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ALT ETHOS WHITEPAPER



Virtual and Hybrid Events  
2021 and Beyond  
**ELEVATE THE EXPERIENCE**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE EVENTS INDUSTRY HAS BEEN FOREVER CHANGED.

During the pandemic, people discovered that the only place they could turn to in order to keep things going was the safety and convenience of new technology spaces. The event industry quickly followed suit.

The global event industry is now poised to reach \$1.5 trillion by 2028. The VR and AR market sector is close behind, on pace to reach the same \$1.5 trillion milestone in 2030 - a convergence of near perfect symmetry.

Hybrid and Virtual solutions are a central driver of this unprecedented demand. From data driven insights and mobile apps to the intuitive, pristine dynamics of immersive networking events, trade shows and demos, they are changing the trajectory of the future of events.

Alt Ethos is an experiential design agency as well as a full-service event producer. Æ is an industry leader in envisioning, predicting, developing and creating cutting-edge Virtual and Hybrid solutions. They also produce physical installations, visual productions and custom virtual environments that come to life in a browser, on a headset, and in the real world.

Æ leverages visionary thought-leadership and seeks to future-proof the events sector through hybrid solutions that lift in-person, virtual and immersive productions to a new level. As the sector rebounds, Æ is providing strategic consultation and comprehensive and flexible solutions tailored to the moment with an eye on developing shutdown-proof solutions for our changing landscape. Our solutions are predictive, driven by data analysis and business intelligence for the delivery of successful revenue-generating events for all stakeholders.

# INTRODUCTION

As uncertainties continue to surround re-entry from the pandemic and the event sector looks for ways to adjust to the new realities, one thing is clear: both Virtual Events and Hybrid Events—in-person conferences or other such large gatherings that provide access to virtual, immersive, 3D and online experiences—are now the foundation of the industry.

Imagine an event planner doing one final walk-through of a hotel conference venue before the speakers and attendees arrive. The stage is built. The chairs are arranged perfectly in order. All the water bottles are within easy reach. The audio-visual presentations are set up and poised for action.

She puts on a VR headset and logs in to the virtual event hosting platform - a platform that will soon be shared by thousands of people from across the globe.

She is instantly transported to a high-rise meeting room in Hong Kong with a stunning view. She flies through the spaces and crosses items off her checklist one by one. The break-out rooms are prepared and ready. The digital gift bags are in place. The custom designed furniture is placed exactly right.

Since this part of the event is virtual, she won't have to know the whereabouts of cleaners, equipment managers, or electricians to help with any last-minute fixes. The staff for this hotel is a team of virtual event producers standing by on their computers.

She checks her event management dashboard. Another 200 people registered overnight. "Great!" she thinks. Logins have already been sent to all the attendees - including the latecomers.

EVERYTHING IS READY TO GO.

# DEFINITIONS

## XR

Extended Reality. Generic umbrella term that covers all these technologies—virtual reality, augmented reality and mixed reality. The common denominator is that a virtual computer-generated world is overlaid on top of the real world, either completely or in part.

## VR

Virtual Reality refers to a computer-generated world that completely immerses the viewer and enables the user to interact within the simulation.

## AR

In Augmented Reality, virtual content is overlaid onto the real world. AR is well suited to multiple applications—from industrial maintenance applications to consumer features like filters. AR capable smartphones, over 2 billion globally, make AR particularly accessible.

## 360 Video

360 videos are immersive, spherical videos where users can experience content in all directions. 360 videos are viewed in a digital dome, VR HMD, on a 360 app on a mobile device or in a browser.

Avatar: An embodied graphical representation of a user in 2D or 3D. In virtual reality the user can see their own form and interact with other avatars inside the experience.

## Virtual Event

An event that is delivered online, in an app or through a head mounted display. There are multiple platforms for virtual events, from pre-recorded online broadcasts to entire experiences that take place in 3D environments.

# DEFINITIONS

## Hybrid Event

An event that incorporates both in-person and virtual elements. For example, a conference that takes place in a physical venue that also features a livestream of the sessions, pre-produced content and digital networking opportunities.

