

ANATOMY OF THE 2021 EVENT AUDIENCE

MEMORABLE
INCLUSIVE
REFLECTIVE
DISTINCTIVE
HUMAN
LOCAL
CHOICE

Those of us working in events know how 2020 changed the design and delivery of live experiences, but how has it changed what audiences' value?





The disruption of the last year has torn back the curtain on what people really want from events. It has pointed the way to a more sophisticated, exciting and varied event landscape – one that will ultimately deliver more.

We've been talking to people ideally placed to judge what audiences have and haven't valued from virtual events, and how this will influence what they want from events in the future.

These insights provide a fantastic blueprint for how we should approach designing events in the coming months and years – whether physical, virtual or hybrid.

**Huge thanks for the input to this report from events and communications professionals at:
Arm, Bain & Company, CBRE, IHS Markit,
National Grid, Okta, Pfizer, Santander and Visa.**



MEMORABLE

The rapid shift to virtual has too often seen events lose emotional resonance. Audiences crave the sense of occasion and spectacle that brilliantly designed experiences can achieve.

INCLUSIVE

2020 saw events become more responsive, more frequent, and open to more people. Audiences will continue to value greater access to a varied range of events.

REFLECTIVE

With back-to-back video calls leaving people less time to think, audiences are valuing events that give them space to reflect and time to share ideas with others.

CHOICE

The 2021 audience value being in control. Time is their most valuable currency. They want event programmes that give them choice over how, when and where they engage.

LOCAL

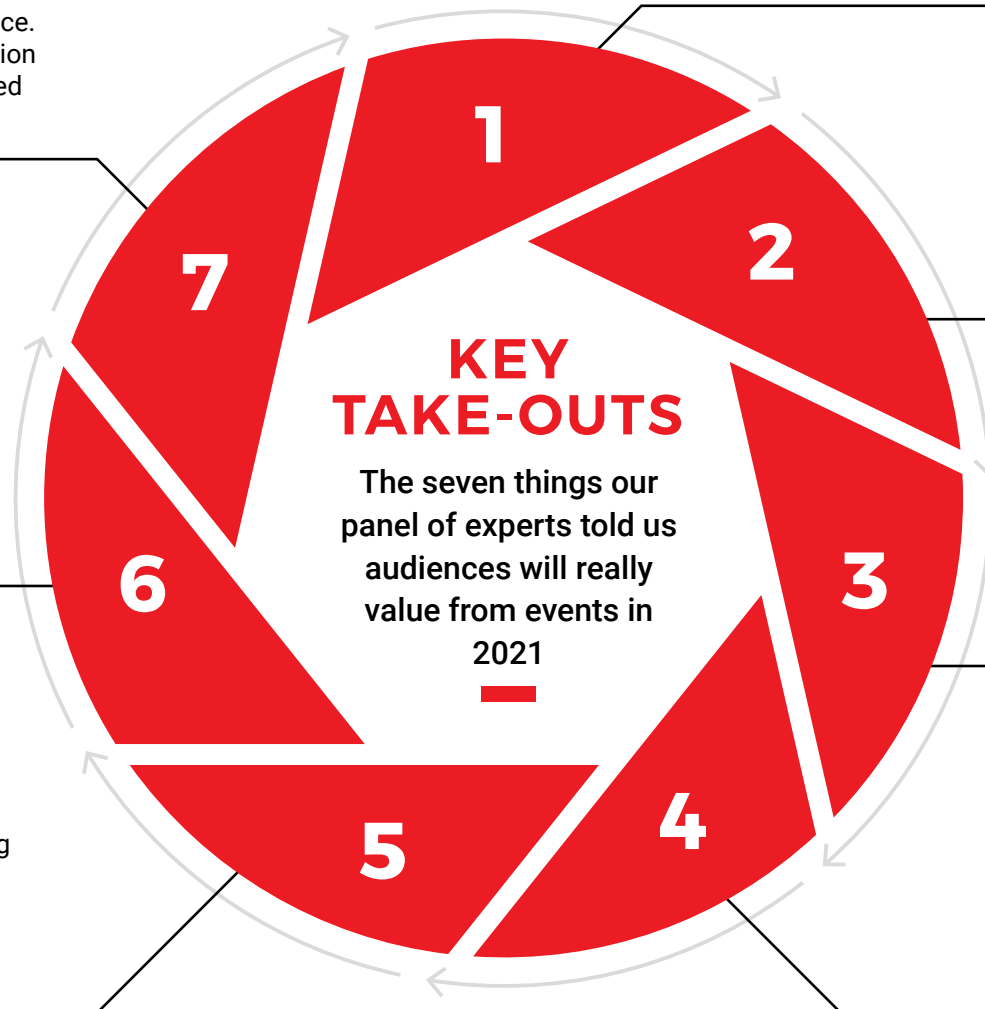
Nervousness about travel, sustainability, company policy and convenience all point to a desire for more local events.

