

HOW TO ENERGIZE YOUR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Neal Woodson of innoVia Productions explores the causes of 'Zoom Gloom' and how to energize virtual audiences.

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

Adam Shapland of CSM Sport & Entertainment reveals how the agency is evolving and planning for the future.

THE FIX

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DR. MICHAEL GEISSER

Born in 1979, Michael studied business informatics at university, achieving a doctorate with the highest distinction. He went on to work in the finance and IT sector, most notably for SAP AG, where he was responsible for the management of several strategic IT initiatives, such as the introduction of virtual events into SAP's corporate network. In 2009, Michael left SAP to establish ubivent, one of the world's leading providers of virtual events. Shortly after the acquisition of ubivent by MEETYOO, a leading provider of digital events and virtual conferences in Europe, Michael was appointed Chief Sales Officer.

MEET+YOO

An Interview With...

Dr. Michael Geisser
Chief Sales Officer, MEETYOO

Dr. Michael Geisser, Chief Sales Officer of MEETYOO, talks about metrics, emerging trends, and reveals his future predictions for the digital events market.

Event organizers are much better versed in delivering digital event experiences now. What changes are you seeing amongst your customers?

There is now a very good understanding of the different elements of virtual events and how they deliver value. Organizers are no longer simply copying physical events into the virtual space – events no longer have a “digital twin” but instead, have a “virtual sibling”. To achieve this, event design and concepts must differ from traditional ones.

There is also more of a focus on digital engagement and not only reach, which was the case in the past. Sponsors are involved more to generate additional revenue streams. For example, sponsors will now pay for interaction and not only reach. The quality of studio production and moderation for digital events has risen significantly, too.

Have you noticed a change in the way audiences are behaving at your customer's events?

The first thing we've noticed is that users have become more selective about what content they consume, so they need multiple touchpoints and activation. They want high-quality content and a consistent storyline that goes beyond a “landing page with content streams”.

An event should always be something outstanding or special, so a virtual event should also be different from a simple live stream or online meeting tool. Delegates are also looking for multiple ways to engage with like-minded virtual visitors through matchmaking, workshops, and breakout rooms, to create a feeling similar to live events.

Virtual event organizers have access to more attendee metrics than ever before. What are the key metrics, and how should organizers be using them?

First, it depends on the type and reason of the event. Internal employee events have different metric indicators to tradeshows or summits. For example, for content-driven events, a good metric to measure the acceptance, quality, and target fit of keynotes and panel discussions is the dropout rate.

If your event is meant to generate leads, measure the number of virtual booth visitors and downloads of your content pieces. This can be enriched with other usage and profile data to categorize the leads into A/B/C leads.

Generally, to measure event engagement we look at the number of chats, both text, and video chat, as well as the numbers of messages sent. To have an indication of overall performance, the event reach can be used. We usually look at the number of participants and where they logged in from.

From a management perspective, event ROI is an important metric. Therefore we track which leads we generated over the course of an event and how much revenue we made. This is made easier, if the audience data can be pushed to a CRM like e.g. Hubspot, Salesforce, or similar, giving a clear indication of the lead origin and lead status.

With many opinions on the hybrid model, what do you see as the best fit model for most organizers?

Hybrid bears the complexity that one team has to organize two events for different audiences that have a completely different experience. Hence, the model does depend again on “the why” of the event.

We are going in two directions to solve this. Firstly, by adapting the physical environment into a virtual one, so the online audience can have a lifelike similar experience, including a virtual exposition floor and breakout sessions. Adoption is important. A simple copy of the physical event concept won't work.

To be honest, engagement between digital and physical audiences is hard to get – we support this through a second device and a mobile app. But usually, on-site participants tend to interact with other on-site participants – at least during the live event.

Our second direction is “virtual-first” where we interpret hybrid as studio production with a limited audience at the location. This content is seamlessly integrated into a virtual setting. This will allow multiple regional satellite events that are combined into one show.

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Finally, what are the key trends you predict will emerge in the next 12 months?

