THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO VIRTUAL NETWORKING AT EVENTS

Hubilo

As an event organizer, one of the most important things you can do for your event is to make networking an integral part of it. Not only is networking a huge value driver, but it's actually the second biggest reason why people join virtual events in the first place (after educational purposes.)

For all types of virtual events - from conferences, to business meetings, to trade fairs - the importance of including good networking opportunities for your attendees cannot be overstated. It will increase your event's engagement, make your attendees happy, and even help you deliver a greater ROI.

But creating solid networking opportunities for your event attendees isn't just a matter of sticking people in a virtual chat room together. There are plenty of ways to create good networking environments before, during, and after your event. Let's look at a few ideas.

PRE-EVENT
NETWORKING

From the moment your first marketing campaign goes live, you should offer interesting ways for registered attendees to network right from the get-go.

1 Host a quick virtual coffee chat before the event

Grabbing a coffee is one of the most common ways people like to connect and talk about their businesses. Capitalize on this by offering a virtual "coffee room" that your attendees can join before the event starts. This is a low pressure, fun environment that provides your attendees with a place to chat in an informal setup, in the same way as they would have at the start of in-person events.

This virtual coffee room will likely be where your most enthusiastic audience members will gather. Simply providing this virtual space will get your attendees talking, whether it be event-related topics or personal one-on-ones. This freeform

networking period will get your attendees into a great headspace for the event itself.

2 Socialize on social

You've likely already been advertising your event on social media. But beyond the basic marketing you've done to garner awareness, how do you use social media to keep the buzz going?

Polls can be a great way to stir up much-needed enthusiasm for your event. Questions like "How excited are you for the event?" or "Which speaker do you most look forward to meeting at the event?" will not only get people talking, but also provide you with some early indications as to which aspects of your event will be the most popular among your attendees.

In addition to polls, creating event-specific hashtags is a great way to increase your event visibility, and inform people about the different pre-event networking opportunities available (#VirtualCoffeeMeetup!)

Getting your future audience talking about your event on social media can also be a great way to introduce your attendees to each other. When people bond over a shared interest - like a particular speaker they're both excited to see, or a panel they both want to attend - they provide themselves additional networking opportunities by identifying other attendees with similar interests to seek out at the event itself.

3 Get the Activity Feed buzzing

The Activity Feed is an amazing way to generate engagement and lay the groundwork for networking opportunities. In fact, you can reuse a lot of your event's social media posts on the Activity Feed to get your attendees commenting and interacting.

Similar to event-specific hashtags, utilizing the Activity Feed gives your future audience an opportunity to seek out like-minded attendees with shared interests, similar titles, or interesting points of view, who may not have interacted otherwise. You'll be giving your attendees a way to build new connections, all while brewing anticipation for your upcoming event!
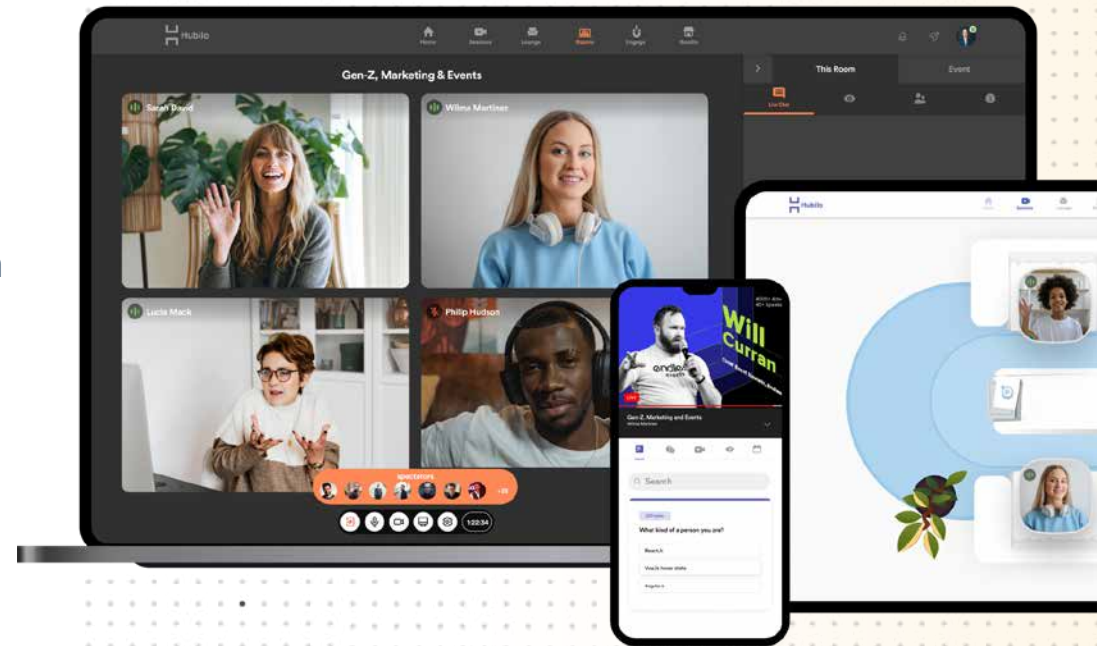
DURING EVENT NETWORKING

