



THE 5 PRINCIPLES OF DIGITALLY TRANSFORMED EVENTS



Hubilo

INTRODUCTION

Before 1995, the idea of virtual presentations, or webinars, had not entered the lexicon of the public. Then WebEx was founded and went public five years later in July 2000. Now, webinars are a ubiquitous marketing tactic, universally employed for their ability to scale connection to prospects and audiences.

In 2021, we find ourselves at a similar crossroads, but instead of digitizing presentations, we are looking to digitize the last analog channel in marketing – events.

Traditional events are planned months in advance, consume large budgets, are rarely inclusive, and result in enormous amounts of waste. In a post 2020 world where ROI, diversity, environmental impact matter, marketers cannot operate as they once did.

With the technologies and shifting priorities of the modern era, the question that this e-book tries to answer is why are we still doing events like it's 1995? Will events evolve to be efficient, engagement tools? Or will they still be cumbersome, wasteful exercises only for the very richest of companies?

We imagine that this e-book would have been the book we would have written in 1994 if our experience and technology were in the webinar space. It would have been about how webinars were going to change the marketing funnel and how to get a leg up on the competition with that knowledge. Hubilo can't change history, but with over 5 years of experience in building scalable, innovative event technologies and planning in-person & virtual events, we hope to share our knowledge to help event planners prepare for the future.

FROM PRESENTATIONS TO EXPERIENTIAL EVENTS



Prehistoric Era (the 90's)

In 1987, a software company named Forethought, Inc. released the first version of presentation software ever created. Three months later, Microsoft acquired the company for \$14 million dollars, and business meetings were never the same again.

- > 95% of presentations are created with PowerPoint
- > 30 million PowerPoint presentations are given every day
- > 500 million people all over the world are using the software

But ubiquity doesn't necessarily make for a great experience.

Making PowerPoint shareable as webinars removed geographic boundaries beyond the boardroom, however, didn't make the audience experience particularly better. How many times

have you opened another window during a webinar to multitask, online shop, or focus on something else?

According to Visme.co, 4 in 5 business professionals, regardless of age, shifted their focus away from the speaker in the most recent presentation they watched.

Even when we're in person at an event, it's not the PowerPoint that makes the presentation. Just look at TED Talks. Most speakers barely have any slides and yet their videos regularly go viral reaching millions of people (rather than the lucky few thousand who can attend).

These are the events that become cultural moments. This is what new technology and platforms can let you do if you let them.

Modern Era

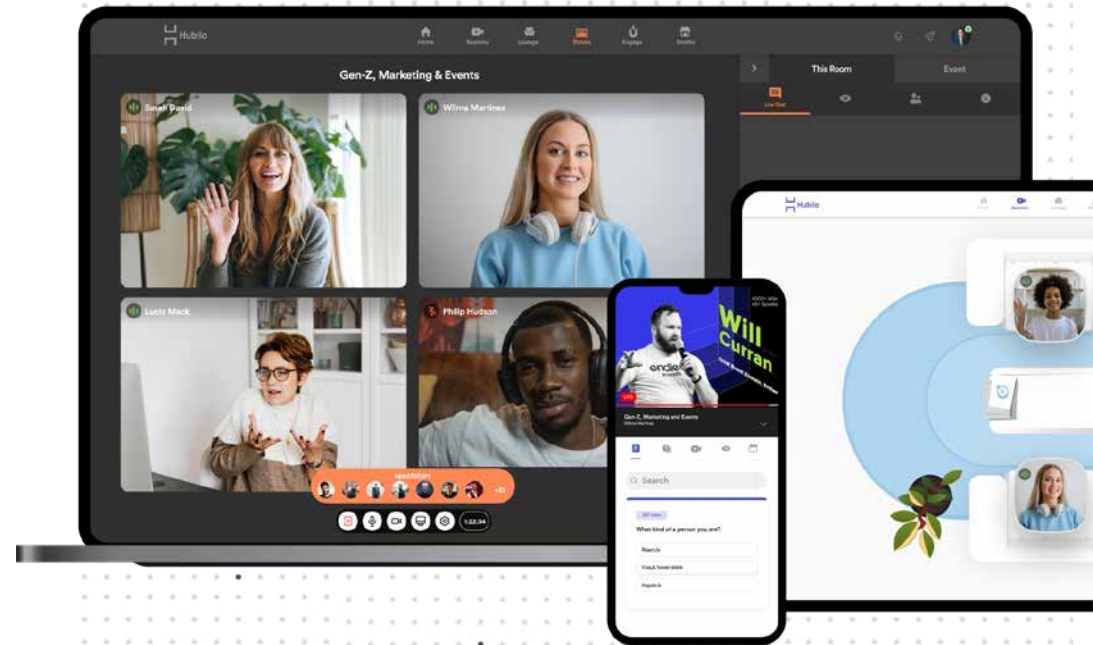
Event planners are often underestimated and prized more for their ability to order canapes rather than their uncanny ability to orchestrate engagement. But the best events not only bring the crowd, they also get them talking, bringing the event a life of its own. This requires a deft understanding of your audience, their personality types, and presenters that can share a fact, wrapped up in a story, with excellent lighting.

