

Virtual Meetings & Events Workshop Recap

Presented by SITE SoCal in partnership with San Diego State University's L. Robert Payne School of Hospitality & Tourism Management

Author: Mandy Brown, CIS, CITP

May 20th, 2020



Introduction

On May 20th, 2020 SITE SoCal hosted a Virtual Meetings & Events Workshop as part of the Stay at Home with SITE SoCal weekly webinar series. It is important to note, this series was held during Stay at Home orders in result of the COVID19 pandemic.

The Virtual Meetings & Events Workshop featured a non-traditional Member Showcase and was facilitated on Zoom by the SITE SoCal Board of Directors, and hosted by Mandy Brown, Past President of SITE SoCal.

The program was produced in partnership with San Diego State University's L. Robert Payne School of Hospitality & Tourism Management where Mandy teaches in many verticals, including a course on Virtual Meetings & Events in the undergraduate program and also contributes on this topic to the Master's Program in Meeting & Event Management at the Payne School.

For information on the Masters in Event & Meeting Management program at SDSU and to find about joining the waitlist for enrollment, please visit: <https://mastershtm.sdsu.edu/masters-degree-meeting-and-event-management/>

The results and inner workings of the workshop have been compiled into this document with the goal to share information, ideas, and resources with the SITE global community. We encourage the community to share and communicate back as necessary and hope to inspire continued discussion to promote recovery for the incentive travel industry as the effects of COVID19 linger in the meetings and events industry.

Stay Home with SITE SoCal – Wednesday Webinar Initiative



When the COVID19 pandemic hit, the SITE SoCal Board of Directors knew they needed to help members to stay connected and engaged while also staying safer at home. To do this, they created the Stay Home with SITE SoCal Wednesday Webinar Series. Here is a look at the webinars produced during this time:

Wednesday, April 8th 30 Minute Mindfulness Reset

A 30 minute Meditation & Mindfulness Reset hosted by Fit City Adventures.

Website: <https://fitcityadventures.com>

Contact: Angela Minardi, Chief Experience Officer, 858-367-9992, angela@fitcityadventures.com

Wednesday, April 13th SITE SoCal Town Hall

Industry leaders were invited to provide insights, perspectives, updates and projections surrounding COVID19. The industry leaders included: Jenn Glynn (SITE Global President), Michael Dominguez (ALHI President & CEO), Holly Niedzielski (Planner at Ingram Micro), Kelley Lansing (Planner at Ingram Micro), and Darren Green (Senior Vice President of Sales at LA Tourism).

Wednesday, April 15th Family Feud with Feet First Entertainment

Feet First took SITE SoCal to a new level of interactive with a team competition based on a favorite game show – Family Feud!

Website: <https://feetfirstevents.com/>

Contact: Warren Press, VP, Sales & Marketing, 323-459-8840, warren@feetfirstevents.com

Wednesday, April 22nd Virtual Happy Hour with SongDivision

SITE SoCal rocked & rolled through an hour of nonstop entertainment hosted by SongDivision. The event included music trivia, music-related nostalgia and a live performance of an original song inspired by SITE SoCal.

Website: www.songdivision.com

Contact: John Lombardo, MC/Client Executive, Western North America, 702-682-6213,
john@songdivision.com

Wednesday, April 29th Battle of the Chapters (SoCal vs. Northeast)

SITE SoCal battle SITE Northeast in a coast-to coast Trivia game hosted by Play with a Purpose.

Website: www.playwithapurpose.com

Contact: Sharon Fisher, CEO/IdeaSparker, 407-474-0388, sharon@playwithapurpose.com

Halftime Report

At this point, 2020 SITE SoCal President Alisa Walsh sent a "Stay Home with SITE: Half Time Report" email communication to mark the halfway point of the weekly series and give a shout out to the individuals and organizations who had provided their time and expertise to sponsor and facilitate these events.

Wednesday, May 6th Seis De Mayo

A double header featuring a presentation with tips on "How to Look Professional on Zoom" from Darlynn Menkin of Where You Want to Be Tours. Plus, a fun Seis de Mayo cooking class with Fit City Adventure featuring Chef Nicole who walked SITE SoCal through an interactive cooking class to make fresh guacamole and margaritas!