While pre-event networking is important, it's the networking during your event that your attendees will most anticipate. Providing these opportunities is what will drive engagement during your event, and leave your attendees feeling good about the ways in which they were able to network and connect with others.

1 Hire a virtual networking moderator

Connecting with others virtually is not always easy. Have you ever joined a virtual event or group chat room, only to be met with blank stares and awkward silences? It's not exactly the most invigorating way to start a discussion, especially when people are unsure who should lead or how. This is where a virtual networking moderator becomes important. They spark discussions, end awkward silences, and ensure everyone gets a chance to speak. If there is a lull, they fill it. If there is a long-winded participant, they jump in.

For one of Hubilo's events, we hired drag queens to moderate some of our lounges. The energy in those lounges was infectious, and attendees were still commenting on their experience for days after the event on social media.

2 Set-up virtual speed networking

Your virtual event platform's breakout room functionality is ideal for hosting a speed-networking event like this. Attendees can enter a breakout room for a short time to discuss a specific topic, and the room's host can decide the topic and the size of the room, as well as invite others to join the room for a specified amount of time. A few powerful virtual event platforms can accommodate up to 500 participants in a room at a time!
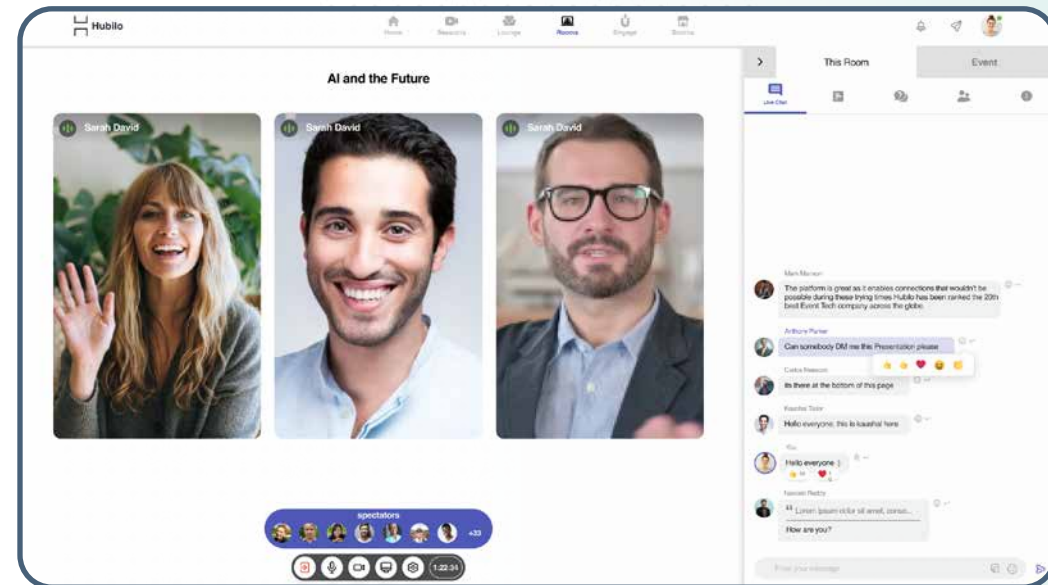
3 Open virtual lounges for discussions

