

Association for Information Systems

## AIS Electronic Library (AISeL)

---

ICIS 2022 Proceedings

Digital Learning and IS Curricula

---

Dec 12th, 12:00 AM

### **Business Model Innovation in Times of Crisis: Highway2Hybrid – A Trade Fairs Digital Transformation**

Markus Böhm

*University of Applied Sciences Landshut*, markus.boehm@haw-landshut.de

Christian Müller

*Technical University of Munich*, christian.mueller.tirol@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/icis2022>

---

#### **Recommended Citation**

Böhm, Markus and Müller, Christian, "Business Model Innovation in Times of Crisis: Highway2Hybrid – A Trade Fairs Digital Transformation" (2022). *ICIS 2022 Proceedings*. 8.

[https://aisel.aisnet.org/icis2022/learning\\_iscurricula/learning\\_iscurricula/8](https://aisel.aisnet.org/icis2022/learning_iscurricula/learning_iscurricula/8)

This material is brought to you by the International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS) at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in ICIS 2022 Proceedings by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact [elibrary@aisnet.org](mailto:elibrary@aisnet.org).

# **Business Model Innovation in Times of Crisis: Highway2Hybrid – A Trade Fairs Digital Transformation**

*Teaching Case*

**Markus Böhm**

University of Applied Sciences  
Landshut  
Am Lurzenhof 1  
84036 Landshut, Germany  
markus.boehm@haw-landshut.de

**Christian Müller**

Technical University of Munich  
(and “Trade Fair Inc.”)  
Boltzmannstraße 3,  
85748 Garching, Germany

## **Abstract**

*The business event industry was hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Within a few weeks, all trade fairs, congresses and events were cancelled in the spring of 2020 and partly replaced by video-conferencing formats as fastest possible alternative in order to reach the goals of the respective industries at least digitally. After more than a year of pandemic, many marketing and business travel budgets were forced to either be cut, frozen, or shifted into online initiatives. The crisis winners of shifted budgets were, for example, the advertising business segments of social media business networks such as LinkedIn. Trade fairs were forced to leverage digital technologies and undergo a significant transformation of their business model in order to survive. This teaching case addresses various aspects of modern live communication in the business event industry and the challenge of combining these elements with digital technologies and services to create added value.*

**Keywords:** Teaching Case; Business Model Innovation; Trade Fair

**Teaching Note:** A teaching note as available upon request from the authors.

## Preface

The business event industry (in particular trade fairs, congresses and events) was hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, as were various other industries in which many people meet face-to-face. Within a few weeks, all trade fairs, congresses, and events were cancelled in the spring of 2020. To achieve at least some of the objectives of the exhibitors and visitors, some events were replaced by video-conferencing formats. Videoconferencing was considered as a substitute approach due to its rather quick implementability. After the infection incidence had decreased significantly in summer 2020, fairs, congresses and events with physical attendance, were allowed to resume in September-October with appropriate hygiene measures, albeit a large part of the participants had to be integrated "virtually" or "remotely". The claim "Hybrid is the New Normal" has also been used for the business event industry from then on. However, some important questions remain to be answered: how can online presence for remote participants and virtual presence for participants on-site - be combined in a meaningful and value-adding way for trade fairs, congresses, and events? What are the future clients' needs and what does it mean for the future of the trade fair and congress organizer as well as their venues? And finally, how can business event organizations build a sustainable business model on this?

After more than a year of pandemic, many marketing and business travel budgets were forced to either be cut, frozen, or shifted into online initiatives. The crisis winners of shifted budgets were, for example, the advertising business segments of social media business networks such as LinkedIn (Bialek & Scheppe, 2021). While the trade fair business has collapsed by about 70% worldwide and in Germany in 2020 (UFI, 2021) and some trade fair companies are cutting staff significantly (dpa, 2021), the use of *live streams* on LinkedIn, for instance, has increased by 437% since October 2020 (Firsching, 2021). Even though *the pandemic has shown us once again the value of personal contact in a very painful way, the digitization of our industry has been exponentially accelerated at the same time by the pandemic* (Wohlert, 2021).

It is also becoming apparent that it is not just the Covid-19 contact restrictions alone that are currently causing the global business of the business event industry and exhibition sector to collapse, and that after the pandemic everything will go back to the previous way of doing business. On the other hand, it has become apparent that marketing concepts can also be realigned due to changed customer behavior as a result of the pandemic. For example, the construction machinery manufacturer Volvo CE has already canceled its participation in the world's leading trade fair for construction machinery, bauma in Munich, planned for 2022, with the following explanation: „*While physical interaction is still very important, we are starting to see significant changes in the way our customers want to engage with us both digitally and in person. This is due to both the technological possibilities of more efficient business processing and the increasing need for more sustainable business management*” (Müller, 2021).