Where You Want to Be Website: <https://wheretours.com>

Where You Want to Be Contact: Darlynn Menkin, 619-917-6037

Fit City Adventures Website: <https://fitcityadventures.com>

Fit City Adventure Contact: Angela Minardi, Chief Experience Officer, 858-367-9992,
anglea@fitcityadventures.com

Wednesday, May 13th The Magic in You

SITE SoCal enjoyed a magical experience featuring John George, International Champion of Magic, presented by FireFly Team Events.

Website: <https://fireflyteamevents.com>

Wednesday, May 20th Virtual Meetings & Events Workshop

In partnership with L. Robert Payne School of Hospitality & Tourism Management, SITE SoCal produced an interactive workshop on the topic of virtual meetings and event. This document was produced as part of this workshop – please see more in the "About the Virtual Meetings & Events Workshop".

Website: <https://htm.sdsu.edu/>

Contact: Mandy Brown, CIS, CITP, mlbrown3@sdsu.edu, 619-548-2700

Wednesday, May 27th Sweatworking Boot Camp

A 30 minute full both strength and conditioning boot camp hosted by Hi-C Fitness with Hillary McCrumb, NASM CPT, PnC

Website: <https://hicfitness.com/>

Contact: 248-330-1550

Special Shout Out to Virtual DJ Extraordinaire!

Lee Dyson of **Hey Mister DJ** joined SITE SoCal for many of these webinars to provide backup tunes and

keep the party flowing!

Website: <https://heymisterdj.com>

Contact: Lee Dyson, Owner, 310-591-0988, lee@heymisterdj.com

To learn more and to view replay videos from the events listed above, please visit:

<https://www.sitesocal.com/past-events/virtual>

About the Virtual Meetings & Events Workshop

Goals & Objectives

The first step to producing your own virtual meeting or event is to determine the goals and objectives. Goals and objectives of a virtual event will support your strategy, which will be your plan of action to support all stakeholders involved in a virtual event. Stakeholders may include: your audience members, panelist or speakers, sponsors, the planning team or committee who is working with you to create a successful event, your board of directors, CEO, boss, client, or whomever may be the person who is financially responsible.

For this workshop, we had one hour to execute the Virtual Meetings & Events Workshop – not a lot of time for the material we could potentially cover! The organizers of the event decided we wanted to focus on these goals:

1. Provide **virtual networking and engagement** opportunities to the participants.
2. Provide an **overview of virtual events** with tips for quick, easy and approachable ways for participants to begin or become more confident in creating their own virtual events.
3. Find ways to **showcase our members and community** who are providing virtual or hybrid services and those who may need these services.

As we continue, we'll look at how we were able to accomplish these goals and objectives throughout the pre-planning, event, and post event follow-up from this workshop.

Timeline

A timeline was created for the workshop that would support these goals:

2:00pm – 2:05pm SITE SoCal Intro & Announcements

2:05pm – 2:10pm Welcome, Speaker Introduction, & Housekeeping

2:10pm – 2:20pm (2) Rounds of "Chat Roulette" – Small Group Networking

2:20pm – 2:35pm Overview of How to Create Virtual Meetings & Events – Educational

2:35pm – 2:50pm Breakout Sessions with Prompted Questions

2:50pm – 3:00pm Group Reconnects in Main Room to Review & Conclude

Goal 1: Virtual Networking & Engagement

Virtual events are more impactful when attendees are given opportunities to engage. Finding multiple ways for participants to communicate with each other, network, and collaborate is key. Be sure to direct and instruct them on how to find these tools, how to use them, and remember to plan for enough time for the participants to use the tools effectively.

Engagement and virtual networking elements were incorporated into the workshop pre-event, during the event, and post-event.

Pre-Event

- A survey was sent to find out what elements of virtual meetings and events the attendees wanted to learn about. We included a few suggested topics and allowed for participants to fill in with their own topics as well. The board sent the survey in the pre-event communications and received response rate of approximately 34% to the number of people who attended the event. This allowed us to customize the overall event and to address the top and most repeated requested items of discussion.