While breakout rooms are great for quick, theme-focused networking, virtual lounges are perfect for free-flowing conversations. Attendees, speakers, exhibitors, and sponsors can use your virtual lounges to discuss business, common interests, or products. Virtual lounge discussions are often scheduled, but they can also be held spontaneously. Lounges in Hubilo can accommodate up to 16 people.

4 Encourage attendees to ask questions during sessions

During a typical event, attendees don't usually get a chance to interact with the speakers between sessions. But on a virtual event platform, they can use the Q&A feature to freely pose questions to the speakers throughout. Good questions often become a point of discussion and breathe new life or alternative
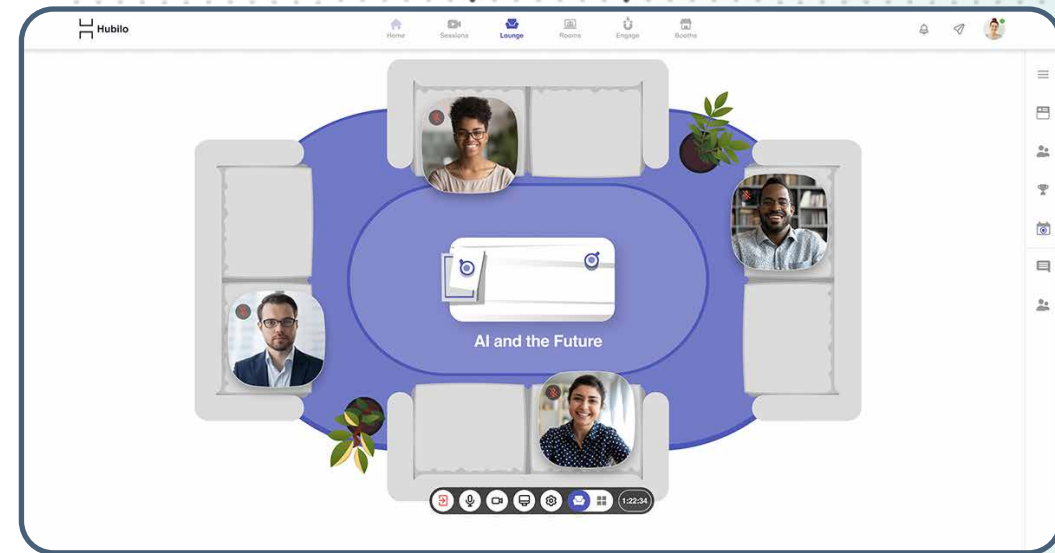
perspectives into the presentation. Speakers may even invite attendees into breakout rooms to continue the discussion afterwards.

5 Host quick event games

If you ever went to summer camp as a kid, you know that fun competitions and games are the best way to not only break the ice, but create a sense of camaraderie among a group of strangers. Your virtual event is no different! Your attendees will likely be eager to network and engage, but might not know quite how to kick things off.

Here are a few game ideas to get your attendees in the right headspace to engage and connect with each other:

> **Virtual Scavenger Hunt**
Split your attendees into small teams, and give them a list of items they need to find around their homes. The first team to gather all the items wins!
> **Human Bingo**

This one is a classic icebreaker. Your bingo cards could include things like "heads a start-up" or "loves football" or "knows how to dance." The first person to fill out five spaces in a row calls bingo and wins!

> **Two Truths and a Lie**

Each participant shares three facts about themselves, but only two of them would be true. Other attendees must try and guess which statement is the lie.

6 Send push notifications to inform attendees about networking events

Your event will likely have a lot to offer, and your attendees might not be aware of everything available to them. Send well-timed push notifications to ensure your attendees know about various planned networking activities, and provide reminders about any impromptu sessions, Breakout Rooms or Virtual Lounges

about to open.