## Super Hybrid

Experience-centric technology to integrate the onsite event virtually, with all of the opportunities, experiences, and benefits of the in-person event. In other words, a hybrid event seamlessly connects virtual and in-person experiences, each part enhancing the other.

## MR

Mixed reality merges real and virtual worlds to produce new environments and visualizations where physical and digital objects co-exist and interact in real time.

## Sense of agency

The feeling of control over actions and their consequences in the immersive experience.

## Presence

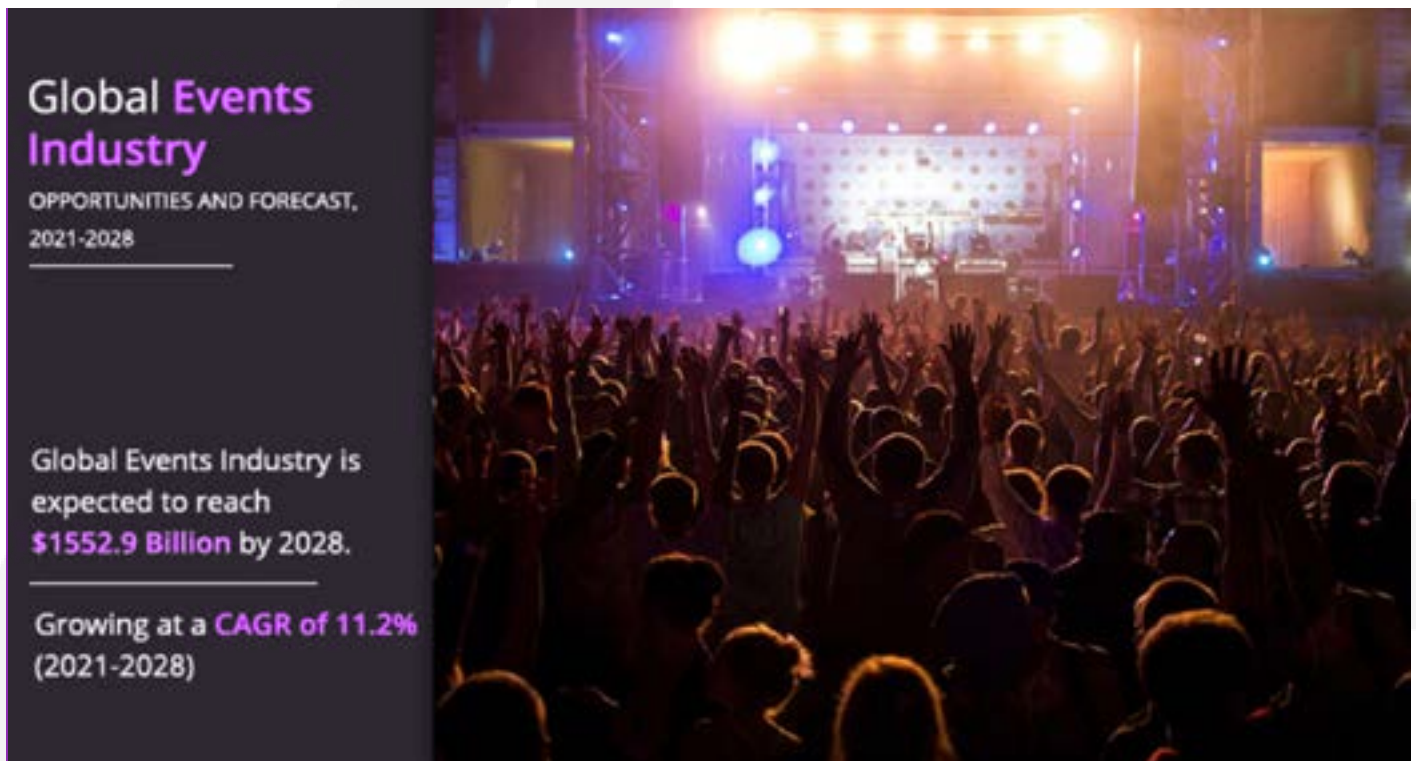
Sense of being in a space—truly feeling as if you were ‘there’. Immersive Experiences in particular taps into the brain’s perceptions of presence.

