

THE ULTIMATE

Virtual Engagement

E-BOOK

21 Surefire Ways to Make Your Next Virtual Event or Webinar

More Profitable, Successful & Engaging



Presented by Andrew M. Davis

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Presented by: Andrew M. Davis | Creator of The Loyalty Loop

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In early March of 2020, Ann Handley was at Boston Logan for an early morning flight to San Diego.

She was heading to Social Media Marketing World, where she was to deliver a keynote presentation to 4,000 social media marketers from around the world.

At the gate, she bumped into her friend Chris Penn, who was heading to the same conference. “Hey,” he greeted her, his voice muffled through a mask that looked like a respirator a steel worker might wear.

Chris was always vigilant about germs on flights, Ann thought. That’s just Chris. But as they boarded their flight, Chris pointed out that this plane had just come from Seattle, where a case of a new virus had been diagnosed in a man who had just arrived back home from an international trip. That case was one of the first in the US.

“Try not to touch anything,” Chris said. “I mean, it probably wasn’t this exact plane. But you can’t be too careful.”



In San Diego, thousands of marketers wandered the halls as they had every year since the conference began in 2013.

But — this was new — giant Purell hand-sanitizing stations had popped up in the sunny, broad hallways of the convention center. In the restrooms, maintenance had installed brand-new posters of anti-viral hand-washing techniques. (“*20 seconds of vigorous scrubbing!*”)

And in the speaker lounge, one speaker stood six feet apart from a small group gathering.

“If it’s ok with you, I’m trying to maintain distance,” he said, half-apologizing, half-incredulous that the speakers all were standing a little too close together. Then by way of explanation, he added: “I have small kids at home.”

Over the next days in San Diego, news of the virus... well, spread.

Attendees who would usually shake hands or high-five began to awkwardly test out elbow bumps instead. There were fewer and fewer hugs. There was more hand sanitizing, more talk about cases of the COVID-19 — *now everyone knew its name* — being diagnosed in California, Florida, Maryland.

The virus was real, but it wasn’t. No one could quite believe what CNN and Anthony Fauci were predicting — that the virus was spreading quickly throughout the nation. That it spread person-to-person. That large gatherings might put people at risk?

It was getting weird. But how weird would it get?

Very, it turns out—especially for speakers like Ann and events like Social Media Marketing World.

Because by the time Ann delivered a killer keynote and arrived back at the San Diego airport en route to Boston, TV monitors rolled an endless loop of COVID updates.

And on the flight home, it wasn’t just Chris wearing a mask.

The next morning, Ann’s email and phone pinged with a constant flurry of notifications. Event organizers from New York to New Zealand were cancelling or postponing her speaking engagements.

And within a day, it was clear that this was a new world.

Throughout the rest of the year, more and more trade shows, conferences, symposiums, seminars, athletic events, concerts, awards shows, and public celebrations saw the ax. ComicCon attendees had to hang up their Jedi costumes and entrepreneurs had to cancel their flights.

It wasn't just the attendees who had their hearts broken, though. Organizations that relied on income from these in-person events began to scramble for new ways to gather their audiences.

Enter the virtual event...

Sure, virtual events, webinars, and webcasts had been around for a while. But within a matter of weeks, organizations across the world began to rely more and more on these technologies to bring groups of people together to learn.

Like it or not, virtual events are here, baby!

Some say we'll never return to in-person events. Others say that once a vaccine is widely available we'll be back together... once again sitting in conference centers with hotel coffee cups in our hands and hope in our hearts.

Or maybe, the future lies somewhere in between — some hybrid, some virtual, and some in-person?

Who knows? Go ahead and consult your crystal ball.

In the meantime, I'm going to focus my efforts on a problem I know I can help solve... how to make virtual events amazing for the presenters, the audience, and everyone in-between.

This book isn't a prediction of what's to come. Instead, it's an in-depth look at what makes online and virtual events special, unique, engaging, and successful.

After all, virtual events as we know them today aren't exactly 'wow-ing' the masses. Event planners are wading into a brave new world and making things up as they go.

So, let's fix that. Let's make virtual events awesome!

Chapter 1

**We All Know Virtual
Events Can Be Boring...
But Here's the REAL
Reason Why Your
Viewers Aren't Engaged**



What's the first problem with webinars and virtual events? Well... they suck.

That's not my opinion either. Just do a quick search on Twitter or Instagram and you'll see images like this one here.

Yep... #WebinarsSuck!

But the real question is "why." WHY do webinars and virtual events fail to hold our attention? Why are they SO bad?

To answer that question, let's chat with a friend of mine named Vlad.

Back in 1997 (Yes, 24 years ago!), Vlad was a Community Technology Specialist working to find new tech that would benefit communities.

At the time, he was at the forefront of online teaching. His company used a program called Placeware to present information to a class of virtual students.



I showed Vlad a screenshot from his class and he could only laugh. "I almost forgot about this! It was a really interesting time."

Back in those days, Vlad's virtual students could pick their "seats" in an online auditorium. Then, the instructor would present slides with the teaching materials.

Most people were connecting with dial-up modems so video certainly wasn't an option. Still, people really loved it.

After all, it was a *real* classroom... on a computer. That's some cutting edge stuff!



Fast forward a few decades and you may wonder what happened to Placeware. Well, along with Vlad, clients like HP, Intel, Sun Microsystems, and even PBS signed up to use it.

In 2003, Microsoft bought the company and re-branded it Microsoft Office LIVE meeting. Then, that transformed into Skype for Business before it morphed into Microsoft Teams.

So, if you're watching a Microsoft Teams webinar, you're essentially using Placeware! Like Vlad said, "I really think Placeware was a trailblazer..."

And... it was! It just hasn't evolved much since then. And that, my friends, is a real shame.

The world has moved on but the basic structure of online event technology has stayed stuck in the past. After all, what was cutting edge in the late 1990s isn't exactly killing it in the 2020s. *(Ask Jeeves anyone... anyone... Bueller?)*

It's time virtual events got with the times.

I spent most of 2020 attending and presenting at virtual events all over the world. I was safely locked down here in my own studio along with an array of screens, lights, microphones, and my IKEA-decorated office.

And after the umpteenth webinar, I started wondering why virtual events are still so... well, so... 1997?

To find the answer, we're going to go back... WAY back to the 1890s to learn about Lumiere's Law.

What is a virtual event anyway?

Yeah, yeah. Maybe you're considering skipping this section. You already know exactly what a virtual event is.

But do you really know?

The reason our virtual events lack engagement might be that we don't understand precisely what a virtual event is and what it could be.

