

BigMarker

The Ultimate Guide To Hybrid Events

Create magic for your attendees, no matter where they are.



Why Hybrid?



Virtual events may have been the product of the year in 2020, but the consensus is that hybrid events are here to stay. In a recent survey of 20,000+ brand marketers, [78 percent agree that in-person events will pivot to hybrid models](#). Here's why you need to add hybrid events to your marketing mix:

- **Provide valuable insurance.** With uncertainty surrounding current and future global pandemics, having a virtual option teed-up provides option value to event organizers.
- **Double your event's reach.** Think your hybrid event will cannibalize guests and revenue from your IRL option? Think again. [96 percent of online attendees at hybrid events were not planning to attend live](#), according to Matthew Ley, President of The Streaming Network. You're not splitting your current audience—you're creating a new one. These are the people who "just aren't that into you yet", the ones who aren't ready to commit a full day to your event, but are willing to check it out on their own terms.
- **Diversify your audience.** Due to financial constraints, family commitments, medical concerns or scheduling limitations, many would-be guests may not be able to attend your IRL events. By providing a hybrid option, you can lower the path-to-purchase barriers for new attendees and appeal to attendees from new, underrepresented backgrounds.
- **Offer flexibility for a remote workforce.** Hybrid events mesh with the modern worker's desire for flexibility and remote work. According to a new [Pew Research Center survey](#), 71 percent of workers are working remotely all or most of the time—and more than half want to continue doing so even after the pandemic, so event organizers will need to use hybrid models to attract more Millennial and Gen Z attendees.
- **Host a more sustainable event.** Hybrid events produce less physical waste and travel emissions, both of which can support your brand's sustainability efforts. Environmental concerns aside, your business will benefit from tapping into consumer preferences for sustainability and ethical business. According to [Barron's](#), North American consumers increasingly prefer sustainable brands and more than half of buyers are ready to change their shopping habits to reduce their negative impact on the environment. And globally, 40 percent of respondents select brands based on how well they align with their personal beliefs. So taking a stand can also boost your bottom line.

