

White Paper: Hybrid is a strategy, not an event type

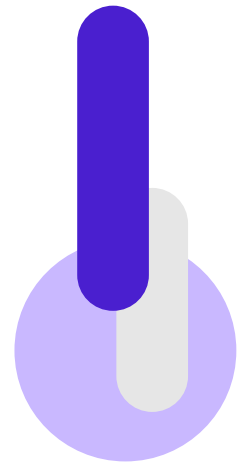
by TIM GROOT
Ceo & Founder at Grip



Grip **idloom**
events ■

→ grip.events

Table of contents



3 Key takeaways

4 Introduction

6 The event success funnel from virtual to in-person experiences

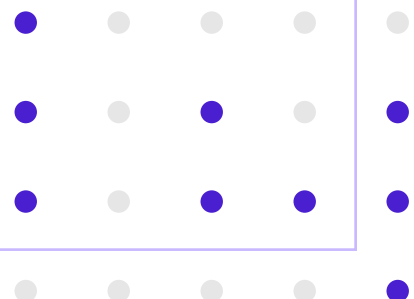
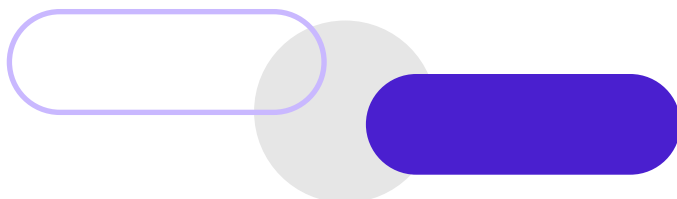
11 The future is a hybrid strategy, not an event type

17 The road to success starts with amazing experiences

19 Conclusion

Key takeaways

- The concept of a hybrid event is lacking clear understanding or proper definition. Recent research suggests that interest in hybrid events is declining among participants. Meanwhile, 63% of event organisers admitted not having a clear hybrid event strategy.
- Hybrid is not an event type, it's a strategy and the best hybrid strategy is omni-channel, where organisers use different channels to engage attendees in different ways.
- Education and brand awareness can be delivered through short and focused virtual events whereas in-person events should be focused on developing and strengthening relationships. Organisers must address attendees' objectives by maximizing virtual and in-person event channels for each stage of the engagement funnel.
- A successful hybrid strategy is not complete without appropriate data management. Yet, only 49% of organisers revealed data management is their top concern for 2022.
- Successful organisers invest in technology that facilitates meetings between exhibitors and attendees at in-person events. This provides timely data that showcases the ROI of activities.



Introduction

The events industry is going through a monumental shift.

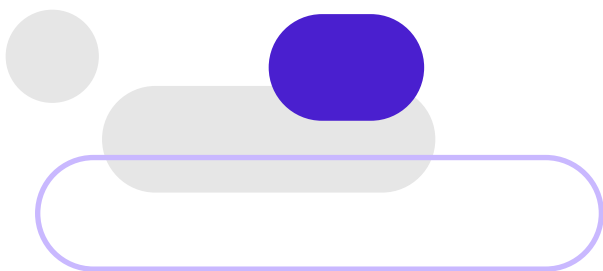
Prior to the pandemic, event organisers operated in a single channel business model, relying only on in-person events to deliver value to attendees, exhibitors and sponsors.

Similar to how the brick and mortar retail industry was disrupted by the internet, event organisers were forced to quickly reinvent their business model through virtual and hybrid events. Except, the concept of a hybrid event was suddenly implemented without a clear understanding or a proper definition, and recent research¹ suggests interest in hybrid events is declining among participants.

In fact, our most recent customer survey revealed **63% of event organisers admitted not having a clear hybrid event strategy**. When asked why they are running hybrid events, the vast majority responded: "Because other event organisers are also doing it."

While some might believe hybrid events are a short term sticky note that fulfills a temporary need, the reality is, hybrid is not an event type, it's a strategy.

The events industry is moving from a single channel to a multiple channel customer journey across virtual and in-person events, also known as "the hybrid future of events."



1. Penn, C., Druart, C., & Holt, S. (2021). (rep.). *Global Recovery Insights 2021 The road to recovery* (pp. 1-21). The Global Association of Exhibition Industry, Explori

