

UN TETHERED 2021

# THE CONTENT JOURNEYS CHAPTER



## BIG IDEAS

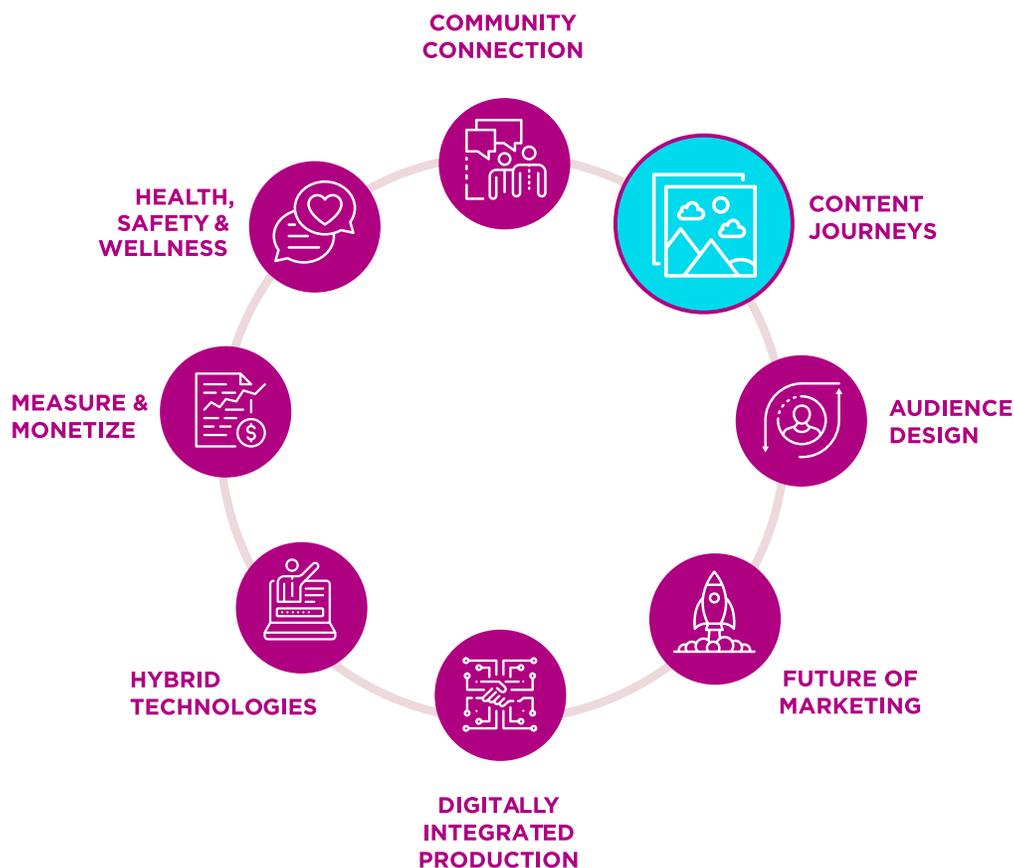
The content journey circle focused on how to create an end-to-end content plan across all touchpoints. And they expanded the notion of content. It's not just about education or knowledge transfer. It's also about relationships: meeting other people, collaborating, growing together.

The circle looked at how to create engaging, accessible, and inclusive content geared to different learning styles—how to customize content journeys. They explored personalized pathways, attendee engagement, content connections, and insights for inclusion.

Think of a content journey as a progression from beginning to end. What are attendees thinking, seeing, feeling, and doing at the start of the event? How does that change over the course of the event and become something even greater? How does that continue after the event?

Our circle members have put on hundreds of events over the years, including hybrid and online events. So they had lots of thoughts on how to 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 novel way to tackle an existing problem. The tactical ideas section offers to-do's that you can try out at your next event.

