

# EVENT TECHNOLOGY

*Stay up to date with the latest trends.*

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# Are Virtual Meetings the New Norm?



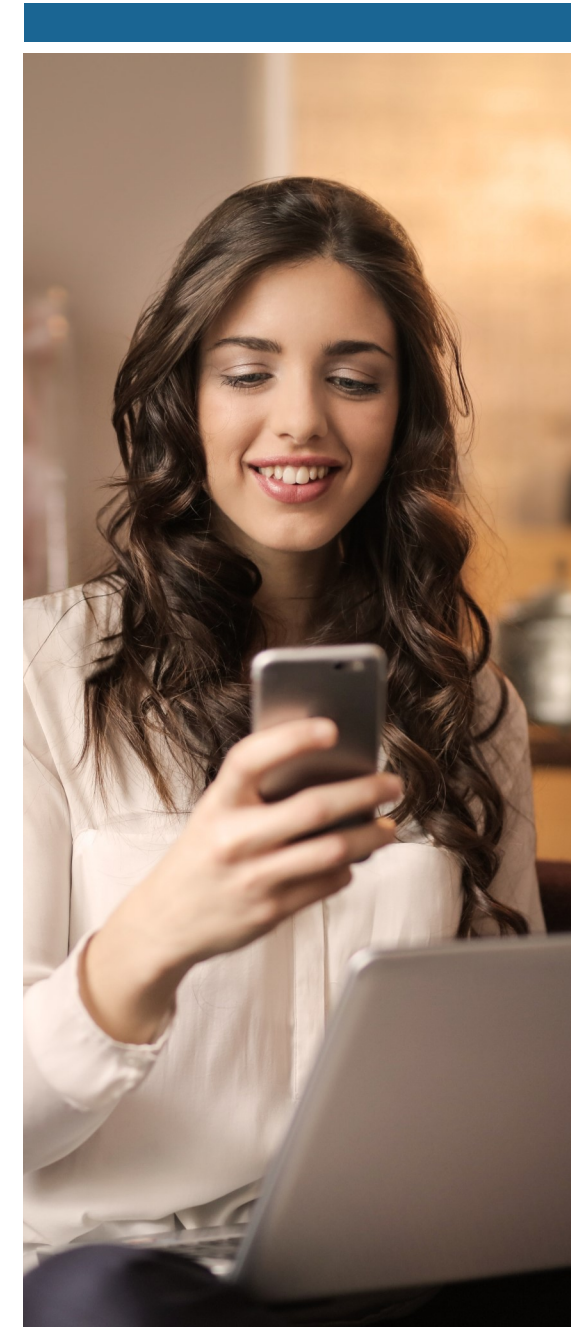
Zoom! No longer just a passing verb or callout balloon from a comic. The video conferencing platform and virtual meeting industry has gained new importance due to recent events. As things continue, this trend looks to becoming the new normal, but should every meeting make its way to the screen?

The greatest benefit to this backup plan we've been using is exactly that. Aside from someone not being available, not much can interfere with a virtual meeting and the hassle of reschedule or cancellation is eliminated. We saw this recently during the COVID-19 pandemic. Business continued for many organizations but with their leadership meeting from their homes instead of congregating in a board room. A virtual meeting had always been a backup option, but through those months it was the only way for teams to forge ahead and keep operations going.

Although we adapted video conferencing and it began to feel like the new norm, I wouldn't start migrating all meetings and events just yet. Yes, the technology is amazing and the convenience undeniable, but it doesn't always work. I'm sure you've seen the hilarious video conference fails floating around on social media! There's the obvious logistics of equipment requirements and user error to work through. An internet outage or missing web cam for one individual can disrupt the whole meeting and leave a team member feeling embarrassed.

Probably bigger than that is the social opportunities lost when we are not gathered together in person. Yes, I understand we still physically see one another on the computer screen but what virtual meetings cause us to miss seeing is that team leader nervously moving their hands during a presentation, a co-worker looking thinner from a lifestyle change, or that long yawn from a friend that's been up late with the baby. We miss these cues and details about our leadership, our team, and our work family. Being together in person lends the opportunity to open up about personal accomplishments and struggles, to offer praise or encouragement, to just be that listening ear.