## Immersive Experiences

Pulls a viewer into another real or imagined world, enabling them to manipulate and interact with their environment. Immersive Experiences can be in the physical environment, in a virtual environment or hybrid.

# HOW BIG IS THE EVENTS INDUSTRY?

## Soon to be \$1.5 Trillion!



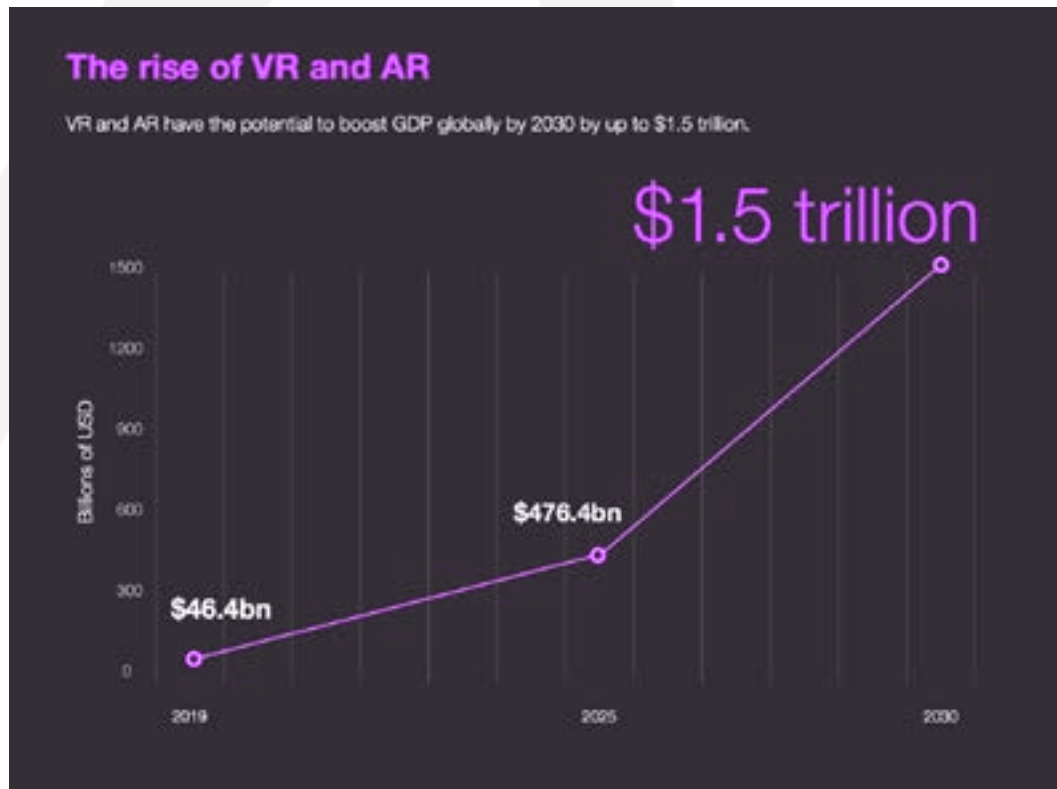
Whether it be an industrial design review, a consumer trade show or an awards celebration, event planners have embraced virtual and hybrid events. This is evident in the dramatic surge in the global market value of the event sector, which is expected to top a trillion by 2028.

The reason this is happening is clear: events that harness the full power of XR, online options and 3D technologies lift the experience of participation up to a new level that simply has no equal.

The VR and AR industry is not only impacting the event sector, but is growing rapidly across multiple verticals to the extent that it is on course to eclipse that same \$1.5 trillion threshold just two years later in 2030.