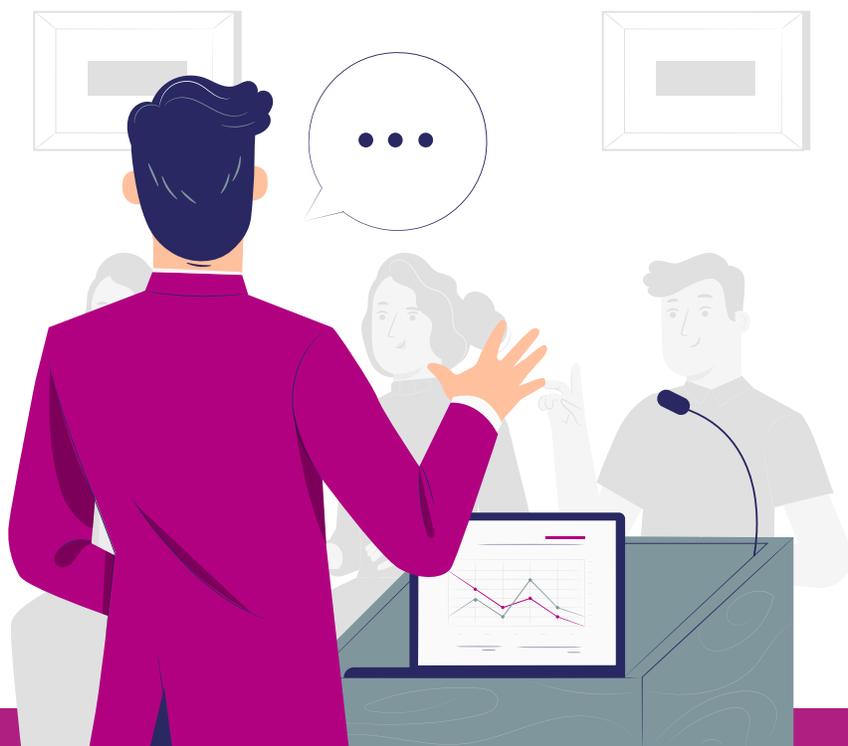


## MIND BLOWN MOMENTS

**The FOMO factor.** You've been to the live events where there are so many sessions happening at the same time, your head spins. Unless you've figured out a way to be in two (or three) places at the same time, it's tough to settle on a session. And once you do, admit it, how many of you park yourself near the door just in case you want to exit early? Fear of missing out is a real thing. But for online and hybrid events, FOMO is less of a factor. Attendees can always watch later on demand. That makes it easier for event managers to create a full program.

**It's not the platform.** It's the experience. You have to start with the goal. What are you trying to accomplish? An event for 3,000 people doesn't need a high level of personalization. On the other hand, an event for your top 300 clients around the globe? You better make it high-value to each and every person. If you do, they'll spend what it takes, even in a virtual environment.

**Curate and customize experiences.** We all have different learning styles. By discovering how your attendees prefer to gather, process, and analyze information, you can tailor experiences to fit. Some people like joining interactive sessions or participating in collective gatherings to solve problems. Some like sessions that happen outside the breakout room, such as walk-and-talks. Some like connecting with others or the thrill of spontaneity and the unexpected. Others are community-focused. The more you know your audience, the better you can customize sessions that appeal to them.



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**Get outside the box.** The sky's the limit in terms of creativity. Our content journey circle described some fascinating examples of out-of-the-box thinking. Like a “midnight kitchen raid” at a hotel, where attendees get a text inviting them down to the hotel kitchen. Attendees can open the refrigerators and pick something for waiting chefs to cook, or choose from a special buffet. Another example: a “gorilla gardening flash mob.” A late-night text goes out inviting people to plant a garden in a pre-selected neighborhood. The group is advised to wear grungy clothes and shoes. Supplied with tools and plants, the group boards a bus and goes to work. In the morning, residents awake to find a beautiful new garden.

**Get physical.** In the digital space, we engage our brains. But what about our bodies? Try some activities that get people moving. For example, take breaks in which you have an expert teach attendees some new hands-on trick. One group, for example, had a coffee barista demonstrate how to make cute foam designs on top of lattes and cappuccinos. An added benefit: The physical break re-energizes the brain for engaging in more content.

**Case in point.** As humans, we love stories. Combine our love of story with experience, and you get the case study. Our circle talked about their own experiences with this. After a while, people want to go beyond theories and abstractions. They want pictures, floor plans, examples of what works, and what doesn't. When presenting case studies, allow for participation through a Q&A session or other engagement. Encourage tough questions. Go for the deep dive.

**Remind me never to do that.** We pay attention to disaster stories. And we remember them. It's not so much a case of schadenfreude as it is our aversion to pain. If we can avoid heartache and heartburn by learning how one of our peers messed up, that's valuable content. Especially when a well-known and admired colleague lets you see what's behind the curtain. Members of the content journey circle said that sessions in which presenters lay bare their pain points and challenges garner the highest ratings and most positive feedback.

