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A Comprehensive List of Tips, Tools, and Examples for Event Organizers During the Coronavirus Outbreak

David Spinks / [Events](#) / 9 min read



COVID-19 is spreading and whether the response is overblown or not, conferences and events are being forced to overhaul their plans. 

This year is going to be rough for event organizers. If your event is coming up soon, you'll likely have to cancel or reschedule. Sarah Evans started a [running list](#) of conferences that have been canceled or rescheduled.

Even if your event is at the end of the year, it will be very difficult to promote your event without coming across as tone-deaf, ticket sales will suffer, sponsorship sales will suffer. Jessie Char, Co-creator of Layers Conference beautifully rambled about how real the struggle is in this [thread](#). For our own event, [CMX Summit](#), while we still plan to host our event on schedule, we're holding off on all promotions for the time being.

It's not just conferences. Local meetups in affected areas are having to seek alternative options for gathering their members too. Local governments are [quickly releasing](#) recommendations and requirements around what events should and should not be hosted. We're working closely with our [Bevy](#) customers to support them as they plan their next steps for both local and global events.

But where there is struggle, there is opportunity! Virtual conferences can be quite powerful, and scale to many thousands of attendees that would be very difficult to gather in-person. And online meetups and roundtables give your members an opportunity to have intimate discussions from the comfort of their home. Are they the same? No. But they do have unique benefits.

So while this is a **really** difficult time for a lot of community teams and event organizers, you can also look at this as an opportunity to build your chops on running virtual events. Who knows, you might decide to keep hosting them as a complement to your physical events long after we've found a Covid-19 vaccine!

So we wanted to compile all the best advice and tools we're hearing from the CMX community and from other conference organizers about what to do and how to keep your community engaged over the next several months.

Thank you to the contributors who helped curate and edit this post: [Blake](#), [Mac Reddin](#), [Tim Bonnemann](#), [Jacqueline Hughes](#), and [Hugh Lashbrooke](#).

Shout out to Mac Reddin who organized a call with 20+ other CMX members where they shared what they're all doing to communicate with their communities and adapt their event strategies. We'll include some of those notes in this post. You can see their [insights here](#).

1. Tips for canceling or rescheduling conferences and events

If you have an event coming up in the next couple months, there's a good chance you'll need to cancel. Even the strongest holdouts like SxSW and SaaStr were forced to cancel in the week before their big events. If you're not sure if you will cancel or not, you can still start getting a plan in place to make it as smooth as possible for your community and your company.

Here are some tips for making the best out of a tough situation:

- Credit vs refunds. Offer credit toward future events in place of refunds if possible, to offset the financial hit you'll need to take
- Review your insurance options. Look into your event insurance to see what you're covered for. Unfortunately a lot of conference contracts do not include viruses in their "acts of god" clauses, but it can't hurt to have legal review exactly what your options are. If your event isn't happening for a while and you haven't set up event insurance yet, now's the time.
- Review vendor, venue and sponsor contracts and update future contracts. Check your venue contract for their rescheduling policy and negotiate terms for potential rescheduling if possible. Revisit all your vendor and sponsor contracts to ensure you have an "act of god" or "force majeure" clause to cover you for COVID-19 (example text included below)
- Be a leader, overcommunicate. Don't remain silent, your community is looking to you for guidance right now. Keep checking what the [World Health Organization is saying](#) so you can provide your community with the most up to date information. Publish and maintain a page on your event website with information about the latest status of potential cancellation, as well as information about what you are doing to ensure the health and safety of attendees. [Here's an example](#) from the now cancelled WordCamp Asia site.
- Defer to your volunteers. If you have local/volunteer organizers running your events around the world, let your local leads make the decision on what to do about their events based on what they're seeing and hearing on the ground. [Bevy](#) customers have not instituted any world-wide pauses on

events yet. For the most part, they've all worked with local organizers to make case-by-case decisions.

- Stay cool. Don't unnecessarily exacerbate fear. Guide your community on how to stay safe and healthy, and what you're doing as a company to take action. But grandiose statements and unsolicited predictions won't help.
- Connect with local authorities. Maintain a contact with your local health authority to secure more accurate information specific to the area. This can also help with acquiring official governmental letters that attendees can use to request refunds for any travel or accommodation they have already paid for.
- Manage your cash flows. Pay vendor invoices as late as is reasonable and, if possible, only pay deposits at first so that, in the event of cancellation, you have less refunds to request.