**Estimated value of the immersive industry**  
(PwC Seeing Is Believing Report, 2019)

	2021	2030
<b>Global</b>	\$148.5 billion	\$1542.9 billion
<b>USA</b>	\$49 billion	\$537 billion



This kind of robust online growth is even more striking if we look at a related sector: retail ecommerce. In China, where super apps that combine messaging, commerce, payments and delivery are setting worldwide trends, retail ecommerce is on course to become 52% of total sales in 2021. China is thus becoming the first country in the world where over half of retail sales come from ecommerce. This came about as a result of an economy that has embraced the merging of physical and digital experiences, the rise of the livestream, more and better virtual worlds for socializing, networking and buying, and a consumer-friendly ease of roaming in between.

In the US, total ecommerce is less than half that level at 21.3%. Yet the surge to online experiences and purchases shows no signs of letting up. Online retail sales in the US grew 44% in 2020, the highest annual U.S. ecommerce growth in at least two decades. This was three times as much as we saw the two years prior: 15.1% in 2019 and 14.3% in 2018.

**Estimated value of immersive industry per use case**  
(PwC Seeing Is Believing Report, 2019)

	<b>2021</b>	<b>2030</b>
<b>Product &amp; Service Development</b>	\$34 billion	\$359.4 billion
<b>Healthcare</b>	\$34 billion	\$350.4 billion
<b>Development &amp; Training</b>	\$28.1 billion	\$294.2 billion
<b>Process Improvements</b>	\$26.4 billion	\$275.0 billion
<b>Retail &amp; Consumer</b>	\$19.6 billion	\$204.0 billion



# VIRTUAL AND HYBRID ARE THE FUTURE OF EVENTS

Hybrid events are on the verge of becoming the new gold standard of the industry.

What are hybrid events exactly? Opinions vary.

For Alt Ethos, hybrid events use experience-centric technology to integrate the onsite event virtually, with all of the opportunities, experiences, and benefits of the in-person event.

In other words, a hybrid event seamlessly connects virtual and in-person experiences, with each enhancing the other.

This translates into having a whole new range of communication tools at the ready to fine tune a whole new range of events.

Æ is using these tools to make some of the biggest changes since entering the experiential design realm. This starts with Pathos Metaverse.

Pathos Metaverse connects brands to a global audience in 3D worlds through browser-based accessibility. The designs are easy to navigate, engage with, and share. Special packages allow you to create super hybrid integration while using existing video screens without the need for proprietary hardware and costly shipping expenses. Post-event analytics will give a full picture of how an audience engaged in real connections with sponsors and each other.

