STAGEDGE

THE STAGEDGE EVENTS PLAYBOOK

Everything You Need
To Know To Make Your
Event a Success

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INTRODUCTION

AN EXPERIENCE-INFORMED GUIDEBOOK

With over 48 years of event production experience behind us, we know that planning an event is a herculean effort.

Every step in the process takes skill, strategy, creativity, technical know-how, and empathy. Event planners must leverage every tool in their toolbox to maximize their budget, attract and engage their audience, and achieve critical organizational outcomes—all while managing travel logistics, coordinating between vendors, and making sure attendees are able to get their coffee before the general session starts.

Does that sound like you?

If so, welcome. We created this comprehensive, no-cost guide to corporate event planning and production to inspire, inform, and support you. At Stagedge, we pride ourselves on being transparent with both clients and prospective clients from our first call. Even before you've signed a contract with us, we are here to offer expertise and ideas, and we'll do our best to answer your questions with honesty and insight.

In that spirit, this guide provides recommendations and tips backed by our experience producing thousands of events around the world. From choosing a venue to selecting your vendors and crafting event content, we've spelled out our best advice for executing an incredible experience your audience will remember.

As you'll see repeated in many of our chapters, we believe that a successful event starts when you choose the right partner. We hope you'll find this guide useful, and that you'll reach out to us to continue the conversation when you're ready to start planning your next event.

PART I

GETTING STARTED

AN EVENT PLANNING GLOSSARY: EQUIPMENT AND ONSITE TERMS

Does your CEO need a "green room?"
What the heck is a "run of show?"

As you plan your corporate event, it's easy to be confused by event-planning terms—and we're here to help. To kick off our guide, we'll cover all the terms you need to know for equipment and onsite jargon.

Backline

A backline refers to the musical equipment used by a band that is in the "back," or behind them. This can include everything from amps, speakers, and stands to keyboards, drums, and percussion.

COI

Short for "certificate of insurance," a COI is proof that you carry business insurance. An essential requirement both for potential partners and customers, a COI signals that it is safe to do business with an organization.

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CYC

A CYC, or "cyclorama," is a curved curtain or wall used as a backdrop in everything from theater to broadcast media. Often made of canvas, muslin, or scrim, a CYC is curved to give the illusion of unlimited and infinite space, with no hard-edge boundaries.

DSM

Similar to a teleprompter, a DSM, or "down-stage monitor," displays electronic text, cues, or slides for a presenter—but it is located on the ground or the stage. Note that both teleprompters and DSMs can offer scrolling scripts (like a newscaster), or notes in the form of static bullets.

FOH/BOH

Used in restaurants and event venues, FOH, or "front of house," refers to the area the public or clients will see, such as dining or audience areas. In contrast, BOH of "back of house" refers to that part of a restaurant or venue (such as the kitchen or backstage area) that the public does not see.

GOBO

Short for "go-between optics," a GOBO is a disc or other object placed in front of a light source to project an image or pattern, such as a logo or word. Typically made of steel or glass, plastic GOBOs now exist for LED fixtures.

Green Room

A term borrowed from the theater world, the green room is the space in a venue that functions as a changing area, HMU area (see below), waiting room, and lounge for performers at any point when they are not on the stage (note: the room does not necessarily have to be green!).

Ground-supported

This refers to equipment that is based on the ground and thus, does not need to be hung. In general, ground-supported equipment is easier to install and manage.

HMU

Short for "hair and makeup," HMU is an easily overlooked detail that can make the difference between a star performance and a sloppy one.

IMAG

Short for "image magnification," IMAG refers to the large-scale video projection of presenters, performers, and content at events. This enables the audience to capture details that, due to distance, they otherwise would not be able to see.

LED Panels

LED panels are composed of light-emitting diodes, or "LEDs" that can be assembled into walls and used in entrances, as stage backdrops, or exhibition spaces to display rich content.

Plot Plan

A plot plan is a bird's-eye view of a venue, showing all of its structures, features, and facilities. This is fundamental for ensuring that your run of show (see below) will operate properly.

Presidential Teleprompter

Whereas a standard teleprompter (see below) is located in front of (or below) a video camera, a "presidential" teleprompter consists of square glass on tall stands placed next to the lectern. This is convenient if a presenter will be staying at the lectern rather than moving around.

Rider

A rider is an addition to a contract detailing certain terms and conditions. For events, the rider comprises the specific terms agreed upon by the talent to perform at the venue. These usually cover hospitality, security, and technical needs, and may also extend to areas such as transportation, comp passes, interviews, and broadcast rights.

Rigging Points

The places, or "points" on the ceiling where equipment is hung or fixed. These points must be adjusted and maintained to comply with safety specifications and are usually detailed in what is known as a "rigging plot."

Run of Show

The step-by-step sequence of how an event will take place, including timings, who will be responsible for each part, and any technical direction. Also known as a "rundown" or "show flow," these plans are essential for keeping events running smoothly.

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Scenic Panels

Like LED panels, scenic panels offer another spectacular way to create a backdrop. These modular, or moveable, panels provide surfaces for projection and can be combined with lighting or other effects.

Speaker Ready Room

A speaker ready room is a room with a mini set-up of the actual performance area. It contains equipment such as DSM (see above), microphones, and prompters for the speaker to rehearse in the final moments before going onto the actual stage.

Teleprompter

Also known as an "autocue," a teleprompter is a device that displays electronic visual text for a presenter. As the presenter can look straight into a camera lens or at the public, a teleprompter gives the impression that they are either speaking spontaneously or have memorized their speech.

Upstage/Downstage

In stage direction, upstage is towards the back or curtain, and downstage is toward the audience. These terms can be combined with "stage left," which is to the left of the performer, or "stage right," which is to the performer's right.

VOG

The VOG, or "voice of God," is the invisible, off-stage voice used to introduce presenters or make announcements.

EVENT PLANNING, SIMPLIFIED

Choosing technology, scheduling and preparing performers, setting up the stage and venue, filming, and live streaming: there are a lot of moving parts to a successful event. By understanding the highly technical jargon, one piece of event planning is made a bit easier.

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RICHARD FERRARA
DIRECTOR OF SALES OPERATIONS

WHAT IS THE MOST CRITICAL PART OF ANY EVENT?

Technology is the most important part of any event, hands down. I know attendees want their coffee in the morning, and they might rave about the banquet reception, but the purpose of every event is to deliver a message. If the technology is ineffective, the message does not get delivered and the event is a failure. We use technology to deliver the most important part of the event: the message.

GO LIVE WITH CONFIDENCE:
5 STEPS OF SUCCESSFUL EVENT PLANNING

How did you feel the last time you hosted an event for your company? Were you confident your conference would meet your organization's goals?

The truth is that your event's success is determined long before the big week arrives. Early and deep collaboration between you and your production partner—to uncover the purpose that will then drive every detail of your engagement—determines your event's overall impact and success.

"Collaboration" sounds a bit mysterious, but it doesn't have to be. In this chapter, we're breaking down the event-planning process into five easy—but critical—steps.

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1   IDENTIFY THE SHIFT

Behind every event is a necessary organizational change—or "shift." Think about what's changed since your last conference that could impact or benefit attendees. Whether your organization has a new leader, a new product to launch, or a new structure, it is crucial to identify what "shift" you want to highlight and what result you hope your announcement or showcase will achieve.

Example: Imagine you're hosting an annual sales kick-off in which the Chief Customer Officer (CCO) will reveal an aggressive new sales goal. Rather than feeling daunted by the announcement, you want your sales team to return to work inspired and empowered. Your production partner should work with you to explore the ins and outs of this "shift," uncovering the implications of the CCO's keynote and what you want audience members to take away from the event. This work provides the foundation for your next steps.

> You and your production partner should **work together** to identify what change you are trying to drive through your event. This "shift" will become the foundation for your planning process.

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2 ALIGN ON THE BASICS

Before jumping into tactics, your production vendor and internal teams need to align on your unique requirements. These nitty-gritty details include both the immovable facts—the budget, the number of attendees, and the location—and the more subtle nuances of your event's goals. Beyond the "shift" you've identified in Step 1, what specific objectives must you meet for this conference to be considered a success? Who are the primary internal stakeholders beyond the attendees themselves?

Example: Let's continue using the annual sales kick-off as an example. In this case, your production team needs to know the size of the sales organization, the number of remote and in-person attendees, and the overall return on investment (ROI) your executive team expects to achieve. In addition, during this stage you and your production partner should tease out more specific event goals—like promoting a sense of team unity—and identify key stakeholders like the CCO, whose experience at the conference will inform next year's budget.

Your event should be as **unique as your organization**. You can ensure your conference **shines** by working with your event production partner to tailor the experience to your organization's objectives.

3 IMAGINE TOGETHER

Now that you've identified the "shift" behind your event and you've outlined its parameters, it's time for you and your production partner to put your imaginations to work. This brainstorming process will help you customize your event for your organization while introducing the opportunity to create wonder and excitement. What experiences will help you achieve your goals and activate your audience? Although every conference has limitations—usually budget and time—that shouldn't prevent a good production team from getting creative.

Example: Returning to our sales kick-off, your production partner might recommend an immersive scenic experience during the keynote presentation that creates a sense of community to motivate and unify attendees. After brainstorming which visuals, animations, auditory elements, and videos would be meaningful to your audience, your production team can move on to recommend corresponding entertainment and activities. Consider what experience might get your sales team in sync—maybe a silent disco to end the evening?

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4 CREATE AND COLLABORATE

This is the exciting part—bringing your event to life! So far, most of your planning has been abstract and focused on alignment. In this stage, you'll focus on the "how," diving into the specifics that will refine your attendees' experience. Here, your production partner should work with you to determine the content and media needed to achieve your goals. It's also an opportunity for your partner to recommend innovative tactics such as environmental artists, laser effects, large-scale LED screens, and world-class musical performances. As plans take shape, your production partner should help you visualize how your event will come together and check in regularly to ensure their ideas hit the mark.

Example: In the final planning stages of the sales kick-off, your production partner should present renderings of both the in-person and virtual event space and demonstrate how the design of each experience fosters the unity and motivation needed within the sales organization. The production team should also review the agenda for the conference—including any activities scheduled around presentations and workshops. The team might even check the disco's setlist and make sure the '90s hip-hop favored by your CCO is heavily featured.

Following this process will help you **feel confident and calm** when you "go live." This event-planning process allows you and your production team to align on objectives and create a foundation for an experience that will **WOW**.

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5 EXECUTION AND DELIVERY

Whether in-person or virtual, there is nothing like reaching the date of your event. Final rehearsals and setup are complete. Your vendor's production know-how has come together to wow your team and event attendees. Unlike the previous steps, this last part of the process is less of a collaboration and more of an opportunity for you and your team to step back and assess. Has your work to align, imagine, and create left you feeling calm and confident that your event will meet your team's objectives? If you've followed the steps above, the answer should be: Yes!

Example: To bring our example of the sales kick-off to a close, we can imagine that— having taken the time to align, plan, and get creative with your production partner— your team is approaching "event day" with calm excitement. You know every detail has been taken care of, and you're confident that your sales team will walk away empowered and engaged by a flawlessly executed kick-off. The only thing left to do is attend the conference and look forward to the dance floor at the end of the day.

EVENT MANAGEMENT

TARGET   BUDGETING   SCHEDULING   LOGISTICS   LOCATION   MARKETING   COORDINATING

CHOOSING THE RIGHT EVENT PARTNER

Before you launch into the early stages of event planning, there is one more critical pre-planning step to consider: choosing your production partner. Before you and your team make your selection, remember to ask potential vendors how they approach the planning process and how they customize each engagement. Their approach should include the early legwork needed to discover the event's purpose and create alignment.

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AVOID AN EARLY MISTAKE:
THE 7 CARDINAL SINS OF EVENT PLANNING

Underestimating the complexity of event planning is unfortunately a common pitfall. With so many details to consider, event management requires unique skill sets, especially if you want to pull off that "one-to-remember" experience. Seasoned event managers have the insight to not only anticipate roadblocks but also overcome them. Partnering with an accomplished, professional vendor who knows and understands the ins and outs of running events is an essential first step, but it is not the only consideration. Since forewarned is forearmed, here are seven "cardinal sins" to avoid when planning your next event.

1 CHOOSING THE VENUE FIRST

Understandably, some organizations jump straight into booking a venue in their eagerness to get back on track. However, choosing the wrong venue could have significant financial implications, including having to pay your way out of a contract if you made the wrong choice. One of the biggest pitfalls in choosing a site is underestimating your space needs.