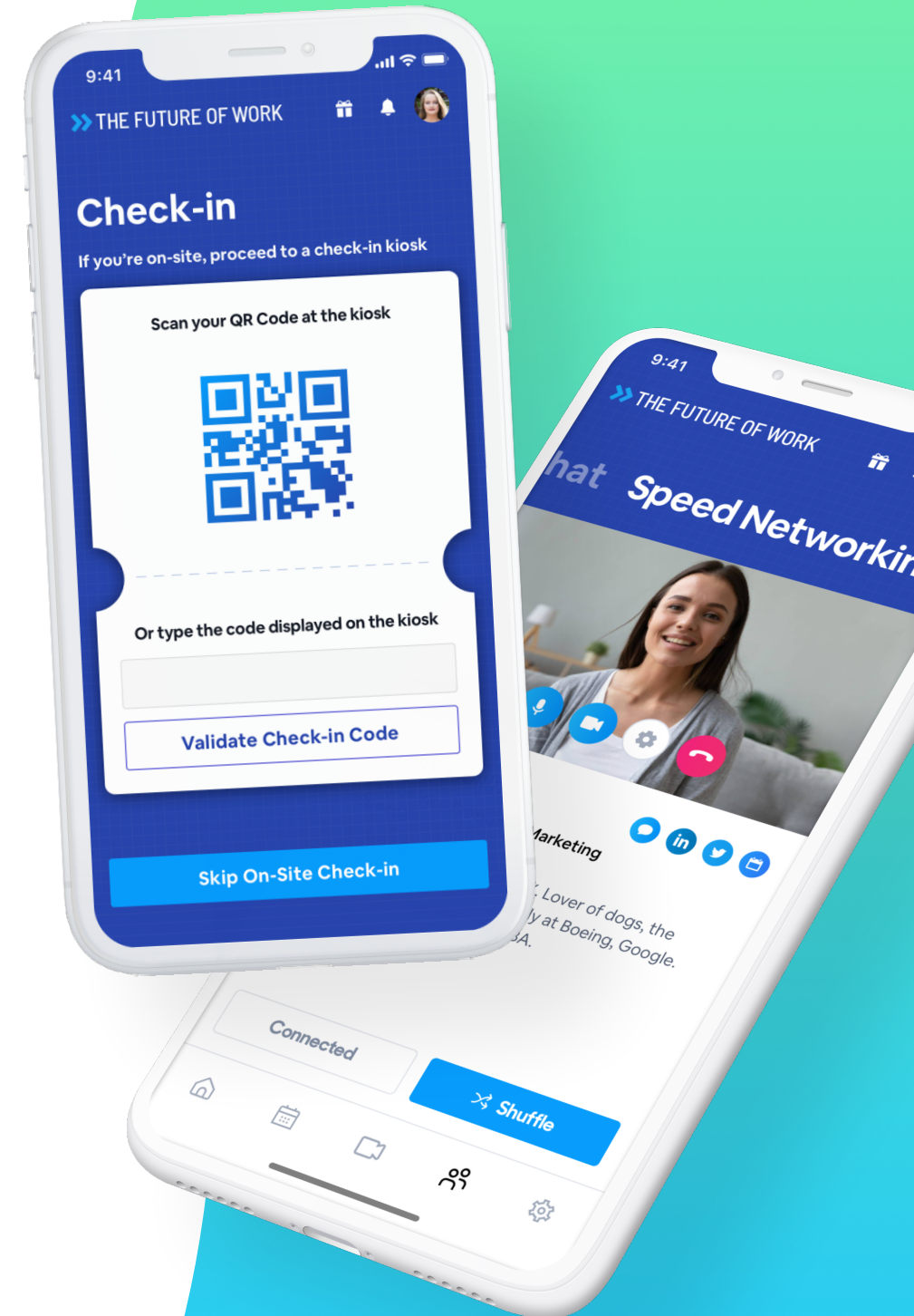
BigMarker's Approach to Hybrid

We've been doing hybrid events since 2012—basically the Stone Age in our industry. Back then, the big buzzword was "multichannel marketing", the idea that companies should engage with their customers—and attendees should have the same positive customer experience— regardless of whether they're buying in the physical store or on the company website.

BigMarker's approach to hybrid events is to answer the question: How do we extend the magic created in IRL venues to digital spaces?

Traditionally, hybrid events have been livestreams with a splash of audience interaction—enough to ward off complaints, but not enough to keep them coming back as customers. But in the last 10 years, we've seen hybrid events evolve into immersive, multi-faceted experiences where attendees can connect with sponsors, hosts, other attendees, whether they're in the front row or in their front room.

From interactive features to sponsor engagement, our hybrid event experience is designed to create magic that's present and palpable—regardless of where people are watching.



Marketing Your Hybrid Event

Hybrid events are still a novelty for most people, so your target audience might not realize that a well-executed hybrid event can feel similar to a “real” one. That in mind, you’ll need to market your hybrid event intentionally to overcome your audience’s pre-purchase objections.

Price

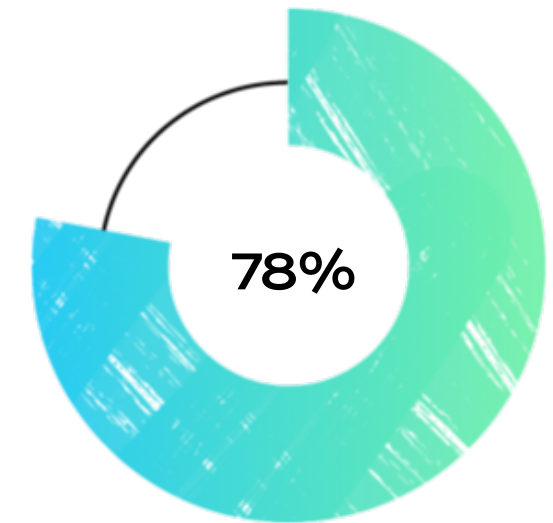
Remember that almost all online guests at hybrid events wouldn’t have attended live? That’s because travel costs or a full-day commitment can deter “on the fence” prospects from attending in person. Slightly discount hybrid tickets to compensate and you could pull a ton of new attendees—and leads— that wouldn’t been on your radar otherwise.

