The
SMART EVENTS
Playbook

Your complete guide to enhancing audience journeys with smart event technology

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Contents

A second wave of digital transformation?

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The pandemic brought all manner of corporate events into the online world like never before, familiarising and normalising 'virtual' and 'hybrid' technologies. As Covid restrictions were lifted, event teams celebrated 'business as normal' and the age-old norm of face-to-face events became a novelty once more...

But is this the end of the story?

As marketing and event teams are under pressure to generate even more content, data and opportunities, the digital transformation of events must continue in earnest.

How then, should corporates build on the rapid digital adoption that the pandemic hastened? What are the pitfalls of new hybrid engagement strategies that should be avoided? And what are 'smart events' and why should in-house event teams be considering them?

This report looks at the factors driving the shift towards smart events and how corporates can use event data to better understand and engage their audiences for greater brand and ROI opportunities

"It is so important that as strategic event planners we ensure we don't go back to the old days of focusing just on delivery. We need to ensure our businesses are measuring and assessing the return on investment and relationships."

Anita Howard, Founder, ICE (In-house Corporate Events)

Key drivers behind digital transformation

In a world filled with digital distractions, corporate events have a unique ability to cut through the noise.

Yet with so much riding on events to deliver, organisers are under increasing pressure to grow their audience, supply granular data on behaviour, present their brand as 'digital-first' and, increasingly, to feed the sales and marketing funnel. A 2022 survey from ICE (In-house Corporate Events) showed that, compared to last year, there was a 10% increase in requirements to measure leads and an 11% increase to measure sales opportunities as key event metrics. [1]

With event expenditure predicted to rise by 83% in 2023, [2] organisers must do more than ever before to keep up with shifting audience demands and, most importantly to demonstrate ROI.

A 2022 survey from ICE (In-house Corporate Events) showed that compared to last year there was a 10% increase in requirements to measure leads and an 11% increase to measure sales opportunities.

External factors

Time-poor audiences

As daily life becomes increasingly busier and audiences have become used to agile working, many expect to digest content whenever it suits them best. Live in-person, virtual or on-demand – event organisers have to be prepared to offer flexibility.

Increased audience expectations

Audiences may have become comfortable with virtual channels, but their expectations have also risen. Brands need to combat Zoom fatigue and deliver interactive, broadcast-quality events that audiences don't just 'tolerate' but truly enjoy.

Sustainability

Sustainability is not just an aspiration but a business priority. The latest McKinsey survey showed 83% of C-suite executives believe ESG (Environmental and Social Governance) programmes will generate more shareholder value in five years time than they do today. [3]