During Event

- DJ Lee Dyson from Hey Mister DJ provided music as guests arrived, in between agenda items, and at the conclusion of the event. DJ Lee also encouraged guests to interact in the chat feature. At one point, DJ Lee had asked the participants what their favorite quarantine guilty pleasures were. The responses trickled in and we learned and laughed as we discovered our community members were finding comfort in salt and vinegar chips, sushi cake, box cereal and Dead to Me (tv show), making banana bread...for the 3rd time, eating a bag of Swedish fish for breakfast, Dots pretzels, Montepulciano 2014 Kurni, wine.com deliveries, keeping up with the Kardashians for far too long, bagels with cream cheese, margaritas, and more!
- VP of Education, Ciara Rubalcava also warmed up the chat feature by including a welcome message for guests to view as they arrived. The message read, "Welcome! Thank you for joining SITE SoCal in partnership with San Diego State University L. Robert Payne School of Hospitality & Tourism Management for today's Virtual Event Workshop. Please chat a warm hello and let us know you're here. Our session will begin soon."
- Before virtually kicking off the event, Mandy Brown congratulated the SITE SoCal board for bringing the community together and asked participants to "Show some love with your encouraging words for our amazing board!". Participants were directed to use the chat or reaction buttons and given a short amount of time to respond. Immediately the chat flooded with encouraging words (see graphic below). It's hard to be a leader when the going gets tough, and we can all agree that effects of COVID19 have been TOUGH. These words ring true and

earned by the SITE SoCal BOD for creating the Stay at Home series, a wonderful initiative created for the community in a challenging time.

"Awesome job team!"
"It's been great! Thanks SITE SoCal!"
"SITE SoCal - ya'll are amazing!!!"
"Go SITE Board"
"Thank you for all you have done to keep us connected!!!"
"Thank you, Board!!! You are amazing and we are so grateful!"
"Go SITE SoCal Board! You're amazing!"
"Thank you for keeping us connected and for the fun during this crazy time."
"Woohoo!"
"Good job, Board - YEA!!!"
"Thank you SITE board - we love you!"
"This has been amazing. Thank you!"
"Love these, they're helping to keep me sane!"
"These are the best "webinar" each week! Thank you!"
"Thank you SITE SoCal - it's been more engaging to look forward to this each week!"
"Thank you, Board - great leadership. Well done."
"Thanks to all for all you do!"
"YAYYYYAYYY! Best Board Ever!"
"Thank you, SITE So Cal board - you rock!"

- Feedback from the pre-event survey indicated that our guests were craving networking time and wanted to find out how they could interact with other attendees in a virtual environment. In response to this, we incorporated a "Chat Roulette" activity, which were break out rooms to host very small group mini networking sessions. Evan Christman, President Elect, managed the breakout feature and split the participants into small groups of three maximum. This gave attendees a chance to connect in a small group setting and hold a short conversation. We received comments after this activity, "I need longer to chat!! 😊", "That was so fun!", "Cute idea and way to keep the networking going even virtually!", "What a great idea! Loved the small chat group!", and "Love the small breakouts! Wish we had more time." Next time, we might host these long and there was a small wait time to go into breakouts.
- We had determined in advance that if there was any type of unplanned delay during the program, we would throw in lighthearted networking questions to keep participant engagement going in the chat feature. Due to this short lag, Ciara threw out the question "What's everyone's favorite ice cream flavor?" and were able to learn that our colleagues have quite the sweet tooth as the fun responses trickled in: "French vanilla", "cookie dough", "coffee", "Ben & Jerry's new Netflix flavor", "Gold Medal Ribbon", "min chocolate chip", "green tea", and "chocolate chip".
- During the educational portion of the event, Mandy engaged guests by asking them questions about their experiences with virtual events such as "How have virtual events helped you through the past few months? And "Have you considered changing anything about the way you do business moving forward because of your use of virtual tools over the past few months? Attendees were encouraged to share their responses in the chat feature.

-
- Small Group Breakout sessions with prompted questions – the questions were created by surveying attendees in advance. 8-10 – good number – guests can all see each other, plus everyone can provide their input. Check out a few notes and findings from our small group discussions toward the end of this document.

