.
- Finally, think about the server capacity needed to host all of that video content. Cloud storage servers use vast amounts of electricity and so some of the environmental gains from less travel may be lost.
- People are less likely to commit to the live event if they know there will be recordings available. A smaller or less attentive audience for the live event will impact on the sense of occasion and the richness of the interactions. The sheer transience of an event is part of the magic, the magic that is worth showing up for.

If, having answered all of those questions, you still want to make recordings available, consider whether you could ask your speakers to pre-record their talks. That way everyone is crystal clear on what they are actually sharing, the editing is done in advance, there is no audience input to worry about and it means you can prioritise questions and conversation during the live event.

# 3. CHOOSE YOUR TEAM

Running a complex online event is not a one-person job. This is an overview of some of the roles we have found essential or useful.

**Organiser** – As you are reading this, you are probably the event organiser, or perhaps a member of the organising team. This person or group will decide on the date, title, structure, format and content of the event. They will also run or help with running the event on the day. Depending on the size of the team and complexity of the event you may need an overall manager to coordinate and may decide to subdivide this group, e.g. some to focus on operations, others on content.

**Chair/Lead Facilitator** – This role is key to the smooth running of live sessions. They will welcome guests, introduce speakers, set tasks, encourage participation, manage discussions, keep time and otherwise guide the session.

**Producer** – A crucial role for large online events, the producer will handle all the technical aspects of the live session allowing the chair/facilitator to concentrate on the content. This may include managing participants, sound and video troubleshooting, setting up polls, breakout groups or other tools, monitoring the chat, and sharing slides or videos. They should also be prepared to intervene quickly in the case of major technical problems or inappropriate guest behaviour.

**Administrator** – This role might, amongst other duties, involve advertising the event, entering details into spreadsheets, contacting speakers, handling enquiries and registrations, preparing and checking the programme, setting up and checking all the links. On the day of the event this might also be an appropriate person to run a virtual ‘helpdesk’ – answering email and telephone enquiries.

**Other facilitators** – depending on the size of the event you may want to allocate additional facilitators to help support certain parts e.g. breakout groups or chatrooms.

**Runner** – large and complex events might benefit from having someone who can come in and out of sessions. To deal with problems, find and share information, answer queries, and monitor noticeboards, chat or social media.

**Professional support** – There are a number of other roles that might be valuable for your event team. These are specialist professional roles so you may need to budget to buy-in this kind of support. If you don't have team members who can confidently act as producers or facilitators then this expertise can be bought in. Quality webcams and microphones can be purchased or hired. If you want an event website, a smart poster or cohesive branding across your event then you may need to hire a designer. Marketing support can also help you to reach your target audience. Although online events can be more accessible for many people, if you have the budget or your audience requires it, bringing in transcribers, translators, or other specialists to support accessibility can be money well spent.



# 4. CHOOSE YOUR TOOLS

## CHECK YOUR TECH

First and foremost make sure you have a stable high-speed internet connection. If at all possible, the key team members like the facilitator and producer should be on a wired internet connection (via an Ethernet cable), rather than wireless. If this isn't possible then make sure you are working in an area that has a good WiFi signal. This is way more important than worrying about having a nice backdrop.

Then check the audio quality. Technology has massively improved, but if there are audio issues consider using a separate microphone. Although it might make you feel like you are working in a call centre, using a headset with mic will make a massive difference to the quality of what you can hear, and how you sound to others. As headset mics are calibrated to work close to the mouth, they are less likely to pick up background noise, whether it's your dog barking or your partner offering you a cup of tea. A headset is also essential if you are joining the call from more than one device or with other participants within earshot.

If you must prioritise, go for audio quality over video quality (it makes more difference to your audience's experience), but video quality is worth considering too particularly for speakers. Speakers should be directly facing their camera and well lit. Ring lights have their place, but sitting near a window or desk lamp can work just as well.

## CHOOSE YOUR PLATFORM

Choosing the right platform for your event is also one of the most important decisions to make early on. By 'platform' we mean the video conferencing service you use to host your event. Now ubiquitous, Zoom is probably the default and certainly has many advantages – it is stable, can handle large numbers of participants, has useful security and collaboration options, and by now, most people know how to use it.