# Internal factors

'Digital-first' brand objectives

Events play a crucial role when it comes to presenting corporate brands as 'digital-first', supporting values of innovation and inclusivity. Brands are also keen to showcase their global connections and offer high-quality speakers based in almost any location.
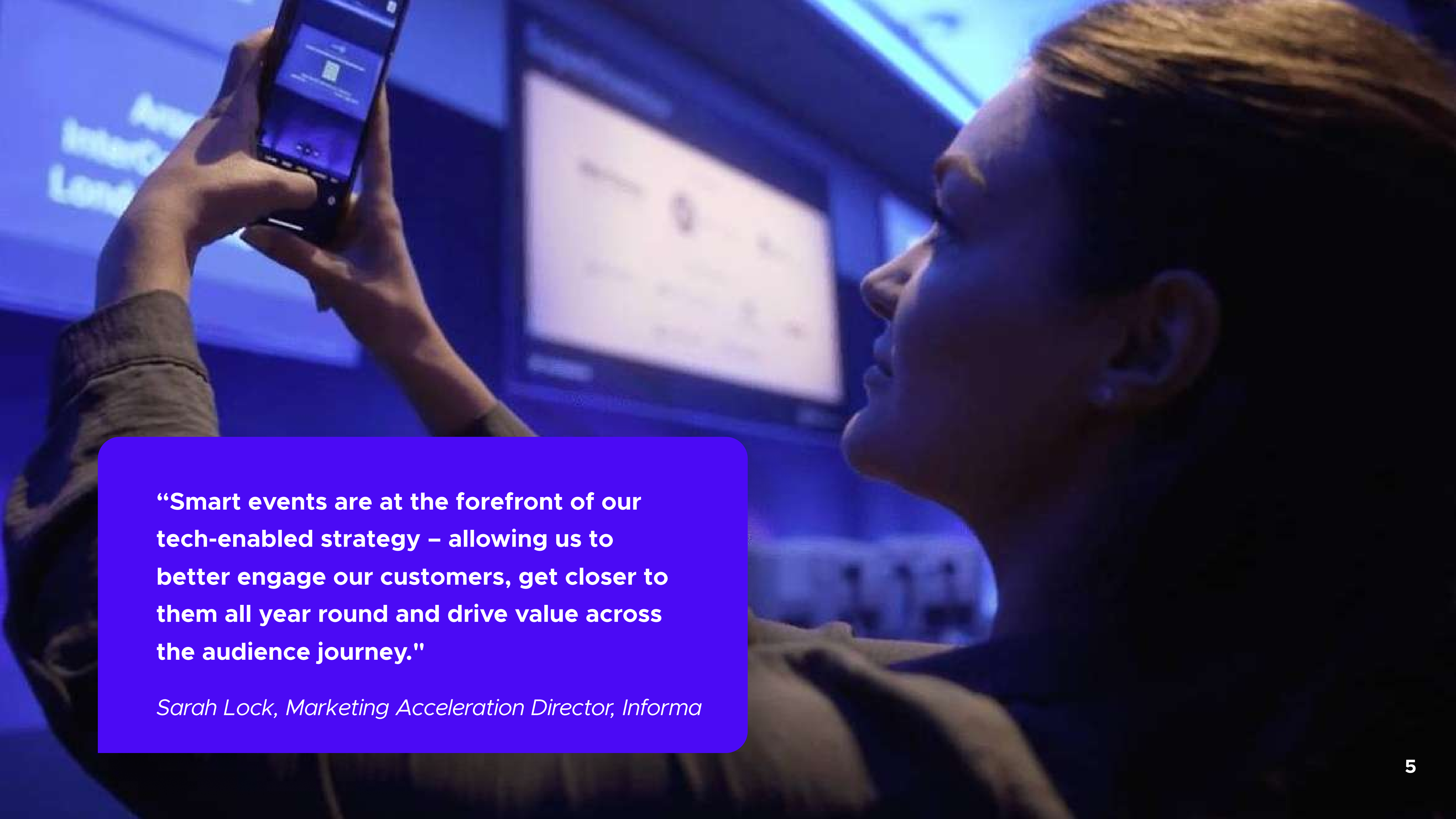
Sales and marketing pipeline

Event organisers are under greater pressure to supply the 'always on' content marketing funnel and assist with lead nurturing opportunities. Increasingly, hybrid channels are sought-after not only to grow audience numbers but to extend the event lifecycle and follow-up opportunities.

Data and ROI requirements

With event costs increasing, there is much greater pressure to capture data and demonstrate ROI. However, many corporates lack a single source of truth for event data; a recent study found that more than 50% of event organisers felt it was difficult to consolidate data due to dispersal across different software systems. [4]
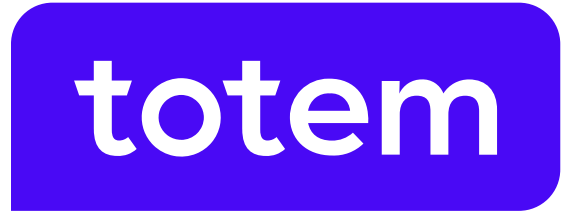
"Smart events are at the forefront of our tech-enabled strategy – allowing us to better engage our customers, get closer to them all year round and drive value across the audience journey."

Sarah Lock, Marketing Acceleration Director, Informa

Smart events: A new way to connect the dots

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What is a smart event?

Drawing on the lessons learnt from the virtual world, smart events are tech-enabled, data-rich experiences that offer the potential to create longer, more engaging audience journeys.

Whether in-person, virtual or hybrid, at their most simple, smart events deliver enhanced digital interaction and data capture. However, forward-thinking event planners are also experimenting with them to bridge digital and face-to-face touchpoints far beyond the traditional framework of a live event.