ATTENDEES: INTEREST IN ATTENDING HYBRID EVENTS HAS WANED

Very interested



Somewhat
interested

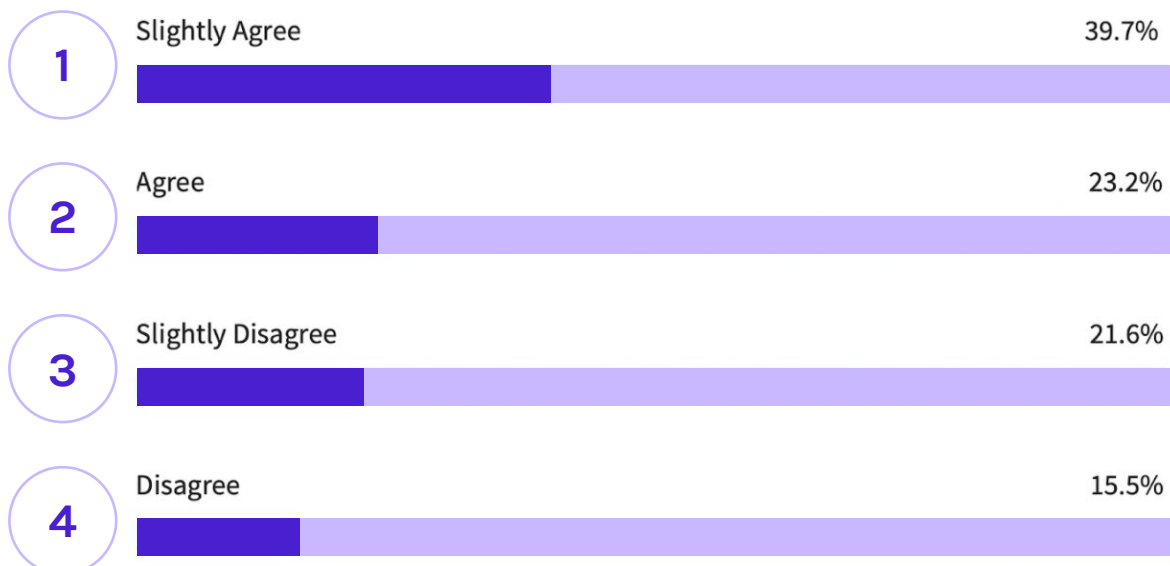


Not very
interested

Source: Global Recovery Insights 2021 - The road to recovery

There's a lot of content available on how to run successful hybrid events, and while many claim to know the answer, the reality is we're all still learning. At Grip, we're excited to help our customers with this journey, which begins with a great strategy.

Do you agree or disagree with this statement: *"My organisation doesn't have a hybrid event strategy in place for 2022"*



Source: Data collected from survey conducted by Grip among 379 industry professionals in October 2021

This whitepaper provides thought-provoking ideas and contributes to the ongoing conversations many event organisers are already having with industry peers as they plan for the future.

The event success funnel: from virtual to in-person experiences



The best strategy starts with the customers' needs. So let's start by analysing the key event objectives for visitors and exhibitors, according to Global Recovery Insights 2021 - The road to recovery¹.

Pre-pandemic, in-person events were able to cover the entire experience funnel through a single channel, which was remarkable. However, over the last 18 months, visitors and exhibitors' objectives have changed.

And interestingly, visitors and exhibitors' objectives align perfectly with a typical engagement funnel - also known as - the sales funnel.

VISITORS

% with Objective

To see new products / services / innovation	64%
To keep up to date with new trends and innovations	50%
To meet with potential new suppliers	45%
Networking	40%

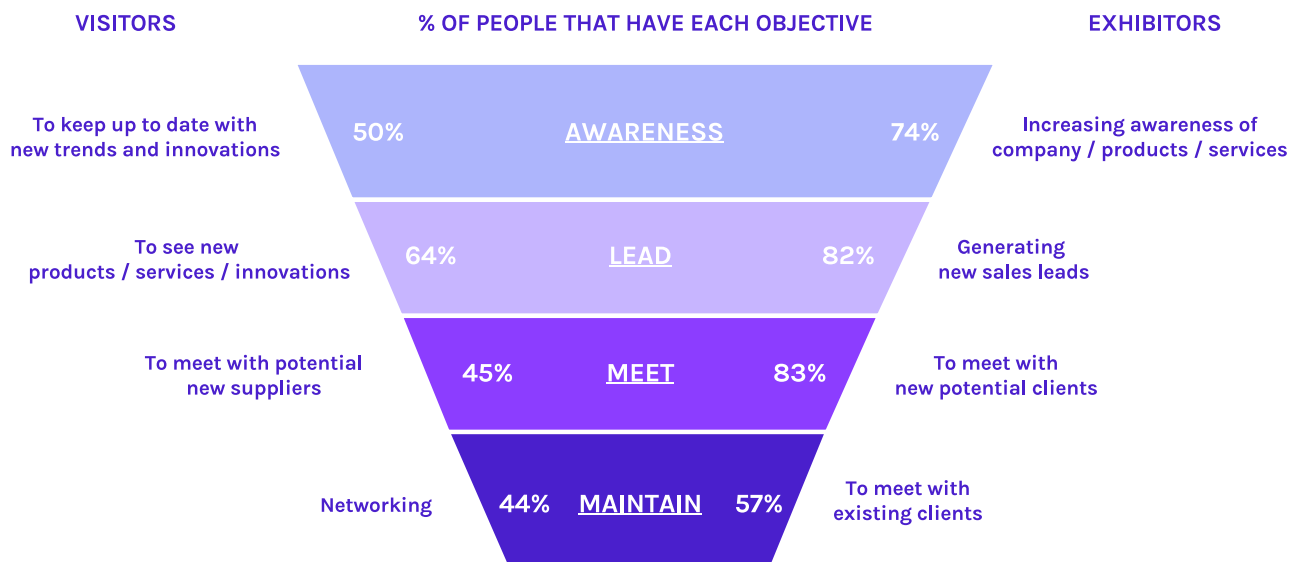
EXHIBITORS

To meet with new potential clients	83%
Generating new sales leads	82%
Increasing awareness of company / product / services	74%
To meet with existing clients	57%

Source: Global Recovery Insights 2021 - The road to recovery

1. Penn, C., Druart, C., & Holt, S. (2021). (rep.). *Global Recovery Insights 2021 The road to recovery* (pp. 1-21). The Global Association of Exhibition Industry, Explori

Virtual events are great for top of funnel activities



Virtual event experiences do incredibly well at supporting top of funnel activities. These types of events improve brand awareness and create engagement, making up 64% of the reasons organisers run virtual events.