What is not required are canapes. Or even, a physical location. And we know this because, in 2020, event planners across the world participated in a forced experiment, transitioning their creative expertise with in-person events into virtual experiences. Great event experiences brought together communities to encourage conversations, engagement, and offer something to reflect on later - building excitement for the next event.

Bad events – and there were many – introduced the term “Zoom fatigue”.

So, if canapes and locations aren’t the only drivers of event success, what separated the great virtual events from the boring ones?

In a word, “engagement”. Platforms that offer different interaction models such as robust chat features, interaction leaderboards, contests, and more fight webinar-fatigue and provide better analytics on what attendees are interested in. This rich data set enables better personalization of future content to drive engagement. In the same way that webinars did not supplant, but rather, added a new tool to share information, virtual events are a new tool to engage audiences.



How Can You Prepare?

Hybrid events will be the new virtual medium. To create an experiential experience at your next virtual or hybrid event:

- **Consider your audience.** Consider how the in-person and virtual can play with your audience. For instance, you can run a virtual event with in-person sessions locally as a complement. Another example is hosting a majority live event but enabling attendees even those present at the event to connect virtually with others.
- **Focus on engagement.** People love to stay connected - whether they're excited about your company or connecting with like-minded folks. You need a medium beyond something that looks like a webinar to let them connect and share ideas.
- **Brand it beautifully.** Your event should feel like you - it shouldn't feel like webinar but an extension of who you're about.

- **Gamify your virtual event experience with contests and polls.** It is a proven method to capture your audience's attention and enrich the event experiences of your attendees.
- **Don't choose between virtual events or physical events.** You can have both, but there are different times when one is more appropriate than the other.

Physical events are good for once-a-year engagement but are very expensive to plan and execute. Best when used for a select audience, and not for broad reach.

Virtual events can be planned more frequently, can reach a broader audience, and at a fraction of the cost. Best for a well-defined, narrow field of interest for a large, geographically displaced audience.

PERSONALIZATION AT SCALE



Prehistoric Era (the 90's)

In 1997, Netflix released its online DVD rental store. With only 925 titles and 30 employees, few could predict the pivot they would later make to being one of the most successful entertainment companies in the world. It's important to note that while Netflix began its business trying to mimic Blockbuster's business model, what they evolved into was something wholly different. They invented a new form of home entertainment audiences didn't even know they wanted. And they did it by being cheaper, more convenient, and more personalized than any of their competitors.

If customers hated returning videos (don't forget to rewind), imagine how challenging it is to have to travel to an event venue, take the day off from work to attend, pay thousands for the privilege of avoiding the throngs of salespeople eager to make commissions, only to be so exhausted by

the end of the day that they hardly remember what was said? While there are many longing to stroll the booth pavilion, we are willing to bet that there are just as many who would prefer to stay home. That is where the event industry finds itself today.

