

# VIRTUAL EVENTS:



**READY, SET, GO**

By Dennis Shiao



Image: A 7-Step Process for Your Virtual Event

Note: This eBook is based on blog postings from “It’s All Virtual” (<http://allvirtual.wordpress.com>)

## Chapter 1: What Is A Virtual Event?

Terms can be best explained by breaking them down into their component parts. “Virtual event” – let’s cover the second part first, the “event”. An “event” can mean many things to many people; however, I like the following definition from Dictionary.com:

**e·vent** [ih-vent] [Show IPA](#)

**–noun**

1. something that happens or is regarded as happening; an occurrence, esp. one of some importance.
2. the outcome, issue, or result of anything: *The venture had no successful event.*
3. something that occurs in a certain place during a particular interval of time.
4. *Physics.* in relativity, an occurrence that is sharply localized at a single point in space and instant of time. Compare [world point](#).
5. *Sports.* any of the contests in a program made up of one sport or of a number of sports: *The broad jump event followed the pole vault.*

Source: Dictionary.com

An event is “something that occurs in a certain place during a particular interval of time”. With a virtual event, the same definition applies – however, the “certain place” happens to be “online” or “on the web”. For “virtual event”, the Dictionary.com definition could be re-worded to:

**Something that occurs in a certain web destination during a particular interval of time**

Of course, like any loosely worded definition, many “things” fit this description, which you and I typically would not consider a virtual event (e.g. a multi-party instant messenger chat qualifies, but isn’t typically considered a virtual event). In my mind, a virtual event is

**A web and occasion-based gathering that facilitates information sharing, collaboration and interaction.**

To date, the look and feel of virtual events has been modeled after a physical counterpart (e.g. a trade show, user conference, sales meeting or job fair). As the industry evolves, the experience will evolve as well – and unique, web-based experiences will emerge. For instance, expect to see virtual trade shows that look and feel nothing like their physical counterpart (hence the power of the web).

There are no “bare minimum requirements” for a virtual event (e.g. Auditorium, Exhibit Hall, Networking Lounge, Booth) – an experience with no Auditorium and no booths can still qualify. Virtual events [come in many flavors](#) – with many more on the way. There are a [variety of use cases and objectives](#) that can be achieved virtually.

Virtual events are known for the following benefits:

1. Green technology that minimizes carbon emissions
2. Supports a global audience
3. Convenience – participate from your home, office, beach
4. Ongoing showcase – the event is not required to be “torn down” at the conclusion of the live date(s)
5. Granular engagement tracking – activity is recorded and deep engagement profiles generated

**Variations**

While virtual events occur on the web without a physical (face-to-face) component, some event planners are creating **hybrid event experiences**, whereby a face-to-face event is combined with a virtual component. The virtual component can occur before, during or after the face-to-face event – when done concurrent to the physical event, interesting opportunities arise for [blending the physical and virtual experiences](#).

While events occur “during a particular interval of time”, some virtual event planners are creating 365 day/year **virtual communities**, which have a focus around periodic “events”. So rather than create a virtual event that’s live for a single day, event planners create an evergreen (and virtual) business community that sees consistent activity throughout the year, with spikes of activity during scheduled days of “live event activity”.

## Chapter 2: Planning Your Virtual Event

A successful virtual event originates with a sound, strategic plan – one that’s researched, developed and documented **well before** the topic of platform selection is even broached. Virtual events involve technology – however, as with physical events, it’s about the experience first. Technology, while important, is there to provide the means to address your experiential goals. Get the planning done right and technology decisions will fall out naturally from there.



### Understand Your Audience

A virtual event planner must act like a product manager – to build the best “product” (i.e. event), you need to first understand your target audience / target customer.

Product managers need to employ “customer empathy”, while virtual event planners need to employ “attendee empathy”. Product managers develop user personas – profiles of different users of the product. Similarly, you ought to create attendee personas.