However, Zoom is not the only option and to host an online event you will need at least one paid subscription. That might be fine if your employer pays for it but not everyone has that luxury. In addition, your employer may not allow Zoom for security or other reasons. Other options include Teams, Blackboard Collaborate, GoToMeeting, Google Hangouts, Bluejeans, Adobe Connect and many more. You might also consider something like a YouTube or Facebook Livestream depending on your audience.

This is going to sound obvious but whichever platform you choose make sure you really know how to use it! That you understand what all the settings and options do and that you know what to do if something goes wrong. How do you turn captions on, share the screen, share audio, set up break out rooms? How would you deal with offensive comments in the chat or a Zoombomber? Come up with a plan for any scenario you can think of.

Whichever platform you choose, if at all possible, plan to monitor the event from a completely separate second device (even if it has to be a phone or tablet) which has joined the event as a participant. That way you can see what the participants see and make adjustments accordingly. If you will be screen-sharing it can also be hugely helpful to do this from a separate device. Screen-sharing often completely takes over the display making it hard to do other things like monitor the chat without fear of accidentally stopping a presentation or video.

## CHOOSE YOUR ADD-ONS

The next thing to consider is whether you will use any other software to encourage participation or collaboration. Again, there are lots of different options which have their own advantages and disadvantages. Some have a free version, some are subscription only. It is up to you to choose the ones that fit your needs. Here are some of our favourites

**Padlet** – Padlet is a kind of online noticeboard. You can have various layouts and lots of users can contribute at the same time, even commenting on each other's posts. You can also add files, pictures and links. Probably our favourite add on, we have used it as an event noticeboard, for virtual poster sessions, for gathering comments and feedback, for attendee bios, all sorts! The free version currently allows you 3 boards.

**Jamboard** – Jamboard is a collaborative online whiteboard from Google where participants can write, draw, type, add images, move things around. You can integrate with Google Hangouts and save boards into Google Drive.

**Mentimeter/Slido** – Mentimeter and Slido are similar, offering structured interaction with your audience through polls, quizzes, word clouds etc. The results can then be presented back immediately or (with the paid version) downloaded for later analysis. Participants often need to have a separate device, e.g. a smartphone, to input their responses.

**Wonder** – Wonder is an online networking platform which aims to create the virtual equivalent of the coffee break chat at a face-to-face event. Each user can move independently around and chat to anyone they like. At the time of writing it is a prototype so access is free while they work out the glitches.

**WhatsApp** - It's hugely helpful for the team running the event to have a 'back channel' so they can communicate privately when the unexpected happens. We like a WhatsApp group chat, but you could also use any other messaging system or good old fashioned text messages.



## CHOOSE YOUR REGISTRATION SYSTEM

So, now that you have a plan, you're going to want an audience. There are two stages to this – advertising the event and managing registrations. For academic events, advertising is often the easy bit as through a combination of subject mailing lists, research networks, institutional mailing lists and Twitter you can probably reach most of your target audience. Managing registrations is potentially a much bigger challenge.

Whatever you do, unless it's a very small event, don't get people to email someone to register. A) it creates a huge mountain of admin as invariably there will be some kind of back and forth to collect exactly the information you need and b) people find it awkward and don't quite know what to write in the email or the correct protocol.

You're going to need some kind of online registration system. The simplest option is a Microsoft or Google Form. They are straightforward and have the bonus that the details can easily be exported to a spreadsheet. However, with this option (depending on your account) you probably won't be able to do automated replies so will need to check the entries often and send replies.

If you want a more automated solution then web-based services like Eventbrite and Bookwhen can be useful. They can save a lot of pain if you need to charge a registration fee for your event as their systems will manage the online payments. However, your employer may also have an 'online shop' type system that you can use, so it's worth checking with your IT help desk. Paid versions of Eventbrite and Bookwhen can also integrate with Zoom so that only people who have registered and paid get access to the live event link.

## IF THIS ALL SOUNDS LIKE TOO MUCH - GET HELP

If all of this is starting to feel really overwhelming then do consider employing professional event management support to do some or all of this for you. This might mean human beings who coordinate all the moving parts for you, or it might be an off-the-shelf online conference platform. You don't need to hand over all control of your event. You can bring in freelancers or companies to do any or all of the jobs listed in the 'Choose Your Team' section. Whether you need technical help, a professional facilitator or just an extra pair of hands, trust us – it will be money well spent. You will feel like a huge weight has been lifted from your shoulders!



