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Shelton Fleming

RE-IMAGINING CONNECTED EXPERIENCES



THE NEW NORMAL

POST-PANDEMIC PLAYBOOK

Social-distancing measures to help business events
bounce back

EDITOR'S NOTE



The coronavirus pandemic has turned the world upside down. There's no doubt about it, especially for the world of events. Most shows planned to take place in 2020 have already been cancelled with a view to 2021. Even if some shows open this year, albeit with some social-distancing and safeguards in place, will delegates want to travel? Will they want to be on a train from Paris to London or Berlin? Will they want to fly in a confined tube? Until there's mass-testing and an effective vaccine for COVID-19, the format of big events has to evolve. That's one thing we can be sure about in this time of uncertainty.

The events industry plays a crucial role in the world of business. B2B brands rely heavily on live events for networking, strategic customer relationship management,

new lead generation and vendor relations in the global supply chains. Hence, most companies have stopped attending events, despite the importance of the medium in their business relationships and brand building. These companies employ high value (rare) talent. They don't want to expose that talent to COVID-19. We, the agency world, have to provide them with solutions ensuring health and safety.

So, what are the practical plays that can ensure the big shows rebound from Q1 next year? It would be brilliant if global events revive sooner but a more realistic time frame would be 2021 if all the predictions about vaccines and continued social distancing remain in place.

In this paper, we introduce some ideas that event organisers, venue operators and exhibitors might want to explore. I hasten to add that some of the solutions here involve cost and might put a strain on delegate logistics and the business models adopted by most event organisers.

The goal is to host a safe show, with the possibility of social distancing.

ANDREW REID

Corporate Strategy and Digital Solutions Director



SOCIAL-DISTANCING & EVENT FORMATS

Format matters

Events which could open first will be those where delegate management can be structured and controlled. You could host a conference (probably with fewer people) where seating is spaced out sufficiently. That might require venues chosen to be larger than usual to layout enough seating. Or, you restrict access (aka delegate numbers) or stagger delegate attendance.

Corporate parties may be harder or impossible to host. By definition, they are free-wheeling, socialising and often with alcohol, which means discipline can be lost. Complacency could creep in. If there is a need for a party or entertainment, a sit-down dinner, with some social distancing around the table, might be possible.

Festival formats aren't likely to be viable. The obvious is Glastonbury; however, in recent years, a lot of B2B sectors have moved to a festival format with satellite stages and demos scattered across a venue. The energy and appeal of those festivalised B2B events is the sense of variety – stalls, booths, satellite stages. These formats are free-wheeling, and designed to drive innovation through serendipity and the chance encounter. They're promoted on the come and discover basis, with little delegate management. That format could be very risky in a COVID-19 afflicted world.

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair looking down at a tablet device. The image is partially obscured by a yellow and black striped graphic in the bottom left corner.

CHAPERONED NETWORKING

A concept that we have seen work well, that potentially has social distancing built-in, is a chaperoned networking event. These events run in a controlled way. A relatively small group of people come together, say 60 to 80 people, who want to network. They have chaperones, usually actors with iPads, that take each guest to a space in a large room where they introduce the guests in a speed dating fashion. The chaperone might stick around and break the ice, getting the conversation going, or leave several people in pairs to talk for ten minutes. The chaperone returns and takes the person to meet someone else. There's usually a big room hired with plenty of circulation space. Catering is brought to the people meeting.

Initially, the idea with the catering coming to the delegates was to allow them to focus on meeting and not wasting time getting a drink or snack. But that modus operandi could work well because it means people aren't moving from A to B so much. You could set up high, long tables, so the people meeting are 2m apart, at either end. Music in the background can ensure atmosphere is created, and there is some privacy in the form of a sound curtain across the room. The key here is, people are moved around in a controlled way.