Post Event

At the conclusion of the workshop, the slide presentation deck as well as this document will be accessible on the SITE SoCal website under “Past Events” for attendees and all SITE community members to access and review with the comment feature enabled to encourage continued engagement and further sharing of resources.

Goal 2: Overview of Virtual Events

After the opening small group networking portion of the event, we went into the educational portion of the program, an overview of How to Create Virtual Events. Guests were encouraged to find excitement in the huge growth in the virtual segment of meetings and events as a result of EVERYONE going virtual.

They were asked to consider the idea that meeting and event professionals were developing skills that weren't planned and how professionals were receiving a bonus education where they are immersive learning and gaining firsthand experiences with a bit of grace from our colleagues in this unique time.

While live events are absolutely preferred, our industry has had no choice but to embrace this temporary virtual reality and prepare for what is to come. Virtual tools can be used as our bridge back to in person experiences.

The overview was not a call to “pivot”, it was a moment to embrace technology, to appreciate it for what it is in the sense that it can provide the means for interaction, education, and engagement when meeting in person is not an option or when meeting in person is an option and virtual tools can further enhance the in person experience.

Below are a few practical discussion points covered during this portion of the event that may help you with the virtual and hybrid events you are planning in your organization.

1. Familiarize

Familiarize yourself with types of virtual events (for example: webinar, webcast, OnDemand, live simulated or simulive, virtual worlds, slide cast, etc) and with virtual technology platforms (Zoom, Brandlive, ON24, AdobeConnect, Intrado, Blue Jeans, Crowdcast, etc.) by watching demo videos to become familiar and acquainted with terminology and functionality. Take note of platforms and types of virtual events that are being used at the industry events you are attending virtually and consider which features and formats might work well for the events you are planning.

2. Develop Strategy, Define Goals and Objectives

In most cases, try not to choose your virtual event platform as step one. Platforms have a variety of capabilities and it is essential to define the goals and objectives of your event prior to selecting a technology platform. Develop a strategy that will set the tone for your event and serve as a plan of action to support all stakeholders. Be sure the goals and objectives are understood, not only by you but also by your stakeholders and planning team. From there, determine where virtual can be a viable and relative option for your groups.

Remember, if you're moving an in-person event to virtual, it's good to understand that your virtual event will not replicate your in-person event, it will be a completely different experience. This may be the time to rethink the event and refresh your goals and objectives.

3. Selecting a Virtual Platform

You've determined that virtual is going to be a viable option for your group and you'd like to move forward to select the virtual platform and technologies you will use to produce the event. Here you will understand why defining goals and objectives is so important. Technology is widespread and there are many resources available, plus you may not need all the features of a robust virtual platform, and a less robust platform may not cover what you need.

4. Vetting Technology

Start with a Research and Comparison Report, put your mind in the perspective of your stakeholder and consider each technology platform from the viewpoints of each stakeholder as you navigate the general workings. You may want to consider creating a task force at your organization to divide and conquer, giving each team member a few platforms to research and bring back notes.

From here you can narrow the selections and build a relationship with a live person from the technologies in consideration. Just as a meeting planner would develop a relationship with a hotel partner, the technology will be the "virtual hotel" who will "house and accommodate" your virtual guests. Discuss contingency plans, insurance, security, and other items of risk management with your technology representative. Connect with this person in multiple ways: virtually using their platform, by phone, email, and in person (when and if safe to do so), to get an idea of their service level and quality of support.

5. Negotiate Pricing & Features

Like the process a meeting planner would take to compare hotel properties the concessions and amenities included, platform features can be compared and negotiated as well. Here are a few items to consider:

- Does the platform provide a unified experience? For example, does the platform handle registration, or do you already have this covered. If you do have this covered, does the platform integrate with the technology in consideration?
- Does the platform in consideration have the capabilities to produce reports, track financials and any other information needed pre, during, and post-event?