The growth and success we saw with remote learning, video conferencing, and virtual workspaces was a silver lining in those tragic times. For some it was simply refining their tactics and for other companies it was learning a whole new language! But regardless we were all pushed, and we met the challenge. The important takeaway is that we continue to use our new strategies when they are best suited, that we do not wait for the next crisis to implement such technologies. We find a balance between board room sessions and casual virtual meetings.



*Planning an event post-pandemic can feel a little uncertain...*



and while we do not have an answer to every what-if scenario, we have put together a guide on keeping your event healthy and safe. Emergency action plans, hygiene in the dorm room, and food service hot spots are just some of the topics covered.

Find it online: [www.ChristianRetreatsNetwork.org/Resources](http://www.ChristianRetreatsNetwork.org/Resources)



## Going Virtual 101

The term “virtual meeting” is floating around a lot these days. Businesses are meeting via Zoom rather than in board rooms. Churches are livestreaming services on Facebook rather than congregating in sanctuaries. These are virtual events; an event where people interact online in a virtual environment, instead of being together in a physical location.

**There are two ways to have a virtual event.** The first is the church example from above, livestreaming the event in real time. The second way is through recorded sessions, also called on demand. Instead of participating at the time, guests can view and interact after the event has happened.

Virtual events may sound like less work because you don't have to set up a venue for guests, but that is not fully the case. When is the last time you watched a Ted Talk given by someone in sweatpants sitting on their living room couch? Even though guests of a virtual event aren't in the environment, planners need to make them still feel a part of it.

It all starts with the view of the camera. What will guests see when watching through their screen? Use a backdrop, podium, lighting and microphone. Have slides and visual content available that is used along with the video. The speaker should still be dressed as if giving the presentation in person. Again, it is all about making the guests feel as if they are truly at the event.

### **Speaking of making them feel involved, don't forget about the engagement part of the experience.**

Pose questions and polls where guests can respond through comments or chats. If it is live, allow time for answering these questions while speaking. Make sure to have someone specifically assigned to monitoring these interactions.

**Just like picking a venue, virtual event holders need to pick their platforms.** Whether they will be viewed later or in real time, the platform(s) for which attendees can view is important. Send out a link to the site(s) for guests so that they don't have to search for it.

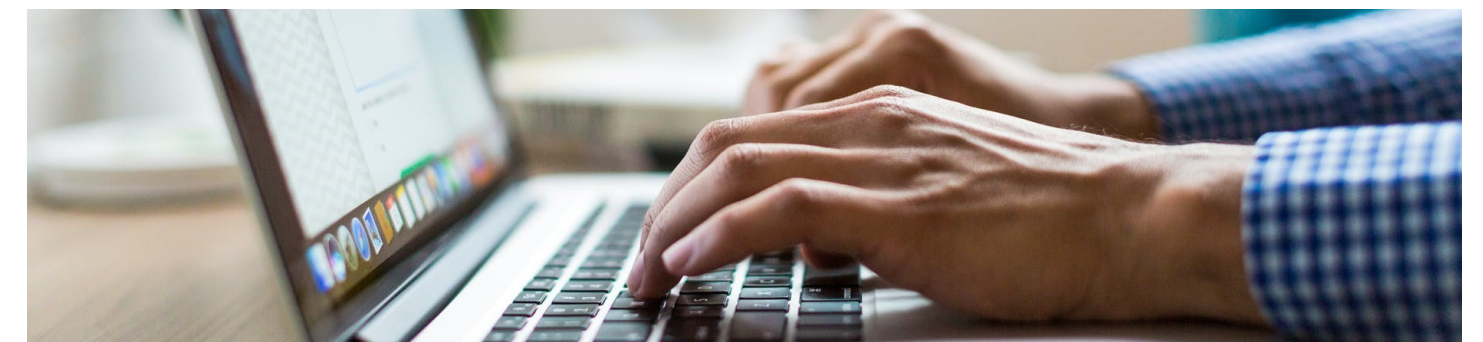
### **If using a social media platform, think about which one(s) your guests most likely have access to.**

Social media sites that offer livestreaming include Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, Twitter and YouTube. Now, younger audiences may have TikTok, but your middle aged and senior guests probably won't. YouTube is a popular option because it doesn't require a profile in order to watch.