If you need language to add to your sponsorship contracts to protect your event, Hung Pham from [Culture Summit](#) shared what they use (this is not legal advice, please consult with your own legal representation):

Force Majeure

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary herein, any delay or failure in the performance of any duties or obligations of Company will not be considered a breach of this Agreement if such delay or failure is due to a labor dispute, fire, earthquake, flood or any other event beyond the reasonable control of Company (each a "Force Majeure Event"), provided that Company promptly notifies the Sponsor thereof and uses reasonable efforts to resume performance as soon as possible. In the event that Company is unable to reschedule the Event due to any Force Majeure Event, Company will provide Sponsor with written notice indicating such with option to receive a full refund of all unused sponsorship fees prepaid as of the notice of termination, or allocate such monies to an alternative event as mutually agreed. Company shall exercise its rights hereunder in its sole, but good faith discretion.

Examples of great communications with communities around COVID-19:

- Michelle Kim at Awaken shared [the email communications](#) they sent to their community.

- The WordPress community published [a general advisory](#) about travelling to WordCamps, as well as some [tips for local organizers](#), [general event cancellation guidelines](#), and [thoughts on running virtual events](#).



2. Tips for running virtual events

The show must go on! While in-person events are on hold, a lot of conferences and companies are turning to virtual events.


Virtual conferences have been a format growing in popularity in recent years, and can be powerful experiences for building community. They won't provide the same kind of intimate interaction you get from gathering in real life, but can still provide opportunities for learning, knowledge sharing, and networking.

Generally, a virtual event is more than a simple webinar where everyone watches a live stream. Virtual events try to incorporate other elements of in-person events like networking, sponsorships, discussions groups, and more.

For many of you, this will be the first time you've ever hosted a virtual event. There are a number of unique challenges that come with virtual events vs offline events.

Tips for running virtual events:

- Teach the technicals. There will be technical challenges for your attendees – make sure to give them time, and plenty of guidance on how to get set up with your tools and technology. Create content and guides specific for your event vs relying on the tools help docs.
- Plan, prep and practice. There can also be technical challenges for you, especially if attempting to stream live content. Plan out ahead of time exactly how everything will run, then do practice-runs with your speakers, partners, and anyone else involved in creating content. You can also consider pre-recording your content to ensure there are no streaming issues.
- Decide if you'll offer recorded content. A lot of virtual events record the content and make it all available after the event. Keep in mind, if you mention that recorded content will be available afterwards, it can affect the

number of people who show up for the live event. But it also gives you the opportunity to continue to collect signups and improve the reach of your content after the event is over. 

- Set ground rules. For group calls and discussion groups, set ground rules up front about what the format will be, when to speak, and how to contribute, so you don't get a lot of people trying to talk over each other, and everyone has a chance to contribute. You'll also want to set ground rules for any chat spaces you create about what people can or can't use those spaces for. They can quickly devolve into promotions and negativity if you don't have rules in place.
- Create a dedicated networking space. What makes the best conferences and events so special isn't always (just) the (hopefully awesome) content, talks, presentations etc. but also (quite often: even more so) the hallway conversations, the socializing during breaks etc. When designing an online event, I'd put special emphasis on trying to figure out how to create similar opportunities in an online setting. -[TB]

3. Tools for virtual events and community

There are a lot of tools available to help you run your virtual events. I shared and asked for recommendations on twitter which you can follow [here](#). Here are some of the top recommended tools:

Networking, many-to-many style:

[Hop In](#) – designed to emulate larger conferences and events, with a main speaker stage, smaller session, and 1 on 1 networking. Still in early access beta.

[AirMeet](#) – Host up to 1M live attendees and let them seamlessly interact with each other just like at a real venue.

[Vfairs](#) – Host virtual job fairs, online tradeshow, online conferences, and more. Connect people through chat rooms, live webinars, and digital content.

[Run The World](#) – free to use, but requires paid tickets for attendees (\$1 minimum).

Remo – A virtual tradeshow that can have virtual tables, and floors. Several hosts can present via video/screen sharing. The virtual tables offer birds of a feather/unconferencing style to it where each table are separate break out groups of up to 6 participants.

TEEOH – Provides a social experience for groups of people who otherwise can't attend events in-person. Good for virtual meetups, mastermind groups, and fireside chats and includes opportunity to set up and sell tickets.

Toasty + Zoom -Similar to Icebreaker with activities participants can engage and connect with using their smartphones. If you are familiar with the IRL Toasty options, imagine it virtually and with Zoom.

Icebreaker – Offers a main chat room where a host can present via video (no screensharing) and also share Youtube videos. The heart of this tool is it allows participants to all be matched at random with 1 other attendee through a series of games. Each game (or round that can last 5-10 minutes) offers a series of cards with talking points and questions the two matched attendees can get to know each other through.

Traditional 'webinar' style:


Crowdcast – Connecting the world through conversation. Host live talkshows, webinars, Q&As, summits and more.

6connex – Host a virtual trade show, job fair, summit, and even establish an e-learning program for your organization.

Hey Summit – Infrastructure 'wrapper' to turn webinars and pre-recorded content into a larger event. Requires another webinar software for any live content.

Demio – Simple, no-download webinar experience for your audience and marketing tools you need to generate better results.