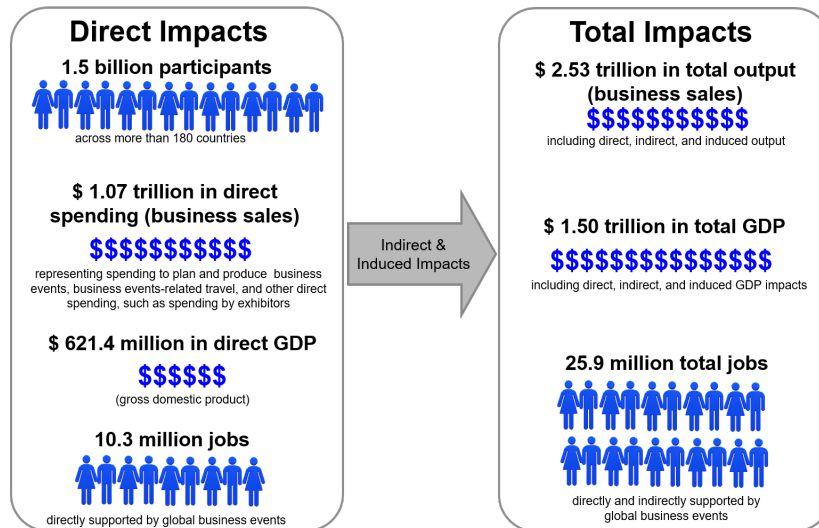
This teaching case addresses the various aspects of modern live communication in the business event industry and the challenge of combining these elements with digital technologies and services to create added value.

The content of this teaching case is based on a true case as viewed and experienced by Hubertus (the real name is kept confidential). Hubertus is the Technical Director of a world-renowned Congress Center, which is also part of a large fairground operator, based in Germany. He has extensive insight and first-hand experience to the direct impact of the pandemic on their own trade fairs, the fall of the face-to-face meetings and the rise of the digital platforms to realize these trade fairs during these world-changing times.

## The Business Event Industry

The event industry is very much diversified and extends into many areas of our daily lives. In general, this industry can be divided into two main categories: firstly, the Business Event Category (B2B), which primarily refers to trade shows, conventions, conferences, and marketing events. Trade fairs are primarily defined by their exhibition character, congresses, and conferences by lectures and discussion panels, and events that focus on the emotional experience. When combined sensibly and wisely, added value is created for all involved (Radtke & Bauer, 2018). Secondly, the private sector or Leisure Event Category (B2C), which reflects the sports, cultural and social event industry.

With a total gross domestic product (GDP) of approx. 1.5 trillion dollars, the global business event industry (B2B) would rank in the 13th place and thus exceeds the GDPs of countries such as Australia, Spain, or Mexico. Counting the direct, indirect, and induced economic effects the sector generated 2.5 trillion dollars of business sales and approximately 26 million jobs were dependent on it in 2017 (see figure 1; Events Industry Council (2018)).

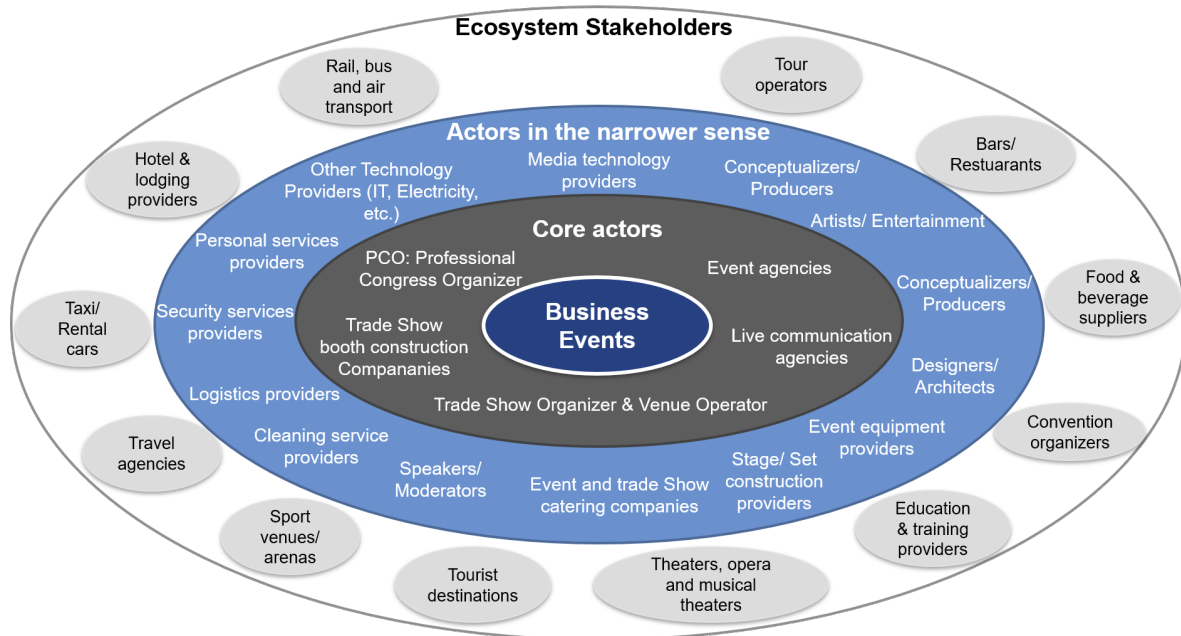


**Figure 1: Direct & total impacts of global Business Events in 2017 (Events Industry Council, 2018)**

The Trade Fair Industry in Europe dated back to AD 1200 in Champagne and has continuously helped shape European business life over the centuries to our present day. Fairgrounds such as Geneva, Lyon, Frankfurt, and Leipzig formed a network for the core regions of European trade as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Along with the important trade routes, they were central trade hubs for the exchange of goods and long-distance trade between economic regions (Schoop, 2017). Trade fairs are a way of reflecting markets and (so far) depicted the development of global trade patterns, as demonstrated by the rapid development of trade fair venues in China, for example, at the Shanghai destination over the last 15 years (Schoop, 2017). According to UFI (the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry), there are about 1200 exhibition venues worldwide with at least 5,000 sqm and about 31,000 trade fairs per year. The 25 most successful exhibition companies in the world had a turnover of about 10.4 billion euros in 2019. The largest trade fair venue is in Shanghai, with 400,000 square meters of indoor exhibition space, closely followed by Messe Hannover (392,445 sqm), Frankfurt (372,350 sqm), and Milan (345,000 sqm) (AUMA, 2020b).