Top of funnel objectives for exhibitors, such as awareness and lead generation, are perfectly met through virtual events, as it allows exhibitors to reach a much larger audience from multiple markets around the world. Meanwhile, virtual events also meet visitors' top of funnel objectives, making it possible to watch, listen and participate from wherever they are, whenever it's most suitable for them.

Virtual events have revolutionised the events industry and this trend will continue post pandemic. This is simply because they're easier to participate in and are better at satisfying the top of funnel objectives through content that can reach a larger audience.



Six Steps for Virtual Event Success

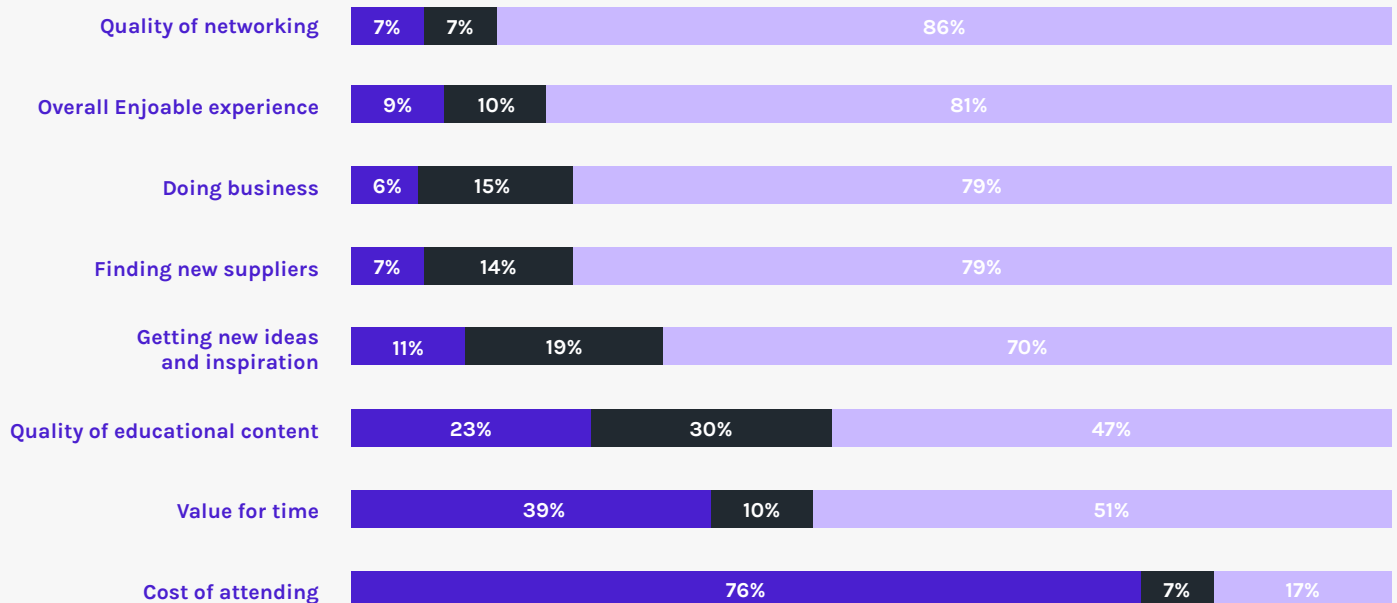
Key insights on how to maximise virtual opportunities and improve exhibitor and attendee experience.

[DOWNLOAD YOUR COPY](#)

Virtual events are not a great fit for the bottom of the funnel objectives

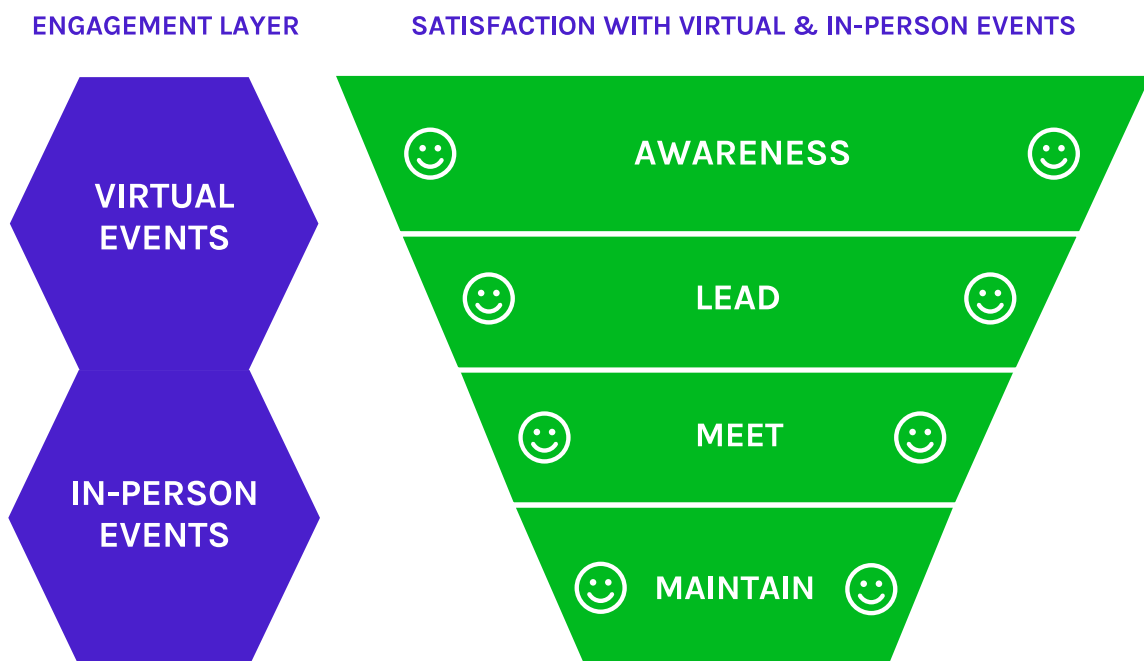
Virtual events struggle to satisfy the bottom of the funnel objectives and that's where in-person events come in.

