An »RPG Company

Multi-modal Hybrid Event Experience

Whitepaper

Table of contents

Executive summary

Event experiences have undergone a paradigm shift in the post-Covid era.

Once perceived as an exclusive add-on, virtual events have become the new normal. Livestreaming technologies, integrated event platforms, and connected experiences are buzzwords that drive how we engage and interact with customers.

As we head into 2023, marketers are prepared for virtual events' dos and don'ts. New trends include immersive experiences and engagement platforms that create seamless customer journeys across different channels and modes.

Against the backdrop of these newfound methodologies and attributes making their way into the marketing realm, this white paper discusses varied facets of events and customer experiences.

Brands are now considering hybrid events and are looking at events as a complete program rather than approaching them in a fragmented way. Interlocking with in-person experiences and enabling an always-on content and engagement platform to support hybrid event experiences is the immediate next step in the virtual event space.

Event experience, what has changed?

Interactions between a brand, attendees and participants, and the event service provider across the virtual event lifecycle — from pre-promotions and registrations to breakout sessions and post-event emails, account for, what we call, an event experience.

The event experience has undergone a paradigm shift in 2021-22. With in-person events slowly making their way back in the post-covid era, brands are increasingly opting for virtual events to reach and engage audiences. According to a survey by Bizzabo, 90 percent of marketers want to include virtual events in their strategy.
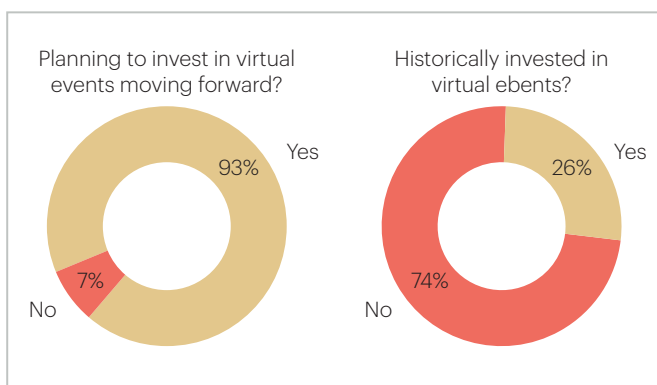

Image source: Bizzabo

Looking at the complete program of virtual events, organizations worldwide have begun to think strategically about what events to run, how to run them, technology choices, and the teams needed to execute them successfully.

To understand how businesses are reacting to this shift, Zensar and Indigo Slate, a Zensar company, commissioned a survey on virtual events. One of the key findings on the most popular virtual event engagement platforms is illustrated below:
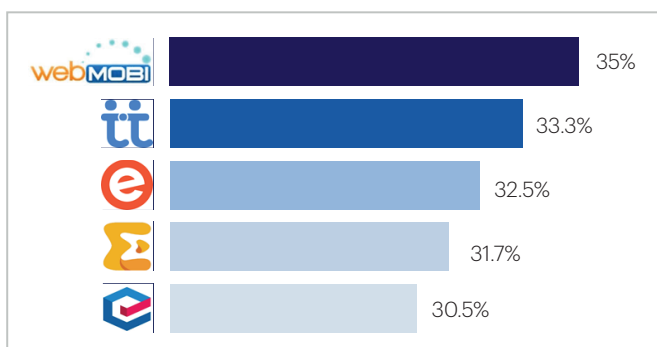

Image source: Indigoslate Everywhere Experiences

About 93 percent of respondents found virtual events appealing because they allow them to build meaningful professional relationships with anyone, anywhere in the world.

Virtual events are budget-friendly, scale better than in-person events, and expand a brand's reach to a broader audience. Not only are they affordable, but they also allow attendees to shape their own event experience.

Rise of hybrid events

There is no doubt that virtual events are here to stay. They require minimal overhead, are not constrained by location, and enrich the attendee experience by allowing them to participate through their preferred medium. However, while virtual events are the new normal, live events will always be essential to any robust event program. Now, it's time to think about a different type of event — hybrid events. These events combine in-person and virtual events simultaneously and deliver seamless experiences with engaging content across both platforms. That said, the right mix of virtual, hybrid, and live in-person events depends on an organization's marketing goals and business objectives.

As with any marketing program, choosing which events should go hybrid and which deserve a different approach is imperative. The table below depicts examples of events and how they can be treated.