With 163 international and national trade fairs, the trade fair industry in Germany recorded 9.9 million visitors in 2019, of which one-third came from abroad. With an occupied exhibition space of 6,716,270 sqm and 180,472 exhibitors, the German business event industry had a turnover of 4.1 billion euros (AUMA, 2020a). The market was relatively stable over the previous years. In addition to these large exhibition centers, 7,600 small event locations hosted about 423 million participants joining 2.89 million meetings, congresses, and events in 2019. Approximately two-thirds of these had a B2B background (EITW, 2020). In Germany, the event industry is the 6<sup>th</sup> largest industry, employing about 1.5 million people, generating a direct sales volume of about 130 trillion euros (R.I.F.E.L. e.V, 2020).

The main reasons for the high employment figures are the complexity and wide-ranging interconnection of the event industry, which draws directly and indirectly on many economic sectors and competencies, *to successfully plan and implement complex, personnel- and material-intensive events* (see figure 3; R.I.F.E.L. e.V (2020)).



**Figure 2: Actors and stakeholders in business related events (R.I.F.E.L. e.V, 2020)**

## The Impact of Digitization and other Trends

*“Digitization and globalization face companies, including trade fair companies, with immense challenges today. Both megatrends are forcing significant changes in the organizational structure, in the processes, in information technology and communication technology, and not least on a strategic level”*  
Bär et al. (2018).

The perception of these two megatrends is not only a new phenomenon in the business event industry, but also an omnipresent topic, as it is in most other industries. Likewise, the implementation of digital technologies at both congresses and trade shows has been a topic or a permanent development process for quite some time.

### **Impact of Digitization**

At congresses, corporate events, and trade shows, for example, apps that inform and connect participants before the event and promote targeted interaction have meanwhile become standard (Zanger, 2020). Virtual or augmented reality technologies have increasingly been used as a matter of routine for special product demonstrations at trade fair booths (e.g., using Virtual Reality (VR) technology to make elaborate construction site setups come alive (Messe München, 2019; Ruetz, 2018).

Apart from VR-trends, experts tend to view IT as a means of communication and future trade shows need to be designed as an *“overall communication task (Zanger, 2020)”*. Technologies like *“Big Data”*, and the digital *“optimization of the customer journey”* are becoming increasingly important in the events industry. To use these potentials and the available technologies correctly, as well as in a target-oriented way for an individualized customer, communication remains a goal and at the same time a challenge. Table 1 in the appendix provides an overview of digital tools to support business events.

New word creations such as *“mediatecture”* instead of *“architecture”* seem to better describe this overarching trend. Mediatecture in this case describes the interface between space and technology in exhibition design. *“Digitalization is changing our society and the way we communicate”* (Zanger, 2020) and this megatrend is having a correspondingly intense impact on the live communication industry. The *“networked customer”* interacts significantly via various channels and this also with changing identities. As

a private person, platforms such as Facebook or channels such as WhatsApp are more likely to be used, while professional interactions are primarily carried out via LinkedIn or XING. The needs of customers are also changing and „*the principle of one-way communication is increasingly being replaced by "virtual" dialog, participation and interaction*“ (Zanger, 2020).

These conditions have been driving the pressure for change in the business events industry for a number of years. There is now a seamless transition from the on- and offline worlds, which in turn also creates a commonality when the communication channels or platforms used (e.g., the respective event app or LinkedIn, etc.) are the same. The "live" event, therefore, loses its restriction of space and time or is given the opportunity to be extended and intensified by means of digital tools before and after the event. A physical experience is linked to the virtual experience in a targeted manner.

*“Even though live communication can now be amplified, optimized, extended and precisely potentiated with the possibilities of digitization, our industry continues to rely on the power and impact of direct emotional experience and personal interaction”* (Zanger, 2020).

### **Eventization (Festivalization) of Business Events**

In recent years, another category of Business Events has gained popularity: *Business Festivals*. The international role models for these business festivals are the world-leading South by Southwest (SXSW) in Austin, Texas, re:publica in Berlin, or Bits & Pretzels in Munich. This trend shows how the boundaries between the various business events are becoming increasingly blurred, and how elements from the entertainment industry are also being deliberately integrated.

### **In-House Trade Shows**

The large annual in-house trade shows of the major software companies and tech companies are in a league of their own. Whether Worldwide Developers Conference - WWDC (Apple), Openworld (Oracle), Dreamforce (Salesforce), SAP TechEd (SAP) or the re:invent of Amazon's cloud division AWS, which specifically bring together important stakeholders from their large ecosystem at their annual events in order to increase business deals, enable further education and create a shared sustainable experience. A new generic term, which is becoming increasingly relevant, is the community-building aspect. As long as most stakeholders can identify with the brand or event professionally and in terms of content, they will become fans and loyal frequent visitors at the festivals. Salesforce, with its annual user conference Dreamforce, the various spin-off events, and the permanent development of the Trailblazer community, is a current example of what modern live communication and permanent brand strengthening can look like.