For the purposes of this book, a virtual event is a multi-session, online gathering featuring more than one webinar or webcast during a specific interval of time.

A webinar is a single seminar conducted over the internet. And a webcast is a video broadcast of an event transmitted over the internet.

So, to be clear, a single webinar is NOT a virtual event. It's a webinar.

Sorry to burst your bubble.

Now back to the regularly scheduled program...



Lumiere's Law: Understanding the Virtual Mindset That is Tanking Our Events

It was Tuesday, March 19, 1895, and Louis Lumiere and his brother had set up their lunchbox sized camera on a rickety tripod outside a small factory in Lyon, France.

Louis and Auguste were tinkerers. They'd patented several innovations already, but today, they couldn't wait for the factory shift to end.

I imagine Louis Lumiere stood eagerly under the camera's black velvet veil anxiously looking through the primitive viewfinder. Auguste probably stood right next to his brother with his pocket watch in hand. "Trois. Deux...," Auguste quietly counted down in French. "Un!"

The steam whistle blew.

The workday was over, and their experiment began.

Suddenly, the massive factory doors flew open. Women in Victorian dresses, men in their mustaches, dogs, bikes, even a horse-drawn carriage spilled onto the cobblestone street.

Louis cranked the camera. Not once, like he'd done thousands of other times with his photographs. Instead, he cranked and cranked and cranked. Sixteen frames of film passed by the lens every second for forty-six seconds.

Less than a minute later their experiment was over. Auguste and Louis Lumiere had just shot the very first motion picture in history.

The Lumiere brothers shot ten more short moving pictures, and by December of 1895, they went on tour. In Bombay, Cairo, London, New York, Palestine, and dozens of other cities worldwide, people paid a small fee to see the magic of the motion picture.

But within a few years, the Lumiere brothers stopped making their films. “The cinema is an invention without any future,” the brothers claimed. Louis and Auguste went back to work on still photography innovations like color film processing.

Check out this video to learn more about Lumiere’s Law!

<http://bit.ly/seelumiere>

How is it that the two men who invented the motion picture camera saw “no future” in the business of cinema? How could two of the earliest moving picture pioneers pass up one of the greatest innovations in media history? What had the Lumiere brothers missed?

The answer to these three questions is simple, and the lesson is profound.

The Lumiere brothers used their intimate knowledge of photography as a lens for understanding the potential of motion pictures. This is a mistake — a big mistake.

Welcome to Lumiere’s Law: our tendency to use previous media, innovations, or audience consumption habits to define a new media.

Louis Lumiere’s films have titles like: “The Exit from The Lumiere Factory in Lyon.” Or, “Fishing for Goldfish,” and “The Arrival of the Train at La Ciotat.”

Each of the brother’s first films simply documents what happens in front of the lens. There’s no story. No hero. No villain. Louis Lumiere approached moving pictures literally. They were simply pictures that happened to move.

The Lumiere brothers assumed that we would forever use a motion picture camera (and its film) just like we use a still camera. They believed that you set up the camera, watch the action happen, develop the film, and play it back in its entirety.

They used photography to define moving pictures.

You and I both know that's not what happened.

By 1900, filmmakers realized that you could move the camera and shoot from multiple angles. They spliced together pieces of film to create a story. They changed locations and introduced the audience to heroes and villains. Moving pictures turned into movies.

Movies are not merely photographs that move.

We've seen Lumiere's Law play out over and over again.

The first television programs were simply radio plays performed on stage, in front of a microphone, with a camera trained on the actors...

... television isn't radio with pictures.

The first online magazines emulated the page-turning experience of the physical printed object...

... e-magazines aren't digitized print magazines.

The list goes on and on...

... Radio isn't a phonograph over the airwaves.

... E-mail isn't an electronic letter.

... Podcasts aren't radio shows on demand.

... Books on tape aren't just books for the blind.

And, here's why Lumiere's Law is essential to you and me: Virtual events aren't simply in-person events that we happen to broadcast online.

If you're to be truly successful with virtual events, you cannot think like the Lumiere Brothers. You cannot follow Lumiere's Law and use our understanding of in-person events to shape our creation of virtual events. You cannot imitate or emulate the offline in-person event experience online.

We must rethink virtual events.

Here's the First Thing You Need to Change... And You're Not Going to Like It

Rethinking virtual events is a lot easier said than done. Just ask my friend Dean Shaw. He's the Virtual Events program manager at SAS, a global software company. Days after the COVID lockdowns began, Dean was already hard at work.

Within the first three weeks, his company did 52 webinars. Holy smokes, right? But he didn't stop there. By the end of April Dean's webinar count had reached 120. And by the end of the year, his team had completed 600 webinars!

(Someone get me a towel!)

That's an average of 2.29 webinars every single day. With this fast-paced environment, it's hard to make really big changes to a system.

So, my very first suggestion to boost engagement, interest, and profit from your webinars is a simple thing...

You'll need to use this fix to maintain your audience's attention — for hours or even days. I attended a lot of webinars in 2020 and every successful event had this one thing in common.



Imagine this...

You're at an exciting in-person conference aptly named AwesomeCon. As many events are, it's held at a fancy hotel and convention center in sunny Florida.

When you're not strolling the streets and eating at fancy restaurants with your fellow event attendees, you're in the main ballroom learning about the latest and most *awesome* solutions for your industry.

(Awesome, right!?)

The content is exciting and ... well, awesome.

Every joke from the presenter sends a ripple of laughter through the crowd. You can see the looks of delight and interest on your fellow AwesomeCon attendees because you are conveniently seated at the back of the large room.

From your vantage point, the speaker looks small on stage with huge media screens displaying his speaking slides on either flank. The bigger the event, the larger the room, and the smaller the speaker appears.

It's a one-to-many scenario. There's *one* speaker talking to *many* people all at once.



Now, let's compare this with a virtual event hosted online. Once again, there is a speaker talking to you from the small corner of your computer. He or she has large slides displayed on the main portion of the screen.

Ugh.. remember Lumiere's Law? *Virtual events are not in-person events that we happen to broadcast online.*

An in-person event is a warm, multi-dimensional, captivating sensory experience. You're surrounded by warm bodies, laughing, chatting, and sharing in the experience.

A webinar is a cold, uni-dimensional, boxed experience with a million distractions just a click away. It's not a one-to-many scenario. Rather, it's just you and the presenter looking at a boring set of slides.

So, if we're going to create better, more engaging, more captivating virtual experiences and webinars, the very first thing we need to do is make the PEOPLE — the presenters, the hosts, the emcees, the panelists — as BIG as possible.