Venues often claim, for example, that they can handle 1,000 attendees, but this number shrinks when you add in technical crew, production equipment, chairs, etc. Your space needs will almost always exceed your initial estimates, and it is far easier to make a large space look smaller than squeeze a giant crowd into a too-small venue. A good production partner will help you choose the right space for your event goals—and even help you vet the contract ahead of time.

2 UNDERESTIMATING COSTS

Old models for estimating costs are outdated, and budgeting with a pre-Covid mentality is a recipe for trouble. In the new economic landscape, you need to think big—ideally three times as big—as before. Why? There are a few factors at play:

Hybrid events are really two events in one— both virtual and in-person simultaneously. This combination requires additional technology and staff to ensure the virtual experience is as good as the physical one, and these extras cost money. Inflation continues to take its toll. Travel, lodging, food, and labor—everything connected to hosting great events—costs more than it has in decades.

Smart event budgeting requires a cushion—extra money allocated for contingencies since Murphy's Law applies. Your keynote speaker requests technology you don't have. An executive can't rehearse until after hours. Having a financial cushion ready for these pop-up issues is a necessity.

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3 FORGETTING TO INCLUDE STAKEHOLDERS

When it comes to planning a large event, there is nothing more challenging to accommodate than last-minute additions. To prevent the likelihood of that occurring, ensure everyone who has a stake in the event's outcome is invited to the planning process. Key stakeholder groups include:

» **Senior leadership or other decision-makers within the organization.** Anyone with final approval of the overall event must be involved as early as possible. When asking for input, use phrases that encourage feedback, like: "I wanted to run a few ideas past you," or, "here's where we are so far. I'd love your feedback."

» **Keynote or celebrity speakers.** These folks may need special arrangements, or they could come with riders requiring that your organization meet specific needs or requests as part of the agreement to appear. Be sure to go over these needs ahead of time to avoid unpleasant surprises.

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4   NEGLECTING BRANDING AND DESIGN

Poor branding and design can sabotage your event, creating an amateur appearance. Consistency in branding and design throughout every touchpoint for your event is key, beginning with save-the-date and registration emails and including the website hub that contains event information.

You'll want this consistent tone and appearance to carry on through signage and other graphics at the venue, including breakout rooms, meals at restaurants, etc. The goal is a seamless event where the theme is established early and ties the event together. Uniformed staff acting as "human arrows" to guide participants is a nice feature, as well as creating an event app or dispersing QR codes at various spots at the event so attendees can scan for information.

5   FORGETTING TO ENTERTAIN YOUR AUDIENCE

There are far more reasons to skip an event than to attend, and in the post-Covid world, you'll need something to break through the inertia of two years of sitting at home. Planners must find the hook that motivates people to attend their events. Finding the "fun factor," the thing that gives people a reason to go to your event, is of primary concern. These fun factors will make your event memorable, inducing attendees to talk about the event and want to return to future events.

Spectacles like live performances—think dueling pianos, a well-known band, or light shows—can lure people out of their hotel rooms for dinner and create excitement. The fun factor can also be an activity, like a yoga workshop, a guided hike, a helicopter tour, or a trip to a brewery. Imagination is the key. At one successful event, the organizer created a designated space, in a branded lounge, for informal gatherings between workshops.

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6 NEGLECTING YOUR SPEAKERS

Speakers are the lifeblood of any event, and forgetting to take care of them can be disastrous. Planners must ensure speakers are updated frequently on what's happening and any changes to the plan. Rehearsals are also indispensable opportunities for speakers to practice with venue technology. Event planners have a chance to help speakers shape their presentations through training and script consultation. Remember, while your speakers are often technical experts, they may have little experience as presenters and public speakers. Ideas to help them achieve success include:

» Incorporating video into presentations

» Encouraging interactivity

» Explaining the format of your speaker's presentation (e.g., panel, Q & A, workshop, speech) when you meet with them for the first time

» Offering a consultation to each speaker with a package of what you can offer them. For example, "We offer speech coaches that will give you feedback on your presentation, and help with tech enhancements, video, and branding advice."

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7 SKIPPING REHEARSALS

There are two types of people: those who want to rehearse, and those who don't realize they need to...yet. Rehearsal isn't solely about working out material; it's also a time to learn about the event space and the technology features available. Rehearsals are also critical for production crews who need to know what's expected of them, too. These sessions can help answer several questions, including:

» Does the speaker know how the tech in their presentation works?

» Is there video in the presentation that the production crew needs to have cued up and ready at a certain time?

» Is the microphone at the right height? What about the volume?

» Is there an emcee or other speaker or group that needs to be on stage before or after a speaker?

» If there is a live band appearing before a speaker, do those two need to interact in any way? Should the band introduce the speaker?

» What are the lighting cues?

» Be aware of transitions between events. Do speakers know what to do at the end of their talk? Specifically, are they introducing the next talk, or do they dismiss the audience? What happens next?

BRING YOUR "A GAME" TO YOUR NEXT LIVE EVENT

It's undeniable that the landscape of live events has changed substantially over the last few years. Now that the working world has mostly returned to normal, it's "go-time" for live events planning. Partnering with a team of experts like Stagedge can take your event planning and execution to the next level, ensuring your attendees receive not only a high-quality informational session but also an experience that will keep them coming back for more.

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PERSPECTIVE

JASON COURTEMANCHE
ART DIRECTOR

WHAT'S SOMETHING YOU WISH YOUR CLIENTS KNEW ABOUT EVENT BRANDING?

When our team is empowered to spearhead creative and design across the event, that allows us to be even more innovative. We don't have to be as concerned about "the rules" because consistency is built into our team. We can stretch the bounds of the brand so that the result is cohesive but interesting and nuanced.

CHOOSING THE PERFECT VENUE: 5 THINGS TO LOOK FOR DURING A SITE VISIT

It's love at first sight—you've found the perfect venue for your event.

But are you sure?

However ideal a location may appear at first glance, many venues contain hidden pitfalls and costs that make them much more expensive than anticipated—or simply the wrong fit for your event. To ensure you're getting the right venue for the best price, it's critical to conduct a careful site visit. Richard Mankiewicz, Stagedge's senior director of production, recommends looking at five critical things on a site visit before you sign the dotted line.

① ROOM CAPACITY

Buyer beware: Don't reserve a venue only to realize you cannot fit all your attendees.

The first problem starts with the fact that many venues are overly optimistic about their capacity. "We've never seen a case where the advertised room capacity is accurate with AV," says Mankiewicz.
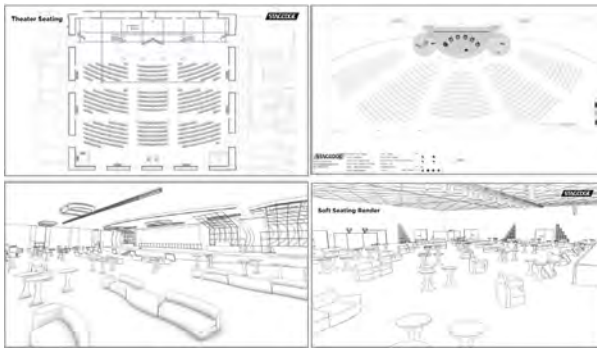
The second problem is one of planning—the capacity of a venue depends on what you intend to do with it. Will there be sit-down dining? Networking and stand-up mingling? Theater seating to watch a keynote speech? All these activities require different amounts of space. And once the stage, equipment, and technical team are installed, space gets further reduced. Depending on your event activity, a ballroom that advertises capacity as 500 may fit no more than 350. The same, of course, goes for classrooms and breakout rooms.

DETERMINING ROOM SIZE

1 | Request CAD drawings from the venue, which will allow you to configure your plans ahead of time via a program such as Vectorworks.

2 | Ask about the fire marshal's rules for occupancy, which vary from state to state.

3 | Ultimately, the question to ask during a site visit is the simplest one: "Is there enough space to do what we want to do?"

2 WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE OPPORTUNITIES

Wowing attendees means building an immersive branding experience from the moment they enter the venue. Not only does signage help with directions, but it's also inspiring and unifying for everyone who attends.

Your onsite visit, then, should include wayfinding discovery. What opportunities exist to get your message across? Will the hotel allow you to add "clings" to walls or windows? What about signage outside the venue, for example on flagpoles or a standalone sign on the sidewalk?

"FedEx is known for creating and installing event signage—and they often have an actual office in the larger hotels for this purpose," Mankiewicz advises. "We usually walk around with the FedEx rep to get suggestions for where to hang banners and clings, as they know what has worked well before."

> Will the hotel allow you to add "clings" to walls or windows? What about signage outside the venue, for example flagpoles or a standalone sign on the sidewalk?
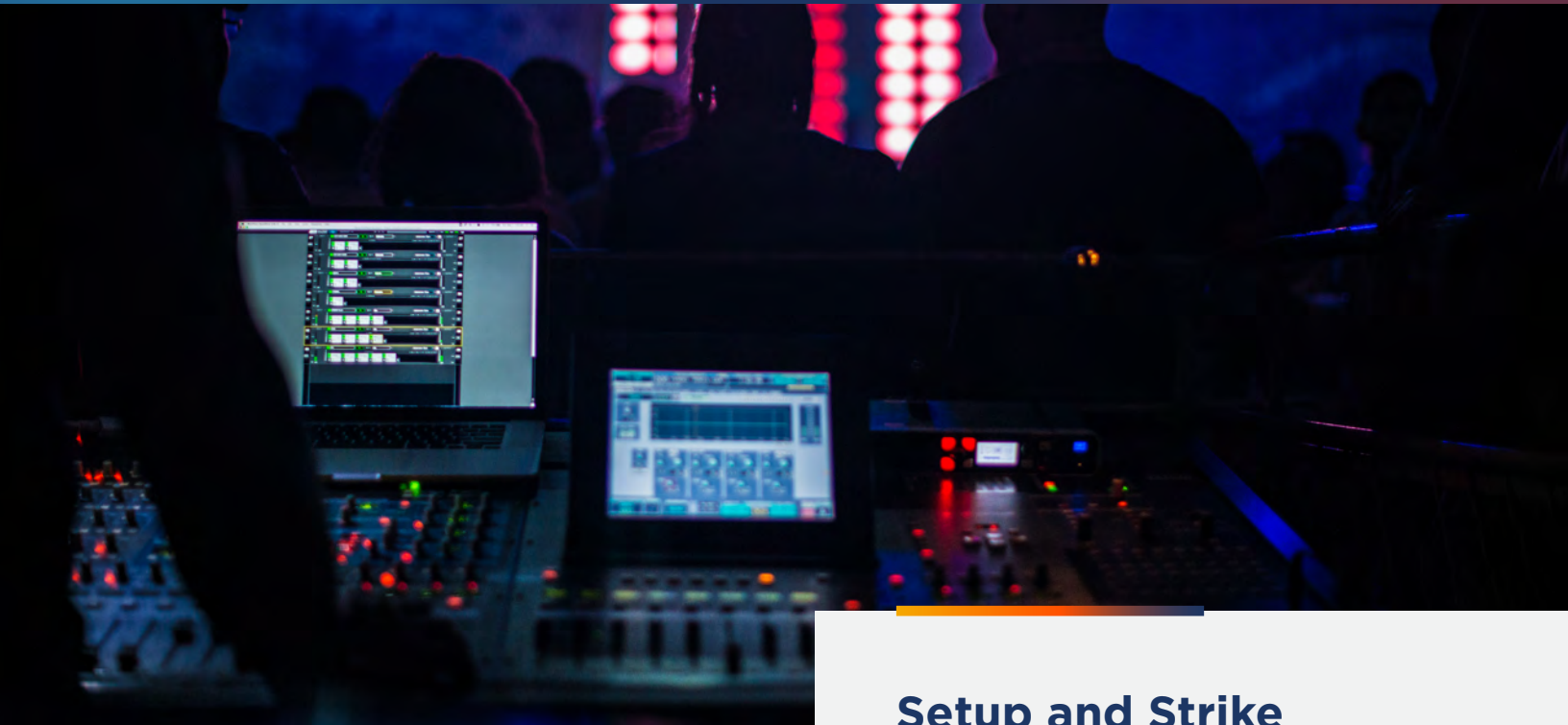
3 POWER AND INTERNET

Similar to room capacity, venues also often overestimate and overcharge for power needs. "In one case, we found that a hotel wanted to charge for 600 amps when our client only required 45 amps," Mankiewicz recalls. "We were able to negotiate down to 100 amps, resulting in a big cost savings." And the same goes for internet.

Do your requirements match with what the hotel wants to charge you? Is there room to negotiate savings? Venue owners look out for their interests, and so should you.