In-house exhibitions have always been an additional instrument in the marketing mix, especially for small and medium-sized companies, in order to maintain relationships with existing business partners and, if necessary, to present certain product innovations or prototypes exclusively to them in advance.

The decline of the Cebit in Hannover (2018) and the recent loss of major exhibitors such as the Swatch Group (2018) and Rolex, Chopard, and Chanel (2020) from the old world-leading trade fair Baselworld, which has been in existence since 1917, are current indications of when the trade fair concept is no longer in line with changing customer and market needs.

## **Trade Fair Inc. and the Covid-19 Lockdown Journey**

As the situation regarding Covid-19 became increasingly critical at the beginning of February 2020 and a large number of international companies had to cancel their participation in the largest mobile communications trade fair (MWC). This leading global trade fair became the first major event in Europe to be canceled on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The originally local virus outbreak quickly and unexpectedly swiveled from China to Europe, as more people fell ill severely, and the number of deaths started to soar.

The date February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020 marked the cancellation of the ITB in Berlin, which would have begun on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020. From this moment on, almost all trade fairs, events, and congresses were canceled within two weeks and topics such as home office for all, short-time work, clarification of claims for damages, etc. had to be organized on short notice.

Various working groups were immediately set up to ensure that the hopeful restart of face-to-face congresses and trade fairs in Germany could be realized as professionally as possible starting September 2020. Extensive hygiene concepts coordinated with the approval authorities were drawn up and all those involved were preparing themselves for business events with fewer participants and maximum hygiene protection measures throughout Germany as of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

At the same time, the need for exchange and interaction with the branches of industry and associations of the canceled trade shows became increasingly louder, leading to temporary studios being set up in many convention centers to produce pure "online congresses" using professional production technology.

In most cases, however, the revenues were not in good relation to the expenses. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, the willingness to pay for online events was and still is largely very low. Secondly, the number of participants was often far below the organizers' expectations, whereas sponsorships were far below the usual budgets of real events, and at the same time the technical production costs were quite high.

Suddenly, new players, such as digital platform providers and streaming service providers, had to be paid in order to be able to achieve a user-friendly online format and enable interaction possibilities for the "online participants" - also called "remotes".

Highly qualified event directors were required while hosting a professional event. More often than not, the content and story board had to be created first with the support of creative agencies, whereas appropriate technical equipment such as a camera, control room, and streaming technology had to be rented. In addition, more professional manpower was required for the professional management of the technology in the temporary studio as well as for the various "virtual speakers" than the newly appointed online event organizers, who had organized trade fairs until recently, were aware of.

In an effort to differentiate themselves qualitatively from the usual web meeting standard such as Zoom and Teams, with which all participants were now sufficiently familiar, an appropriate studio environment and the associated technology were unavoidable. The call for a permanent webcast studio, which lowers the production costs for all studio users in the mid-term with a one-time moderate investment, grew even louder.

In addition, it became obvious that many participants were not allowed, were not able, or were not willing to travel for the planned congresses starting in September 2020. Thus, it was clear that all sessions taking place in the lecture halls of the congress center should be streamed live as well as recorded for later "on-demand" use. In order to realize this, a lot more technical equipment and staff were required than during the previous regular face-to-face congresses.

On the one hand, the costs for the technical implementation became much higher, whereas, on the other hand, the revenues decreased because fewer participants and exhibitors attended under the more difficult Covid-19 requirements. Moreover, this could only be realized temporarily with enormous discounts in other cost blocks (e.g. venue rental) as a form of compensation.

Hubertus was in charge of technical services and infrastructure at the congress center of the trade fair organization. He suggested that in the mid-term, a more flexible infrastructure should be made available to cover the need for an easier and more cost-efficient way of producing congress content and providing it to an online audience. For Hubertus, there was no alternative to upgrading the infrastructure and setting up a permanent webcast studio.

Furthermore, starting October 2020, the Covid-19 incidence figures rose again resulting in all further congresses and trade fairs, which had been planned for the 4th quarter of the year, had to be canceled on short notice. This consequently meant that the last potential revenues for 2020 had to be depreciated.

At the same time, a one-off cost-cutting program had been announced by the top management. In order to continue to obtain secured loans to maintain liquidity, not only that all investment and maintenance budgets had to be drastically reduced, but cutting personnel costs in the long term was also unavoidable. Hubertus believed that the general conditions for investment decisions had been better in the past.

**Assignment 1:** How would you evaluate the situation of the business event industry in light of Covid-19? What are the options for further actions? How would you personally decide on the investment in a webcast studio and infrastructure upgrade?