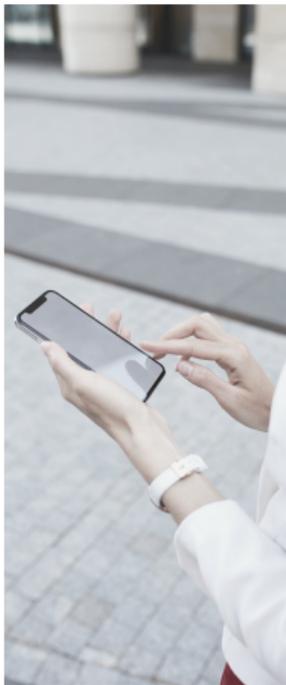
EXHIBITIONS COULD WORK

BUT THESE TOO NEED TO BE LESS FREE-WHEELING

There could be controlled access to halls and booths. The old style of meeting booths where things have been very open is unlikely to be possible in a COVID-world. Queuing into halls could be put in place.

Booths would need to be managed with a queuing system too. This avoids the crush of people. Meeting management apps control can the process. It has already been tested at Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, where Hall 2 is often quieter and less congested, for that reason. Booths are managed on an invitation-only basis. Meetings are mostly timed and handled behind closed doors. You can't just rock up and wander around the booth.

It's a gated experience.



DELEGATE MANAGEMENT

Control the number of attendees

Large trade shows often see 100,000 plus people crammed into halls that heave for 12 hours each day, for several days, not to mention the congestion in the build phase. That may not be feasible any more. Maybe it needs to be 60,000 or 50,000. Or, the organiser sells tickets to 100,000, but stipulates they can only attend on given days. Currently, many conference and exhibition passes are for the entire event, which might be several days or weeks. It may now be necessary to say, X pass is for day one only. Same with the hall access. So, you manage numbers in a hall or at an event. The likelihood is you need RFID wrist-bracelets to track where people are and when, and if they can have access in that window at a specific time. **The tech exists.**

To compensate for the loss of delegate and ancillary income prices could be partially hiked; the opening day would cost more than day two onwards, using scaled pricing.

Reducing the number of exhibitors or the plot size would allow halls to have more circulation space. Double or treble-deck booths would create more corridor space in hallways.

Staging some events at bigger venues could impact profitability if other commercial dynamics remain unchanged, like plot rental costs. For some shows, like InnoTrans or CES, finding anything larger than a Vegas shed or Berlin Messe, wouldn't be easy. Many of these seminal events are already outgrowing the largest venues on the planet.

CIRCULATION IS KEY

Fewer attendees doesn't solve social distancing. Equally significant issue is circulation space. Some halls and corridors are narrow. It may be better to remove booths and create more space or make the footprint smaller and let exhibitors have double or even treble deck booths. That way, they recover the floor space vertically. A treble deck booth can involve a more durable structure and structural engineer's certification. It can be challenging; there is a cost in doing that, plus, some venues don't have the height for a triple deck.

Flow delegates in one direction, e.g. avoid people having to pass each other face to face by filling a room from one entrance and leaving by another. Corridors might need to be directed with a divider and friendly wardens to ensure delegates comply with protocols.

Some venues may want to move people around the halls from the outside, not the inside. By that we mean, often attendees will go through halls 1 to 5 to get to hall 6. Have the people who want to get to hall 6 walk around the outside areas. Signage and staff could direct people to get from A to B in ways that avoid congestion in halls. Depending on the site, it's possible that alternative pedestrian corridors could ease congestion in some halls. In some venues, you could put an upper walkway in. That's more cost, but you could say, the upper deck is one direction, and the area below is in the opposite. That might avoid the head-on clash and bottlenecks between halls.



