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Jim Boomer • Oct. 16, 2020



In the past six months, several organizations in the accounting profession have postponed or canceled their conferences in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, while others have taken their events virtual.

In many ways, moving an event to a virtual environment is a good thing. CPAs can save on the cost of a plane ticket and hotel room while still learning about the latest trends in the profession, connecting with others and receiving CPE. But as anyone who's attended an event in person knows, the greatest value often comes not from

the keynotes and breakout sessions – as informative and inspiring as they may be –

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Treat virtual conferences like live events

When you attend a conference, you likely clear the decks as much as possible before you leave and add an auto-responder to your email, so people know you'll be out of pocket for a few days. Do the same for virtual events.

Although you may be sitting at the same desk or in the same home office that you work in every day, don't treat virtual conferences like just another workday. Don't schedule calls or work on other projects. If you're not in a session, talk to a vendor or meet up with someone you haven't connected with yet. This will help you immerse yourself in the event, and you'll get more out of it in the end.

Go with the flow

Don't expect every online conference to run perfectly, especially since the conversion to online was unexpected, and many organizers had only a few months to identify a platform and recreate an experience.

There will be some technical glitches, awkward moments, and less-than-optimal internet connections along the way. Presenters might not be as enthusiastic and engaging when speaking to a monitor as they are on stage. A sense of humor, empathy and acknowledgment that this is a weird time will go a long way.

Embrace innovation

Whether you're planning, speaking at, or attending an online event, try to think outside of the box. Nobody wants to sit through an eight hour day of dull webinars and PowerPoint presentations.

That's why, when we decided to take our [Boomer Technology Circles Summit](#) virtual this year, we wanted it to be more than a Zoom call. After evaluating several different

platforms, we chose to hold the Summit on [VirBELA](#), an immersive, virtual event

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Stay interactive

Virtual conferences might lack the intimacy of a physical gathering, but it's still possible to connect with your peers.

If you feel a little unsure of interacting in a virtual world, try outlining a few goals for the event. That can be as simple as deciding:

- How many new people you want to meet during the event
- How many existing contacts you want to reconnect with
- How many exhibitors you want to talk to in the expo hall
- Which speakers you want to follow up with after their session
- Which questions you want to ask of your peer group

By setting a few success metrics, you can check in with yourself during the event to make sure you are on the right track – and make adjustments if you aren't.

Many event organizers are also adding contests and games to their events. For the BTC Summit, attendees visited sponsor booths to complete a MadLib, which then entered them into a drawing for \$10,000. It was a fun way to break the ice while encouraging members to stay engaged.

With our profession facing challenges now and in the near future, community is more important than ever. We all need to lean on our peers, learn from each other's experience, and find out what works and what doesn't in the "new normal."

Whether you meet with peers in person or virtually, you need to give in order to get. The more you share, the more value you get back. So make a commitment to engage and build connections in a virtual world. You'll find you can accomplish some surprisingly powerful results.

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