

UN TETHERED 2021

THE AUDIENCE DESIGN CHAPTER

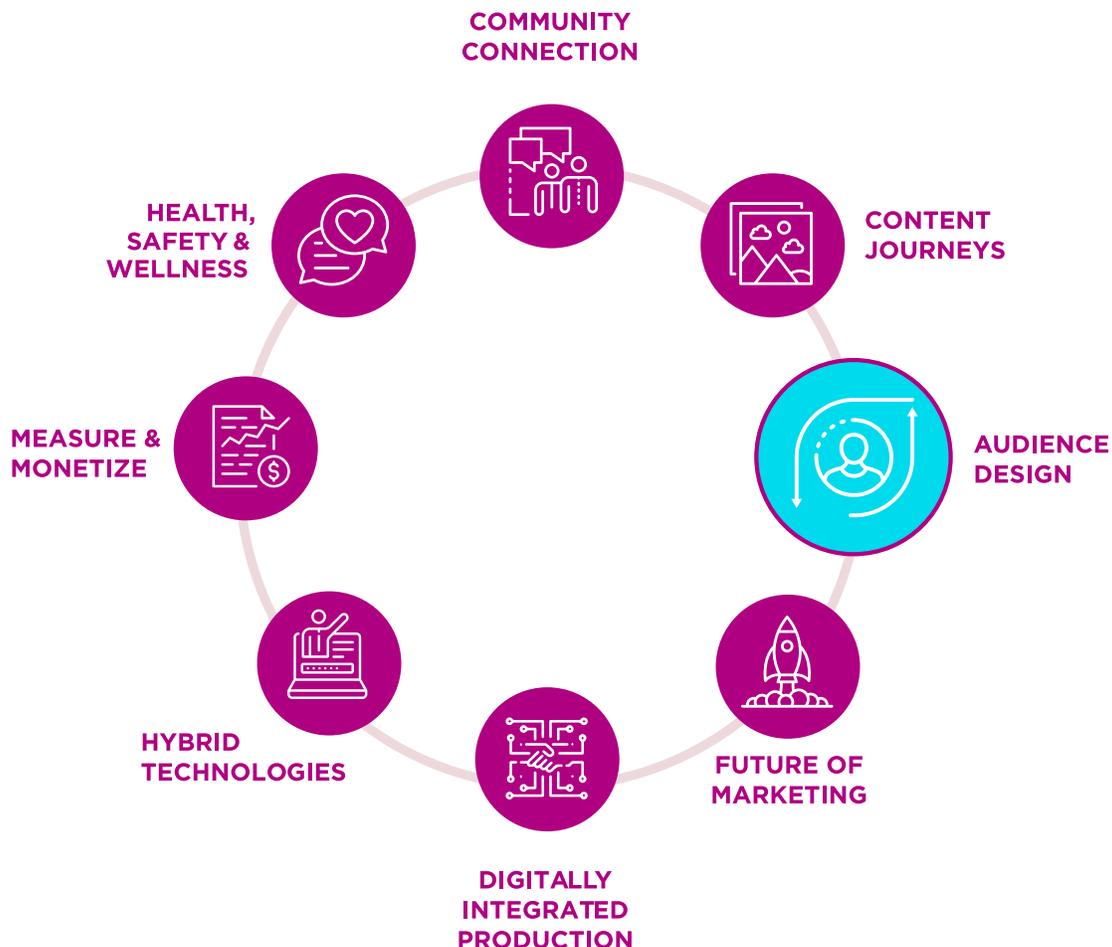


BIG IDEAS

The topic of this chapter is absolutely fundamental to good event planning. All the keynotes, breakouts, and activities in the world won't matter much unless we first understand our audiences. Then we can build our events around who they are, what they care about, and what they want. In event planning parlance, this is called audience design.

Our workshopers have put on hundreds of events over the years, including hybrid and online events. So they had lots of thoughts on how we can create events that truly match our audiences' wants, needs, and tastes. We've sorted through all the great tips and tricks, highlighting the best of them for you here.