Identify the attendee profiles – and for each profile, document the “average user”. Questions you ought to ask about your audience:

1. Are they inclined to experience an event virtually?
2. What topics/subjects are they most interested in?
3. What online sites do they frequent the most?

4. When they're not online, what are they doing?
5. How do they prefer to consume content?
6. How do they prefer to interact with one another?
7. What would prevent them from interacting, engaging, etc. online?
8. What motivates them?
9. What is their preferred form of reward (e.g. recognition, money, etc.)?
10. How do you hold their attention?

There are many more questions you could ask. Understanding your audience is one of the most important planning steps, so make sure you invest the right amount of time and energy here. When done, document your “audience profiles” and share the document with your extended team. Ensure you're all on the same page with regard to your target audience.

### **Identify Your Funding Sources**

The virtual event never happens if you're not able to pay for its costs. Are you an association that aims to fund the event with association or per-event fees? Are you a non-profit organization who submitted a bid for a grant? Or, are you a B2B publisher who aims to fund the event by selling sponsorships at a virtual trade show?

For virtual trade shows, identify possible exhibiting companies and forecast the amount of revenue you can generate from the sponsorships. Review past events you've produced (whether physical or virtual) – and, review competitors' trade shows to see which companies are exhibiting at them.

Regardless of the scenario, ensure that your funding model is identified – and, that the funds are “firm”. It does you no good to spend a month profiling your target audience, only to have that work go to waste when you're not able to obtain funding for the event. If possible, seek to have your funds secured before you begin the subsequent planning steps.

### **Define your Format, Venue, Style, Personality**

There are many types of virtual events: virtual trade shows, virtual career fairs, virtual product launches, etc. Chances are, you already have a format in mind and that's good. Following that, however, you ought to consider the additional details of the design, style and personality of your virtual event.

The most direct (and cost effective) approach is to select from the pre-existing “event templates” of your virtual event platform provider. They'll allow you to select a theme from their template library and you can apply customizations on top of the base image. While this approach is time and cost efficient, keep in mind that it's more challenging to distinguish your event, especially if your competitor uses the same platform and selects the same theme.

If you have the budget (and time) to create a unique experience, consider the venue and theme – a virtual experience is not bound by physical space limitations (or, by gravity), so there are endless possibilities. Do you want an outer space experience? Perhaps not, but that's possible if you so choose.

If budget allows, consult with a creative agency or design firm – you'll first want to “storyboard” the event experience in the same way you'd map out a new web site. In addition to event components,

storyboard the user journey and user experience – map out how you’d like attendees to move through your environment.

### Identify the Event’s Content

Most virtual event planners associate “content” with “sessions” (e.g. Webcasts, Videocasts, etc.). Sessions are indeed important – invest the time and effort to identify hot topics, develop session tracks and recruit speakers and presenters. Once that’s complete, identify additional content formats to include:

1. Break-out Sessions
2. Training Sessions
3. Scheduled Chats
4. Quizzes
5. Games

Virtual events no longer need to be focused around the session schedule – as you can see from the list above, many content formats are available – and some are more effective at engaging and involving the audience.



### Identify Potential Dates

Who knew that virtual event planning would be similar to wedding planning? With regard to date selection, your first step is “conflict avoidance”. You want to eliminate important dates within your organization (e.g. the date of your annual customer conference) – as well as important dates within your industry. Then, review competitive events and related events in your industry, as you want to avoid those too.

Finally, consider seasonality dependencies, such as the December religious holidays or the week leading to Labor Day (in the U.S.), during which many families with school kids are out of town.

Once you've done the "elimination" of dates, consider events or occasions that would work well for your event – you might want to plan your virtual event around an existing physical event of your's – or, plan for event around a key product launch you have scheduled two quarters from now.

