



The new normal

Considerations for business events
in a post-COVID-19 world





Health and safety are the #1 priority

At Freeman, our first and foremost concern is the health and safety of our employees and their families, our customers, and the wider communities where we live and work. The purpose of this document is to outline new ideas, processes, and protocols to help ensure the safety of everyone at controlled business events.

We encourage our team members and partners to utilize this resource to help you take necessary precautions and determine next steps while planning for your events during this challenging time. What we know about the novel coronavirus is constantly evolving, so please always rely on resources such as the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and your local public health department for the latest information. We will proactively update policies and safety recommendations as they become available.

We are stronger together. If you have best practices and new ideas for making your business events safer, please share those at bettertogether@freeman.com.

Any questions or comments related to this document should be directed to Dan Steiner, Freeman's Head of Enterprise Risk Management, at dan.steiner@freeman.com or [469-673-8275](tel:469-673-8275).

Not all events are equal or fall under the category of mass gathering

Through our industry advocacy work, we realize more than ever that the words we use and how we use them matter. As communities begin to reopen, people have questions about what's safe. As governments provide guidelines, a term that is being regularly used is “gatherings” — as in small gatherings are safe and mass gatherings are not. Things are never that simple.

Unlike mass gatherings, business events and exhibitions can take place in controlled environments. We can architect an experience in a space that is safe, adheres to guidelines for social distancing, and creates a meaningful and memorable experience for all who attend.

As face-to-face events come back, it is all of our responsibility — event producers, organizers, associations, brands, exhibitors — to consistently educate ourselves on how we are building safe events.



It's about working together

We are actively engaged on committees with the following organizations to advance health and safety procedures and policies for our industry:



[View full list of GO LIVE TOGETHER partners](#) ➔



In April 2020, Freeman launched Go LIVE Together with live events leaders from across the United States to support legislative actions that will aid our industry's recovery from COVID-19 with task forces on health and safety, impact, and legislation.



The mathematics of social distancing

For the foreseeable future, physical distancing will be a way of life in our personal and professional roles — but we can still be socially connected.

Here's how the math breaks down:

Social distancing standard allows for 6 feet (2 meters) of physical distance between individuals. This calculates to a 36-square-foot (4 square meters per person) square or 28.3-square-foot circle per person. Both calculations maintain 6 feet between individuals. The 28.3-square-foot circle calculation accounts for a more efficient use of the space.

Using this calculation, you can determine the capacity of your event location.



Adapting to the new normal

As the world starts to get back to business, people, companies, and industries need to adjust to what that means post COVID-19.

Our industry's challenge

Everyone will have higher expectations for face-to-face events post COVID-19



Live event consideration



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Marketing your event

Scenario planning & rapid response

Our perspective

COVID-19 has impacted every aspect of life: how we live, how we work, and how we interact with one another.

A crisis management plan is something you should have for every business event. Work with your partner to create a plan. For example, work with your logistics partner to provide a plan for each event, addressing clear roles and responsibilities. Your logistics partner should review the crisis management plan with all event participants involved in running the event to verify that critical tasks and activities are properly assigned and addressed. This includes protocols around security and medical facilities.

If an employee or attendee experiences symptoms indicative of COVID-19 (cough, fever, trouble breathing), they should be immediately provided with a mask and transported to the on-site medical station (if available) or directed to the closest health care facility for testing and treatment.

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Strategy

Our perspective

A digital-first mindset underscores the value of face-to-face events.

Now that events have had to shift to digital, it has put the spotlight on how important and valuable face-to-face events are in the overall marketing strategy. Digital can complement that experience.

Data-driven decisions inform what's next.

Event strategies will be re-evaluated to determine what events continue digitally and what programs extend to omni-channel. The new standard will integrate digital into the overall strategy. Data-driven decisions will inform cadence, event formats, and content development, as well as digital and physical components.

Purposeful event strategy will drive the reimagination of events.

Gone are the days of “what we’ve always done.” Event professionals will make conscious decisions on what to do, when, based on the overall business objectives versus a date on a calendar. For those who have been hosting the same event for years, it is an opportunity to rethink and reinvent.

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Event marketing

Our perspective

Marketing events will require a new level of attention to detail in explaining the value of face-to-face events. Attendees will be cautious for some time about both being a part of gatherings and traveling to get to them. It will become more important to help people understand what they will get from coming to a face-to-face event that they couldn't get from other means.