The gateway to digital communities, personalisation and 365 engagement, smart events are at the very heart of a new digital corporate engagement ecosystem.

Why consider upgrading?

- Gain better insights through increased data capture
- Demonstrate deeper audience engagement throughout the year
- Gain more content views across a larger audience
- Maintain consistent brand perception across any kind of touchpoint
- Increase the likelihood of converting contacts into leads

Traditional event model vs smart event model

Virtual / Digital **In-person**

Pillar event

Webinar

Webinar

Pillar event

Webinar

Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec
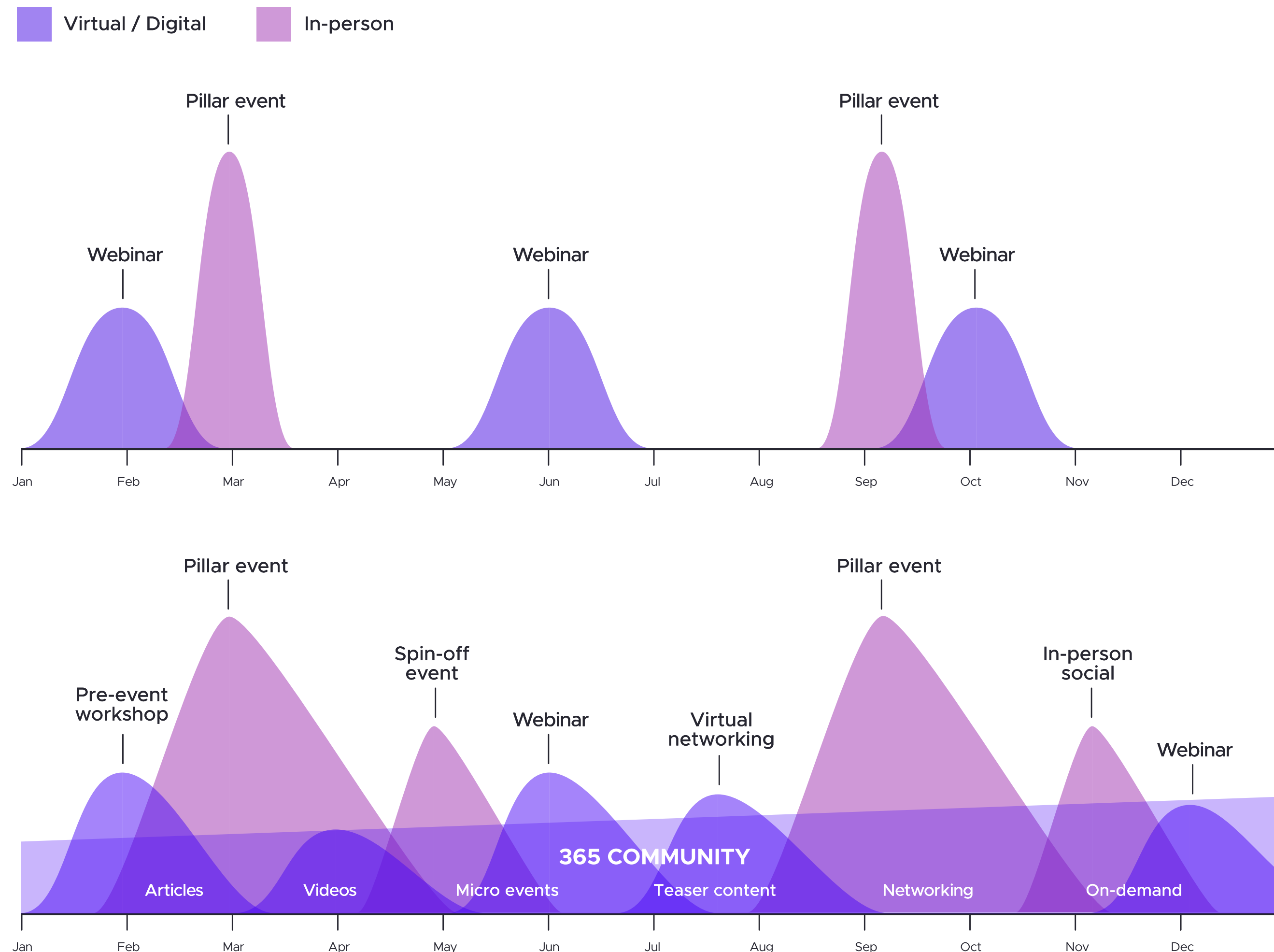
Example **Traditional Event Model**

In the traditional event model engagement is sporadic and limited to a couple of in-person and virtual touchpoints a year. Outside of these singular moments in time audiences can easily disengage.