**This ain't no Talking Heads.** Leave the talking heads to that rockin' band of the '70s and '80s. It's long past time to retire the one-way lecture. Sure, there's an hour and place to hear from the subject-matter experts and great masters. But not in our virtual and hybrid world of events. The watchwords for our world are inclusion, engagement, and interaction.

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# TACTICS TO TEST

## CHALLENGE 1:

### HOW DO WE BUILD RELATIONSHIPS IN HYBRID?

A good way to open up people for sharing is to start with some icebreakers. Let people get to know a little more about each other personally. Of course, it's one thing to meet and get to know people in person. It's another to do it in a virtual setting. But it can be done. Our circle participants brainstormed a bunch of techniques and shared some of their own experiences.

#### GET SOCIAL

- Who doesn't like special gifts? Juice early registration by offering a gift to those who sign up by a deadline. In that gift, include instructions to access particular pages on the virtual event platform or to post to social media to earn gamification points—or just to show their excitement for the event.

#### BREAK THE ICE

- A fun, yet powerful exercise is to gather a small group of four or five people who don't know each other. Ask them to find four or five things they share in common. It could be anything: favorite foods, sports teams, colleges, pets, vacation spots, TV shows, actors, podcasts, music, musicians. The list goes on. Sharing these little favorites can help people to feel more comfortable with each other—and get them in the frame of mind to contribute.

#### THE POWER OF AI

- Artificial intelligence tools can help match people with similar preferences and interests. Let's say the AI tracks attendees' choices at the event—where they go, what they do, what sessions they attend, what they click on, what they write. The tool can analyze that data and then introduce that person to, say, 10 other like-minded individuals.

#### SCAVENGER HUNT

- Warm up attendees before the event by sending them activity kits. They're given fun things to do, like scavenger hunts, on different days of the event. Then they're encouraged to post their activities for points and a chance to win prizes. The prizes can be photogenic doodads, like cute pet bling, that inspire people to share pictures, comments, and likes.

## CHALLENGE 2: HOW DO WE BREAK FREE FROM THE SLIDE?

Save the slide show for your vacation pics. Thank goodness we've moved past the days of the text-laden PowerPoint presentation. At least, we hope everyone has gotten the memo. If the medium is the message, what does the bullet-point-heavy slide show say about us? Free yourself from the tyranny of the text-only outline slide!

### THINK IMAGERY

- Most of us remember pictures better than we do words. Err on the side of images in your presentations—whether that's a photograph, an illustration, or an infographic. Treat your images as ways to punctuate your presentation—not as ways to drive it.

### HOW DO YOU FEEL?

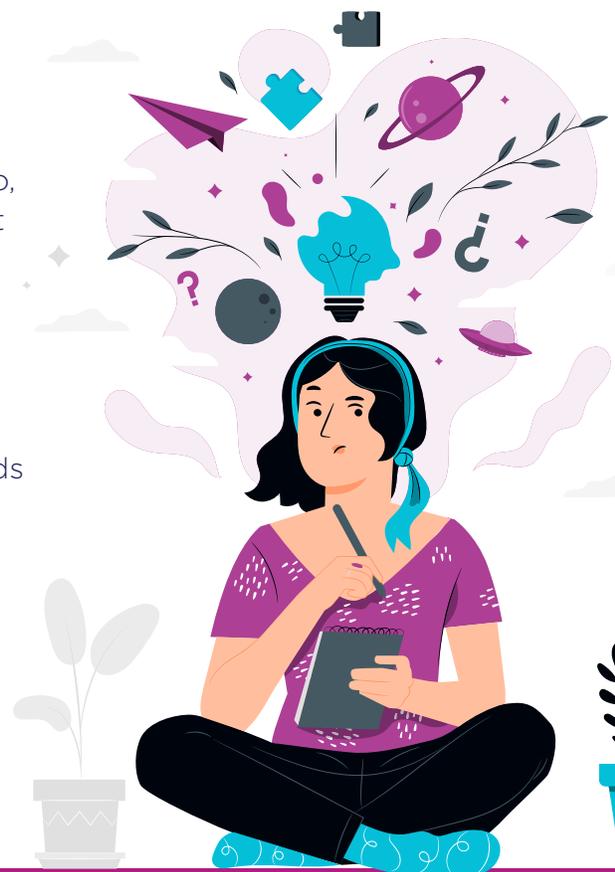
- We're more likely to engage with content if it triggers our emotions. Choose your images carefully to elicit a feeling, whether that's happiness, joy, sadness, disgust—even anger. Social scientists and novelists know that, to really reach someone, you've got to tug at their heartstrings. When we feel empathy, we are much more persuadable and open to change.