### **Identify the Event's Duration**

Single-day events are the most common today. Your event, however, should have a duration that's driven by your goals and objectives. For instance, if you have more content than can be consumed (or scheduled) in a single day, consider the multi-day event. If your event is based around an ongoing game, with points accrued over days (or weeks), then the game parameters will dictate the event duration.

For multi-day events, be sure you have an audience engagement strategy in place to incent Day 1 attendees to return for Day 2 (and Day 3, etc.). In addition, keep in mind that multi-day events require staffing and support to be available for each live date, which adds hard and soft costs to the equation.

### **Conclusion**

Hold your horses! Technology is fun and exciting, but before you jump into that step, be sure to spend the necessary time and effort to complete the planning steps outlined here. In the end, you'll be rewarded with a successful event.



### Chapter 3: Selecting a Virtual Event Platform

The increase in demand for virtual events brings with it a common question: “**Which virtual event platform should I select?**”. Some clients find a vendor and stick with them – others will end up doing business with all the major platform vendors. My preference would be to find a long-term partner and stick with them, as changing vendors can be painful for all involved.

For me, selecting a virtual event platform comes down to six P’s: **People, Platform, Production, Price, Process and Partners**



#### People

While virtual events encompass a wide range of innovative technologies, we’re very much a **services industry** today. This is never more true than on a client’s very first virtual event on a given platform – that first event is all about the platform vendor’s team working closely with the client to jointly achieve the client’s overall goals (and produce a great show, event or community).

In this model (in which that platform vendor handles 75-100% of the production activities), the customer experience is entirely defined by the services (and service level) provided by the vendor. Providing an extraordinary level of customer care requires that the vendors’ company culture be built around servicing the customer – in a manner similar to how Nordstrom, Disney and Zappos have done it.

Of course, a great customer experience is ultimately delivered by individuals, which means that vendors with the right people, the right knowledge and the right experience really make a difference. And that spans the entire spectrum, from Client Services to Development to Marketing to Finance to Legal – all departments in a company end up “touching” the customer in some way.

When considering a particular platform, I suggest you request a profile of the team (i.e. the individuals) behind the vendor’s services – and if you’re far enough in the sales pipeline, information on the specific individuals who will be assigned to your account. Similarly, when speaking to other clients of the vendor, be sure to ask about the type of customer experience they received.





## Platform

Now that we've covered the services piece, the underlying technology comes next. The evolution of our industry will see a shift from 80% vendor-producing events (today) to 80% client-self-producing events in a few years. As that shift unfolds, the industry will move away a bit from its services focus – technology then becomes a critical factor, with nothing more important than the technology to enable the self-servicing itself.

The first challenge you'll face is that platform comparison is entirely qualitative today – there are no quantitative measurements on the technology (yet), like you have with computer hardware (e.g. megahertz, FLOPS, etc.). While there are key quantitative metrics (e.g. %-availability, peak simultaneous users supported, etc.) – today, the claims are just that – with no independent, third party verification.

Given this, you'll have to rely on other companies who have been clients of the platforms – try to find a company in your industry (even a competitor) who has produced an event similar in scope to your's. For instance, if you're doing a virtual product launch in the pharmaceutical industry, try to find similar customer references – you'll receive better and more direct insights than if you speak to a technology company who did a virtual sales kick-off meeting on the same platform.

I base my platform criteria around the following:

*Flexibility* - You want the ability to shape and mold the platform in a way that suits your unique requirements – this may include seamless integration of third party technologies or it may mean customization of features or layout that suit your unique needs.

*Reliability* - The platform must be available when you need it – and that includes everything from the event environment itself, to the registration system, to the reporting system, to the email system.

*Scalability* - The ability to scale up to tens of thousands of simultaneous users (if your event requires it).



### Production

As you become a steady producer of virtual events (e.g. 1-2 events per year to start, growing to 5-10+ events per year), you'll likely want to shift production from the vendor's team to your's. In doing so, you'll take on more control over the timing and delivery – and, save on cost (to the vendor – obviously, you need to staff appropriately to make this shift occur).

