

REGIONAL CONFERENCE PLANNING MEETING | RECAP

2/23/2021

HQ SHARE

PIVOTING TO HYBRID OR 100% VIRTUAL

Considerations for hybrid events

- **What does “hybrid” really mean?**
 - Any meeting that offers a way to participate online
 - This can be anywhere from meeting with active discussions on twitter, to a meeting that features the live streaming continue and chatrooms online
- **Benefits of a hybrid event:**
 - You can reach participants anywhere in the world and potentially more that those who choose to participate in person
 - Content can easily be repurposed/repackaged
- **Challenges of a hybrid event:**
 - It’s not as simple as putting a camera in a room and live streaming the sessions. The content must be appropriate for online participation.
 - It requires you to think about the entire experience and make sure you’re not neglecting one audience over the other (in-person versus virtual)
 - There is no way to guarantee the level of engagement in a hybrid event
 - What we’re seeing as “success” for hybrid events is hosting the virtual program before or after the in-person experience, not concurrently.
 - It begs the question: “what is the intent of the content?” “does the in-person element translate well online?”
 - Think of your regional conference’s current F&B budget, and that is likely going to be what your technology budget looks like
 - If you’re working through a hotel or venue to try to live steam, we’ve seen costs of \$20K+

Considerations for 100% virtual events

- **Determine Session Delivery Mechanisms**
 - **Live** – allow you to actively interact with the speaker in real time for them to respond in real time. This comes with a risk of technology failing, and anything can happen.
 - **Simulive** – a combination of pre-recorded with a live feature (e.g.: *Q&A with speaker at the end*).
 - **Pre-recorded** – allows attendees to watch at their own leisure but lacks engagement opportunities (i.e.: *on-demand content to watch whenever they’d like to*).

- **Create a Strategic Agenda Design**
 - Virtual experiences need more thought since engagement is key and the most challenging aspect when you're not in-person
 - Challenges: your attendees are distracted (so are you), how will you keep their attention?
 - This must be the focus when planning virtual programming
 - Attendee styles to consider:
 - Sit & watch (passive)
 - Active learning (answer questions in real time or have a handout item to work on during the session)
 - Mixed bag (variety of both passive and active)
 - Are attendee webcams needed? Should they be off for most of program?
 - Engagement strategy
 - What activities are included? (e.g.: musical performance, DJ, Yoga)
 - On a smaller scale: music as they arrive to meeting, stretch break, etc.
 - Schedule regular breaks (more than you would in person)

- **Consider Timing of Sessions**
 - Keep your sessions short (*30-45 mins max*)
 - Variety of programming lengths
 - Time zones, is this within your region only? Do you intend to invite members in other time zones? Be mindful of starting too early or too late.
 - One-day programming is preferred versus programs over multiple days, if it's multi-day, take only 4 hours per day total.
 - Record everything to watch after its broadcast (*expectations of virtual conferences are that everything is accessible after the conference concludes*).
 - Create more breaks for people to step away from their screens (*15-30 min breaks*)
 - Include a form of engagement in all your programming (*speakers should be responsible for this, including you and your team*)

COVID-19 SAFETY TOOLKIT

- **We have uploaded several [COVID-19 resources to MySMPS](#) for regional conferences still planning to have a 2021 in-person conference**
 - Resources include:
 - Waiver example
 - Design room layout examples for social distancing
 - Event contact tracing tips
 - Helpful webinars to watch
 - Safety protocol abuse steps
 - Strategies to avoid exposure at your meeting

OVERALL CONFERENCE CONSIDERATIONS

- **Reminder:** Most 2021 regional conference contracts have been successfully postponed to 2022. However, if you'd to connect with us about your contract negotiations, please reach out to Julio at julio@smps.org!
- **Here is a reminder of the mission of SMPS regional conferences:**
 - *The mission of the SMPS regional conferences is to advocate for, educate, and connect leaders in the building industry by providing an elevated professional experience in an intimate environment, and organized to support geographical networks and culture*
 - That said, regional conferences typically provide an intimate experience – meaning less than 300 or 500
 - Consider strategies and tools to continue to provide an intimate experience virtually for your attendees
- **Keep the buzz going!**
 - Don't let your attendees and members lose sight of your regional conference
 - Continue your communication plan even if you're postponed to 2022
 - For the majority of regional conference attendees, the regional conference is their first impression of an SMPS event beyond their chapter

HOPIN | VIRTUAL PLATFORM FOR REGIONAL CONFERENCE USE

- **Hopin virtual event platform**
 - SMPS HQ has spent months vetting virtual event platforms and has decided on Hopin
 - SMPS HQ will pay for the base product
 - The regional conference may need to pay for any advanced features
 - This provides our regional conferences and their attendees with a consistent experience
 - A few of Hopkin's clients are Slack, Dell, the United Nations and next SMPS HQ!
 - Here are some features of Hopin:
 - Intuitive navigation
 - Easy brand/palette/image updates
 - Keynote presentations
 - Live discussions, breakouts, direct messages and polling
 - Interactive expo areas
 - Private virtual “backstage” for your speakers
 - View event analytics
 - Download recordings for sharing later
 - If you've already taken registrations, or prefer to take the registrations via your current website/processor, you can just upload your registration list into Hopin
 - Access to SMPS' knowledgeable HQ staff available as well as a Hopin project manager
 - Check out this [17-minute YouTube video](#) to see how it works!
 - Please reach out to Julio Santos, SMPS HQ Component Relations Manager at julio@smps.org for more information