Event	Try Hybrid	Live/Virtual
Panel Discussions	✓	
Product Demo	✓	
Training Event	✓	
Conferences/Seminars	✓	
VIP Events	✓	✓
Recruiting Events	✓	
Workshops	✓	
Global Townhalls	✓	
Sales Kickoff's	✓	
Customer appreciation Lunch	✓	✓

Equally crucial is to maintain a seamless and consistent hybrid event experience. A successful experience requires engaging content, marketing the event, a smooth registration process, and appointment scheduling paired with a powerful virtual streaming provider.

Challenges and impact

With the right digital event strategies and technologies, organizers can design the entire event experience for optimal attendee interactivity and engagement. However, creating highly engaging, immersive, and unforgettable virtual or hybrid events isn't always easy.

Brands and event organizers typically struggle to provide meaningful and seamless experiences while hosting hybrid events. Let's quickly look at some key challenges and their potential impact.

Take an in-person event and replicate it for the virtual world: Brands do not design audience-based agendas. Though the content may be the same, the way it is presented will be different in physical and virtual events. For example, showing virtual attendees interactive sessions in which only in-person attendees can participate.

Tool and technologies: Event technology providers cannot yet deliver relevant and seamless experiences. Brands are still using webinar platforms to host virtual/hybrid events. Hence they miss the experiences of a fireside chat, the ability to move from one breakout session to another, and more.

Engaging content: Content quality is a significant pain point most virtual event attendees cite. Long hours, powerpoint-led sessions, and a lack of interactive content make the audience quit sessions before time.

Element of exclusivity: In-person events offer merchandise and giveaways such as t-shirts, bottles, books, and other brag-worthy swag. However, brands fail to bring these elements into virtual events. If the attendees don't feel exclusive or special, they will most likely not return to your hybrid events.
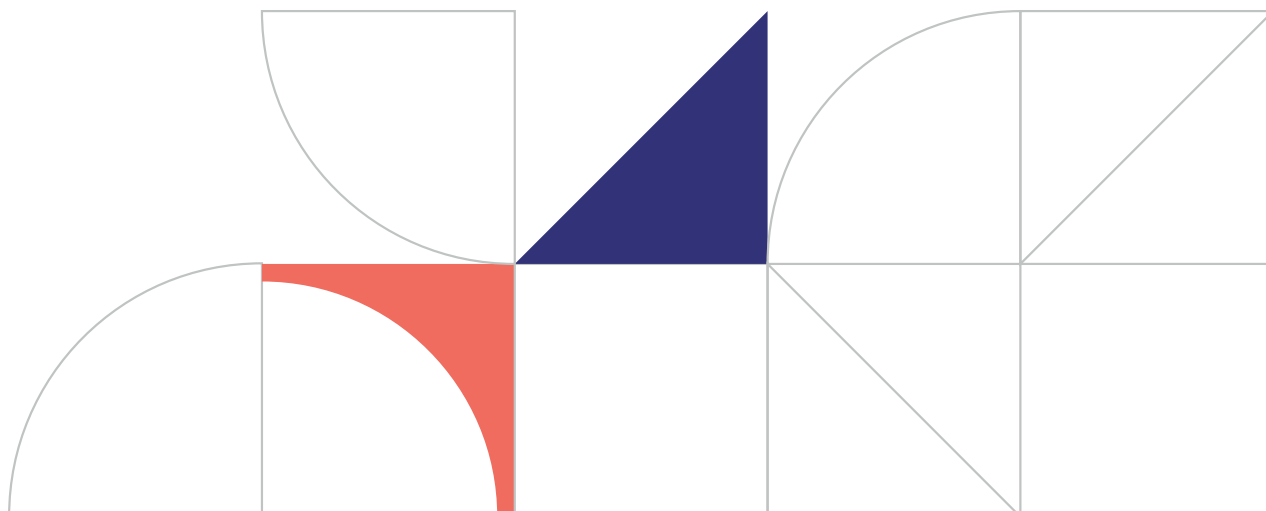
> "
> **Whereas in-person events are more theatrical in nature, virtual events need a cinematic approach. Audiences aren't captivated by an hour long stream of a single camera pointed at a person on stage. You can create dynamic experiences, even if your hosts are sitting six feet apart.**
>
> – Bob Bejan, CVP Global Events, Microsoft
> "

Events are an essential tactic marketers use to interact with prospects, leads, and customers. To differentiate virtual and hybrid events in an increasingly noisy market and deliver value, brands need to focus on the uniqueness of the experience they provide to their attendees, sponsors, and partners.