**Along with the platform, planners must think about the tech tools they will be using.** Most laptop webcams and mics lack the quality needed for a professional-grade event. Most smartphone cameras have excellent HD capabilities. Although, you can also buy a webcam that is meant for this situation. Just hook it up to your computer, mount it and get rolling. Whichever camera you choose, make sure to put it on a tripod so that it has a steady angle. It's hard to bounce back from a camera that falls to the ground or tilts so that the speaker is lopsided.

**But the video quality is irrelevant if viewers can't hear what is being said.** Getting a standalone microphone will ensure clear sound throughout the meeting. Lapel microphones work well too and would normally be used when giving a presentation. Just don't use the ear bud mic. It may work okay, but it can be distracting for viewers and doesn't look like you put a lot of effort into tech for a virtual event.

**Expect technical difficulties.** Physical events have issues, there is no reason to believe a virtual one won't. The number one thing to check is the internet connection. Also, test out the sound and video equipment with a few phrases to make sure everything sounds good on the viewer's end. It is also a good idea to have backup visuals, just in case.





Virtual events are not always ideal. Although, when you are unable to host a large gathering, this is the next best option. Let's be honest, keeping an audience's attention, especially during a virtual event, can be very challenging. The guest's location can cause extra distractions, allowing their mind to wander. To overcome this obstacle, we have created a list of tips and methods to help keep their attention:

### 1. Timing

Keep your sessions short. Now, we are not saying to cut down your meeting to 10 minutes. We suggest keeping your timeframe at 20 to 25 minutes. According to Serenity Gibbons from *Forbes*, "virtual attention spans will be significantly shorter than they might have been in person. That doesn't mean you can't cover the same amount of information — you'll just need to break it up into easily digestible pieces."

### 2. Delivering Your Message

Continue to strategically place pauses throughout your speech. This can help keep or reinforce your audience's attention. Before going live, practice a couple of times in front of a mirror or the camera (just make sure it is off). This will help you feel more confident and practice any facial expressions. Also, make sure to speak with enthusiasm. Using a monotone voice makes it easy for guests to quickly "check-out". Another great way to capture their focus is by incorporating colorful visuals. How? By integrating your presentation slides within your video! This can easily be done by screen sharing or by switching out the camera view from the presenter to just the presentation.

### 3. Invite special guest speakers

Even though you are hosting a virtual event, you can still invite a special guest speaker to present. This is very easy to do, especially if you are using a platform like Zoom. Make sure to advertise the guest speaker on the event's social media pages and all promotional pieces to build up excitement.



### 4. Involve your audience

There are several simple ways to encourage audience participation during your event. For example, ask questions or provide live voting by creating a poll. Create an outline with missing text and a blank for them to fill in. This is a great way to keep them following along with your message and it provides them with notes to reference later. By involving guests, this encourages them to stay focused on the topic at hand.



### 5. Streaming Schedule

Even though your event is live, make sure to hit that record button. Once the videos are uploaded, allow guests to access them 3 to 4 days after the event (or however long you prefer). This permits those attendees who were unable to tune in live or that had to step away for a minute, to still be able to reap the benefits of the event. Because, life happens.



### 6. Pre-recording the event

We recommend hosting your event live, however if you must pre-record some parts, take advantage of the special effects during editing. For instance, you can add in fun images, charts, diagrams, sound effects and backgrounds (just to name a few).

Hosting a virtual event presents all kinds of obstacles. One being unable to control an audience's environment for which can distract them from paying attention to your message. We hope that these tips will help you not only draw in, but also keep the audience's attention throughout the virtual event.



# There is an App for That



If you are an event planner, you know there is so much more to planning than a great theme and a dynamic speaker. Budgets, schedules, registration, speakers, marketing, and the list goes on. However, thanks to today's technology, there are so many helpful event planning tools at our fingertips to make this process easier and less stressful. We have compiled a list of a few of our favorite apps to help you plan, organize, promote, and amaze!

