

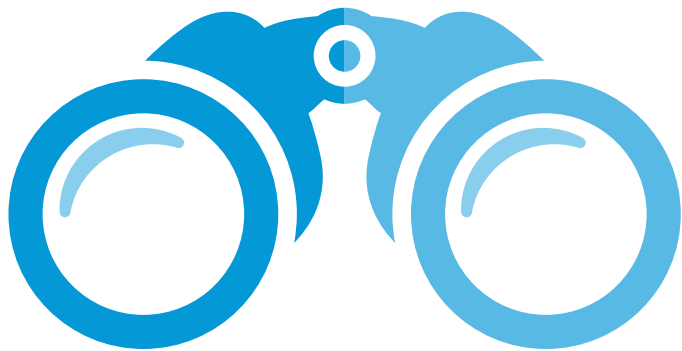
EVENTS IN 2022

The transformation of investment events



stoneshot 

WHAT EVENTS USED TO LOOK LIKE



In 2019, the events we promoted at StoneShot looked a lot different. In total, we handled 1,700 for financial advisers. In 2020, not so many. Some say we got lazy. Others quite rightly pointed to the biggest global pandemic since the Spanish Flu.

But let's rewind a couple of years and paint a picture of financial advisers jumping in their cars or hopping onto trains excited to learn more about GDPR compliance or tax planning, while picking up a few valuable CPD points in the process.

They'd shoot off up the motorway or onto Network Rail, typically up to 50 or so miles from home, launch themselves into a hearty networking breakfast, lap up what the speakers had to say and make full use of breakout sessions.

Come five o'clock, maybe the networking carried on, with a little liquid hospitality to oil the wheels of asset management.

In 2020, the events continued, of course. But they took another form. So what could we learn from the online events we promoted? Which elements could we preserve when we went back to real-world events?

BACKGROUND TO OUR RESEARCH

In March 2020, the world shifted a few degrees on its axis. Coronavirus beat its unhealthy path across the globe, the world went into lockdown, and we learned interesting new words and phrases, such as furlough, social distancing and new normal.

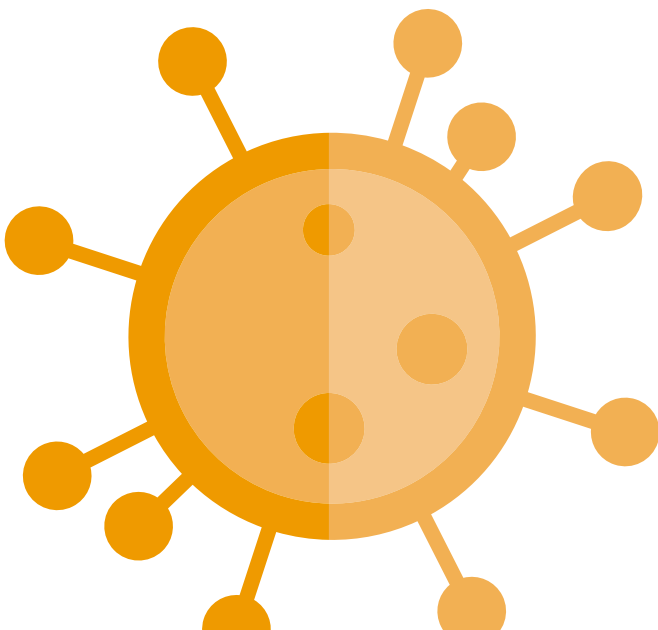
The old normal

Back in the old normal, financial advisers had a tremendous appetite for physical events. Investment management is very much a relationship business and, in 2019, advisers attended between six and 20 events each. But things took a significant hit in 2020. After March, the grand total of real-life events was zero and they became an online thing only.

So, as we all emerge from our enforced chrysalis, blinking in the harsh daylight of a new and different world, we wanted to know what advisers expect from their events going forward.

Offline or digital?

By the summer of 2021, we began to see physical events slowly making a comeback. Do advisers want to go back to these real-world events? How keen would they be on keeping things digital? We quizzed hundreds of financial advisers about how soon they planned to return to events, and their preferences over what those events might look like. Three key findings stood out.