Attributes of a seamless hybrid event experience

The pandemic resulted in a fundamental shift in how organizations work — establishing hybrid work as the new norm. A similar trend can be seen with events, with most enterprises preferring a hybrid option, presenting both physical and virtual opportunities for people to choose from.

Hence for key marquee events, marketers will have to go hybrid for higher engagement and more significant marketing ROI.

> **People attend marketing events for their experience — and digital substitutes will never rival their physical versions in this regard. For this reason, Forrester, predicts that hybrid models will become the dominant format post-pandemic.**
>
> – Forrester Research Report

That said, the shift to hybrid events will need structures to be established across people, processes, and technologies for brands to deliver seamless experiences. Let's take a quick look at the attributes of a seamless hybrid event experience:

A modular platform: Different events have different requirements depending on the audience size, duration, global vs. local execution, etc. Hence brands may not need all functionalities. Quick-change systems, plug and play modules result in shorter execution times.

Appropriate tech stack: Event providers must leverage the current technology stack of the brand, requiring minimal change management, adding flexibility and agility to connect with existing adtech, martech, and brandtech systems. This enables brands to increase the ROI of existing investments.

Include interactive elements: The platform should also be able to include interactive features such as:
a) Video rolls to keep attendees interested and engaged
b) Omnichannel and multi-modal capabilities for seamless shifts between channels and modes (fireside chats, networking rooms, videos, voice, etc.)
c) Allow attendees to swing between in-person and virtual attendance in the same event

Engaging content: As cited above, content quality is one of the biggest challenges for any event. The modular platform must be able to host content in different formats. This is vital to keep the session engaging and interactive for attendees.

Data security: The most critical need for hybrid events is to keep the attendee information secured and governed by privacy and cookie consent compliance. The event provider should ensure the authentication of events, access and secure logins, privacy certificates, and account lockouts.

Personalized experiences: Another attribute is to include customized experiences in the event. There are several ways to introduce personalization for better engagement. Some examples include a dedicated landing page for each attendee showcasing their session progress, real-time dashboards, breakout session recommendations, networking opportunities, and so on.

In summary, a hybrid event experience needs a multi-modal platform, which enables marketers to create customer interactions that leverage the unique capabilities of each mode of communication (voice, website, email, SMS, etc.) to provide a seamless experience across the event lifecycle.
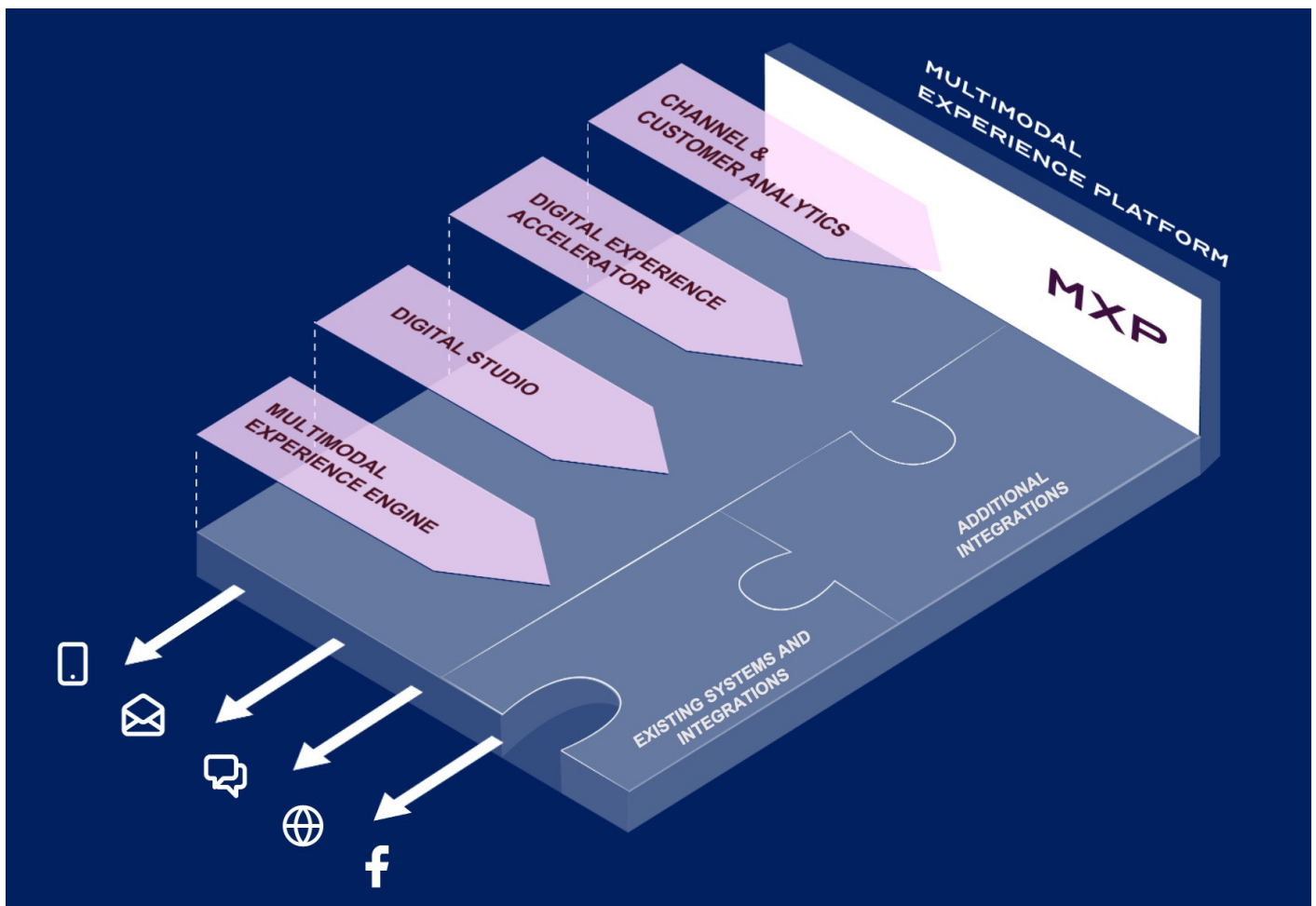
Zensar's multi-modal experience platform