-
- Is the technology scalable? Will it support the 15-person meeting you are planning for August, as well as the 2,500-person meeting you are planning for October?
 - Is the technology compatible with the equipment your users will be connecting with?
 - If you plan to have sponsors or need branding or visibility needs, how does the platform accommodate those?
 - What engagement features are included? How do speakers engage with participants and vice versa? How do participants engage with each other?
 - If you are working with groups where attendees will be joining from international destinations, consider if the technology is compliant with GDPR (Global Data Protection Regulations) and if it is usable in all countries, including destinations where technology is limited or restricted.

These are just a few considerations, add your own priorities to the checklist and after a thorough comparison, you can determine which platform is going to create the next best experience for your guests who are not able to attend in person.

6. Create A Timeline

If you're at a complete loss for where to begin planning your virtual event or how to move an in-person event to virtual, creating a timeline is a great starting point. This is where you allocate time for the items you will need to plan for – which means you PLAN for the time you need to PLAN!

- Set a deadline to have your goals and objectives clearly defined and communicated.
- Allocate time for research to select the virtual technologies you will use for the event.
- Schedule time to interview the best internal and external planning team members and contracted suppliers to support the success of your event.
- Designate rehearsal time using the equipment and technology you plan to use when taking your event live.

7. Build Your Team

When building your production team, consider that virtual events need hands on support, just as in person events do. It's not a click and play production, there are many humans behind the scenes who are covering specific roles to produce the virtual experience. When planning your own virtual events, you may consider the following role:

- Host or Facilitator
- Greeter (great for events where guests are in and out on a flow!)
- Question & Answer (Q&A) Manager
- Breakout Facilitators or Moderators
- Equipment Manager
- Security (also known as Troll Patrol!)

Call on your **trusted industry suppliers** to team up with for your virtual and hybrid events moving forward. Refer to the "Stay at Home with SITE – Webinar Initiative" section of this document as well as the

coverage in our next section on how we strived in this workshop to accomplish “**Goal 3: Showcase SITE SoCal Members and Community**” to discover trusted industry suppliers in the SITE SoCal community.

8. Producing Engaging Content

Special guest Jordan Valdez, Art Director from EventWorks shared five things to remember when creating engaging content for a virtual meeting:

- Select a dynamic platform that can provide not only a visual frame for the video content, but a place for guests to network and interact with the content as well as sponsors and speakers an outlet for highlighting their message.
- Rethink the Stage: rather than mimicking last year’s in person business session, perhaps use a format proven to work on the screen. News desks and talk shows provide wonderful environments for engaging content. Should you be creating a hybrid event, think about creating a stage that has layers and is scenic.
- The creative personnel may need to change. Think about hiring a director that is familiar with live TV rather than a business session. If you are executing a hybrid event, have two directors – one devoted to in-person and the other to virtual.
- Talking heads are holding a lot on their shoulders. Those who are speaker where it is not their profession should be offered coaching and speech development services. All visual content needs to be animated; a static PowerPoint slide will not work to hold your audiences’ attention.
- Rethink the budget and move some food and beverage dollars into something tangible and tactile that you can send to the guests. Have them open or utilize it during the session for a shared moment of connectivity.

Goal 3: Showcase SITE SoCal Members and Community

SITE SoCal recognizes we have an incredible amount of talent in our community. We wanted to find ways to showcase those who are providing virtual or hybrid services. We asked participants to provide their name, organization, and a brief description of the services they are offering with their contact information. All were encouraged to take note of these individuals and organizations and to call on them for their event needs, keep the conversations going after the workshop and find support in the SITE SoCal community to grown up and through the lingering effects of COVID19 together.

Check out our community members in attendance who are offering virtual or hybrid services:

- Lee Dyson, Hey Mister DJ - MC/JD for Virtual Events
- Michelle Harty, Meeting Sites Pro, Inc. – Full service meeting management company offering virtual meetings and hybrid meetings. Contact Michell at 858-220-0010 or michelle@meetingsitespro.com