Be open and honest in your communications. Consider the ways that you're providing online community and education to make the moments spent on-site even more valuable. Consider a hybrid approach to keep your audience engaged digitally and in person throughout the year.

There's always a temptation to simply pick up and adapt what was done for your last event, and a good chance that you'll miss the opportunities and the threats associated with today's new reality.

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These are just a few of the many considerations you will need to explore:

- How has the audience your event serves been affected, and how must your approach to database development and marketing adapt accordingly?
- Are certain geographic regions impacted more than others?
- Are segments of your audience still under travel restrictions?
- What new partnership opportunities exist?



Marketing checklist

Adapt communication strategies and campaign tactics.

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- ✓ **Ensure your tone and message are authentic, honest, open, and transparent.**
- ✓ **Answer the “what’s in it for me” question.**
Ensure your value proposition is strong and, as much as possible, personalized and targeted.
- ✓ **Avoid statistics touting the overall size of an event.**
These are how show organizers measure their own success, not how an attendee measures the quality of their experience. These statistics can exacerbate fears about business gatherings and even set unrealistic expectations for your audience.
- ✓ **Shift your focus from the size of the event to the smaller, more intimate connections that are made.**
Recognize that many attendees will be balancing the desire for connections and community with their fear of crowds. Address this by promoting the connections that can be made within smaller settings, e.g., matchmaking programs, a CEO breakfast, an LGBTQ reception, a mentor program, etc. For exhibitors, focus on the quality of the attendee you are attracting through your marketing campaigns.
- ✓ **Let your audience know what your on-site preparedness/sanitation plan is, but don’t lead with it.**
Just as a restaurant doesn’t lead with messaging about cleanliness, you need to make the case first as to why an attendee should be interested in attending. Dedicate a page on your website to event health and safety measures.
- ✓ **Look at your creative through a new lens.**
This won’t necessarily be business as usual, and your typical creative approach will likely need to be revisited from the perspective of this “new normal.” Show visuals that focus on an individual’s experience at an event. Avoid any visuals that will exacerbate your audience’s fear of germ-spreading or that will provide fodder for critics on social media.
- ✓ **Consider a hybrid event.**
Savvy event organizers should be adding virtual components to future events. Coordinated as a combination of in-person meetings and virtual presentations, a successful hybrid event blends these elements seamlessly to expand reach and engagement.

[Learn more about Digital.](#) →



Event logistics & registration

Event logistics

Our perspective

While the impetus of rethinking face-to-face interactions may start with reducing disease transmission, this is a golden opportunity to implement more forward thinking to revamp legacy processes — making the experience better for our attendees and customers.

By incorporating more technology, such as AI-based chatbots and touchless registration technology, we can provide a safer environment, improve customer service interactions, and reduce wait times.

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Event registration checklist

It's time to up your reg game.

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☑ **Registration becomes entirely digital.**

Use an eco-friendly alternative to printed programs and handouts — give your attendees the option to register in advance by using their laptop, tablet, or smartphone. Some tools feature tracking and do-it-yourself options where you can share contact information and enable contactless pay.

☑ **Staggered check-in times.**

Give attendees a specific time window for check-in so registration happens in waves versus a mass rush.

☑ **Antibacterial surface wipes for counters.**

Clean counters frequently.

☑ **Express check-in and satellite registration at hotels and airports.**

Eliminate long queues and crowds by enabling convenient locations for check-in and registration.

☑ **Pre-event badge delivery.**

Provide the option for attendees to be mailed their badges in advance or provide a print-at-home option.

☑ **Body temperature detection, such as thermal cameras and/or infrared thermometers.**

Consider requiring temperature checks for all employees and attendees of the event.

☑ **Medical exam room.**

Provide facilities to care for workers or attendees who may become sick on-site. Assess and refer them to medical professionals as soon as possible, if needed.

Event logistics checklist

Navigating your show.

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✓ **Floor graphics for social distancing.**

Use graphic indicators as a reminder of how far apart attendees should stand when in line.

✓ **Enable touch-free doors and entryways.**

✓ **Sanitation stations.**

Provide touch-free hand sanitizers, hand-washing stations, etc. Mark the locations on signage maps or within your event app.

✓ **Utilize remote robotics.**

Enable attendees to explore and interact with spaces via a roaming robot versus physically doing it themselves.

✓ **Service desk / concierge.**

Transition away from a physical to a virtual service desk. Provide on-demand response services, but have the first touchpoint be virtual, and follow up through mobile communications or email.