Pillar event

Spin-off event

Pre-event workshop

Webinar

Virtual networking

Pillar event

In-person social

Webinar

365 COMMUNITY

Articles Videos Micro events Teaser content Networking On-demand

Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec

Example **Smart Event Model**

The smart event model shows what is possible when you extend the digital footprint of your event across the year with numerous sequenced touchpoints that can blend in-person and virtual interaction. This is sustained by a digital community accessible anytime anywhere.

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Digital communities: A more personalised way to interact

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Digital communities offer delegates exclusive access to a variety of content matched exactly to their needs, as well as the ability to continue the conversation with their peers and pinpoint subject experts outside of the live event.

Rather than a two-dimensional transaction between speaker and delegate, event communities allow members to play an active role in what content they interact with and when they choose to do so.

Power up your content marketing

Smart events and digital communities can work together to supply content for your marketing pipeline and move leads through the funnel.

Not only can you measure exactly what content is most popular amongst your segmented audiences, but you can guide them through increasingly focused materials and touchpoints until they are ready to connect with fee earners or sales teams.
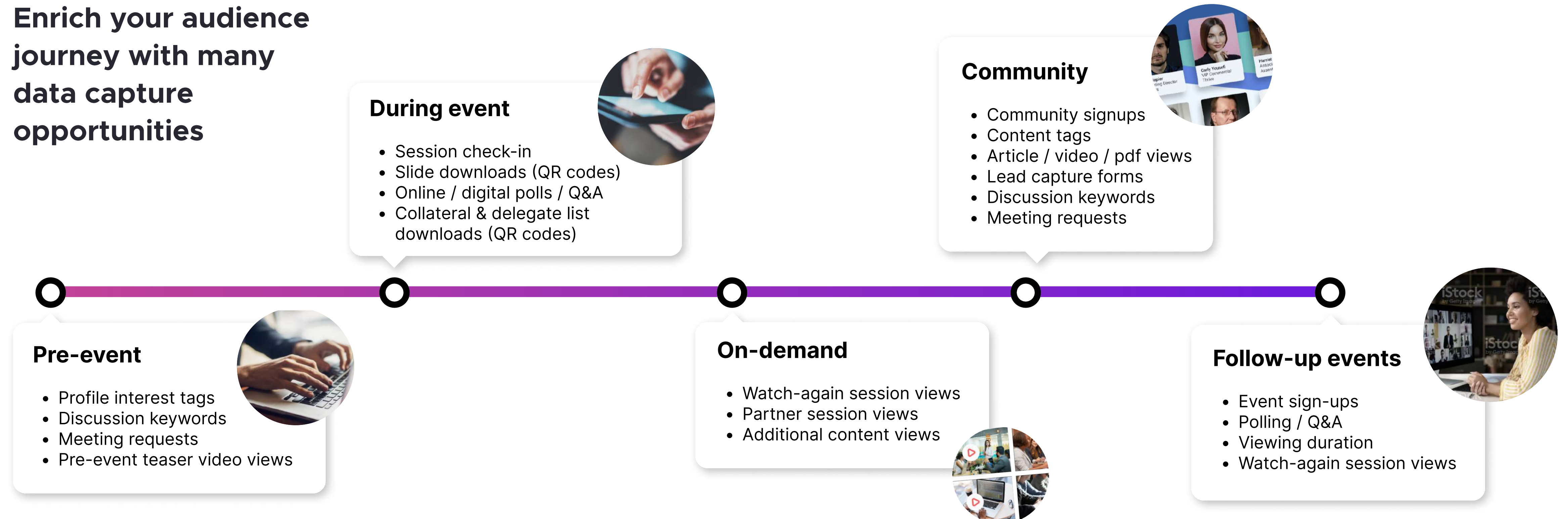
Virtual Roundtables

Webinars

Discussion Threads

Watch-again

Spin-off Events

Smart Networking

News & Articles

Thought Leadership

Personalised Tracklists

From singular moments to connected experiences

By starting to join touchpoints together, organisations can nurture audiences through data-rich journeys.
The more data you collect, the more you can segment your audiences, offering them highly personalised
content through online communities.