BREAKOUT DISCUSSIONS

CHAIR/HOTEL/CONTRACTS ROOM

- While regional conferences may be postponed to 2022, some leaders are making sure their volunteers are doing site visits to get an idea for how their 2022 conference will look
- For 2022 planning, it's best to try to go as large as you can in your planning, for now, and then scale down as needed
 - This is much easier than starting small and trying to scale up, get more rooms at the last minute, etc.
- If space for proper social distancing continues to be a concern, the idea was shared to possibly use a virtual platform for select sessions while the in-person conference was taking place
 - For example, general sessions, networking, and keynotes would take place in the physical meeting rooms, but the attendees can be directed to their hotel rooms to watch specific tracks/sessions via their laptop
- SERC (hybrid in 2021) made note that they have their selected rooms in writing so that the hotel couldn't try to make them switch rooms for another group
 - This included the room names, square footage, and capacity for social distancing
- SERC (hybrid in 2021) shared the following about continuing to plan for an in-person 2021 conference:
 - Focus is 100% on health and safety
 - Hired an event planning to ensure the planner provides expertise for safety and other items
 - They want to ensure the messaging for both in-person and virtual elements are on point
 - i. They are connecting with SMPS HQ staff to connect on messaging
 - ii. If you need assistance with marketing and communications, please reach out to Josh Miles, SMPS Chief Marketing Officer at josh@smps.org or Julio Santos, SMPS HQ Component Relations Manager at julio@smps.org

FINANCE/REGISTRATION ROOM

- Please reach out to Antonio Payne, CPA, SMPS Chief Financial Officer at antonio@smps.org for any budget review
- SMPS HQ recommends that when planning your 2022 conference, budget for less attendees than you're historically used to (e.g., 15-20% less)
- Please ensure your total F&B and A/V pricing is included in the budget – including taxes, service charge, gratuity, etc.
- SRC shared that even though they are postponed to 2022, the finance team is still meeting monthly
- SRC also shared a reminder that some expenses don't go away even when you're postponed (QuickBooks, website hosting, etc.)

- They are factoring those 2021 expenses into their 2022 budget to ensure they're accounted for
- SMPS HQ shared that it may be a good time to go back to the hotel and try to negotiate pricing down such as room night minimums, F&B minimums, etc. before you get closer to your 2022 conference, and before things get "better" and "back to normal"
- SRC shared that one of their priorities is to get their event insurance locked up for 2022 so it can be accounted for
 - Event insurance will look higher than they historically have
 - And they will likely not cover communicable diseases!
- Make sure your conference contracts have an "Impossibility Clause"
 - If you are unable to fulfill your obligation of having an event based on the climate (e.g., COVID-19), then the clause will allow you to get out of the contract
 - Please reach out to Julio Santos, SMPS HQ Component Relations Manager at julio@smps.org for more information

MARKETING/COMMUNICATIONS ROOM

- The status of your conference should be front and center on your website, including date, location, format (in-person, hybrid, virtual), was it postponed from 2021, etc.
 - Only stating that you're hosting your event in 2022 may not be enough
 - There may be folks that are wondering what happened to your 2021 event, and a status update may be nice in that instance
 - If you need assistance with marketing and communications, please reach out to Josh Miles, SMPS Chief Marketing Officer at josh@smps.org
 - Participating chapter websites may also be a good place for a status update
- It also doesn't hurt to have a message/quote from your conference chair on your website
 - We've seen some regional conferences share the status updates via videos, which certainly grabs the audience better than text can
 - [SERC YouTube video](#)
 - [MVRC YouTube video](#)
- Even if you're postponed to 2022 and a year out, it's good to stay top of mind with quarterly emails at the very least to:
 - Send a Save The Date
 - Remind your audience about the importance of your regional conference
 - What to expect in 2022 and what you're working on for them
 - You can even shout out the committee members to acknowledge their work
- Have information or contact information readily available on your website for potential sponsors
 - Even if your conference doesn't have sponsorship packages available, having contact information can be helpful to start the relationship
- SERC recently let their attendees know via an e-blast that they will be offering a hybrid event with in-person and virtual elements
 - They provided a snapshot of their attendee survey results within the e-blast to justify the decision

SPONSORSHIP/PROGRAMS/LOGISTICS/AWARDS ROOM

Sponsorship

- If a sponsor is concerned about the virtual format and their exposure level to your members, consider the following additional benefits:
 - Are they thought leaders? Can they speak at an event?
 - Would they be open to contributing to your e-newsletter?
 - Are they interested in virtual elements such as a video on your website, social media, or e-newsletter?
 - Do they have the ability to send swag or something along those lines to attendees?
 - Can your regional conference offer a sponsor-focused virtual networking event?
 - Ultimately, you should be asking the sponsor what *they* are looking for
 - Be open to having a-la-carte options for sponsorship on top of the packages
 - While surveying your sponsors helps, SMPS HQ finds success in individual phone calls to sponsors

Programs/Logistics/Awards

- New roles to consider: Do you have the full support you need?
 - Production team
 - Pre-production and live streaming
 - Chat Greeters
 - Keep the chats going and address questions in real time
 - Chat Moderators
 - Skimming the entire virtual environment for inappropriate behavior to remove party crashers virtually
 - Platform MC/ Host
 - To keep the cohesive discussions and engagement going on stage in front of all attendees so they know how to determine what's up next)
- What SMPS HQ has experienced is that keynotes are still charging a premium, but there is a potential savings for travel costs
 - Always ask if there is a reduced price for a virtual presentation
- SMPS HQ is also seeing more speakers reaching out for speaking opportunities that we wouldn't normally partner with
- You may consider pre-recording your virtual awards program to keep the production quality high, while lessening the potential for connectivity issues

Questions? Contact Julio Santos, SMPS HQ Component Relations Manager at julio@smps.org