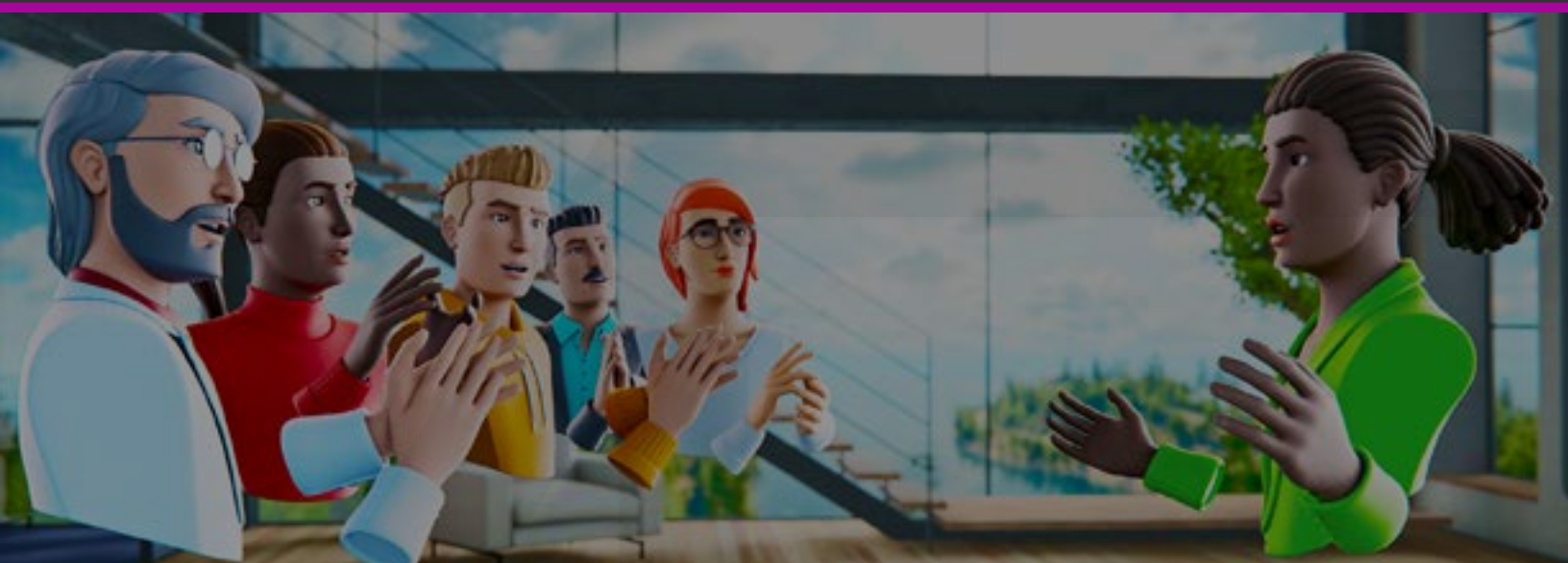
That might be an uncomfortable idea for some people, because we all just want to get back to normal after the pandemic. But for Æ, there is no back to normal. The expectations, attitudes and behaviors of people attending events have forever changed, accelerated by the pandemic. Events need to evolve in their turn and catch up.

When the pandemic shut down the economy and made the organization of physical events impossible, event organizers began to rush online as a default option. It wasn't long before they realized how beneficial virtual and hybrid events could be: the expanded reach to a global audience, the instant feedback from attendees, the tools that make gathering in-depth attendee analytics so effortless. Far from being sidelined as default options as before, virtual formats have retained their attractiveness as uniquely effective tools to spur growth and success as the economy edges back into action and in-person venues seek safer and more effective ways to reopen. In a recent survey by Freeman Data Solutions, 78% of the 20,491 brand marketers surveyed agree that moving forward, in-person events will pivot to hybrid models.

Hybrid events also have significant potential to be more profitable and attractive as well as making unique contributions to business growth over the longer term. In-person events that could only handle 500 to 1,000 people at a time can now reach over 10,000 worldwide. Speakers can make presentations more frequently to more people. Data gathering and content integration are supercharged by comparison. When in-person goes hand-in-hand with virtual, the content can add value to an event in a way that simply cannot be achieved otherwise.

Hybrid-first experiences are here to stay. They increase the options, effectiveness and climate-friendly scenarios that clients, attendees and stakeholders alike have come to value and expect in our new normal.





# ENGAGEMENT

The heart of a good event is engagement. Successful events are infused with the kind of emotional connection that is the essential ingredient of authentic engagement. Virtual events are distant by nature, but hybrid solutions are now proving their effectiveness in integrating the organic nature of in-person networking with a virtual corollary that complements our increasingly digital lifestyles and feels human. More and more, hybrid events are generators of meaningful, memorable experiences that foster long-term relationships and increase a consumer's life-time value to the marketer.

When viewed through that lens, it is easy to see how in-person and virtual experiences can both contribute to positive engagement metrics, making the sum greater than its parts.

# NETWORKING

At its best, in-person networking contains a big dose of serendipity. A participant suddenly ends up next to a speaker at the coffee table, or looking up from a lunch plate to see the person who asked the most interesting question in the session you left a few minutes before taking a seat at the same table.

Designing that kind of serendipity into virtual formats needs to be approached in an intentional way. Chat functions, team-building experiences, exchanges of contact info can all be incorporated in virtual formats, but can't be expected to accurately replicate in-person dynamics.