## The Rise of Old and New Platform-Communication Providers

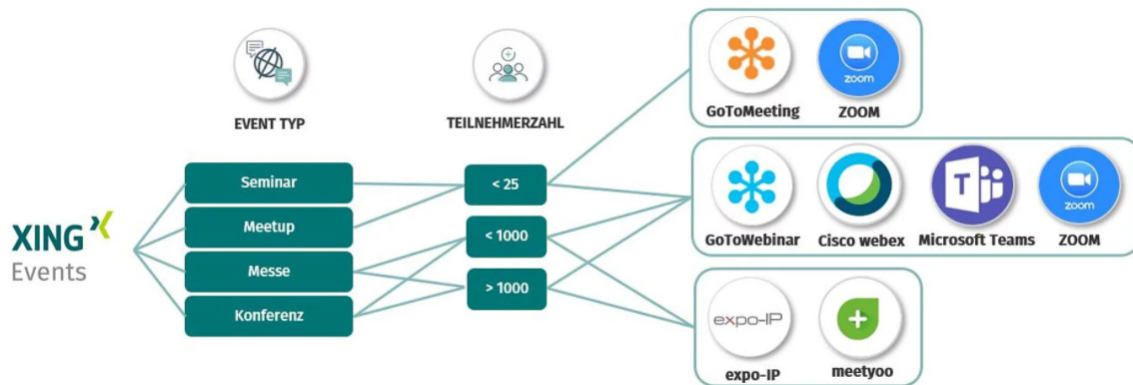
The only way to interact with customers, stakeholders, or the community of an industry was through online events. The requirements for this were and are always extremely varied. At the beginning of the pandemic, many companies often had the need to communicate the initial measures to employees within their own company or, if necessary, to stream smaller press conferences. All in all, these could generally be implemented with relatively little effort. For the internal communication needs of the companies, it was often possible to use the already existing video conferencing tools such as Cisco-Webex, Microsoft-Teams, Google Hangouts or Google Meet, GoToMeeting, etc. These are suitable if the number of participants does not exceed 250 people and no special attention is paid to CI-compliant branding of the landing pages.

The next level, which differs primarily in design and reduced interaction options, is made up of webinars and small streaming productions for press conferences or similar events. Here, the production side ensures that the sender's information reaches the recipients in an appropriately controlled and simple manner. As a rule, the recipients have the opportunity to ask their questions via chat. Cameras and microphones of the participants often remain switched off by the central administrator in this format, but considerably more recipients - over 250 up to 1000 - can be informed in a controlled, orchestrated manner. To name but a few, we have already known the platform GoToWebinar by LogMeIn, Inc., which particularly specializes in the business e-learning segment and was in the leading sector in 2019 compared to Microsoft, Cisco, and Zoom (Gartner, 2020). In the business and especially in the higher education sector, "open source technologies" such as BigBlueButton are gaining more and more supporters, as a recent survey of 56 universities shows (Dreyer, 2020).

The change in the internal meeting culture of the companies and the type of collaboration had already reached a high degree of maturity due to the rapid development of various collaboration tools and was ultimately accelerated by the pandemic starting spring 2020. The companies that had already invested in company-wide technical meeting solutions were able to implement the rapid move of most employees to the home office fairly smoothly. In September 2019, months before Covid-19 was even identified as a cause of global lockdowns, Gartner analysts based their annual Magic Quadrant for Meeting Solution report on the following strategic plans: „By 2024, remote work and changing workforce demographics will impact enterprise meetings so that only 25% will take place in person, down from 60% today“ (Gartner, 2020).

While the previously mentioned web meeting tools were already widely established in the everyday work of various industries, the cancellation of all trade fairs, congresses and live events marked the hour of the digital event platform providers. What almost all well-known providers have in common is that they already had digital event services in their portfolio before the pandemic. Many of them either developed new functions for their core competencies at relatively short notice or cooperated with corresponding providers or prepared and aligned their own interfaces (APIs) in the best possible way. It gradually became clear that until the end of 2020 there was no one-fits-all solution for all variants, but the challenges also lay in implementing the right solutions for one's specific "online event format".