✓ **Protect workers and attendees with transparent barriers where appropriate.**

Use sneeze guard protections and other barriers for appropriate areas (information desk, service desk, registration) where technology-based distancing isn't feasible.

✓ **Chatbot and AI-driven service.**

Voice-based interactive systems provide a quick and cost-effective way to answer questions and request services. Show organizers can benefit from improved efficiency and reduced person-to-person interaction.

A man with short dark hair, wearing a grey knit sweater and large white over-ear headphones, is shown in profile, focused on his work. He is sitting at a desk in a modern office with large windows in the background. On his desk, there is a laptop open in front of him, and several other computer monitors are visible. The lighting is soft and blue-toned, creating a professional and tech-oriented atmosphere.

Education

Education experience

Our perspective

There's been a big shift in how people consume information that won't go away any time soon.

As a result, we must optimize face-to-face events for activities that are best accomplished in person, such as discussions, networking, and discovery, rather than long-form speeches and one-way information delivery.

While stage productions (keynotes and general sessions) have been the norm for years, we can adapt these methods to deliver key news with global reach in a variety of different formats, LIVE or virtual.

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General sessions & live engagement

Content Delivery in a Physically Distanced World

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Reimagine the general session.

Space limitations from physical distancing will create the need for quality over quantity for your entire event. Use your general session for high-value moments that can only be delivered live. Create shared moments in time. Build your expanded online viewership to extend your reach and go beyond the constraints of single-digit days with your community.

Safe distance seating layouts.

Smaller sessions with a larger focus on interaction and content.

Second screen technology for audience engagement.

Enable attendees to use their own devices to follow along with slides, take notes, participate in polls, and ask the presenter questions — all from the comfort of their own seat and device.

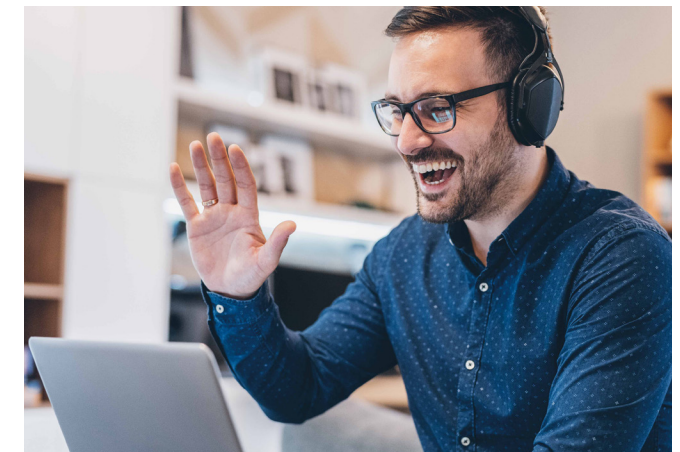
Move all passive learning to online and digital channels, while reserving face-to-face events for applied and interactive learning.

Insist on shorter, tighter presentations with a focus on a single message. The TED

conferences evolved public speaking by forcing speakers to keep their presentations tight. Social media and other online forums have additionally trained people that information comes in bite-sized bits. Create guidelines for speakers and set agendas knowing that attention spans are short.

Enlist content coaches experienced in making content consumable and entertaining, live and online.

Remember that your audiences are familiar with consuming content from many sources, including TV shows, online news outlets, and podcasts. Raising standards in content delivery will create better experiences for your audience at your event and online.



Education checklist

Make it a digital engagement, not just an event online.

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- ✓ **Focus on pre-show content delivery to prepare (and enhance) on-site experience.**
It sets the tone for what your audience can expect during showtime.
- ✓ **Embrace rehearsals — just as you would for a live event.**
Online audiences were slightly more forgiving of technical glitches; this is no longer the case.
- ✓ **Experiment with microlearning. Adults have a 10-minute attention window.**
It's critical to deliver information in very small amounts quickly. It boosts knowledge retention and enables individuals to quickly pick up concepts.
- ✓ **Choose the right tech for your use case.**
Livestreams, webinars, virtual conferences — each has unique benefits for your attendees and your sponsors.