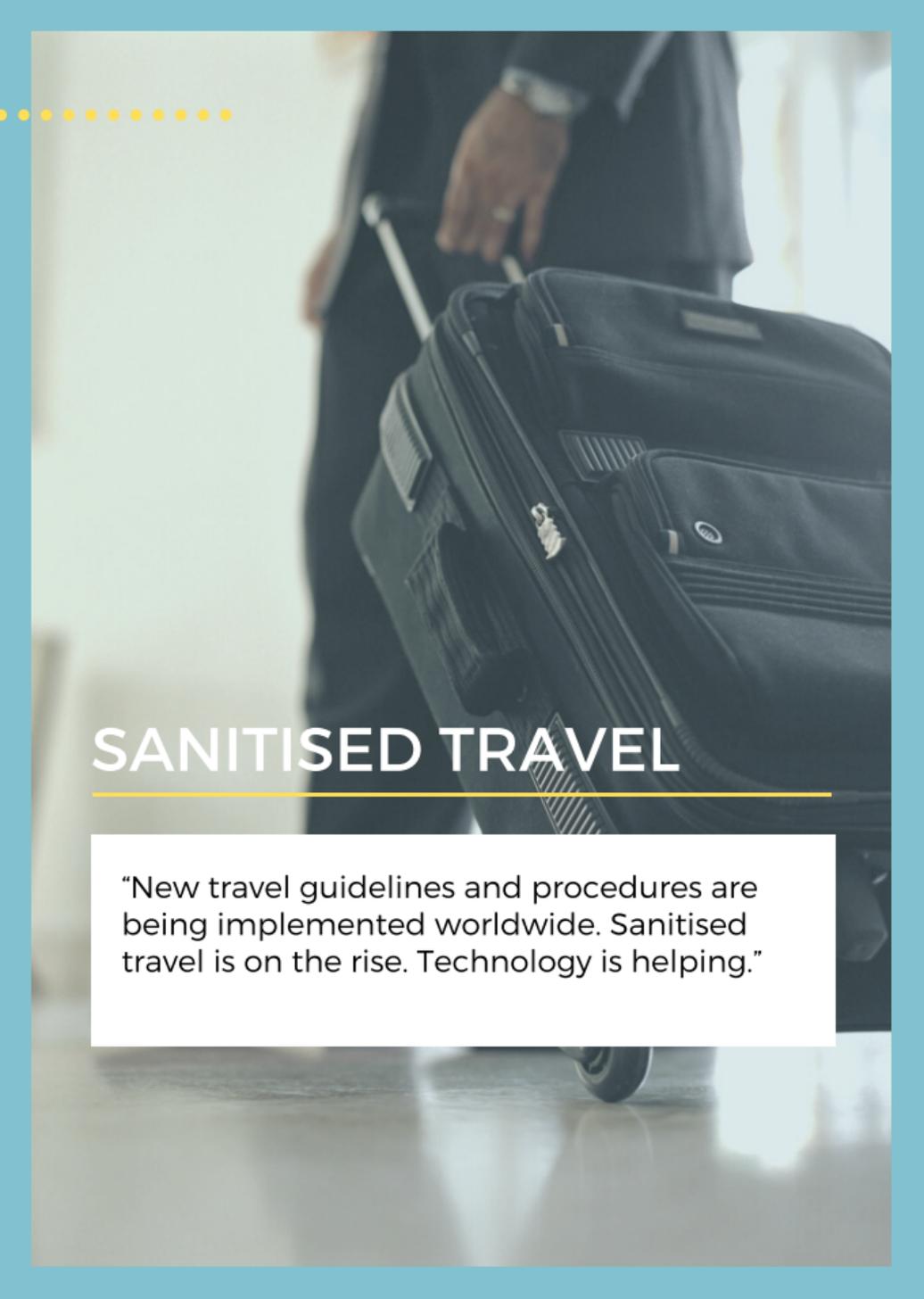


LIMIT NON-ESSENTIAL STAFF

There should be some controls put on how many stand staff attend events and ditto, agency and technical staff. Many events have a lot of peripheral (sometimes non-essential) staff attending. That could be controlled too. In some shows, it could be 5 - 7% of the people in circulation. You only have to look in the cafes; they're packed with technical support staff, on-site, at the show. These people may need to be off-site and called in as required for any technical issues on a booth.

KEEP IT HANDS-FREE

Things, like registration, will need to be hands-free. No one is going to want to self-check-in to an event at a terminal (aka iPad and printer) that they have to touch. there are systems which involve facial recognition, QR codes activated on smart-phones or RFID chips in wrist bands that can be sanitised and not involve touching screens.