Setup and Strike

Don't forget that large events require two or three days for both setup and strike time, including rehearsals for your C-suite speakers. Some venues will be reluctant to accommodate this extra time, either because they have booked other events or because your guests will not be staying in the hotel during that time. This is something to negotiate with the venue—way ahead of time.

4 MEASURE FOR SUCCESS

Simply put, some hotels are well equipped for hosting large events, while others are not. While CAD drawings of the venue are helpful, there are some key areas where you should go in and check for yourself:

» **Ballrooms and breakout rooms:** Measure walls and truss points to double-check the accuracy of the CAD drawings. Ensure that ceiling heights are tall enough for sight lines and camera views and that chandeliers won't be in the way. Are there other things that were not captured in the CAD drawing, such as mouse holes in the walls to run wires through? If not, you will have to run longer feeder cables through open doors and then add ramps and other accommodations to avoid trip hazards and unsightliness.

» **Loading docks:** Loading and unloading equipment is a major part of event planning. If your venue possesses loading docks, check to ensure they are compatible with your trucks and trailers—and don't forget to measure the garage entrances. If there are no loading docks, you will need to rent a forklift to load and unload, adding time and expense. For certain hotels, you may even need a police detail to block the street so that your trailer can double-park and unload that way.

» **Elevator sizes:** Like loading docks, the venue's service elevators also need to be big enough to fit equipment and cases. If the elevators are too small, your team will need to unpack cases on the loading dock—a situation that adds both time and expense.

5 MANAGEMENT AND PERSONNEL

Certain venues require union labor, which can be expensive. Additionally, a company such as Encore or an in-house AV provider may have exclusive rights to manage certain aspects of the production. If they do, you will have no choice but to work with them. "If union labor is required," Mankiewicz notes, "your vendors need to be able to work well with them." It's important to ask about labor requirements ahead of time, as this will add to your overall cost.

PARTNERING REDUCES THE RISK

When it comes to event planning, your venue is the first and maybe the most important step in the process—except for choosing your event production partner. Engaging a production partner early in the process and bringing them along to site visits will help you negotiate with venues and develop a better understanding of what you need.

Engaging a production partner early in the process, and bringing them along to site visits, will help you negotiate with venues and develop a better understanding of what you need.

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THINKING ABROAD? THINK AHEAD: 5 BEST PRACTICES FOR INTERNATIONAL EVENT PRODUCTION

Nearly one-third of all business meetings or events require attendees to travel internationally. Besides creating a strong sense of allure, international travel allows attendees to gain a new perspective on their work, industry, and colleagues. However, holding a conference abroad can feel daunting. Read on to learn some of the best practices you and your production team need to know when planning an international event.

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1   EXTEND YOUR TIMELINE

Planning for domestic events in the U.S. usually takes place within a 12-month timeframe. International events, however, need a longer timeline—ideally, 18-24 months. The reasons for a longer planning period are twofold:

» Event planners and the production team require additional time to research and apply for local permits (which often have long wait times). Additionally, accommodating different time zones across the globe slows down internal approval processes that could usually take place in a single day.

» International travel is also more complex for attendees. Planners should send the "save the date" at least six months before the event so attendees can cost-effectively book travel and apply for passports and visas if needed.

Besides creating a **strong sense of allure**, international travel allows attendees to gain a **new perspective** on their work, industry, and colleagues.

2 MAKE YOUR LOCATION WORK FOR YOUR OBJECTIVES—AND YOUR BUDGET

When event planners evaluate locations for their overseas conferences, they should consider how to maximize their investment both in terms of spending *and* event objectives. A world-class destination doesn't have to be a black mark on your budget. In fact, for companies with global offices, a non-American destination may be less expensive. For example, if you have large teams in both Europe and the U.S., Athens could be more affordable than New York or Los Angeles.

You can also boost your return on investment by matching your objectives to your event location. Rewarding your sales team for a big year? A tropical locale feels celebratory and exciting. Is sustainability a key priority? A deeply "green" city— like Copenhagen or Amsterdam— provides meaningful context.

There are two things to consider when choosing an event location: your **budget** and your **objectives**. If your organization is global, consider picking a central event location—like hosting a conference on sustainability in a sustainable city.

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3 DON'T SKIP THE SITE VISITS

Site visits are essential for any conference plan, but—given the cost and time required for international travel—it's tempting to reduce the number of site visits or people on each visit. Be wary of this potentially costly mistake. International venues are not always set up the way U.S.-based planners have come to expect. A site visit is critical to understand how the event will flow.

With any site visit, setting an agenda prior to your visit is equally important and fiscally responsible. Having an agenda in place will ensure there is no wasted time and that the "right" team is in place.

As an example, a certain Belgian venue seats 2,500 attendees according to its specs online. On the site visit, however, event planners discover it lacks a large lobby, and there's no place for attendees to gather for coffee before the general session. Without a site visit, attendees would be left waiting outside. However, because the planners visited the venue, they could budget for a tented coffee area in the building's courtyard.

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4 MAKE YOUR EVENT WELCOMING AND SAFE FOR ALL

While a conference abroad can expand people's horizons in exciting ways, there are critical elements that should be in place to ensure everyone's comfort and safety. Attendees' personal cultures and preferences should be respected by making a range of cuisine available at mealtimes and ensuring that the timing of meetings doesn't conflict with cultural or religious traditions. And to remain respectful of the host country, attendees should be educated ahead about local customs, including dress codes and cuisine.

Safety is also critical. Nearly any location—domestic or international—will have some safety concerns, and some attendees will feel more anxious when traveling abroad. A "need-to-know" email sent before the start of the event will help wary travelers feel more secure. This communication should include "best practices" for transportation with a clear, direct message on the best and safest way(s) to travel.

Guidance doesn't stop once attendees have reached their destination. Extensive signage and waymarkers will keep everyone on the right path. For a truly white-glove attendee experience, onsite greeters can answer common questions and point wayward guests in the right direction.

Make everyone feel **safe** and welcome. Provide **"homey"** touches that help attendees feel **comfortable**. Ensure that pre-event communication and onsite wayfinding equip attendees with the **knowledge** they need to be secure.

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5 LET THE LOCALS BE YOUR GUIDE

No matter how many site visits you schedule (and we encourage you to have a few!), nobody knows your event location better than the folks who already live there. Ask your production partner to connect you with a network of on-location vendors who lessen the burden of an international event. They might say "plinth" when we say "podium," but local event professionals will know the venue, the culture, and the city best—and it can be cheaper and more environmentally friendly to hire locally. Just be sure to anticipate fluctuations in exchange rates when budgeting for their services.

TEMPT ATTENDEES WITH A TRIP ABROAD

As the business world rebounds from the pandemic years, people are eager for something new. An international conference gives attendees the incentive they need to pack their bags and hop on a plane. Events are transformational and transportive—both physically and mentally. We don't go to conferences to be passive listeners. We go to be challenged, to connect with one another, and to learn. By taking your event abroad, your attendees will be assured that the time and effort of travel will be worthwhile.

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PART II

PLANNING AND PRODUCTION

PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN EVENT PRODUCTION: 3 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR VENDOR

Planning a multi-day event or conference is not for the faint of heart. There are the ins and outs of choosing a venue, budgeting, building a website, and hiring talent and vendors—not to mention the thousand-and-one details that go into the week of production itself.

In the face of all of this, the most important decision you can make is the selection of your production partner. Ironically, however, many vendors are still organizing their events via Excel spreadsheets. Clearly, there is a better way. In this chapter, we'll lay out three key questions you should be asking your vendor to ensure that project management for your event is both up to snuff and up-to-date.

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1 DOES THE VENDOR HAVE A PROJECT MANAGEMENT OFFICE (PMO)?

While project management offices (PMOs) are often associated with large companies, they've become increasingly important for event production vendors, as well. Why? According to the project management team at Stagedge, there are two main reasons.

First, PMOs focus on creating systems. Instead of fluctuating, "one-off" activities that can easily be misunderstood or misinterpreted, the PMO schedules regular meetings with department heads to shape, organize, and troubleshoot the planning process. With such systems in place, teams can collaborate with ease while stress, mistakes, and human error are all reduced. In short, the bird's-eye view offered by a PMO allows for better and more straightforward project management.

Second, PMOs involve clients in the process, allowing you to see every piece of the project in real time. The idea of letting clients see "how the sausage is made" may scare some vendors, but transparency helps everyone see what still needs to happen to get to the finish line. Viewing the timelines and receiving alerts when tasks are accomplished means you are never left guessing, as often occurs in more ad hoc event planning structures.

> Although the idea of letting clients see "how the sausage is made" may scare some vendors, transparency helps everyone see what still needs to happen to get to the finish line.

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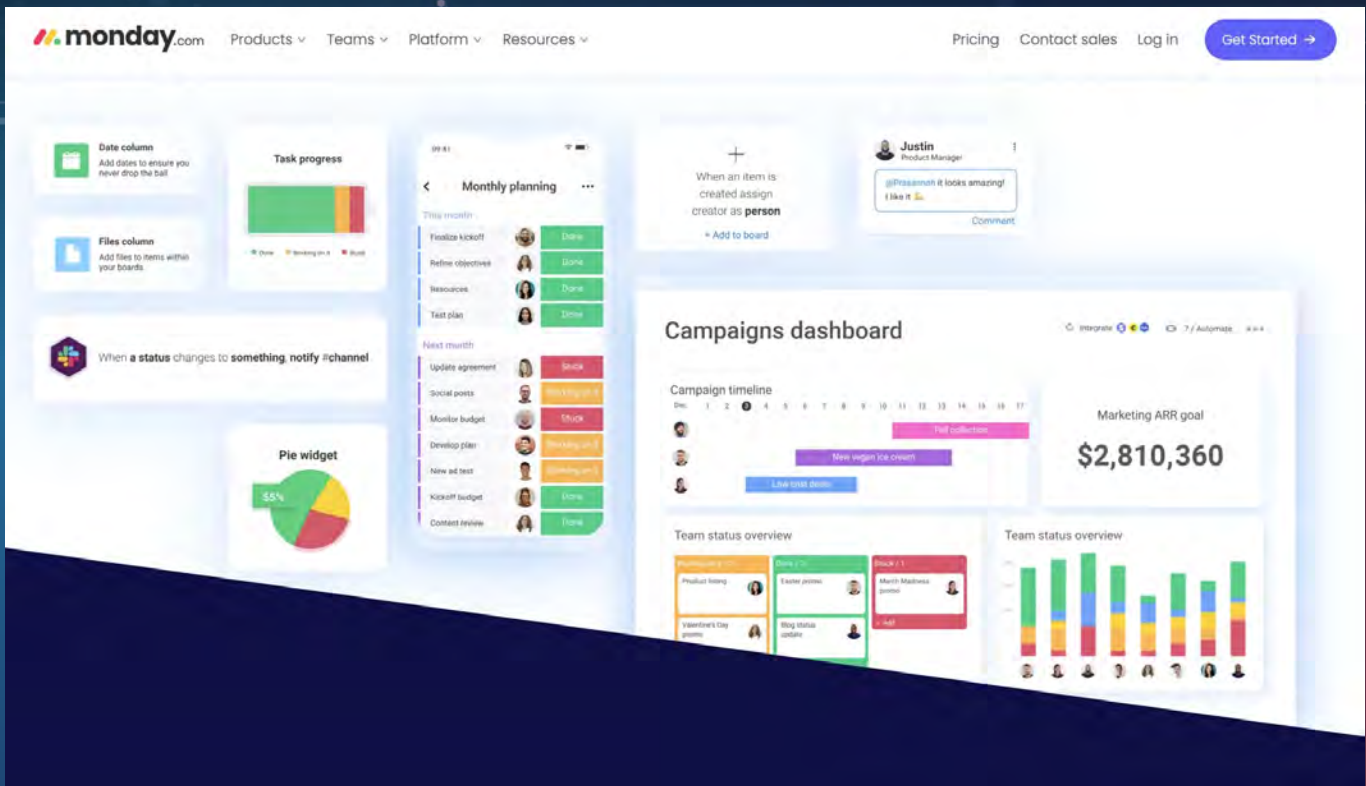
2 DOES THE VENDOR USE PROJECT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE?

Say goodbye to juggling multiple Excel sheets—project management software for live event production has arrived. But is your vendor using it?

According to Michael Basteri, director of solutions at Stagedge, his solutions team vetted a number of solutions before setting up a small pilot program with the project management software Monday.com. When the PMO was established, Monday.com was finally chosen for our enterprise solution.

Here's why Monday.com was the right choice:

» **Ease of use:** With an intuitive interface, Monday.com is simple for everyone—not just the IT experts.