Yup! Time to ditch those slides!

I'm serious. We live in an age where platforms like YouTube, Twitch, Netflix, and Hulu have set our expectations for streaming content. And none of these platforms — exactly ZERO of them — have slides.

Ditching the slides is only the first step. Next, we have to figure out how to tackle something that organizers call their #1 problem with virtual events...

Before You Panic, Read This!

I know the thought of presenting without slides sounds crazy. But, it's going to be okay... I promise.

First off, there are some truly fantastic presentation tools out there. Take Prezi Video for instance. This software doesn't cost much and it helps presenters deliver engaging, exciting, and informative content — all while the presenter's FACE is still front and center.

Think of the final product like a news broadcast. The speaker is talking directly with the camera while graphics appear on the side or corner of the screen.

Remember, it doesn't matter where your virtual event falls on the amateur-to-professional slide scale. The technology is always going to be less important than the structure of your content and one-one-one presentation.

Chapter 2

Time to Reinvent Virtual Events



Image Credit: Greg Rakozy

I've attended and presented at hundreds of virtual events. But there was one event that impressed me in a very special way.

It's the monthly Chamber of Commerce meeting for the small town of Owensboro in Western Kentucky. This little town sits on the southern banks of the Ohio River and sports the honor of being the fourth largest city by population in the state. It's also the Bluegrass Music Capital of the World.

These Chamber of Commerce meetings are something to see. Each month, over a thousand people log on at eight o'clock in the morning to watch the event live. A local radio DJ serves as the host — constantly teasing what's next in the episode.

I use the word “episode” on purpose. These folks have mastered the art of grabbing and holding their audience's interest. Just ask the chamber members who tuned in to watch the cooking segment featuring the town's famed Kentucky Legend Ham!

There's a very important lesson here...



If we want to make virtual events more profitable, successful, and engaging, we need to add that secret sauce that will take our event from Yawnfest 2020 to the *Coachella* of webinars.

In short, we need to shift our mindset and stop thinking like virtual event producers. Instead, we need to think of ourselves like the head of programming for a cable TV network!

You're the one who's making the schedule and determining what shows air when. You're in charge of keeping people glued to your channel hour after hour.

Later in this e-book, I'm going to reveal three TV programming strategies that can help your virtual event find success. (If these strategies worked for the hit sitcom Friends, they can surely work for your event too!)

But first, let's look at the specific concerns our event organizers are facing and how "thinking like a TV programmer" can help.

In June of 2020, EventMB asked 1700 event professionals about their challenges pivoting to virtual events. 31% of event organizers and meeting planners cited "lack of engagement" as the number one challenge. This response was followed by "lack of tech knowledge" at 21% and "sponsors" at 14%.

Let's start with the lack of engagement...

So we're all on the same page...

If you're new to my world, let me share a little secret. The traditional model of a marketing funnel doesn't work in our new and evolving world. Instead, we need to imagine our customers' journey in a whole new way... a loop!

While on this journey, a prospect experiences a Moment of Inspiration which sends them on an unexpected journey of discovery and evaluation. Then, they reach a Moment of Commitment where they invest their time, money, or data into a product or service.

The Loyalty Loop explains how to keep customers flowing along this endless loop of positive experiences. Want to learn about the key loyalty drivers?

Visit: <http://bit.ly/lldrivers>

THE LOYALTY
LOOP

What is Engagement... Really?

The year was 1599 when Shakespeare's famous Globe Theater first opened for the public. Nobles paid for expensive seats in the balconies and the "groundlings" paid one penny each to stand elbow-to-elbow on the ground level known as the Yard. Rich or poor, they all crowded into the rounded space in broad daylight to laugh, cry, jeer, taunt, and generally enjoy the theatrical production as one.

But centuries after the theater burned to the ground, modern theaters took on a much more isolated tone. The lights were dimmed, people were forced to sit forward in their seats and the entire experience became more subdued.

People began to see Shakespeare's plays as less exciting. That is, until a sunny day in 1997 when the theater was rebuilt 750 feet from its original location. (I was a young buck at the time, but that didn't stop me from donating 500 GBPs to help with this rebuild. Now I'm a proud owner of one whole brick in the new Globe Theater!)

Anyway, after the rebuild, audiences once again crowded in to see live Shakespearean plays. The first play to be performed was Henry V.



Image Credit: Hulki Okan Tabak



And you know what? The round design and close quarters allowed spectators to once again share in the experience as one. People actually seemed to enjoy the show much better! They had more fun. They were more *engaged*.

So, thinking about virtual events, what does it REALLY mean for an attendee to be engaged?

If you ask the average virtual event producer, they might say that the attendee needs to be actively doing something. They want participation.

That's why event organizers tend to fall back on gimmicks like poorly designed polls and giveaways. They give attendees avatars and create virtual trade show floors where attendees can wander the "booths" and "talk" with vendors (because we both know they're not really booths and they're not really talking!)

It's Lumiere's Law all over again!

For many event producers, "engagement" can be achieved by getting their audience to simply click on anything and everything. It doesn't matter if their audience is enjoying themselves or not.



But it's not working... clearly. The definition of engagement is not to have one's audience actively clicking on mindless polls.

The true definition is this: Engagement is the act of occupying, attracting, or involving someone's interest or attention.

Too often, we focus on the verbs in the definition of engagement: "occupy, attract, and involve." However, the key to increasing engagement for anything, including virtual events, is to break down the nouns: "interest" and "attention."

Interest is the state of wanting to know or learn something. And attention is regarding something as interesting or important.

So, if we're going to manufacture engagement for our virtual events, we're going to need to make sure we create a desire to learn about something in the minds of our attendees.

We need to position the insight we're planning to deliver as important. We need to make sure our audience realizes that there is a gap between what they know and what they need to know in order to be successful.

So many of our virtual events aren't engaging because we're not challenging the audience from the very beginning.

Want an example of an audience that is NOT engaged but is participating? Someone who is prompted to click on a poll while watching slides and a boring presenter is a perfect example.

Want an example of an audience who is engaged but not participating? Just look at a group of gal pals sitting down with popcorn to watch a three-hour Oscars broadcast. Or, imagine a family gathered around the TV to watch the Superbowl.

Again... It's that element of TV programming that holds the secret for more profitable, successful, and engaging virtual events.

Mind the Gap!

Check out my keynote about the Curiosity Factor and how speakers can enrich their presentation with cleverly placed knowledge gaps.

<http://bit.ly/curiosityfactor>

There's Power in Being "Together"

There's another lesson in that Shakespeare story...