The only question is, do you want to be Blockbuster or Netflix?

It only took Netflix 6 years to bankrupt Blockbuster.

Modern Era

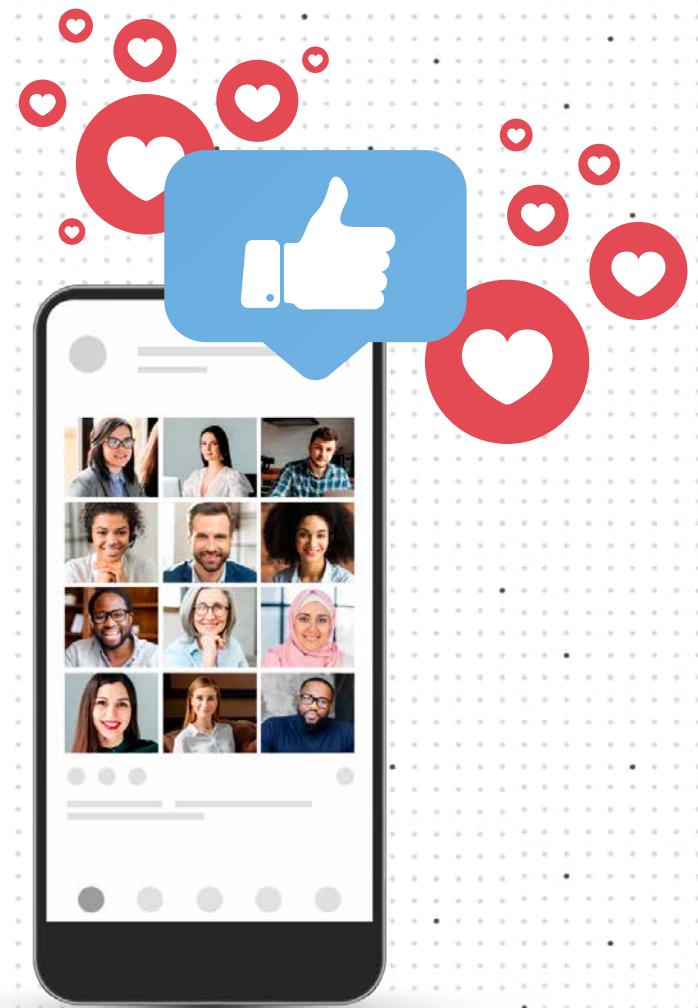
It only took Netflix 6 years to bankrupt Blockbuster, and not just because people really hated the late fees. An outdated business model can easily be overcome by a digitally transformed business strategy that can intelligently wield data and analytics to personalize the experience at scale. When events cost millions of dollars,

months to plan, and results are difficult to measure, it's easy to see why the content presented is designed to appeal to the broadest audience rather than be personalized for the audience.

The events of the future are more about the breakout rooms, and less about the big arena. Attendees, spoiled by personalized recommendations tailored to their consumption histories of music (Pandora), movies (Netflix), and purchases (Amazon), want personalized recommendations at an event of what to attend, who to meet, and where to maximize their time for networking. They see the value of the content, but they don't want to spend an entire day weeding through the basics to find the revelation they're looking for that will improve their way of working.

Ultimately, in a world utterly changed by a global pandemic, events are competing for the

attention of an audience inundated not only with other online events, but other forms of engagement they can get from their screen. Yes, event content may be more useful, but can that really compete with Sangria Secrets with Drag Queens or their favorite show on Netflix? As more experiences can be virtualized than ever before, and audiences have readily adopted these richer forms of engagement, experience bingeing becomes the norm in the same way that binge-watching an entire season of shows in one sitting is relatable today.



How Can You Prepare?