Having discussed the various elements involved in delivering a seamless hybrid experience, we would like to introduce the multi-modal experience platform (MXP).

MXP enables delivering a multi-modal experience to customers on simultaneous channels to support a single interaction and on the channel of choice with a seamless experience across concurrent channels and multiple modes.

MXP modules are depicted in the diagram below:

Zensar's leading-edge MXP solution works on four fundamental principles to elevate the hybrid event experience:

Flexibility: Connects easily with multiple tools and technologies

Agility: Allows configurations of events and building sponsor assets quickly

Plug-n-play: Reuses existing solutions; no need to build the platform from the ground up

Scalability: Extends platform functionalities without impacting existing capability

MXP's modular architecture facilitates adoption in almost all technology landscapes, allowing clients to adopt the solution at any stage in their transformation journey.

MXP in action: Hi-tech and insurance

MXP enables the creation of seamless customer journeys across virtual event experiences, enabling proactive participation and interlocking with in-person events.

To confidently go to market across respective events, hi-tech and insurance organizations have varied requirements from technology tools. Let's take a sneak peek at how MXP can play a pivotal role for hi-tech and insurance marketers.

Hi-tech giants

These clients are particular about their data being in-house and are hesitant to include any off-the-shelf platform. MXP with its plug-and-play uniqueness and ability to keep the data in their existing ecosystem is the right choice.

Hi-tech event durations can vary from anywhere between half a day up to even five days. Hence a modular platform like MXP fits the bill perfectly as hi-tech organizations can leverage the module based on the event.

They have a good content mix, such as videos, demos, articles, ads, and more. They want to reach out to the attendees post the event as well. Hence MXP's flexibility with universal connectors to martech, adtech, and brandtech enables going beyond the events.

Insurance players

With intermediaries, merchants, and agents being their backbone, insurance players need to virtually coach them through interactive content. MXP being an agile platform can assist in quick build and publishing of various content formats.

Since their customer data has associated PII, these clients are obviously hesitant to share data outside their ecosystem. Insurers can leverage MXP on-premise or host it on the cloud keeping their data secure.

