

# The future of B2B events:

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE  
OF EVENTS ELEVATED BY  
TWO YEARS OF CRISIS

## HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

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## SECTION 1

# The return of the physical event!



**STEVE KEMISH,**  
Propolis Hive expert,  
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Without digital events, many businesses wouldn't have been able to survive – and continue to survive – the pandemic. Of course, the pandemic has left its mark, and it's unlikely that any business will go back to functioning exactly as it did before. It makes good sense, therefore, to take stock of the current situation, and consider what's right for the future. How will your events be structured into 2023, and beyond?

There's a lot that is in flux, but one thing that is crystal clear is that events are back and are here to stay! Sales and marketing teams have leaned heavily on them over many years, and the opportunity to put events at the centre of their business toolkit will remain.

The interesting question is: 'in what format?' This report gives great insight and commentary on the current direction of travel (spoiler alert: there are many directions for you to take!), and how a blended and balanced approach will become the norm. Therefore, modern event curation and management will necessitate a blending of old skills (rock-solid planning, coupled with a healthy sprinkle of creativity – be it venue, content, or both) with modern requirements around digital and technology.

The scrutiny on event success will remain, but it's possible that digital events offer greater hope for those striving to prove ROI. Digital transformation has not only provided us with more tools and options to showcase our brand and values, but digital typically leaves us with more data – all of which is useful for measurement, following up and insight. This helps us to prove the direct value of the events we both host and attend.

As an industry, we will likely learn fastest by taking inspiration from live sports, television and theme parks – diverse places where we can benchmark their approaches to multiple-audience-experiences and adapt for our own purposes.

I'd predict that the events that succeed will be the ones that ensure the experience for both the physical and virtual audiences is world-class, even if a different approach is taken for both. In fact, a one-size-fits-all model is no longer acceptable. Consider how TV chat shows or live sporting events ensure the audience in the room or stadia enjoy a world-class experience, without detriment to their television audiences (and vice versa). They may result in a different experience, but both are valuable and can co-exist happily in such entertainment spaces.

With that in mind, why can't the same apply in our more formal and business-centred industry too?

Whilst looking outside of our industry is important, benchmarking closer to home remains vital. After all, we are still in a state of evolution, so keep your eyes open for bright ideas (or epic fails) from your direct competition, as well as via the wider community. Of course, Propolis is one such place to start, providing you with a safe place to learn from others, as well as providing feedback from your own experience. An iterative approach to each event will mean you not only continue to deliver a better product for attendees, sponsors, stakeholders and colleagues, but you can also remain nimble, adapting to trends and subtle changes in consumption behaviour as we go through to this new hybrid era.

Lastly, harnessing technology and coupling it with the vital event curation skills will also be critical. Regardless of the medium, the stalwarts of content and venue (experience) remain the vital focus for events teams throughout the year ahead and beyond.





## SECTION 2

# Marketing events are back, but they're different



**PETER O'NEILL,**  
lead analyst,  
B2B Marketing

Over the past two and a half years, marketing events have changed dramatically. For the sake of clarity, by 'marketing events,' we mean events run by an organisation for its prospects, customers and business partners (usually a one or two-day conference with potentially hundreds, or even thousands, of attendees). When the pandemic began, physical events were put on hold altogether, and the acceptance of *purely digital* marketing events, among both organisers and attendees, has matured much faster.

The accelerated adoption of digital events has led to innovation in both presentation and interaction, changing the expectations of event attendees forever. Gone are the days when businesspeople will sit through hours of simple talking head videos and slide decks; they now expect a modern media experience with content provided in many forms tuned to their context and providing actionable advice on the questions topmost on their minds.

Furthermore, as physical events begin to return to marketing calendars, there are questions about their new role in the marketing strategy. Many companies, for instance, want to combine the advantages of actually meeting up and networking in-person, while still providing that modern

media experience to enhance both audience reach and their branding. These 'hybrid events' are becoming a key consideration for all players, as attendees want the choice of attending from home or in-person.

**They key question this report will seek to answer is: what does the future of B2B marketing events look like in a post-Covid era?**

In order to build this report, we did not run a quantitative survey. Instead, we held long interviews with six senior executives in and around the B2B marketing event industry for deep insight into the topic. This report documents those interviews, as well as some insights and additional research I have done as an industry analyst. The interviews were with senior individuals from the following key categories:

**Venue owners:** Venue owners were asked about the expectations they're seeing from their clients: event organisers and event delegates. What are the requirements for running a physical event in 2022 and beyond?