HUMAN

Designing successful events in 2021 will mean going beyond simply delivering content, it will mean helping people connect in deeper and more human ways.

DISTINCTIVE

People are exposed to ever more content - the bar has been raised - they want strikingly designed, innovatively delivered content.





CHOICE

CHOICE

Audiences have valued having more control over how they engage with events. The increased convenience of virtual is something they'll continue to want from events in the future.

Neil Cullen, Senior Director, Events and Sponsorship at CBRE believes people will continue to demand choice. "We'll have clients who are going to be craving that interpersonal experience and we'll have clients who will be hesitant to travel. There's going to be a much broader spectrum of event delivery."

Emily Magee, Marketing Events Manager, EMEA at Okta agrees, "audiences will value the flexibility to digest content in the way that suits them best, it's the convenience of choosing live stream or OnDemand or being able to decide an hour before whether you want to join the event."

The past year has seen audiences become more mindful of how they spend their time, this has changed how they think about events.

"We've seen the value that our audiences are placing on their time. Virtual events can help them connect to great content in a more efficient way, but you must earn that time in their diary by providing something valuable." Melissa Noakes, Head of Sponsorship and Events, Santander.

Emily Magee sees virtual platforms becoming ever better at helping people multi-task, "similar to a physical event, where you can watch live content whilst browsing the app and learning about the speaker or checking who else is attending."

What seems certain is that audiences want experiences designed to fit their lives. In 2021, whether creating virtual, physical or hybrid events – convenience will be king.



Delivering Audience Value:

Plan for a future in which event delivery is more multi-dimensional – physical, virtual, hybrid.



CHOICE



LOCAL

LOCAL

Convenience will be one of several drivers of audiences' desire for more local events.

Charlotte Bygraves, Director of Marketing Events at Bain & Company believes a combination of nervousness around travel, company policy and sustainability are likely to curtail international events.

The issue of sustainability and travelling to events isn't new, but it's something individuals are increasingly taking into account. "When we poll colleagues, we find they really care about sustainability. The biggest thing we can do to reduce our carbon footprint within work is to limit how much we fly." Ali Fox-Robinson, Head of Colleague and Community Engagement, Pfizer UK.

With a commitment to achieving net zero by 2050, sustainability informs every decision at National Grid, but according to Laura Jameson, Senior Manager, Group Employee Communications, it's becoming an increasingly personal topic. "Covid has made us more aware of the footprint we leave in society, when we see restrictions lifted people will ask themselves whether they need to travel long distances to an event."

"It may be that domestic events become more socially acceptable than international events." Clare Melton, Global Head of Events, IHS Markit.

According to Melissa Noakes, "the rise of home or remote working will change audience behaviours. As we all get out of the habit of travelling to work, audiences will want a choice of attending nearby venues or joining events remotely."

All of this points to a reduction in long distance travel to events.

Delivering Audience Value:

Explore models that reduce travel and use technology to link local hub events into a single experience.