WHAT HAPPENED IN 2020

We all know what happened in 2020 and how COVID-19 knocked any kind of social interaction on its mask-clad nose. Before coronavirus, our research showed that nearly half of our respondents attended several events a year. The virus changed all that. So how did marketers adjust?

COVID impact report

After extensive research, we pulled together a COVID-19 Impact Report to help financial marketers clamber over this new rocky terrain. We combined qualitative insight with quantitative figures from our app data to arm marketers with the information to weather the storm.

Here's what we saw. Increased communication, coronavirus-specific campaigns, stable open rates, fewer opt-outs, consistent engagement, and bi-weekly cycles. Not to mention an Easter holiday period packed with online action.



The rise of webinars

Webinars became the channel of choice to replace physical events, but we also saw more videos, calls, emails, and social media.

A rapid learning curve followed to help with this transition from physical to digital, and joint processes were required between the event and content elements of the marketing mix to ensure the team was aligned.

In fairness, many larger firms were already well-versed in the demands of online events. But the new normal was more of a challenge for mid-sized and smaller firms that relied more on in-person events.

Many clients reported that the enforced change was a good opportunity to test video tools that they might previously have been reluctant to dip into. This strategy of virtual meetings seems likely to continue when restrictions are lifted.



SUMMARY OF OUR KEY FINDINGS

The conclusions from our COVID-19 Impact Report were echoed in our events research, which produced three key findings:

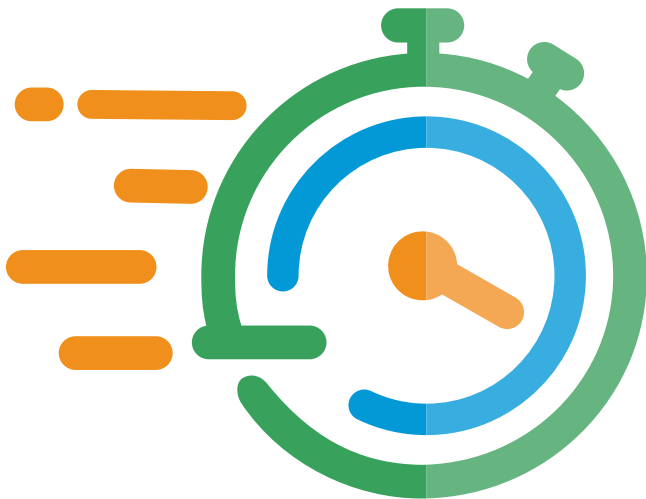
- Professional investors are ready to attend events again
- Client experience is key
- Hybrid is the future of events

Interestingly, 96% of respondents preferred the registration experience for online events, perhaps because they had fewer fields to fill in because of the joy of one-click registration, whether the event was digital or real-life.

Says Gavin John, StoneShot Founder and CEO, “Events may be back but they are set to change. Hybrid is the future.”



PROFESSIONAL INVESTORS ARE READY TO ATTEND EVENTS



Our aim with this research was always to find out what events demand was going to be like from the advisers' standpoint.

We already knew that asset management firms were keen to get back on the road and meet people. But there's little point doing that if the investors won't turn up.

Grumpy sales people

One of the worst nightmares for event managers is arranging an event, 100 people registering and only 50 turning up on the day. It's the kind of thing that makes sales managers very grumpy.

Happily, our research showed that 40% of investors are ready to go back to events immediately, 13% in a few weeks and 24% inside a month. Effectively, over three-quarters of those surveyed were keen to mingle within a month of restrictions being lifted.

Distance

But what about distance? In the UK, how far people travel for events has always been a factor that had to be carefully planned.

This, too, was positive. Almost half our respondents were happy to travel up to 50 miles, with an intrepid 9% prepared to venture up to 100 miles from base. Almost one third said ten miles was their limit.

Interestingly, we also analysed this before 2019. We found a drop-off in registration and an increase in no-shows when an adviser was more than 35 miles from the venue.