SANITISED TRAVEL

“New travel guidelines and procedures are being implemented worldwide. Sanitised travel is on the rise. Technology is helping.”

DIGITAL HEALTH PASSPORT

Very soon, business travellers will likely need a digital "health passport". This solution is currently being developed in a form of a smartphone app—secured by blockchain protocols—that certifies you're not infected with COVID-19.

UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has been working on internet-based tools to reduce the pandemic's impact on the world's tourism industry and business travel. Their focus is on Hi+Card, that will be tested on a July (2020) flight from Madrid to the Canary Islands.

The digital health passport app that will use data from health authorities to certify that travelers are free of COVID-19. Contactless biometric boarding is likely to become a norm with all airlines. The ability to digitally certify being free of COVID-19 could prove the key to future cross-border travel.

Similar measures, or simply integration with Hi+Card system can be adopted to ensure safety of event participants. It could speed up the registration process and avoid risks and uncomfortable situations at the front desk of any conference or trade show.



DISINFECTED BAGGAGE

Many airports will soon start disinfecting our luggage. Ultraviolet light upgrade kits for airport checkpoints capable of killing 99.9% of microorganisms on baggage trays have recently been introduced to the market. .

Airports will have to showcase increased hygiene standards as they aim to restart operations and encourage travellers after the COVID-19 pandemic. One way to restore confidence in travelling is through the use of UV technology, which provides longer-term protection against viruses or bacteria.

Similar technology can be adapted at the security points installed at large events, to aid in protecting staff and guests from the transmission of contagious diseases via touching trays used at checkpoints.

The technology is not new. It's already used to disinfect surfaces by food and health sectors, along with other industries that require high levels of hygiene.





SAFE HOTELS

Hotels will have to adjust to rigorous cleaning and disinfection measures. This could change the guest experience, most probably by banning buffets and ensuring minimum contact.

Some hotels are even installing screens between tables in their dining rooms, and introducing staggered dining hours and room service deliveries by staff in masks and gloves. This will most likely be relaxed in time, but will surely affect the experience.

COVID-19 affects room design too - making it easier to wipe-down, with coffee makers, extra bedding and decoration removed. In Spain, where Mobile World Congress is held, the government protocol suggests removing carpets and minibars from the rooms. That could become a standard worldwide.

The hospitality industry, crucial to the events sector is going through a rapid digitisation. We'll soon see apps to generate a welcome the moment a guest arrives at the hotel, to create a virtual key, for the elevator to take them to the right floor without having to touch a button, to place orders in the restaurant and bar without contact with a waiter.



STAY IN CONTROL

“Events where you can control visitor numbers, access and flow could be ok. If it’s left to be free-flowing, social-distancing principles could collapse quite quickly.”

CHECK THE TEMPERATURE



RFID tech can be used with temperature taking technology. So, a delegate can have their temperature read, walking through a portal or temperature camera, and if they are ok, the RFID wrist bracelet is given a pass. Monitoring tech around the halls will flag if they are ok to be in the hall, or not. The temperature technology can also keep taking the delegate's temperature over time. If they suddenly come down with a temperature, they are easy to locate and remove (sensitively and with medical care) from the environment. Data protection isn't an issue because the only data on the wrist band is a unique identification number that ties back to the event registration database, which the delegate would be on already. These systems can also enable contact tracing, if other delegates had been exposed to another delegate with COVID-19.

Hong Kong has been trialling a system that uses artificial intelligence to monitor a person's temperature. The AI is better at detection than humans and can allow more entry points to be monitored. AI can substitute for any lack and cost of trained personnel. It's possible that by 2021 there will be solutions like a breathalyser-style test-kit for COVID-19. If this is feasible, it might be possible for an organiser to require all delegates to be tested at the venue or the day before.



EMBRACE HUMAN-CENTRIC PROCESSES

Anyone detected or suspected as having COVID-19, needs to be managed sensitively.