HUMAN

HUMAN

The general feeling amongst our panel of experts is that audiences are going to hugely value the human connections that a return to physical events will bring. They had mixed opinions as to whether virtual events could offer valuable networking.

“The challenge with virtual is getting those one-on-one connections, going to the booth and meeting someone, seeing old friends. The connection is the biggest miss for audiences.” Neil Cullen.

Melissa Noakes agrees, “where we’ve built in efficiency, we’ve lost some of the magic of bumping into people; sharing a moment and reflecting on something you heard with somebody.”

Virtual events have triumphed in bringing people together in difficult times, the question is whether they can go a stage further and spark deeper connections? Emily Magee believes they can, “virtual can achieve more targeted and less awkward networking than is often the case at physical events, you can identify interesting topics and easily join conversations.”

Arm have put human connections at the heart of their virtual employee events. “The demand for virtual events has grown, because it has opened up the opportunity to bring together communities across the world in ways that weren’t possible before – people are embracing this new way of networking, and really enjoying it!” Kate Harris, Senior Events Manager, Arm.

Arm’s success in creating highly connecting virtual events has seen them going beyond simply sharing content; they’ve focused on designing experiences that are fun and engaging, giving people some downtime and showing leaders in a more relaxed light.

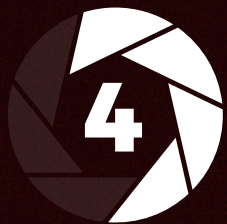
Ali Fox-Robinson believes that both employees and leaders at Pfizer UK have valued the more relaxed nature of virtual events, “leaders have enjoyed having more human and open connections, they’re more authentic in their homes, people like that, they like the humanity.”

In 2021 audiences are going to increasingly value meaningful human connections, this is something that can be achieved through both virtual and physical experiences.

Delivering Audience Value:

Helping people make human connections isn’t just about networking, it’s about stripping away artifice and making experiences personal.





DISTINCTIVE

DISTINCTIVE

With the exit only a click away, in 2020 there's been a healthy focus on what audiences really value from content.

Jane Franes, Senior Director of Client Communications, Visa, says the bar has been raised. "Sessions have to be short, sharp and super engaging. The days of long, scripted PowerPoint presentations are gone!"

According to Kate Locke, Senior Corporate Events Manager, Visa, as well as compelling delivery, "it's about having leftfield, differentiating, challenging content."

The desire for a wider spectrum of content is something Clare Melton also points to, "people's interests have changed, they've had access to far more content and as a result will value broader agendas."

Everyone we spoke to pointed to the growing number of virtual events people are being invited to. Audiences are choosing what to attend based on the uniqueness of the content, a trend that will continue.

"People are gravitating towards those brands that are creating valuable content – content that is going to improve their jobs and their lives". Melissa Noakes.

Delivering Audience Value:

In an age of information overload, the curation, design and delivery of content are crucial.



DISTINCTIVE





REFLECTIVE

REFLECTIVE

Working life became rather brutal in 2020, back-to-back video calls with no time to think.

“Virtual events can feel like a bit of a treadmill. You don’t have the restorative environments and the decompression time that well designed physical events offer.” Emily Magee

“All too often with virtual events you lose the moments in between, the times when people move and travel and chat – we’ve lost that time to think.” Melissa Noakes.

Laura Jameson asks, “how do you give people the opportunity to process? In an always on environment, we expect people to have an instant thought – it doesn’t work like that.” For Laura, designing valuable audience experiences in 2021 will mean “achieving those watercooler moments, those casual conversations you have in passing - people will want agendas that leave time for reflection and idea sharing.”