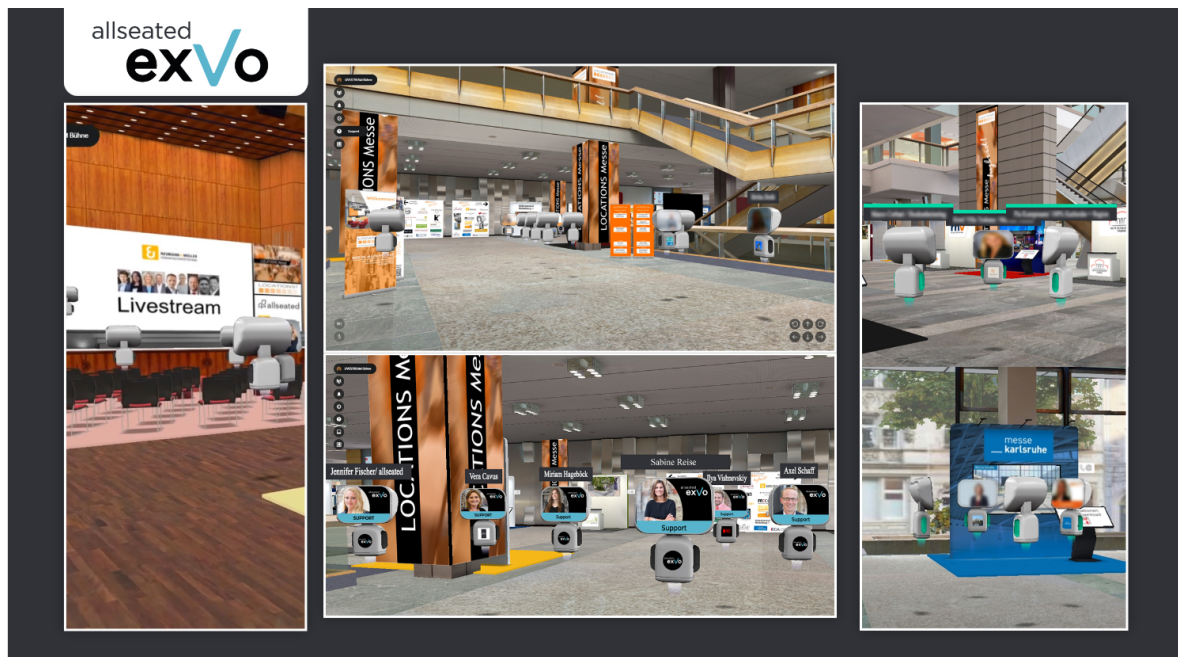


**Figure 3: Example XingEvents – different event types need different solutions (www.xing-events.com)**

The platform providers, which can seamlessly integrate other tools that the event organizer may already have in its portfolio, have been very well prepared (see figure above) or have adapted very quickly. During a platform demonstration call in June 2020, Babtiste Boulard (CEO & Founder swapcard, Paris) said: *We want to become the new LinkedIn for the Exhibition Industry!* Half a year later, they announced their next acquisition in the virtual platform segment in the northern American market.

Another trend that is emerging in the virtual platform market is the further development of gaming platforms for online events. The primary difference between this and most online event platforms is that the online participant can move freely in the form of an avatar in a virtual room or a digital twin of a real event location. By moving through the virtual exhibition in a similar way to that in a computer game and seeing the avatars of the other participants in real-time, a different experience of community is created. Through the playful way of moving around "digitally", the explorer or play instinct is sparked much more and you can decide through your own navigation, at which digital booth you want to stop spontaneously and with whom I want to engage in a direct video call. Smaller spontaneous digital meetups in the form of separate video sessions are possible, as is participation in seminars in separate lecture areas or halls (see figure 5).

Considering the rapid technical development in the field of Mixed Reality, the statement of Apple CEO Tim Cook in a Q&A session at the Utah Tech Tour Conference 2016 could soon become reality: *"I do think that a significant portion of the population of developed countries, and eventually all countries, will have AR experiences every day, almost like eating three meals a day. It will become that much a part of you"*.



**Figure 4: Example allseated exVo – Virtual participation as a 3D-digital twin of a conventional exhibition ([www.allseated.com](http://www.allseated.com))**

There is definitely a lot of movement in the former niche market of online event service providers. Otherwise, as Hubertus (name changed), the Technical Director of one of the international Congress Centres in Germany reflected, there wouldn't be any explanation for Cisco's recent acquisition from IMImobile (UK) and Slido (Slovakia).

**Assignment 2:** Ecosystem Description: What are the key actors in the traditional event business ecosystem and what kind of values do they exchange? What are the key actors in the "Online Event Production" ecosystem? Briefly outline the two ecosystems "Traditional - Onsite" and "Digital - Online".

## Learning to Run Online Events

The tremendous challenge for every traditional trade show and event organizer was to manage a completely new digital service portfolio. Once the right platform provider was chosen, the initial format had to be developed together. Hubertus reflected upon the last months: *Overnight, we went from being a live event organizer to a B2B product TV producer. We quickly realized that giving presentations on stage in front of a real audience is different from producing content and streaming it over the web.*

In order to get attention for their production in the first place, many online events were to be offered free of charge. This quickly gave the impression that such a webcast production could not have cost a fortune. However, the truth was exactly the opposite. In order to produce the content professionally, not only advanced lighting, audio, and video technology were necessary, but also the additional appropriate equipment was needed for the purpose of making the respective content "streamable".

*"All of these were far too expensive"* were the comments coming from the project groups! Setting up temporary studio solutions repeatedly was very cost intensive.

Furthermore, new details had to be taken into account and implemented in terms of content. After the importance of a new condition called "virtual or zoom fatigue" became increasingly recognized in the new

everyday working life in the permanent home office, exactly this aspect also had to be considered for the content design of online productions. Lectures or discussion rounds, which usually last longer than 20 minutes, very quickly lose the permanent attention of the remote participants. It also became rapidly clear that most online events cannot keep the virtual viewers permanently bound in front of the computer screen from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. Regular breaks are also enormously important, especially for online events, in order to counteract "virtual fatigue" as best as possible. Virtual training seminars still belong to the online events, which could implement the longest period, where the pure educational aspect lies in the foreground.

In order to keep participants enduringly engaged, regular feedback loops are important, in which small surveys are integrated and thus the interaction is encouraged.

A very important aspect is digital barrier-free accessibility. *"If the ticket doesn't work at the entrance to a real event, people certainly won't leave immediately, but will take all measures to gain access to the trade fair, congress, or seminar"*, Hubertus thought. The situation is different at the home office. *"As soon as you don't have the desired seamless user experience after several attempts, you turn your attention to other topics, which just had to wait for the attention of the online event"*.

A "digital shyness" was also partially visible when it came to the topic of "networking". In real space, one perceives the appearance of a person much more comprehensively with one's senses and, if necessary, enters into a conversation more quickly if one can better interpret the gestures and body language of the counterpart in the queue at the café break. On the other hand, there is also a general reservation during lectures in large auditoriums when the audience has the opportunity to ask the speaker questions loudly and clearly via the available auditorium microphones. This is where the so-called chat functions, Q&A or polling features in the event apps were a very popular tool even before Covid-19 and have been indispensable since Zoom and Teams.