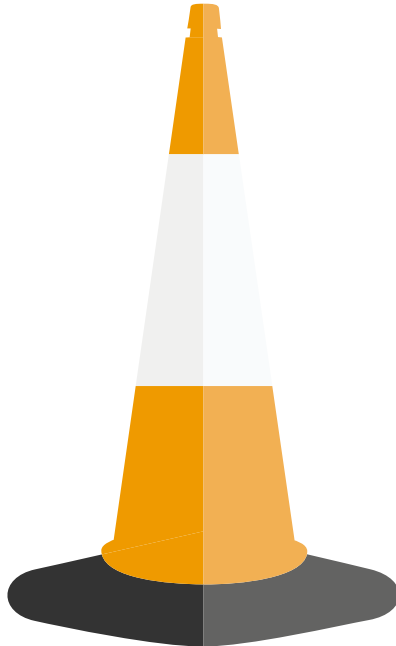
However, distance travelled has always differed regionally, in any case. Dropout rates tend to be higher in London, where there's a fund manager on every corner and meeting peers is less of a novelty. In more far-flung outposts, meeting fund managers is less of an everyday occurrence, so higher attendance is commonplace.

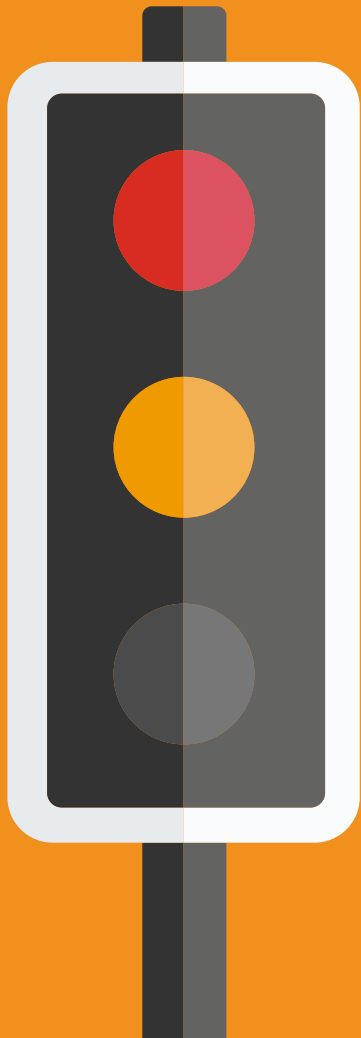
Location, location, location

Comments from our respondents bore out the importance of travel.

When asked, 'What makes or breaks a physical event experience?', one replied simply, 'Location, location, location.' Another suggested, 'The travel time and expense, if overnight'.

Another UK adviser was adamant that if the journey involved heavy traffic, he'd seriously consider swerving the event. Nobody likes a traffic cone.





**“ IF THE LOCATION WAS
VIA HEAVY TRAFFIC THEN
I WOULD SERIOUSLY
CONSIDER NOT ATTENDING.”**

Financial adviser

With people having taken part in thousands of online events over the last COVID-stricken year, how do they see virtual events now?

Roughly 35% of respondents said the balance that worked for them was a roughly even mix of physical and online events, even when life gets back to 'normal'.