Place

For online attendees, your hybrid event platform will be the “place.” And just like a room with bad acoustics can sink an IRL session, lagging virtual event platforms lead to mass logoffs in seconds. Even if you’ve picked a rock-solid software, guests may believe the remote experience will be inferior to the IRL counterpart because that’s what they’ve heard before. So once you’ve chosen a hybrid event platform, use screen recordings of its interface to reassure potential guests that they’ll have a good user experience.

Promotion

As you start to advertise, include an FAQ of the online experience on your event site. The less questions your audience has about how they’ll access sessions, how they can network, how they interact with exhibitors and other attendees, the more likely they’ll be to attend.



78 percent agree that traditional in-person events will pivot to hybrid models

Audience Engagement: Out of Sight, Not Mind

What's the difference between a hybrid event and a lecture? Interactivity. If your online guests can connect with your speakers and other attendees, they're less likely to log off to change their laundry or something. So every element of your event's architecture and programming needs to facilitate engagement, including the following:

- **Enable Interactive Features.** If your online guests can't be in the crowd, at least treat them as if they are. Assign one of your team members to produce the online portion of your event, so that a real live person is answering your remote guests' questions, distributing offers and handouts, and moderating in place of the live presenter. This person should be in lock step with your in-person event producer to ensure your run of show is consistent experientially.

Or as the great poet Gucci Mane says,
“Stay ready so you don't have to get ready.”

- **Proactively engage the virtual audience.** The easiest way to make your online guests feel seen? Acknowledge that they're actually there. Encourage each of your presenters to address the virtual attendees at the beginning of sessions, and have your co-host filter questions from virtual attendees for the presenter to answer for the whole crowd. Your online guests are more likely to stick around if they know they can shape the discussion—and that they're as visible as the live attendees.
- **Minimize dead time.** From going over time in the previous session to waiting for that one panelist to turn on her webcam, many event sessions end up running a few minutes behind. In an IRL event, that's practically expected. But many of your online guests are logging in specifically to watch certain sessions at a certain time. If the session hasn't begun at the scheduled time, and there's no clear explanation, your virtual audience could get confused and log off. So use social media or push notifications to notify guests about delays and session start times to keep them updated. Within sessions, have holding slides and videos ready to play for attendees in case you need to work through any technical issues.



Prepare Speakers to Please Two Audiences

Once you've figured out how to excite your online crowd, prepare your speakers to do the same. [A full 46% of event organizers say that speakers had difficulties engaging a virtual and in-person audience simultaneously](#), so if your speakers can strike the balance between the two crowds, your event will stand head and shoulders above your competition.

Create online-specific handouts and offers



BigMarker allows presenters to share handouts—downloadable documents summarizing the session—and call-to-action offers with online attendees. Both materials can significantly improve audience recall and follow-up, so encourage presenters to create them in advance. During the session, these features can be distributed automatically (using automation) or be manually triggered by the online event producer.

Prepare presenters for a broader audience



Hybrid presenters are talking to a global audience of varying experience levels, so make sure they aren't speaking solely to national issues or overusing industry slang. To keep everyone aligned, give speakers a Presenter Guide stating this upfront—or have them submit an agenda with their talking points two weeks before the event.