Can new technology help? Immersive experiences are certainly making impressive strides. Avatars are becoming more life-like, participants can now upload photos of their faces onto their avatars. Conversations in 3D environments can now be made to feel more natural through spatialized audio that moves with the virtual participant. Once you're in an immersive environment, it is possible to forget that you are actually speaking avatar-to-avatar.

Alt Ethos has embraced the challenge of creating the right 'feel' in virtual reality, using innovative and accessible technology solutions that make it easy for participants to create their own avatars and jump into a virtual world straight from a PC or mobile device. Participants are given agency to move around and engage with others—very much like being in the middle of a video game.

# REACH AND SCALE

Hybrid events can scale up well beyond the limits of in-person formats and offer new opportunities for meaningful - and profitable - engagement for participants who face steep barriers to access. They may be in a country halfway around the world, or disabled, or may be on a limited budget, or concerned about the impact of their travel on the environment, or may want or need to stay at home with their families. With hybrid solutions, these and others can join from anywhere in the world to learn, share their knowledge, and add value and character to the sessions. Live language translations and transcriptions lowers barriers even further. The potential for hybrid solutions to make anyone feel welcome and cared for is only beginning to be explored, and is only as limited as your imagination.

Virtual platforms are also powerful tools for growing in-person audiences. 96% of virtual participants at a recent event who responded to a researcher's survey said that they would not have attended the physical event. Yet their virtual experience had been satisfying enough that over a quarter of those respondents declared that they would attend the in-person event next time.

# CONTENT

With the full hybrid networking solutions  $\mathcal{A}\mathcal{E}$  offers, you can spontaneously walk up to a group of people and talk to them in real time. There will be two kinds of people in the group that you can see head to toe: half in person on location and half avatars created by people from a menu of easy-to-use design options that are virtually flying in from anywhere in the world. It feels as organic to talk to them as it feels for them to talk to you. No barriers.

In a hybrid keynote, the same dynamic is in play. A speaker can both be addressing a live audience and simultaneously be a hologram speaking live to a packed immersive dome presentation hall where, almost by magic, there is always a spare seat with the best view. Whether in person or virtual, everyone feels like the presenter is there with them in their space. The virtual enhances the physical, and vice versa. Either way, there's a feeling of unexpected joy at being in such a lively new environment.

You may have experienced something similar, maybe not. Hybrid events are not new, but they are getting better and better.



**Bach, Ethan. "Who Needs a Holodeck? Engaging Hybrid Event Solutions" Pathos Reality Event Space. June 24, 2021. <https://altethos.com/virtual-hybrid-solutions/>**

# DATA

Rich first-party data gathered from all attendees can be a gold mine of strategic business intelligence. Product information, buying signals, lead-generation, remarketing opportunities and more can be derived from data on time spent, session attendance, viewer fall off, comments and quizzes. Detailed marketing personae can be developed that provide insights across the board on clients, agencies, sponsors, venues and event producers.

That includes data on the future prospects of the virtual and hybrid events sector itself, such as:

- Post-pandemic, 81% of brands believe their event and experiential budgets will match or exceed their pre-virus levels (EventTrack)
- 65% of B2B marketers plan to reallocate some or most of their live event budgets to online events (B2B Marketing Zone/Webbiquity LLC)
- 54% of respondents to a recent survey are now planning meetings with both online and in-person components or planning to do so, up from 48 percent in January (Northstar Meetings Group)
- A typical event marketer plans to run more virtual events (40%) than in-person ones (34%) (LinkedIn)
- A majority of members of professional membership associations have been engaging with their organization virtually and expect to continue (Community Brands)
- 93% of event marketers will integrate virtual events into their repertoires in the future (Bizzabo)

# PRODUCTION VALUES

There are very good reasons why we don't like Zoom any more. It's not that virtual events are inferior to in-person events— far from it. It's that Zoom fatigue is real. No one wants to spend hours stuck in front of a screen being talked at. We've all had that experience, and it throws into sharp relief the need for the kind of high-quality engagement that immersive formats can offer. Moving away from video streams or video conferences and towards the meticulously designed visuals, enlivening activities and stimulating social engagement that immersive formats can offer lifts the experience beyond facts and figures to create experiences that invigorate and impressions and memories that last.



