




HOW TO PLAN A
Virtual Conference
AT YOUR ASSOCIATION



It's no secret that in this day and age, everything's going digital.

Meetings, events, methods of communication — you name it, it's all going online. That said, is an online event, such as a virtual conference, something your association should consider? And if you do go that route, how do you even get started?

We've got a few tips! In this guide, we'll explain the benefits of hosting a virtual conference, and better yet, how to plan and execute one should you go that route. Take a look!

The benefits

When it comes to virtual conferences, there are actually several perks in comparison to traditional in-person events:

▶ **They allow more people to potentially attend.**

Sometimes, in-person conferences can be difficult for people to attend. First, there's the issue of having to get away from the office. Some people simply can't swing that. But then, there's also the issue of travel and hotel costs. Depending on where the conference is, some people can't afford and/or justify that. A virtual conference eliminates those barriers, allowing more people to register and attend. (Plus, when it comes to networking, virtual conferences can be much less intimidating than in-person events — another draw for some people.)

▶ **They can save you time and money, operationally.**

Think about how much time and money you spend planning an in-person conference. It's a lot! Sure, virtual conferences still cost money, but not necessarily as much money.

With a virtual event, you can cut back on costs for hotel room blocks, conference center rentals, food and drinks, onsite signage, and more.

▶ **They leave you with evergreen content (and something to leverage).**

Last but not least, virtual conferences provide you with valuable content to use in the future. Because virtual conferences take place entirely online, everything can easily be recorded. That means your association can then use that content and information for years and years to come. Your attendees should, of course, be able to access that content for free, but as far as non-attendees go, you may want to consider leveraging that information as a source of **non-dues revenue** for your association.

How to plan a virtual conference

Ok, let's say you've decided to host a virtual conference. What now? Where do you even begin? Well, there are a few specific steps you'll want to follow:

1

Identify your audience

Before doing anything, it's crucial to nail down who you're targeting for this event. Is it members of your association only? People in a certain industry? A small sub-group within your membership? It's important to hash this out first because everything else — your content, your promotional tactics, your delivery, etc. — will stem from this.

Note: With your previous in-person conferences, you may have targeted members of your association only. And you may want to do that with your virtual conference as well. But just know, because it is online and easily accessible, you can open it up to others should you so wish and choose.

2

Determine speakers/content

Just like a regular, in-person event, you'll still need to identify speakers and content. Several months before the event, announce call for proposals — on your organization's website, on your social media sites, and via email. You want the word to get out there, particularly if this is a first-time event.

Then, once all your proposals are in, sit down with your team and determine who would be a good fit for this particular event. And not only that, but what topics and content would be **the most valuable** to your future attendees. That's the whole point here — to provide your attendees (and members) with value.

3

Select a conference-hosting platform

This is where things start to get a little different. In order to host a successful virtual conference, you'll need a reliable conference-hosting platform. You'll want to pick a company that's reputable, and ideally, that can help out with the event logistics.

Not sure where to begin? Take a look at [MC | LMS](#), the full-scale learning management system from MemberClicks. With it, you can livestream an in-person event, host live webinars, upload and store content for on-demand viewing...the list goes on and on.

And note: What's great about an LMS is it expands (or can expand) beyond just your conference. For example, you can track continuing education credits (ahem, more value for your members) and/or build out your content library to generate non-dues revenue for your organization. So...a tool worth considering, certainly!

4

Promote your virtual conference

Once everything's in place, it's time to promote. Just as you would an in-person event, promote your virtual conference on your organization's website, on your various social media platforms, via email, and perhaps even through some print marketing tactics, such as a well-designed direct mail piece.

Marketing tip: Really sell the fact that this is a VIRTUAL conference — that attendees can attend the event in the comfort of their own home or office AND at a lower cost than an in-person event. That's a big perk for some people, especially for those who may have wanted to attend one of your events in the past but couldn't due to travel costs.



5

Execute

Once all of the above is complete, it's showtime! Now don't be nervous. If you partnered with the right software company, they can (and should) help during the event (and particularly in the off-chance that something goes wrong — there's an issue with sound, connection, etc.).

But note: Even if something does go wrong, we promise you, it'll be ok. We all struggle with technology flukes from time to time, and your members and attendees are bound to understand.

So there you have it! Everything you need to plan a successful virtual conference.

This may be completely new to your association — and maybe even a little intimidating — but it's still worth considering. Remember, virtual conferences can draw in a bigger crowd, save you time and money, and provide you with non-dues revenue opportunities. So at the very least, they're worth a little thought.



Now just as we mentioned having an all-in-one learning management system to help with your association's virtual conference, you may want to have an all-in-one platform to help with the rest of your association's undertakings — dues renewals, email marketing, payment processing, etc.

If that's the case, you may want to consider an association management system, or AMS for short. An AMS is an all-in-one solution designed to make membership management easier.

Want to see exactly what an AMS can do, and more importantly, how it can make your life easier? Check out our free guide, [What is an AMS?](#) here!



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