- **Reimagine what online events can be, rather than trying to mimic physical events.**
 It's not all about the headline speakers. The lounges can be great opportunities for entertaining, creative engagement.
- **Define your audience segments carefully.**
 Beyond offering interesting content, you should be able to segment your audience into different groups beyond basic free, paid, or live tickets. This way you can serve specialized content to them and create that special, nurturing feeling.
- **Streamline the event experience.** Choose user interfaces that streamline attendee views, enable personalized calendars, and help attendees focus on their current activities. It's easy to get lost in a virtual event without a well-defined attendee journey.
- **Bring engaging speakers.** It doesn't matter if they're on a physical or virtual stage. Fascinating speakers draw the crowd. Edward Snowden has earned over \$1 million in speaking fees since 2015 while seeking asylum in Russia to sell-out crowds.
- **Ensure your event platform delivers robust analytics and insights.** Every platform will say they provide data, but do they analyze the engagement? Or just how many people attended? The more robust the data, the easier it will be to use those insights to create more relevant, personalized content.

RESPONSIVE

Prehistoric Era (the 90's)

In the late 90's, Comdex peaked as the largest computer expo tradeshow in the world with over 200K attendees and over 2,300 exhibitors. The challenge of navigating a sea of 2,300 exhibitors is perhaps why by 2004, attendance was down to 45K with only 550 exhibitors.

Responsiveness to market realities is key to making events relevant to the audience, but nearly impossible when events take a year to

“By the end of the 1990's Comdex had expanded its focus to include consumer electronics stuff and the Internet,” said Tim Bjarin, an industry consultant who attended his first Comdex in 1981 and has been a longtime member of the show's industry advisory committee. “In 2002 there was a complete shift in the market and the show lost its way.”

plan, requires significant investment that may be difficult to map to ROI, and that's even before something unthinkable, like a pandemic, happens.

If 2020 taught us anything, it should be that adaptability trumps predictability every time.

Modern Era

There's no way to make physical events agile. That's not necessarily a bad thing. A physical event definitely feels more solid to the attendee. But it's difficult to respond to new conditions and showcase your relevancy to today's concerns if it takes months to plan the event. Opportunity costs can be staggering if organizations don't respond fast enough.

Take for example diversity and inclusivity, which is a major priority for many organizations because of the performance boost these programs deliver. Case in point:

- > Gender-diverse organizations' financial performance is 15% better.
- > Ethnically diverse organizations' financial performance is 35% better.
- > For every 10% increase in diversity on executive teams, organizations saw an 8% increase in profitability.

While the numbers above demonstrate how diverse organizations outperform versus their less diverse competition, the same principle can probably be applied to events. It's not a stretch to believe that more inclusive and diverse events would perform better than their non-diverse counterparts. Virtual and hybrid events enable inclusivity by allowing more people to participate, more conversations with unique perspectives to be had, and more opportunity for innovation to be sparked.

Beyond inclusivity, a hybrid event that incorporates virtual elements delivers resiliency

and business continuity. Hurricane shuts down your event venue? No problem, just reroute everyone online. Social unrest in the area? Ensure safety with a virtual event backup. Pandemic conditions make your product more relevant? Plan an event in days rather than months, invite your customers and prospects, and close new deals before your competitors even know what they're going to offer. Virtualization can remove many of the risks of event planning and make sales and marketing organizations truly agile.



How Can You Prepare?

- Rethink your marketing touchpoints. Consider incorporating virtual events as a powerful tool in your marketing funnel to close more business, much in the same way that webinars are part of every marketer's toolkit. For many people now normalized to virtual meetings, they are nearly as effective as face-to-face meetings.
- **Don't wait to engage with customers when market conditions change.** Relevancy is the key to driving engagement. Respond quickly to customer concerns before your competitors do.
- **Think about diversity and inclusivity beyond the differences you can see.** Virtual components enable different personality types to engage in a way they may not be able to in person. The trick is to offer many different mediums to engage and incentives like gamification that keep them interested.

ROI IS EVERYTHING



Prehistoric Era (the 90's)

When in-person events were the rage, the most attributable data to measure ROI was restricted to ticket sales and sponsorship revenue.