They can't be carted off like lepers. They might also be suddenly very worried themselves, so the person with the temperature needs care and reassurance. There needs to be a qualified process for managing delegates that are picked out by these temperature scans. By the time someone has a fever, they're possibly already contagious. So temperature monitoring is not fail-safe. However, it's a means to reduce the risks and it provides some reassurance to delegates.





COOL TECH IN USE

WE PRESENT A SELECTION OF TECH-SOLUTIONS THAT COULD BECOME A PART OF THE NEW REALITY IN THE EVENTS INDUSTRY

Unitech's EA510HC is an Infra Red thermal reader for temperature reading. It is also equipped with Enterprise grade barcode scanning & NFC capabilities for instant & accurate identification of any wristbands, Staff ID Cards or Visitors Badges and also offers several convenient connectivity options via WLAN, WWAN, Bluetooth & GPS radios.



There's a wide selection of so called "contact tracing" apps, some of them based on Apple and Google's decentralized reporting protocol, utilising a combination of Bluetooth Low Energy technology and privacy-preserving cryptography. In the very near future, incorporating them into security protocols may prove to be crucial for event planners.

HYGIENE

Clean toilets

Many venues lack adequate facilities. Toilets are often cramped areas. Dirty. Poorly maintained and managed. Queuing will be needed. Cleaning rotations may need to be improved. There are several solutions. It may be costly but install the Japanese-style, bidet toilets which self-clean and don't require paper. They're expensive, and they need regular, expensive maintenance. A less costly alternative is to have enough hospitality staff that every time a cubicle is used, it's cleaned.

There will need to be a toilet queuing system at most shows. Often the circulation space in hall toilets is narrow. Ideally, like a restaurant kitchen, you need to be able to enter at one end and leave by another door which may require expensive structural changes to facilities. However, there are often vast areas (parking lots where all the trucks drop off the booths and technical kit) that are vacant during shows. In some cases, it should be possible to place a large number of porta-cabin toilets in these spaces and encourage their use. Have the staff clean them frequently.

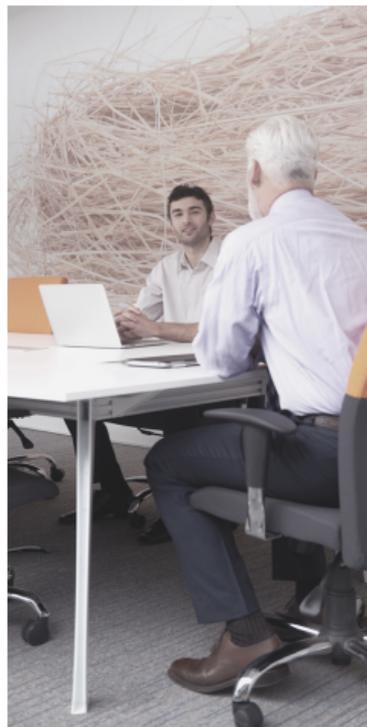


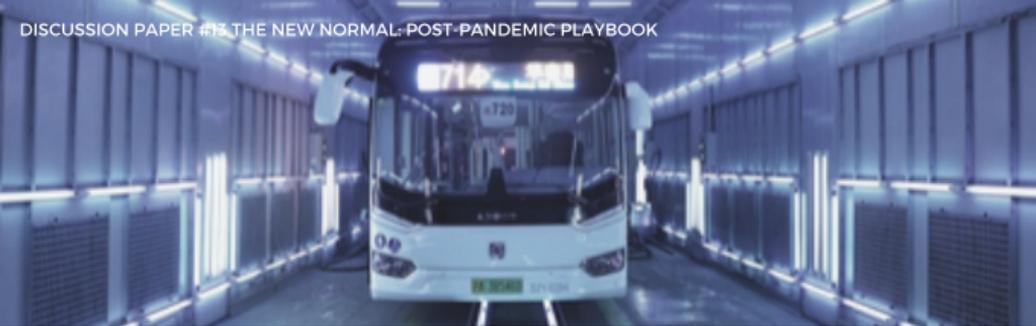
STERILE SPACE

BOOTH MEETING ROOMS MAY REQUIRE REDESIGNING

Meeting rooms all need gel dispensers, preferably ones where you hold your hand under the dispenser and the gel drops into your palm, so you're not touching the dispenser and spreading the virus. Furniture, in general, should be something you can easily wipe down. So, fabric furnishings best avoided, unless they are antimicrobial fabrics. The virus might last longer on plastic, but plastic can be wiped down more easily with a sanitary product.