» **Customizable:** Monday makes it easy to create templates that can then be customized and used for new projects. This cuts down on both time and error.

» **Client-friendly:** As many people as necessary can be invited onto the platform, allowing your team to collaborate with the vendor's team—no limits. Since you can track deadlines and offer feedback, there is no need to ever feel out of the loop (related to #1 above).

» **Facilitates communication:** Comments and updates can be communicated to the entire group or to specific individuals by simply using the "@name" convention. And because the newest version of a file is always accessible to everyone on the team, version-control problems are vastly reduced.

Don't forget to ask your vendor which project management software they use, what functionality it possesses, and how you can be onboarded. You can even ask to see a sample of how it works before signing on.

Don't forget to ask your vendor which project management software they use, what functionality it possesses, and how you can be onboarded.

3   IS THERE A DEDICATED PROJECT MANAGER (FOR YOUR EVENT/PROJECT)?

We've discussed the importance of a project management office and software. Now it's time to discuss the role of project managers themselves. Beyond the project infrastructure, your vendor should be designating an individual staff member to oversee your entire project. This role should include tracking deadlines, keeping projects moving, and maintaining constant communication with you. Make no mistake: this is a full-time job.

A full-time project manager is not an extraneous expense. It allows other team members —including producers, senior producers, technical directors, and creative directors—to focus on their jobs and missions. Freeing the team from project-management tasks also allows them to spend more time mastering their piece of the project and communicating it to others. Finally, having a single point of contact for project and timeline questions is simply gold for you, the client. This translates to greater efficiency and communication—and, yes, cost savings.

SELECTING THE RIGHT VENDOR IS A CRITICAL STEP

Live event production consists of a multitude of moving parts. When things go right, these moving parts are invisible to your audience. When things go wrong, they show—leaving your audience disappointed or underwhelmed. With so much at stake, it's critical to know that your event production partner can handle the scope of the project. Just as we interview prospective employees, tenants, and business partners, it is fundamental to ask vendors about the big three: a project management office to create systems, project management software to organize workflow, and a project manager to oversee the overall project.

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UPLEVEL YOUR EVENT
BY CENTERING THE AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE

Event planners understandably focus much of their attention on filling the main slots of their conferences or SKOs—the keynotes, workshops, and exhibitions that comprise the educational aspect of the event. In all the hubbub, though, what often gets lost is the ability to "zoom out" for a look at the most important— and neglected—piece of event planning: the attendee experience. In this chapter, we'll offer tips for ensuring that your attendees are getting the most out of your event— throughout their entire journey.

DON'T FORGET WHAT HAPPENS OUTSIDE THE VENUE

Event planners are understandably focused on what happens inside the venue: the speakers and educational workshops that provide the main content of the event. But don't forget that the event also encompasses what happens outside the venue. Things like arrivals, departures, meals, and evening activities can make an event memorable—in positive or negative ways. While planning, remember that the attendee journey starts from the moment a participant arrives in the city and ends with them getting back into their car or on a plane.

Tips:

» You'll want to start setting the tone and atmosphere even before your event begins. Consider sending out digital info packets prior to the event to get attendees oriented and dropping off welcome baskets in hotel rooms to generate excitement.

» Ensure that the process of arrival, check-in, and check-out is simple, intuitive, and smooth. What happens if someone arrives a day early? Or stays a day later?

» Consider transport from airports and train stations, signage, and staffing needs for before and after the event.

OOPS!

MISTAKE: IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT FILLING BLOCKS OF TIME

Facing a blank calendar can be a daunting task, and it's tempting to think of event planning as simply filling open blocks of time. But this approach can result in an overbooked schedule that causes burnout for participants. Never forget to "zoom out" and think about the attendee's entire journey through your event. The goal is to offer a fulfilling experience, not merely to fill time.

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SEEK BALANCE IN EVENT PLANNING

Balancing education and entertainment against downtime is a bit of a tightrope act—but one that must be managed. The goal is to give attendees enough to do while not overwhelming them with a jam-packed agenda.

It is important to offer attendees downtime to greet one another, check in with their families, or just take a deep breath. These breaks can also offer opportunities for informal or unstructured conversations with event speakers or experts in a more relaxed forum.

FINDING THE "FUN FACTOR"

Whether it's a live band, dueling pianos, or a light show, lure attendees out of their hotel rooms with something special that will keep them reminiscing about your event. Off-site activities can also pump up the "fun factor." Consider yoga sessions, wine tastings, helicopter tours, or a private tour to a local tourist attraction. All of these activities provide bonding and networking opportunities, while making attendees feel included and entertained.

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Tips:

» Remember that your audience will include both introverts and extroverts. Some people will want to be social the entire time, while others will need alone time to recharge.

» Scheduling multiple workshops or speakers at the same time offers attendees options for how they want to spend their time. But do so with great deliberation so that attendees are not forced to choose between two equally desirable options. For instance, scheduling a technical workshop at the same time as a sales workshop offers attendees two very distinct options—which is a good thing.

» Consider creating a branded lounge—just for event participants—where people can relax, check email, get refreshments, and socialize with one another. This keeps attendees together while also offering them a designated spot to recharge.

HELP YOUR PRESENTERS DELIVER THEIR BEST

In today's fast-paced world, attention spans are down and expectations for a high-quality experience are up. Bottom line? Attendees have a lower tolerance for sitting through another boring slide presentation. One sure way of boosting the attendee experience is by helping your speakers up-level their talks.

Tips:

» Borrow a page from TED Talks, and offer your speakers consultations prior to the event, giving them a chance to sharpen and improve their presentations.

» Require speakers to rehearse their talks in the venue ahead of the event. This ensures they understand the technology and their cues, and gives your tech team a chance to run through the equipment, lighting, and transitions.

» Improve the interactive experience. Rather than having presenters passively impart information for an hour, ask them to switch it up with a Q&A period, interactive polls, or hands-on activities.

TAKING CARE OF ATTENDEES IS THE "SECRET SAUCE" TO A GREAT EVENT

While finding amazing speakers and filling your agenda with impactful panels is at the core of a great event, organizers cannot fully capitalize on their ability to bring people together without accounting for the attendee experience. Find the fun factor in your event and your attendees will remember their time with you—and will want to return again next year.

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PERSPECTIVE

MELISSA WOLFE
SOLUTIONS ENGINEER

WHAT ARE SOME TIPS FOR KEEPING THE AUDIENCE ENGAGED?

First, make sure your event site and registration are user-friendly. If someone has to click 10 buttons to register, that's a blocker. You're going to lose folks along the way. Then, think about ways to make an event interactive. Especially if you have viewers watching from home, it can be hard to capture their attention. Adding surveys, polls, and Q&A to your presentations is an easy way to keep folks engaged.

VENDOR PARTNERSHIPS:
A "WIN-WIN" FOR EVERYONE

We all know that planning and producing corporate events means a lot of moving parts and pieces. Companies will often look to hire vendors to deliver different services and work on various aspects of their events. For instance, a single event can involve:

THE CLIENT'S INTERNAL STAFF

A MARKETING AGENCY

A PUBLIC RELATIONS PARTNER

AN EVENT PRODUCTION COMPANY

Collaboration is the key to exceeding client expectations and delivering a seamless event, which solidifies the idea that working together the right way can benefit all partners. Below are five tips to make vendor collaboration a "win-win" for everyone involved.

1 THE INTRODUCTION

A frequent mistake (and one of the worst) we see in event planning is when a client hires different vendors without proper introductions. If you're a marketing agency brought in for an event and you don't talk to the production partner, it's a problem just waiting to happen—and vice versa. Step one: Arrange a meeting that includes ALL partners. At the very least, introductions should always consist of:

» **A detailed explanation of what strengths and resources all participants bring to the table.** And be specific. What do the vendors specialize in?

» **Get a lay of the land and the scope of work (SOW).** Why was that vendor hired? Have the client explain which piece everyone was hired to tackle and why.

Collaboration is the key to **exceeding client expectations** and delivering a seamless event, which solidifies the idea that working together the **RIGHT** way can **benefit ALL partners**.

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2 ESTABLISHING A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

According to Jeff Bezos, founder of the famously customer-centric company, Amazon, "We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It's our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better."

The two operative phrases here are "we are the hosts" and "customer experience." The number one goal of the vendor partnership is to help the client succeed. Hands down, this is the mindset we should strive to create from day one. The customer's needs are the rising tides that raise all ships, and establishing this culture as a priority will set you up for success.

To foster collaboration, follow this advice:

» **Ask for input from your partners.** This should go without saying, but we'll say it anyway—communication is key. Make sure everyone knows you are open and available to help them but also not afraid to ask them for their help.

» **Adopt a problem-solving mentality.** When things go wrong, come together with a problem-solving mentality. Playing the "blame game" helps no one. Instead, ask how you can all come together to make the project succeed.

» **Give credit where credit is due.** Don't be stingy with praise when a job is done well, and don't wait until the end of the project to give it. Ongoing credit for excellent work keeps everyone motivated.

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3   ASSIGN THE ROLES

To maximize efficiency, establish who's doing what right from the get-go. By doing so, you eliminate any duplication of work and avoid stepping on the toes of others.

As part of this role determination, decide where the handoff from one partner to another occurs so there's no confusion when the time comes. Similarly, establish who oversees when you move from ideation to execution.

Chief among the roles to define is project management. Decide:

> » **Who "owns" project management?** Is it the client, the marking agency, or the production partner?

> » **Which project management tool will be used to keep deadlines on tasks?** Who will manage that tool?

> » **Who will be onboarded and be able to use that tool?** (HINT: It should be *all partners*.)

When you bring together the **right team** and the r**ight technology**, this is the "**wow facto**r" that clients can come to expect with Stagedge and their vendors.

4 THE EVENT "MUST" BE SEAMLESS

The day of the event should see the entire team looking like a coordinated bunch—from outward appearance and badges to messaging and schedules. After all, everyone is there to deliver a seamless event for the client. In practice, this means:

» **Everyone has the same talking points and agenda.** In other words, all attendee questions are answered in the same way.

» **If something goes wrong, the solution must be executed in a way that the client looks good** (see previous bullet points about collaborative mindsets and eliminating the "blame game.").

» **Never forget:** if you pull off a fantastic event for the client, everyone wins.

5 POST-EVENT BRIEFING

Once the event ends, vendors often go their separate ways, considering the partnership at an end—but this is a missed opportunity.

Instead, schedule a time to bring all the event partners together to discuss what went well and what could be done better. What are the things you learned that could further improve the client experience at your next event?

Also, discuss how you can partner in the future—and explore opportunities for additional collaborations. Great vendor relationships can be powerful referral sources for both parties. Indeed, some of our best collaborators are partners we've met along the way!

KNOW WHO IS BEHIND THE SCENES

At Stagedge, our success is contingent on the success of our clients. They are the heartbeat of everything we do—our lifeblood, our DNA. But, with every successful client relationship, there is also a vendor partnership working behind the scenes, creating a true "better together" story. When choosing an event production partner, make sure you ask who they are partnering and outsourcing with, and how those vendors are aligned with the event strategy.

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COACHING YOUR KEYNOTE:
5 STEPS FOR HELPING YOUR SPEAKER SHINE

Speakers provide tremendous value to your event. How much? [According to one study](#), 87% of companies experienced an ROI from equal to *up to 5x* the cost of hiring the speaker. But in the busy months ahead of the event, it's easy to overlook your speakers. And while company leaders might be exceptional in their day jobs, most of them could still benefit from some tips and coaching.

What makes a good keynote presentation? In this chapter, we'll cover five keynote speaker tips that will help you truly make your speaker shine.

1 BRAND YOUR SLIDES AND PRESENTATION

Your event is special and important—and your creative collateral should reflect this. Instead of defaulting to your corporate PowerPoint template, **build an event-specific brand** that extends to presentations. Branding your slides will ensure your event presentation feels both targeted and sophisticated. And make sure that the template is distributed to speakers at least three months ahead of the event; a mishmash of slides, from speaker to speaker, can make an event feel disjointed—or even amateur.

As for the slides themselves, keep the designs simple and bold. "The key is to focus on one main takeaway per slide," says Jason Courtemanche, art director at Stagedge. "People tend to have too much content. Be choosy about what you say."

Always remember that the slides are there to support the speaker. If the audience is scanning text or trying to decipher a complex chart or table, they're not listening. If there are too many slides like this, you risk losing them altogether. Request that speakers send you their slides ahead of time so your team can proofread, reduce the amount of copy (if needed), and ensure they are branded appropriately.