Although post-event surveys added a layer of insight around satisfaction and engagement, convincing attendees to complete a survey in the first place required herculean effort. Thus, event organizers, sponsors, and brands were willing to overlook the fact that one could not truly measure the effectiveness of an event, let alone try to improve it with data and insight.

Modern Era

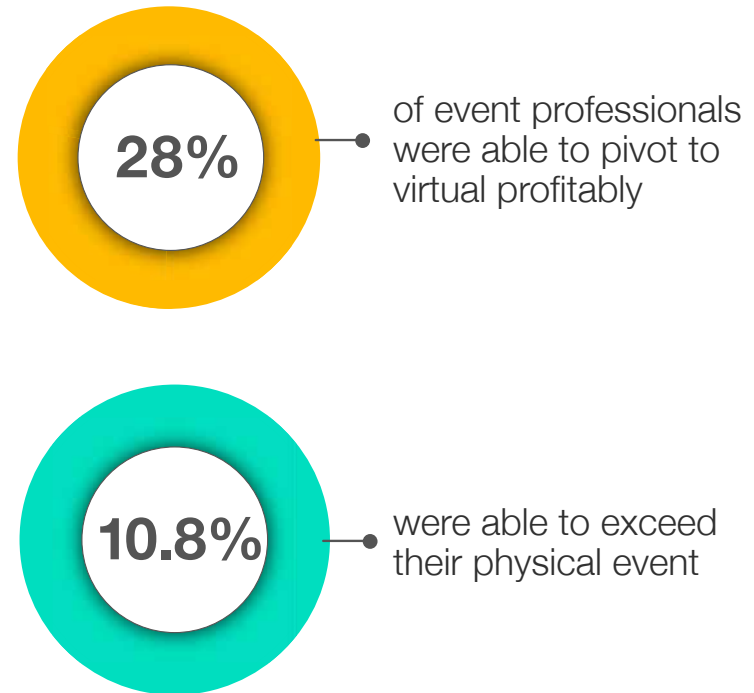
In contrast, virtual events have opened the possibility of measuring true engagement levels, close to real-time, and with more depth than the traditional surveys of the past. Much in the same

way that Netflix can analyze your viewing history and recommend movies you might like, events can do the same with topics, networking, and matchmaking you with specific exhibitors you may be looking for.

When attendees can personalize their event experience to focus on the most important topics, their engagement levels go up and so does the potential of ROI for you and your sponsors. Event organizers, using data and analytics, can continuously optimize the content making every event more engaging, delivering more ROI than the last.

Despite the advantages that virtual events deliver in terms of data and analytics, event professionals have been slow to adapt. An EventMB study showed that 28% of event professionals were able to pivot to virtual profitably, while only 10.8% were able to exceed the profitability of physical events.

This represents a massive opportunity for savvy event planners who want to deliver more value to their clients, and continuously improve their event properties.



How Can You Prepare?

- › **Measure everything.** Invest in your knowledge of data and analytics and how you can use it to differentiate your event experiences from others.
- › **Choose partners wisely.** Partner with organizations that understand in-person, virtual, and hybrid events, who can gather data effortlessly, present insights that planners can easily understand, and ensure that you can strategize performance metrics for your next event.
- › **Prioritize engagement.** Leverage a platform that offers a variety of engagement features that can be tracked to gain insights that can up level your next event.
- › **Share your knowledge** with your sponsors or exhibitors. Make it easy for them to understand how they've performed at your event, so they understand the value of working with you and leverage that at the next event.
- › **Integrate your virtual platforms with your existing technology stack such as your marketing automation or CRM tool.** This will make it easier to understand your customer journey and offer different ways to engage.

SCALABILITY

Prehistoric Era (the 90's)

In 1995, communication between brands and consumers was mostly a one-way conversation. Mark Zuckerberg had just entered middle school, and it would be another 9 years before his brainchild, Facebook, would begin to change the way people connect with each other in the digital world. It would be another 5 years before media streaming company Pandora would be founded and set up the precedent for personalization at scale. And another 2 years before Netflix would dream up endless amounts of entertainment from home.