# 5. CREATE A SAFE, WELCOMING AND ACCESSIBLE ENVIRONMENT

Hopefully we all know what a great event feels like. One where you had all the information you needed, you could find your way to the activities you wanted to do, the content was great, you felt included, you felt inspired. Great events have participant experience at the heart of their planning. It doesn't matter how interesting your topic is if the link doesn't work, or the PowerPoint slides are illegible, or the speakers ramble on for so long that no-one gets a break.

## PRIORITISE BREAKS

Creating a great experience is often about things which seem trivial, but in reality they are everything. Ever wondered why people always complain about the toilets and the food? It's because people really care about these things! In an online event you may not have control over the quality of the toilets and the food, but you do have some control over when people are able to access them. Prioritise breaks. Make sure sessions are never go more than 90 minutes without a break. At mealtimes, make sure that there is adequate time for people to prepare and eat their food. Perhaps even get some fresh air.

## NEED-TO-KNOW INFORMATION

Another key thing for creating a great experience is to make sure your participants have all the information they need and that they can get help when they need it. Information about how to access the event should be sent out at least 1 week in advance.

Consider what kinds of problems people might have and think about how to solve these problems. What would you want to know if you were in their position? Perhaps think about their experience as a game of snakes and ladders – if they slide off at some point (e.g. due to technical problems) how can you help them get back on the ladder. Having an email address people can contact for support is the bare minimum. You might also share a phone number (useful in case of major technical problems) or even have a Zoom room helpdesk where there is always someone available to talk to.

## HELP PEOPLE TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES

Once these basic operational matters are dealt with, the next thing is to ensure that people feel safe and included at your event. As the organiser, you set the tone for the whole event and you can provide clear signs that everyone is welcome and catered for. You can encourage people to take care of themselves and others – both physically and emotionally – and to treat others with respect and understanding.

We have already talked about some ways to support physical wellbeing including breaks. You might also provide some guidance on reducing Zoom-fatigue including giving people permission to turn their cameras off any time they like and perhaps having some non-screen activities like reflective writing or drawing, a musical interlude, or perhaps even a walk-and-talk audio only session. This variety is not just great for wellbeing, it might also boost engagement and information retention.

## PRE-EMPT PROBLEMS

For us, supporting emotional wellbeing often includes asking participants to agree to a code of conduct. This makes it clear what is expected of everyone and, also brings the topic into the open making it easier for people to come to you with concerns if they need to.

You may wish to establish procedures in advance for what you will do if there are issues. Who will deal with the concern and who can they call on for support? What will you do in the moment and how will you investigate further? Are there institutional policies or procedures to follow? Being prepared in advance will help you cope more calmly if there is an issue.

## ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

We all perceive the world differently and learn differently. And the most amazing thing about online events is that they have opened up a world of opportunities to those who might have found in-person events inaccessible for various reasons. When talking about accessibility in the context of a real-world event you might think of wheelchair users or dietary allergies. With online events you are likely to be faced with a much broader range of accessibility requests.

Accessibility means different things to different people. Someone who hears differently might ask for subtitles. Someone who is caring for an infant might want to have their camera off so they can breastfeed. Someone with a chronic health condition might need more frequent breaks. Someone in a different time-zone might ask for a recording. The absolutely essential thing to do is ask! Ask what people need and how you can help, then you can do your best to support them within the constraints of your format and budget.

There are some easy fixes, many of which we've covered already. For guests with sensory differences or neurodiversity you may need to consider some additional tools. As a minimum, activate built-in tools like auto-transcription which guests can turn on or off as they wish. If possible, allow for both typed and spoken questions and contributions. Presenters should be well lit and near enough to their camera to be seen clearly for lip-reading.

There are helpful best-practice guides to setting up PowerPoint or other visual materials to make them more accessible, covering things like font size, colour contrast and alt text. Consider asking speakers if they would be willing to share their notes. Finally, if your budget allows and your audience requests it, you may wish to bring in professional support such as live transcription or interpreters.

## EXAMPLE CODE OF CONDUCT

We are committed to diversity, accessibility and inclusion. Underpinning that commitment is a firm belief in the value of freely exploring competing ideas and concepts – with a fundamental respect for the rights, dignity and value of all persons.

We ask you to join us in ensuring that today's event creates a dynamic, friendly, intellectually enriching and harassment-free environment for everyone, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, physical appearance, ethnicity, religion or other group identity. All communication should be appropriate for the audience including people of many different backgrounds. Above all, please be kind.

