

## INDUSTRY VIEWS

Driving impact



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# Pushing the right button

The world of organised events is facing an entire suite of disruptions, with the pandemic being the imminent – but not the only – one, says **Sven Bossu**.

**L**ike many of you, I have had my share of digital experiences over the last 12 months – both as participant and organiser. And, systematically, the experience improved. Evolving technology has been a contributing factor, but even more important was the fact that we recognise this new world for what it is and not what we wish it to be. Digital cannot replace face-to-face, so it needs to be used for what it can do.

Technology, geopolitics, changing member behaviour, new business models, and climate change all have an impact on the way organised events will evolve. As a result, we will need to be very agile as an industry and use our different platforms – digital and physical – to enrich each other and provide a better outcome to both the organiser and the participant.

### END GOAL

Digital definitely has its role to play, even when physical events are possible again, and it's important to prepare for this reality.

The starting point for successfully using technology is to carefully look at the organiser's objectives. If you look at associations, for example, this is often linked to the mission or the purpose. And despite all the disruptions faced, the purpose of the associations is the one thing that did not change. Medical associations still want to improve the lives of patients, technology associations still want to create a smarter world, and business associations still want to stimulate trade. What is up for change is how this is done – the buttons to be pushed.

Digital allows for connectivity in a world where travel will remain challenging for some time. And although Zoom does not come close to a face-to-face experience, it does enable you to talk to peers, share

knowledge, and take comfort in the fact that you are not alone in facing the challenges ahead. This is really the moment to carefully look at the different audiences and distinguish their varying needs.

### INCREASED REACH

Some audiences have remained unserved until now, because – for example for economic reasons – they could not make it to the on-site events; however, digital enables an organiser to be more inclusive. Not only can this extend the reach of content, but previously unheard voices are included, which enriches the conversation. Translating this input into output, amplified via digital channels, enables communities to grow – in both number and impact.

Digital allows for (and sometimes forces) us to experiment. This is the moment to be bold and try things you would not have imagined before. Being open and transparent about this experimentation increases the likelihood that participants will join you on your journey. It will be like a cooking class. As we know, it is this type of journey that creates long-lasting friendships.

Connectivity, inclusiveness and experimentation – digital allows for all of this and will enrich organised events going forward. The beauty in this is that there is no single solution, and it does not require a magical wand to make it happen.

That said, there is one pitfall to avoid. Digital is vastly different from face-to-face. Elements that have proven very successful in the physical world might be completely irrelevant for digital. Theatre is not the same thing as a television show – it requires a different approach, different management, different skills, and a different mindset. So, take the digital reality for what it is, not for what you wish it to be, and have fun testing it out. 