



*Here's a checklist of a few dozen questions and critical things meeting planners and their CEOs might not have considered when looking to plan their first virtual meetings, based on comments from a veteran Assn meeting planner. Caution: There's not a lot of uplifting points made on this list. Rather, it's a sober dose of reality.*

### **ZOOM FATIGUE**

Right now, it's all-aboard for companies when it comes to holding a virtual meeting now, but what tolerance will your customers/clients have for laptop-based communications such as Zoom a month from now, much less in the fall or by year's end?

When does Zoom fatigue set in? It's only mid-April and already some are saying, "I'm webinar-ed out."

Be careful. There is plenty written and shared by consultants about how to do the perfect virtual meeting. But there is NOT a one-size-fits-all solution. It comes down to what works for *your* members, *your* industry and syncing with the country's shifting social lifestyle.

The silver lining taken from Covid-19 is that meeting planners are forced to think differently about their events. Meeting planners who have been doing the same ol', same ol' for 20+ years are in trouble. They don't know how to plan an annual meeting any other way.

### **TAKE A DEEP BREATH**

Don't stress too much if you struggle: Everyone's trying to figure this out right now.

Before spending day-after-day watching demos from virtual meeting service providers, determine what your goal is: Provide a client benefit? Offer valuable content? Include a trade show? Make money? Replace your annual meeting?

Phrases you'll hear often: "Go/No Go" and "Pivot"

If planning an event isn't challenging enough, some meeting planners are being asked to construct virtual meetings and in-person meetings simultaneously.

What's the first question association that CEOs are asking their meeting planners: When do we need to make a decision by?

### **ATTENDEE LOGISTICS**

Come fall, are people going to be willing to jump onto airplanes?

Will their companies have money in their budgets to send employees to events: \$700 registration fee, \$500 air fare; \$300 per night in a hotel. Who's going to approve that during a recession?

What will hotel and convention center social distancing guidelines be? Will everyone have to wear a mask? Gloves?

Buffets? Forget about it.

In big cities, what will attendees do during down time? Are they going to want to jump onto buses (a huge expense to meeting planners) to get around town? Will the restaurants even be open? Will they be able to catch a ballgame or

want to attend an Opening Party or even a small reception?

### **THE BREAK-EVEN BUDGET**

If your annual operating budget runs July 1 through June, and your annual meeting is this fall, you might not have even set your budget. In this case, it's suggested that the annual meeting budget for break-even or even to operate at a loss given the unpredictable future.

The first thing you should do: Eliminate any expenses that are based on "hope."

Don't forget: Your show decorator, registration company, convention center, CVB, and hotels have already furloughed or even laid-off a lot of their staff due to lack of demand. So, if/when you get a green light to resume effort toward a live event, how long will it take those organizations to staff back up?

### **CHECK REFERENCES**

Too many firms out there are pitching their virtual meeting services and yet, many have never put on a virtual meeting. Most won't tell you that until the end of the demo.

Be sure to ask the companies you are scheduling demos with to list the virtual events they have done and for which clients.

It's also important to remember that you aren't alone. All event organizers – in the U.S. and around the globe – are going through the same thing. Reach out to peers to learn more. Join and participate in industry online groups. Knowledge is power.