But let's vault into modern times and consider a question. Before the pandemic, did you ever wander over to the water cooler in the middle of the day to grab a refreshing drink? Maybe a bunch of your buddies were gathered in the hallway chatting about that "big thing" that happened last night.

You, of course, have no idea what they're talking about. You missed it. You didn't see the big game, you missed that celebrity's big announcement, and you were busy washing the car while that inspirational thingie happened on the news.

Feeling a little left out? Of course you are!

People like to be a part of the greater story. This is a huge reason why people found Shakespeare more exciting in a crowded theater. And there's a great reason why we enjoy watching live events more than recordings.

We want to be there... live... while all the action is happening.



It helps us feel connected with our community... and it gives us a chance to add to the conversation around the water cooler the next day (or with our gal pals while we're watching the Oscars.)

With this in mind, it's no surprise that new platforms like Amazon Prime's Watch Party, Teleparty, and Hulu Watch Party saw huge usage spikes in 2020. Now, you can sign into the app, invite your closest friends, and sit back to watch an online movie...together... while you're apart!

There's another reason we like to watch in groups. People actually share emotions when they're in a crowd. It's even been studied by scientists!

You've probably seen this phenomenon on your own. Just think of how much funnier a comedian seems when you're watching them in a comedy club. Or, think of how much scarier that horror film is when you're in the cinema surrounded by other people gasping and squirming in their seats.

Humans like to laugh in crowds, learn in crowds, and yes... watch virtual events in crowds. So your challenge is going to be to create a live event where your audience members can feel like they are part of a collective audience.

You need to provide them with a shared experience where they can get to know their event planners, fellow attendees, presenters, and sponsors.

You need to transform your virtual event into an experience that your attendees will want to engage with over and over again. In terms of The Loyalty Loop, help reinspire them by crafting Micro-Moments of Commitment over and over again.

One of the first steps to achieve this goal is by using the right types of technology...

Pee Breaks: Yea or Nay?

Look, that's one of the biggest differences between a virtual event and an in-person event. At an in-person event, you have a captive audience, and it's really embarrassing if you have to get up and go pee in the middle of a session when you're in an audience of 1,000 people and you're in the middle of the row.

You're like, "Oh my gosh. I really have to pee so bad, but I'm not disturbing these people and I don't want to get up." And as soon as the session is over you're running to the bathroom. So you have to provide breaks at an in-person event, but you do not in a virtual environment. In fact, you shouldn't, it's a really bad idea...

Forget the Tech Bells and Whistles: This is Way More Important!

In the world of marketing, there's always something "new" and there's always something "next." That just happens to be one of the main principles in The Loyalty Loop philosophy.

It tells us that we can't get so distracted by fancy tech, advertising platforms, and the latest thing that we lose track of what's really important... putting on a great virtual event.

Solving the real problem with virtual events is not going to be found in a particular tool with all sorts of bells and whistles. Instead, we need to focus on the structure of the content.

Let me say that again.

The STRUCTURE of your content is what's going to make your virtual event more successful. This means you need to make your event person-to-person rather than slide-to-person. You need to eliminate multiple tracks and instead focus your efforts on a single thread of content filled with engaging material.



And yes, it helps if you have a dynamic presenter who can speak well on camera. One who can let their charisma shine through to interest and excite your viewer. Presenters are going to need to rethink how they share their content.

But that, my friends, is a topic for another day.

For now, let me introduce you to an interesting concept I've recently discovered. It's called the Production Paradox...

While the country was in quarantine, many television networks realized they were going to have trouble filming fresh content for their popular shows.

For Food Network star Ree Drummond, also known as the Pioneer Woman, a mere global pandemic wasn't going to get her down. Rather than stopping all fresh content, she whipped out her iPhone, recruited her kids, and started cooking on her own.

Professional cameras and a 25-person crew were replaced by her daughter holding her phone while she chopped, mixed, and stewed her way to TV success. Not only was this content just as engaging as her professionally filmed show, but it also revealed a more intimate side of her life. We were, after all, in her home in the presence of her family.

It's not about the quality of the production. Instead, it's about the way the content is formatted that makes Pioneer Woman work. The content is still great.

The same thing goes with another cooking favorite, The Kitchen on the Food Network. One of the hosts is Jeff Mauro, aka The Sandwich King. While filming from his home during the quarantine, we got to see a softer side of Jeff.

During one episode, he was wrapping up a recipe and took that predictable "first bite" that all TV food personalities take. "That's a great bite!" he exclaimed.

This his son piped in, "Can I have a bite, Dad?"

"Sure." The child scoots over and takes a big bite out of the sandwich.

"What do you think, son?"

"Eh... not my favorite."

Jeff just looked at the camera and sighed. "Well, you can't win every one!"

TV producers have learned that it's not that hard to pull off a quality TV show. You don't need a ton of fancy equipment. Instead, you just need an engaging personality and the basic elements of tech. Then, you need an audience that is so curious about your content that they'll commit time and attention to watch your show.

On the flip side, virtual event producers are learning that elements of TV can help enrich their online experiences.

This is a good thing because television writers happen to know a thing or two about creating engaging content that will keep you glued to the screen for hours (or entire weekends) at a time.

And this leads us back to the Production Paradox: As television looks more like a Zoom call, Zoom calls are looking more like television.

Virtual event producers can embrace this concept and start leaving things to chance just a bit more. Even though it's live, it's still got to be fun. Don't worry about the glitches. Keep it simple and it's going to be more entertaining and interactive. People will enjoy it a lot more all the way around.

Just ask the folks in Owensboro, Kentucky. Their Chamber of Commerce meetings have basic tech -- laptops, iPhones, ring lights -- but they are still killing it when it comes to engagement. Their cooking segments even LOOK like the Food Network!

So, when all is said and done, thinking like a TV programmer is the ultimate key to making your virtual events truly successful.

Where Do We Look for Inspiration?

It's been a busy year here at the Davis residence. I've participated in and attended over 60 virtual events in the last nine months. (For those of you keeping score, that's an average of one every three days.) And not all of those were bad.