As with the other chapters, we've organized the content into mind blown moments and tactical ideas. The mind blown moments might give you a new way to solve an existing problem. The tactical ideas section offers to-do's that you can roll out at your next event.



MIND BLOWN MOMENTS

We're driven by our emotions. Our egos insist our logical, right-brained way of thinking is always in command. But, truth is, we're driven by our emotions a lot more than we'd like to admit. (Come on now, you didn't buy that fancy red sports car because it gets good mileage!) So take a tip from the behavioral scientists and consumer-goods marketers: Appeal to the emotions of your audience. They may think they're all business, but deep down, they're human beings with bodies, minds, hearts, and souls. Tap into that. Engage your audience with positive emotion, and you can make a big, memorable, and long-lasting impact.

A nudge, a push, a shove. Some attendees need an extra push to engage. Others want to be left alone. Everyone's a little different. Vive la difference! The key is to design a diversity of experiences and ways to access those experiences. For example, try creating some informal events as well as building in informal elements into events. This can make people feel more comfortable about opening up, sharing, and networking.

Everyone is an artist that loves to create. Remember when you were a kid and you were proud of your drawings or Lego creations? Human beings have a biological drive to create and show off. We like making stuff. So give folks opportunities to create things they can hold in their hands, walk around, and have others admire. It's a super engagement tool.



Competition is key. Another human drive you can tap into is our zest for competition. There's a reason people are drawn to contests, games, and races. Competition gets our hearts racing, our bodies moving, and our minds focusing. Which makes it a great way to get people engaged.

Listen to the customer. Product marketers are big on audience surveys, focus groups, and customer research. Why? Because they know that the secret of selling starts with understanding the needs and wants of the customer. They have a term for this: voice of the customer, or VOC. Inject the VOC more richly into the full cycle of your event-building process, from pre-event to post-event. And likely, your attendees will voice their pleasure with their experience.

A guy walks into a bar. One of the toughest acts in show business is working as a stand-up comedian. Even the best of them have stories about bombing in front of an audience. One trick, they'll say, is to learn to read the audience and be willing to adjust your act on the fly. Take a cue from the stand-ups: Find small ways to adjust what you're saying in response to audience participation. Don't be afraid to shift your content or delivery with your audience.



TACTICS TO TEST

CHALLENGE 1: HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND OUR AUDIENCES?

Funny thing about us humans: We want to be understood. There's nothing more annoying than getting pitches from salespeople who know absolutely nothing about you, right? I mean, do your homework, buddy! So the first step in creating an engaging and personalized experience for your audience is to—drumroll please—know your audience! Do they prefer small group workshopping? Big keynotes with bursts of fire and lights? Networking over tapas and margaritas? So just how do you figure this out? Good question! Learning the likes and dislikes of your audiences is easier said than done, especially when you're working on a tight timeline. Here are some tactics you can use to decipher the personas of your attendees.

FOCUS POCUS

- Not to get all Mad Men about this, but even Don Draper conducted focus groups to figure out how to sell Lucky Strikes, Chevies, or John Deere tractors. Get representative attendees in a room and probe. (It's also fun in a weird voyeuristic way to sit behind the one-way glass and watch.) Focus groups give qualitative, not quantitative information. So you may get insights you won't get on a survey.
- By virtue of their agreeing to join your focus group, participants already have a bigger stake in the outcome of your event. So give them special recognition. This can be a special beta-tester badge on their profile, an exclusive tchotchke, or even a facilitator role.



THE NUMBERS GAME

- Surveys are a good way to collect data about your audiences. This is the quantitative side of research. Surveys provide an easier way to analyze the numbers. They're also a bit more reliable than focus groups, which can be swayed by vocal or opinionated participants. If 75 percent of respondents say they prefer keynotes over workshops, you can be pretty sure that keynotes are a good bet.
- Keep your surveys short. People are okay with giving you a few minutes of their time, but don't push it.
- Make surveys a part of the registration process. That way, you'll capture nearly everyone's preferences, not just those of the most outspoken group.