**Event delegates:** Delegates were asked about their reasons for attending both physical and digital events. What drives them to attend a physical or a digital event?

What are their expectations from digital, physical and/or hybrid events. What would they like to see going forwards? What do they think is missing from current hybrid events?

#### **Event organisers and marketers:**

This group were asked why, when and where they run an event. Have physical/hybrid events had to become more selective? Are digital events now an equally important part of the event strategy? How are hybrid events marketed to two separate audiences? What are expectations around pricing, etc? Have the traditional 'big city' locations become less important, as marketers increasingly decide to work from home?

In order to build this report, I also worked with Steve Kemish. Steve has worked in digital marketing since 1997, working both client and agency-side on digital, CRM, marketing strategy and consultancy with many global brands, including Motorola, ADP, Oracle, LEGO, Skype and Capita. As well as his role at marketing agency, Junction, he is a guest lecturer at various business schools, a member of the DMA Digital Council and a longstanding Superbrands and AEO judge. Steve is also the Propolis Hive Expert for Execution & Campaigns.

*"Without digital events, many businesses wouldn't have been able to survive – and continue to survive – the pandemic. Of course, the pandemic has left its mark and it's unlikely that any business will go back to functioning exactly as it did before. It therefore makes good sense to take stock now and consider what's right for the future. How will your events be structured into 2023, and beyond?"*

**Steve Kemish**, Propolis Hive expert,  
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## SECTION 3

# The event venue provider perspective

Imagine the relief across the event venue industry when travel and meeting restrictions were loosened earlier this year. The end of laying-off or furloughing employees, finally being able to set up all logistics as booked and, at last, people walking through the doors. Back to business as usual? Or has the event industry changed for good?

Jeremy Rees, CEO of ExCeL London, certainly doesn't expect a full return to physical events.

*Jeremy Rees: "Even in the olden days where Cisco Live was running in 2011–2012 here at ExCeL, they'd also have an online proposition with thousands more delegates. It has always been nuanced. Think of how people watch rugby: some go to Twickenham, which is an amazing experience, but many more people can be watching it on TV and they have a different experience."*

So, hybrid events are not new. But it is not only the digital event presentations that are changing. Even face-to-face events are now quite different than pre-Covid.

*Jeremy Rees: "Event hosts have had to up their game in order to enhance the proposition and make it more relevant. Quite a lot of the research that I've seen seems to be suggesting that..."*

**Want to hear more from Jeremy about the future of B2B events? The rest of this section is available to Propolis members now.**

# Want to access the rest of this report?

Propolis members get exclusive access to the full version of this report, which includes more insight from senior marketers. Specifically, the full report includes:

- › Far more insight on what event attendees, marketers, organisers and venue owners are predicting for the future of B2B events.
- › Skip Fidura, marketing guru and frequent event speaker and host, offers his views on why B2B events need to be seen as 'entertainment', whether or not marketing should own the events function, and much more.
- › A breakdown of the leading event tech vendors in the B2B space.
- › The complete framework for the Propolis Marketing Maturity Diagnostic. This tool helps you benchmark just how mature your marketing department is when it comes to all things execution and campaigns.

“

*In order to drive our business and global marketing team forward, we knew we would benefit from an international professional membership, which is exactly what Propolis with B2B Marketing gives us.*

*Now more than ever, the need to come together as a community of B2B marketers isn't just relevant, but necessary*

CAT DUTTON  
global deputy CMO, Atos

”

All this and more, exclusive to Propolis members. Want to find out more about Propolis? **Find out more here.**



## SECTION 4

# The event attendees' point of view

Of course, venue owners only offer one side of the story. So we also spoke to event delegates to understand their drivers for attending (or not attending), and what they now expect from events.

Post-pandemic, event delegates usually have a choice of how they enjoy an event, be it attending in-person or consuming the same content in the comfort of their own office/home via digital platforms. In our interviews, we spoke with Emily Gravel, manager, marketing operations and shared services at technology vendor VMware, and Andrea Clatworthy, global head of ABM at Fujitsu. We explored their preferences and thinking around whether or not they decide to attend an event physically or remotely. For reference, both Emily and Andrea have recently attended a number of events (including those from B2B Marketing). Honesty was encouraged!

While digital events can come close to the physical event these days in terms of content experience, networking remains a key reason for deciding to attend physically.