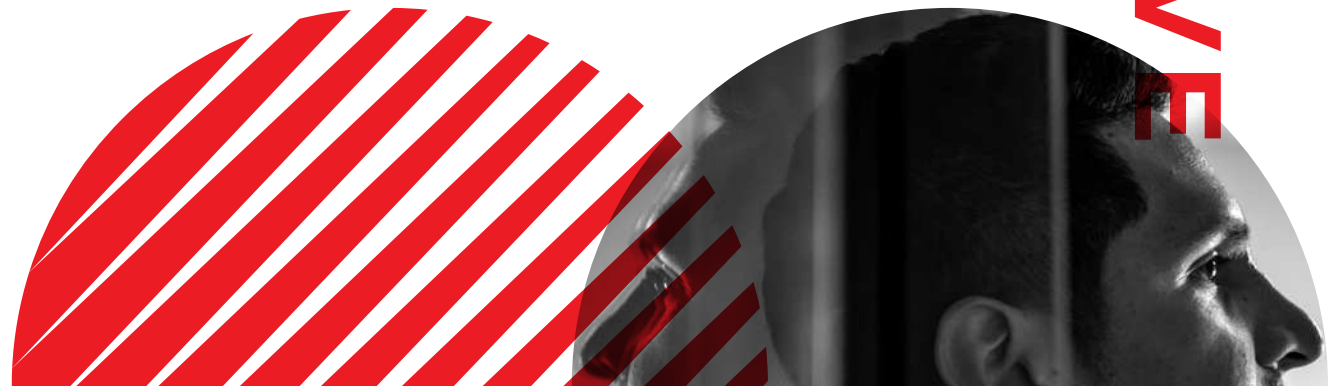
Attending events is a way for audiences to chisel out time to think about the bigger picture. We must ensure that the events we design in 2021 provide reflective learning experiences.

Delivering Audience Value:

Design events that give people space to breath, aim to leave people feeling physically and mentally revived.



REFLECTIVE





INCLUSIVE

INCLUSIVE

The shift to virtual has seen events become more inclusive and more frequent, things audiences will continue to value in the future.

“Shorter lead times for inviting people to virtual events mean you can be more responsive, putting on timely events around relevant topics.” Clare Melton.

We’re also seeing people dipping toes into events that they wouldn’t previously have been invited to or had time to travel to. Virtual allows events to be more democratic, for example, businesses that book external speakers are inviting many more people to enjoy their content.

According to Laura Jameson, from an internal communications perspective, “Covid has been a great leveller, stripping out a lot of hierarchy, events have become more open and accessible.”

Employees have also enjoyed the frequency with which they’re able to connect with leadership teams. Pfizer’s Ali Fox-Robinson says she’s never organised so many town halls, “they’ve been more frequent and more inclusive. We’ve brought together new communities; people have really valued hearing from other areas of the business.”

Delivering Audience Value:

**Plan for more
fleet-of-foot events that
respond to new news and
mix different audiences.**



INCLUSIVE





MEMORABLE

MEMORABLE

However events are delivered in 2021, audiences will crave a sense of occasion.

“It’s that heart-pull when you’re at an event that makes you feel something or remember something.” Charlotte Bygraves.

There’s a sense that audiences have experienced too many sterile virtual events. “It can feel like just another calendar invite, just another meeting.” Jane Franses.

Melissa Noakes believes virtual events have the ability to deliver entertainment and spectacle, “look at what Secret Cinema are achieving. Audiences appreciate you being brave, they want you to bring an experience to their home.”

For Emily Magee it’s important that as virtual events develop, they strive for a feeling of spontaneity. “We need to find the sweet spot between live and pre-recorded content, audiences crave a live connection, but also want to be able to engage on their own terms.”

What seems certain is that audiences returning to physical events are going to expect the sense of anticipation and occasion that makes face-to-face experiences so special.

“Going forward audiences will expect experiential content.” Jane Franses.

Emily Magee agrees, “the pressure will be on to considerably raise the bar for physical event experiences, so attendees don’t question their travel and time – we definitely want them back in the room!”



Delivering Audience Value:

**Where's the heart-pull?
To keep audiences
coming back events need
to achieve an emotional
connection.**



RE-IMAGINING YOUR EVENTS

**At Live Union we have the expertise to meet
changing audience needs.**

From designing virtual and hybrid experiences to future proofing your physical events, our content, digital, broadcast and production teams will help you achieve real audience value.



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