Keeping this eventual path in mind, you'll want to select a vendor with strong “self service” capabilities. The capabilities should allow you to create unique experiences – with the growth of virtual events, it serves you no good if your event looks identical to your competitors' events. The platform should allow you the highest level of customization directly **without custom development**.

Any virtual event platform can create a highly unique experience – but if that's accomplished via custom development, then the model is not scalable and repeatable – and you'll end up paying the vendor dearly (on the custom development costs).



### Price

As with all purchasing decisions, price is always a key factor – you likely have a budget in place (either set by yourself or your management) and ultimately, the vendor's price needs to fit your budget. However, pricing should be a secondary focus – first make sure you have the right vendor on people, platform, production, etc. – then, for those who “make the cut”, determine which ones fit into your budget.

If you're willing to make an investment beyond a single event, most vendors are open to negotiating volume discounts, based on the size of your commitment. Be sure to ask the vendor about event costs if/when you shift production to your own team. You may be pleasantly surprised. Lastly, think twice if your selected vendor has a price that's significantly lower than the rest of the pack. Sure, they may be very incented to get your business, just make sure you don't "get what you pay for" – use those customer references to ensure the vendor can meet your key requirements capably.



### Process

"Process" goes back to my first point about "People" and the production of your very first event. It's critical that the vendor have an established process for getting you from the starting line to the finish line – it should be based around project management best practices, while being flexible enough to adapt to unexpected developments or changes. In fact, the vendor ought to show you a project planning template or timeline, so ask them for a sample to see their "execution lifecycle".

In addition, give higher marks to those vendors who have successfully produced virtual events in your market – they'll be able to take their learnings from the prior events and apply them to your's – the process will be based on prior learnings and the vendor already has a sense for how the event execution process will unfold.



### Partners

Most virtual event platform vendors provide a somewhat specialized offering: the virtual event technology (and production) itself. The vendors then rely on a set of partner companies to fill in the

gaps (e.g. A/V, streaming, experiential marketing, strategy consulting, etc.). Do you need an “agency” to manage your overall event experience creation and execution? Or, are you planning to do hundreds of on-site video captures and want the resulting footage streamed within your virtual event?

Determine your entire set of needs, then review the vendors for their own capabilities – along with whom they’ve partnered with. Chances are that by combining the vendor and its partners, you’ll have a comprehensive solution to suit all of your needs. Find out from the vendor whether all the “books” run through them (e.g. general contractor model) or whether you should make separate arrangements with the individual partners.

### **Conclusion**

Like any other major purchasing decision, selecting a virtual event platform vendor (and partner) can be a daunting task. A vendor with strong grades on the six P’s will serve you well.

## Chapter 4: Building Your Virtual Booth

Your company is exhibiting at a virtual event and you've been assigned the responsibility of building your company's virtual booth. You've had plenty of experience assembling a physical booth, but never before have you built one virtually. What's your first step? To immediately **resist** the urge to start the virtual build.



### Set/Confirm Objectives & Goals

The objectives and goals for your virtual booth should align with the goals for your company's participation in the virtual event. If you do not set the direction yourself, be sure to round up the necessary decision makers and have a documented set of goals – publish them internally and be sure that all stakeholders have a copy. Sample goals include:

1. Obtain contact information from "X" number of prospects
2. Generate "Y" number of meaningful prospect engagements in-booth
3. Yield "Z" number of qualified sales opportunities
4. Generate "X%" of brand uplift, as measured by "Y"

It's absolutely critical that goal definition be your first step, as it drives the decisions you make regarding the build-out of your virtual booth.

### Content is King

The main elements of a virtual booth are (1) content [e.g. images, signage, videos, documents, links, etc.] and (2) virtual booth staffers. Your first job is "content curator" – review all content available and be selective about which content you'll place in your booth. It all goes back to the defined goals – the content you select should align with the goals.

