Running Virtual Events to Improve Employee Engagement: Executive Summary

Brought to you by Ragan Communications in partnership with Workplace from Facebook
As the uncertainty and upheaval of 2020 continues, many employees are feeling fatigued and even overwhelmed, which brings additional challenges to internal communicators aiming to boost engagement and productivity, while also supporting employees with empathy, compassion and transparency.

Live events can be a great way to connect and engage the members of your workforce, but you must strategically plan your efforts to go above and beyond the “Zoom Doom” your employees are likely feeling from back-to-back virtual meetings.

In a recent “digital classroom” event presented by Ragan Communications, Workplace from Facebook experts shared essential guidance on how communicators can bridge the gap between dispersed and remote employees, creating moments of inspiration, connection and excitement even during times of crisis and change.

Keep these takeaways and tips handy and use them to boost your employee engagement, enhance employee loyalty and strengthen both your internal communications and your company culture—all from your home “office” (whatever that might look like).
Maintaining employee engagement with internal events

Realize employee engagement has decreased.

• Gallup recently reported the most significant drop in the company’s 20-year history of tracking employee engagement in the U.S.
  o Only 36% of employees are currently engaged.
  o 14% are actively disengaged, meaning they “have miserable work experiences and spread their unhappiness to their colleagues.”

Seize the opportunity for connected and happy employees.

• Use Facebook’s formula for success: Happy People = Happy Customers = Happy Business
• Happy people are engaged, included and heard. This starts with building connected organizations that empower employees to do their best.

Transform traditional events to virtual by planning for success.

• Build in additional time. A session or transition might take longer than you expect, and your agenda can quickly fall behind.
• Don’t replicate in-person experiences. Instead, create engagement meant for the virtual space.
• Keep it short. Think about how to create small chunks of content or shorten key messages to keep your audience’s attention.
• Go big immediately. Keep the most important content in the first 60 minutes, before viewership drops off.
• Combine live and pre-produced content. Pre-recorded sessions are faster and more engaging, while live speakers can connect more authentically to the audience.
• Use a high energy and fun host. This person can weave the segments of your event together and engage with your audience, providing input on practical details as you progress.

Practice makes perfect.

• Plan pre-production calls with speakers to find the right filming location, ensure lighting is good, test the audio and output prior to filming or going live.
• Conduct rehearsals to ensure live speakers are confident and ready. If possible, record them, so you have a fallback if there are any issues during the day of your event.
• Rehearse back-up plans. Have a fallback for every scenario, and discuss what those are in advance.
• Guide panel discussions. When hosting a live conversation, direct questions to certain people or specify the order in which people should answer. While spontaneity is great during an in-person panel, talking over each other can create awkward moments in a virtual setting.

• Plan for the unexpected. Enough said!

Don’t sacrifice community.
• Enhance virtual live sessions with Workplace. This way, you offer a unique experience that’s the closest to an in-person event, while remaining apart.
• Drive conversation on social media. Enlist community managers to encourage Workplace comments during the event. Point people to resources, help answer questions, and encourage conversation.
• Engage before and after the event. When creating a virtual event, think about how the conversation and community can extend, just as it would in person. Opt for questions that prompt engagement easily, such as polls or GIF challenges.

Running a virtual internal event
• Consider your audience. Design virtual events with remote employees in mind. Every decision you make should be considered through this lens.
• Aim for a balanced tone. Strike a decent mix of light-hearted moments and content with serious subjects and takeaways.
• Produce in a TV show format. Keep your audience engaged by making your event similar to a TV production, including reducing session times and including breaks and commercials with important messages.
• Build your community. Maximize effectiveness by building community each moment of your event through in-office discussions, a hashtag, other social media groups and posts, polls and more. Create both the program and your engagement with a digital-first audience in mind.
• Create relevant, evergreen content. Think about the shelf life of your event’s content, especially if talking about current events. This is especially important when offering your event as an on-demand recording following your livestream(s). Make sure your references and your takeaways will be relevant when viewed at later dates.
• Manage distractions. Realize employees are more distracted and disconnected than at in-person events, especially those with other WFH distractions. Create shorter sessions and bake in breaks to help minimize distraction and increase attention to your presenters.
Clearly communicate every step of the way. Think of every possible scenario and make sure there’s a single source for truth for all information, as well as answers to all potential questions that might come up. Explain how to use other channels, tools and features along with how your audience can best find your agenda, descriptions and more before and during the event.

Prepare your speakers. Speaking to a virtual crowd or pre-recording presentations can feel awkward to even seasoned speakers who are comfortable addressing in-person audiences and adapting to real-time reactions. Tell them beforehand you’ll need several takes, and build in time to do so, keeping energy high for your speaker(s) by encouraging and supporting them through the process. Make sure they have all the tools necessary to properly present live or pre-record as well.

Making virtual presentation exciting and engaging

Create interactive moments with video-conferencing and live video tools. Elicit responses through “Chat” or “Q&A” features, or check your audience’s knowledge with real-time polls.

Pump up the excitement. Make your session memorable as well as informative by connecting with your audience emotionally. They’ll remember both you and your lessons more.

Get to know your audience. Ask for their experiences and insights, and respond to them by name whenever possible.

Q&A periods are a crutch. Don’t be afraid to answer questions throughout your video session. Most presentations save all questions for the end, which is basically a nice way of saying, “Please don’t ask me anything.”