Network with virtual and IRL attendees



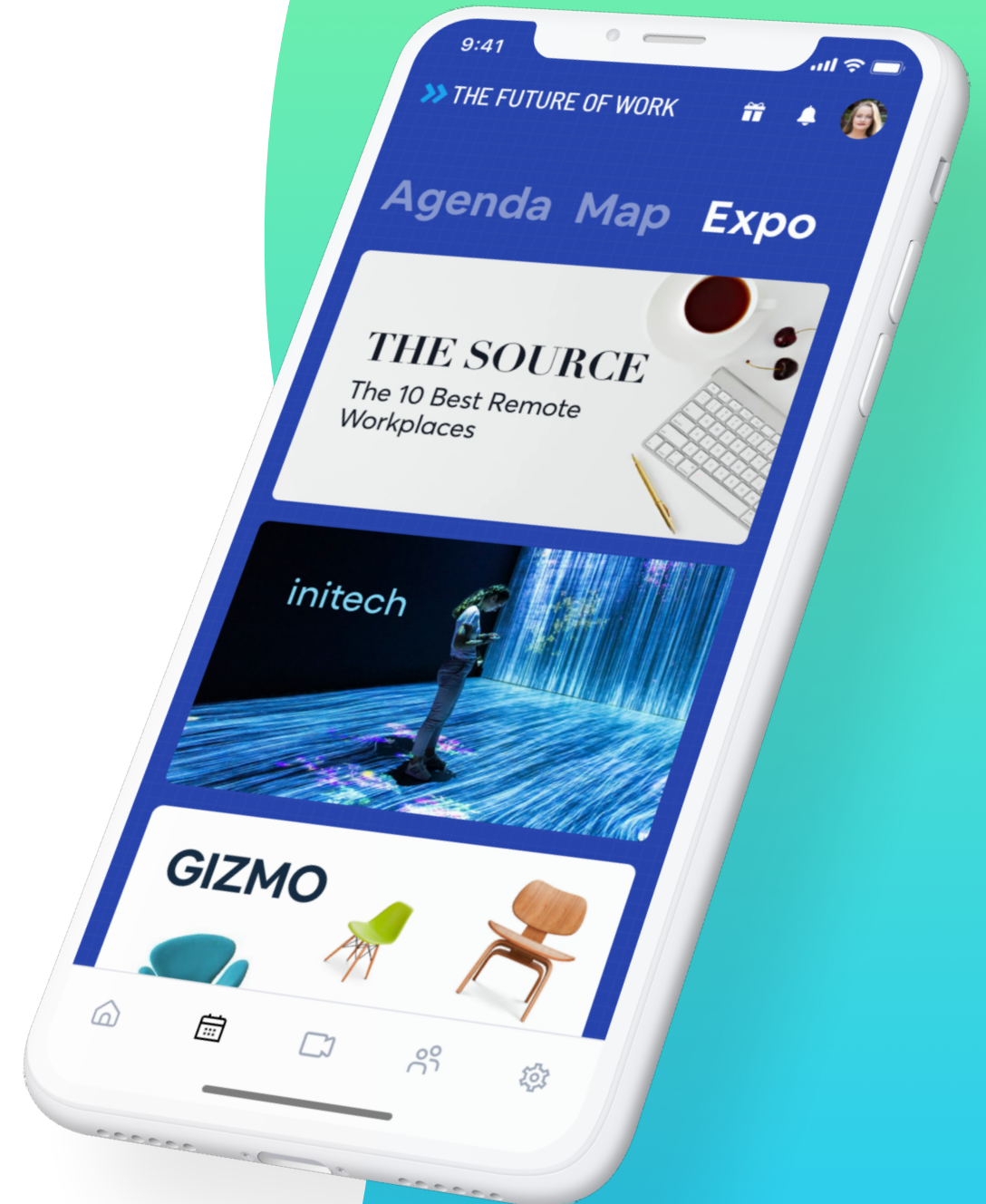
Ensure that presenters divide their time between live networking sessions and chats within the virtual Networking Center. This doesn't need to be a strictly even split—but when presenters participate in virtual networking, the online guests feel more included and presenters get exposure to even more valuable connections.