Holding productive sales meetings during virtual events is significantly more difficult. The data shows the reason attendees are coming back to in-person events is because they want to grow their network, strengthen relationships and have face-to-face interactions, therefore, all bottom of the funnel objectives are not being met through virtual events.



● Virtual events are better
 ● No difference
 ● Live events are better

The Global Recovery Insights 2021¹ research revealed 85% of attendees believe the quality of networking is better at in-person events, indicating that the bottom of funnel activities will move back to in-person events. Predictably, many in-person events this year were positioned as an opportunity for people to come together once again. PCMA referred to its Convening EMEA Conference 2021 as "Simply Connecting" while IMEX America 2022 marketed their show as 'Homecoming'.



As we move forward, organisers need to strategically address attendees' objectives by maximizing virtual and in-person event channels for each stage of the engagement funnel. This means we end up with a hybrid customer journey, with the top of funnel activities taking place online and bottom of the funnel activities happening at in-person events.

1. Penn, C., Druart, C., & Holt, S. (2021). (rep.). *Global Recovery Insights 2021 The road to recovery* (pp. 1-21). The Global Association of Exhibition Industry, Explori

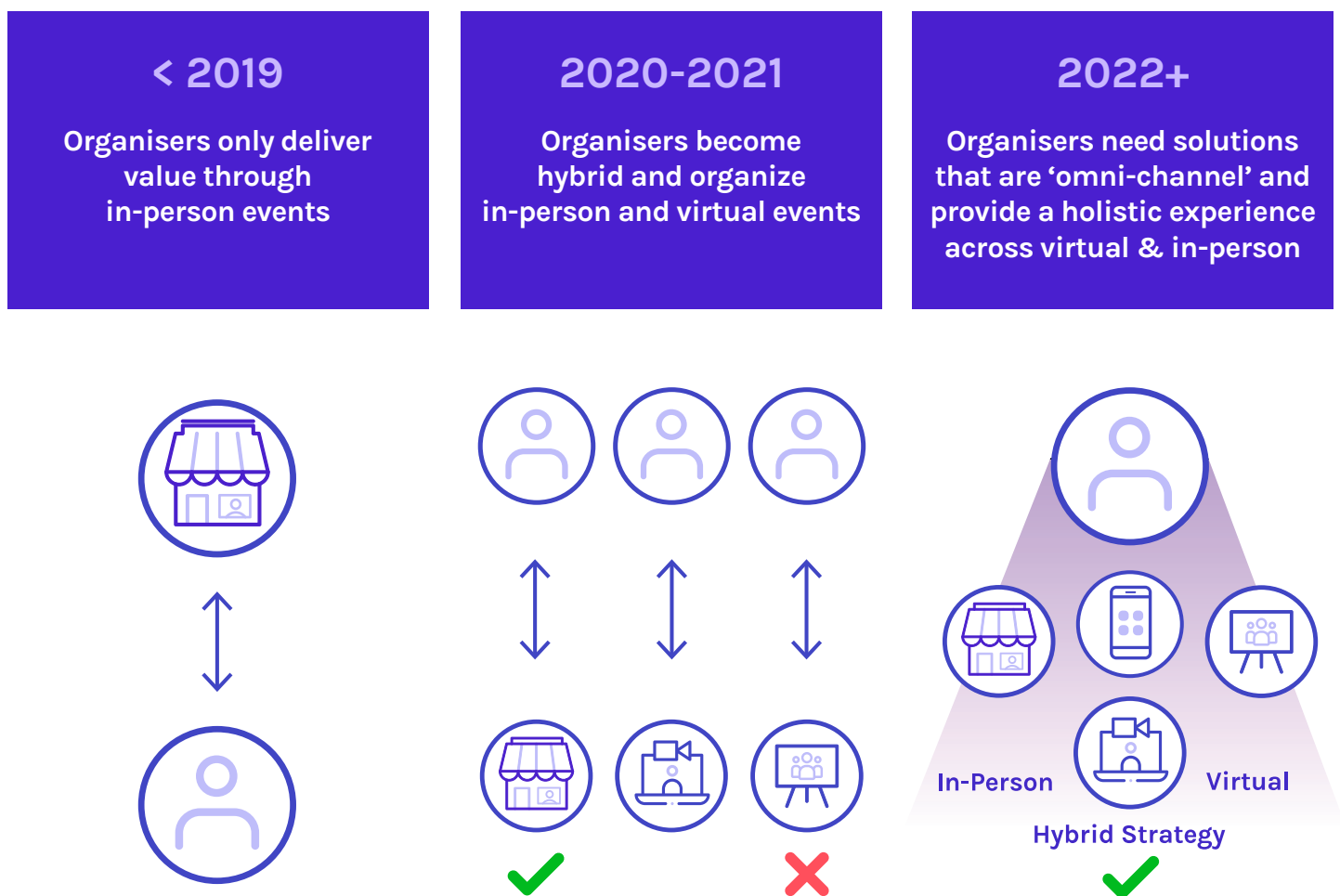
**The future is hybrid
as a strategy, not
an event type**