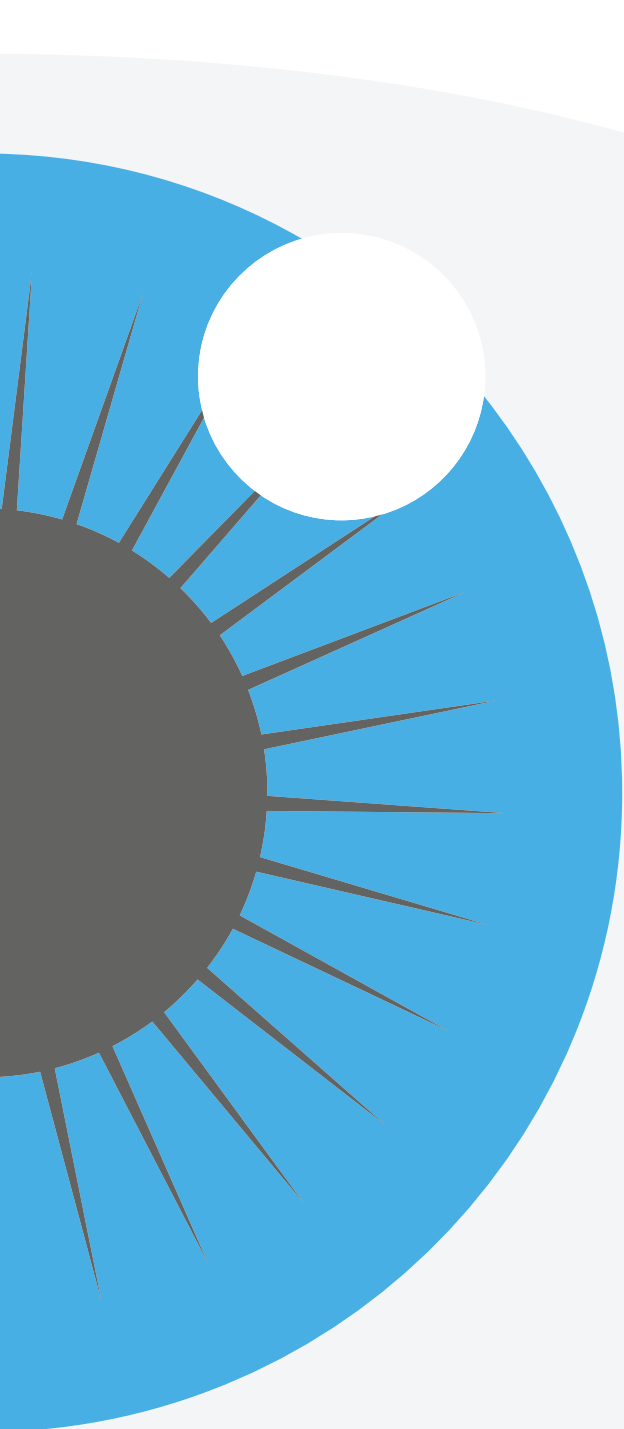
When asked what percentage of their event attendance would be physical, we saw an even spread of answers. For 39% of our cohort, 40-60% of events would take place in the real world. Tellingly, only 6% wanted four-fifths or more of their events to be held exclusively offline. For 21%, 20-40% would ideally be physical affairs.

Online is here to stay

Clearly, online events and virtual meetings are here to stay and do have a place. That said, from an event manager's point of view, physical events are back. Future engagement of clients will now depend on providing the right balance between the two experiences.

But what kind of content do investors think works best online? Among our respondents, 54% cited educational seminars, 58% product pitches, 40% small meetings and 25% round-table discussions.





With educational seminars, online makes a lot of sense. Educational content is easy to replay at leisure and you can easily annotate and learn from it. Understandably, not many were keen to battle through two hours of traffic just for an educational talk lasting 45 minutes or so.

Product pitches

More contentious is the 58% figure keen to attend product pitches online. StoneShot Account Director Matt Burley says, “We know that’s not going to happen. Salespeople want to look into the whites of the advisers’ eyes. This is not going to take place online.”

That’s not to say, though, that product pitch content can’t be reused and repurposed online. “Ultimately, it’s about getting the content in front of people,” adds Matt.

Virtual events, though, don’t always lend themselves to individual discussions, round table meetings and breakout sessions, hence the low score for round table discussions. Most still believe these are better tackled by physically getting together.

CLIENT EXPERIENCE IS KEY

Our second key finding was that client experience is key. We simply asked people where they got the better experience: in real life or online?

Overall, taking everything into consideration, 89% believe the better experience was at the event. For networking, 86% also agreed it was best to be present in person.

Education better online

For pure educational purposes, 63% said that online tends to come up trumps. Advisers cited fewer distractions, being able to see and hear better, and the benefits of pausing and rewinding a recording to help them annotate and digest.

Fund manager interaction tends to be better face-to-face. Advisers get to speak to the product manager, the analyst or the fund manager, and have a better conversation.

When it comes to registration, an overwhelming 96% believed checking in to be a better experience online. At StoneShot, we're all for this approach.



Registration

From a fund manager's perspective, though, the online registration process does allow for some mistakes.

Matt Burley explains, "You can have a one-click registration. If the adviser forwards it on to four people, they all register and you don't capture those details immediately, they can still join the webcast."

"With a physical event, you can't have 300 people turning up to a 100-person event. You need to know precisely who's coming. So you do need to be more careful about that process and you do have more boxes to fill in." Perhaps we can take the best of online check-in and make it easy for people to register for physical events.