Hybrid is a trend that will be on the rise, but we believe that the added complexity and cost will lead to a more digital focus. We believe that virtual events as a service will make digital events as a tool more accessible to sales and marketing, but also HR and event organizers of small and medium-sized businesses. Our solution for this emerging market is MEETYOO Go.

A more proactive focus on climate change will lead to a change in travel behavior and a trend to decrease the emission impact of events. One solution for this is going digital.

This article is sponsored by MEETYOO.

The Fix: Agency Spotlight

VEI editor Alison Ledger spoke to Adam Shapland, Associate Director of CSM Sport & Entertainment to find out how the event agency is evolving and planning for the future.

How do you see the event agency landscape changing?

If you're asking someone to travel a thousand miles across the world, the event has to be worth it. Otherwise, they'll sit at home and attend from there. All face-to-face, hybrid or virtual events have to be to a very high standard and the event agency delivering that has to provide a good proposal with all three elements to it. If you're only going to focus on one, you may lose out.

What are your biggest challenges as an agency?

Having, or getting on board, the right people with the right skillset that have embraced virtual and hybrid. The events industry as a whole needs more people to embrace it and come on board as there's a real mix of skillset needed.

What specific challenges are your clients facing, particularly with the digitalization of events?

The natural habitat for networking and B2B events is face-to-face. The challenge for our clients, and in turn for us, is to provide a solution that answers what the world's been used to (networking, exhibitions, hospitality) that's engaging and also relevant for the generation to come.

Every client wants to see a tried and tested example as budget and ROI are so crucial, especially now. They may not initially be willing to commit to it, even though they have the ability to connect the world in one place. The challenge for them is jumping first and committing. But they need to have confidence in virtual and hybrid solutions before they commit.

Earlier this year we delivered the first-ever extended reality virtual squad reveal for The British and Irish Lions. It's one of the most anticipated moments in world sport and our client was keen to deliver something different in a Covid environment, which was producing the reveal of the rugby captain and squad through virtual reality.



ADAM SHAPLAND, ASSOCIATE
DIRECTOR, CSM SPORT &
ENTERTAINMENT

“
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The show included in-person interviews, interviews via Zoom brought onto the stage, and the use of AR technology to “teleport” the Captain, Alun Wyn-Jones, into the environment from a remote location. This technology had never been seen before for a live rightsholder announcement broadcast to the public.

The event offered fans worldwide an engaging viewing experience and the client was delighted with the project and the resulting social engagement numbers, and broadcast and media exposure. This was a good example of a client jumping first, committing, and seeing fantastic results.

What have been your biggest lessons learned?

Audiences are used to seeing broadcast-ready content and you need to provide a solution for that at your virtual or hybrid event. A single-person Zoom or Teams platform won't cut it. Audiences want to be engaged with speakers, programs, and content.



“

I believe the events industry will adapt but they are still getting to grips with virtual/hybrid as a concept and still playing safe. The industry needs pilots and pioneers to test and then everyone will embrace it.

”

Looking ahead, what event trends are you seeing from your clients and future bookings?

Everything has to be looked at from a global-to-local perspective. You and your client have to ask, 'Will the audience get on a plane and travel to this?'. The event has to be really good and worthwhile, otherwise, the audience won't be engaged.

We also have to acknowledge that tomorrow's consumers will have radically different expectations in terms of experiences and what consumers and fans will want. Technology is catching up with real-world solutions very quickly.

Augmented Reality is in every smartphone around the world, in the palm of the audience's hand. VR and smart speakers are part of everyday real life and our transactions, and this is where the virtual world will begin to connect with the real world.

I believe the events industry will adapt but organizers are still getting to grips with virtual/hybrid as a concept and still playing safe. The industry needs pilots and pioneers to test and then everyone will embrace.

The emergence of the MetaWorld and the crossover into virtual worlds is on the rise with gaming, NFT & crypto, and the events world hasn't yet embraced that. That's what I see as the future of events – transporting people to places they won't ever go to and unlocking experiences they won't ever find. 5G will be imperative to this – it will make virtual and hybrid events much more prevalent than they have been before.