Merriam-Webster defines hybrid as "...something that is formed by combining two or more things" - no wonder organisers approached "hybrid" as a channel, where virtual and in-person components are delivered simultaneously.

However, hybrid is not an event type, it's a strategy. The best hybrid strategy is omni-channel, where organisers use different channels to engage attendees in different ways. Organisers must combine all the different touch points provided to stakeholders as part of a single customer experience and decide how to tie it all together.

The goal is not to satisfy all objectives with every touchpoint, but instead, satisfy an objective at every touchpoint. That's where a successful hybrid strategy starts.



Beware of a fragmented journey

A successful hybrid strategy is not complete without appropriate data management. However, as we move towards an omni-channel approach, apprehensions about data are starting to emerge with 49% of organisers revealing data management is their top concern for 2022.

What is currently happening in the industry, and at Grip we see this quite often, is that organisers use different platforms for different channels and end up losing the data connection between their events. Here's a typical scenario:

Jane attended a virtual event organized by the XYZ Association in January. A few months later she attended another event by the XYZ Association, however, this time in-person. Although this is a multi-channel experience, unless these two events were technologically connected from the start, the association delivered nothing but a fragmented customer journey. In other words, it failed to capture Jane's journey through its multi-channel hybrid strategy.

HYBRID STRATEGY: VIRTUAL LEADS TO IN-PERSON MEETINGS

In order to enable visitors and exhibitors to achieve their objectives, a hybrid strategy can be organized as follow:

VIRTUAL EVENTS



Implemented for top of funnel activities, such as driving awareness for exhibitors and introduce visitors to trends and innovations. Use sponsored content to convert attendees to leads.

IN-PERSON EVENTS

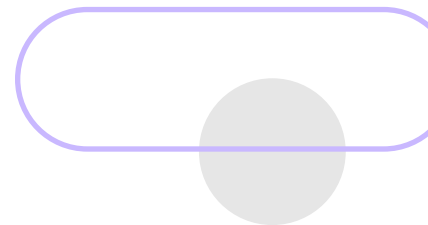
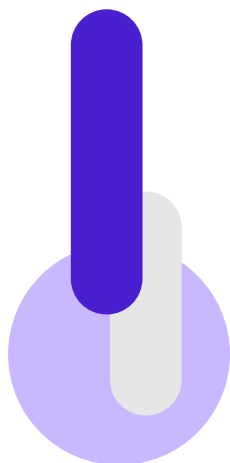


Implemented for bottom of funnel activities, such as networking. Use unique in-person experiences to convert virtual leads to an in-person meetings.

Without data, it's a lot more difficult and time consuming for organisers to provide a holistic experience to attendees, not to mention track and understand an attendee's journey through different touchpoints. It also becomes a challenge for organisers to justify the return on investment to exhibitors and sponsors, possibly threatening the sustainability of their events portfolio.

Whether intentional or not, organisers have already moved from a single-channel to a multi-channel experience. However, without data from all these unique year-round interactions, they are leaving a lot of value on the table and delivering a poor attendee experience.