- ✓ **Personalization x10.**
Audience segmentation and even self-selection can be further leveraged with attendees dispersed throughout the globe. Think about adding more breakouts to discussions with unique focus. This allows each audience to get more of what they need from you.
- ✓ **Incorporate learning paths and gamification to encourage participation.**
Create thoughtful experiences that balance competition and collaboration. Engage your audiences to embrace their inner problem solvers.
- ✓ **Never underestimate on-demand content.**
Our clients share that nearly 60% of online viewership comes from the on-demand version of their content. Broadcast live is great, but depending on your content and budget, it's not always necessary.

Networking & show floor

Considerations for business gatherings post COVID-19



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Networking

Our perspective

One of the biggest reasons people attend face-to-face events — networking experiences — will have to be carefully rethought. If we've learned anything from this experience, it's that building a community doesn't require walls.

Connecting with someone doesn't always require proximity. And even if we're physically distant, we can still feel closer than ever.

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Encourage matchmaking.

Make networking more efficient and qualitative. Technology has been shown to be highly effective in making valuable connections between attendees.

Enable digital business card exchange.

Create smaller, more value-driven networking opportunities.

Instead of a large concert or party with all attendees, create the opportunity for smaller (possibly sponsored) networking opportunities for specific groups.

Rethink furniture layouts.

Replace shared seating like sofas and loveseats with individual club chairs carefully spaced and optimized for conversations. Implement best practices to provide food and beverage to your attendees.

Follow guidelines from the experts.

Buffets and large areas to mix and mingle may need to be replaced by smaller groups eating and drinking together. Enable virtual (at-home) attendees to still engage with on-site attendees.

Create conversation pods with appropriately spaced seating and potentially even an antibacterial screen between the two sides.

Introduce a custom greeting for just your attendees that replaces the handshake.

Consider open-air venues versus enclosed spaces for networking activities.

Look to sponsorship programs to create smaller, more intimate group experiences for like-minded conference attendees.



Show floor

Our perspective

This is an opportunity to reimagine the entire show floor experience. Forget the “this is the way it’s always been done” mentality — and use this post-COVID-19 reality as an opportunity to design the exact kind of show floor experience you’ve always dreamed of.

Imagine experiences more tailored to each specific member of your audience, similar to how an appointment at a boutique provides a more personalized experience than shopping at a department store. In this new reality, visiting an exhibitor may mean making an appointment.

Digital experiences will be integrated to allow for exploration on a more personal level.

While show floors may need to be reimaged with fewer crowds, this is an opportunity to enhance and personalize the experience, making it more valuable for both the attendee and the exhibitor.

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Show floor checklist

Enhance the show floor experience for exhibitors and attendees.

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☒ **Curate the experience.**

Create recommended pathways for different interests and transform the typical booth model into interactive vignettes.

☒ **Rethink the layout.**

Larger lounges with individual seating are a good place to start. Go further. Rethink the rows of 10x10 booths and create more space for your exhibitors to interact safely with attendees.

☒ **One-way aisles vs. wider aisles?**

One-way aisles are more cost-effective, as they leverage infrastructure already in place. We recommend adding personnel with signs at aisle openings to help ensure traffic flows smoothly. These individuals can help direct traffic at a safe distance to put attendees at ease.

☒ **Schedule tours of the show floor.**

This could also include scheduling visitors for your exhibitors, so meetings are done by appointment only.

☒ **Enable the ability to navigate the floor virtually.**

If attendees can use the event application to search the show floor using keywords, guests will be more efficient with their time and how they get from place to place.

☒ **Control density.**

Use measurement technology and heat maps to determine and control capacity levels to ensure areas do not become overly crowded.