Tests are being done with UV light. It is dangerous if applied around people and animals but, it may be possible to sweep a venue at night. UV light kills germs in hard to reach places and reassure delegates attending. There would need to be a way to flag to delegates that a UV sweep has been carried out. An organiser wants to be in a position to say their venue has been UV-scanned for optimum protection. It's not a panacea; however, there are tests being carried out to evaluate these sanitising methods.





COOL TECH IN USE

SAFETY ENSURED AT THE ENTRANCE? HERE'S A COUPLE OF SOLUTION THAT COULD HELP ACHIEVE IT

UV sanitising gates are a perfect solution for the events industry, especially if used at the entrance to large trade shows. So called "far-UVC", utilising a specific subset of UVC wavelengths that, according to researchers from the Columbia University, efficiently kill viruses without harming humans. Similar technology is being used to sanitise public transport vehicles.



CleanTech is a personal sanitising booth. The interior surface of the chamber has an antimicrobial coating which is reported to remotely kill viruses and bacteria on human bodies and clothing through the technologies of photocatalysts which trigger a chemical reaction in materials through the use of light and nano needles thinner than a human hair. The process itself is completed in 40 seconds.



PURE AIR

Air-conditioning in a booth should be a single unit per room, rather than a large system spreading a virus around the booth. Air-filtration should be considered.

Not having any air-con would be a challenge. Many shows, even in the winter months, are hot environments. With fewer people attending the temperature might drop but generally the hall heating, human bodies and technology in exhibition booths generate heat. Air-con is essential to delegate comfort and staff operating in healthy conditions.

“In a COVID-19 climate, cleanliness across all areas will need to be de rigueur.”



CATERING

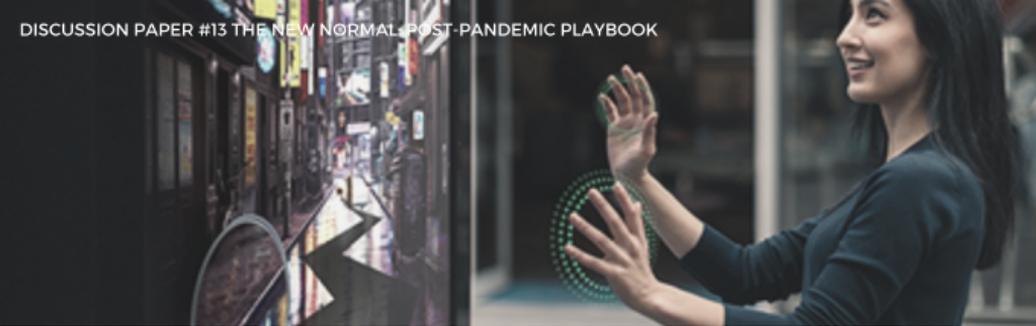
On-site restaurants and café seating may need rethinking. It's (probably) been an intentional policy to limit this. Event organisers want attendees visiting booths and the conference. They don't want attendees sitting in restaurants, checking their email and drinking lattes for too long. They want the latte income, but they want the delegate to buy, drink and go. As a result, attendees cram into these areas for lunch and coffees. There may need to be more places with proper social distancing for delegates to buy a coffee or sandwich and eat away from the crowd. If we force them into grazing-herds, we'll see events create a resurgence in COVID-19. That approach to catering isn't sustainable.

Catering is essential at events. Remove catering and delegates will disappear in the local area to find. Plus, these services are a source of income for the event organiser. Remove it, destabilises business model.