**Holmes, Charles. "I've Never Played Fortnite, But Was Forced to Attend Travis Scott's Fortnite Concert" Rolling Stone, April 24, 2020, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/travis-scott-fortnite-concert-989209/>**



# CUSTOMER FOCUS

Virtual formats allow participants to attend sessions at their convenience, no matter which time zone they are logging in from. Sections can be reviewed at their own pace and shared on social media or with colleagues. This saves time and money for the attendee (and for the event producer, who doesn't need to plan for and provide additional in-person services). Consumers are also increasingly concerned about the carbon footprint of their business travel, and offering a virtual participation option will increase the likelihood of attendance and improved customer loyalty.

Speakers that are particularly in demand can more easily present at multiple conferences. For example, sessions can be pre-recorded with embedded visuals to connect more effectively with hundreds, if not thousands, of additional attendees. More attractive, prestigious and higher value speakers can be booked and their pre-existing audiences converted into new customers. A win-win for participants, organizers, sponsors and speakers alike.



**Alt Ethos virtual events staff selfie 2020**



**Bach, Ethan. "Who Needs a Holodeck? Engaging Hybrid Event Solutions" Super Hybrid Demo. June 24, 2021.**  
<https://altethos.com/virtual-hybrid-solutions/>



# TRADESHOWS AND EXPOS

## Demos and Lead-Generation

Business-to-business executives understand the value of in-person experiences at their trade shows. That's the reason they spend \$137 billion on those trade shows each and every year. Large expos specialize in lead-generation, demonstrations and sales meetings—a highly valued marketing channel in corporate America. Unlike conferences where dozens of presentations routinely follow the same format, the buyers stroll from one customized booth to another that has defined the trade show experience for decades can be a challenge for event planners who want to replicate that time-honored experience virtually. While the serendipity of that experience cannot be replicated, virtual formats can provide a new experience of their own, broadening the sales funnel, engaging new prospects through technology, and ensuring that attendees don't miss out on the special fun that can be had on the much larger geographical scale that is possible in virtual worlds.

The pandemic brought out a can-do, problem-solving spirit in Expo organizers. They came up with bold virtual showcases that satisfied attendees and exhibitors as industry insiders and casual attendees alike surged online or into virtual reality.

Alt Ethos supports that bold approach with Innovation Design principles which seek out the context in which true innovation happens at the crossroads of three factors:

1. **Business strategy** (what the market at a certain context and moment in time deems viable)
2. **Humanity** (what the potential customers desire)
3. **Technology** (Feasibility)

In Business Strategy, Æ identifies the importance of creating environments that are an extension of the nature of the event: digital environments that capture the imagination, character of the target audiences, and connectivity of the physical event spaces.

For Design, Alt Ethos focuses on leveraging the potential of the digital realm to engage participants with intricately designed spaces that delight and surprise.

For Technology, Æ develops ways to facilitate navigation and make it easier for users to enjoy the digital environment, even if they only have access to old computers or have disabilities/transportation challenges.



# BOOTH EXAMPLE

Virtual booths have the advantage of being a buyers' destination up and ready with hosted office hours and appointments long before the opening of the trade show proper. Immersive experiences are an ideal solution for customers who want to try out a new product at their convenience—even a product that doesn't fit in the booth!

## CASE STUDY

Patria Land, a manufacturer of armored vehicles, uses XR to allow prospects to test drive and explore the Patria AMV. The marketing director often jumps into the experience with the customer to discuss the finer points.

For the Patria team, the immersive solution has helped their business advance in leaps and bounds on multiple fronts. There's no comparison to the time, energy and expense involved in shipping these mammoth vehicles around the world to trade shows—and it makes for an unforgettable customer experience.