One of the most difficult tasks was and is the "digitization of the exhibition". This is where the greatest monetization potential lies, should a virtual exhibition attract the same qualified contacts to the booth as at a real trade show. Very simple, but decisive differences to the real exhibition are the "coincidental" interactions, which occur in the real, temporary marketplaces many times in every minute of the exhibition duration. In the digital space, the visitor must first "actively" click on the virtual booth or one of its features so that the virtual booth supervisor can even see whether and which person might be interested in a product or service of the exhibitor. Up until today, it has hardly been possible to significantly guide people who happen to be "strolling by" to the booth area with a friendly smile, a casual joke or an appealing booth design.

**Assignment 3:** Describe the advantages and disadvantages of real face-to-face -business events as well as those of online-events.

**Assignment 4:** Describe the primary added value propositions of face-to-face trade fairs, congresses and events. From your point of view, which of them can be transformed into online events and which ones rather not? Are there new value propositions which can be generated by online events?

**Assignment 5:** "Digital shyness" and a lack of serendipity to run into interesting exhibitions or contacts seem to be critical barriers to achieve the core value propositions of an onsite trade fare. Are there any approaches from the online live streaming (e.g. eSports) industry that can be transferred to online business events to overcome digital shyness?

## Onsite + Online = Hybrid

In many conversations with exhibitors and customers, the insistent desire to again meet face-to-face as soon as possible came up regularly. The tenor was always: The event or the trade show must then take place in a "hybrid" form! Often there were also sweeping statements such as: *Hybrid is the new normal!*

The business event industry has held many online panels with their industry experts in the winter months of 2020 and 2021, in which it was often reiterated that, from their point of view, the education sector at conventions can be docked online and therefore hybridized. The overarching topic of networking and the

business development exhibition is proven to be difficult to digitize. After all, at the turn of the millennium, we wouldn't have imagined that in 2020 we would be using our cell phones much more frequently for other types of use than making phone calls.

*„I like to compare it to the cell phone. In the past, it was only there to make wireless phone calls. Today, a smartphone is the entry device to the whole world of the internet. You can play games, take photos, navigate, film, and watch TV on it. That's how trade shows have to evolve, too. For us, the phone function is the area with exhibitors and visitors. In addition, there must be all the functions that a modern smartphone has. The fact that you can offer international contact options all year round beyond the trade show and develop products that add value for the customer”,* said Klaus Dittrich, CEO of Messe München, in a recent interview (Hausknecht, 2021).

Many unanswered questions remain for Hubertus as an expert, and the entire business event industry:

- How could we combine the needs of onsite and online participants in such a way that both groups of participants feel meaningfully integrated into the business event, can interact with each other in the best possible way, and, at the end of the day, experience added value from their participation?
- Will the majority of hybrid events take place concurrently, bringing online and onsite participants together in one event? Or will it take place more sequentially? In other words, will potential participants first be prepared for the onsite event with a series of shorter online events, and then finally be supported with an online event after the onsite event?
- What skills do our employees need to develop in order to design and ultimately implement the "hybrid" services for the respective event format in a target-oriented manner for and with the customer?
- How could one integrate the right platform provider(s) and adapt the existing systems without requiring the future online attendee to log into different systems? Seamless use of digital services is standard today; just as the term "one-stop shop" is popular for quality online stores.
- Do online attendees need a comparable abstracted digital twin of the real event venue, in order to simplify a visual orientation in the user experience (UX) where one could participate while not losing, yet strengthening the sense of connection with onsite attendees?
- What technologies should a venue operator continue to invest in to remain competitive as an event venue?
- Can we move from being a temporary marketplace rental company to a year-round platform provider?
- Would a digital presence be just as appropriate and as highly recognized as the physical presence at the venue?

It appears that we have just started on the highway to hybrid and still have a long way to go, Hubertus reflected.

**Assignment 6:** Describe your view of the ideal "hybrid event" of the future. Which components should a hybrid event contain in any case? Which components should a hybrid event definitely not contain in any circumstances?

## Appendix

The following table is a non-comprehensive list of exemplary digital features to support business events. The list has been compiled by analyzing the features of common Digital Events platforms such as *talque.com*, *virtualhive.live* or *allseated.com*.

**Table 1: Digital Tools to support Business Events**

Digital Feature	Description
Ratings	(Anonymous) Rating of the performance of speakers or exhibitors. As a tool for quality management or, if public, a peer-review tool for visitors.
Surveys	A tool to gain an overview of the sentiment or opinion of the audience by raising e.g., multiple choice questions and receiving live feedback.
Chat	A text message-based feature to communicate with participants on the platform or within a session without disturbing the presenter.
Direct Call	Video Calls to specifically assigned company representatives that are available for requests.
Matchmaking	An algorithmic approach to bring people with similar or complementary profiles together. This can support creating interpersonal relationships.
1:1 Meeting (On-Site)	Tool to support individual meetings on-site by using the calendar information of the participants and suggesting locations within close distance to all participants.
1:1 Meeting (digital)	Video call feature for participants that are not meeting on-site.
Video Conference	Scheduled and previously announced video presentations for large audiences.
Break-out rooms	Feature to create video calls for smaller groups within a video conference session to increase interaction and discussion with a moderator starting and ending these sessions.
Live Streaming	Video-stream of an on-site presentation. Either via fixed equipment in a conference room or with free ranging reporters strolling around the exhibitions.
Ad-hoc Conference	Creation of ad-hoc virtual meeting rooms with group video calls for topics that are arising during the conference. Ad-hoc conferences can be announced in the Digital Agenda.
Digital Agenda	Detailed information about the program of an event and important key information as well as details on sessions. Participants can create their individual itinerary by picking from parallel sessions of the event program.
Slot Booking	A reservation tool to book time slots with exhibitors (on-site or via video-call).
Profiles	Company, speaker, or participant profiles to obtain background information and contact details.
Virtual Reality	Demonstration of Products in a 3D World.
Virtual World	Strolling around a virtual conference venue by directing an avatar. Personal interaction can be established with nearby avatars by establishing a direct video call.
Interactive Floorplan	Floorplan of the event venue with additional information overlays such as current or next sessions from the agenda, location of exhibitors or individual contacts, or the menu of the restaurants.
File Galleries	Sharing of Documents (e.g., presentations) with visitors of sessions or booths.
Analytics Dashboard	Key performance metrics for exhibitors or speakers such as number of visitors at on-site and virtual booths, ratings of speakers / booths, clicks in company profiles, etc.