Your attendees probably won't attend everything at your event - but they will surely appreciate the opportunity to do so.

7 Gamify networking activities

Humans love games - it's in our nature! A great way to capitalize on this is to award points to your attendees based on their different networking activities. Perhaps they get points for viewing a fellow attendee's profile, or attending a breakout session, or following a sponsor or exhibitor on social media.

Then, display these points on a leaderboard and celebrate the winners! Not only will this inject some light-hearted fun into your overall event, it will further encourage your attendees to be more active during the event!

8 Share connection recommendations with

your attendees

Hubilo's platform offers a Matchmaking Feature, which offers suggestions on who to connect with based on common interests. Sharing these AI-generated recommendations with your attendees is a great way to improve their networking experience - since people can't simply run into each other online in the same way they can at an in-person event, this matchmaking takes care of a lot of the legwork of virtual follow-ups.

Once attendees find others they want to connect with, they can use the Matchmaking Feature to connect instantly via text or video chat, and schedule meetings for later.
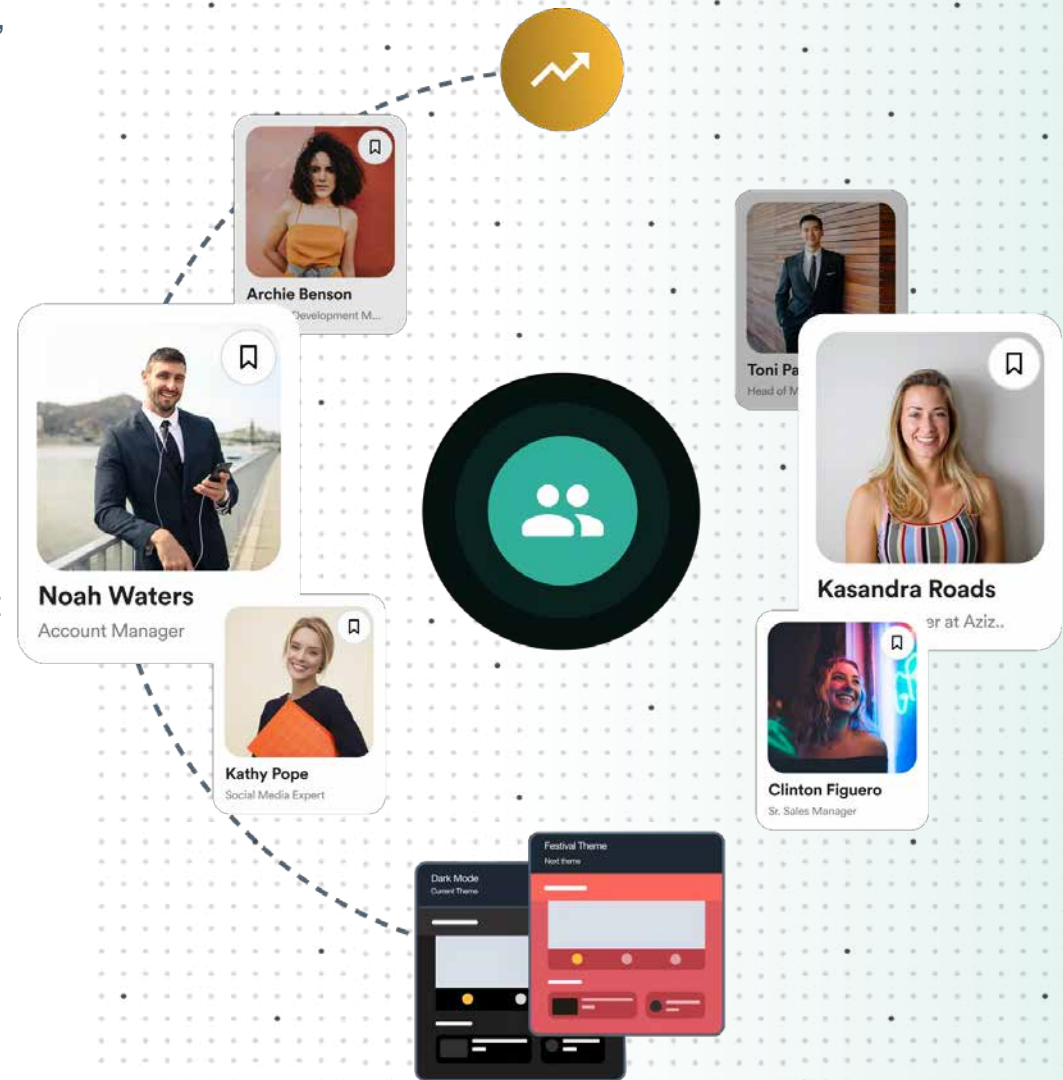
POST-EVENT
NETWORKING