So if your goal is demand generation, find the same White Papers that your marketing team is using to generate sales leads across the web. If your goal is driving awareness around a product launch, grab

that 2 minute video of your product manager and have it auto-play when visitors enter your booth. Besides documents in your marketing library, be sure to cobble together useful links on your web site, along with third party articles, blog postings and product reviews that reinforce your objectives.

### Booth Labels Are Like Headlines

Content in a booth is typically housed behind a set of “booth labels”. Your next job is one of headline writer – you’ll want to craft captivating “headlines” for the booth label, along with attention-grabbing titles (and descriptions) for the underlying content items. You’re like the home page editor for your favorite content site – you need to figure out how to write headlines (titles) that will grab your visitors’ attention.

While you certainly want to avoid the “bait and switch” (e.g. writing a label/title that intentionally deceives), your labels need not literally reflect the underlying content. For example, if you assemble a set of blog postings from your company’s blog, you need not label these “Blog Postings”. Instead, organize the blog postings into themes – a set of postings on best practices could simply be labeled “Best Practices” in your booth.

While I suggest you do **not** change booth labels while the event is live (that would significantly confuse your booth’s repeat visitors), you’ll want to review the activity reports from your booth to learn from the labeling decisions that you made. You’ll begin to figure out what worked and what didn’t – and can use those learnings for your next event to more effectively use labels/headlines to achieve your goals.



### Use A Call To Action – Not A Declaration

For signage within the virtual booth, I prefer to use a call to action (e.g. “Ask Us Why 2010 is The Year of The Hybrid” above) over a declaration. So instead of declaring, “The world’s leading producer of plastic widgets”, try a call to action, “Ask us why plastic widgets are the new metal widgets”. The call to action **initiates** a conversation with your visitors, rather than **telling** them what they should know. If visitors enter your booth’s group chat and proactively ask the question stated in your call to action, then give yourself a pat on the back.

### Stand Out From The Crowd

You'll likely have competitors exhibiting in their own virtual booths, which means that a key part of your job is to figure out how to separate your booth (and company) from the crowd. Greenscreen video (aka an embedded video greeter) has been used at enough virtual booths that it won't make your booth any different.

Instead, try an offbeat video that's not yet made its way to YouTube. Or, how about an avatar of your CEO whose mouth movements are synchronized to the words s/he is speaking. Perhaps an animated avatar is the new greenscreen. Thinking further outside the box, how about bringing one of your products to life – personalizing that product to the point where it speaks and delivers a message to visitors. A good example (in general – not in a virtual event) is the [DCX Man](#) character created by Brocade:



Source: Brocade (dcxman.com)

Further information can be found here: [http://www.dcxman.com/whois\\_dcxman.html](http://www.dcxman.com/whois_dcxman.html)

### Optimize Your Content For Search

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is not the sole domain of your web site or blog – it applies to virtual events as well. How can this be? Well, most virtual event platforms provide basic and advance search capabilities – they index all content in the event (e.g. documents, links, Webcasts, etc.) and some platforms even index the contents of uploaded documents.

As a result, keep SEO in mind for selecting documents to include in your booth, along with the labels, titles and abstracts that you use to catalog your booth content. Taking a step back, be sure to write an SEO-optimized description for your company and booth – if attendees search for a key term and your booth is at the top of the search results, then all is good in the world.

### Subject Matter Experts as Booth Staffers



While you'll certainly want sales reps and sales engineers as booth staffers, it's critical to work subject matter experts into the staffing schedule. A visitor who asks specific product or service questions is a hot prospect – and telling that prospect “let me get back to you with an answer to your question” becomes a lost opportunity. Even worse, that opportunity could fall into the lap of your competitor, whose booth is only one click away.

If you're a technology vendor, try to have your product manager, chief engineer or event your CTO available within the booth. While some technology folks may not be comfortable face-to-face with a customer, most feel quite at home in a text chat session.