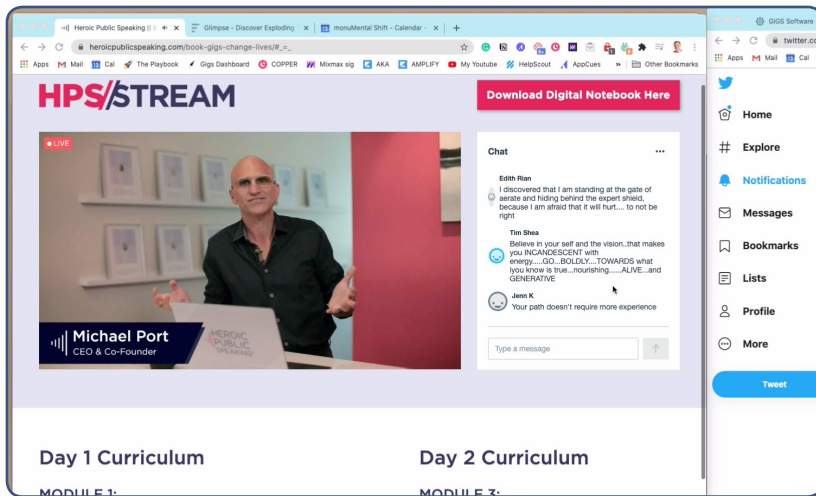
In fact, some of them were downright awesome. They managed to capture and hold the audience's attention for hours (and sometimes days) at a time.

I'm sure you're hoping for a long list of events on my honor roll. But honestly, I only have a few to share with you today.

That's because this is a new frontier for all of us. Just a handful of companies have figured out how to attract the attention and interest of their viewers.

One of my favorites was a seminar put on by Michael Port of Heroic Public Speaking. This virtual event had a good mix of live and on-demand content. Live sessions were people-focused with one presenter working with a single hot seat participant on the virtual stage.

Michael also built-in and reinforced his hot seat lessons using on-demand content that fit in seamlessly between live blocks.



And you know what? The audience LOVED it.

Of the 2,000 people who originally signed up, about 1,200 followed through to attend the first day of programming (an acceptable number.) But by the end of the event, an incredible 1,400 people were in attendance.

So Michael didn't just "not lose" participants... he actually "gained" them!

I can just imagine what the people were saying to their buddies. "Dude, I thought you were going to come to this. It's soooo good. You've got to get here."

Michael kept things simple. He didn't use a lot of fancy technology... just a single video stream with content

masterfully programmed to grab and hold the viewer's attention.

He also had a chat window on the side so attendees could interact with other members and feel a sense of community. That was literally it. No other buttons, no polls, no juggling different windows of content.

I think that's what kept people going. It's what kept people glued to their screen.

I tried to just put the livestream on in the corner of my computer so I could get other work done while he was teaching. But over and over again, I found my full attention sucked into the presentation.

Another really awesome virtual event was held by a UK-based company. The event was Atomicon 2020 and I'll come back to them in a moment...

For now, let's cut to the chase. You're reading this Ultimate Event Engagement E-Book because you want those specific strategies that will take your virtual event from average to awesome.

You're in luck because we're about to dive right in...

Chapter 3

The Three-Legged Stool: 21 Surefire Ways to Boost Engagement for Your Next Virtual Event



Image Credit: Rumman Amin

I'd like you to think for a moment about the relationships you share with your TV programming...

Do you feel like Rachel from Friends is actually your BFF? Do you watch every single spin-off show with HGTV's Property Brothers or Fixer-Upper? Do you check what's on ABC before you even consider looking at the other channels? Do you desperately wait for the next season of The Crown to drop on Netflix?

TV programmers have long studied these relationships. In fact, they came up with a three-legged stool analogy to explain how people relate.

On one leg is the relationship between Viewer and Program. It explains why you feel compelled to watch every single NCIS or Real Housewives season regardless of who's in it.

Then, there's the Viewer to Viewer relationship. This one explains why gads of medical students decide to spend Thursday nights crammed into a living room watching the latest Grey's episode.

Viewer to Character explains that very real personal relationship you feel with characters on the screen. We want to be friends with Leonard and Sheldon and wish we could join the Glee Club at William McKinley High.

If our goal is to make virtual events more like well-produced television shows, then we might as well take a page out of television theory.

Turns out virtual events also have a three-legged stool of relationships.

Want to see these 21 ideas in action?
Check out Andrew's video breakdown: bit.ly/21ideasvideo

I think the reason virtual event producers find themselves being pulled in a million directions is they aren't clear on the benefits of each leg of the stool. They aren't sure where to invest their time and energy:

- **Attendee to Event:** How can you maintain the relationship between the event itself and the individual person watching?
- **Attendee to Attendee:** How can you help participants connect with and get to know their fellow participants?
- **Attendee to Presenter:** What does it take for your presenter to personally connect with each viewer in a meaningful way?

Ready to see some solutions in action? Let's take things one stool leg at a time...

Think of your virtual event as an experience on The Loyalty Loop.

A Moment of Commitment is the instant your viewer trades money, data, or time to buy a product or service, get information, or support a cause.

So, in terms of your virtual event, you'll want to raise anticipation over and over again. Every three to five minutes, your viewer will experience a new micro Moments of Commitment so they can stay engaged with your event.



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Attendee to Event:

How can you maintain the relationship between the event itself and the individual person watching?

1: Extend the event.

It's no secret that people are busy. That's one of the main advantages of a live event. You can pack a lot of stuff into a day or two because your audience is completely immersed in the experience.

But when you're doing a virtual event, you won't have this same level of attention. So, try to embrace the constraints. Think about extending your 1 or 2-day event over more than just a few days.

One of the awesome virtual events I keynoted in 2020 was called Atomicon. And they did a fantastic job of extending

their event. Rather than a single day of programming, they spread out the fun over the entire month of April.

Every single day, five days a week, there was something to participate in. Attendees had the chance to engage with the content over a longer period of time instead of trying to cram it all into one or two days. Then, on the last day, there was a big final live full day of the event. More time to engage, more time to connect, more time to learn.

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2: Create a virtual staff roster.

You know when you're at a live event, how you see the same faces of staff members roaming the halls? You see their t-shirts and start to get to know them? Well, with a virtual event, it's a bit harder to get to know the staff this way. A virtual staff roster is a great way to let your attendees get to know and build relationships with the staff.

For Atomicon, they published a webpage with the staff roster on the first day of the month. This lets attendees see who they can ask questions of in Facebook groups or in other parts of the presentation. It lets attendees connect the dots between the people who are putting on the event and the other members who are there in the virtual world.

Heroic Public Speaking also did a great job with this. They put the brand's colors around every staff member's avatar. This way it was easy for attendees to see them in the chat.

3: Designate a FOMO creator.

No one likes to miss out on the fun. That's where a FOMO creator comes in! They create the "Fear of Missing Out" in attendees by sending regular updates about past or future events. Even potential attendees or complete outsiders can see these posts. It's just another way to tempt people to join in so they don't miss out on the fun.