Enrich your audience journey with many data capture opportunities

During event

- Session check-in
- Slide downloads (QR codes)
- Online / digital polls / Q&A
- Collateral & delegate list downloads (QR codes)

Community

- Community signups
- Content tags
- Article / video / pdf views
- Lead capture forms
- Discussion keywords
- Meeting requests

Pre-event

- Profile interest tags
- Discussion keywords
- Meeting requests
- Pre-event teaser video views

On-demand

- Watch-again session views
- Partner session views
- Additional content views

Follow-up events

- Event sign-ups
- Polling / Q&A
- Viewing duration
- Watch-again session views

7 ways to **get started** with **smart events**

There are many ways to approach smart events and not all will be right for every organisation. On the following pages, we've assembled some top tactical ideas to help you get started.

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Create an evergreen content hub

On-demand, evergreen content ticks many boxes. It allows attendees to catch up on sessions they missed, exposes your thought leadership to a wider audience and provides a valuable source of information about content popularity.

When you are planning event topics, ensure you can extract some content with evergreen value in order to enable year-round promotion.

Placing on-demand content on your virtual event environment rather than just on a landing page on your website maintains the same user experience as your event while avoiding the barrier of forms or website logins for gated content.

Above all, however, it allows for a level of super-targeting and personalisation that is much more difficult to achieve on a website – more on this to follow.

1

Tactical Ideas

● Use **pre-event taster videos** to get your audience excited about what to expect and accustomed to the on-demand environment

● **Segment sessions into bite-sized 20-minute clips** to make it quicker for audiences to find what they want and to capture more granular viewing data

● Create **content libraries** for demo videos, pitch videos, partner videos, market research videos etc. and track who is watching what

Explore a 365 digital community

How many of the interests of your ready-made network can be catered to in spin-off events or online meetings such as virtual roundtables?

By segmenting your audience into communities, you can introduce them to a living library of searchable on-demand content where they can also network with peers and receive invites to smaller, live events in their niche.

Your content could include anything from thought leadership whitepapers and industry articles to webinars and product demos. The trick is to reuse, recycle and repurpose wherever possible and remember that while some communities may need close editorial management, others are more light-touch and self-sustainable.

Signpost audiences to relevant communities during live conferences, and consider making some content, polling or survey results exclusively available upon sign-up.

Tactical Ideas

- Invite your community to a blend of **physical and virtual spin-off events** to move them down the sales funnel

- Encourage members or partners to **post their own content or events**. Host a day when they can create their own **virtual 'brain-date'** sessions, for example.

- Use your community as a **lead generation tool** by making a section of content publicly visible via SEO-optimised landing pages and then adding lead capture forms

2

Activate personalisation

Capturing more information from your delegates all year round allows you to steadily increase the amount of personalisation across the audience journey, creating a compelling reason for your audience to continue to engage.

One way of doing this is to create communities within communities. For example, if you had a group of angel investors who are engaging with and actively monitoring content about AI, you could invite them to a community specifically for AI investors interested in early-phase start-ups. Here they could find the latest news and insights about AI as well as pitch videos from a range of tech founders.

They could select the companies they wanted to meet at a virtual demo day event, and you could add this to a personalised agenda, setting up one-to-one meetings on their behalf.

Tactical Ideas

- Use **pre-populated personalised event agendas** at your annual conference giving VIPs or community members access to special events according to role type

- Use **smart matching tools** based on content tags for targeted pre- and post-event networking

- Send **automated email campaigns** to community members drawing attention to particular thought-leadership pieces or events

3

Add data-rich touchpoints

Despite professional audiences being increasingly willing to engage with tools like event apps, often their potential is overlooked. This is a missed opportunity considering 41% of corporate event organisers report having insufficient data from in-person events. [5]

Some potential data-rich touchpoints include:

QR codes – can be used within sessions, breakout rooms or stands to augment the experience and monitor which content is most popular amongst different audiences.