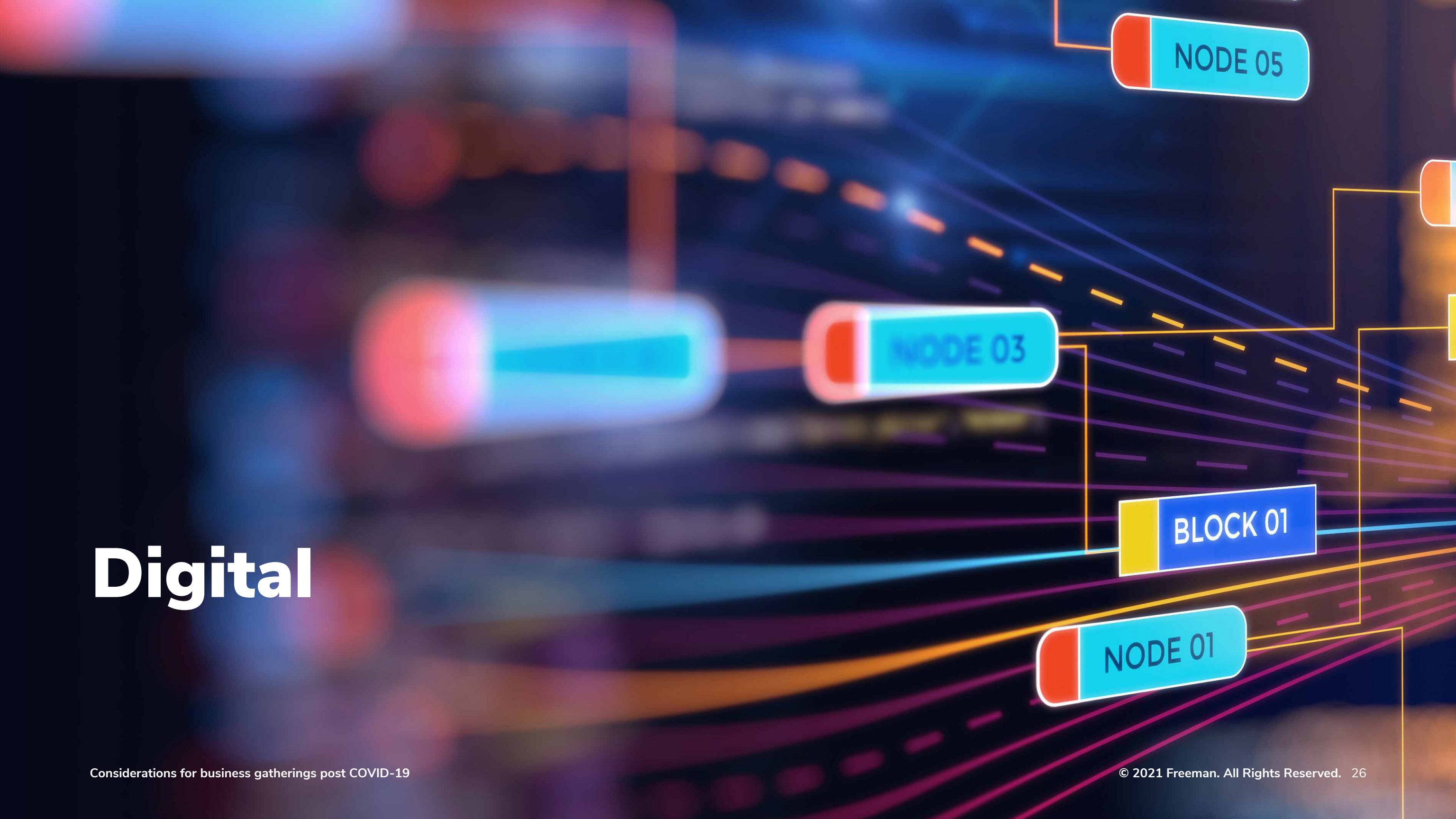
☒ **Adjust KPIs.**

Foot traffic may very well no longer be the best indicator of success. Think quality over quantity, and educate your exhibitors on this shift.

☒ **Plan for cleaning of spaces throughout the day.**

Build breaks into schedules to clear attendees from show floors to allow for cleaning. These defined time segments will also allow more flexibility in offering “sessions” or segmenting audience visits like a museum might manage a special exhibit.

Digital



Digital

Our perspective

The global pandemic of 2020-21 has forced workers and consumers alike to spend more time online than ever before. With this in mind, we will continue to help reimagine events in new and virtual ways.

Every day, we are seeing new examples of work getting done, entertainment being produced, and people interacting in new ways while dispersed around the world. As event organizers think about the ways to embrace digital, the emphasis should not be to simply move traditional events online in a way that feels familiar.

Rather, the role of the event organizer is to create digital social communities that can interact all year long. It's not just an event online — it's a digital experience.

Live events then become poignant moments for those communities to come together, increasing their value, while digital experiences ultimately enhance and extend the face-to-face environment.

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Digital checklist

Virtual isn't going away. Master it.