Audio and video

What else makes for a good client experience? Online, it's high-quality sound and visuals. If they can see and hear better than if they're at the back of a conference room, and replay or download the content to digest whenever they please. There's no reason, therefore, why you can't run a physical event and then distribute the recording afterwards.

Clients also want a smooth log-in experience. This tends to lie online, possibly because of automation. Using an event platform results in reminder and confirmation emails that tend to be automated, so people get timely reminders ahead of the webcast

Human interaction

Respondents also found that interactions with people were easier on newer platforms. They can ask questions through chat, voice, breakout sessions or networking.

Online, we also found people were looking for great planning and logistics: how easy it is to get online; how it all slots together. There was a perception that online events were better prepared and structured: a 45-minute webinar tended to be just that. Respondents felt they got good value from the pacing of online events.

Technology, too, scored highly. It's easy to join online events as long as the interface is slick, the sound quality is fine, and they can replay the event whenever they wish. They also appreciate when the speaker mutes everyone else, so they can hear clearly – not something you can do in a physical location.





Fresh content

And content? It should be fresh and interesting.

As Matt Burley says, “One of the challenges people had initially is they started replacing events with webinars and it started to work. And then they came up with more content, more frequently. And it’s very easy to turn a series of webinars into something fairly turgid.

“So, while it’s a challenge, people appreciate where content is good, fresh and topical, as well as how good speakers are – the same for physical events. But people have found that online events are better when they’re short and sharp, without pointless preamble and chatter, and sticking to 30- or 45-minute slots.”

Efficiencies

One of our respondents said, “Being able to attend an event without wasting time travelling is 100% great. Speakers need to do a good job, you need good lighting, sound, connections, background.”

“ I WANT GOOD CONTENT: ALL THE TRAPPINGS AND HASSLE OF A PHYSICAL MEETING, LIKE HAVING TO MAKE SMALL TALK WITH COMPETITORS, AREN’T ENJOYABLE. SO ONLINE MEETINGS ARE ALWAYS PREFERABLE TO ME.”

Financial adviser



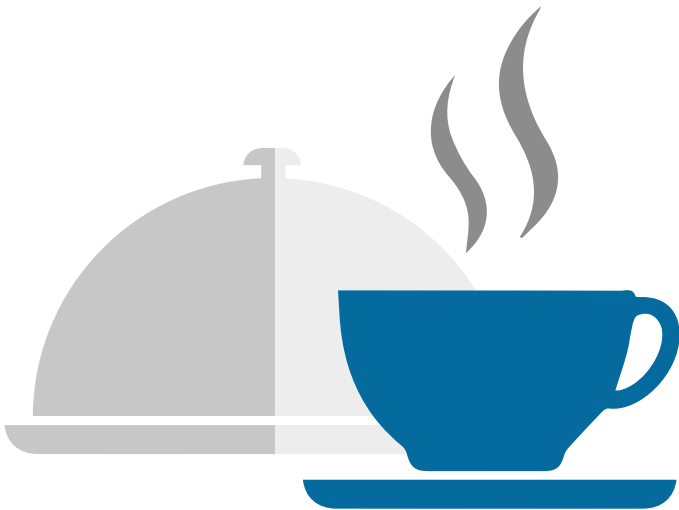
Better content

So what do clients love about physical events? They take place less often, so the content is usually better. The best speakers get rolled out. Interaction with people is better. There's good coffee and quality sandwiches on offer. They flow smoothly and come across as well-rehearsed.

Citing what makes a good physical event, one adviser said, "The usefulness of the information and applicability to my practice/clients. Also proximity to my office/home, except for overnight trips, where I can invite my wife and mix social/business."

Practically speaking, attendees are looking for convenient travel and parking, and good catering. We've learned that some events that start at 9am in tricky locations are notorious for no-shows – they're simply too hard to get to. And if they have to pay to park? Forget it.

You don't get to be a financial adviser by spending money.