Scalability was limited to the physical domain, e.g., venue capacity, budget restrictions, and human resources to coordinate it all. Event presenters presented. Audiences, for the most part, pretended to listen but mostly, networked, enticed by free swag that most likely, ended up in a landfill. With staggering costs for venues, food,

swag, production and A/V, and fierce competition for attendees, most events happened once or twice a year. Most organizations simply could not scale their resources enough to do it any more frequently.

Modern Era

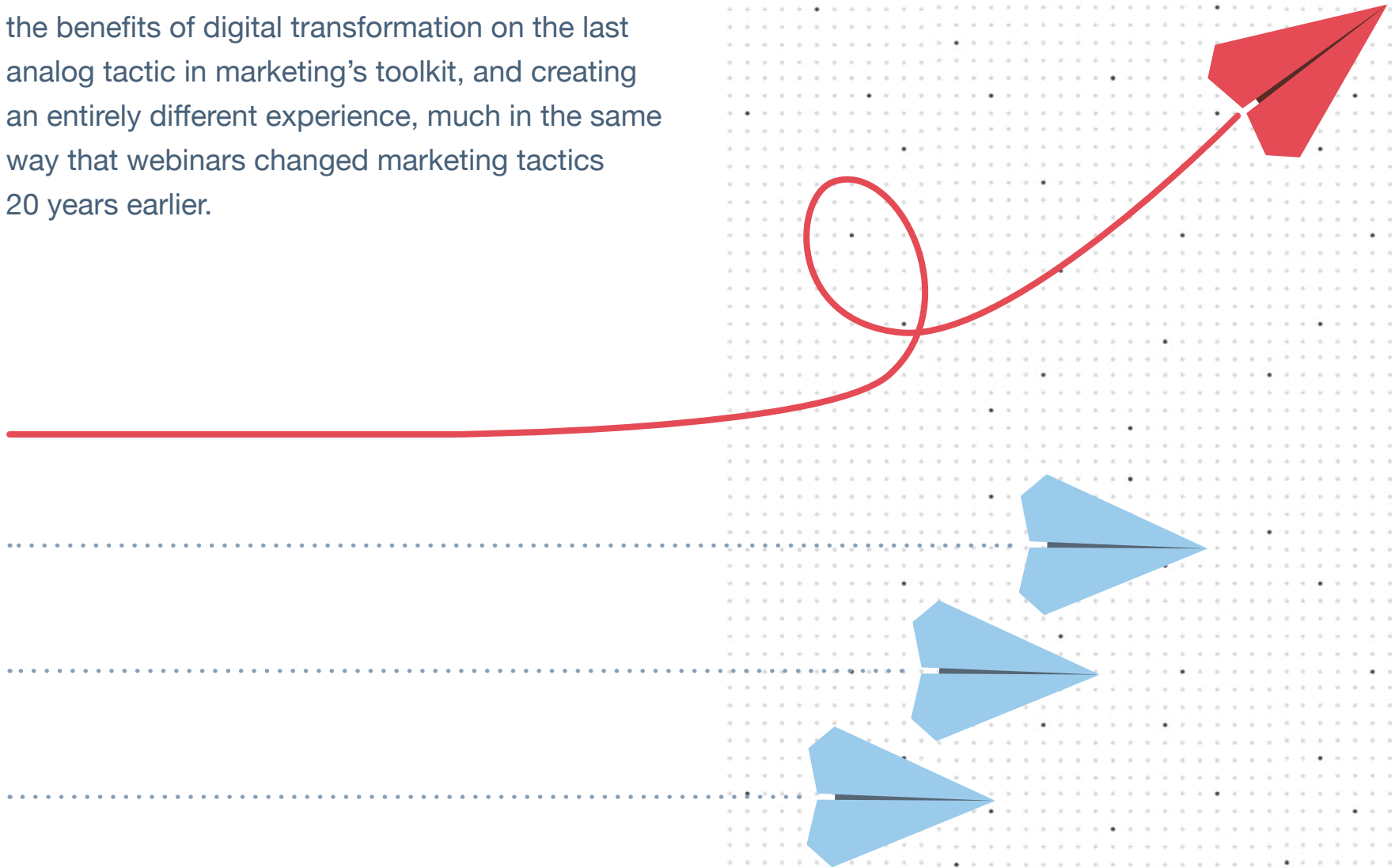
For event organizers who digitally transform their events, it's not venue capacity, time, or resources that limit scalability. These problems are largely solved by technology and modern event organizers can organize an event for thousands of attendees complete with virtual lounges, in the time it would take to tour a venue. Scalability is not about the number of attendees but about the ability to engage them.