A FOMO creator also helps people who are considering not coming to a virtual event that day reconsider and show up. It's important for this to be a single person so the attendees can begin to know, like, and trust that specific person... you know, like Rachel in Friends. :)

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4: Use an emcee or host.

It was 1992 and Billy Crystal was hosting the 64th Academy Awards. The orchestra struck up a haunting melody as a masked figure was wheeled on stage dressed as Hannibal Lector. He stepped off of his gurney and shambled over to Anthony Hopkins who was seated in the audience.

“Good evening. I’m having some of the Academy over for dinner. Care to join me?”

The crowd laughed and applauded as Billy returned to the stage and removed his mask. The Silence of the Lambs went on to win the evening’s top prize and Billy Crystal has gone down as one of the all-time best hosts ever for the awards show.

A single host who can guide attendees through your virtual event will help them feel more connected to the event. A really great master of ceremonies will not only introduce next segments but continuously help raise anticipation.

5: Send a snack box, food delivery, or a box of drinks.

Imagine this. You’re about to attend a five-day virtual event called Reach 2020. A day before things kick off you hear a knock at your front door. It’s the delivery man and he’s holding a massive box with your name on it.

Inside you find a special gift from your event organizer... a box of snacks! And I’m not talking cheap snacks either. I’m talking about legit awesome snacks... popcorn, candy, chips, gummies, granola bars, Oreos, and more!

Not only was I excited to get one of these gems, but I was also amazed by the attendees’ responses. People raved about it. They talked about the snacks in the chat box, compared their progress as they ate through the snack items one by one.

“Guys, I’m losing energy. I’m opening my Cheezits.” “Just ate mine. I’m already working on the M&Ms.” Need I say more? (Check out snackboxusa.com to see what I’m talking about.)

Want to see these 21 ideas in action?
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6: Use a countdown loop sponsor.

Sponsorship is an important part of making any live event profitable. And the only way you're going to attract sponsors is by giving them value - especially in a virtual world. So, here's an idea that will kill two birds with one stone.

While attendees are waiting for an event to start, consider creating a sort of pre-show. This may include the emcee chatting with a co-presenter as they welcome participants into the event. This pre-show could be "presented by" your main sponsor. Or, you could run a video loop with information from all of your sponsors so attendees can learn about each of the companies.

Make it fun and interactive. Have your participants use the chat feature to chime in with their own thoughts so they can be a part of the conversation.

I saw this done recently on a virtual event for AMA Tampa Bay. The zoom event started at noon, but they invited everyone to sign on at 11:45 to get to know others who were attending the event. The host posted a "sponsored question" and invited every new person to chime in with their answer. It's a perfect opportunity to get the people who are showing up early involved so they can have a good feeling about the sponsor.

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7: Use stacking. (Television Secret #1!)

When it comes to grabbing and holding on to a viewer's attention, TV programmers have got things down to a science. It's a good thing too. Because without their tried and true methods, they'd be losing viewers to one of our favorite pastimes... channel surfing!

Yup, by the year 1990, more than 80% of households had televisions with remote controls. Add in the introduction of cable TV with 79 channels of premium content and you have the birth of a phenomenon that transformed the future of all content creation.

Suddenly viewers could click their finger and flip between channels whenever they got bored. Networks had to find ways to keep us watching... stop channel surfing and keep you glued to their programming for hours on end.

I'm going to introduce you to three TV Programming strategies that will have the biggest impact on your virtual events. Unlike an in-person event, virtual events don't have a captive audience. Instead of a remote control your audience has the entire internet at their fingertips...

Your goal isn't to keep your audience from channel surfing... it's to keep them from surfing ANYTHING ELSE.

Let's look at the first of these strategies.

In 2014, ABC decided to put Grey's Anatomy, Scandal, and How to Get Away with Murder all together on Thursday nights. They called it TGIT. And they marketed Thursday nights to women 18-49. And it was a massive success.

This is called Stacking.

It's when you program a number of shows consecutively that have a similar audience appeal. When it comes to a virtual event, stacking all your sales sessions, or marketing sessions, or leadership sessions into ONE block - stacking them... is a much smarter way to ensure you keep your audience engaged for longer!

Want to see these 21 ideas in action?
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Attendee to Attendee:

How can you help participants connect with and get to know their fellow participants?

8: Appoint a matchmaker.

We know that people go to events to network. They want to meet their peers, get ideas, and get to know everyone who's in attendance. So, if you appoint someone on your virtual team to help make those connections, then people will have the same rich experience.

Atomicon did this successfully by appointing a woman named Samantha to be the matchmaker. She went into the events Facebook page and invited people who were interested to fill out a quick form. They shared some information about their interests and what types of people

they were hoping to meet. Then, Samantha connected them with other attendees for a 10-minute Zoom call.

During the first week, Samantha matched 200 people. It was so popular that two weeks later they offered a second round of matchmaking. 123 people responded within the first 24 hours!

If it goes well, they may be lifelong friends. And if it doesn't, that's okay too. It's like passing someone by at cocktail hour. Really really smart.

Want to see these 21 ideas in action?
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9: Tap into the audience with virtual table talks.

Your audience is going to be filled with some smart cookies. And if it were an in-person event, it's reasonable to assume your attendees could strike up interesting conversations about a variety of topics. They'd learn from each other and go away richer from the experience.

So why not tap into that brilliance? Invite your attendees to come to virtual table talks about a variety of topics. These are audience-oriented. They're not speakers. I went to one table talk at Atomicon with 12 people discussing the merits of podcasts. Then, I went to another with 100 people ready to discuss and learn website design tips and tricks from each other.

We've got to tap into the audience's expertise and connect those people to make that networking field great.

10: Sponsor table talks.

Want to amp things up one more level? Why not invite your sponsors to host some of these table talks? At Atomicon, a company named Ecamm sponsored a table talk and people loved it. Each person went away with a discount code that could only be used within the next hour. People were signing up in droves.

Want to see these 21 ideas in action?

Check out Andrew's video breakdown: bit.ly/21ideasvideo

11: Host a virtual pub with breakout rooms.

For a lot of in-person events, the word “network” is synonymous with cocktail hours. And let’s face it, it’s often people’s favorite part of an event!

Atomicon tackled this challenge by inviting attendees to a virtual pub hosted in a Zoom room. They added a series of breakout rooms so people could gather together in a fun and different way.

12: Give out prizes and awards.

There’s no reason your virtual event attendees can’t enjoy prizes and awards just like they would at an in-person event! If you’re extending your event over multiple days, you can do the same thing with your prize giveaways.