If you do experience or observe harassment or inappropriate behaviour, please contact XXX.

Thank you for helping make this a welcoming, friendly event for all.

# 6. CREATE A SENSE OF OCCASION AND COMMUNITY

What makes events really special is the sense of occasion. A break from the usual routine. The chance to catch up with old acquaintances and make new ones. The thrill of being surprised, intrigued, or challenged. Feeling like part of something bigger than ourselves. This sense of experience is by far the hardest thing to achieve online. It is something we feel with our whole bodies, and being confined to a 2D screen snuffs out some of the magic. Perhaps one day we will run immersive virtual reality events with full haptic suits, but for now here are some things you can do to create that sense of occasion and connection.

## MAKE SURE YOU'RE 'ON-BRAND'

An important way to create a sense of occasion is to create a coherent identity which cuts across all elements of your event – for example having a signature image, colour and font that is used for all materials including your adverts, website (if you have one), social media, holding slides for the start of presentations etc. It may also be a good idea to choose a hashtag for your event, use it in all your own posts and share it frequently with participants, encouraging them to post about the event too.

## DRIP FEEDING ISN'T JUST FOR PLANTS

Your communications plan is another opportunity to create a sense of occasion. Thinking a little differently about your communications strategy can both boost attendance and create excitement. Drip-feeding information is a very useful approach here as it regularly re-engages the audience.

This might mean contacting your attendees increasingly regularly in the run up to the event – first monthly, then weekly, then perhaps even daily – making sure there is some new information each time. This helps keep people engaged and avoids overwhelming them with too much information in one go. A communications plan for a large online conference might look something like this

- 2 months before – confirmation of registration and outline programme e.g. start/end times
- 1 month before – information about keynote speakers including dates/times
- 3 weeks before – full programme details highlighting a few key sessions
- 2 weeks before – pre-event reading or videos to watch
- 1 week before – joining instructions including links and reminder of programme
- 3 days before – opportunities to engage with other attendees before and during event
- 1 day before – reminder of joining instructions and any pre-event tasks
- 1 day after – thanks and feedback request
- 1 week after – links to any recordings, transcripts, presentations etc.
- 3 weeks after – reminder to access time-limited content and complete evaluation

## TURN UP, DON'T TUNE OUT

In section 2 we discussed finding a balance between live and static (synchronous and asynchronous) elements. This balance isn't just important for participant experience, it also impacts on the sense of occasion. For an event to feel special it must be transient. If the content will be available online forever then there's less incentive to show up in real time.

And if participants don't feel it is important to show up in real time then it may lead to poor attendance at the live elements. Poor real time attendance will, in turn, change the energy of the live sessions, and that will be disappointing and challenging for presenters, who may feel their efforts are not appreciated. So, it is worth putting your efforts into encouraging people to attend for the live content, making it clear that it is the real highlight of your event.

If you do decide to record sessions or make static content available, consider making this time-limited. For example, deactivating links or setting content to 'private' after perhaps a week or a month.

## ENCOURAGING ENGAGEMENT

When it comes to encouraging interaction and creating a sense of community and connection, the foundations of connection are laid by making sure your event is welcoming and accessible as discussed in the previous section. Once those keystones are in place, really think through the participant experience and the aims of the event. Are you trying to build deep connections within a group that collaborates regularly or just encouraging some informal networking? Having clear aims will help you choose your tools and event elements. Here are some suggestions and examples of when they work well.