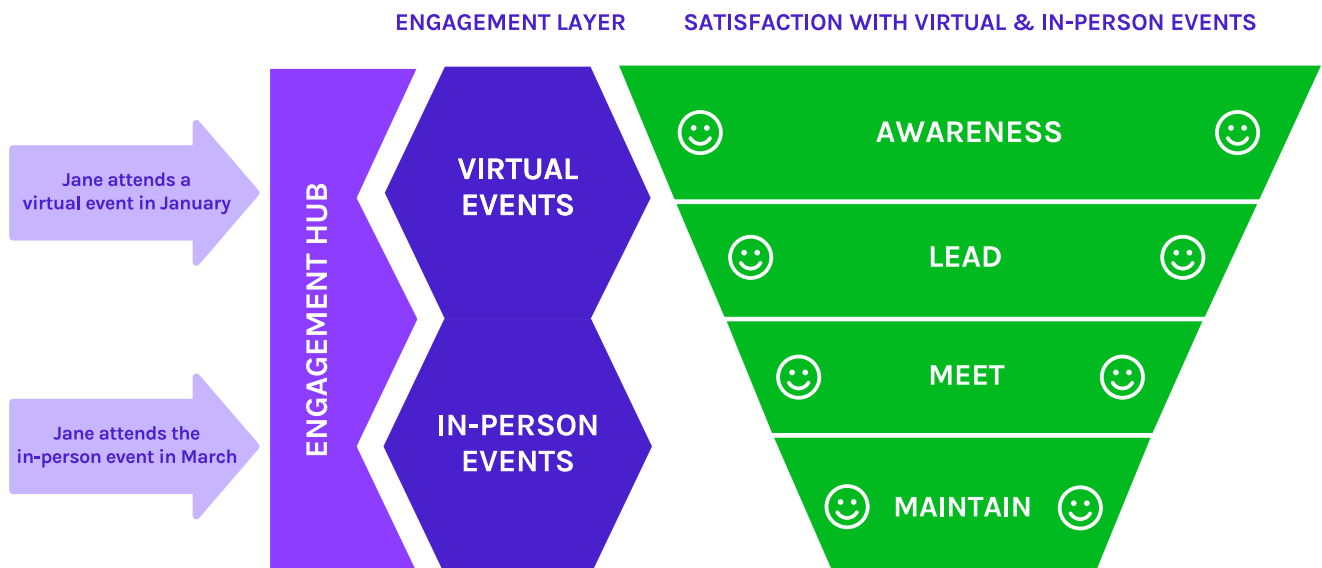
To move forward, organisers need to invest time and resources in forming long-term partnerships with technology providers that can deliver an omni-channel strategy, streamline the process through an engagement hub, and provide timely data points on all aspects of the attendee and exhibitor journey.