READ THE TEA LEAVES

- The great thing about data is all the ways you can crunch and analyze it. Look at past attendee data to get a better understanding of previous attendees' experience with the product or company. That can be helpful in extrapolating to the new event.
- Social media can give great (and sometimes brutally honest) insights into what people really think. Analyze social media to see what attendees are saying about the event, the organization, or the industry, and to gauge what they are interested in.



CHALLENGE 2: HOW DO WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

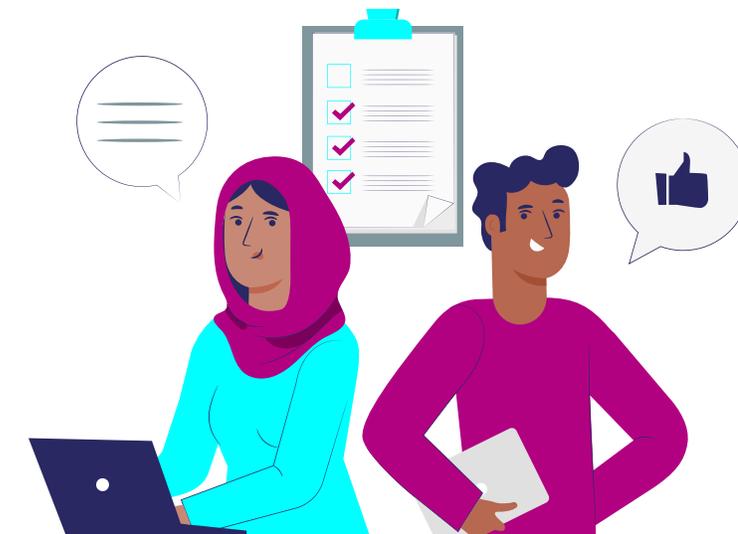
With the move to digital and hybrid, attending an event is possible for a host of new folks: People who previously couldn't afford the time and money it took to travel to an in-person event. People with rigorous dietary or mobility restrictions. Or people who simply don't like crowds. But it's not all sunshine and flowers. With a greater diversity of attendees, it's imperative to create a more inclusive environment. There's a lot that goes into creating a digital or hybrid experience that makes your audience feel included and welcome. Here are some of the tactics our workshopers came up with.

CONDUCT ACCESSIBILITY AUDITS

- You wouldn't make it difficult for people with disabilities to get around your in-person event. Likewise, you need to design your online event for easy access for all. This is especially critical during live events. Accessibility audits evaluate how easy (or not) it is for people to navigate and interact on the website or platform. Keeping track of accessibility for past events helps prevent issues from recurring in the future.

HOW WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE?