Vainio, Vesa and Aulu, Tapio. "Get a real feel for products in a virtual room" Patricia Group, January 23, 2021

<https://www.patriagroup.com/newsroom/patria-magazine/tech/get-a-real-feel-for-products-in-a-virtual-room>

# EXPO EXAMPLE

Can an entire convention center be migrated to a 3D experience? The European Commission showed that it could. They hosted their flagship event, the Research and Innovation Expo, inside a virtual reality exhibition hall. Avatars created by attendees strolled through the vast expo space, chatted with exhibitors and enjoyed product demos— all in spectacular VR.

## CASE STUDY

European Research and Innovation Days is the European Commission's annual flagship Research and Innovation event, bringing together policymakers, researchers, entrepreneurs and the public to debate and shape the future of research and innovation in Europe and beyond. This year's edition was a fully virtual event, both conference and exhibition.



**Manalac, Alvin. "European Commission's Flagship Event" Virtual Reality Marketing. December 9, 2020, <https://www.virtualrealitymarketing.com/case-studies/european-commissions-flagship-event/>**

# THE ALT ETHOS DIFFERENCE

Alt Ethos takes participants beyond the mundane and forgettable with custom, flexible, online, 3D and virtual reality solutions that delight and engage event producers and attendees alike. Whatever the challenges may be, Æ solves them with creativity, determination and next-gen technology.

The Alt Ethos team has you covered! Æ people are experts who understand innovation, events, spatial computing and the optimum ways of delivering engaging experiences, from the first consultation to the final report.

Alt Ethos offers solutions for events of all kinds, from simple livestreams and mini booths to the Pathos Metaverse. Æ's flagship virtual world features vibrant, intricately designed environments with life-like avatars and appealing visuals. Pathos Metaverse's total immersion environments create a richer emotional experience, intuitive ease of use, and strong personal connections.



**Bach, Ethan. "Who Needs a Holodeck? Engaging Hybrid Event Solutions" Super Hybrid Demo. June 24, 2021.**  
<https://altethos.com/virtual-hybrid-solutions/>

# MOBILE EVENT APPS

## Tying it all Together

Traditional in-person conferences are organized around audio-visual hardware, presenter coaching, and trade show booths. Person-to-person conversations and networking have to be saved for cocktail hour. These events were flawed even by yesterday's standards.

Digital solutions can transform the conference experience in enlivening and cost-effective ways. Event metrics are developed in powerful ways through robust data gathering at scheduling, content management and interactive exchange points by multiple software platforms and mobile apps. Organizers are migrating to unified platforms that manage both in-person and virtual events rather than using parallel (and often unequal) tracks for service and engagement. Digital solutions can now provide clients with a holistic, data driven, dynamic dashboard.

Mobile event apps can handle a full range of functions; registration, calendars, maps, session scheduling, notifications, speaker bios, check-in, credentials. New features like Q&A, interactive polls, gamification, audio options, content, networking, lead-generation, social media amplification, compliance and security issues, sponsorship opportunities, robust reporting, and even conference swag are transforming the event technology landscape.

Reporting analytics can capture and measure



**Examples of Mobile Event Apps rated by G2— a technology review platform**

these and millions of other digital interactions to parse correlations and surface business intelligence insights. The kind of streamlined data collection that virtual formats support can elevate the entire event experience for producers, brands, presenters, exhibitors, content creators, attendees and stakeholders alike.



# CONCLUSION

We are in the midst of a renaissance in the global events sector. Innovations in collaboration software, ubiquitous connection, smart device penetration and increasingly sophisticated tech tools for creating visually stunning immersive environments are redefining the event experience for a new era. The pandemic accelerated these developments by a good ten years and laid the digital foundations for hybrid event production and marketing the likes of which we have never seen before.

Alt Ethos has met the moment with Pathos Metaverse, a magnificent virtual world, alongside a complete suite of virtual, hybrid, and in-person event solutions. Years of leadership in the industry make Alt Ethos the ideal consultative partner to deliver the very best event experiences as the dawn of this new renaissance reaches every corner of our new world.

**For additional information please email Alt Ethos CEO  
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