



A series of strategic trends briefings for event and trade show marketers

THIS ISSUE: **HYBRID EVENTS**—BLENDING DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL EXPERIENCES

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## TREND ALERT: CONNECTING ONLINE AND LIVE EXPERIENCES

Hybrid events are becoming the ultimate killer app and they're here to stay:

Here's why hybrid events are growing so quickly—and what you need to know about them

More and more of our customers' lives are becoming split between the physical and the online worlds. The ways they shop, learn, communicate with families and closest friends, and consume entertainment have all been altered by omnipresent connectivity. So it's no surprise that the world of live marketing has also been transformed by technology—with more and more events now marrying online and offline elements.

It's official. Event marketing has officially gone hybrid, as marketers combine the effectiveness of face-to-face with the reach, scale and trackability of the digital realm. **Brands that have already taken the leap and sandwiched digital and live report tangible ROI increases across the board.**

"In integrating the live and online experience, marketers leverage both environments to optimize their brand. As a result, they elevate the attendee experience," says Kim Myhre, George P. Johnson's senior vice president and managing director.

In fact, it's becoming harder to find an event—consumer or b-to-b—that isn't at least somewhat of a hybrid. Whether it's fans updating their Twitter feeds from a NASCAR race, a company pulling content from YouTube into its tradeshow booth or a sales meeting being extended to employees around the world via webcast, event marketers and audiences have embraced the combination of traditional events with new media. "The two environments today support each other very well. There's no reason to think about online and offline as distinct anymore," Myhre says.

### What's Driving the Evolution

The merger of physical and virtual event marketing accelerated rapidly in 2009, thanks to what Myhre calls a "perfect storm" of factors. For one, the global economic slowdown eviscerated corporate travel budgets. One result was that b-to-b marketers quickly ramped up their efforts to web-enable their trade shows, sales meetings and conferences accessible, so clients and internal audiences who couldn't be there in person could still be a part of the experience.

Second, consumers and customers are more comfortable than ever with communicating online, and on a wider array of devices than ever before.

Third, the technology that enables meaningful online interaction is finally fulfilling its promise. "Devices are more powerful, bandwidth is greater and the quality of online video has improved dramatically," Myhre says.

Finally, the continued paradigm shift in the consumer-brand relationship—with consumers' power continuing to grow—means that it's becoming even more important for brands to communicate in ways that are timely, relevant and authentic to their consumers. So an increasing number of brands are finding that their traditional event marketing can be extended or enhanced when online elements are layered in.

### Why Hybrid Wins

All of those developments led some to predict that brands would ditch their live marketing initiatives and that online-only events would

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## SURVEY SAYS: MARKETERS' TOP PRIORITIES FOR 2010

## EVENT MARKETING INSTITUTE

**49.4%**

Half of marketers going virtual are looking to expand the reach of an existing event.

**71.6%**

Percentage of brand marketers adding social media to their event mix in 2010.

**74.5%**

Three of four brand marketers expect trade shows to integrate virtual components.

**20.9%**

Percentage of marketers who've employed a 'hybrid' event.

Source: 2010 Virtual Events Pulse Survey. Event Marketing Institute

### Internal Affairs

For your hybrid events to click, collaboration is key

If hybrid events are truly the future of event marketing—and there's plenty of evidence to support that supposition—marketers must begin adapting to the new model.

For starters, brands would do well to rethink their approach to event development. As hybrid events take hold, companies can no longer plan the physical event first and tack on the digital elements as an afterthought. “For the most part, brands have one group of people plan the physical event and another team plan the virtual,” says Kenny Lauer. “But there are opportunities to thread virtual elements into the physical ones if it's done at the same time you're planning the agenda and event layout.”

“The ideal scenario may be having a single department responsible for delivering the real and virtual elements of a hybrid event.”

For example, most physical events don't allow time or space for the audience to interact with virtual attendees. But just as most conferences offer sessions for networking with other attendees, they also can incorporate breaks for Tweeting, texting and chatting with remote attendees—event organizers can also use the time to scan the digital networking activity for useful content that can be folded back into the live event.

The ideal scenario may be having a single department responsible for delivering the real and virtual elements of a hybrid event. But, for now, the more closely the physical and digital event teams collaborate from the first stages of event planning, the better. Says Lauer, “The physical and virtual components won't always have the same objectives, but they need to work together.”

## THE HYBRID ADVANTAGE

Extended audience reach and ROI trackability are among the top benefits of the red-hot hybrid event model

As more brands move to layer digital interaction on top of their physical events, they're realizing a wide array of benefits—some anticipated and some unexpected. The advantages might be too many to list, but here are five reasons your company's move to hybrid is just around the corner.

