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WHITEPAPER

SUCCESS FACTORS OF HYBRID & DIGITAL EVENTS

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LIVE IS LIVE?

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS FOR LIVE, DIGITAL AND HYBRID EVENTS

Digital and hybrid event formats played an important role in live marketing and communication long before the COVID-19 pandemic. While offline events score mainly through direct and personal contact, multi-sensory content as well as emotions and experiences, the focus of digital formats has so far mostly been on reach. This results primarily from the fact that digital formats are generally used independently of time and place and are available almost always and everywhere. The digital conference can be attended by a global group of participants and content can be provided in digital form before and after the event.

Further arguments are sustainability (e.g. reducing emissions by not traveling to physical meetings), effectiveness and efficiency (e.g. by reducing travel time to physical meetings) and convenience (it is more convenient to watch the event on your own monitor).

Hybrid events and corresponding concepts combine the best of both worlds: The aspects of physical events (multi-sensory, personal dialogue, experience-oriented and emotional addressing) and the advantages of digital communication (reach, sustainability, effectiveness, efficiency and convenience).



Figure 1: Live and digital merge to form hybrid

By combining and synthesizing the different properties of live and digital, not only can synergies be created, but even completely new event formats and communication strategies can arise.



439 EVENTS IN ONE WHITE PAPER: BACKGROUND, EXPERIENCE & APPROACH

This white paper combines the theoretical considerations with practical experience from numerous digital and hybrid events. In this way, previous experiences are channeled and condensed in order to generate learnings and inspire change.

The underlying experience and practical input are based on the conception, organization and production of 439 digital and hybrid events. The existing wealth of experience is not

only characterized by the quantity of events carried out, but also results from the depth of high-quality insights from different events with various properties:

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 10 to 3,000

ALIGNMENT: internal to the company, external to the company

RANGE: regional, national, global

TARGET GROUPS: B-to-B, B-to-C, B-to-B and B-to-C

EVENT PURPOSES: awards, entertainment, generating reach, conveying information, media feedback, employee motivation, employee training, product launch, product presentation

FORMATS: discussion rounds, employee awards, specialist events for clients and partners, global conferences, internal sales events, congresses, live talk shows, multi-part series of events, trade fairs, employee parties, employee meetings, online receptions & dinners, round tables, farewell parties, webcasts, webinars, workshops

The broad and in-depth wealth of experience from the events shown was ultimately channeled through the formation of focus groups. Twelve project managers were interviewed in four discussion groups in which they exchanged experiences. Existing theories were discussed and examined on the basis of detailed preliminary considerations in the context of the creation of the guidelines and the associated

deductive approach. The open and honest discussion rounds also enabled the inductive gain of knowledge through corresponding evaluations. This is done (based on Mayring) by means of qualitative content analysis.