Help Your Sponsors Help You

72 percent of corporate sponsors are interested in participating in a hybrid event, so going hybrid can really boost your event budget—and enhance your guest experience. Sponsors like hybrid events for several reasons: access to a wider audience, opportunities to connect 1:1 with virtual attendees, more ad placements, and richer attendee and engagement data to justify their investments.

So help your sponsors help you, Jerry Maguire style. Start with the basics: According to Event MB, hybrid event sponsors need the following three features above all else: [sponsor/exhibitor profiles \(78%\)](#), [analytics/reporting \(77%\)](#), and [banners in high-traffic areas \(70%\)](#). From there, encourage them to go beyond exposure and engage your audience in inventive ways.

But even the splashiest activations won't attract leads if your sponsors aren't ready to use the event software while also running the IRL experience. So in partnership with your virtual event platform provider, conduct onboarding sessions with each sponsor so they can practice using interactive features, distributing polls and Q&As, triggering offers and more. To maximize their reach and effectiveness, sponsors should also consider resourcing for hybrid events, with dedicated staffers "working the booth" and other team members overseeing the virtual booth.

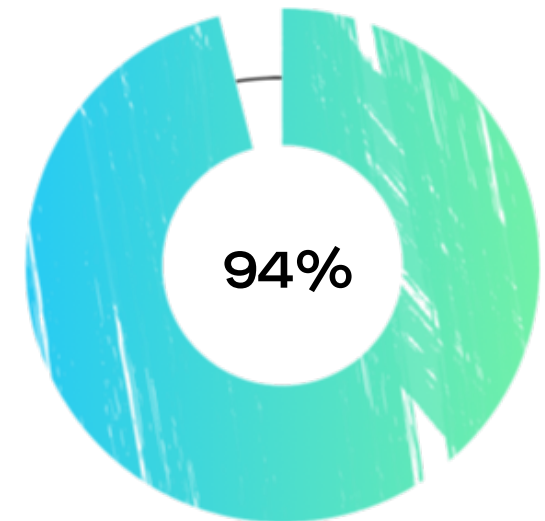


Nail the Dismount

So you successfully engaged your in-person and virtual audiences, your speakers crushed it and your sponsors are happy. Now what?

If you, like [94% of B2B event organizers](#), consider “[pipeline generated](#)” as your key success metric for hybrid events, you know it's all about the leads. Convert those interested attendees into promising customers with our best practices on post-event lead generation

1. **Integrate your virtual event platform with your MAS, CRM and email tools**, so your brand new leads—both in-person and virtual—are automatically pushed to your sales team right after the event ends, and they can move to convert leads right away.
2. **Trigger offers for discounts or free trials during sessions themselves.** On BigMarker, these usually appear as pop-ups on screen. The moment you've sparked their interest, audiences can click the offer and redeem it. (Note: Make those deals online-only, then include them in your pre-event promotion to attract more hybrid attendees.)
3. **Repurpose event content as on-demand videos**, then host them on your website following your event. This way, your audience can rewatch anything they missed—and you can attract new attendees/leads with minimal extra effort.



94 percent of B2B event organizers consider “[pipeline generated](#)” as your key to success.

So, what's next?

First, you need to pick a hybrid event platform powerful enough to fully engage your online audience and generate new leads. Use the checklist below to ensure it's got the functionality and features you need to ace your next hybrid event. To learn more about the world's most innovative companies are using virtual events to drive business results, get in touch with our team at sales@bigmarker.com.

Happy hosting!

Features	BigMarker	Other Platforms
10 years of experience in the Virtual Events space	✓	☐
Browser-based software	✓	☐
Live video for up to 50,000 attendees	✓	☐
Custom-branded event site	✓	☐
Custom-branded event emails	✓	☐
Integrates with top CRM/MAS	✓	☐
Up to 10 stages and 30 exhibitors	✓	☐
3-6 hours of training and onboarding	✓	☐
Live event day support package	✓	☐
Account management with a dedicated support team	✓	☐