



## How to INNOVATE your Virtual and Hybrid Events: A Playbook

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The term “Zoom fatigue” has been thrown around somewhat excessively since the start of the pandemic. As I discussed in a recent [podcast episode](#), when Medical Affairs teams were first forced to bring all of their meetings online, there was a steep learning curve for many in terms of what does and does not work.

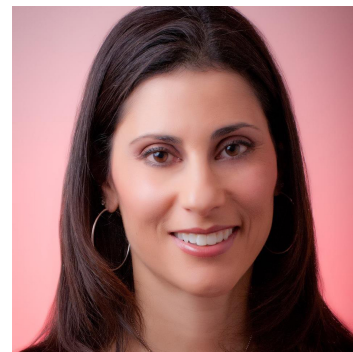
### Virtualizing advisory boards and other stakeholder meetings

One thing that became clear very quickly at the start of the pandemic was that a full-day in-person meeting does *not* translate well to a full-day web meeting. In fact, based on Impetus Digital’s 13 years of experience, we usually suggest capping synchronous web meetings at around 3-4 hours.

To successfully [translate an all-day advisory board meeting to virtual](#), the most important thing is to **minimize the didactic content and allow ample time for workshops and brainstorming**. An effective way to share clinical data and prepare the advisors, while shortening the time of the live meeting, is to **add an asynchronous pre-meeting touchpoint**. This allows the advisors to review the data on their own time, whenever and wherever it is the most convenient for them.

Likewise, **adding a post-meeting asynchronous touchpoint** allows the advisors to debrief and reflect on the learnings from the live meeting. This combination of live (in-person or web) meetings with multiple asynchronous touchpoints throughout the year also helps create authentic relationships with the participants and turns stakeholder *meetings* into thriving *communities*.

**Leveraging a variety of interactive tools** is important if opting for this longitudinal hybrid approach. Web meetings, surveys, and online discussion boards definitely have a place, but



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having a large toolbox and expert guidance on how and when to use those tools will make all the difference.

### Designing successful virtual and hybrid events

It's not just advisory boards and other small-group meetings that have gone virtual. Larger events such as conferences, corporate meetings, hackathons, and medical education events were all forced to go online when travelling restrictions were put in place. For these larger, often multi-day, events, the keys to success are **simplicity** and **personalization**.

*Simplicity* means having everything on a single portal, with no need to launch a different app for polling, chats, or networking. It means having all event data in one place. It means only having one vendor to coordinate with, and it means peace of mind for the organizer. However, it does not necessarily mean that "less is more."

This is where *personalization* comes in. Event attendees can be broadly classified into three groups: "skimmers," "swimmers," and "deep-divers," and the virtual format allows all three personalities to be catered to. For example, deep-divers want to review a poster in detail whereas a skimmer just wants to get a summary of key findings, ideally through interactive buttons and easily digestible graphics. To [avoid run-of-the-mill, "one-size-fits-all" events](#) and keep attendees interested and engaged throughout, the event platform needs to be fully customizable, with innovative tools and a range of data visualization and agenda options.

### Virtual and hybrid events remove barriers to participation

According to a [2020 report by Reuters Events](#), over 70% of life science leaders in the US expect that HCPs will prefer fewer or no face-to-face meetings with reps once things get back to "normal." Additionally, almost 85% of respondents believe that medical congresses will never go back to the way they were and that there will always be a virtual element present.

Offering a virtual option allows larger and more diverse groups of participants to attend, removing geographical, language, time zone, and travel barriers. In turn, this results in a greater opportunity for serendipitous connections and breakthroughs. Further, by adding pre- and post-event activities, **virtual events can be stretched far beyond the typical 2-5 days of an in-person conference**, giving sponsors and exhibitors more reach and enhancing networking opportunities.

At conferences, so much of the learning happens outside of the event itself. However, our experience shows that relationships can be effectively developed and sustained online. By offering **multiple, personalized networking options**, as well as incorporating gamification elements and fun social events, you can create authentic connections online.

To accommodate a variety of learning and reviewing styles, **meetings and events can be segmented into bite-sized touchpoints** that can be completed at one's convenience. For external stakeholder meetings, content and questions can be customized and delivered to

parallel groups of physicians, nurses, allied health providers, patients, and/or payers to gather more granular insights from multiple perspectives. Alternatively, regional groups of participants can be assembled to compare and contrast their local experiences.

### Innovative ways for Medical Affairs to engage their stakeholders virtually

The virtual/hybrid format is ideal not just for conferences and advisory boards. Comprehensive online platforms like the Impetus InSite Platform® can also be used for [cutting-edge applications](#) like:

- Case study submissions and discussions
- Co-development and execution of educational programs
- MSL training
- Digital MSL offices
- Community boards for healthcare providers
- Research grant submission and review programs
- Congress e-huddles and debrief sessions
- Treatment pathway profiling
- Patient journey mapping
- Internal meetings, POA discussions, product launches, and much more.

It sounds cliché, but [the possibilities really are endless](#). To ensure that your program runs seamlessly, it is imperative to choose not only a comprehensive platform but also a vendor with deep expertise in creating virtual events. The chosen vendor should provide white-glove strategic and digital services to create confident and blissful experiences for event organizers and participants alike.

### The silver lining

For all the heartbreak and uncertainty that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought, there is a silver lining in that we have been given an opportunity for *true* digital transformation. While some late adopters might still pine for more traditional engagements, digital is here to stay, and it is only getting bigger and bolder. Once we change our mindset to think outside the box and explore all the possibilities that it brings, Medical Affairs teams will reap the benefits 100 times over.