## Evernote

You have some cool ideas and a great team ready to get busy, however delegation and execution can be tough. Think of this app as your mobile filing cabinet; organize your venue research notes, coordinate travel itineraries, and quickly share notes with members of your team. Sync this app across multiple devices to ensure that no man (or file) is left behind.

## Eventbrite

So you've created an amazing retreat, but now you need to get people to register. Event registration is one area of the planning process that can be extremely time consuming and frustrating. Especially if you only see your potential registrants once a week at church. This does not have to be the case! Let Eventbrite handle the registration process for you and feel the stress melt away. Eventbrite allows you to easily reach more people by sharing your event information and registration on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. The wider the net you cast, the more successful your event will be.

## Hootsuite

There is going to be tons of tweeting, posting, liking, and checking in before, during and after your event. To easily manage all your social channels, use Hootsuite to create streams and stay up to speed with the buzz surrounding the event content. Schedule posts in advance to allow time to manage the other aspects of your event.

## slido

Really engage your audience with this web-based Q&A and polling platform for live events or virtual. This app makes it super easy for everyone in the audience to ask questions and vote on live polls via their phones, tablets, or computers.

## Dropbox Basic

Take the headache out of sharing documents with this free and secure online storage resource. Upload event information or promotional materials for churches to easily download and use. Encourage your guests to upload their event photos or simply share documents with your planning team.

## The Weather Channel Weather Channel

I know what you are thinking. How does a weather app have anything to do with events? No matter what time of year it is, the weather is unpredictable. You never know when you must pull out "plan B" due to a sudden rainstorm canceling your field games. This handy app is a must have for your "toolbox" to help you stay informed and ahead of any possible weather interruptions.

From preparations to communication after the event, these apps can help keep you organized and take some stress off the planning process.

*Apps not your thing???*

Download our easy-to-use, fillable templates for registration sheets, budget calculator and more online.



# Yes Hashtags are Still a Thing



Hashtags. Have you heard of them? They can be a single word or a bunched-up catch phrase. If you have a social media account, then you more than likely have seen a hashtag. Some people only use one or two, while others use 10+. Here at Christian Retreats Network, we use hashtags like #welcome or #MondayMotivation within our social media posts. Not only do they add some extra fun, but these creative phrases are a great multi-tool for an event. Hashtags can help advertise your event for FREE. Also, they allow you to easily track pictures, videos and posts on social media. Are you interested in creating one for your event? If so, here are some tips on how to create and utilize a hashtag.

When creating a hashtag, it is important to keep it simple, catchy, unique and related to your event. It should also convey a message

to your guests. These parameters will help make it easy for guests to remember and to catch people's eye on social media. With this in mind, the hashtag can involve your event name, go along with the theme or the event's takeaway message. Some people create their own, while other use hashtag generators.

*However, before you start advertising the hashtag, hop on social media and type it into the search bar to see if others are using it as well.*

Depending on what you find, this can help you determine whether to use a specific hashtag or if you should go back to the drawing board and create a new one.

The main key to a successful hashtag is to encourage guests to use it. For this to occur, you will need to advertise your hashtag everywhere you can so that guests are aware that one exists. You could make a special announcement on the event's social media page(s), include it on the promotional signage, place information about it within the welcome folders or make an announcement at the event. Set up a fun selfie booth so that guests can take pictures of themselves at the event. Then have a sign about your hashtag to remind guests to use it when publishing the picture or video to social media. Additionally, set up designated "snap a picture" locations around the property for guests to take pictures of the beautiful scenery or to snap a quick selfie. Label these areas with some form of fun signage, like a plastic yard sign, that encourages guests to participate. At the end of the day, you can view and gather this footage by typing the hashtag into the search bar on a social media website. Save the footage in a designated folder on your computer, then use it at the event. These posts would make a great addition to your daily recap video.

A hashtag is a wonderful resource that can add some extra creativity and encourage guests to interact. Make sure to utilize it at your next event.