Need to ringfence existing customers with virtual exhibitions inclusive of simultaneous use of multiple channels, networking opportunities, and engaging content. MXP's ability to manage modes based on customers' choices helps deliver seamless experiences.
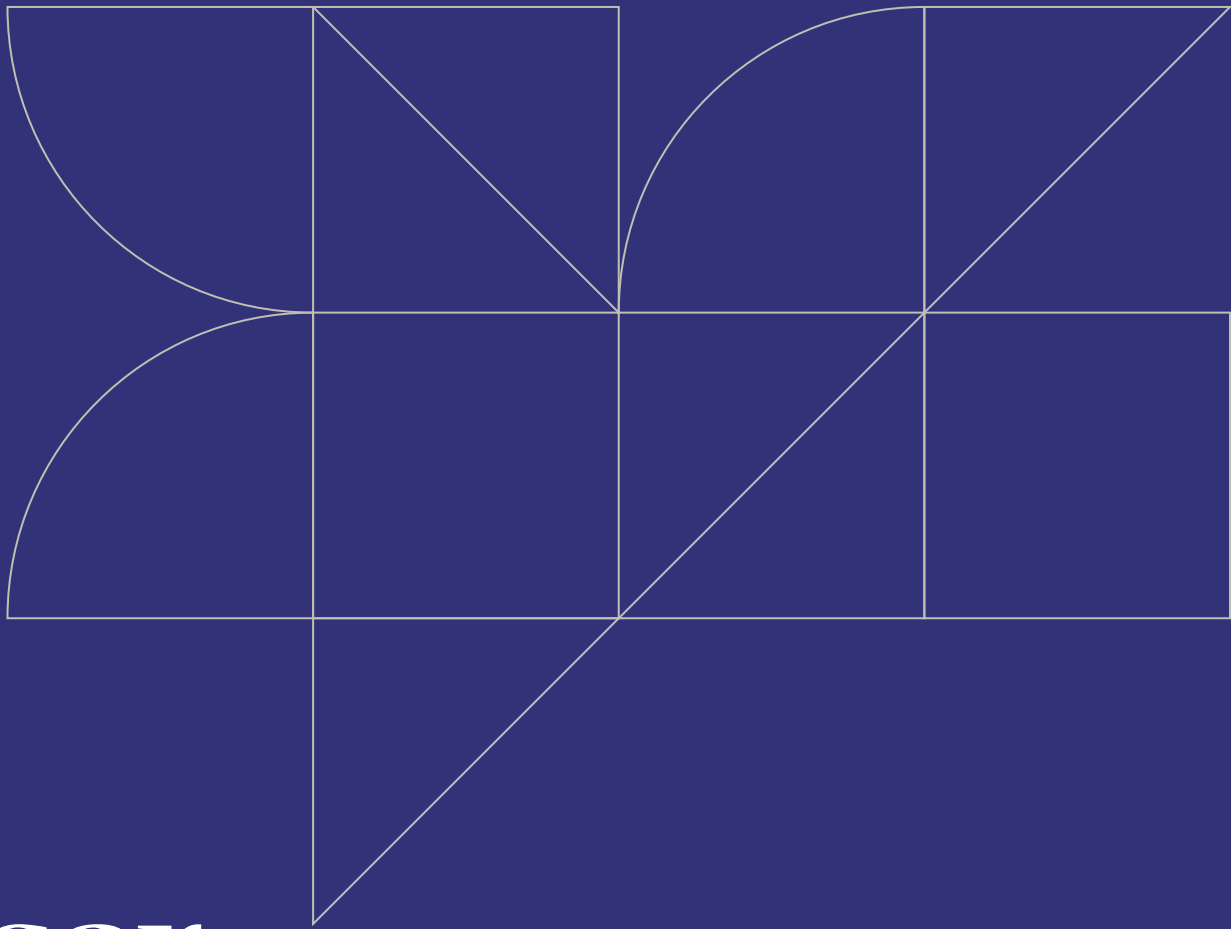
Conclusion

Innovations in virtual events, backed by impeccable technology, have never been served like they are today. Multi-modal platforms that orchestrate and integrate different channels to improve customer experience and deliver better business results are quickly becoming priority requirements for brands.

While audiences will take some time to spring back to full-fledged in-person events, brands must be prepared to execute hybrid events and deliver seamless cross-channel experiences to the ever-demanding audience.

As hybrid events rise, your events need to be more connected with all your marketing channels — website, social handles, email communications, and mobile. Moreover, a modular platform will prove cost-effective as it allows enterprises to pick and choose modules relevant to their marketing initiatives.

Connect with us to unlock avenues for a seamless hybrid event experience and learn more about Zensar's Multi-modal Experience Platform.

zensar

An ◈ **RPG** Company

We conceptualize, build, and manage digital products through experience design, data engineering, and advanced analytics for over 145 leading companies. Our solutions leverage industry-leading platforms to help our clients be competitive, agile, and disruptive while moving with velocity through change and opportunity.

With headquarters in Pune, India, our 11,500+ associates work across 30+ locations, including Milpitas, Seattle, Princeton, Cape Town, London, Singapore, and Mexico City.

For more information please contact: **velocity@zensar.com | www.zensar.com**