HYBRID EVENTS ARE THE FUTURE

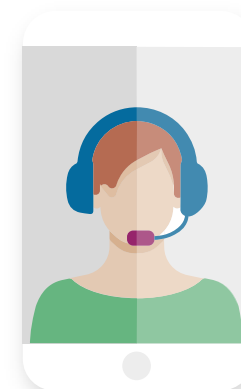
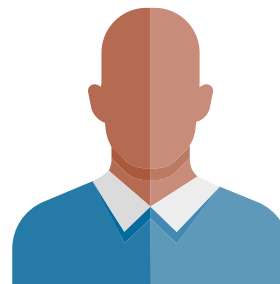
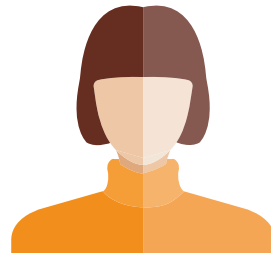
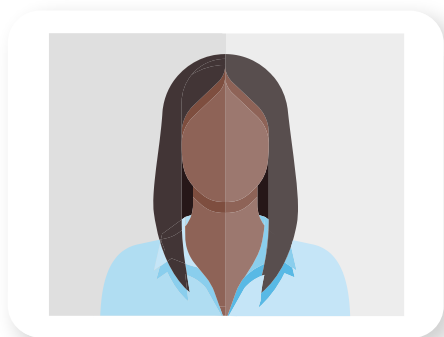
It's clear that clients see virtue in both physical and virtual events. This has given rise to what we call hybrid events and we've already seen a few firms migrating to this approach.

Hybrid isn't a balance of online and offline events; it's where both are run at the same time: running your live event in a location such as London while live-streaming it to others.

Best of both worlds

This brings together the benefits of both formats. Those who attend physically can get all the benefits of that: the ability to mingle and network, enjoy good coffee and hear the best speakers. But those who are unable to travel or who live in far-flung locations can still enjoy the content.

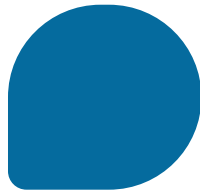
This hybrid format works for a wider spread of people. It's also a benefit to asset managers, who get to reach a wider audience at potentially lower cost than having to stage perhaps 15 different sessions in various locations around the country. Success will be all about getting the right technology set up.



THE ANATOMY OF A GREAT HYBRID EVENT

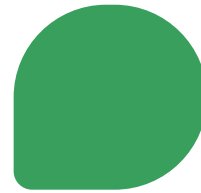
Once you've decided that a virtual component to your event makes sense, there are a few things you'll need to bear in mind when designing a hybrid event.

Hybrid lends itself particularly well to events such as trade shows, conferences, sales kick-offs, and global town halls and, obviously, where delegates would have difficulty attending.



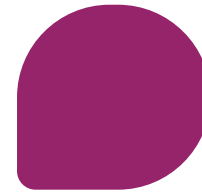
Key elements

For a great hybrid event, you need more than just a streaming provider. You'll need all the same elements as an onsite event PLUS a reliable streaming partner.



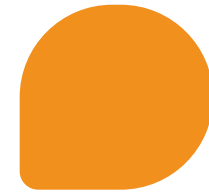
Great content

Make sure your content is as good as it would be at a purely physical event. Check that speakers are well-prepared and their presentations engaging.



Publicity

With both in-person and virtual attendees, you get many more delegates, so your publicity is even more vital than usual. A stunning microsite and great email content are absolutely key.



Registration

Hybrid registration should be seamless, with a branded event registration webpage, and customized registration paths for in-person and virtual attendees. Track those who abandoned registration and send them reminder emails.

THE ADVANTAGES OF HYBRID EVENTS

Get it right and you'll enjoy:

- A bigger attendance
- More content engagement
- A lower carbon footprint
- A better deal for sponsors.

Tips and tricks



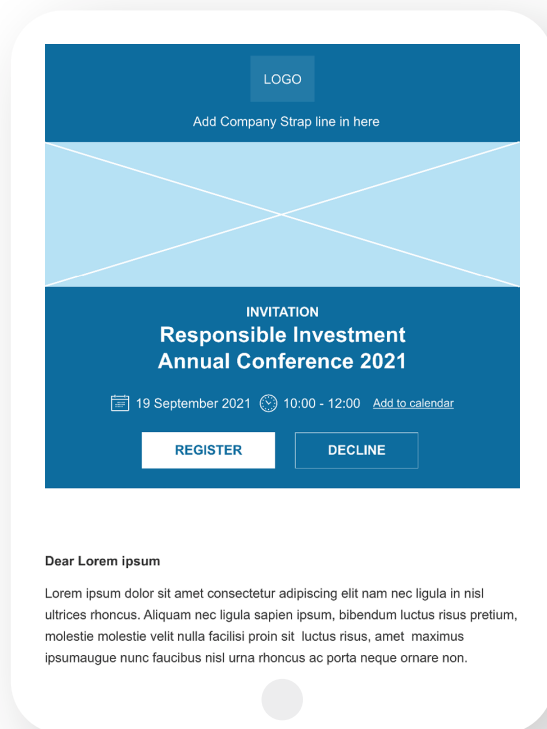
Create one event but two experiences. That means delivering your content differently to both groups. Make sure your streaming works and your presenters are happy to be recorded. Ensure the content relates to both sets of people.