The engagement hub as the omni-channel solution

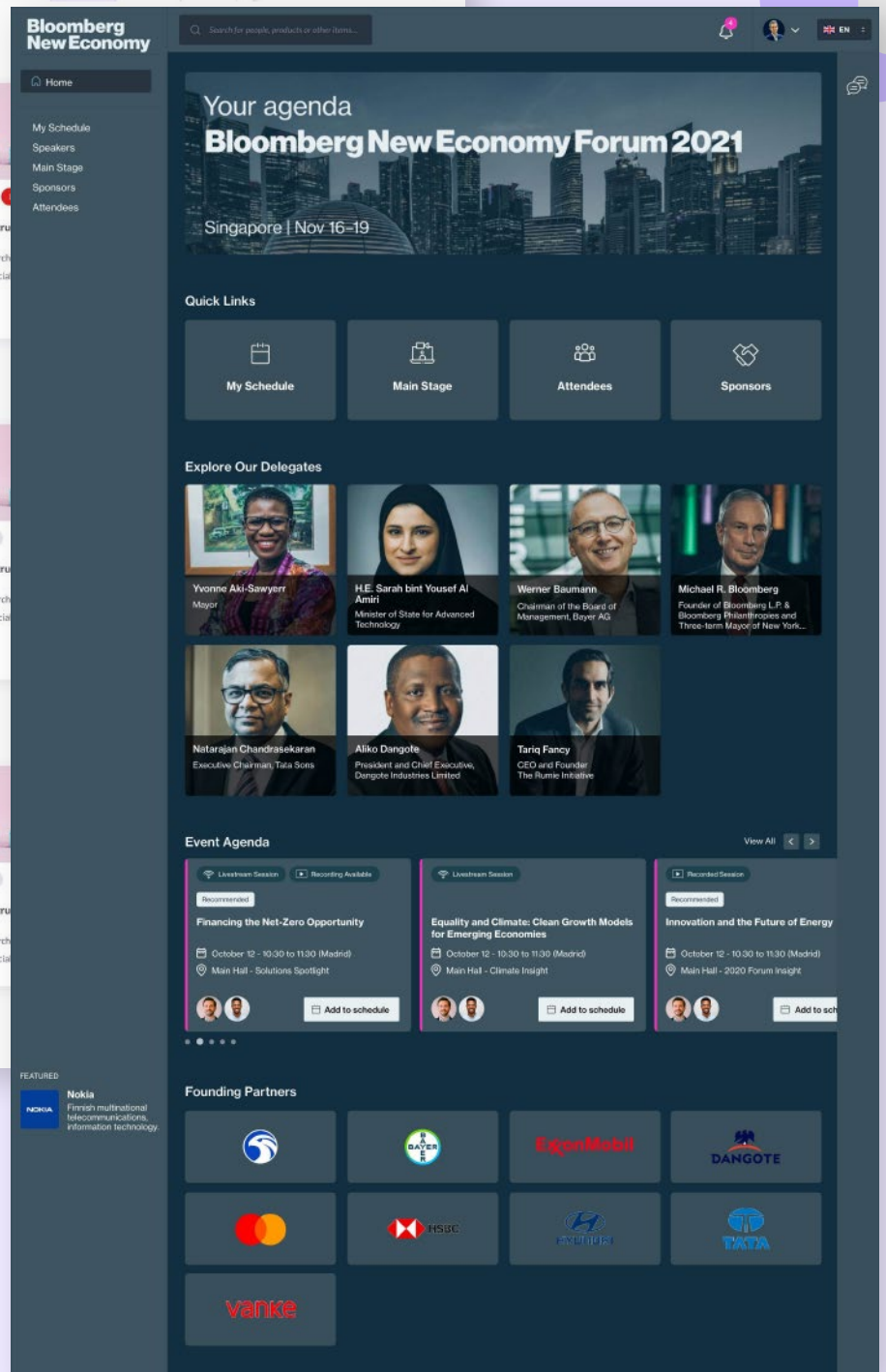
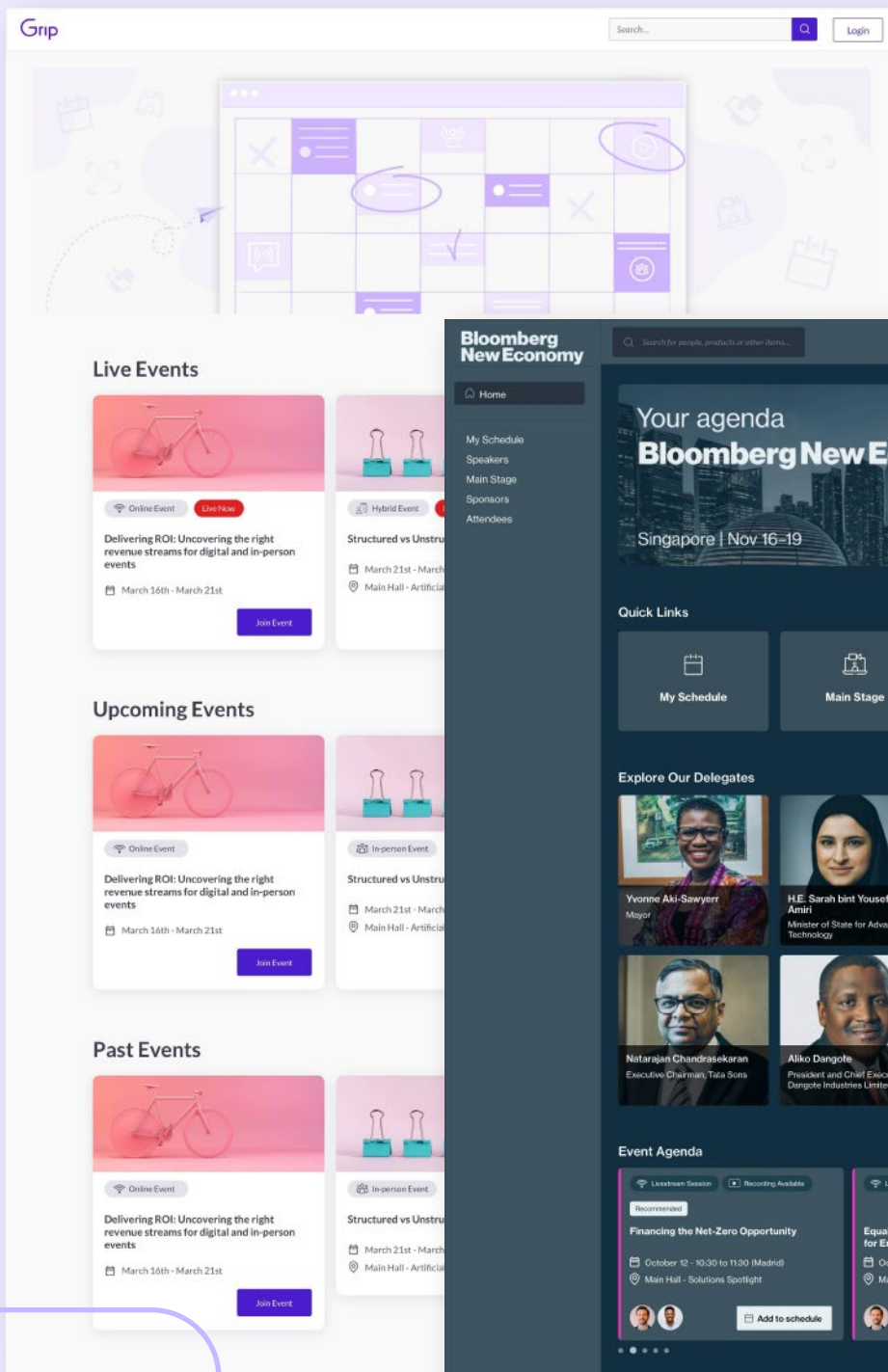
As previously mentioned, an omni-channel approach holds the enormous potential to provide a holistic customer experience across various touch points from both an engagement and data point of view.

An engagement hub provides a single place for people to explore all events that are happening with a community. These can be virtual events, in-person events, webinars and other smaller experiences that are organised on the same technology platform by organisers, exhibitors and thought leaders. By using a single participant profile, an engagement hub empowers experiences across various event channels throughout the year resulting in a seamless customer journey.



An organiser has the potential to become the single point of entry for an entire industry as opposed to a single touchpoint in the customer journey. Resulting in significantly more data, engagement and monetisation opportunities.

Grip Engagement Hub



**The road to success
starts with amazing
experiences**



Personalisation is a core element of amazing experiences

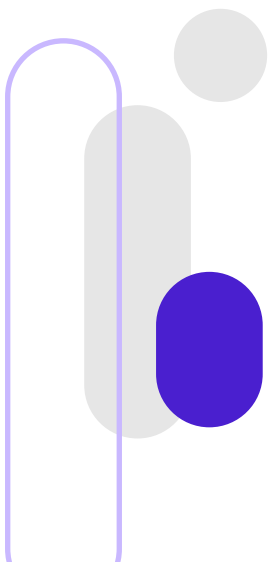
It's crucial to turn every touchpoint into a personalised experience. Use the data gathered at every event to make recommendations and suggestions to stakeholders and repurpose content to build personalised experiences. Organisers that capitalise on every opportunity to maintain ongoing contact with stakeholders will ultimately increase conversion rates, participation and engagement.