### PALETTE CLEANSER

- Another small way to give attendees a break and prevent information overload: Insert a restful photo, music, or video as a sort of palette cleanser. Give it five or 10 minutes before moving on to presenting more content.

### PECHAKUCHA

- PechaKucha® is a fast-paced storytelling approach in which a presenter shows 20 slides for 20 seconds of commentary each. It's all about show, don't tell.



## CHALLENGE 3: HOW DO WE INJECT MORE ENGAGEMENT INTO HYBRID?

What differentiates a virtual, digital experience from, say, a YouTube video? In the latter, we passively consume content. That's fine when you want to sit back on the sofa and chill. In the former, we actively engage our brains. That's why we're moving away from the straightforward, stand-up-at-the-podium-and-lecture format at our events. Today's virtual and hybrid events are all about engagement and interactivity.

### INSTANT EXPERTS

- Here's a creative way to create a panel on the spot. Pick a topic, say, virtual events. Then ask people to line up virtually and sort themselves along a range of knowledge, from most knowledgeable to least. The top three most-informed people then become the panel of experts. It's a great way to leverage the brainpower in the room (and save on the cost of paid panelists).

### TURN THE TABLES

- We spend a lot of time trying to intuit what our audiences want to hear. A sure-fire way to do it? Ask them directly. Instead of delivering a well-meaning presentation that may miss the mark, conduct an ask-me-anything question-answer session. You may be delighted to learn that people want to hear more about what you'd planned to discuss. Or you may be surprised to go in a completely different direction.



## ENGAGE YOUR PEERS

- There's so much collective intelligence at our events. A good way to tap into it? Share it. A variation on the informal Q&A session, this approach works if you have attendees willing to share a problem or a success. One content-journey circle participant tried this at an event by soliciting ideas during registration. Did someone have a challenge they wanted input to help solve? Or was someone willing to share a success with a unique issue and get additional input? These turned into fun, high-value discussions.

## JUMPSTART THE CONVERSATION

- Use “micro-keynotes” at the start of a session as a basis for discussion. Then use that content as a catalyst for conversation in breakout roundtables, either in-person or digitally.

## ROUND ROBIN

- This approach employs a combination of the pre-set topic and the open-ended conversation. The twist here is to start with a pre-determined number of topics. Assign each topic to a separate “table” (real or virtual). Then go round-robin, limiting the number of participants at any one table to four or fewer. (More than four can break the talk into two separate conversations.) Set a time limit. When the alarm sounds, people can move on to a new table.

## HACK IT

- A fun approach to collective problem-solving is the hackathon. Set a clear goal or problem to solve. Then invite participants to brainstorm solutions. One content journeys circle member ran a hackathon to drum up fundraising ideas for a local non-profit. But the tool can be used to develop any number of solutions on a range of challenges.

## BREAK IT UP

- If you have a long session with a subject matter expert, look for ways to break the session into smaller chunks. Every 12 to 15 minutes or so, stop the presentation. Run an activity that engages the brain or body in a different way. This pause refreshes energy. And it gives participants an opportunity to digest the content up to that point.

## CHALLENGE 4: HOW DO WE ENSURE DIVERSITY IN CONTENT AND SPEAKERS?

Your digital event is essentially your brand. So make sure your event sends the right message about what you stand for. If diversity and inclusion form part of your values, make them a part of your content strategy and speaker representation. The days of all-male panels (manels) and other gender-, ethnicity-, and identity-exclusive (non)representative groups are—or should be—over. Diversity means a mix not only of identities but also perspectives.