How catering is provided needs to be reimagined. Maybe more disposable cups, snacks wrapped but also provided with a wet wipe, or the catering staff should have wiped the packaging before giving the snack to the visitor. There needs to be regular cleaning of rooms and areas with catering debris.

VENUES MAY REQUIRE **MORE CATERING POINTS** AND COMMON AREAS TO ENABLE SOCIAL DISTANCING.

A **QUEUING MANAGEMENT** SYSTEM WILL LIKELY BE REQUIRED.



IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGY

PRODUCT DEMOS IN EXHIBITION BOOTHS WILL NEED TO BE HANDS-FREE, POSSIBLY USING MOTION-ACTIVATED SENSORS FOR SCREEN-BASED NAVIGATION.

There are many technologies now where you don't have to touch screens to navigate menus and content. Screens can use motion sensors and hand gestures to navigate. There's also sonic haptics technology that uses sound pads that allow hand gestures to browse content on a screen.

Exhibitions have become experiential. However, the days of tech brands strapping attendees into a gyrating, mock-roller coaster, wearing one of their virtual reality headsets won't be advisable. The gesture-controlled solutions are engaging experiences. So, there's no compromise on the quality of interaction.

If the event involves breakouts or workshops with ideation sessions app-based post-it-note software can be used. So people seated are not walking around a room putting their ideas on whiteboards. Everything uploads to digital screens from the participant's smartphone.

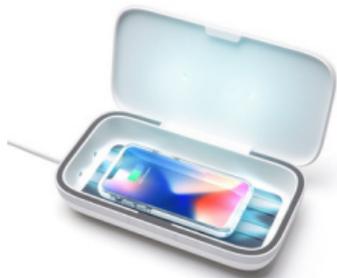




COOL TECH IN USE

WE PRESENT A SELECTION OF TECH-SOLUTIONS THAT COULD BECOME A PART OF THE NEW REALITY IN EVENT HYGIENE

UV smartphone sanitizers are on the rise. These UV-kits can easily clean a phone in just a few minutes, multiple times a day. A wide selection of portable sanitizers is already available on the market: HoMedics UV-Clean Phone Sanitizer, PhoneSoap 3, Lai Fion UV Smartphone Sanitizer to only name a few. Seems like a perfect giveaway idea in 2020 and beyond.



Currently in development, Glamos will be a motion sensor that creates a virtual touchscreen anywhere. Once connected to a device, such as smart-tv, it can introduce gesture controlled navigation.



COMMUNICATION

Communication is important. Delegates need to know safe-guards are in place. Ideally, there needs to be an ISO or accreditation mark that states the event or venue is managed a certain way. This would be similar to what was implemented after 9/11 with security protocols and labelling. In the US, the TSA would scan bags at airports and apply a small, security clearance sticker. The security presence is visible, and hence reassuring.

COVID-19 will also affect non-verbal communication between delegates. The handshake, hug or kiss on the cheek may be a thing of the past. Even the renowned, reserved-nature of the British had eased up in recent years, to embrace the Italian, French, Spanish, Greek and Russian etiquette. It's a shame, but for the time being, it's likely to be a friendly greeting, nod and smile.



HYBRID FUTURE

Predicting the future is a precarious past-time. COVID-19 is proof of that. Only a few people with a truly helicopter view of life were talking about pandemics: people like Bill and Melinda Gates, and a cohort of academics. And interestingly, a Hollywood film director: Steven Soderbergh who produced Contagion, perhaps the ultimate COVID-19 playbook. Film directors tend to look at life through an anthropologist's or ethnographer's lens and a surfer's desire to catch the next wave. However, what might a future scenario be for events?