# Building Your Social Media Wall

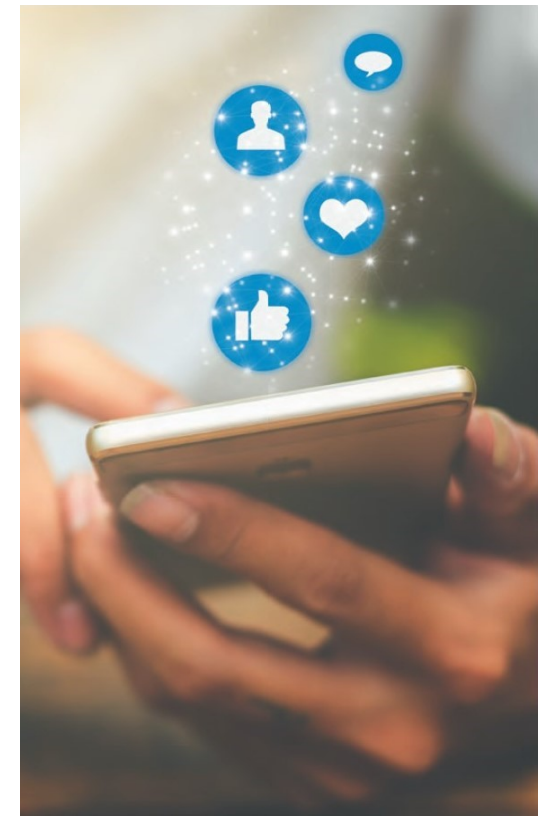
Have you been to a professional sporting event, where they show attendee's social media posts on the big screen? It may only be displayed for 15 seconds, but it is always exciting to see if they choose your picture to publish on the screen. Now, what if you could do the same thing at YOUR event? That is right, it is possible. Step up your social media game and wow your guests by using a social media wall!

A social media wall is created by using a software system that collects posts from numerous social media platforms and displays them live on one screen. This is a great tool that will make your guests feel extra special at your event. To utilize this software system, you will need to create a unique hashtag or handle for your guests to include in their social media posts. This will allow the software system to easily locate and collect the posts. By connecting your computer to a projector system, you can effortlessly stream the social media wall on the "big screen" at your event. Or, if you prefer a smaller scale, connect your computer to a TV to broadcast your real time content.

*Either way, make sure to credit the person who originally published the content.*

There are numerous software systems online that you can use. Such as: Tagboard, Everwall, Tint, Hootfeed, and The Wallrus, to name a few. Even though these programs have similar elements, each offer their own unique features. For example, Tagboard will allow you to gather posts from multiple platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and more! Whereas Hootfeed, will only allow you to broadcast tweets. Everwall not only allows you to stream live social media posts, but you can also use it to show announcements during your event. Another element of Everwall is the voting feature. This is yet another great way to get your guests involved with your presentations and to have some fun! Some programs, like The Wallrus, can be free to use, while others, like Tint, require a fee. Nevertheless, this is a great way to encourage your guests to post and share pictures from your event.

Social media walls are simple to create and easy to use with these online software systems. So, what are you waiting for? Add some extra pizzazz to your event by creating a social media wall. Your guests are going to love it! Plus, by encouraging them to post pictures to social media, you may reach potential guests for your next event!



# Can You Hear Me Now?

You are working on the computer and suddenly it freezes. This can be extremely frustrating, especially when you are in the middle of your event. Each one of us has had a moment where technology has failed us. If you are like me, the first reaction is to shut down... and I am not talking about the computer.

But do not shut down! Instead, jump into action. Let us discuss some typical issues that can occur with AV equipment and how to counteract.

## Issues with the projector system.

There are multiple issues that can occur when it comes to your presentation. One in particular could be the projector not working. Thus, causing your slide show to be unusable, and/or your visual aids becoming significantly reduced.

*Plan B:* Printed slides are ok for small groups/meetings BUT for large events upload the slideshow to Dropbox and create a public share link for guests to download the slideshow. Do a low-res pdf so they can view it on a tablet or phone.