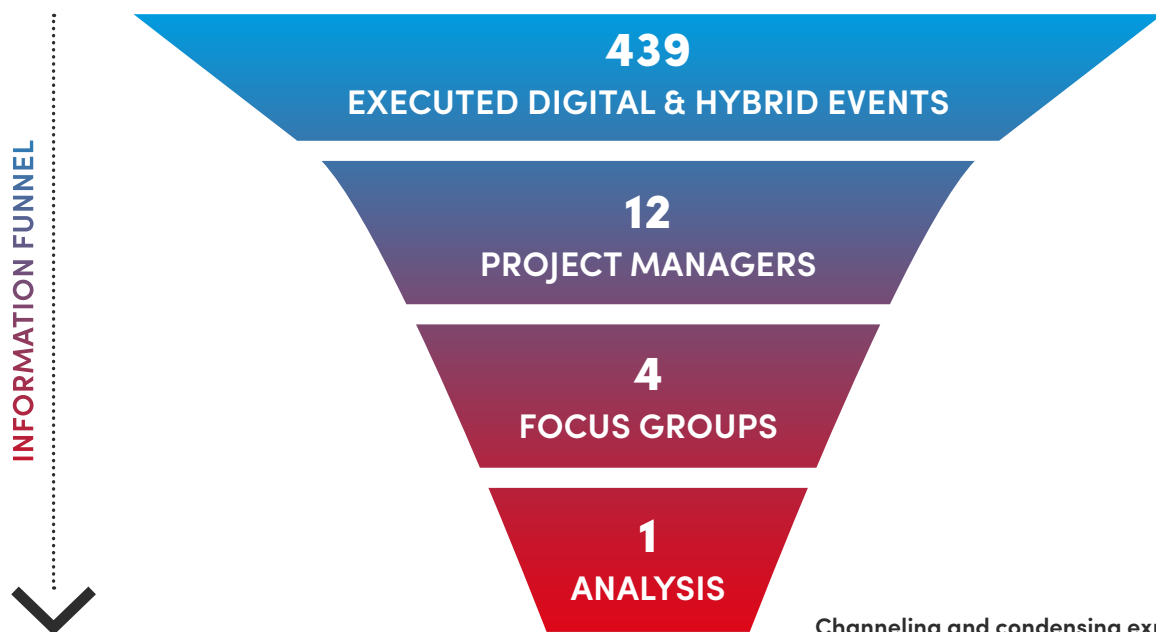


Figure 2:
Channeling and condensing experiences

The evaluation of the content and the comparison of the various focus group discussions resulted in nine main topics. These are each discussed in more detail below:

- Participation, interaction and co-creation
- Autonomy and choice
- Timing and pace influence on participant attentiveness
- Content – before, during and after the event
- Multi-sensory and haptic moments
- Networking and personal dialogue
- Number of participants – exclusive group vs. great coverage
- Budgets
- Success factors and central questions

PARTICIPATION, INTERACTION & CO-CREATION

3 PARTICIPATION NEEDS TO ADD VALUE

As with offline events, the participation of the participants is a key success factor for digital and hybrid formats. While participation in the analogue context arises through presence at the event, digital formats require a more in-depth analysis of how, to what extent, with which actions and for what purpose event participants should interact.

The starting point is the participant's free will to actively take part in appropriate parts of the event (see below under autonomy and choice). If this will to actively participate is not yet displayed, it is the task and challenge of the organizer to encourage it. This can be done by making it clear to the participant what added value is created by their participation and what added value they personally get from participating in the event, through specific activities and by offering new and exciting content.

Another critical factor is the technical implementation and user interface. Motivated participants can only take part if the technology is understandable and reliable.

While participation, interaction and co-creation can take place in the context of the digital event, it is also conceivable to extend this time by offering both upstream and downstream activities. Examples of this can include prior coordination on relevant topics and thus actively helping to shape the agenda, offering participants the possibility of contributing content or a platform for the exchange between the participants. The latter can also be made available beyond the event period so that communication can take place afterwards or, for example, editorially prepared content can be accessed.

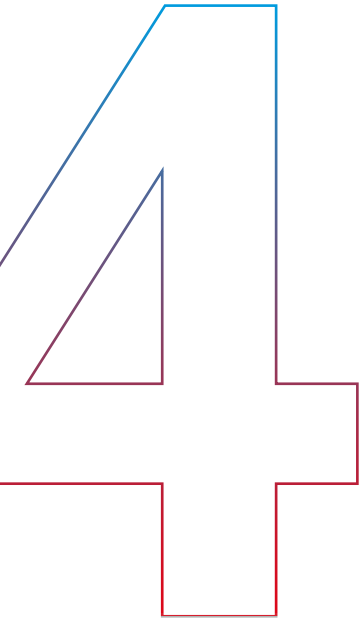
Furthermore, interaction is not limited to the screen or the medium through which the digital event is being followed. In the sense of a second screen, the participants' smartphones

can also be integrated via individual event apps or existing applications (e.g. WhatsApp, WeChat, social media) or physical objects can be sent to the participants (see below for multi-sensory and haptic moments).