HYBRID FUTURE

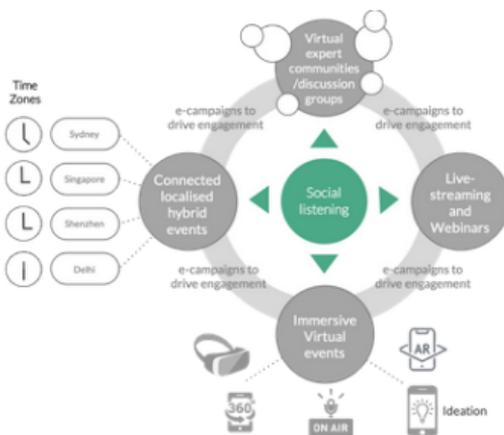
BASED ON CONVERSATIONS WITH CLIENTS AND ASSOCIATIONS SPANNING EVENTS, COMMS, AVIATION, AEROSPACE, TRAVEL, HOSPITALITY AND HEALTHCARE, THE HYBRID EVENT COULD BE ONE CLEAR RESPONSE TO THE POST-COVID ERA AND FINDING A NEW EQUILIBRIUM. **WHAT IS A HYBRID?**

We published a paper on hybrid events long before COVID-19 emerged. Our thinking 12 months ago was, the climate agenda would eventually force a realignment in the events world, where the carbon footprint from people travelling over vast distances would be unsustainable. That argument still holds true. As a response to a pandemic the hybrid event offers scale with both a face to face option (where fewer people travel) and virtual access for a much larger audience, than was previously possible.





HYBRID FUTURE



Project forward a few years and think of what companies, like Spatial are doing, with mixed and extended reality solutions, the virtual event could be elevated to a whole new level. However, there are more immediate solutions for hybrid and virtual events, that combine experiencing virtual gatherings in teams or cohorts with extensive social collaboration opportunities.

Our other discussion papers cover hybrid and virtual events in more detail, than we will here. Have in mind, there's a world where the customer experience and journey is more holistic. We think of it as an immersive customer ecosystem. We harness online forums and communities that frame topics and generate intrigue and interest. Webinars and live-streams integrate to connect cohorts and expand understanding of the challenges in different business ecosystems.



HYBRID FUTURE

A virtual event is designed around a hub broadcast and satellite studios in other locations. These studios may or may not have an audience, safely hosted with social distancing. The hub and satellite studios become part of a TV-quality interactive broadcast with immersive VR and AR experiences and ideation sessions.



Hybrid event is smaller but can be accessed in a dynamic, immersive way both remotely or by attending smaller, localised events that are connected. The hybrid events may transition to being smaller, more exclusive gatherings, almost akin to retreats.



SUMMARY

There's little doubt that people will want to attend events again, big and small. It's frequently said that we are social animals. True, contact is essential to us, whether for entertainment, embracing our friendship circles or for business reasons. However, there's also a recognition that a new normal will emerge from this global pandemic. COVID-19 may be with us (even once we are immunised or build-up a herd-immunity) for a long time to come. Some epidemiologists are hinting it may never go away.

If the big events with people flocking in from far-flung geographies are to happen, the approach to safety and reassuring audiences will need to evolve. It will require innovation and excellent communication to provide reassurance.

MEET THE AUTHOR



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Disruptive thinking. Strategic focus.

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A hand is shown pointing towards a screen. On the screen, there is a circular graphic composed of many small green dots arranged in a spiral pattern. A horizontal line of yellow dots is visible on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the hand.

Shelton Fleming Group is a London-based, full-service creative agency with a strategic approach to live events, with almost 40 years of experience. We harness insight, data, creativity and technology, to deliver thought-provoking experiences. We enable brands to be part of something bigger – making them more meaningful to customers, stakeholders and society. More about the company at <http://sheltonfleming.com>.

Disclaimer:

In this paper, we introduce ideas and generic thoughts that are non-specific to any sector or business. Our views aim to stimulate discussion rather than provide specific recommendations. We'd encourage you to work with us, or an equally qualified partner, to analyse your activities, agree your desired outcomes and decide on a strategy to achieve them. This will enable you to find the solution that's best for your event and business. Every live or virtual event has unique requirements and, as such, the technologies, methods and concepts deployed should be evaluated against your brief. © Shelton Fleming Associates Limited.