## Issues with the microphones or sound system.

It can be distressing when a microphone or the sound system stops working. Although it is not ideal, there are several tricks that can help your guests hear you without a microphone.

*Plan B:* Ask your guests to sit in the seats closest to the stage (instead of spreading out) to make it easier for them to hear you. While you are presenting, make sure to drink a lot of water to help prevent throat strain.

*Plan C:* Use techniques like clapping patterns or waiting techniques (stop talking) to catch your audience's attention.

## But what about the band?

*Plan B:* Ask the band to only play one guitar while they are singing. That way guests can still enjoy the music and hear what song the band is playing.

*Plan C:* Ask the band to lead the worship music in acapella.

I know none of these plans are ideal, but they will get the job done in a pinch. Or until the issue can be fixed.

Interested in trying to prevent these problems? Here are some helpful recommendations to ensure that your presentation, whatever it may be, goes smoothly.

## Pre-Event Recommendations

1. *Plan an on-site visit before your event.* Check out your meeting space and the AV equipment.

Make sure to bring any of the technology you plan to use at your event, such as your laptop, to ensure that it is compatible with the equipment. Furthermore, do a sound check and run through any video presentations. This will allow you to see if there are any bugs that need to be worked out. Better to have it happen at sound-check than during the actual event.

2. *If you are unable to make an advance site visit, call instead.* There is usually someone available that can answer any questions you have. However, once you are on site, take time to make sure everything is connected correctly, and that the AV equipment is working. Even if you did the advance site visit, double checking never hurts!

Now, I am not saying that issues will not occur if you follow these recommendations. Anything can happen, especially with technology. So, if you run into some problems with the AV equipment, here are some helpful tips to get things moving again!

## When Issues Occur

1. *Turn everything off.* Make sure all the cords are connected correctly and securely. If you find any issues, like loose cords, fix them or ask for help. Then turn everything back on.

2. *If you are still having issues, check each component individually.* This should allow you to pinpoint the issue. It could be a dead battery, a bad mic cord, an issue with the projector bulb or a piece of equipment may need to be swapped out.

3. *If you are still unable to find the problem, call for help.* Our retreat centers are blessed to have people on site that can help you figure out any issues and get you going again.

Although, sometimes it is completely out of our control. There will be times that the issue cannot be immediately fixed. With that being said, it is always best to come prepared with a backup plan (or two).







# Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality

## How to Use This Technology During an Event

Virtual reality (immersive multimedia) and augmented reality (a layering of computer-generated sensory input onto real-world views) have seen major investments and advances in the past few years. Don't think these tools haven't gone unnoticed in the event world. This creative, immersive visualization technology is beginning to work its way into events in a number of ways.

Recreate Bible stories with a VR headset. Visit the empty tomb, explore the ark, or look upon the cross in ways never before imaginable. No plane ticket required!! It's like watching a movie versus reading a book. Guests can visualize it in their minds or be shown.

The same idea can be applied using AR. Using their phones, guests can bring characters to life through their screens (think Pokémon Go). Such characters could give an announcement, share a story, or reveal clues for a mystery trail.

Checkpoints throughout the venue can have a video, character or popup of information that guides guests. Post the schedule or give directions in a real-time format for guests.

Pastors, speakers, and team leaders can utilize vision casting to share a project or idea. Whether it is a church remodel or other project, the presenter can give a 3D model to attendees for a much clever show of what they are presenting.

Similarly, stage sets, exhibit booths and other event setups can now be done using a virtual walkthrough, instead of 3D modeling. These walkthroughs can be saved and compared to future designs.

Products apply to the same concept. VR headsets can be used to demonstrate products at tradeshow in a more realistic, interactive, and engaging manner while minimizing the need to ship physical products to a show.

VR will redefine virtual meetings! Instead of watching a webcast, VR could make it seem to the remote attendee as if he/she were actually in the meeting room. But this doesn't have to be in real time for those who didn't show up. Record the event and provide this option for guests to relive the experience later.

Every event is looking for that "wow" factor. Augmented and virtual reality experiences are it.





# Christian Retreats Network

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