*Andrea Clatworthy: "For me, normally it's the networking piece, regardless of the topic. But I wouldn't go to an event just for networking, it's also got to be a compelling agenda, where I'm going to learn something practical that I can then think about how I deploy or work into my thinking. I'm happy to take thought leadership stuff virtually, or even on-demand. When attending live, however, I...*

**Want to hear more Andrea and Emily about what audiences want from your physical events? The full report is exclusive to our Propolis members. Check out Propolis [here](#).**

## SECTION 5

# Events from the perspective of those planning them

But what about those marketers and organisers actually planning the events themselves? Their point of view is possibly the most important of all three groupings. We interviewed Colette Leong-Son, managing director, events at business services provider InfoPro Digital, Faye Carter, head of experiential at Deloitte UK, and David Clack, head of marketing communications at Ricoh UK.

Our first question was on how things have changed in their process of selecting a suitable venue for physical events.

*Faye Carter: "We are often now looking for venues that are actually bigger than what we perhaps need for our numbers, just to create that sense of space. I don't think people want to be crammed in like they used to be. For instance, we're looking at venues..."*



*Want to hear more from Faye, Colette and David? You can learn more about the expectations and requirements of event planners and marketers by checking out the full report in Propolis.*



# EXECUTION AND MARKETING MATURITY DIAGNOSTIC FRAMEWORK 1.0

*This is an edited version of a comprehensive framework and diagnostic process which is available only to Propolis members.*

The following framework seeks to define the different stages of execution and campaigns maturity, and map them against different criteria required for success. This is an abridged and edited version of a comprehensive framework, which is only available to members of Propolis – B2B Marketing's online community. There are eight frameworks in total, which map across all aspects of B2B marketing practice, relating to the eight community Hives within Propolis.

Each framework is a flat or static version of the interactive Marketing Maturity Diagnostic, which is designed to help you determine your specific level of competency against these criteria, compare them against other Propolis members and highlight areas to focus on for improvement. It is available as part of Propolis membership.

If you'd like to find out more about joining Propolis, visit [b2bmarketing.net/propolis](https://b2bmarketing.net/propolis)

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# EXECUTION AND MARKETING MATURITY DIAGNOSTIC FRAMEWORK 1.0

BUSINESS CONTRIBUTION		1 . BUILDING	2 . DEVELOPING	3 . PERFORMING	4 . IMPROVING	5 . EXCELLING
Integration of digital channels	Is there an integrated, multichannel strategy?	No multichannel campaigns deployed, with no integration of martech tools.	Efforts to develop a multichannel approach, with some integration of martech tools.	Most campaigns follow a multichannel approach, and there's a roadmap to integrating all martech.	Everything is multichannel and integrated. The only thing missing is a single customer view.	Every campaign is multichannel, with channels selected for best-fit. All martech integrated, with a single customer view enabling personalisation.
	How skilled are the team, and how robust is the campaign briefing process?	The team's ability is an unknown quantity, and there is no formal campaign briefing process.	A 'skills versus gaps' programme has been implemented, and a briefing process is being formalised.	Key gaps have been identified and are being filled. A consistent briefing process is being followed for most campaigns.	A comprehensive team improvement programme is underway. The briefing process is always adhered to, with lessons starting to be learned.	Gaps are regularly flagged and filled using either internal or external resources. The briefing process is used for all campaigns and continuously improved.
Campaign management and integration	How integrated are both campaign execution and campaign content?	Not at all. Siloes and unintegrated timelines are evident.	There is some coordination in terms of cross-channel content and campaign execution.	Most campaigns use consistent content and integrated planning.	All campaigns use consistent content and integrated planning.	All campaigns are integrated, with lessons learned for future. Content is not only consistent, but optimised for the channels used.
	How integrated is the campaign calendar, and how is content scheduled?	Both the campaign and content plan are completely ad hoc.	Campaigns are planned quarterly. Content scheduling is evident, but in isolation.	Annual campaign plan, with some joined-up campaigns. Content schedule is centralised.	Annual plan, with all campaigns/initiatives joined up. Content creation and curation are centralised and measured.	Fully integrated and 'updateable' campaign plan showing all activity. Rolling content schedule which everyone can access and utilise (i.e. social selling).
Attribution management	How are campaign measurement and attribution conducted?	There is no (or very little) measurement or understanding of whether campaigns have delivered or not.	Metrics recorded, but not reviewed. There are plans to model campaign attribution.	Metrics recorded and reviewed, but KPIs non-existent. Attribution expectation is assumed, but not scientifically based.	Metrics and KPIs both in use. ROI on all marketing campaigns is tracked.	Metrics/KPIs are reported upon in a centralised hub, enabling optimisation. ROI/attribution can be reported for all marketing activities.
	How developed is sales and marketing alignment, as well as coordination with other teams?	No (or very little) dialogue between marketing and sales, or with any other department.	Cooperation is starting to happen, but it's ad hoc. Sales and marketing are looking to establish goals.	Sales and marketing's goals are measured, but in isolation. Marketing is now having regular meetings with other departments.	There are agreed and shared goals between marketing and sales, as well as with other departments, for all projects.	Marketing works side-by-side with sales and other departments, regularly reviewing goals, strategies and tactics. SLAs in place.
Cross-organisational coordination and communication						

