



# *click, comment, share*

**Making Digital Marketing Work for Your Live Events**



## *the new normal*

We live in a digital world. Smartphones, mobile apps, and social media platforms have become an intrinsic part of our daily lives, and you don't need to be an expert to foresee a future in which information sharing over the Internet will flow through our lives "like electricity." For younger generations who've never known life without digital connectivity, there is no difference between the real world and the virtual world.

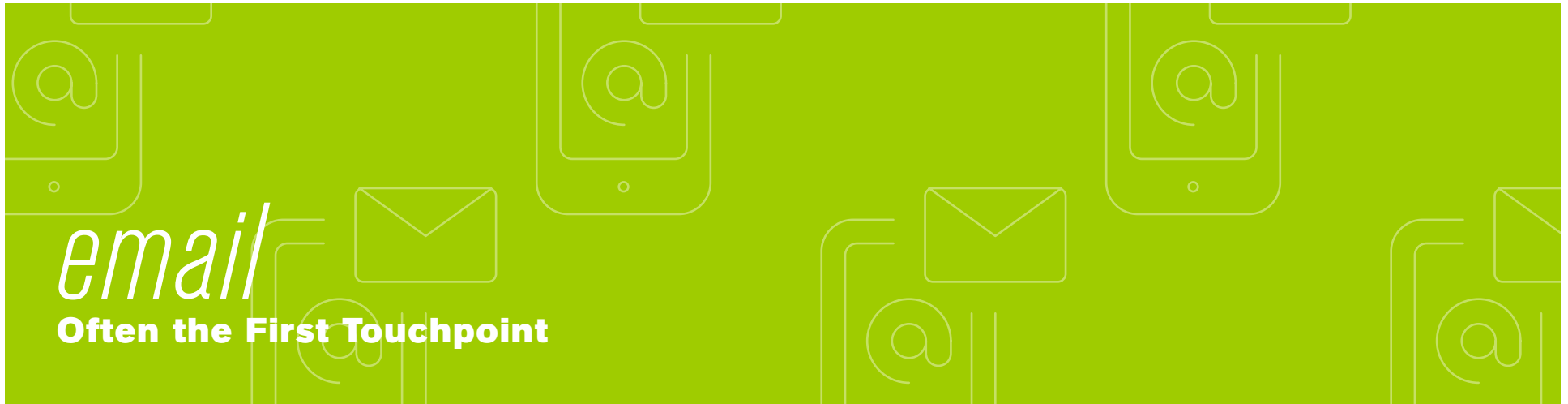
These trends have created a new normal for event professionals. It's an environment in which digital is no longer just a tool in the toolbox but instead is an absolutely critical, core component of the live brand

experience. The reality is that potential attendees are discovering events and experiences online through the web, social, and email. But many event marketers have yet to embrace this new reality, putting them at risk of losing attendees, sponsors, and revenue to competitors.

Here's the good news: Event marketers today have access to powerful, engagement-building technology that wasn't available 25 years ago. The challenge and opportunity is to leverage the exciting capabilities of today's digital, mobile, and social tools to create easy-to-discover, rich, memorable experiences that differentiate your brand from the litany of attention-grabbing messages. Use this guide as a basic framework to learn how to take audience engagement to a new level by making digital technology work for you.

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, "Digital Life in 2025," March 11, 2014.  
<http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/03/11/digital-life-in-2025/>



Before the digital age of event marketing, direct mail was the initial point of contact for potential attendees. Now email is frequently the first touchpoint.

Building your database of email addresses is merely the first step in a successful email marketing campaign. Emails need to have compelling subject lines, eye-catching design, and strong content. They need to deliver targeted messages that feel as if they were created personally for the recipient in order to combat the deluge of emails they already get on a day-to-day basis. And they need to open and display properly in multiple email browsers across a variety of devices.

With inboxes as cluttered as ever, the days of universal email blasts are gone. Potential attendees are far more likely to open an email that seems personal and relevant to them. To ensure that the right message

gets to the right audience at the right time, event professionals need to segment their email databases into different groups by dimensions, such as demographics, industry, and even geographies, in order to craft emails that matter to the wide variety of groups they're trying to attract. While there are myriad segmentation strategies, dividing an email list by attendee type or job function is a great place to start.

A word on HTML coding: Event marketers often assume that because they can create visually appealing HTML emails in Microsoft Outlook, they can craft eye-catching emails that open in any platform. However, because of the complexities of HTML email rendering engines, designing an email that looks the same in both Outlook and Gmail — and also looks just as good on a laptop as it does a mobile device — is, by no exaggeration, extremely difficult. It's best to seek the help of event partners that have expertise in HTML coding and optimization.



Next to email, the event website is the second most important digital touchpoint for event marketers. You would be surprised at the number of websites that look like they were built before Y2K. Yet simply having a decent-looking website is only half the battle.

In a sense, today's potential attendees are just like any other consumer contemplating an e-commerce purchase: They expect your website to have intuitive navigation, to clearly and concisely convey the event's value proposition, to easily execute a purchase or registration, and to be optimized for viewing on mobile devices. If your event website lacks these or other fundamental features — such as multiple engagement points (contact forms and calls to action, for example) — you run the risk of potential attendees abandoning their shopping carts and clicking elsewhere.

A key purpose of the event website is to provide an easy and secure mechanism for potential attendees to register for your program. It's just as important, however, that the website serves as a constant presence for your brand by offering engaging content that drives traffic to the site throughout the year (many people discover events through content), and by providing a forum for community discussions and networking. Remember: You've done the hard part by getting an audience to your website in the first place. Don't abandon them simply because they've registered for your program. Articles, discussion boards, community registration, and blogs are just a few of the tools you can use to leverage your website and build a community around your event. It's a cliché, but it's absolutely true: Content is king.