Why does engagement matter in today's virtual event environment?

Truthfully, it has always mattered. However, it was nearly impossible to measure. Most event organizers would say that the audience was highly engaged, but what were they measuring? The number of questions? The amount of laughter? Their observations of drink orders after the event? No one really knows.

With a digitally transformed event platform however, now we're getting somewhere. Every contest entry, every comment, every interaction can be measured and recorded, code framed and analyzed. And an audience who has lived through over a year of quarantine is here for it. **The only limit for an event organizer is the number of imaginative ways they can engage an audience and now they have the data to know what works.** Whether it's through celebrity hosts or virtual escape rooms, or even drag queen bingo, a renaissance in event creativity will likely result from the digital transformation of events.

Tomorrow's virtual events are not so much trying to replicate physical events, but rather, reaping all the benefits of digital transformation on the last analog tactic in marketing's toolkit, and creating an entirely different experience, much in the same way that webinars changed marketing tactics 20 years earlier.



How Can You Prepare?

- **Allow the crowd to self-organize.** With no physical limits for audience size, you can now invite everyone to your party. AI-driven recommendation engines can help attendees find the content they want and the people they want to meet.
- **Ensure your contract includes top-notch support before, during and after the event.** More eyes are watching for a virtual or hybrid event, so it needs to run smoothly.

While all virtual platforms guarantee almost 100% uptime, things happen, and you need to be able to ensure someone can assist you no matter if you're planning or running the event.

- **Consider localization.** Reach audiences you might not have been able to by enabling connections globally by offering multilingual support.

THE NATURE OF GATHERING



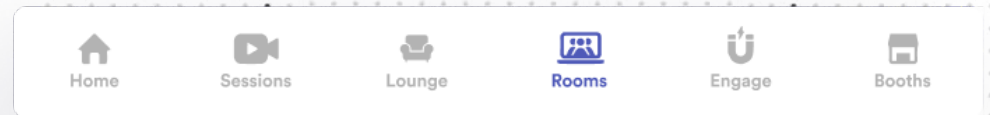
Humankind has been drawn to gather from our oldest ancestors to our socially distanced present. The question of physical versus hybrid event is not an either/or paradigm. The analog channel is not dead, nor will it ever be so long as humankind seeks connection.

In the same way that sales presentations are still made in person every day, and not over WebEx, event professionals don't have to choose between digital transformation and in-person events. They can have both. But make no mistake – digital transformation is as inevitable as the human need to gather. Those who embrace it will have one of the most powerful tools in their arsenal to reach more attendees and a head start on the competition. They will drive better, more measurable results and deliver even more events than they did before the pandemic.

Because when events no longer need millions of dollars and months to plan, events can go

beyond being an annual occurrence with bland, basic content designed to appeal to everyone. Experiential, personalized, responsive events that increase ROI and scalability will become a natural tactic, used to bring people together more regularly whether they are employees or clients, experts or novices, large companies or small.

Virtual events were not a way to survive 2020. But rather, a new place to gather and grow, drive connection and inclusivity, and spark our imaginations.



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 our 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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