Quality is better than quantity

Research indicates exhibitors prefer quality over quantity when it comes to in-person events. This is likely happening because exhibitors now realise awareness and top-of-funnel leads can be successfully generated through virtual interactions, whereas the ROI of in-person events comes from 1:1 meetings with prospects and existing customers.

This translates into increasing pressure on organisers to deliver high quality interactions at in-person events as there are more opportunities to schedule meetings with the right contacts, resulting in higher value meetings.

It's imperative that organisers invest in technology that facilitates connections based on interests so the best possible meetings happen on-site between exhibitors and visitors. Our customers that deliver the most successful in-person events focus their programs around pre-scheduled meetings. This enables them to proactively convert what might have been an online lead into a more valuable in-person meeting.



Conclusion



Hybrid is a strategy, not an event type

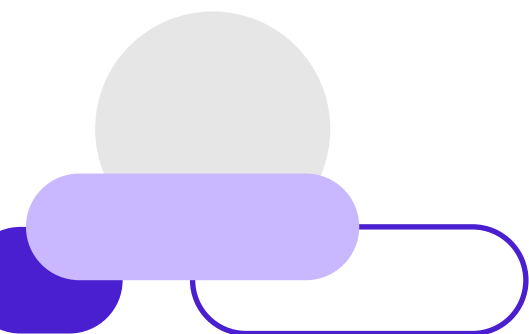
While attendee interest in "hybrid" events is in decline, this is only temporary. It will take some time before organisers clearly outline their strategy, build their technical capabilities and educate their customers that hybrid is not a type of event, it's a strategy.

Start with the objectives of your core audience and create various interactions that meet those objectives. For example, use virtual events to deliver education and awareness programs, then in-person events to grow and strengthen relationships.

Remember that the goal is not to satisfy all objectives with every touchpoint, but instead, satisfy one objective at every touchpoint.

Organisers should continuously challenge the status quo and ask themselves: What is the real value proposition for event participants at virtual and in-person events? How can first-party data be leveraged to further define the strategy?

The key is to focus on what really differentiates the event, while meeting stakeholder objectives. This is what will deliver a successful hybrid strategy in 2022 and beyond.



The journey to event success in 2022

STEP 1

EXHIBITOR SUCCESS

Focus on delivering incredible value to exhibitors through training, great lead generation and plenty of meeting opportunities.

STEP 2

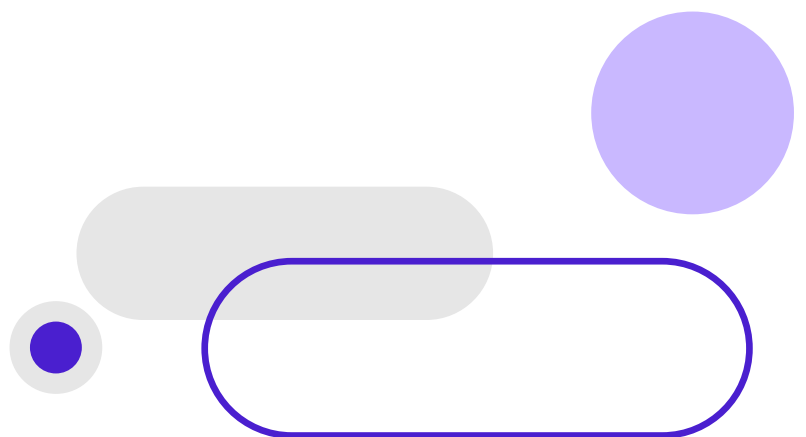
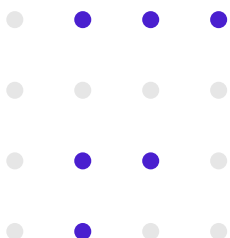
VISITOR SUCCESS

Organise small virtual events that increase conversion from registration to in-person attendance, showcase exhibitors and content all year round in a central engagement hub.

STEP 3

ORGANISER SUCCESS

Gain deeper insight into the interest of event participants, built up a single customer view and personalize the entire customer journey to increase retention and growth.



About Grip





Grip is the leading event success platform which uses AI-powered matchmaking to increase visitor engagement, lead generation and revenue. It supports event professionals, by delivering technology to facilitate world-class hybrid events – through digital and in-person solutions.

For event participants, our powerful platform supports the return on time invested at industry events, with flexible content delivery and purposeful meetings and matchmaking. For event professionals, our intelligent, flexible platform provides the solutions, support and integrations needed to maximise return on investment.

Since 2016, Grip has facilitated the connection of over 5.5 million participants through AI-driven event solutions.

This has resulted in the culmination of billions of data points from some of the world's largest events, plus strategic insight and expertise, to ensure Grip can deliver the event experiences that today's markets and industries demand.

To learn more about Grip or book a product demo, visit:
www.grip.events

About the Author



Tim Groot graduated with a BBA in International Management from the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He started his career in tech working as an Account Manager for a leading app development agency, Nodes.

His passion for events and startups eventually led him to co-found Grip in 2015.

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