In addition to others, the following actions and elements are possible to improve and strengthen participation, interaction and co-creation in digital and hybrid event concepts:

- Integration of participant feedback in on-going events (e.g. via voting, ranking tools, polls, feedback options)
- Interaction and communication between participants and organizers as well as in between participants (e.g. through public chats, in small groups or in person, with or without moderation)
- Creation of cooperative content (e.g. through moderated collaboration, joint whiteboards and word clouds, discussions in breakout rooms, submitting your own drafts)
- Tasks and challenges that the participants solve individually, in teams or together (e.g. step challenge before the event, quiz questions, games, picture challenge)
- Virtual fairs or 3D worlds in which avatars can interact (chat and communicate, obtain various information, independent movement)
- Share individual haptic experiences and generate a community experience (e.g. participants cook in their own kitchen and eat together, bartender guides people to mix cocktails together, joint unboxing of items sent)

With creativity and openness, numerous elements can be integrated into digital events that not only enable interaction, participation and co-creation, but even encourage them. The decisive questions here are how professional moderation can take place, whether and how editorial support must be implemented, or whether the participants appear personal or anonymous. Interactions between participants and organizers ultimately lead to a personal approach and a more individually rewarding event. In this way, interest can be aroused and increased, communicated in a target group-oriented manner, and finally a real experience can also be created in a digital context.



AUTONOMY & CHOICE

I AM IN CONTROL

Questions and considerations about the participants' autonomy and choice go hand in hand with participation, interaction and co-creation. For example, while recorded lecture videos only cover one lecture, topic or camera perspective, digital and hybrid events can offer a much wider choice simultaneously. In this way, it is possible for participants to decide for themselves which lecture to listen to, which topics to engage in more detail or which opportunities for interaction are used and when.

As with offline events, it is also important for digital formats to give the target groups the chance to create their own personal event experience and to satisfy their individual requirements. This is the only way to create the added value that is so important for the participant, which in turn is the prerequisite for the participants to join the event.

Possibilities for autonomous and self-determined action in the context of digital events result from – among others – the following factors:

- Selection of different content and topics that can be joined in different virtual rooms
- Live query of the current level of interest and adjustment to participants' responses, for example whether topics should be further expanded in the presentation
- Query of content-related requests of the participants, to be included in the content design or agenda
- Self-determined visits to various virtual trade fair and information stands and contact with conversation partners chosen by the participants
- Choice of whether program items are requested now and / or in recorded form at a later point in time (on-demand)
- Individual options for the camera perspective by the participant (only speaker, only slides, speaker with slides, entire room, etc.)

While there are numerous options on the part of the organizer to allow the participant options and thus (within a limited framework) autonomous and self-determined action, the decision to what extent these are used ultimately remains with the participant. This not only relates to camera settings or breakout room selection, but starts with the fundamental question of whether said participant is following the event at all. Furthermore, it must be considered and questioned to what extent participants must be brought to participate in corresponding interactive program items (see above). The following must always apply here: If the participant – for whatever reason – does not want to take part in the voting, chat or Q&A session, this must not be enforced.

With regard to autonomy and choice, it's clear that digital events and digital technologies offer event visitors a wide range of content, actions, topics and possibilities. The challenge is to design this offer in such a way that added value is created for the participants, which ultimately pays off for the organizer.

When transferring offline events into digital formats, it becomes clear that the attention span of the participants in the digital context is significantly lower. A one-to-one transfer of the agenda is not expedient. Rather, an adaptation to the digital situation must take place at this point, with program points shortened and content focused.