RingCentral – Traditional webinar style. Renders recordings very fast.

[Twitch](#) – Twitch has become a powerful streaming platform for much more than just gaming, and already has a lot of the social features you'd want for a virtual event built in. 

[Youtube Livestream](#) – Easy way to livestream on desktop, mobile, and the YouTube app and reach your audience in real time.

[Zoom](#) – Traditional webinar style with either 1 host or a group chat. It also offers [breakout rooms](#).

[Shindig](#) – Enables a host to give a video conference, lecture, seminar, interview or media event in front of an online audience of thousands. Hosts can share the stage for face-to-face interactions with audience members before the entire gathering or sidebar with participants privately.

Online Discussion tools:

[Discord](#) – While this tool specializes in the gaming industry, lots of different companies use it as a more “external facing” version of Slack.

[Slack](#) – A crowd favorite for organizing chat-based networking around your event.

[Facebook Groups](#) – Another free option that most people are already comfortable and familiar with. In fact we always set up a facebook group for all our [CMX Summit](#) events.

Other tools:

[Virtual Braindates](#) – With this tool, you can connect attendees with mentors and experts for 1-1 and small group discussions on varying topics.

[VideoAsk](#) – More of a tool (in this case) that can compliment online events. Post online event, the host/speakers could record some answers to questions that there wasn't enough time for using this tool, that later gets shared on social/video channels.

[Slido](#) – Easy-to-use audience polling and Q&A platform. It works great for in-person events as well as virtual ones. The free option will be fine for most events, but if you want more advanced moderation tools then you'll need to use the paid plan.

[Notion](#) and [Google Docs](#) – great options for hosting spaces where attendees can collaborative take and share notes with each other.

[Poll Everywhere](#) and [Kahoot](#) – audience engagement and polling tools that you can use to spice up the overall experience.

4. Examples of great virtual events

Luckily, many companies have paved the way and you can learn from their examples. Here are some of the best examples of virtual conferences and events:

[altGDC](#) – GDC decided to convert their conference into a virtual conference, using Twitch for streaming and Discord for discussions

[COLLISION | Toronto 2020 | “North America’s fastest growing tech conference”](#) – moved to online conference “Collision from Home”

[Resources for Humans by Lattice](#) – this virtual event brought together 15,000+ attendees who work in HR. You can now see all the sessions on-demand.

[VMUG Virtual](#) – The VMware user group conference is fully virtual and hosted using the [vfairs](#) platform.

[Women-Led Summits](#) – a series of online conferences focused on magnifying the voices of women.

[WordSesh](#) – A WordPress-focussed virtual conference series that happens in multiple time zones annually.

Net Tuesday Mixed Reality Event: SecondLife for Nonprofits – This hybrid online/offline event took place in July 2006 ([screenshots](#)).



You can check out more suggestions of great virtual events in this [twitter thread](#).

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We will keep this post updated with resources and tools. If you see something missing, comment here or email us at team@cmxhub.com.

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**Wayne Sutton**

Thanks so much for this list and your work!

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**Shayna Rector Bleeker**

Thank you for this excellent and clear resource. We need people supported to make decisions, continue good work AND reduce opportunities for this virus to spread.

This is a generous and generative guide not only for this acute moment, but in general. So many good tools and tactics to be used which could help us reduce travel, related GHG emissions and.... wait for it... enable people to spend more times in their home communities. Where - the social connections that bring love, joy and a sense of place and community are built and nurtured. Oh yea - and let us be reminded of the definition of 'community resilience'... "Community resilience is a measure of the sustained ability of a community to utilize available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations."

Thank you David, and all of the contributors to this important post

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**MC Thamizharasan R K**

We are a part of an Education Expo thats happening in Tamilnadu, India in August 2020. Will there be any impact of Corona Virus on this event?

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**Phil Hadridge**

This is great stuff - so many wonderful ideas and prompts. Great resonance with this researched piece <https://www.linkedin.com/.../toward-new-normal.../> Thank you

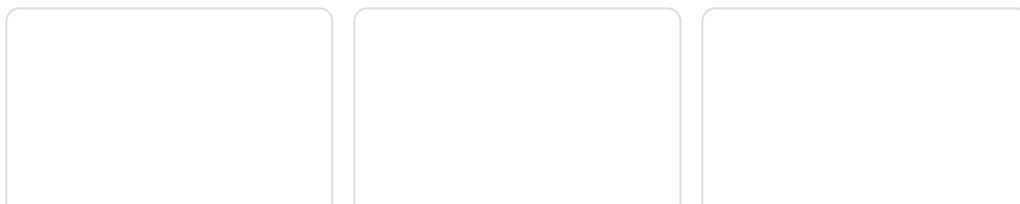
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**Lorena Freitas**

Excellent list, thanks for compiling it. I would add <https://remotely.green> to the "Tools for virtual events and community" list.

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