### **Optimizing For: Demand Generation**

If you're looking to generate sales leads, cobble up all your best lead gen content – the latest White Papers, Case Studies, product sheets, videos, podcasts, customer testimonials, etc. Be liberal and selective at the same time – that is, ensure there is a good mix of content choices, but be religious in making sure the content you select aligns with your goals – and relates to the theme of the virtual event. The beauty of a virtual event is that registration occurs once – but all activity with your content is tracked. So you'll have rich activity profiles at your disposal to help you separate the cream of the crop leads from the visitors who came simply to enter your prize drawing.

### **Optimizing For: Thought Leadership**

Are some of your co-workers experts or luminaries within your industry? If yes, then have them be staffers within your booth! Visitors will have a natural inclination to engage with them – and they'll be able to funnel the ripest opportunities to sales reps within your booth. If your employees have not achieved rock star status within your industry, leverage some of the luminaries to produce content on your behalf.

Perhaps it's a research report authored by an industry expert – or, a video interview (hosted by the expert) with your CEO. Better yet, a Webcast within the virtual event that features the expert(s) who provide a presentation prior to your own speakers. If the experts are available to attend the virtual event, invite them to provide Q&A within your booth, as they'll serve to draw interest and engagement from visitors.

### **Conclusion**

While much of the logistics occur “online”, building a virtual booth will take longer than you think (if done right). Be sure to clearly define your goals first – then, make sure your booth achieves those goals. Take planned breaks from the virtual build to assess whether your booth aligns with the stated goals. Finally, be sure to study activity data from the live event so you can make improvements for your next event!

## Chapter 5: Running a Virtual Event Command Center

Your extended team worked weeks and months to plan and strategize for your virtual event – now, it's time to deliver. While your attendees enjoy the convenience of joining the virtual event from anywhere, the functional leads on your team ought to convene in a single physical location while supporting the event. As I wrote in a posting on [Virtual Tradeshow Best Practices](#), it's a good idea to set up a virtual event war room – or, what I prefer to call a Command Center.

The notion is ironic – attendees gather virtually, but the support team gathers in person? Well, there's tremendous value to face-to-face when supporting a large scale event. The benefits include:

1. *Instant communication* – If I discover an important issue, I can yell out my discovery and have the entire room hear me. Those responsible for addressing the issue can jump right onto it. I suppose you could set up an audio conference bridge to accomplish this sort of coordination, but sitting around the table (in the same room) makes it all the more convenient.
2. *Better facilitates instant collaboration and problem solving* – if there's an issue that requires triage, I can lean over and look over the shoulder at my colleague's monitor. We can troubleshoot the issue together and call over other functional leads as necessary.
3. *Quick turnaround on requests* - in any virtual event, there's a series of requests that one functional team requires another to implement. Rather than handle the request communications via email or IM, it can be easier to walk to the other side of the room, communicate what's needed and receive instant confirmation that the request is being addressed.
4. *Builds camaraderie* – whether it's the large cheer in the room when the two thousandth attendee enters or the laughing and joking at a team member's expense, being in the same physical location builds a sense of team closeness and camaraderie that's hard to achieve over a conference bridge.

I fully expect that technologies will emerge to make a virtual command center an intriguing possibility – for now, however, I'm a firm believer in gathering the support team face-to-face. Here are some best practices in configuring and running the command center:

1. *Carefully select the command center staff* – you don't want too many people in the room – however, you do want a lead from each functional area (e.g. Operations, Engineering, Marketing, Strategy, Communications, Support, etc.). Make sure the right staffers are present – and communicate to the rest of the extended team via IM, email and virtual meetings.
2. *Arrange the command center seating strategically* – similar to how a business might arrange employees' cubicle assignments, determine the common collaboration paths – and seat applicable combinations of people close to one another. This way, Operations doesn't need to walk across the room to huddle with Engineering – instead, they can tap one another on the shoulder.
3. *Configure large-screen displays with dashboards* – use the displays to show the virtual event in action – also create dashboards of key metrics that allow the team to spot trends or issues. For instance, a real-time graph of simultaneous users can flag a system issue if the upward trend line suddenly drops. Additionally, use displays to monitor attendee feedback, such as chat room activity and Twitter comments.