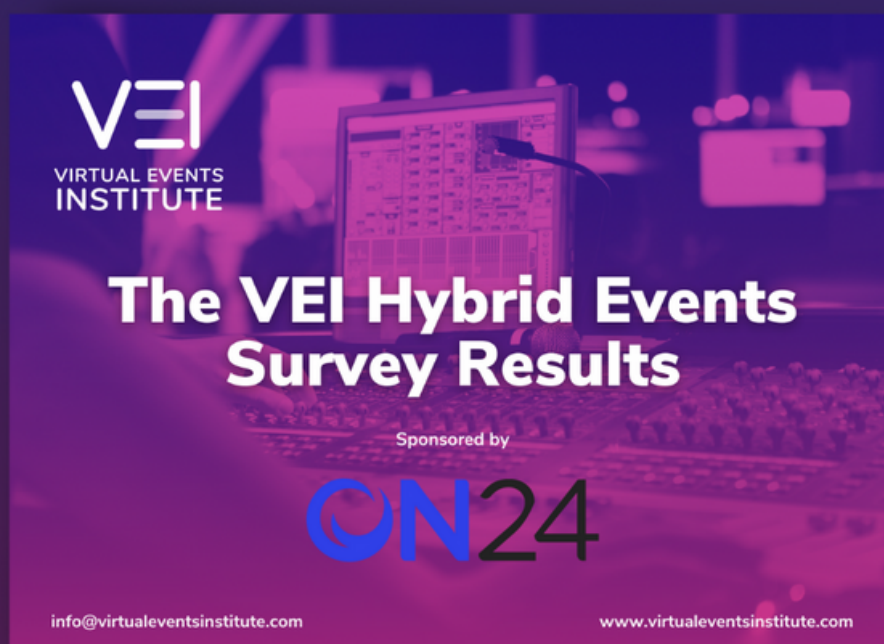


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Say goodbye to 'Zoom Gloom': How to energize your virtual meetings

Why are virtual meetings much more tiring than in-person meetings? In this article, Neal Woodson, communications manager and event producer at innoVia Productions, looks at what can cause 'Zoom Gloom' in the virtual world of events and shares ideas on how to address them for a better experience

Focused attention is hard work

Virtual meetings require more focused attention than in-person ones. Our ability to keep attention for a prolonged amount of time can vary depending on different factors. As the virtual world is relatively new to us and not as natural as the in-person environment, we are forced to develop new ways to process and decipher non-verbal cues like facial expressions, tone and pitch of voice, and body language. This heightened focus requires more work for our brains, resulting in more fatigue.

We don't like silence

If you've ever felt uncomfortable when there is a long pause during a radio program or during those quiet seconds when a TV reporter has a delay before responding, this is the peril of what media people call "dead air." When it is in a broadcast medium like radio, TV, or video conference, silence makes us feel unsure and anxious even though it is a natural part of face-to-face conversation.

In addition, scientists tell us that during phone or video meetings, silence has a big influence on how we view people. In experiments, delays of just over one second made people view others as less friendly.

Because of this unconscious tendency, we work harder in virtual meetings. Presenters do everything they can to fill every second with words.

Discussions have virtually no downtime and small-group sessions get awkward and uncomfortable when there is nothing substantive to fill the void, which is another multiplier of exhaustion.

We are in the spotlight

Finally, because we are physically on camera, we know everyone is looking at us, so we feel like we are on stage, and with that comes the pressure of performance.

Given that most people are not accustomed to being on stage, being in the spotlight, or at least feeling that way, can be very nerve-wracking. This is in addition to the stress of seeing oneself on camera and feeling the need to frequently groom and adjust to maintain a good appearance.

So, in answer to the question as to why virtual meetings are more exhausting than attending live events, we have three main reasons:

- 1) we must work harder on focusing deeply to discern non-verbal cues;
- 2) 'dead air' makes us uncomfortable so we labor to fill the silence; and
- 3) we feel we are always 'on stage' and thus constantly working to look and sound our best.