While a general statement on the length and timing is not possible – in this context there is a great dependency on the content of the program items, the speakers, acts and on the participants themselves – for professional and content-oriented event the following general recommendations can be made:

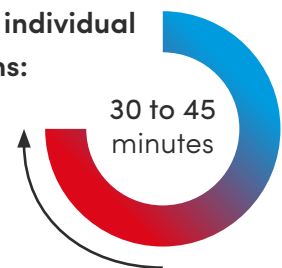


COMPACT & TO THE POINT

TIMING & PACE INFLUENCE ON PARTICIPANT ATTENTIVENESS

3^{max.} Number of individual presentation formats per event:

Length of the individual program items:



Length of the entire event
(including warm-up, lectures,
moderation, interaction and breaks):

Total length of the program items presented
on stage and without audience interaction:

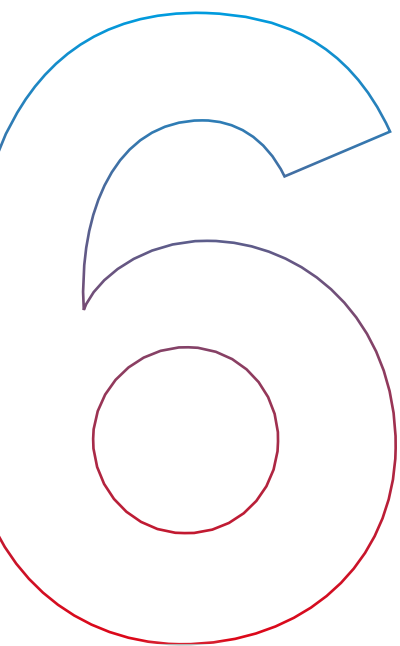
90^{max.} min.
(e.g. 3 x 30 min. or 2 x 45 min.)

Depending on the situation and content, it is advisable to hold technical and content-related events in the morning. End of spectrum timings, both within the week (Monday and Friday) as well as during the day (very early or very late), should be avoided in order to reduce the “no-show rate”.

The following measures, which mostly relate to the dramaturgy and agenda of the event, can help to increase the attention of the participants:

- Short (ten to fifteen minute) „intro“ or „warm-up“ sessions before the start of each session
- Conscious use of clear topic changes
- Ten to fifteen minute breaks in between sessions
- Promotion of active involvement of the participants
- Interaction with participants
- Enable stage scene or viewing perspective changes
- Content-related program items as input and impulse sessions, followed by networking and interpersonal communication
- Most anticipated content at the end of the event so that participants stay until then
- It is better to have several „small“ events than one lasting several days

In the context of the dramaturgical design of digital and hybrid events, numerous parallels to prime-time TV can be identified. Ideas are often transferable and captivate participants with the same means tried and tested in TV productions.



CONTENT IS STILL KING:

BEFORE, DURING & AFTER THE EVENT

A lot can also be learned from TV productions in terms of effective content production and broadcasting / communication. Content must be to the point, exciting, entertaining, professionally produced and create added value in order to reach the target groups. If this is not the case, there is a chance that recipients will lose interest and, for example, turn to their email inbox.

In addition to the above-mentioned aspects of participation, interaction and co-creation as well as autonomy and choice, followed by the considerations on timing, duration, dramaturgy and attention, there are the following content design recommendations for hybrid and digital events:

Speakers and speakers have to be “made fit” for the (new) digital situation, since digital events “work” differently than analogue live events (applause, reactions from the participants, studio situation, handling the camera, volume, intonation, etc.) A briefing related to the content and the digital situation must take place for each program item (length of the program item, content, design and inclusion of graphic elements, etc.)

In order to produce good content, appropriate technology and its professional application (camera, lighting, audio) is required. This is particularly important when speakers and actors are joining from remote locations instead of being on-site.

If several speakers or different program items are planned, it is worth employing a moderator or commissioning one of the speakers to moderate. In this way, unwanted pauses (e.g. when switching between two program items or while the audience is typing in questions) can be avoided and it is possible to moderate between speakers and participants (e.g. by formulating and asking questions from the participant chat). Depending on the context and objective, we recommend editorial support or curation of the contributed content (e.g. evaluation, preparation and channeling of the questions asked in the participant chat).