- 1. Reach.** Extending a live event with 500 attendees to thousands more around the globe just got a lot easier. “Technology allows you to reach well beyond the walls of your venue to share that experience in better ways than you ever have before,” says GPJ's Kim Myhre.
- 2. Tracking.** Measurement mavens, rejoice. Almost every move made by a digital attendee can be recorded and analyzed. “Everything is captured online,” says Kenny Lauer, GPJ's executive director-digital experience. “You can track what they say to another attendee or a brand rep, how many times they enter a booth, or how much content they view or download.”
- 3. Predictive Modeling.** An added benefit of hybrid events' trackability is the intelligence brands gain about online audience behavior, which they can often use to predict audience behavior at physical events—or in the marketplace. “If you assume that people attending a virtual event have similar needs as those at a physical event, you can use your data as a proxy for how someone might interact in the physical space,” Lauer says.

For example, if online traffic reveals a heavy interest in a specific product at a virtual trade show, the sales team can add booth staff to that part of the physical tradeshow exhibit.

- 4. Reaction Time.** Much of the data from online audience behavior is available in real time, which means that event managers can adjust content to maximize audience interest in a certain topic or modify logistics to eliminate unpopular sessions. Brands also can incorporate digital media into live events to gain a competitive advantage over rival brands. Want to draw customers away from another company's tradeshow stand? Send a Tweet to your clients about a hot promotion coming up in your booth.
- 5. Participation.** Creating experiences that integrate live and onlive capabilities allows you to create more participatory and longer-lasting audience engagement. Technology is enabling audience members to do more than just consume content—it's letting them participate, ask questions, collaborate and even contribute their own content to a live event. “Creating experiences that integrate live and online capabilities allows you to create more participatory and longer lasting audience engagement,” Myhre says.

## ONLINE PLUS LIVE

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ultimately replace face-to-face events. But Myhre says that a hybrid model will prevail.

“The reality is that people like to be together—you can't overlook that,” Myhre says. “So the opportunity now is to optimize the experience in both environments in ways that enable participants to get the face to face interaction they require while also gaining the extended and ongoing advantages of an online experience.”

Fortunately, event marketers should be well positioned to ride the hybrid wave. Although the technology adds a new wrinkle, the fundamentals of physical events are just as important. “Just like in live events, you need to understand the marketing goals and the audience and design an audience experience that best achieves those goals,” Myhre says. “The only difference with hybrid events is that you now need to consider both environments at the same time so that you are not building in inconsistencies and conflicts between the two, while leveraging the unique strengths of each.”



## ASSEMBLING THE HYBRID TOOLBOX

To build successful hybrid events, you'll need the right mix of technology, strategy and staff

Whether you're adding a robust digital presence to a physical event or creating a hybrid event from scratch, chances are you're familiar with most of the tech tools you and your audience are going to need to deliver—and consume—the content.

The basics include a mix of devices, applications, digital media and websites. Not every event uses all of them, but among the technologies that usually come into play:

- ✓ Blogging
- ✓ Text Messaging
- ✓ Podcasting
- ✓ Webcasting
- ✓ Microblogging (Twitter, Google Buzz)
- ✓ Social Media (Facebook)
- ✓ Video Sharing (YouTube, Ustream)
- ✓ Photo Sharing (flickr)
- ✓ Smartphones

Having all of those tools at your disposal can be exhilarating (or daunting) but GPJ's Kim Myhre says **it's critical to think about the audience experience first—before you try to determine which technology to throw at it.** "Technology is the enabler; it's not the experience," he says. "Just because something is online doesn't make it a great experience. The questions we ask about engaging the audience at a live event are just as important, if not more important, in digital events."

There are three types of resources to consider for the digital components of your hybrid event.

**Platforms.** There Platforms. For virtual events such as trade shows, there are now several off-the-shelf solutions that bring together much of the technology, such as InXpo, Unisfair, 6Connex and ON24. These are essentially online event templates that combine a content repository, text chat capability, video and audio streaming and other basic tools. All are designed to be implemented with minimal effort. But there is an endless combination of tools and platforms to suit every event format way beyond trade shows. Some platforms are more self-service than others, but most software allows event hosts to customize their landing pages and design elements for their virtual trade show, booth or meeting hall; providers generally offer some level of

technical support. No matter the platform, the event owner still has to do the heavy lifting when it comes to event content.

It's important to consult with the platform providers to ensure the software can handle the amount of traffic you're expecting for your event, but GPJ's Kenny Lauer says that one of the products worked just fine for a meeting with 13,000 virtual attendees.