Content tagging – in delegate profiles and searches can provide insights into trending topics and sought-after communities.

Polling & Q&A – can be used to capture data from both virtual and in-person audiences, making the experience more interactive as well as providing valuable content.

On-demand content – delivered in the virtual desktop environment can provide a rich source of information about which content is being watched and how often.

Tactical Ideas

- Use **QR codes** and **virtual briefcases** to allow delegates to download slides and research and watch supporting videos

- Prior to the event, or during the opening session, **ask delegates to submit questions** they would like to ask their peers then **poll the audience** and display the results

- Offer **QR codes or event apps** for **virtual delegate lists** and advanced access to **dinner seating plans**

- Once delegates have interacted digitally, **signpost them** to the next content asset

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Leverage 360 analytics

Without sophisticated tools to make data analysis quick and easy, valuable insights are lost. Does providing content on demand boost overall engagement stats for senior leaders or do they prefer to attend in person? Would a different communication strategy help more clients network using your event app? Are communities signing up for future conferences through their community environment?

In order to pivot to a data-driven strategy, event leaders need to move away from fragmented software. Painstakingly trying to understand audience journeys without all the data in one place takes up valuable time that could be spent elsewhere.

Ensure you plan meetings with leadership pre- and post-event to reflect on the 'as is' data, and then decide what you ought to do next. This might mean changing your event strategy, adding a popular content topic to your marketing plan or making smaller adjustments to your audience journey.

5

Tactical Ideas

● Use smaller micro-events as **A/B testing grounds** for new digital tools

● Experiment with an **agile approach** – for example, if you can see a particular speaker has had a lot of registrations, ask them if they will do a 'meet the speaker' session the following day

● Try directing your audience to your **event app** at different points throughout the journey to see when they most engage

Use immersive interaction toolkits

Smart events, whether virtual or in-person rely heavily on audience interaction. There are a number of techniques organisers can use to keep audiences watching and immerse them in the digital world, a few ideas are below.

Immersive virtual event staging – bring big screen, broadcast quality to your virtual audience with interactive staging, broadcast studios, branded experiences and multiple camera angles for live-streamed content.

Teleportation – virtually 'port' audience groups into breakout rooms or bring them back together for plenary sessions, for seamless engagement.

Polling - allow audiences to complete polls either in the virtual environment or via your event app and display results live on the theatre screen.

Digital networking – try smart matching networking tools and pre-booked hosted buyer meetings for virtual audiences.

Tactical Ideas

- Take virtual audiences right into the heart of the action with **floating cameras** tracking across the theatre

- Elevate your virtual experience with a team in a **broadcast studio** who interview experts or clients

- Allow in-person audiences to **virtually scan the lecture theatre** from their mobile phone and message other attendees to meet face-to-face for a coffee

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Polling

Admin

and

vellers

Renewable Energy
13%

Fly less   15%

Smaller baggage allowance
38%

16

Design for sustainability and ESG programmes

For the past three years, sustainability has topped the ICE's poll as the top priority for corporate event planners.

With in-person gatherings now in full swing, many corporates are considering a hybrid strategy; could more audiences be encouraged to join live online? If you have already done the work to build a digital community you may find that more pre- and post-event workshops and roundtables can also be done virtually.

According to research from the University of Cambridge, a hybrid conference where overseas attendees are encouraged to join virtually, coupled with promoting travel by land, not air, could reduce emissions by almost 90%.[6]

Organisers can also find smarter ways to reduce their carbon footprint at in-person events by swapping paper collateral for QR codes or providing ways for delegates to offset their carbon footprint.