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2 PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

"Even top executives are set up for failure if they have not made time to rehearse," notes Jon Martel, Stagedge's senior marketing manager. For this reason, public speaking coaching should also start at least three months ahead of the event. Schedule the time on your speaker's calendar and make sure they stick to it.

Start by having the speaker read their presentation and approve the overall content. From there, they can rehearse on their own, then in front of a few people. The next step is to record the presentation so that the speaker can watch it and critique themselves. This includes practicing gestures and movements and reviewing slides and scripts to ensure they know their content backward and forward. Simply put, the less time the speaker needs to look down at the monitor means more time to engage the audience.

As with the slides, so with the speech: keep it simple. A winning presentation should be anchored with a solid opening and closing. In between, there should be three key takeaways the speaker wants to leave the audience with. The last thing any speaker wants is to leave the audience either wondering what the presentation was about or bogged down with an excess of information.

Even **top executives** are set up for failure if they have not made **time to rehearse**.

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To avoid mishaps, **ensure the tech crew** receives the **script and presentation** at least a week before the event so they can create what is known as a **"run-of-show"** document.

3 **LOOP IN THE TECH TEAM**

Behind every great keynote speaker is an invisible team of technicians, working the lights, music, microphones, cameras, and other technology. As the saying goes: when things go right, you don't notice them, but when they go wrong, everyone does.

To avoid mishaps, ensure the tech crew receives the script and presentation at least a week before the event so they can create what is known as a "run-of-show" document. This document will contain everything necessary for the crew to stage its own cue-to-cue rehearsal, including what actions to take when the speaker walks on stage (music, narration, introduction), camera work, and preparing and cueing any video clips used during the presentation.

While the technicians will do their best to make the speaker shine, there is one factor they cannot control: voice modulation. It is important for speakers to project their voice, even when wearing a microphone. "If you're speaking loud and clear, the audio engineer can adjust the levels if needed," points out senior producer Joey Toppan. "But if you're speaking too softly, there's only so much they can do."

4 **LEVERAGE THE SPEAKER READY ROOM**

A speaker ready room is a private space where speakers can prepare and rehearse. This room offers a golden opportunity that is often underutilized—it can, and should, be leveraged ahead of time to help your speaker get everything ready *before* they rehearse onstage. Here's why: last-minute changes tend to take longer than anticipated and making tweaks onstage holds up the entire dress rehearsal. Both team morale and budget take a hit as you pay for technicians to stand around while your speaker painfully changes some slides. Leveraging the speaker ready room ahead of time, however, allows the speaker and an assistant to adjust slides, scripts, and cues in a relaxed setting—before going out to rehearse.

For a 30-minute talk, we recommend booking a two-hour session in the ready room. You will find this to be time well spent. In addition to saving time and money, it focuses time onstage, making dress rehearsals both more impactful and cost-effective.

5 TIPS FOR PRESENTING ONSTAGE

You've got your slides, technology, wardrobe, and makeup squared away. But here are five keynote speaker tips for being onstage:

1 Keep your movements slow and purposeful so the audience can easily follow—pacing can become distracting, especially on camera.

2 In general, stand toward the front of the stage, in the lights.

3 If there is a camera, remember to look there as well. There is a big audience behind that lens!

4 Don't turn your back to the audience to gesture toward the screen—the audience can see the slides on their own.

5 Remember to speak strongly and annunciate. Even a good mic cannot compensate for mumbling.

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5 DON'T FORGET MAKEUP AND CLOTHING!

Part of helping your speaker shine is making sure they look their very best. Having branded your event, you want to ensure your speakers are on-brand, as well.

If you offer outfit and wardrobe consulting, recommend that your speaker avoid busy patterns such as plaids and checks. The camera has trouble picking up such patterns, and they can even look like they're "moving" on the screen. Solid colors look better on camera—with an emphasis on "color," as white shirts or outfits can wash out certain skin tones or appear too bright (even blinding) under the lights.

Speaker microphones can also be a tricky issue. Avoid chunky necklaces and scarves that can interrupt them, as well as sheer fabrics, which, in addition to being hard to attach mics to, can also become see-through under strong lights. If your speaker is wearing a dress, consider adding a belt to clip the microphone pack onto.

Hiring a hair and makeup specialist should be a no-brainer. Without a little powder, the bright lights of the event venue will not be flattering—for any speaker. Adding hair and makeup as an obligatory step in the process will help speakers feel confident and ensure that all speakers in a panel are positively representing your brand.

> Adding **hair and makeup** as an obligatory step in the process will help **speakers feel confident** and will ensure that all speakers in a panel are **on-brand**.

LEAVE YOUR AUDIENCE INSPIRED

With so many details to handle in the run-up to your event, it's tempting to leave speakers to their own devices. But that's a mistake that can hurt ROI for your whole event. Investing time to help your speakers perform at their very best is a triple win: your audience feels inspired, your speaker feels successful and gratified, and you've provided value to your attendees—boosting your brand and ensuring they want to return next year.

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SPEECH, SPEECH! HOW TO LAND AN UNFORGETTABLE KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Creating an engaging and memorable experience is essential, and one of the biggest draws is the keynote speaker. A great keynote helps capture your organization's ethos at that moment—what the company's focus is and in what direction you're heading. But how do you land the type of speaker who will leave your audience talking about your event for weeks? In this chapter, we'll take you through the most important aspects of selecting—and preparing—a dynamic and unforgettable keynote speaker.

FINDING THE TALENT

The first question you need to answer is: why am I putting this person on stage? "Sourcing talent begins with a discovery discussion," says Chris Ciotoli, senior producer at Stagedge. "First determine: What is the event's overall purpose, objective, and theme? From there, we begin to brainstorm who would be a good fit."

A high-profile expert in your audience's field or industry is an excellent selection for a keynote. If your company is hosting a conference on healthcare innovations, for example, you might consider bringing in a keynote speaker like Dr. Sanjay Gupta or Dr. Anthony Fauci. Of course, some celebrity speakers are so skilled—and so famous— that they can speak on a variety of topics and are almost guaranteed to fill seats. This was the case when President Barack Obama recently keynoted a conference in Boston, easily filling every one of the venue's 10,000 seats.

DEVELOPING KEYNOTE MESSAGING

Bringing in a high-profile speaker will only get you so far. If you don't have a strong idea of what you want to convey, it won't matter how well-known they are—your keynote could fall flat.

"Each attendee is asking: Why should I attend? And that answer should be obvious and strong," says Jason Kershner, Senior Producer of Creative Services at Stagedge. "You need to make the message highly relevant to the audience—and give them a 'hook' to want to be there."

Before you determine your messaging, you must understand your audience demographic—and be clear on their knowledge level. For instance, a speaker delivering a highly technical speech to a non-technical group (or vice versa) could leave audience members disappointed or confused, diluting your message and undermining your event.

After you've honed the message for your audience, use the introductory call with your speaker to ensure they're the right fit. Be sure they know exactly what your event is about, that they're knowledgeable about the keynote topic, and that they support what you're trying to accomplish. Include multiple stakeholders in this conversation to ensure internal alignment.

BUDGETING MONEY AND TIME

Even if you're not bringing in a former U.S. president for your keynote, be prepared to spend significant dollars on a well-known speaker. Keynotes can start at $20,000 and go as high as the hundreds of thousands of dollars. At a recent conference, for example, a popular 1980s rock star fetched a $300,000 fee. Know from the outset what percentage of your budget you have earmarked for your keynote. This will also help narrow down your selection.

Timing is another crucial factor. To attract the very best speakers, you'll need to start contacting them 8–12 months out from the event. If you wait until you're three months away, many of the best speakers will already be booked.

HELPING YOUR SPEAKER SUCCEED

Don't expect your speaker to show up on event day ready to hit the ground running. "Make sure you read their contract carefully so you understand and can handle all of their personal requirements—things like food, lodging, and amount of time onstage," says Melissa Wolfe, Solutions Engineer at Stagedge. "You'll need to iron out all of those details before a contract is signed."

In the months leading up to the event, share a creative brief outlining the event's goals, along with the pertinent messaging to convey. As your speaker works on their presentation, offer to help them create branded slides, give feedback on their material, and provide anything else you can think of that will make them shine. Remember—their success means that your event also succeeds.

Last but definitely not least: Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse! Your speaker should agree to the production schedule ahead of time, including onstage practice time. If they have supporting content, ensure they include it in the technical rehearsal. Your engineers and producers need to know what's expected, choreographing lighting, audio, and video cues in tandem with the speaker to deliver a smooth show. Rehearsal time also allows your speaker to get comfortable with the event space while letting you "see around corners" by looking for any potential issues.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP

Working with a production company makes choosing a keynote speaker easier. At Stagedge, we do the research for you, offering our clients several options for recommended speakers (to include bios, headshots, video samples, and fees) based on the theme and message of the event. This allows our clients time to consider speakers ahead of time—and even interview multiple candidates. We also help you vet the speaker contract to ensure there are no unpleasant surprises when the big day arrives. The result? Highly qualified speakers, more memorable keynote speeches, and fewer speed bumps along the way.

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THE STAGEDGE
PERSPECTIVE

JOEY TOPPAN
SENIOR PRODUCER

WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST PIECE OF ADVICE FOR EVENT SPEAKERS?

There is a difference between "practicing" and "rehearsing." Practicing your presentation means taking time to review your slides and script to make sure you know your content by heart. Rehearsing means you're on your feet and running through it from start to finish, using the same hand gestures, pacing, etc., every time. To be successful you need to **do both**!

3 STEPS TO LEVEL UP
YOUR VIDEO PRODUCTION

Online engagement is at an all-time high. Business leaders are devoting more time and resources to digital strategy and planning—particularly when it comes to marketing, content creation, and video production. But with **92% of video marketers reporting an increase in competition recently**, how do you get started producing top-notch video content? In this chapter, we'll discuss three ways to get the most value out of your videos by upgrading the production level.

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STEP 1: TAKE YOUR VIDEO CONTENT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

While video recordings of your CEO talking on Zoom may have been acceptable in the past, those days are long gone. In today's ever-changing world, consumers expect—and deserve—a TV broadcast-level viewing experience. And, with around 50% of consumers dropping off within the first three minutes of an online video, you have limited time to captivate the viewer and promote your brand. Below are a few requirements to consider as you plan your video production:

> » **Use professional equipment.** Consumer-level equipment is inexpensive and easy to find but often produces low-quality videos. Creating a broadcast-level video requires professional video cameras, lighting, and audio equipment.

> » **Invest in a team of expert storytellers.** Investing in top-tier equipment is not enough—you need experts who know how to tell YOUR story and operate that equipment to capture the best visuals to tell your story. Beyond camera, lighting, and audio experts, you'll also need a knowledgeable post-production team to take the raw footage and make it into a compelling story through careful editing, color correction, and visual effects.

> » **Get into a professional studio (if you can).** Whenever possible, it's best to record your video in a professional studio. While an in-office video might feel more manageable, variables like décor, ambient noise, or poor lighting can't be controlled.

STEP 2: BRANDING, BRANDING, AND MORE BRANDING

Make sure you are incorporating branding into ALL your videos. According to a recent study, inconsistent branding and messaging across channels is one of the top frustrations for consumers. Your content can easily miss the mark if the viewer doesn't fully understand the company's identity and tone. Make sure all your video assets adhere to your brand guidelines—colors, fonts, imagery, etc.—to maintain visual consistency across all your marketing channels.

STEP 3: BRING YOUR STORIES TO LIFE BY INCORPORATING VIDEOS INTO YOUR EVENTS AND EXPERIENCES

Too often, companies and organizations consider event planning separate from other creative services—but events are an extension of your brand, just like any other piece of content. In fact, events require many of the same skills as video production: dedicated creative staff, skilled videographers, audio engineers, and meticulous organizers and planners.

Events are no longer standalone experiences—you'll inevitably have a mix of in-person and at-home audiences, whether livestreaming your event or posting recordings of them for viewing on-demand.

To ensure brand consistency across all your events and experiences, it's helpful to have the same partner or group working on ALL your creative assets. Work with a skilled event production and creative services team that can handle all creative aspects of your event experience to create synergy between your event theme and content.

UP YOUR PRODUCTION GAME

Video content is proven to be the most effective way to get your message out to your audience, and marketers need to stand out from the crowd. Partnering with Stagedge's team of experts will take your video production to the next level, ensuring consumers not only get a high-quality product but also the right message.