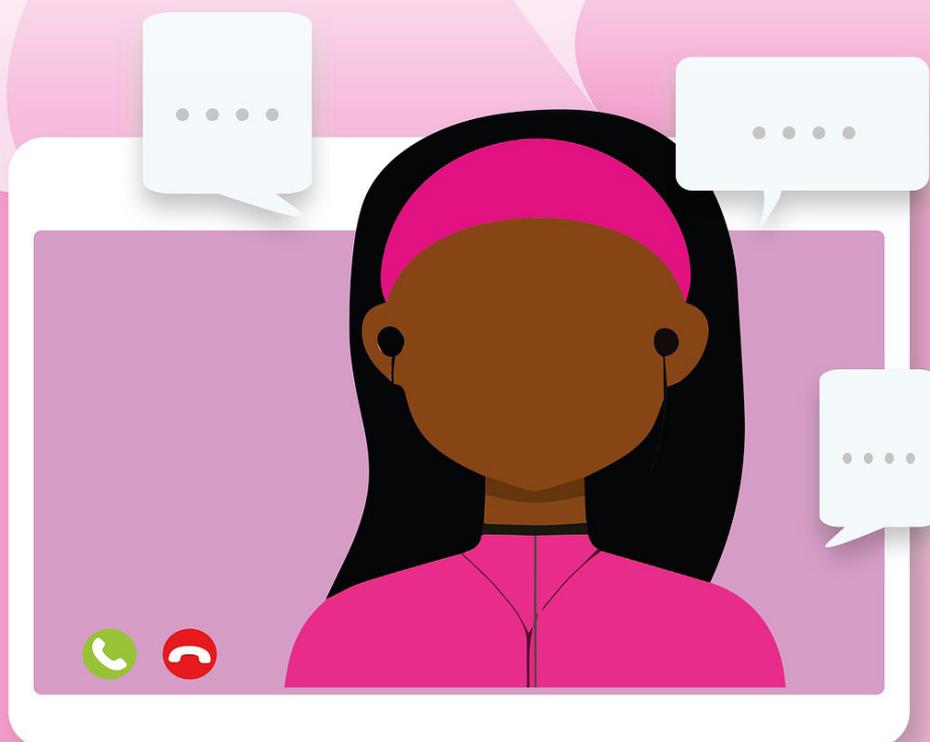
- Polls and quizzes – great for low stakes engagement, checking understanding and keeping things lively.
- Post session Q&A/discussion – allows people to connect over a shared topic of interest. Can be for the whole group managed by a chair or facilitator, in breakout groups or in a networking platform like Wonder.
- Structured breakout groups – good for building deeper connections with specific people to work on collaborative projects or discuss particular topics of interest. May need a chair or facilitator.
- Random breakout groups – good for meeting different people and discussing something that they have just heard/experienced together. Be aware that some people find these types of breakout groups very challenging.
- Speed networking – random very short (e.g. 3-5 minute) breakout groups of 2-3 people with some ice breaker questions to create opportunities for lots of people to meet.
- Self-selected networking – using a platform like Wonder, people can choose who they want to talk to, what they want to talk about and for how long. This can replicate 'coffee queue' conversations to some degree (with the same awkwardness!)
- Typed chat – allow participants to type comments and questions in the chat function during live sessions, and permit both public and individual direct messaging, but ensure someone is monitoring the chat for any possible inappropriate content.
- Social media – providing an event hashtag can empower people to connect directly over their shared experiences in a way that isn't managed by the event organisers so can feel more relaxed.
- Noticeboard/comment board – providing something like a Padlet board can encourage people to share information, propose topics for discussion, comment on each other's posts and connect. Like chat this will need to be monitored for any inappropriate content.
- Living library – participants or presenters post topics they would like to share their knowledge about, and participants can 'borrow' them to meet for a 1-1 chat at an agreed time.

Whichever method you choose there will be pros and cons. Whichever method you choose, it is also critical that the event/project team take some responsibility for encouraging the conversation. That might mean being the first one to speak in a Q&A, asking lots of questions in a breakout group, offering to host a Wonder room, or commenting on and sharing social media posts. Keeping the conversation flowing in a virtual event is the equivalent of keeping the drinks flowing at a real-life party.

## CONCLUSION

We hope that this guide has given you some useful tips and food for thought when it comes to running excellent online events. Even as we return to face-to-face interactions it seems pretty clear that online events are here to stay. The environmental reasons for reducing travel remain. And it feels callous to return to a model which would exclude all of the people for whom online events have been an absolute boon – those people with health, caring or financial reasons to stay at home.

Done well, online events can replicate much of what is great about in-person events. Doing online events well starts with thinking through the aims of the event and how it will be structured. Then it's time to put together the right team and the right tech for the job. And through all of this planning, keeping the audience experience firmly at the front of your mind. Because without an audience, you don't have an event. However prestigious your speakers, the audience are the most important people in the (virtual) room. First and foremost, running amazing events is all about being a good host and, in the words of Carl W. Buehner (often misattributed to Maya Angelou) "They may forget what you said — but they will never forget how you made them feel."



**I think you're on mute....**

**Maybe try leaving the call and coming back in?**

**Should I share my screen now?**

**Can everyone see that?**

**I'll post the link in the chat.**

**Sorry, there's someone at my door**

**You just froze there.**

**Next slide please**