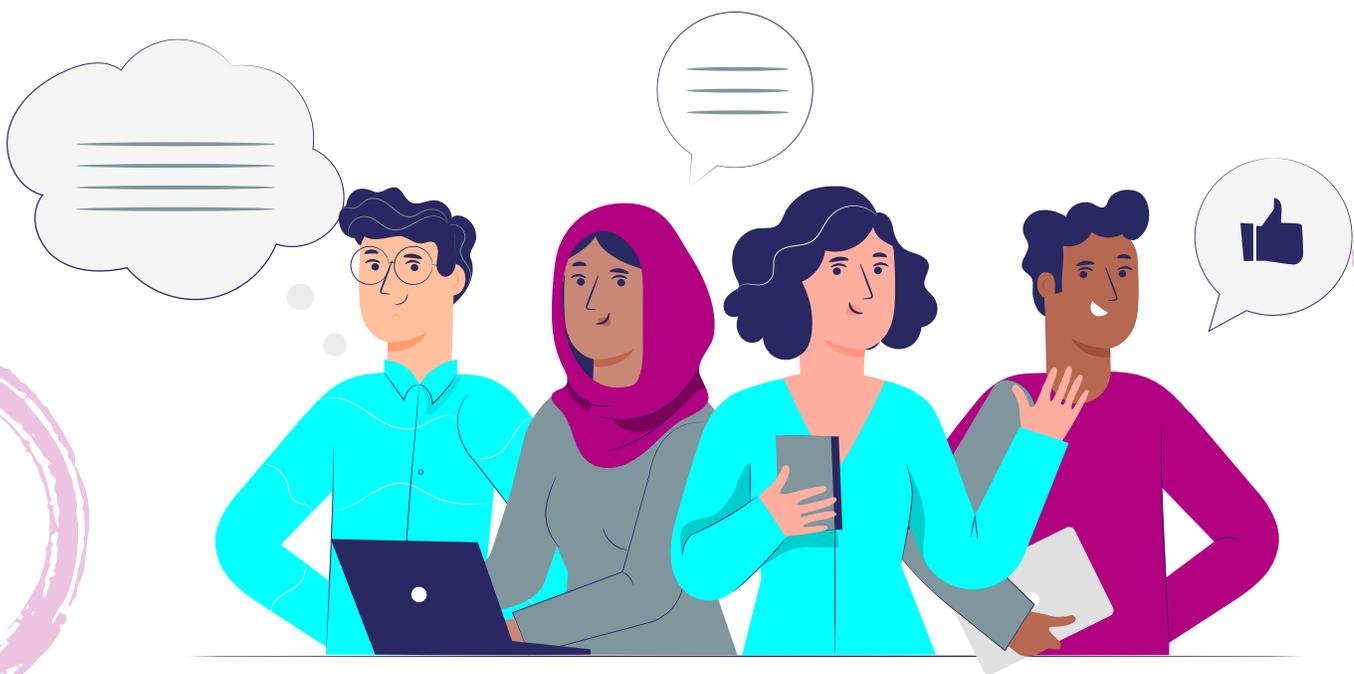
- Just as you wouldn't throw up barriers to people with disabilities, you wouldn't make navigating your digital event the equivalent of a tourist trying to get from Penn Station to Times Square in New York. (Trust us, everyone has a different answer.) User experience, or UX, is about evaluating what it's like for someone to use a product or, in your case, to interact with and get around your online event platform. What's the journey like? How easy and efficiently can people move about? Start with good UX design from the beginning. Then get beta testers involved to test drive. Gather their feedback on what works, what doesn't, and how to improve.



- Create a pop-up tutorial or a series of mini videos that guide your attendees through the platform.
- You can also add pop-up notifications that bring your audience to where they need to be, when they need to be there. Too bad they don't have that in New York!

LEND AN EXTRA HAND

- Think of your non-English speakers. And those with hearing impairments. Provide language translation for those who prefer to engage in their native tongue. You can gauge which languages will be represented in your registration survey. If you're not able to translate every session, at least consider providing translation for keynote sessions. For the hearing impaired, provide closed captioning. But keep in mind also that having an interpreter or signer can help convey the emotion of the speaker.
- One workshopper suggested a cool idea for those who get fidgety or antsy. Consider distributing sensory kits (e.g., Playdoh, fidget spinners) that allow attendees to feel, touch, and keep their hands busy. These little doo-dads give people an activity to redirect all that anxious energy. (And, since they're remote, their fidgeting won't likely bother their neighbors). Something as simple as a knot-tying kit or doodle pad and pen could help the more uptight among your attendees pull through the event.



CHALLENGE 3: HOW DO WE CREATE MEANINGFUL ATTENDEE CONNECTIONS?

Events are all about bringing people together, being a part of something larger than ourselves. In the coolest events, we can work as a group to unravel the knottiest problems—something that would have been impossible on our own. But creating this powerful connection has always been a challenge for planners. Now that we're planning hybrid events with two distinct audiences, this has become even tougher. Here are some strategies our workshopers dreamed up to help you foster meaningful connections at your event.

BEAM ME UP, SCOTTY!

- Create a 3D environment/space station lounge for your remote audience with virtual reality headsets to meet and greet. At your connection station, provide VR headsets to your in-person audience to meet their digital counterparts.
- Knock down the digital divide between your online and in-person attendees. At the physical location, create connection stations with computer tablets where in-person attendees can join in on Zoom meetings and other virtual gatherings to connect with online attendees.