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PART III

INCORPORATING TECH INTO YOUR EVENT STRATEGY

HYBRID 101:
5 BEST PRACTICES FOR HYBRID EVENT PRODUCTION

In a 2022 survey, researchers found that [70% of all events can be considered hybrid](#). That means if you've hosted a corporate event at any time over the last few years, you've probably already done "hybrid"—whether you called it that or not. But the term is confusing, and it can be hard to know if you're doing it right. In this section, we're covering all things hybrid. You'll learn what "hybrid event" really means, why it's critical in today's environment, and five best practices for doing it right.

HYBRID EVENTS: REACHING ATTENDEES WHENEVER, WHEREVER

A "hybrid event" is defined as any event that contains both in-person and online components—a term that casts a pretty wide net. The online piece could be as complex as live-streaming event sessions or as simple as making videos available on-demand.

No matter how you and your team "go hybrid," adding the virtual component offers the ability to expand your audience, an opportunity that is far too valuable to ignore. Consider that 83% of those who attended the online portion of an event were never planning to attend in-person. Engaging these participants virtually can lead to a growing relationship with someone who otherwise would not have attended. Even better? People participating in an online conference are likelier to attend in-person the following year.

While adding an online component to your in-person event can sound daunting, the upside is clear. Here are five best practices for approaching hybrid event planning that will increase engagement and ROI for both your in-person and virtual event experiences.

1   STREAMLINE YOUR VENDORS

Going hybrid means essentially planning two separate events: online and virtual. Managing multiple vendors across two events, with event strategy and direction, design and branding, online and in-person registration, videography, and day-of execution is difficult and time-consuming. Unless all vendors are in lockstep, the end result could be a chaotic or inconsistent event experience for attendees. Instead, make it easy on yourself and your event marketing team by finding a production partner who fully understands hybrid event production and can run both the virtual and in-person parts of your event. And if you do find that multiple vendors are necessary, establish a "chain of command" between vendors so that communication to stakeholders is streamlined and details don't fall through the cracks.

To host a **successful hybrid event**, it's essential to **choose the right production partner** and make sure you have plenty of time to prepare. Hybrid adds an element of complexity, so streamlining your vendors and considering the additional time needed for **technical approvals** is critical.

KEEP AN EYE ON SECURITY PROCESSES

Many companies have implemented lengthy reviews of SaaS applications—like hybrid event software—and have strict procedures for collecting personal identifying information, such as online attendee registration data. With advance planning, event marketing teams can avoid being at the mercy of their IT team and skip the anxiety of waiting for a technology review as the event day rapidly approaches.

2 **GIVE YOURSELF PLENTY OF TIME TO PREPARE**

With no venue, dining, or travel to prepare for, the virtual component of your event may seem more straightforward. Since you're planning two separate events, however, it's important to begin planning well in advance. Consider that teams will need time to develop your event website with branding and design consistent with the in-person experience and practice with technology to make sure videos are accessible and the user experience is seamless. For these reasons, the best production teams and technology for hybrid events are often booked 12 months ahead.

Hybrid events allow you to reach attendees who otherwise wouldn't be able to attend your event—including international folks or people unable or unwilling to travel.

3 CREATE AUDIENCE JOURNEYS FOR BOTH IN-PERSON AND ONLINE ATTENDEES

Attending an event online feels very different from attending an event in-person. Think about how you feel watching your favorite TV show from the couch versus attending a live theatre production. Since the two experiences are received in very unique ways, it makes sense that the audience journeys also must be treated and produced differently.

Your event production team should help you strategize ways to reach through the camera to engage audiences at home. For instance, since online attendees won't have the impactful "walk-in" experience you've planned for those in-person, you can send them a welcome video to draw them into the spirit of the event, or even a SWAG bag of goodies. And while virtual folks won't be able to network in the hallways during breaks, they can take the time to consume "extra" material—like a video or a podcast—in their own time, while stretching their legs.

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4 DESIGN STAGES AND SETS FOR TWO AUDIENCE TYPES

Similar to creating two separate audience journeys, the best hybrid productions will also think about design elements for your different audiences. Consider how game shows or live TV productions, like Saturday Night Live, are produced. These TV shows provide equally powerful viewing experiences for viewers, both on- and off-set.

Your hybrid event management needs to operate the same way. The event production team must design the set with the folks at home in mind, with scenic elements that are both awe-inspiring in person and pop on the small screen. And, of course, your talent— in many cases, your top executives—need to be at their very best both onstage and online. With ample rehearsals, expert coaching, and support from onsite videographers, your speakers will feel empowered to engage the audience no matter what the medium.

5 GIVE THE FOLKS AT HOME A BREAK

How many of us have stood up from a long day at work and realized our eyes are tired and our backs are sore from hunching over a computer for hours? When designing the run-of-show, build in breaks throughout the day, give your online audience something interesting to look at during downtime, and consider shortening your event day to prevent online fatigue.

Last but not least, keep in mind that "hybrid" doesn't have to be live! In fact, [75% of event attendees find on-demand viewing valuable](). Making on-demand event content available allows online audiences to watch event content when they have the capacity to learn new information and the ability to focus. It's also a great way to allow international attendees in different time zones to participate in your event.

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HYBRID EXPANDS THE BOUNDARIES OF YOUR EVENT

While going hybrid requires additional investment—including budget and time—to be effective, it's worth it. Adding the virtual component vastly expands the dimensions of your event, allowing you to attract a wider audience and give your event a longer life.

By developing an online component, you've also created a medium for reaching attendees outside the boundaries of the event itself. Before the main event day, consider sending out a sizzle reel or asking attendees to submit questions they have for speakers.

After the closing session, use your platform to survey attendees, send out videos and photos, and keep in touch until next year. In some ways, a hybrid event never has to end. The discourse can continue to evolve and build with relevant content and messaging, pulling new attendees into your event and into your brand's orbit.

We're excited by the infinite possibilities presented by hybrid events.

Hybrid makes your event **"boundless."** Through an online platform, you can reach attendees anywhere and **engage your audience** pre- and post-event.

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JON MARTEL
SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON LIVE EVENTS VS. VIRTUAL EVENTS?

Although there's still turbulence in the economy, live events have made a big comeback and are continuing to show good ROI. And post-Covid, the virtual aspect is here to stay. Finding an event marketing services partner that can handle both live and virtual aspects of event production is both convenient and a money-saver.

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7 TIPS TO MAXIMIZE THE SECOND-SCREEN EXPERIENCE AT YOUR EVENTS

If you've ever conducted an online poll during an event or used an app to share event news and help attendees connect, then you're already familiar with the concept of the "second-screen experience."

In the events-marketing world, a "second-screen experience" refers to the practice of interacting with audience members via their personal devices (the "second screen"). Through polls, surveys, and chat applications on their second screen, the attendee moves from passive listener to active participant.

While second-screen tech has been around for a while, it remains underutilized in event planning—and that's a mistake. Not only is the second screen a powerful way to connect with your audience, but it also keeps participants involved and collects valuable feedback. Let's face it: people are already on their phones all the time—this simply allows you to leverage that reality in a constructive way.

Here are seven tips for maximizing the second-screen experience at your next event.

1 ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE RIGHT AWAY

Find an early opportunity to "train" your audience to use this new type of mobile engagement. Introduce a poll or survey question at the outset of your event—this early experience will prepare participants to continue to use their second screens as the conference progresses.

When adding a **second-screen experience**, don't layer more content onto what your speaker is already presenting. **Aim to entertain** and **spark engagment**.

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2 USE LIGHT, ENTERTAINING CONTENT

The point of the second-screen experience is to entertain and engage—not to add more heavy content to what your speaker is already presenting. Whether an audience member is sitting in row one or row 50, an interesting question or survey will spark engagement. Better still, share the results in real-time on the primary screen—and then discuss those results. Not only is an interactive element a surefire method for making your audience feel personally invested, but it also helps break up a longer presentation. Remember: after 10 minutes, your audience's attention begins to wane. Instead of losing them, listen to them.

3 HAVE A WRITER SCRIPT YOUR POLL QUESTIONS

Not all of us were born to write for Saturday Night Live—and that's okay. Keep the content light and lively by having a professional writer wordsmith your poll questions. If the questions are engaging, it will spur audience members to be relaxed and funny themselves. If the questions are dull, you risk undermining the whole idea of event engagement and prompting your audience to keep their phones in their pockets.

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4 COACH YOUR SPEAKER ON HOW TO IMPROVISE

Speakers are often reticent to include second-screen experiences in their presentations because it requires them to go off-script as they discuss the results. We understand—ad-libbing can be daunting. The best way to deal with uncertainty? Help your speaker by rehearsing how to introduce a poll and what to highlight when the results are revealed. You can even roleplay the moment by having event staff submit answers during the rehearsal to get your speaker comfortable with both the process and the technology.

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5 USE EXISTING SECOND-SCREEN SOLUTIONS

Don't reinvent the wheel. Several tried-and-true audience engagement tools are already on the market to optimize your experience. Here are a few to consider:

Pigeonhole® Live

Pigeonhole provides everything from polls and surveys to quizzes and Q&A and can also integrate with platforms such as Zoom, Teams, and **Swoogo** (our personal favorite!).

SPOTME

SpotMe allows event organizers to create customized event sites, branded event apps, social feeds, 1:1 networking, reactions, and more.

slido

Slido is an intuitive option for events of all sizes, with over a million customers worldwide.

Don't reinvent the wheel. Many audience **engagement tools** are already on the market to **optimize your experience**.

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6 GENERATE ANALYTICS AND FEEDBACK

There's more to the second-screen experience than just polls. In addition to some of the options mentioned above—quizzes, chat, notes, and more—it's also a great way to gather data and audience feedback. Second-screen technology helps you understand which audience questions were the most common, which slides were most popular, and how many people engaged with polls. Post-event, you can export poll results for further analysis. All the information collected helps you learn and improve your future events.

7 ENGAGE PEOPLE ATTENDING VIRTUALLY

Second-screen tech also helps you connect with people who aren't physically at the event—all they need to do is log on. This helps the interactivity of your event extend to those in remote locations. Likewise, audience members near and far can use your event hashtag to promote the event on social media. Apps like Walls aggregate social content across platforms to create dynamic content walls that can be cast onto the primary screen—allowing your audience to see their name (or at least their social media handle) in lights.

> With these kinds of event **technology solutions**, you can connect with people attending both **in-person** and **virtually**.

FROM SECOND SCREEN TO SECOND NATURE

Like anything new, adding the second-screen experience can feel intimidating at first. But with a little rehearsing, incorporating it into your events will become second nature. And with the added audience interaction, your events will become livelier and more informative—for organizers and attendees alike.

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5 QUICK AND EASY TIPS
FOR THE BEST QUALITY LIVESTREAM

After several decades of at-home internet and the more recent ability to stream shows on-demand [from any device](#), today's audiences have high expectations for streamed video content. They expect quick load times, uninterrupted streaming, sharp images, and clear audio. And these same expectations hold true for livestreamed virtual or hybrid events—especially in a post-Covid world, after several years of screen-time overload. Today, simply livestreaming a Zoom call doesn't cut it. [Video content needs to look great, sound great, and work seamlessly](#).

Check out these five tips for improving your audience's experience during live virtual or hybrid events.

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1   IT STARTS AT THE SOURCE: HARDWARE ENCODERS

Don't rely on a computer with encoding software to stream your event—that's a recipe for disaster and is why Stagedge is brought to the table. Instead, only deploy the best-in-class, bonded hardware encoders that are built for broadcast. Bonded hardware encoders reduce risk and eliminate a single point of network failure.

2   TAKE ADVANTAGE OF 1080P-30

1080P is a standard HD video format used across industries. It stands for the dimensions of the aspect ratio: 1,920 pixels displayed across the screen and 1,080 pixels displayed down the screen. Most video content you see is displayed in this format. While 1080P content is often captured at 60 frames per second, we recommend opting for 30 frames per second for a few reasons. First, 1080P-30 provides the same high-definition resolution while using half the bandwidth. It also reduces buffering for audience members who don't have a fast internet connection. Finally, 1080P-30 helps improve the end-user quality and experience.

3 HELP ATTENDEES OPTIMIZE THE AT-HOME VIEWING EXPERIENCE

There's a lot you can do while producing an event to make it look and sound great. But you can't control absolutely everything. On the other end of the line, figuratively speaking, it's hard to know what your audience's video-streaming setup looks like. With a little bit of advance planning, however, you can help attendees optimize their experience by sending out a few best-practice tips via email.

For example, since video streaming eats up a significant amount of bandwidth, advise audiences to close down other apps and minimize the number of devices using the same internet service. You can also ask them to check their sound and sign on a few minutes early so that if they do run into any issues, they have time to troubleshoot or get support without missing out on the content you worked hard to produce.