Facilitating networking opportunities during your event is undoubtedly the most important part. But what you provide your attendees after the event can truly set your brand apart from the pack. So how do you keep the spirit of your event going, even after your attendees have left? Here are a few ideas:

1 Create a room on Clubhouse

Clubhouse is a drop-in audio chat app, and a great option for creating common spaces for post-event interactions. It offers a community space where, instead of posting, people can gather and talk with others freely.

Clubhouse's audio-only format is an excellent forum for attendees who otherwise might be too shy to engage in video presentations or sessions. Creating a laid-back space where people can share their opinions, feedback, and comments with each other (as well as your events' speakers) is a golden opportunity for you to keep the conversations about your event going, long after it's over!

2 Host an entertainment session

While your event will surely offer plenty of networking and educational opportunities, you also want to ensure your attendees enjoy themselves. And when you provide good entertainment, you get brownie points for making your attendees smile.

In the case of virtual events, entertainment options like musical performances, magic shows, or standup comedy sessions can work very well. If attendees haven't already interacted during your event, there is a high chance they'll talk to their fellow audience members during these fun, laid-back sessions.

3 Initiate post-event networking sessions between exhibitors and attendees

A great way to keep the activity of your events going long after the sessions have ended is to utilize Virtual Booths. At Virtual Booths, exhibitors can display information through a variety of assets such as static text, logos, banners, video, and even chatbots. If an attendee finds an exhibitor's product or service interesting, they can enter a virtual table with the exhibitor and talk to them in detail. Networking at Virtual Booths can often go on for several days after an event has ended!

You can keep a record of the people viewing different exhibitor's products or downloading files. Understand your audience better by looking at important metrics such as:

> Number of bookmarks per booth
> Number of connections made per booth
> CTA clicks per booth

After your event, you can connect exhibitors with attendees who seemed the most interested in that exhibitor's booth, but might not have gotten the chance to interact with them during the event.

WHAT FOLLOWS AFTER NETWORKING

Making networking an important part of your event strategy is the key to generating great engagement. Not only will you kickstart audience interaction and improve your attendees' enjoyment of your event, but you'll also learn as much as possible about their interests so that you can pursue them accordingly.

It's important that you choose a virtual event platform that gives you access to this type of data and insights about your attendees' networking activities. This will allow you to identify attendees with a high level of interest in your product or service, decide who is a priority to connect with, and follow up with your most promising potential prospects.

Make sure to utilize all the available tools at your disposal to deliver the best networking experience possible. Attendees will remember your event (and be inclined to attend future ones) if you've crafted creative ways to let your

audience connect and engage with the products, material, and each other.

Lastly, remember to collate all the metrics you've gathered, analyze them, and see how you can increase engagement next time.

If you want to host your virtual event on a platform that offers multiple networking options, Hubilo is here for you!

ABOUT HUBILO

Hubilo is the only all-in-one hybrid event platform built to drive engagement - and we do this with the industry's largest suite of engagement and gamification features.

Engagement on your fully branded event, backed by your designated full-time customer success team, ensures every event run on the Hubilo platform executes perfectly every time. All the enterprise security, integrations, and analytics you need - with the engagement and white-glove support you want.

Visit hubilo.com to learn more.

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