Atomicon gave out thousand dollar cash door prizes. They also awarded daily “Networker of the Day” awards in the form of twenty dollar gift cards for Amazon. Rather than trying to recreate an Awards Ceremony (cough...Lumiere’s Law!), try something a little different. Give out an award every 30 minutes throughout your event.

Want to see these 21 ideas in action?
Check out Andrew’s video breakdown: bit.ly/21ideasvideo

13: Use live chat and polling.

In June of 2002, America's youth were obsessed with choker necklaces and wide-legged yoga pants. They also couldn't stop watching TV's newest sensation - American Idol. Each week, they'd tune in to watch judges Randy, Paula, and Simon tear apart contestants before they voted for their favorites.

This idea of voting and joining in on a nationwide conversation appealed hugely to viewers. And 19 years later, the show is still going strong.

Just like with American Idol, I've noticed that virtual events that have polling and live chat are much more engaged audiences than the ones that don't.

And it makes sense, even on the surface. If you're sitting and watching an online event and you don't feel like other people are watching it with you, it's very easy to get distracted. A live chat helps people have a shared experience.

A word of caution... don't just use polls as a way to keep people "busy." Instead, make sure it's a useful part of the presentation. (Asking how many people in the audience have cats isn't going to make a difference if your presentation is on home mortgages.) Each poll needs to have a purpose or demonstrate an important point... otherwise DON'T USE IT!

Want to see these 21 ideas in action?
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14: Create a virtual scavenger hunt.

At the end of the day, competition TV shows are some of the highest-rated shows out there. So, why not tap into the competitive nature of your own audience?

General Mills recently held a sales kickoff meeting for all of their reps around the country. In order to build team camaraderie in a world where you can't hang out with your team, they created a virtual scavenger hunt.

It was simple stuff. The challenge might ask a team of five people to find a CVS receipt in their home. One of the members would think, "Oh, I got it. I'll be right back." Then, they'd rush off to find the receipt so they could take a picture and post it into the chat.

The participants got so into the competition that one team member scrambled just a bit too fast. She sprained her ankle!

But, that's just proof that people will take this seriously and have a lot of fun with it along the way. It doesn't have to be a scavenger hunt either. Any friendly competition will do... wine tasting, virtual cooking classes, mock game shows... just warn your viewers not to break any limbs!

Want to see these 21 ideas in action?

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Does Networking During a Virtual Event Actually Make Any Sense?

The short answer is... no!

Let's face it, networking at a virtual event is never going to be quite the same as wandering around a crowded room – cocktail in hand. But that doesn't stop event producers from trying a million different ways to make attendees connect.

I think it's a little ironic they're trying so hard when you consider how there's an entire industry devoted solely to online networking. Yup... it's social media to the rescue!

The most successful virtual events I've attended have social media networking both before and after the live sessions. However, during the sessions, they let attendees focus on learning the content.

Remember, anytime you try to host something like a trade booth "floor" or a virtual cocktail hour, you're falling victim to Lumiere's Law. Instead, use groups on something like Facebook to let your attendees get to know each other. (The exception to this is Atomicon's matchmaking service -- because that's just pure brilliance!)

Want to see these 21 ideas in action?
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Attendee to Presenter:

How can you help participants connect with and get to know their presenter?

15: Create intimacy with the presenter.

Let's travel back to September 26th in the year 1960. It was the first televised presidential debate between Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice President Richard Nixon.

Nixon treated this like any other public or radio broadcast debate. He showed up five minutes before the start and did little to adjust his presentation for a televised audience.

Kennedy, on the other hand, knew how to create intimacy with his audience at home. He hired a television producer consultant and was coached on how to address himself to the camera. He wore clothing that contrasted well with the set's background and begrudgingly allowed his staff to fix his facial blemishes with makeup.

Each time a question was asked, he looked right into the camera -- right into the eyes of his at-home audience -- and shared his answer. The result was a much stronger TV performance for Kennedy.

This is the type of intimacy that needs to be created in our virtual events. Remember, an online event is a one-on-one relationship with your viewer. Attendees need to feel like it's just them with the presenter.

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16: Leverage your stars with drop-ins.

Have you ever been at an in-person event when you see a face you recognize? Maybe you're standing in line waiting for the coffee, or maybe you're on the elevator headed up to your room. Suddenly, the face registers and it dawns on you... "Oh, this is an *important* person!"

It might be a keynote speaker, a celebrity industry expert, or one of the event organizers. Either way, you stand up a bit straighter, take a deep breath, and walk up to introduce yourself.

You can give your virtual event attendees the same type of experience with drop-ins. Explain to your attendees that a mystery guest will be joining them live via video on social media. Then, your star pops into the screen and talks with your participants through chat. It's a great way for your attendees to gain access to the stars.



Image Credit: Mateus Campos Felipe

Loyalty Loop Driver Alert!

Leveraging your stars is a great way to Raise Anticipation for your audience. Want to learn about this and other Loyalty Loop Drivers?

<https://bit.ly/lldrivers>

Want to see these 21 ideas in action?
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17: Dump the slides. (Yes, I really want you to do this one!)

Remember, you want your virtual event to be people-focused, not slide-focused. Don't let your event become a victim of Lumiere's Law. Your virtual event is not simply an in-person event held online.

Instead, challenge your presenters to share their content without the use of slides. Have them present directly to the camera and use other ways to reinforce points for their audiences.

18: Send the book or event materials before the kickoff.

Here's another excellent and simple way to raise anticipation for your upcoming event. It's simple. Send the book!

I saw this done really well at a recent corporation's virtual team meeting. The author sent each attendee a copy of their book two months before the event. After reading, each attendee came to the event excited to meet the author and chat about the content. The attendees also had the chance to pitch an idea which could be put into action. That's two months of anticipation for the price of a paperback!

Want to see these 21 ideas in action?
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19: Move the Q&A away from the end of your presentation.

“Okay, now I’m happy to take some questions...”

For some people attending virtual events, this is the magical phrase that turns “off” their attention. When it comes at the end of a presentation, the Q&A portion becomes the perfect excuse to stand up from the computer, wander to the fridge, or see what’s on sale on Amazon.

So, try something a little different with your virtual event Q&A. Instead of saving it until the very end, have your presenter pause for questions at key moments throughout the presentation. Or, have the presenter promise one more key detail for the presentation that they will only share after they’ve answered a few questions.

This way, your audience will stay interested and won’t wander away. Plus, this method makes our next strategy, hot switching, work MUCH better...

Pro tip: Be sure to plant a few seed questions to help get the ball rolling. It takes a little time for people work up the nerve to ask a question. Plus, streaming technology often puts viewers anywhere from twenty seconds to two full minutes behind the live presentation.