-
- Amanda Ma, Innovate Marketing Group, Inc. – Event Management & Design (Live & Virtual)
 - Michael Wallace, Firefly Team Events – Virtual building and marketing engagements. Contact Michael at 714-598-9804.
 - Lisa Tomaselli, ShowTec. – Contact List at ltomaselli@showtec.com
 - Jackie Ash, 360 Destination Group – Virtual cooking classes, mixology, teambuilding, emcee's, fun and engaging entertainment and more! Contact Jackie at Jackie.Ash@360dg.com.
 - Alisa Walsh, EventWorks- Full service virtual and hybrid event production. Contact Alisa at awalsh@eventworks.com.
 - Kathryn Wells, Hornblower Cruises & Events – Offering Hornblower at Home – Celebrations to Go
 - Connie Reeves, Connie Reeves & Co. & Modern Meetings – Virtual and Hybrid Meetings
 - Marshall Jones, Prestige Global Meeting Source – Full event services for Virtual or IRL events.
 - Kim Lefebvre, 360 Destination Group – Destination Management Services. Contact Kim at 610-814-3600.
 - Jen Kamins, Unbridled Solutions – Full virtual and/or hybrid meetings with their own virtual platform. Contact Jen at jkamins@unbridled.com.
 - Abbie Fernandez, Sync Meeting Management – Full-Service Event Planning. Contact Abbie at abbie@syncmm.com.
 - Courtney Jones, PEP Creative in San Diego – Providing a variety of services such as brewmaster experiences, video DJs for meetings, digital caricaturists, and more entertainment. Also, live streaming for non-profits, fundraising with a “studio”. Contact Courtney at 858-458-9908.
 - Jennifer Keltner, RescuePartyGive – Hosting events to raise awareness of human trafficking in the corporate environment and our community. Contact Jennifer at 562-884-9855 (see more information in Additional Resources section).
 - Geraldine Gatehouse, Writer – Virtual Copy, Show Flow, Blogs. Contact Geraldine at Geraldine.Gatehouse@imexexhibitions.com
 - Leonard Neil – Virtual Entertainment. Contact Leonard at LN@LNPRODS.com

Attendees were reminded to turn VIDEO on and when in small groups to turn AUDIO on so we could see and hear from them. The time given in the small group networking sessions was mindfully implemented into this event to give attendees a chance to talk about what they are doing and to showcase themselves to their peers.

Having a post event document was in the plans from the beginning. The goal for this document would be to provide this as an educational piece and resource for the SITE global community, plus allow us to have an additional opportunity to showcase our members in attendance at the workshop as well as the organizations and individuals who had supported the webinar initiative by offering their virtual services.

Breakout Sessions

Prior to going into breakout session, participants were all given the link to a Google Doc featuring questions to prompt discussion in their small groups. The questions were created using feedback from the pre-event survey. Using the Google Doc link, participants were encouraged to collect their feedback knowing it would be used to compile this document and be shared. Groups had the option to work through all questions, or to focus on one or two as their conversations developed and as time allowed. Below are the questions a few thoughts as provided by participants:

Question 1: In what ways can virtual services, products, and platforms be used in incentive programs? Regarding virtual and hybrid events: Suppliers – what do you need from meeting planners? Meeting planners, what are the key expectations and what do you need from suppliers? Please share.

- Finding ways to recognize incentive winners virtually, create virtual platforms for award ceremonies and achievements.
- Question whether a true 'incentive' can be done virtually and if so, it may not be travel or trip rewards.
- Consider photo gift ideas
- Virtual green rooms offered for meeting planners
- Suppliers convert live events to online events and support both virtual and hybrid events.
- Meetings in a box, knowing what technology is provided by the hotel property.
- Survey stakeholders to find out about future attendee feedback, virtual tease of next year
- Mail tactile items to virtual attendees in advance, such as ingredient boxes so they can go through a live cooking demonstration or a tiki experience kit.
- Create memorable virtual competition experiences and consider bringing the winners to the in-person location when it is safe, permissible and all parties feel comfortable.
- Find solid forms of interaction for virtual attendees, have someone dedicated to attendee engagement.
- Understand that it's okay to have a virtual event that is not packed full of engagement.
- Have a mix of both pre-recorded and live materials
- Reconsider timeframes for events and understand the incentive process may become shorter or longer.
- People are still looking to show appreciation for their employees. What can suppliers create that no one else can? Planners are looking for unique events.
- One planner provided their incentive group with a reservation to their favorite restaurant once things open again. The incentive program was already in place and the reward needed to still be provided.
- Gamification for engagement – scavenger hunts, guess this image?, making cocktails, virtual wine tastings.