## *Among other best practices, your event website should:*



Employ basic SEO strategies to make content easy to find on the web



Leverage analytics tools that track the online activity of site visitors



Deploy SSL technology to ensure secure payments and higher search rankings



Include specific calls to action for purchase or registration, and offer social media sharing links on every page

By leveraging these best practices, you'll also create a knowledge base about what content you should be creating for your online presence and also your real-world program. It's a pretty safe bet that content that ranks highly in search on your website is also content that highly interests your event audience.

Even when potential attendees leave your website — or if they haven't yet discovered the site — there are other ways to build engagement online. Display advertising, for example, is a cost-effective digital engagement tool that all event marketers should use. Display ads are the sponsored banners and boxes that appear on content websites. These ads, which incorporate images, audio, video, and other elements in addition to text, can automatically display on pages that are related to your event content, such as car-buying websites for potential attendees of an automotive trade show, but also on other web pages that users may have visited or that may have interested them.

Retargeting is a more advanced twist on display advertising. Retargeting technology enables event marketers to reconnect with website visitors after they leave a site. Here's a simple example: A potential attendee visits your event website but doesn't register; the next time that person opens Facebook, they see an ad promoting early-bird specials for your live brand experience. Retargeting can be a very cost-effective way to build your audience because it's relatively passive, meaning users don't have to feel annoyed by too many email marketing messages, but also because it's very rare for attendees to make the decision to register immediately for an event.



# *social media*

## An Essential Marketing Channel

In this age, it's likely that social media is increasingly becoming the primary touchpoint for attendees, exhibitors, sponsors, and speakers. Consequently, it's critical that event marketers develop a strategy that maximizes the full potential of social media to drive attendance, enrich the live brand experience, and deepen relationships with their audiences. Tasks that should be completed months before the event include:

- 1 Assembling your social media team
- 2 Deciding which social media channels to use (and how to use them)
- 3 Developing a timeline for posting content on social media
- 4 Creating an event hashtag or hashtags

A well-designed social media strategy should play to the strengths of each platform. It's both an art and a science to combine the art of storytelling with a keen understanding of which platforms are most effective before, during, and after the show. Event marketers need to prime the pump with blogs, videos, polls, photos, and other content that sparks conversations and generates a “buzz” around the live brand experience. The science part involves taking into account the fact that attendees will most often engage in those conversations on Facebook and LinkedIn before the show, and then turn to channels such as Twitter and Instagram during the show.

It's also important to note that in China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Singapore, WeChat is the dominant social media platform, making it a key channel for any event marketer building an international audience.





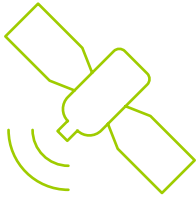
Event marketers have a number of additional digital tools at their disposal to help create a richer brand experience, while also capturing valuable data on audience feedback, satisfaction, and participation.



**Second screen apps**, for example, are designed to engage audiences on mobile devices that they're already constantly glued to in the first place, providing a platform for real-time conversations, feedback, and content distribution. Among their most powerful capabilities, second screen apps enable attendees to provide real-time feedback on presentations and speakers, and ask questions, via their mobile devices. The apps can also capture engagement metrics, such as attendance, screen time, and social interaction, enabling presenters and organizers to better understand which speakers and sessions resonated with the audience.



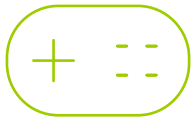
**Radio-frequency identification (RFID) and near field communications (NFC)** technologies are other ways to capture attendee information, while simplifying logistics and improving the attendee experience. One common application of this technology is to scan RFID tags embedded in visitor badges as attendees enter educational sessions or visit exhibitor booths, providing show organizers with valuable data on session attendance and enabling exhibitors to easily capture contact information.



**Geolocation mapping** refers to mobile technologies that enable attendees to find their way within an event, but also enable event marketers to create personalized maps that enrich the event experience by directing attendees to exhibits, breakout sessions, and other points of interest (such as nearby attractions). Putting detailed maps and directions in the palm of attendees' hands also arms event marketers with valuable data about the attendee experience.



**Digital signage** enables sponsors to present dynamic and eye-catching messages and, in the process, potentially gather analytics on the frequency of how often they were searched for and who touched their logo or requested more information. This technology enables sponsors to easily capture metrics by placing pads in front of wayfinding units, while also incorporating traditional sponsorship in floor clings that cover the pads. With digital signage in sessions and on social walls, this technology now allows the signs to change language and customize ads based on the audience walking by.



Event marketers can also employ **virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies** to create powerfully engaging experiences and to amplify the reach and impact of their live brand experience. Once the stuff of science fiction, VR allows people who aren't physically on-site to attend sessions or visit exhibitor booths through live VR streaming. Likewise, event marketers can use this technology to let potential attendees, speakers, and exhibitors experience an event or destination before committing to attending — enticing them in a way that photos or videos can't. On-site, VR lets visitors explore products that are otherwise too dangerous or expensive to use in the real world.





## *make it personal*<sup>SM</sup>

Today's social, mobile, and digital marketing technologies provide a window into user tastes and preferences that wasn't available to event marketers in the past. This information empowers event marketers to constantly improve the content and logistics of the live brand experience.

For example, by giving attendees the ability to rate session speakers on their mobile devices, second-screen technology delivers powerful,

concrete insight into what content struck a chord with attendees — and what missed the mark. The tried-and-true post-show debriefing session is the perfect opportunity for the marketing team to analyze the feedback data provided by second-screen apps, social media channels, and other digital technology to create more personal, tailored programming content for next year's event.



# *get real results*

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