But there is an endless combination of tools and platforms to suit every event format way beyond trade shows. For experiences ranging from entertainment sponsorship to road shows, such tools as blogging/publishing software, text messaging, microsites, social media networks and related platforms are all readily available. Lastly, in terms of listening and closing the loop on engagement, monitoring tools such ranging from TweetDeck and Radian6 provide a 360-degree view into your audiences' conversations in real time.

**Wayfinding.** Considering that the attendee experience is just as important a part of the online event as it is for a physical event, it's essential that the online audience knows what to do, where to go and when to be there. If that's a relatively straightforward proposition at concerts, conferences and trade shows, it takes know-how and the right technology to make it happen online.



One way to accomplish this is with video of an event guide—a person who pops up on the user's screen and gives a brief welcome and schedule highlights ("Don't miss the keynote at 3 p.m.") The event owner must provide the actor and video, but most of the off-the-shelf platforms offer the ability to layer in the pop-ups for a relatively low cost. Pop-up messaging, internal e-mail messages and Tweets are other ways to ensure virtual attendees can find the content they want.

**The Experts.** Lauer recommends that companies have staff in two key positions. The first is a marketer or event manager who understands the intricacies of the event, is responsible for the user experience and serves as point person for interacting with the company providing the online event platform. The second is an IT program manager, or ITPM. This person's responsibilities may range broadly depending on the event, but responsibilities may include custom programming and development (if needed), liaison with the technical support manager at the company providing the event platform, integration of data between the event and the brand's existing database and firewall issues.

## CASE STUDY

### Online + Live Clorox brands get cookin' with Keith Urban

The Clorox Co. showed off the power of hybrid event marketing with an online-offline push around the U.S. leg of Keith Urban's 2009 Escape Together world tour.

The company touted its KC Masterpiece and Kingsford brands with a sweepstakes offering a chance to win a meeting with Urban at a backyard cookout. Social media sites, including text-message promos and video screens at the concert venues encouraged fans to enter. Other prizes included instant seat upgrades and song downloads.

And keithurban.net served as the online home for the promotion.

In all, more than 500,000 consumers entered, and nearly one-third elected to join Urban's mobile fan club.



## Expert Corner



GPJ's Kenny Lauer  
On What's Next

### Why are hybrid events so hot right now?

Kenny Lauer: They bring together the best of both worlds. One of the challenges of a physical event is that it ends with the last breakout session, and then people go home. But with virtual events, you can maximize the benefit of face-to-face interaction for your key audiences, you can extend a lot of what you're already doing to influencers and other people who wouldn't be able to travel to your event, and you can extend the duration of the event. That means you're leveraging what you're already spending on the content for the physical event.

### What's next for hybrid events?

Lauer: Today, we're still talking about virtual and physical events as two separate ideas. But there's no doubt that the two worlds will soon blend together. Every event already has a digital component—even if it's e-mail or a social media add-on. In a short time, every physical event will at least have some virtual extensions, whether it's video on demand, Facebook or Twitter, or Google Buzz, as ways to engage audience members who aren't physically at the event. We won't think of the experience as divided between physical and virtual; we're going to have one experience that has physical and virtual touchpoints.

We'll also see a layering effect—events will layer experiences throughout the event and pre-and post-event so people can interact with the content in a way that suits them best.

### Where is it headed?

Lauer: The hybrid model will become the de facto standard for events. Right now, some companies can't do everything they want in digital events because they don't have the bandwidth, but we'll see the technology develop and get cheaper.

### Can the hybrid model be applied to any type of event?

Lauer: There may be some very high-end, private, invite-only events that will continue to exist as physical-only events. But the ability to extend the engagement with your audience and to drive your event goals is so enhanced by adding virtual components that in almost every case, brands would be missing an opportunity not to do it.

## KEEPING 'MULTIPURPOSING' IN MIND

Pushing an event into the hybrid realm takes a new mindset that spans both live and online

Never again can you plan a live event without considering how you will use online capabilities to promote, enhance and extend the overall experience. There's no turning back—so having a planning approach that allows you to ask the right questions about both the live and online experience will become more and more critical. Moving forward, practitioners of experience marketing will need to be familiar with and comfortable working in both live and online medium, to make sure they are doing what they've always attempted to do: create the best experience to deliver against their marketing objectives. If you're not sure that hybrid events make sense for your plan, consider this: In most cases, adding the most basic digital elements to a physical program can quickly enhance the attendee experience.

"It's amazing how many live conferences I've attended where once the sessions are over there is no direction given to the audience as to where they might go for more information on what they've just heard," say GPJ's Kim Myhre. "Better integrating online elements into the conference content can offer the audience greater opportunities to find out more about the topics at hand—web sites they can search, video links to click on, online communities to join, blogs to read."

Sounds pretty simple, but brands have to be careful not to choose the medium before deciding on the message. Create the content first and then decide how to best leverage it across the live and digital platforms.

