Tips & Tricks for Partnering with Sponsors and Exhibitors on Virtual Events in 2020
By SHRM Membership Team*

BEFORE THE EVENT
How to Plan Your Virtual Event

START FRESH
- Throw out everything you did for your in-person event.
- Reimagine the entire event, including exploring sponsorship and exhibitor opportunities that extend beyond one virtual conference or event. (Bundling several events in a package might be more attractive to sponsors who are unsure about committing.)
  - Know your audience to deliver the best benefits, content, activities, topics and what technology to use.
    - What do they value?
    - Are they tech savvy?
    - Are they decision makers?
    - What industries are they in?
  - Diversify your delivery format: from pre-recorded sessions, video streaming to live Q&A, panelists to long-short sessions—and add surprises!
- Think about the technology:
  - Which conference platform are you using? (Possible platforms include 6Connex, Communiqué, Digitell, Hexafair, Intrado, INXPO, LeftfieldLabs, , vFairs, WorkCast)
  - What are the features and costs? Is it practical for your objectives?
    - Is there an option to allow virtual sponsors/exhibitors?
    - Getting the platform costs will determine your registration fees and sponsorship/exhibitor fees.
- Make it desirable for attendees to share their contact information with sponsors and exhibitors (e.g., attendees who provide their contact information are entered in all prize drawings).
- Create videos on how to use the platform for sponsors, exhibitors, attendees and presenters.

MARKET THE EVENT AND VIRTUAL BOOTHS
- Set expectations: share a day at a glance.
- Create an event hashtag for sponsors and exhibitors to use before and during the event to encourage dialogue.
- Encourage sponsors and exhibitors to develop a marketing plan to get people to visit their virtual booth.
  - Are they promoting their virtual booth on social media?
  - What unique or fun prizes are they giving away?
  - Have they created a YouTube video to share on social media and at their virtual booth?
- Encourage speakers, sponsors and exhibitors to promote the event and their booth to their networks.
- Add hyperlinks to your digital brochures.
• As an additional sponsor/exhibitor package benefit, add their logos and website links to your emails and registration website.

SCHEDULE VIRTUAL NETWORKING EVENTS
• Consider the timing of networking events. (Note: We have found that hosting the virtual expo at the end of the day has been largely unsuccessful and recommend spreading it out throughout the day.)
  o Organize a room using the world café model: the sponsor will host a networking room and facilitate a conversation on a specific current topic.
  o Invite a special guest (e.g., keynote speaker, local celebrity) to the room to participate in the chat.
  o Invite a local attorney, DOL representative, government official, etc. to the room to participate in the chat.
  o Arrange sponsor-led networking or breakout sessions.
  o Suggest that, instead of giving out tchotchkes when attendees visit the booth, sponsors and exhibitors donate to one of the charities identified in the conference.
  o Schedule sponsored stretch breaks.

SUPPORT SPONSORS AND EXHIBITORS
• Coach sponsors and exhibitors on how to engage virtually with attendees (see “MARKET THE EVENT AND VIRTUAL BOOTHS” and “SCHEDULE VIRTUAL NETWORKING EVENTS”).
• Have an open dialogue on how to make their booth or room virtually attractive. Once their booth is set up, work with them on how to get virtual engagement through chat, polling questions, story sharing or testimonials.
• Host a boot camp on how to engage attendees virtually.

INVOLVE STATE COUNCIL AND CHAPTER BOARD MEMBERS
• Assign each board member to connect with a sponsor or exhibitor. The assigned board member can make virtual introductions to attendees.
• Make each board member a liaison to each sponsor or exhibitor.
• Have board members use the chat function to encourage attendees to visit the virtual booths during the event.

DURING THE EVENT
How to Attract People to Virtual Booths & Keep Them Engaged

ENHANCE INTERACTION
• Be active on social media using the hashtag.
• Use live chat tools and webinars.
• Provide attendees with the option to download marketing content in the form of documents, presentations and videos. Monitor the booth and regulate available content in real time.
• Customize booths without the hassle of vendors and printing.
• Use an online shop to make “on-the-spot” sales.
• Ensure additional 15-minute breaks for attendees to visit with sponsors and exhibitors.
• Schedule breakout sessions by appointment (platform may have additional fees).
  o However, there may be a challenge if there are “no-shows” for appointments.
• Auto-direct attendees to sponsor rooms.
  o However, there may be a challenge if attendees leave the room.
• Invite sponsors to help facilitate Q&A sessions.
• Host roundtable sponsorship: the sponsor leads a roundtable discussion.
• Assign sponsors to different breakout sessions: the sponsor facilitates conversation during the intro or during the Q&A.
• Offer a variety of interactive sponsor and exhibitor booths: each booth can have a different activity or theme.
• Use a Convos & Coffee–like platform in the breakout rooms.

PLAY GAMES
• Use games to encourage attendees to visit virtual booths and prizes for the top winners.
  o Bingo: each sponsor is a bingo square, and the attendees must complete the full card to be entered in the grand prize drawing.
  o Jeopardy
  o Wheel of Fortune
  o Family Feud
  o House Party
  o Kahoot

OFFER PRIZES AND MORE
• Offer prize drawings: attendees are entered in the drawing after visiting the virtual booth.
• Name sponsors and exhibitors during welcome sessions and introductions at the event.
• Have virtual business cards: attendees can drop virtual business cards at booths (provided from their conference information).
• Host coffee break Q&As: encourage attendees to stay logged on during breaks and have someone there for Q&As on different discussions with sponsors.
• Use e-tchotchkes to pull in booth visitors:
  o For example, offer a $5 gift card (Starbucks, Target, Amazon) to the first five attendees who listen to a sponsor’s or exhibitor’s five-minute pitch every 30 minutes throughout the day. People must provide their contact information in order to receive e-tchotchkes.

AFTER THE EVENT
How to Follow Up and Evaluate
• Evaluate booth performance with detailed demographic reports to show ROI (e.g., number of participants, booth visits and sources).
• Send a follow-up thank you email to attendees with:
  o A summary of resources from the event.
  o A list of the sponsors and exhibitors.
  o A link to the recording or downloadable materials.
• A survey.
• Send a follow-up thank you email to sponsors and exhibitors including booth performance data with a survey and future event opportunities.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

How to Brainstorm More Ideas

- 18 Virtual Event Sponsorship Ideas: https://www.eventmanagerblog.com/virtual-event-sponsorship
- 17 Ideas of Virtual Event Sponsorship Revenue: https://meetingtomorrow.com/blog/virtual-event-sponsorship-ideas/
- How to Host the World’s #1 Online Tradeshow: https://www.vfairs.com/how-to-host-the-worlds-1-online-tradeshow/

*These tips and tricks are only suggestions from the SHRM Membership Team on how to engage attendees with your virtual sponsors and exhibitors during your virtual events and are not to be taken as expert advice.