## References

- AUMA. (2020a). AUMA - Die Messewirtschaft - Bilanz 2019: Ausstellungs- und Messe-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft e.V.
- AUMA. (2020b). *Kennzahlen der Messewirtschaft: Ausstellungs- und Messe-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft e.V.*
- Bär, C., Grädler, T., & Mayr, R. (Eds.). (2018). *Digitalisierung im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Recht*. Springer Berlin Heidelberg. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-55720-4>.
- Bialek, C., & Scheppe, M. (2021). *LinkedIn wächst schneller als Xing – und setzt die Konkurrenz unter Druck: In der Pandemie verlagert sich das Netzwerken in den digitalen Raum. Die Karriereplattformen profitieren davon. LinkedIn hat dabei der Konkurrenz allerdings etwas voraus.* <https://www.handelsblatt.com/karriere/karriere-netzwerke-linkedin-waechst-schneller-als-xing-und-setzt-die-konkurrenz-unter-druck/26860566.html>
- dpa. (2021). Messe München reduziert Geschäftsführung. *Zeit Online*. [https://www.zeit.de/news/2021-04/22/messe-muenchen-reduziert-geschaeftsfuehrung?utm\\_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com](https://www.zeit.de/news/2021-04/22/messe-muenchen-reduziert-geschaeftsfuehrung?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com)
- Dreyer, M. (2020). *Umfrage zu BigBlueButton an Hochschulen im November 2020 durch den ZKI-Arbeitskreis Strategie & Organisation*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4300202>
- EITW. (2020). Meeting- & EventBarometer: Deutschland 2019/2020.
- Events Industry Council. (2018). *Global Economic Significance of Business Events: Global study conducted by Oxford Economics*. <https://www.eventscouncil.org/>
- Firsching, J. (2021, February 2nd, 2021). *LinkedIn Statistiken 2021: 722 Mio. Nutzer weltweit & 16 Mio. im DACH-Raum: LinkedIn hat sich zur zentralen Anlaufstelle der digitalen B2B-Kommunikation entwickelt.* <https://www.futurebiz.de/artikel/linkedin-statistiken/>
- Gartner, I. (2020, 17.01.2021). *Magic Quadrant for Meeting Solutions*. Retrieved 17.01.2021 from <https://www.gartner.com/doc/reprints?id=1-249WPGXS&ct=200930&st=sb>
- Hausknecht, W. (2021, 10.02.2021). Münchens Messe-Chef überstand schwere Corona-Infektion: So heftig ist seine Branche von der Pandemie betroffen. *Merkur*. <https://www.merkur.de/welt/coronavirus-sti164091/muenchen-messe-chef-corona-infektion-pandemie-entlassungen-digitalisierung-folgen-kurzarbeit-zr-90198273.html>
- Messe München. (2019). *BAUMA 2019: Die digitale Baustelle: Mehr als nur Unterhaltung*. Messe München. <https://www.presse-zur-messe.de/bauma-2019-die-digitale-baustelle-mehr-als-nur-unterhaltung/>
- Müller, V. (2021). Volvo geht nicht auf die bauma! *baunetzwerk.biz*. <https://www.baunetzwerk.biz/volvo-geht-nicht-auf-die-bauma>
- R.I.F.E.L. e.V. (2020). *THE MACROECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EVENT INDUSTRY: Research Institute for Exhibition and Live-Communication*. <http://www.rifel-institut.de/>
- Radtke, B., & Bauer, T. (2018). Messtivals oder wie sich eine wichtige Branche erneuert. *Absatzwirtschaft*(3).
- Ruetz, D. (2018). Digitale Tools bei Markeninszenierungen auf Messen und Events. In C. Zanger (Ed.), *Events und Marke* (pp. 132–158). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.
- Schoop, K. (2017). Historie und Entwicklung von Fachmessekonzepten. In M. Kirchgeorg, W. M. Dornscheidt, & N. Stoeck (Eds.), *Handbuch Messemanagement*. Springer Fachmedien.
- UFI. (2021). *UFI Global Exhibition Barometer: 26th Edition*.
- Wohlert, N. (2021). Ein Jahr digitale oder hybride Events: Wie geht es der Messebranche? *Presseportal*. <https://www.presseportal.de/pm/6344/4888971>
- Zanger, C. (Ed.). (2020). *Events und Messen im digitalen Zeitalter*. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-31775-1>.