20: Use hot switching. (Television Secret #2!)

I once spoke at a virtual event hosted in South America. The speaker right before me was a media genius named Martin Lindstrom. Almost all of the 400 attendees tuned in to hear what Martin had to say.

As this speaking superstar was wrapping up, the emcee came on screen. “That was great! Next up we have Andrew Davis. So, come back in 15 minutes.”

Well, you can guess what happened. The viewer count dropped like a rock as people wandered off to the restroom, grabbed food, or checked in with TikTok. I started my session with a half-empty virtual room.

Now, this isn't my first rodeo. So, as I was delivering my virtual session, I watched the viewer numbers creep up... and up... and up. By the time I was done, MORE than 400 people were watching my presentation.

(Gotta say, I was both humbled and excited.)

In the world of television, programmers avoid this sudden drop off in viewers by using a technique called hot switching. This is when you eliminate any pause between the end of one program and the start of the next one.

TV programmers used this technique to roll directly from the successful sitcom Mad About You to a relatively unknown show called Friends.

Remember, your virtual event audience is not captive. They don't need bathroom and stretch breaks. When you offer them a break, you're inviting your attendees to surf... AND NEVER COME BACK.

Instead, hotswitch between each session. Kill the breaks. Keep your attendees engaged!

BTW, this is how Netflix pioneered binge-watching... they hotswitch to the very next episode before you have time to pick up the remote.

Want to see these 21 ideas in action?
Check out Andrew's video breakdown: bit.ly/21ideasvideo

21: Use hammocking. (Television Secret #3!)

The final television secret is called hammocking.

Let's say you have an amazingly successful show like NCIS and another top-performing spin-off – NCIS NEW ORLEANS.

Now, you have a legal drama called Bull that you know the NCIS audience should like... but Bull isn't performing very well in it's current time slot... what do you do?

You use Hammocking.

You insert the under-performing BULL in between your two highly-rated shows. Audience flow will tend to bring up the new or weak show.

So, instead of having an opening keynote and a closing keynote at your virtual event... with half a dozen weaker sessions in between, embrace the idea of hammocking! Move the strongest segments closer together to help hold up the weaker content.

These 21 techniques are going to make a tremendous difference in how audiences engage with your virtual events. Remember, you don't need ALL of these tips for every single event. Just choose wisely. Every event, organization, and audience is different. It's up to you to pick and choose the ideas you believe will make the biggest impact on your audience.

Want to see these 21 ideas in action?
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Chapter 4

The Future of Virtual Events



Remember, in the world of marketing, there's always something new and there's always something next. So, what's next for the world of virtual events? Good question.

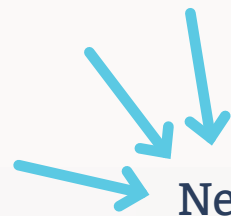
I may have discovered the answer in my garage during the pandemic....

After the lockdown began, I quickly realized I needed to get some exercise. I tried running, but I've never liked to run. I tried workout apps, but core workouts and boot camps bore me.

And then, one weekend, my brother-in-law said, "Hey, if you want to escape the pandemic and travel the world, you need to get a VR headset. It's going to blow you away. It's amazing."

So, I ordered a Virtual Reality Headset.

I use a Virtual reality workout app called Supernatural. And three or four days a week I transport myself to exotic



**Need a Virtual Event speaker that thinks like a TV producer?
Check out Andrew's Virtual Event Experience: bit.ly/21ideasvideo**

locales and squat and slice my way towards physical perfection (or improvement anyway).

I LOVE it. I haven't worked out this hard in 27 years. Virtual Reality IS AMAZING... I'm a believer. But, is virtual reality going to transform virtual events and webinars?

I love Virtual Reality... but Virtual Reality is the online event equivalent of the flying car. We've been promised it's coming, but it never seems to arrive. Well, I'm here to tell you that it's here.

(Not the flying car, but the VR experience.)

Anyone who tells you that VR events won't work, or that no one is going to put on a headset and transport themselves to a virtual conference has not truly experienced VR.

It IS spectacular. Within minutes, my garage melts away and I'm immersed. So immersed in fact, that in a boxing game called Thrill of The Fight, at the end of each round I find



myself thinking I can sit down on the stool at the corner of the ring.

I can't. It's NOT REALLY THERE.

I know, a game or fitness app isn't the same as an online event. But I've tried some of the early VR event experiences and while they're not exactly there yet... it's getting close.

There are two things holding virtual reality events back from taking off.



**Need a Virtual Event speaker that thinks like a TV producer?
Check out Andrew's Virtual Event Experience: bit.ly/21ideasvideo**

The first problem is consumer adoption of the physical VR headsets. During the pandemic, we saw ten years of consumer technology adoption happen in just three months. And VR was no different. I'm proof that the analyst predictions of VR adoption are only accelerating.

The future of online events IS VR, but wide adoption is probably a decade away.

And the second problem with VR events... well it all goes back to Lumiere's Law...

For VR events to truly work... we're going to need to Re-invent the entire event for a virtual world. Instead of trying to recreate our real world in a VR setting.

One of the reasons I love Supernatural so much is that every workout happens in a different location. This morning I worked out on a glacier in Alaska and overlooking the ocean at the Cape of Good Hope.

There's no reason to go to a virtual reality event that feels like a "conference center" when the presenter can take me anywhere in the universe.

So, what about today? What does the next year of virtual event sessions and webinars look like? Well, it's probably going to look a lot more like your TV programming.

Because television writers and producers know how to create ENGAGING CONTENT... Content that occupies, attracts or involves our interest or attention.

And this is what I expect we'll see for 2021 and beyond! We'll see more virtual events and webinars that look and feel like TV shows...

So, as you think about your next webinar, virtual event, or online meeting, take your inspiration from NCIS or Pioneer Woman... and you'll keep more attendees engaged for longer!



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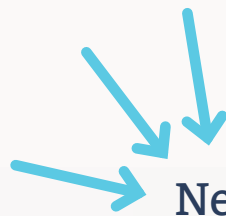


**Want to see these
21 methods in action?**

Check out Andrew's
video breakdown.

Watch Now!

<http://bit.ly/21ideasvideo>



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Andrew Davis is a bestselling author and keynote speaker. Before building and selling a thriving digital marketing agency, Andrew produced for NBC and worked for The Muppets. He's appeared in the New York Times and on the Today Show. He's crafted documentary films and award-winning content for tiny start-ups and Fortune 500 brands. Today, Andrew Davis teaches business leaders how to grow their businesses, transform their cities, and leave their legacy.

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THE LOYALTY
LOOP

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