While these things are not totally removed from our in-person meetings, they are less prevalent and not as apparent to us. Thus, we can endure longer in the in-person world than in the virtual one.

Clearly, for virtual events to be more enjoyable and less taxing, planners and facilitators need to consider these challenges and adjust to alleviate their potential negative effects.

Virtual meetings are here to stay given their convenience and cost-effectiveness but, for them to be effective, we must address our natural tendency to not be able to hold focused attention for a prolonged amount of time and adjust accordingly so virtual meetings don't become tiresome.

This article is sponsored by innoVia Productions, creators of the Zenevent platform.



TOP
TIPS



VEI

Tips for making virtual events easier for delegates

Here are three simple ideas you can incorporate today to reduce virtual meeting exhaustion:

1

Build in transition periods in the agenda to help refresh attendees in addition to 'bio breaks'. Try stretching, doing a bit of exercise, playing a game, raffling off some company swag, or simply playing some light music to change the tone and freshen up the atmosphere. Do not pack your agenda with only serious business throughout. Attendees must be given a chance to switch gears and catch a breath.

2

Set aside some time to catch up with people on a personal level before diving into the agenda. Check into people's well-being and give them a chance to connect with others. This has been shown to reduce stress and fatigue tremendously. One great solution is to have a host or Emcee drive the ice-breaker conversation and invite attendees to use a chat feature to engage with others. This tip allows for the attendees to be engaged in the meeting from the start and look forward to making connections just like they would in the in-person event environment.

3

Make turning on the camera optional. Inform attendees ahead of time that cameras do not always have to be on throughout each meeting. This will help with the 'on stage' problem and put your attendees at ease.

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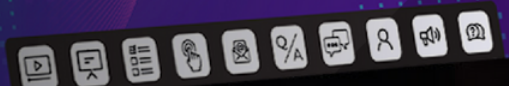
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An Interview with... Michael Seaman, CEO of Raccoon Events



After 14 years working for the likes of Clarion Events and UBM, Michael Seaman set up Raccoon Events in 2016. He launched The National Running Show and has since expanded the business with a passion-led portfolio of events. The Raccoon Events team now oversees seven exhibitions in the health and wellbeing market in the UK and the US.

VEI caught up with Mike to talk about life as a CEO, going digital, and the future of the events and exhibitions sector.

What has been your biggest learning as a CEO?

The importance of ethics. A strong moral business structure will pay back in the long term, particularly in difficult times.

Delegation is also vital. Entrepreneurs are passionate about their business and may think they know everything. It's only when you bring in people with other skill sets and start to delegate that you can grow a business.

What have the last 18 months been like at Raccoon Events and how have you adapted?

It's been tough for everybody, but adversity brings opportunities. We've done lots of moving, jumping, and changing. It was an interesting time and the most difficult period I've ever had. We raised investment, which took the cash issue out of the equation and allowed us to experiment. We invested in new products because we foresaw a live experience boom.

What about digital events?

During the pandemic, we took the opportunity to experiment in the digital world. Online is great and has some strong benefits. For example, our digital indoor running relay raised £44,000 for charity. It worked well because it was a digital-first proposition.

We also launched the Digital Running Show. The event reconnected more than 2,000 people from all over the world. It made a bit of money and everyone was happy, but it didn't work to the same level as the physical show. Digital-first works for a digital-first proposition. What works for a physical show, doesn't always translate well online. There is a risk of losing the elements that make it successful.

What about the hybrid model?

In my opinion, hybrid isn't a thing. This is controversial. Many people disagree with me, but it isn't viable for our business. The benefits of a digital event and a live event don't go together well.

Digital is about the speed of access, the connection between different countries, the convenience of not being in the same place at the same time, and on-demand content.

Whereas, a live event creates serendipity. It's about actually being there, discovering what you didn't know you needed. A curated experience is a free experience. In our sector, those benefits should not be pushed together. They fulfill different needs and can operate independently.

— “
**It was an interesting time and
the most difficult period I've
ever had.**

How do you see the exhibition and events industry evolving in the next three to five years?