Keep content engaging. Make sure it works well over video and include audience participation tools such as Q&As and live polls. Keep content short and snappy.



Watch out for time zones. When attendees can be 16 hours apart, it'll be difficult for some to attend when they'd normally be tucked up in bed. Ensure the sessions you offer your virtual attendees can be accessed on-demand. You might also consider running multiple sessions of the same webinar so people in various regions can catch it during normal working hours and be able to ask questions 'live'.



Events platform

Happily, we at StoneShot have always had this in place. Our events platform offers personalised invitations, a slick registration experience, on-demand content, and automated event communications. It's always offered the best of both worlds.

There are analytics both for online and offline attendees, simple management of multiple sessions, and seamless integration with platforms such as BrightTALK, Dynamo, Microsoft Dynamics 365, ON24, Salesforce, Wistia, and Zoom.

Alongside this, our event dashboard plugs into one of the benefits of an online event: automation. We'd also recommend bringing those benefits into a physical event.

Dynamic emails

The journey goes like this: we build clients a microsite and branded registration forms, then pre-populate and feed data straight back to the dashboard, while auto-scheduling dynamic emails in advance reminding people to come.

You can even give people the opportunity to drop out when you send the reminder emails. Let's face it: it's far better to have an early cancellation than a no-show on the day.

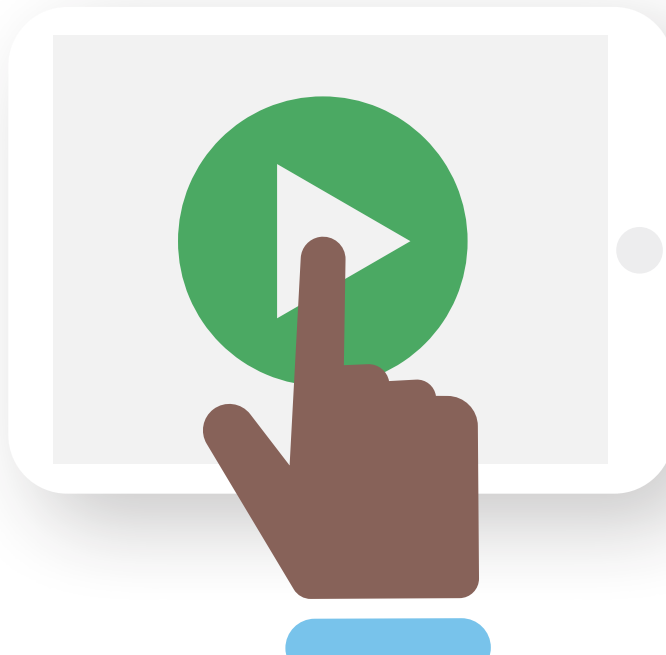
With a waiting list in place, it's easy to reallocate that spot to someone else.

Once the event is up and running, the organiser uses our iPad app to check in attendees and sync to StoneShot.

Post-event comms

Post-event, we can automate the distribution of slides and presentation materials, and also CPD/CE certificates and feedback surveys. So those things that online events often do can also be brought into the realm of physical events as well.

In short, we offer a simple tool for creating and managing all your events in one place.



HYBRID EVENT

a StoneShot case study

A major bank was running a physical event in Hong Kong. They wanted to invite their clients from around Asia, but they couldn't travel because of COVID restrictions. So we put together a hybrid event.

The keys are: the invitation process started off the same, by inviting people to register. They could then choose whether that's for the online or physical event. So the process starts as a single event but then branches off.