### START SMALL

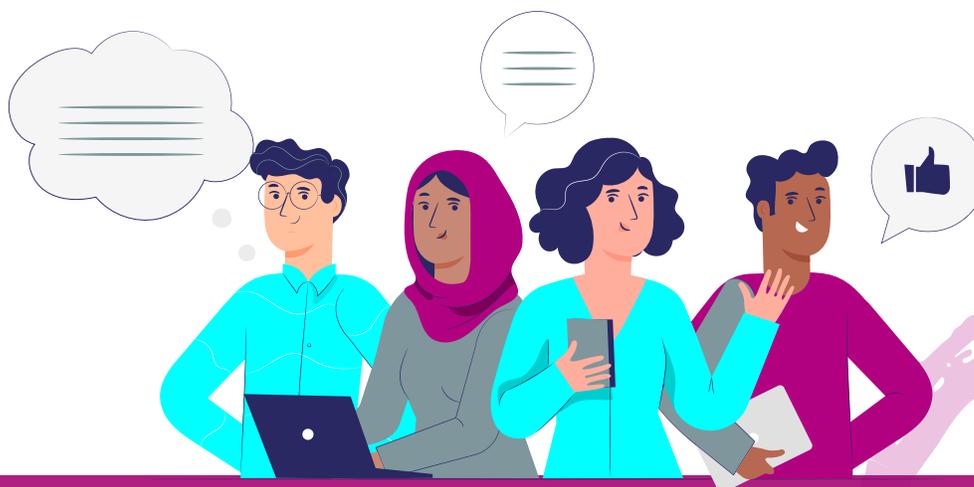
- If you have subject matter experts with little public speaking experience, giving them the choice to pre-record presentations feels less daunting than presenting live. This opens up an untapped pool of talent and showcases the presenting firm's thought leadership. It also builds confidence in subject matter experts to continue presenting—eventually going live.

### SPEAKER'S BUREAU

- Start an internal speaker's bureau. Recruit speakers, then provide resources and training throughout the year. You could even start a Toastmaster's group to give practice opportunities. A speaker's bureau allows you to build capability, bring in authentic new voices, and then plug into an enthusiastic, confident, and diverse pool of talent when speaking opportunities arise.

### PANEL CHANNEL

- Introduce potential speakers by first having them join panels. The panel is a good first step toward presenting. There's less pressure to deliver formal remarks. But it's still an opportunity to get in front of an audience and build confidence.



## CHALLENGE 5:

# HOW DO WE MAXIMIZE THE INTERACTION BETWEEN IN-PERSON AND VIRTUAL ATTENDEES?

It's probably not fair to those who pay more to attend an in-person event to have the same experience as someone who pays less for the virtual version. So it's important to recognize them as separate experiences. Still, how do you encourage interaction between and among these audiences?

### EXTEND THE EXPERIENCE

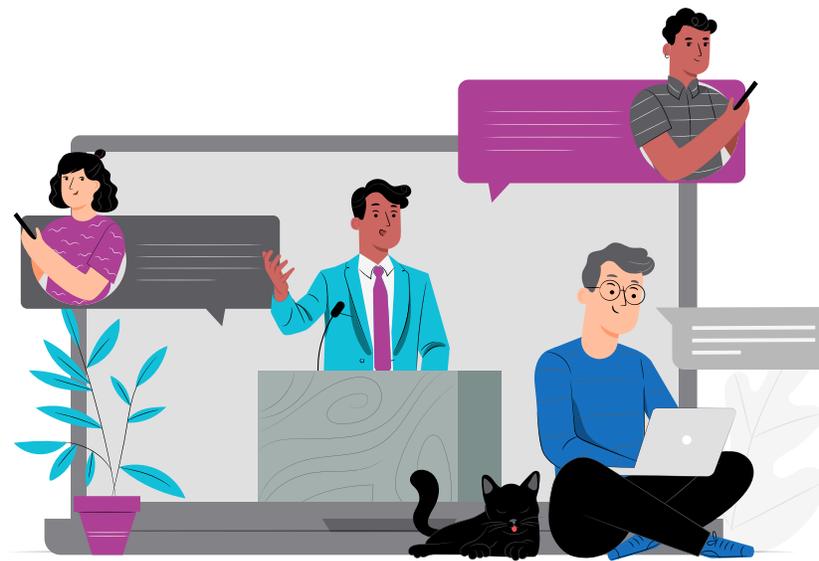
- Instead of treating the event as a one-shot deal, extend it throughout the year. While you may treat the in-person and virtual experiences separately, after the event you can host combined virtual events for both audiences.

### PEN PALS

- Create pen pals, perhaps groups of two, three, or more, who agree to stay in touch after the event. This can be done via email, a Facebook private forum, What'sApp, or another social media channel. It's a great way to share problems, challenges, and resources and to solicit ideas and solutions.

### COMMUNITY FORUMS

- Ever had the experience of really enjoying a digital event and engaging in a spirited chat? When the meeting's over, the chat ends. Bummer! But wouldn't it be great to keep the energy going? Establish an online community forum that lives beyond the event. It's a way to create always-engaged fans.



## FACILITATORS AND PARTNERS

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