Tactical Ideas

- Offer an **engaging hybrid experience** to your pillar event and **spin-off community events** to reduce air travel

- Go **paper-free** and encourage use of the app by **eliminating paper delegate lists**, **seat-drops** and menus in favour of **QR codes** and asking partners to do the same at their stands

- Allow delegates to **offset their carbon footprint during event registration** or during the event itself using gamification and QR codes

7

The do's and don'ts of smart events

✅ Do

1 **A/B test to learn fast** – if like many, you have added more smaller events (virtual or otherwise) to your portfolio, these offer excellent opportunities to experiment with a new digital tool. Switch the setup between similar events to see how it performs best.

2 **Set clear digital objectives that link to business goals** – from QR codes to virtual coffeetables and vlogs, be selective and pick the tools at the right stage of the marketing funnel to meet your goals.

3 **Get smart with content** - split up, re-use, and recycle existing content as well as encouraging partners and users to get involved in order to make their own content and start a flywheel effect.

4 **Have a clear adoption strategy –** for example, encourage app adoption by making it the primary means to register on the day and ask audiences to submit a question during the welcome remarks, or in the case of a virtual platform, use it to push pre-event teaser content.

5 **Develop and evolve your communication plan** – make sure you have a solid plan to introduce your app or platform to your audience, including how you gather feedback.

❌ Don't

1 **Try too much too quickly** - start small and iterate so you can allow audiences to get used to new technology and enable your team to close the feedback loop and take time to analyse the data.

2 **Downgrade your virtual-only audiences** – if you merely pay lip service to your virtual environment don't assume your audience won't notice or care. Look for complete control over branding and broadcast quality staging.

3 **Always mandate digital interaction** – for example reaching the end of a session and forcing in-person delegates to submit speaker questions through an app, rather than giving them the option to ask them verbally.

4 **Miss out on technical and strategic support** – find a strategic partner to help you map out the audience journey and model scenarios as well as one that offers remote and on-the-ground support.

5 **Spend all your time gathering data, but not gaining insights** – generate a few hypothesises in advance and work out what data you need to prove or disprove them. Look for engagement software that consolidates data and has a powerful analytics capability.

Conclusion

A challenging but exciting time lies ahead for corporate event organisers. Digital transformation will gather pace as brands look for more flexible ways to reach a global audience and generate business growth against a backdrop of rising costs. Regardless of the format of the event (in-person, virtual or hybrid), demand for better data from events will only become more acute.

The brands who will leap ahead, however, are those who can interweave a high standard of digital engagement into everything they do, creating smarter sequences of in-person and virtual touchpoints that become part of their brand experience. In order to continue captivating audiences and to demonstrate event ROI, event professionals must reimagine their audience journey, thinking beyond its traditional framework.

Smart events offer plenty of opportunities to create more immersive interaction and get a closer understanding of your audiences, all year round. They provide events and marketing professionals with exciting new opportunities to work more closely together and take a data-driven approach to content and lead generation.

The good news is that there are many ways to start small, for example exploring the full potential of event apps, before evolving to year-round engagement strategies and online communities.

Book your smart event workshop

Ready to take the next step on your journey towards digital transformation?

Book a workshop with our experts to find out how to:

✓ Select smart event components that will meet your business objectives

✓ Gain better insights into your audiences

✓ Make the business case to augment your event

Book here

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Your enterprise event partner

reef   backstage

Totem helps enterprise organisations to better understand, engage and grow their audiences.

Our award-winning digital engagement platform, Reef, offers a smarter way to deliver events, meetings, content, communities and online learning. As a single unified platform, it enhances the audience journey, extends event lifecycles and provides data-driven insights to help uncover new business opportunities.

Supported by our team of expert event, video and creative specialists, Totem works with leading corporates to elevate their engagement experiences; in-person, virtually and everywhere in between.

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References

1) ICE (In-house Corporate Events) *Benchmark Research For Corporate Events*, 2022 - **Click here** to read

2) ICE *Benchmark Research For Corporate Events*

3) McKinsey *Global Survey*, 2020 - **Click here** to read

4) Eventforce, *The Changing Role of Event Data* - **Click here** to read

5) ICE *Benchmark Research For Corporate Events*

6) University of Cambridge, *Reducing the Carbon Footprint of Academic Conferences by Online Participation: The Case of the 2020 Virtual European Consortium for Political Research General Conference* - **Click here** to read

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