4 HIRE EXPERT TECHNICAL SUPPORT

When running an event, the sheer number of moving parts means multiple opportunities for details to fall off track. A skilled project manager or producer can save you a lot of grief (and money!) by keeping all details organized and well-managed. But a project manager might not know what to do if the sound cuts out or an audience member is unable to connect. With a virtual event, the need for precision and perfection surrounding the technology is critical. By hiring specialists in the fields of video engineering, audio engineering, and livestream engineering, you can ensure a sophisticated experience for your audience.

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5 MAKE SURE PRESENTERS HAVE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

Many of us have sat through the awkward and unpleasant experience of a livestreamed event that goes awry because of bad technology. To ensure that your presenters will be able to communicate clearly—across time and space—you'll need high-quality equipment to capture both video and audio, and the right technology to broadcast it to your audience. Proper lighting (including a key light), a microphone setup, and a "set" that furthers your brand and its mission will elevate your event to the next level. Do you need to ship any equipment to your presenters? A good-quality mic and a custom backdrop go a long way. Remember, the medium is the message.

IT PAYS TO HIRE THE PROS

Planning a hybrid or virtual event is hard. Not only do you have to create the content, choose the speakers, help them prepare, and register the attendees—but there is an entire universe of technology that needs to be executed exactly right for the event to go off without a hitch. Partnering with an experienced event production team significantly reduces stress (and errors!), saves money, and results in a more professional and successful event.

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CYBERSECURITY: 4 THINGS YOU MUST DO TO KEEP YOUR EVENT SECURE

For event planners, attendee experience is a primary focus, from providing valuable keynote speakers to the quality of the catering. But there is another important aspect of event planning that is often overlooked: cybersecurity. Cybercrime is on the rise, and it's costly— **a recent report by IBM** puts the average cost of a data breach at 4.5 million dollars. A data breach could put your attendees' data at risk—and brand your event with a negative lasting impression. To keep yourself (and your attendees) safe, learn these four critical ways to heighten your event cybersecurity.

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1 ENSURE PARTNERS AND VENDORS CAN PROVE THEIR COMMITMENT TO CYBERSECURITY

When choosing partners and vendors, make cybersecurity a requirement. Whether onsite or virtual, all event vendors should be able to show proof of their strong security practices and compliance. Not sure what to look for? SOC 2 compliance is a good place to start. Issued by the **American Institute of CPAs (AICPA)**, SOC 2 reports provide detailed information "relevant to security, availability, and processing integrity of the systems the service organization uses to process users' data."

swoogo + BRIGHTCOVE

Here at Stagedge, we look for this high level of compliance with all our SaaS providers. For example, before we began working with **Swoogo** and **Brightcove**—two of our favorite partners—we carefully reviewed their reporting and compliance. Before you sign a contract, ask potential vendors what level of security they have, how they prove compliance, and what reporting instruments they use to evaluate their systems. And make sure their commitment to security extends to the vendors *they* use, too. What does their vetting process look like? If they can't produce any of this information, that's a red flag.

Cybercrime is **on the rise**, and it's **costly**. A data breach could put your attendees' **data at risk**—and brand your event with a negative lasting impression.

Ask potential vendors what **level of security** they have, how they prove **compliance**, and what **reporting** instruments they use to **evaluate** their systems.

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2 BUILD YOUR EVENT ON A SECURE PLATFORM

When choosing an event platform, features like ticketing, payment, scheduling, and applications are front and center. But don't overlook security. Your event platform will be collecting attendee registration information and other data, and it needs to have a strong security infrastructure in place.

Similar to evaluating a vendor, when it comes to event platforms you should look for hybrid and virtual event platforms that provide clear and comprehensive information about their security measures. Examine their data security infrastructure. Ask for details on data storage, encryption, and sharing. Review their security compliance and certifications. What are their password policies? Check out their auditing and incident response processes. What are their redundancies and backups? The best event platforms should meet *all* of your needs—including robust cybersecurity.

> Your **event platform** will be collecting attendee registration **information** and **other data**, and it needs to have a **strong security infrastructure** in place.

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3 ENFORCE STRONG AND SECURE LOGINS

In the digital age, most of us understand the importance of password protocols, but it's important to remind your team that every unsecured access point can be an invitation to cyber criminals. One way to reduce vulnerabilities is to enforce login procedures, like two-factor authentication. This is an absolute requirement for anyone accessing our systems at Stagedge events.

Password best practices strengthen your overall cybersecurity, as well. For example, avoid having a single login on any app for all employees. Though it may seem convenient, shared login information is more likely to attract unauthorized access. It also complicates password changes—a cornerstone of password security. It is also worth looking into single sign-on (SSO). While implementing SSO can feel like a large undertaking, it greatly increases login security, which is why many enterprise companies have already added it for an extra level of security.

4   CONFIRM GOOD NETWORK SECURITY AT THE EVENT

On the day of the event, everyone who accesses your network wants to know their data is safe. It's no secret that Wi-Fi is another potential target for cybercriminals, and your venue's existing network may not be the most secure choice. For the highest level of security, consider bringing in your own separate, event-specific Wi-Fi and creating a unique event password. While this is especially important for companies in the financial sector who have to be more careful to protect sensitive data, all orgs can benefit from this level of security. If you do decide to use your venue's network, there are extra steps you can take to increase security, such as using an appropriate travel router. These let you create your own VPN, segregate your network, and add a firewall.

Don't wait until the week of the event to try to figure out Wi-Fi security. Loop in your IT team early in the planning stages—even before booking the venue—to help determine what level of security you will need to stay secure at whatever venue you choose. Taking a proactive approach to network security will help everyone feel comfortable accessing your network during the event, creating a positive feeling about your event before attendees even sit down at the opening keynote.

> Don't wait until the week of the event to try to figure out Wi-Fi security. Loop in your IT team early in the planning stages to help determine what level of security you will need to stay secure at whatever venue you choose.

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STAYING AHEAD OF CYBERCRIMINALS

Cybercriminals know how to adapt quickly. For that reason, while the tips outlined above will help you improve overall event cybersecurity, it's also a good idea to pay attention to cybercrime trends and update your practices accordingly. At Stagedge, we work hard behind the scenes to stay up-to-date with the latest technology and cybersecurity trends. This helps us build security measures into every step of event production, ensuring that our clients' events are protected by the most recent industry standards.

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WHAT SETS STAGEDGE APART IN THE INDUSTRY?

JON PAUL ROYER
ASST. DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION

We've always been a step ahead when it comes to the technological aspect. For example, post-Covid, hybrid events became highly sought after. For a lot of companies, that meant struggling with a learning curve. But we've been running hybrid events for a long time, so we were prepared to meet the increased demand. We can even go out on the road to capture a live event and stream it through our studio. We can do the web design for the event's home page. We can do it all.

PART IV

SUSTAINABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

ECO-FRIENDLY EVENTS:
CRAFTING A CONFERENCE THAT WILL MEET YOUR ORGANIZATION'S SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

Today, "sustainability" has become more than just a buzzword in corporate America, with companies demonstrating their commitment to the environment throughout all layers of their business. Consider that the **percentage of companies with Chief Sustainability Officers** (CSOs) more than tripled in only two years, from 9% in 2019 to 28% in 2021, while **96% of the world's top 250** companies now regularly report on their organization's sustainability.

With sustainability becoming a key corporate priority, companies are looking for ways to "green" all aspects of doing business—including events and conferences. With that in mind, we're offering four easy methods for sustainable event planning that will help you showcase your organization's commitment to the environment.

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① LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

When it comes to sustainability, the first choice you make when planning the event is the most impactful: where to host it. Did you know that flights account for a whopping **90% of business travel emissions**? When choosing your location, consider which city will be most central for your team and attendees so that fewer—or shorter—flights are needed. Is public transportation available in the city? If so, incentivize attendees to use the train or organize a shuttle to ferry multiple people back to the conference hotel.

After you've chosen the city, it's time to pick a venue. Before booking a conference center or meeting space, you can ask questions about their sustainability practices—particularly how they conserve energy while keeping guests comfortable. Additionally, event planners should book only the amount of space needed, so that cooling and heating resources are not wasted on empty rooms. By keeping travel logistics and energy usage in mind as part of your calculus as you pick your spot, you can be sure you've built your event on an eco-friendly foundation.

2 THINK DIGITAL

Events are an incredible opportunity to motivate and inspire attendees with unique content, beautiful stages, and fun experiences. And thanks to recent innovations in event production, your event's scenic centerpieces—sets, photo walls, and backdrops—no longer have to be built as single-use structures. Along with being more environmentally friendly, choosing "digital scenic" instead of "hard scenic" provides creative benefits, letting your team be more creative as they seamlessly blend videos and visuals into your center-stage story. The result? A more cohesive look for your event space that is also much better for the environment.

Similarly, you can choose to go digital-first with all of your event content. Rather than passing out single-use programs and flyers, use an event app and QR codes to point attendees to the content you want to showcase. In addition to minimizing paper waste, digitizing event content allows you to follow up with attendees who download content and to offer quick surveys gauging the event's efficacy. Digitizing content allows your work to continue to live on after the conference has closed rather than ending up left in a hotel room—a win for both the environment and your brand.

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3 MIND THE MENU

According to the **Professional Convention Management Association**, the meetings industry spends about $48 billion on food and 30-40%—about 63 million tons—goes to waste. Food waste can occur at the "back of the house" when too much food is ordered or made ahead of time, or at the "front of the house" when attendees do not eat everything on their plates. Fortunately, there are ways to improve both sides of the equation.

In the case of the "back of the house," event planners should order food as thoughtfully as possible—in consultation with an experienced events production team. Along with being less wasteful, this practice can also reduce your food budget. When the event ends, the team should audit how much food was left over, capturing data to help them plan more accurately for future events. To solve food waste at the "front of the house," event planners can consider offering "to-go" boxes (made from recyclable materials) to attendees while following local regulations.

Additionally, your event's menu is an opportunity to showcase local, sustainable cuisine. If possible, choose a food vendor who can provide meals made from local ingredients. On site, you can provide access to information about the meal's origin on digital signage or within the event app. This showcases your company's commitment to sustainability while giving your attendees a unique culinary experience. Finally, should local regulations allow, consider donating extra food to local nonprofits and food banks.

4   SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

Every event organizer knows that a great event experience is formed by thousands of small decisions made over a period of months. The same is true for sustainability: each decision is an opportunity to be more eco-friendly and support your company's goals.

These opportunities include aspects of the event we might otherwise take for granted, like lighting, signage, event giveaways, and badges.

For example, organizers can work with their event production company to ensure that, wherever possible, LED lights are used to lessen the energy impact of the event. Your production partner can also create digital signage to assist with wayfinding, using screens that won't be disposed of post-event. Giveaways should be limited to objects that would be helpful on site, like a reusable water bottle attendees can refill at water stations. Event organizers can even donate to a local sustainability organization instead of offering gifts.

Even the ubiquitous badge can be an opportunity to make an eco-friendly choice. For instance, if you're gathering in a city by the ocean, consider making the event badge water soluble so it will dissolve, rather than float, should it end up in the sea.

SHOWCASE YOUR EVENT'S SUSTAINABILITY

Today, [84% of global consumers say sustainability is important](#) when making purchase decisions—and your event is the perfect arena to share your commitment to being green. Remember to call out your sustainability efforts in your event apps, digital signage, and content. Help attendees feel good about their participation, and invite them to continue using sustainable practices in their daily lives. You might even consider a special "green" hashtag so attendees can tag their sustainable activities at the event—and beyond.

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HOW IS "SUSTAINABILITY" CHANGING THE EVENTS INDUSTRY?

MIKE BASTERI
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF SOLUTIONS

Many organizations now have in-house sustainability teams—they're keeping leadership honest and looking closely at how their business can support global sustainability and local environmental causes. Event attendees are concerned as well; today, the majority of consumers are looking for companies to be environmentally conscious. At Stagedge, we've earned an EcoVadis Bronze rating, and we can help organizations develop carbon-friendly events that show attendees they care.

WHAT'S YOUR EVENTS CARBON BUDGET? UNDERSTANDING AND REDUCING YOUR CO2 EMISSIONS

Addressing climate change has become a top priority for organizations globally. In a recent survey, **61% of CXOs** reported that climate change will have a "high/very high impact on their organization's strategy and operations over the next three years." As a result, marketing executives, managers, and event organizers are feeling more pressure than ever to reduce their carbon footprint.

Did you know that an average conference (three days, 800 attendees) will produce **more carbon dioxide** than 95 cars will emit in one year? The bad news is that events can put a serious dent in a carbon budget. The good news is that there are clear and concise strategies your team can utilize to lower an event's expected CO2 emissions. Attendees will be eager to hear about your green initiatives. In this chapter, we'll outline the important steps to reducing your event's carbon cost.

