

The Live to Virtual Pivot: 4 Best Practices



HOW TO AVOID VIDEO CALL FATIGUE AND GET HIGHER QUALITY INSIGHTS WITH OVER-TIME MEETINGS

The events of early 2020 changed the way the life sciences industry conducts business within a very short period of time. Prior to the emergence of COVID-19, life science companies sensitive to the cost and environmental impact of global business travel were already choosing to conduct smaller local or virtual events¹. Now that large-scale live events – always vulnerable to disruption due to recession, global conflict, and other factors – are on hold, a virtual communication strategy is essential.

The global market for online meeting software is forecast to reach more than \$6 billion by 2024². While COVID-19 accelerated the adoption of virtual engagements, it also fundamentally changed the way engagement will be done going forward. Life sciences companies will increasingly look to virtual solutions to effectively engage HCPs, patients, payers, and internal stakeholders.

For life science companies that aren't accustomed to conducting virtual meetings with external stakeholders, this conversion to virtual can seem daunting. But standing up a reliable way to do business online isn't just a stopgap – it's a sound investment for the future. Below are four best practices that will enable your team to make the switch to virtual without missteps or backtracking.

1 DON'T OVERSIMPLIFY

Most of us have likely taken part in a video conference, probably for an internal meeting. However, this is not the right venue for every type of meeting. Many live meetings don't translate well to webcast, for the simple reason that scheduling conflicts still apply. Consider that:

- HCPs are busier than ever, and might not be available for a one-time event
- Strong personalities may dominate, meaning some voices won't be heard
- Global meetings present barriers like widely distributed time zones, language barriers, or unpredictable internet connections

It's not enough to simply convert a live meeting to a video conference. With HCPs around the world in demand for high-stakes work, most of your desired participants will have few free hours that will overlap. Consider using a virtual platform that allows asynchronous communication – individuals can participate when their schedule allows, whenever it's most convenient for them.

2 USE GOOD CHANGE MANAGEMENT

If a new virtual venue is selected, team leaders should formulate a communication plan so that everyone knows what's involved with changing formats. Similarly, once participants are enlisted for an asynchronous virtual meeting or event, teams should promptly reach out and share adequate information about what to expect.

If you're unsure about how to communicate these changes, don't hesitate to rely on your virtual engagement platform vendor for guidance. They'll have lots of experience helping get teams oriented to new workflows, and can help you avoid rookie mistakes.

Key Takeaway:

Determine what virtual venue you'll use based on the outcome you're trying to achieve, schedule considerations for participants, and geographic distribution.

Key Takeaway:

Don't assume everyone will know what to expect – make a plan and communicate.

3 KEEP IT INTERESTING

Most professionals in the pharmaceutical industry would be comfortable with an all-day event, but even “all-day” meetings aren’t without interruptions. Think about the agenda from the last live event you attended. Sessions are offered in 45-minute increments, breaks for coffee and lunch, time set aside for networking. These events keep your interest by changing the topic often and building in time to wind down or regroup.

Virtual meetings should follow the same concept. A virtual meeting can take place over a period of days or even weeks and include content broken down into shorter sections, with the opportunity to provide focused feedback after each topic.

Just as listening to a single long lecture could cause your attention to wander, relying on a single approach for each part of your virtual meeting will be too repetitive. Platforms designed for asynchronous meetings offer built-in features such as different question types, surveys, and document annotation or collaboration to keep participants actively engaged. Periodic digest emails are used to remind participants to come back to the meeting and respond to new questions or comments.

Key Takeaway:

Focus on maintaining participant engagement throughout your virtual event.

4 KEEP WHAT WORKS

Travel restrictions make us keenly aware of what we can’t have – the opportunity to see one another and feel the energy of our colleagues discussing a common interest. Webcasts can provide some of this personal touch, so if your team prefers a verbal presentation, consider recording a webcast and making it available on-demand to anyone who can’t attend live. Webcasts work in tandem with asynchronous meetings in many situations, including advisory board meetings, steering committees, focus groups, and patient or HCP working groups.

Key Takeaway:

Maintain an element of face-to-face communication with a recorded webcast.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Virtual meetings, once considered a nice-to-have, are an essential business tool. The benefits of a temporary “virtual only” policy will persist as a “virtual first” approach. With thoughtful virtual venue selection and vendor guidance, life sciences companies can address the challenges of the present and establish a path for future success.

¹ Market Research Media, Virtual Event Market Forecast, May 2019

² Kenneth Research, Global Online Meeting Software Market Research Report, October 2019

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