For example, consider how an event could optimize a keynote speech in the physical and virtual worlds. "First make sure you capture the keynote content—video, audio, visuals and transcripts. You would be surprised how many events still don't," Myhre says. "Then you have an opportunity to decide how the content can be best leveraged—you may want to stream the content live online during the event, post in online as video on demand to access after the event, or both—depending on your objectives."

Another consideration for brands adopting the hybrid model is how the live-digital combination can support a year-round marketing agenda. Live events are, by definition, episodic, but adding digital elements can keep audiences engaged during the times in between the physical events. "This is about a continuous brand relationship," Myhre says. "Now, the live experience are episodes within a continuing, engaging experience, with no distinct start and end."

Finally, marketers planning hybrid events must recognize the quirks, limitations and opportunities posed by consuming an event online. Those networking receptions are often a critical part of the attendee experience at live events, and they're impossible to truly replicate online. But brands can achieve some of the same objectives by incorporating online-friendly entertainment—think alternate reality games—into the digital event.

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### About George P. Johnson

GPJ is a worldwide experience marketing agency that enables brand marketers to create great ideas and bring them to life through integrated live and online experiences and environments, helping them cut through marketplace noise, differentiate from the competition and create lasting relationships that directly impact the bottom line. Consistently ranked one of Advertising Age's "Top 25 Marketing Agencies," GPJ provides its services through 26 offices around the world. The agency's clients won 37 awards in 2008 and five Ex Awards in 2009 alone, an unprecedented achievement in the event and experience marketing industry. Learn more about us at [www.gpj.com](http://www.gpj.com).

# JUMPING INTO HYBRID EVENT MARKETING?

Successful hybrid-event implementation begins with an assessment of objectives and resources

Are you considering creating a hybrid event—or a full-on virtual experience? Fortunately, most of what you know about planning and executing physical events translates to the virtual events world. But the unavoidable truth is that the way attendees interact with an event online is different from how they consume it in person. So launching some or all of an event in cyberspace takes an extra measure of strategic thought. It all begins with a look at the audience and an understanding of how that audience will interact with your brand on-site and online.

Use this worksheet below as an example of the questions smart marketers need to ask, and answer. Only by understanding your audience can you begin to craft a plan for engaging people at events and online. Understanding the audience's technological capabilities, as an example, will prevent potential technology misalignments, such as delivering a webcast where broadband connection is weak or a mobile video cast to customers whose phones can't support it.

## Hybrid Prep. UNDERSTANDING THE AUDIENCE

Where is your audience likely to be when they participate in your event?  
 Home  Office  Mobile  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Where will people experience the event?  
 North America  Europe  Emerging  Asia Pacific

How many unique people will attend the event? \_\_\_\_\_

*Note: This will dictate preparation for technical support and bandwidth issues.*

Will the event be delivered entirely in English?  
 Yes  No

If not, what languages would need to be supported? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe your audience's online behavior. Where do they go online and what do they do? \_\_\_\_\_

What specific sites does your audience (or those who influence your audience) visit? \_\_\_\_\_

Does your audience make content online—write blogs or upload video, music or text?  
 Yes  No [If Yes, they are creators]

Does your audience respond to content from others—post reviews, comment on blogs or contribute to articles (wikis) or forums?  
 Yes  No [If Yes, they are critics]

Does your audience organize content for themselves or others—use RSS, add tags to web pages or photos, or vote online?  
 Yes  No [If Yes, they are collectors]

Does your audience connect in social networks—have profiles on, or visit, MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn?  
 Yes  No [If Yes, they are joiners]

Does your audience consume content, read blogs, watch videos listen to podcasts, or read forums or reviews?  
 Yes  No [If Yes, they are spectators]

What factors could prevent your audience from attending or engaging? Factors might include lack of perceived value, slow broadband access, poor hardware, firewall problems, audience members are technophobes, government-imposed restrictions.

What factors will motivate your audience to attend and engage? Factors might include interest in participating in new or “cool” events, interest in networking with industry peers.

## HYBRID AUDITS GENERATE CRITICAL INSIGHTS AND IDEAS

George P. Johnson is a champion of the hybrid model, fusing live experiences, online assets and digital tools for companies around the world. **To schedule a Hybrid Planning Audit, visit [gpj.com/hybrid](http://gpj.com/hybrid).** For more information about all things hybrid, in the Americas contact Kenny Lauer at 650-226-0649 or [kenny.lauer@gpj.com](mailto:kenny.lauer@gpj.com); in Europe contact Kim Myhre at +44 (0) 208-879-2222 or [kim.myhre@gpj.com](mailto:kim.myhre@gpj.com).