## SECTION 10

# The event tech vendor perspective



**FELICIA ASIEDU**

senior marketing manager,  
Europe, Cvent

Collaboration, networking, dialogue, and discussion. It's no surprise that in-person events resumed their rightful place as one of the best performing marketing channels. But what is interesting is that they have transformed into meetings of a different kind. Whereas in the past content was certainly king, now a healthy balance of networking opportunities and roundtable style discussion alongside a compelling agenda filled with best practices and case studies (rather than thought leadership) go hand in hand at the top of the list of attendee requirements.

It's great to hear feedback such as this from across the industry, and this report enables us to understand how to move forward with the hundreds and thousands of events that are due to take place over the next year. There was a worry of how the pandemic would affect

the return to in-person events. But venues are seeing that live event frequency and attendee numbers are bouncing back to the same levels as they were pre-pandemic because of this need to get together, network and collaborate.

Now that marketers and event organisers are armed with more information around when to go hybrid, which events suit a digital-only format and the level of targeting and depth of value proposition required to run in-person events, it's clear to see that it is not about the rise and fall of one format over another. Virtual is not dying, hybrid is just getting started and there is no room for pitting the varying formats against each other. Instead, it's about how to shape a total event programme that is tailored to the needs of your audience and event objectives.

Attendees interviewed for the report are clear with their needs and articulate well what drives them to attend different events. They do well to provide suggestions on when each format works for them and what can be provided before, during and after events. This feedback should be taken seriously and should be shared with marketers, event organisers, venues, suppliers, and board members alike. Listening to this attendee feedback

gives all organisations the keys they need to unlock the attendee engagement that drives event and organisational success.

People value their time now more than ever, and venues and marketing event management software vendors have a job to do to help event planners create special, easy-to-get-to experiences that satisfy the needs of attendees. They need to make it easy for organisers to understand what is on offer from space, food and entertainment to sustainability measures, technology specifications and collaborative tools.

This report does a fantastic job of outlining the challenges that exist within the technology landscape of too much choice, with not enough explanation, so vendors must tell better stories to make their offerings clear. It is good to see that there is a renewed focus on integrations into marketing stacks, as capturing the right data from events will help to alleviate one of the top challenges outlined in the report of data strategy and discipline.

Cvent is pleased to be a part of such important research and are excited to see how venues, marketers, planners, and technology vendors continue to collaborate to meet the needs of both organisations and attendees.

# About

## B2B Marketing & Propolis

B2B Marketing was founded in 2004, starting life as a print magazine. It has since evolved into the world's go-to resource for B2B marketers looking to become best-in-class at what they do, and place themselves at the forefront of marketing evolution.

B2B Marketing produces a number of products, including: insight reports; interviews with the best minds in the business; *The B2B Marketing Podcast*; webinars; conferences; and even Awards programmes.

The latest product in B2B Marketing's extensive portfolio is Propolis – an exclusive community for B2B marketers. Propolis gives you instant access to unbiased experts, training, technical resources, research and peer-to-peer learning, all supported by a dedicated customer success manager.

Want to learn more about B2B Marketing or Propolis specifically? Just get in touch using the contact details below and start your journey with us today.

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## Cvent

Cvent is a leading meetings, events and hospitality technology provider with more than 4,300 employees and nearly 21,000 customers worldwide. The comprehensive Cvent event marketing and management platform offers software solutions to event organisers and marketers for online event registration, venue selection, event marketing and management, virtual and onsite solutions, and attendee engagement. Cvent's suite of products automate and simplify the entire event management process and maximise the impact of in-person, virtual, and hybrid events. Hotels and venues use Cvent's supplier and venue solutions to win more group and corporate travel business through Cvent's sourcing platforms. Cvent solutions optimise the entire event management value chain and have enabled clients around the world to manage millions of meetings and events.







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