4. *Schedule regular checkpoint meetings* – make sure the team has a chance to stop what they're doing and take a step back to collectively review where things stand. You want to provide a summary of recent happenings (or metrics), highlight issues that need addressing and identify any key trends for the team to be aware of. Take a moment to review your key metrics and ask all functional leads to provide an update. With everyone moving at a fast pace, it's important to pause and get a handle on the bigger picture.

And finally, what's one last benefit of the command center? At the successful conclusion of your big event, you all get to go out together for the celebratory dinner.

## Chapter 6: Organizing a Virtual Event De-Brief

Philosopher and essayist George Santayana was quoted as saying, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”. With virtual events, the “past” is fairly recent. However, the spirit of Santayana’s quote holds true – we need to learn from our prior virtual event in order to make the next one better.

In the virtual events I’ve worked on, the conclusion of the virtual event is very much like crossing the finish line of a marathon – you’ve worked and trained hard and now it’s time to unwind, rest and relax. The team that worked on a virtual event often has to move on to “the next project”, without much time to reflect on the event that just concluded. As a virtual event show host, it’s your job to round up the team for a debrief meeting – you’ve all completed the marathon, but now it’s time for the half-mile cool-down jog to reflect back on the race.

The keys to a virtual event debrief:

1. *Define, measure and review virtual event goals and metrics* – the first step in the debrief has to occur prior to the start of the project. During or before your kick-off meeting, you and your team need to define the goals of the virtual event – and the associated metrics that you’ll use to quantify those goals. Whether it’s “maximize sponsorship revenue”, “maximize user engagement” or “generate leads for exhibitors”, you’ll want to define measurable and non-subjective data points to serve as the basis of your virtual event report card. So the first segment of the debrief is to review the data (i.e. the measured metrics).
2. *Review what worked* – a combination of the metrics results – and, more subjective/anecdotal feedback regarding the overall event. The key here is to understand **why (or how)** it worked and determine whether you want to repeat that success in your next event. For the most part, what works in one virtual event should be carried over into the next.
3. *Review what didn’t work* – again, a combination of metrics plus anecdotal feedback. This is one of the most important components of the debrief – be honest in your assessments of what didn’t work – so that you are not “condemned to repeat it”. My experience has been that when things don’t work, the reasons are usually “not enough lead time” / “too rushed”, “communications mix-up”, “human error” and “mismatch in expectations”. Another category is “technology issue”. I believe that all of these are correctable, with technology being the most straightforward and human error / communication / lead time being a bit trickier to nail down.
4. *Review and judge your constituents’ experiences* – different event types will have different constituents. In a virtual tradeshow, the constituents include yourself (show host), attendees, exhibitors and presenters. You may want to ask each constituent to complete a survey that’s specific to their experience. Did attendees find the content useful? How about the event experience – was it easy to navigate? Did exhibitors have meaningful interactions with attendees? For speakers, did they find the webcasting presenters’ interface intuitive? Each constituent in a virtual event is important – if they were not 100% satisfied in this event, make it a goal to achieve 100% in the next event.

With the growth we’re seeing in this industry, chances are that when one virtual event concludes, you’re rushing off to your next one. My recommendation is to stop and take a breath. Take the time to gather the team and do a debrief. Then, document the debrief and be sure to review it before you start planning the next event.

## Bio

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Dennis provides strategic consulting to clients on their virtual events and has managed virtual event campaigns for Cisco, HP, Oracle and Microsoft, among others. Dennis blogs about virtual events and virtual worlds at “It’s All Virtual” and is a frequent author and speaker.

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