The past 18 months have taught us to value the face-to-face experience. The human interaction that sits behind a transaction is important. People want to get out, away from Zoom, and meet people. This presents a real opportunity for those in live events.

Yet, the game has changed. Zoom meetings are part of our lives and it's now a valuable business tool in a way it wasn't before. Virtual events will stay in some capacity. There are great opportunities through webinars, digital platforms, and the ability to conduct business through one-to-one online meetings.

Is community building important to your business?

At a show, the big bang of consumer engagement is great. Not talking to your customers between events has always been a missed opportunity. The combination of good websites, social media, and digital events provides a route for genuine and year-round community engagement.

We have launched a website called Outside and Active that is a catch-all site that sits under our live event propositions. Within that, we have community groups and micro digital events. The live event is the tip of the spear. The digital community sits underneath with the potential for e-commerce and affiliate revenues.

What is key to building a successful community?

Don't force it. It has to be genuine. Immerse yourself within your community, curate content and give value – there must be a value exchange.

What's your future vision for Raccoon Events?

Raccoon Events is a live-event-first business, but we also want to be omnichannel, providing many routes to market for our clients. We are enhancing our digital proposition to include video, data, websites, YouTube, podcasts, and e-commerce and this is an area of significant growth for us. We want to stay in the B2C health and wellbeing sector – our team has a strong passion for anything that gets people outside and active.

“

Immerse yourself within your community, curate content and give value – there must be a value exchange.

”

Best business advice you have received?

I had the idea for the National Running Show in my head for seven years. One day my wife said: "Can you shut up and do it!" It was great advice!

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Find something you love. When you find something you care about, it gives you a different buzz.

VEI Certification:

Monetizing Your Virtual Event and Mastering sales skills for virtual events – An Overview of Modules 5 and 6

At the heart of VEI's offering to the global virtual and hybrid events community is the VEI Certification Program. The ever-growing online training program comprises 11-plus on-demand modules, providing a step-by-step guide for all event disciplines, across sales, marketing, content, and operations.

Each month in The Fix, we will provide an overview of one or two modules, plus some top tips for planning virtual and hybrid events. This month, we provide an outline of Module 5 and 6.

Module 5: Monetizing Your Virtual Event

Learn how virtual event experts develop pricing and charging models and have created brand new revenue streams for you to implement in your market.

- How to create new revenue streams
- How to develop value-based pricing
- How to determine price points & accurate benchmarking
- How to develop a value proposition tailored to the new needs of your customer
- How to monetize audience data
- How to present and sell the new packages and environment to your customer
- How to help your sponsors gain demonstrable value and ROI from your virtual event

Module 6: Mastering sales skills for virtual events

Discover the key skills in selling virtual and hybrid events.

- Stepping into your customers' shoes in the new normal
- Helping your customers to discover what they need
- Updating your sales skills to embrace the new generation of solutions for events
- Becoming a consultative salesperson with a more personalized approach

- Achieving your customers' goals through innovative solutions
- Deepening your understanding of your virtual events tech platform

VEI's Training Modules also include the following topics: Introduction to Virtual Events, Attracting Your Audience, Increasing Audience Engagement, Developing Strategic Content Design, Choosing the Right Technology, Executing Your Virtual Event on the Day, Measuring Success Post-Event, Building Your Online Event Community, An Introduction to Hybrid Events.

TESTIMONIALS

"I really enjoyed the sponsorship lesson, as it gave me a deeper understanding of selling sponsorship for virtual events."

Irene Tancini, Student

"The speakers are excellent! I learned a lot and I am very impressed. I think this module is very complete."

Florence Dinar, Portfolio Business Development Manager IBTM Group, Reed Exhibitions

Lots of new material that I'd not seen before that I can use in my consulting business"

Michelle Fanus-St Hill, Founder, The Conference Director

"The information was delivered in a very organized way. The methodology was refreshed and informative"

Laura Palker, CEO, Trade Show Solutions Center



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VEI is the Global Community for virtual & hybrid events. Through certification, events, awards and content VEI is advancing the next generation of event professionals



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