There were different communications based on whether they needed a Zoom meeting or travel information.

On the day, separate activities took place: coffee, delicious food, and the presentation. But the tech was there to live-stream the whole event back to the people who were joining in by Zoom.

Interestingly, because of COVID, the breakout sessions took place only online, as the smaller rooms were out of bounds.

After the event, the timeline converged back into a single event. Communications would feature broadly the same content, whether the person had attended or missed the online event or physical event.

From a reporting point of view, we treated it all as a single entity. The key question was simply: how many people engaged with this content? How many people attended?

Lessons

We see this as a model that'll be adopted by a lot of firms because it brings so many benefits both physically and online. It extends the reach of what you can do.

We just need to ensure we get the right technology in place to manage the process. It's even possible to pre-record the event so there's no need to hold it at a set time. Who could ask for more? Apart from Oliver Twist, obviously.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND ADVICE



- Whether you're hosting a real-life event, a virtual event or a mixture of both, there are certain elements that will never go out of style. Never skimp on content. Get the best speakers you can afford. And don't fall into the trap of producing second-rate content because you can produce so much of it, if offline-only is your choice.
- If you're going hybrid, make sure you create one single event with two audiences. That means organising the event in the regular way, diverging in the middle (the actual event) and then reverting to the one event at the end.
- Always put the client experience at the top of everything you do. Some types of event are best suited to online, some to offline, and some work well as hybrids. Don't make people drive 200 miles in rush-hour traffic for a 30-minute educational talk.
- Take advantage of the smooth offline registration process – 96% in our survey loved it – and the high-quality audio and visuals, but don't be blind to the benefits of physical-only events. Remember, 89% still believe they offer the best overall experience.
- Finally, don't skimp on the food and good coffee. Good luck.

ABOUT STONESHOT

Since 2001, we've been helping financial services companies ace their digital marketing. Specifically, that means email marketing, marketing automation, agency services, and our world-class event management platform.

We know that one size doesn't fit all in finance and that reaching the right audience, at the right time, with the right message, is crucial. To help us do that, we come armed with an intuitive platform to help us create, send and track communications, and an in-house team of strategists, designers,

developers, and account specialists.

Over the last ten years, we've also expanded our global reach, adding to our London headquarters with offices in New York, Singapore, Paris, and Milan. We work with leading brands, such as BNP Paribas, HSBC, Invesco, and UBS.

Wherever you are, whoever you are, if you work in financial services, we can help you smash your digital goals.

Our platform

Before the 'new normal', everything

centred around our events dashboard.

We built an event management solution specifically around the financial services industry. One that enables you to organise your own events, covering scheduling to promotion, and from registration right through to post-event communications.

Simple scheduling

With our dashboard, scheduling is simplicity itself. You can track registration, check attendee status, schedule upcoming sessions, set event capacity and more.

Promotion and reminders? You can manage and automate invites, reminders, and follow-up emails. Then, when it comes to crunching numbers, it's easy to integrate detailed event reports into your other marketing platforms.

Class of its own

When it comes to check-in, our app for iOS is in a class of its own. Forget clipboards: you'll ace the check-in process without breaking sweat.

Simply tap into an event on your iPad or iPhone, pick an attendee, and check them in. You can also update personal details, add colleagues for any surprise arrivals, work offline, and use multiple devices to check in contacts simultaneously.

Then, when everything's done and dusted, you can use the attendance certificate generator to create and distribute custom CPD/CE PDFs.

No one else can do this. Cool, eh?

Agency Services

We also cater these services to clients who might need a helping hand.

Microsite design and build

We can create a microsite for your event to share the venue info, agenda, speakers and host collateral or information on upcoming events. The benefit of a microsite is that you don't risk invitees getting lost looking for event-specific information on your corporate website.

Response management

We can handle all the responses and requests that can take up a lot of your time. We can efficiently redirect queries and handle any email replies.

Reporting and analytics

Need real-time intel? Your sales and marketing teams will get up-to-the-minute registration reports.

Benchmarking

Our post-event analysis compares your event to those of your peers. This provides invaluable insight to help you see what you did right, and how you might do better next time.

CONTACT US

To find out how we could help you succeed in Event Management [contact us](#) or visit www.stoneshot.com or follow us on social media



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