Avoid rhetorical questions. Lead your viewers through questions, not by statements, so people can think toward their own conclusions.

Let your audience create and suggest questions. Ask questions that get to the heart of what, specifically, your audience would like to learn about—and then follow up by delivering requested information.

Support engagement outside the video screen. Here’s where Workplace can really help power engagement. Using groups and posts, ask questions, share moments from your live event and encourage your audience to share their thoughts.
Live video best practices

Before you record your session or go live, run through this checklist to ensure your message is heard loud and clear.

**Phone**
- Unless otherwise directed, film vertically.
- Download any updates and make sure your device is fully charged.
- Enable “Do Not Disturb” mode to silence notifications.

**Internet**
- Conduct a speed test before recording, aiming for a ping of less than 100 ms and an upload speed of more than 2 Mbps.
- Get close to your router—or, better yet, use an ethernet cable to wire into the internet.
- Tell your kids they’ll have to watch “Baby Shark” later—stay away from huge downloads or streaming content (including video games) that can quickly eat up bandwidth.
- Test logging into the videoconferencing or livestreaming platform ahead of time to ensure your computer settings won’t block your access.

**Lighting**
- Make sure your main light source is consistent.
- If sitting in front of a window, check the light level beforehand. Often, you’ll need to close your blinds or curtains, so your facial features aren’t washed out.
- Experiment with a few setups to see where the light and shadows work best.
- Invest in a ring light for well-lit videos and different settings (you can find many affordable options on Amazon.).

**Audio**
- Close the door or use an empty space to ensure there aren’t distractions during your live event or recording session.
- Wear headphones or earbuds to ensure clear communication back and forth.
- If wearing headphones that are wired into your laptop or phone, take care not to brush against the microphone portion of the cord. Long hair can also produce sounds.
- Get a high-quality mic (Saramonic has many affordable options).
- Take a deep breath, and practice your stage voice: Speak to the “back of the room.”
Framing/composition

- Use the rule of thirds, and leave headroom in your videos.
- Sit back far enough to allow viewers to clearly see and hear you, and place your computer at a higher level than when you’re typing, to gain the most flattering angle.
- If using a second monitor, work out ahead of time which will display your slides, and which will show your notes (if using them).
- Look into the camera as much as possible, instead of at your second monitor or off to the side.
- Natural backgrounds with interesting, but not distracting, features trump goofy, fake backgrounds.

Timing

- Live video is great, but it’s not always the right choice.
- Livestreaming works for current events, breaking news, and employee updates, but pre-recording enables you to add production value and smooth out the kinks.
- Consider time zones. Is a live shoot going to exclude people? If so, reconsider your options—especially if you want to create virtual networking and engagement opportunities.
- Prepare in advance for potential issues (speakers running over time, a dropped connection, etc.)—but be ready for anything to happen.

To learn more about Workplace from Facebook, go to workplace.com.
About Us

For more than 50 years, Ragan Communications has been delivering trusted news, training and intelligence for internal and external communicators, HR professionals and business executives via its conferences, webinars, training, awards, subscriptions and membership divisions. Its daily news sites—PRDaily.com and Ragan.com—are read by more than 600,000 internal and external communicators monthly. Its Communications Leadership Council is one of the fastest-growing membership groups for communications executives.

Ragan Products:

Through our world-renowned newsletters, conferences, research reports and guides, Ragan Communications, Inc., delivers practical advice, real-world solutions and field-tested strategies for today’s corporate communicator.

PR Daily is a news site that delivers news, advice, and opinions on the public relations, marketing, social media, and media worlds.

Ragan’s Communications Leadership Council is an exclusive membership organization for senior-level corporate and internal communicators. Comprised of the most innovative companies in the world, the membership provides benefits for both senior leaders and their teams, including premier networking, extensive industry training and benchmarking reports.

Ragan Training is an online membership portal providing access to video training courses in communications, public relations and digital marketing. The video library provides sessions and courses covering new practices and required skill sets for various specialties—as well as panel discussions and perspectives on the changing nature of our industry.

Workplace Wellness Insider gives leaders in HR, wellness and communications the insights, ideas and strategies to align employee health and engagement with organizational goals. Through it’s subscription service and training programs, Workplace Wellness Insider provide managers with the tools, strategies and ideas on employees’ mental, physical and financial health, social wellbeing, and work-life balance.
Ragan’s Social Media Council is an exclusive membership organization for senior-level social media leaders. The membership offers benefits for both senior leaders and their teams that are tailored to companies’ social media needs, including monthly webinars, networking opportunities and in-person training.

Ragan’s Crisis Leadership Network is the resource you need before, during and post-crisis. As a member, you have access to an online members-only portal, all-access pass to the annual Crisis Management Conference, subscription to the Crisis Communications Daily, access to research, data, case studies, checklists, tipsheets, articles and other resources, plus a peer to peer discussion board to interact with other members. You and your team will also have unlimited use of online training via webinars and virtual conferences on crisis management topics.

Ragan’s latest offering, the Communicators Roundtable, is a unique offering designed for mid-career communications professionals that includes online roundtable meetings, premium content, a peer to peer portal and more.

First Draft provides communicators & editors with timely and relevant content to keep readers engaged and connected.

Bits and Pieces is committed to providing the personal inspiration and motivation that so many people crave.

Bits & Pieces on Leadership offers insights and inspiration to motivate you through the work week and throughout your career.