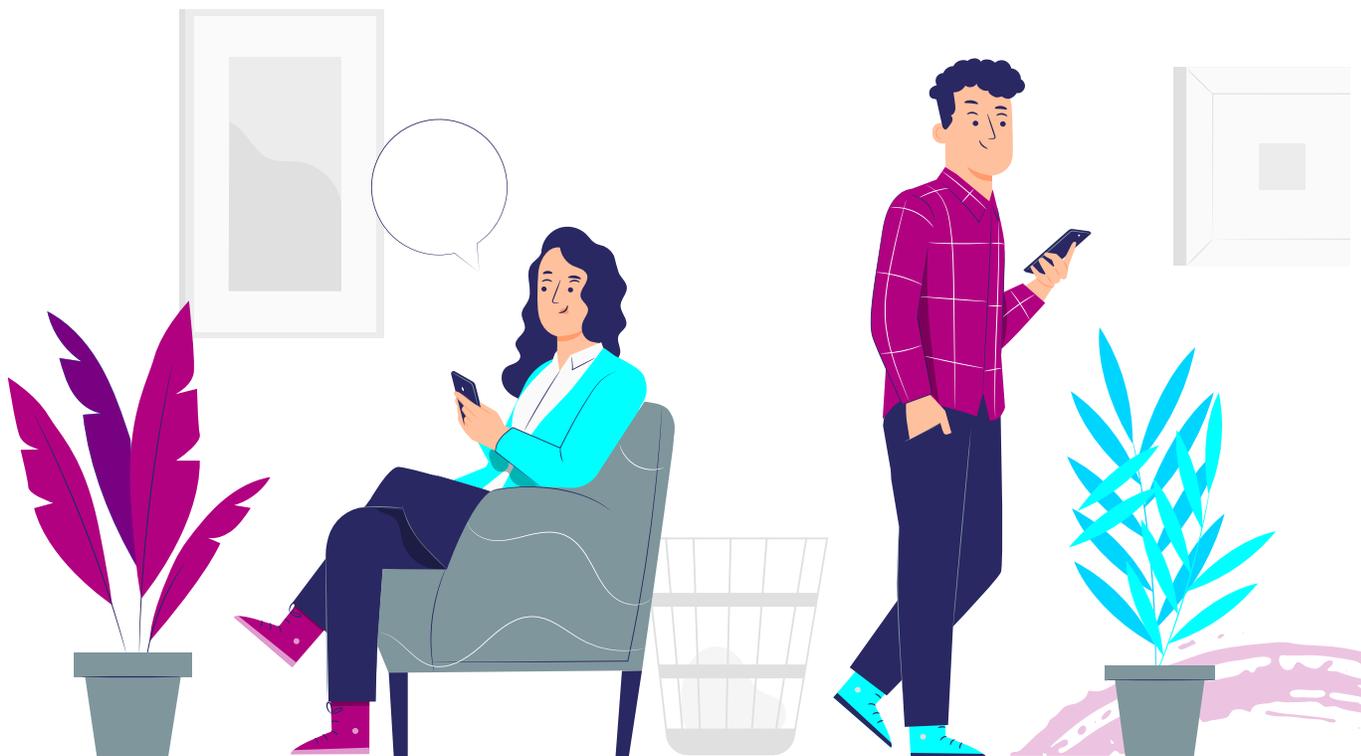


GET SYNCHED

- Equal access for all! Regardless of whether they visit in-person or virtually, all attendees should be able to ask questions and participate in polls in the same way. A true hybrid event is when everyone experiences activities, sessions, and other goings-on together at the same time.
- For the in-person audience, put the session chat up on the screen. That way, they can see the digital audience's real-time participation. And make sure they can participate as well on their phone.
- For those who might find the running chat distracting, create separate rooms. Or put the chat roll on the far end of the screen or out of sight of that audience.

MATCHMAKER, MAKE ME A MATCH

- Offer a “pairing” system during the pre-event that matches virtual and onsite attendees. That way, they can share their journeys or learnings with each other. As much as we try to make the two ways of experiencing equivalent, their experiences will differ somewhat. So this allows partners to help each other catch up on anything they may have missed on the other side of the digital curtain.



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