Question 2: How are virtual events supporting you personally and professionally at the moment? How are you producing events – are you on your own, working with an outside provider, or production company? Please share.

- SITE Board is utilizing virtual to connect the members.
- Trying to get information on virtual and hybrid to keep meetings alive.
- DMCs are doing virtual meeting to see if it is valuable to go virtual and working with others who are doing virtual.
- We are enjoying free webinars for our personal life.
- One participant had moved their entire conference virtual with 10,000 attendees and did it all in house!
- Pivot to virtual meetings has saved jobs! Having the opportunity to do things in meetings that we might not normally have done.
- Virtual was used to plan a FAM trip that was not able to happen in person. This was kept fun rather than educational. Used external production company and it was well received. The content was a mix of live and recorded, was put into a TV show format that was appealing.
- Production company shared that they are diversifying to see best ROI – could be producing smart events, textile production for safety items, etc.
- It takes a lot of background labor to accomplish the virtual tasks, but monetizing it is still complicated to understand.
- Suppliers have pivoted to a world no one was operating in a few months ago and people are finding value in these events and are more forgiving.
- Virtually meetings provide social connection that we really need. We need to get creative to make it personal – even if it's virtual launches or wine tasting.
- For smaller meetings, planners need to become well-educated and well-versed on the tech they choose.

Question 3: What technology platforms are working for the events you are producing? OR What virtual technology resources are you in need of to produce virtual and hybrid events? Please share.

- GoToMeetings, Zoom, AdobeConnect, YouTube are being used.
- Challenge - it's hard to know which platforms to use for each kind of meeting and technology will change quickly.

Question 4: What ideas do you have to implement hybrid events at resorts for incentive groups? How do you include networking or social activities into a virtual event, as you would have at a live event? Please share.

- Sending gift boxes or interactive boxes to guests and do an interactive online experience together.
- Going virtual can actually allow for name acts, different entertainment that may not have been available or affordable with travel.

Question 5: How can we, as an industry, sell against long-term virtual meetings and events? How can “Zoom fatigue” work to our benefit? Please share.

- Overall – we don’t think it will be a hard sell. Everyone is tired of Zoom calls and they are missing being together.
- Even though the virtual meetings save money, the hope is that the CEO’s and stakeholders still see more value in an in-person meeting. We think people are viewing this as a temporary.
- People like in-person connection. An in-person event is much more impactful, engaging and fun. It is still not the same as the in-person sensory experience.
- Attendance typically increases following the virtual meeting year. Make people feel safe in a live setting and it will increase desire to meet in person. Zoom fatigue is real and people will be ready for bear hugs!

Questions 6: Other thoughts or group discussion items?

- It was mentioned that virtual tradeshows may be something to consider participating in into the future, although virtual meetings are not as attractive.

Resources

Several resources were mentioned during this program:

Michelle Harty (Meetings Sites Pro, Inc.) shared a link where you can download a free PDF on their virtual think tank sessions with hotel leaders and third parties around the country:

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/131926/admin/>

Sarah Diem shared a resource for finding overview information on various virtual platforms:

www.meetingpool.net/coolapps

Natalie Wong shared details on an amazing #Quarantiki party she planned for her friend’s birthday.

Jennifer Kleltner shared information on her organization, RescuePartyGive, that is hosting events to raise awareness of human trafficking in the corporate environment and our community:

<https://rescuepartygive.org/>

Call to Action

In conclusion of this document, we ask our SITE global community to engage, respond, interact and promote the advancement of the incentive travel industry up and through the lingering effects of COVID19 and to shop SITE as services in the meeting and event industry evolve.

We also invite you to share your needs with the SITE community so we can form organization around the needs of our industry moving forward.

THANK YOU

This program was produced by SITE Southern California in partnership with San Diego State University's L. Robert Payne School of Hospitality & Tourism.

Questions? Please contact:

Mandy Brown, CIS, CITP

mlbrown3@sdsu.edu

END