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WHAT IS A CARBON BUDGET?

Almost every human activity produces CO2, and events are no exception. A carbon budget is meant to provide a guideline for how much CO2 a company, department, or event will produce. It sets a cap on emissions—just as a fiscal budget sets a spending cap—while giving an organization the flexibility to prioritize where their carbon "spend" will be allocated.

1 CONSOLIDATE EVENTS FOR EXTRA IMPACT

With air travel alone comprising up to 87% of total carbon emissions, the number one contributor to your event's carbon footprint is most likely transportation.

That means the simplest way to reduce carbon emissions generated by events is to reduce the number of times that attendees travel. If your organization has multiple conferences attended by the same set of people, consider consolidating those events into a single, spectacular event. Your carbon budget *and* your fiscal budget will go much further, and you won't have to compromise on the attendee experience.

The **number one contributor** to an event's carbon footprint is **attendee travel**. Reduce the number of people flying or driving to your events by consolidating events with overlapping audiences or creating a hybrid event experience.

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2 GO HYBRID AND GROW YOUR AUDIENCE WITHOUT INCREASING EMISSIONS

Another easy way to reduce attendee travel is to ensure that your event has a virtual component, allowing attendees to participate from anywhere. Post-pandemic, most attendees expect events to be hybrid, and this offers an opportunity for event organizers to create **dynamic, thoughtful online experiences** for attendees globally. You'll reduce the number of attendees in the air and on the road, and as a bonus, your event will be accessible to those unable to travel due to family obligations or mobility limitations. Going hybrid allows your event to transcend barriers to access while creating a broader audience for your content. A true win-win!

3 PICK A DESTINATION THAT HAS CARBON REDUCTION "BAKED IN"

Beyond air travel, the destination you choose will also impact your carbon budget, with some cities making it easier to lower the environmental impact of event attendance. Look for a destination with excellent fossil-free public transportation, for example, and a centrally located venue. Consider the season as well. A temperate climate means you can spend less on heating or cooling event space, host some activities outdoors, and motivate attendees to walk to local destinations (rather than using transportation).

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4 VET PARTNERS AND VENDORS WITH AN EYE TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

When it comes to sustainability, not all vendors are created equal. As your team vets event vendors—from production companies to swag providers—ask them questions about their own carbon budget and reporting. Check if they've been rated by industry-leading sustainability assessors. They can better support carbon-reducing initiatives at your event if they've prioritized sustainability within their organization.

Vet **event partners** and **vendors** by asking about their own sustainability strategy. If they're prioritizing **carbon reduction**, they'll be able to support your organization's efforts to **lower its carbon impact**.

STAGEDGE

5 ESTIMATE YOUR CO2 CONTRIBUTION AS YOU PLAN

There are many tools available to help your team understand its carbon footprint. Here are a few free resources that anyone can use:

» **Myclimate** offers a free calculator that estimates the total carbon impact of an event and suggests ways to make an equitable climate protection contribution.

» **International Air Transport Association** (AITA) has a free calculator that business travelers can use to calculate the carbon footprint of their flights.

» This **Princeton University calculator** helps you understand the carbon cost of food and beverage planning and offers suggestions for creating a sustainable menu.

By measuring your event's CO2, you can ensure you're not going "over budget" or—if you are—find ways to offset your impact.

BALANCING THE CARBON BUDGET TOGETHER

Calculating the environmental impact of corporate events is a new frontier for most of us—which makes it tricky to balance a carbon budget. After all, how can you limit your carbon "spending" if you don't fully understand your costs? While creating a carbon strategy for your event won't happen overnight, building a "climate-conscious" culture into your event planning—including vendor selection—is the clear first step.

Stagedge is excited to help our clients understand and offset their CO2 emissions. We were awarded the Silver sustainability rating by **EcoVadis**, a trusted provider of sustainability assessments, to recognize our effort to offer green event solutions.

UNDERSTANDING EVENT ACCESSIBILITY:
IS YOUR EVENT ADA COMPLIANT?

Event planners have a long list of responsibilities: choosing a venue, finding hotel accommodations, booking speakers, and scheduling workshops and panels—all while trying to make the experience engaging for attendees. However, in the hubbub of planning an event, it's easy to forget about accessibility.

With 1.3 billion people—or 16% of the world's population—facing significant disability in their lifetime, today's events and platforms must be ADA-accessible to ensure *all* attendees have a positive experience.

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MAKING YOUR IN-PERSON EVENTS INCLUSIVE

With the new focus on the digital experience, it's easy to forget that in-person events must also be inclusive. And while making your venue ADA-compliant helps attendees with disabilities feel cared for, it can also improve the overall quality for everyone in your audience. Here are four tips to consider for your in-person events:

1 **Captioning and language**

To ensure guests with hearing impairments and speakers of different languages are not left out, use live transcriptions as a visual aid. This means all presenters should have open captions transcribing their words in real-time—whether via human "captioners" or AI speech recognition (which often functions better than human translators). Guests can read these captions on monitors, television screens, and projectors throughout the event.

2 **Create presentations and coach speakers**

Everyone learns differently. Proper visual aids, combined with the guidance of an experienced speaker, help deliver the message to an audience of diverse learners. Send your speakers branding guidelines beforehand and assist them in crafting visually compelling presentations. Before the event occurs, guarantee that graphic and video content can be supported by the venue's technology. Finally, offer coaching and feedback to your speakers so they can perform at their very best.

With 1.3 billion people—or 16% of the world's population—facing significant disability in their lifetime, today's events and platforms must be ADA-accessible to ensure all attendees can have a positive experience.

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3　**Accommodations and restaurants**

For a venue to be ADA-compliant, all transportation, hotel, restaurant, and event accommodations must be accessible. Worried your accommodations don't meet ADA requirements? Ensure they match the criteria by following the ADA compliance **checklist**.

4　**Activities**

When considering activities for your event, remember to include easily accessible options for people with disabilities. For example, if you're hosting a conference in Las Vegas and you plan a hiking trip to visit the Grand Canyon, set up a simultaneous option to see a comedy show so that nobody feels excluded. A variety of options will benefit everyone.

ENSURING YOUR ONLINE PLATFORM IS ACCESSIBLE

Post-pandemic, the global virtual events industry is poised to grow substantially. Valued at more than $114 billion in 2021, the market is expected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 21.4% from 2022 to 2030, according to **recent research**.

Bottom line? Online events are here to stay, and event planners must ensure that the at-home experience is accessible to everyone.
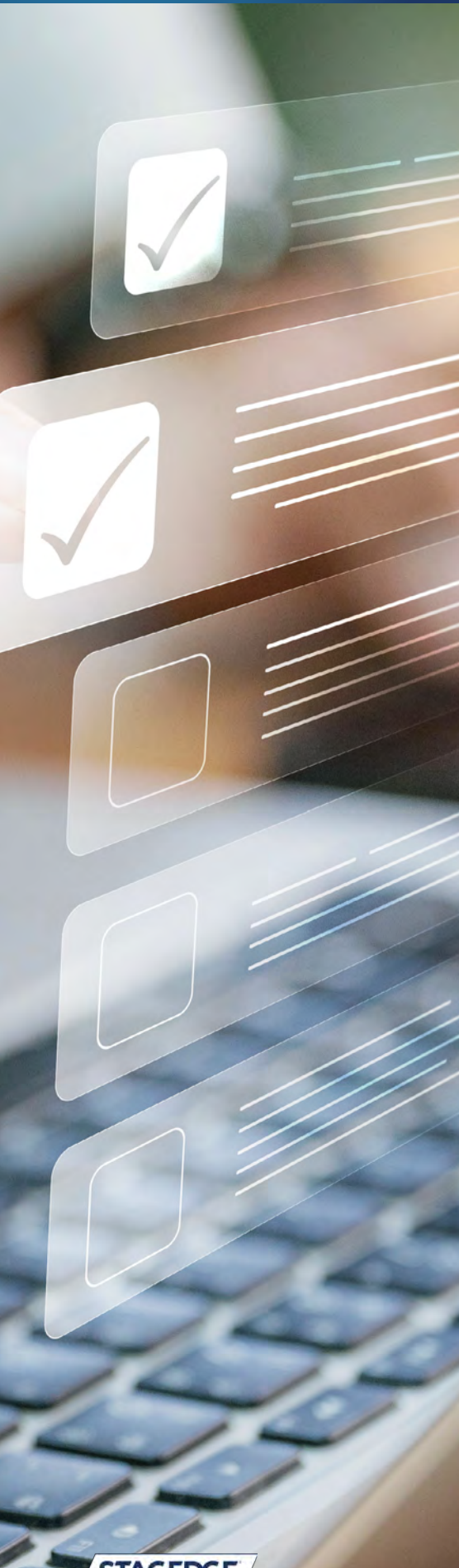
According to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), there are three levels of compliance: A, AA, and AAA. Most organizations strive to meet AA compliance, a requirement for all government platforms. What does it take to achieve an AA ranking? Here are three things to look for:

1 Visual and auditory assistance

» **Dictation.** For the visually impaired, AA compliance means the platform can "speak" to the user using screen readers, allowing attendees to navigate the software without seeing it. A website that meets these requirements also supports photo descriptions—allowing users to hear narrated depictions of visual content.

» **Video relay services.** For those with hearing impairments, a Video Relay Service (VRS) facilitates communication via ASL, delivered via video. Many providers offer this service with different types of sign language, if necessary.

» **Captions.** For speakers of a different language, live content should offer close captioning, while on-demand videos should provide transcriptions.

2 **Website design**

» **Formatting.** To ensure the website is easy to read, AA compliance requires there to be a significant contrast in lettering. The text also should be large enough to be read from certain distances.

» **Color and design elements.** Verify that all "clickable" aspects of the platform are apparent. There should be clear distinctions between font, color, and size so that the text easily guides users to different parts of the website.

3 **Technology elements**

» **Mobile and tablet usability.** Chances are that many members of your audience will not be using large monitors or laptops. Ensuring your content can be consumed on multiple device-types expands accessibility to more attendees.

» **Add new technology.** Including the latest tech can make a virtual experience more enjoyable—while positioning your company as forward-thinking. Event planners should consider how accessible new technologies—like virtual reality and artificial intelligence (AI)—are before moving forward.

Wondering if your platform is accessible? An easy way to check is by entering your URL into a free validator tool, which will flag spots that are less accessible or don't meet the criteria.

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ACCESSIBILITY PROTECTS EVERYONE

Making your events ADA-compliant is not only the right thing to do—it can also help your company avoid legal problems. In 2021, more than 11,400 accessibility-related lawsuits were filed against companies in the U.S., according to the **Society for Human Resource Management**—a 320% increase from 2013. Partnering with a knowledgeable event production company to ensure ADA compliance is met removes this worry from your list of uncertainties. This ensures everyone in your audience is taken care of while also eliminating any distractions from the important message of your event.

THE STAGEDGE
PERSPECTIVE

JOEY TOPPAN
SENIOR PRODUCER

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT YOUR JOB?

I'm just going to say it—I work with the best people in the industry. I love my team so much. They're incredible. Everybody knows their job inside and out. They know exactly what they're there for and are always on top of their game. Anyone who gets hired and placed on a Stagedge crew is already the "top of the top." No one produces live events better than the Stagedge team. I wouldn't want to work with anyone else.

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CONCLUSION

THE DEEP VALUE OF THE RIGHT PARTNER

We hope this guide has helped you on your event journey. We covered a lot of ground in this guidebook—discussing everything from cybersecurity to venue selection to sustainability—but we hope to leave you with two main takeaways.

1

First, we know that the most challenging aspect of event planning is its variability. While event planning often lives in one department within an organization, event professionals are called to be experts in a multitude of verticals, including digital distribution, video, content creation, hospitality, and stagecraft. This guidebook is meant to advise and support you *and* represent the incredible complexity of event planning. **To pull it off, deep collaboration between event planners and their vendors is a necessity.**

2

Second, choosing the right partners is one of the most important decisions you can make. As a full-service production company, Stagedge creates cohesive, seamless event experiences that engage audiences and delight our clients. From the moment you decide to partner with us, we become an extension of your team. Through our proven process, we learn about your audience and event objectives and, with 45 years of experience and know-how, bring your event to life. **The value in knowing your event is going to be executed flawlessly—while avoiding common and costly pitfalls along the way—is immeasurable.**

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Learn more about us, our work, and our values at our **website**, and reach out to us at **info@stagedge.com** when you're ready to hit the ground running.