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Online experience

- ✓ **Create communities online.**
Focus on creating opportunities for discussion and interaction rather than simply archiving what's happened at an in-person event.
- ✓ **Mirror what your audiences already consume online.**
Give your audience content that is stimulating and fun by using the methods of podcasting, influencer-led forums, and entertainment.
- ✓ **Embrace more voices.**
Integrating digital means bringing more voices into the conversation. Rather than a single speaker, bring in multiple thought-leaders to share varying perspectives. Find speakers and experts who can speak to different levels of audiences.
- ✓ **Inject humor, fun, and engagement into content.**
Understand that your job may have evolved from delivering information to, at times, entertaining your audience. Keep it fresh, fast-moving, and fun.
- ✓ **Be aware that online events are different.**
It's a different medium, and the best practices are different. It's not as simple as just translating face-to-face event best practices.

Digital at face-to-face events

- ✓ **Apps will be key.**
Technology providers will continue to integrate new application technology into the fabric of events, but with a 365-day mindset. Future apps will go beyond location finding, session schedules, bios, attendee profiles, and matchmaking to seamlessly connect physical and digital worlds.
- ✓ **Large touchscreens and wearable tech (VR goggles) will need to take sanitation standards into effect.**
- ✓ **Enable attendees to use their own devices to drive a digital experience wherever possible.**
- ✓ **Utilize beacons for crowd control and push notifications.**
This creates an easy snapshot of where attendees are.
- ✓ **Tap into touchless tech.**
Hands-free technology is changing the game in automotive and manufacturing industries. Even Nike recently invested in technology so you can step into their sneakers without the use of your hands. With gesture recognition and other touchless tech, we'll soon see new ways to engage even more safely at events.



Sponsorship

Sponsorship

Our perspective

The opportunity for sponsorships has grown and allowed for more creativity as we move to always-on communities that reach from online to offline and back again. It is time to reimagine sponsorships. Focus on creating meaningful sponsorship partnerships that connect to content and experiences online and in person.

Reimagine sponsorships, moving away from selling physical opportunities such as banners and badge lanyards and instead focusing on creating meaningful sponsorship partnerships that connect to content and experiences that support overall engagement and sales.

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Find your friendlies

Sponsorship equals partnership. Involve your sponsors as true partners with a seat at the table. Think about what your audience needs as part of your overall ecosystem and how your partners fit into those solutions and segments.

Sponsored networking

Make it worth it. Sponsored targeted networking spaces and VIP experiences will create meaningful relationships like never before. Do some detective work to find out what is possible at adjacent locations and extend your partnership beyond the four walls of a convention center through networking in local cafes or restaurants.

Sponsored content and education

Get creative. Think about what you'll deliver online and in person throughout the year and how your partners can best engage with the community. The possibilities are endless.

Sponsored digital

Give your sponsors time and space that matter. Show them the value of your community, and find ways to enhance

the online experience. Where to start? It doesn't all have to be online. Sponsors can deliver attendees a physical welcome box — catered lunches, iced coffees, or build-your-own cocktail kits for guests to open before a virtual event begins — to add to the fun. Think of ways to develop custom sponsorships that connect the dots to more than just a banner ad.

[More digital considerations](#) →

Sponsored marketing

Attendees should feel the love whenever they interact with your brand and your partners. Organizations have always said they want that 365-day engagement; however, we haven't quite gotten there. Now is the opportunity and expectation to do so. Be sure to have your sponsors join in everything from pre-event communications to online elements to on-site experiences. Consider promotional items and sponsorships that keep attendees safe, such as hand sanitizer, face masks, or hand-washing stations. These items send a message that you not only want your attendees' business but that you're interested in their protection as well.

What now? What next?

Interdependencies inform insights.

We believe exploring the interdependencies in the event ecosystem provides better insight into what now and what next.

As a global company, Freeman has access to how business gatherings are evolving across GEOs in a post-COVID-19 world. Our ideas, approach, and recommendations are informed based on input from experts, real-time updates from government and health agencies, third-party industry reports, and primary research.

Events will be different moving forward. You can read more about how we're staying connected with our customers [here](#). For help reimagining your event strategy, please contact us today.

Contact Us



The responsibility for creating a healthy and safe environment starts before an event ever opens

It begins with our employees. Freeman has implemented new health and hygiene protocols to keep our people and our customers safe.

Freeman Safety Protocols

About Freeman:

Freeman is the world's largest brand experience company. We help our clients design, plan, and deliver immersive experiences for their most important audiences. Through comprehensive solutions including strategy, creative, logistics, digital solutions, and event technology, Freeman helps increase engagement and drive business results. What makes us different is our collaborative culture, intuitive knowledge, global perspective, and personalized approach, gained from our 90+ years as an industry leader.