If the hybrid or digital event is part of a long-term communication strategy, there is an option to present content-related components pre-event. In this way, participants can work out key topics in advance or be informed about the offered activities. In this context, it should be noted that this will create participant expectations which then have to be met in terms of content at the event to avoid disappointment.

If communication is extended beyond the actual event, special attention is paid to the question of how the content is presented and what added value should be generated with it. For example, added value can be created by the fact that the recorded presentations can also be commented on afterwards and these comments are dealt with accordingly.

This “responding to the participant” forms the central core of the content orientation not only afterwards, but also before and during the event. Content must be adapted to the target groups and their requirements at all times in order to create added value for them that ultimately leads to a successful event.



I FEEL YOU

MULTI-SENSORY & HAPTIC MOMENTS

In addition to the presented measures and options aimed very much at the digital situation, hybrid and digital events can be enhanced in particular through multi-sensory and haptic moments and actions. The idea of supplementing the visual and acoustic perception on screen (whatever size the participants are using) by addressing additional senses, opens up numerous possibilities. Real / physical products are made available in advance to the participants of digital events, which are then integrated into the course of the event.

For example:

- Printed event programs and documents
- Printed documents and working materials for the lectures
- Sample parts, products and product samples
- F&B boxes for program items or breaks (popcorn for the presentation of the new image film, coffee and snacks for the break, cocktails for the digital get-together)
- AR and VR glasses or digital devices with the corresponding content
- Give-aways

In addition to the multi-sensory addressing of the recipients and the haptic moments created by this, the pre-event haptic packages can also be dramatically integrated into the event process. Joint unpacking creates a shared “unboxing moment”, and the joint coffee break creates a sense of community among the event participants.

In this context, questions about effort, costs or compliance should be considered. It must also be ensured that all relevant participants are equipped with appropriate utensils on the day of the event so that they are not excluded from the respective program items or experiences from the outset.

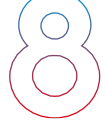
Like multi-sensory and haptic moments, networking activities and personal dialogues can also be implemented at hybrid and digital events. It becomes particularly exciting when participants whose meeting in an offline context would be rather unlikely can be brought together. Virtual networking offers the opportunity for communication and networking on a global level or between people at different company levels and areas.

Furthermore, in the hybrid context with the appropriate technology, there is the possibility of connecting participants at the offline event with those who are only digitally connected. The fundamental questions here are about the communication format (chat, audio, video),



CONNECTED WITHOUT BORDERS

NETWORKING & PERSONAL DIALOGUE



how large the communication groups are (private communication with two participants, several participants in a group, all participants in the event) and how the selection of the communication partner or group (by the participants themselves or by the organizer, by chance or according to defined criteria) will take place.

In the context of the considerations on the composition of the communication partners or groups, there is also the option of using match-making methods and bringing people together, for example on the basis of previously specified interests and topics or on the basis of social media profiles such as Xing or LinkedIn.

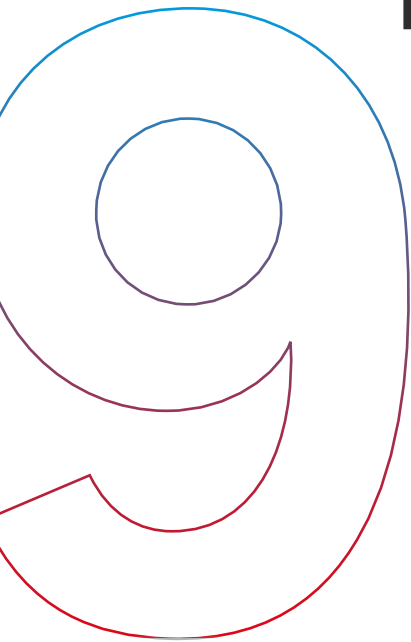
POSSIBLE SCENARIOS IN THIS CONTEXT INCLUDE:

- Expert discussions in small informal groups at virtual watercoolers
- Networking lounge with roaming avatars and information on potential conversation partners
- Opportunities to talk to company executives in breakout sessions
- Breakout rooms as „open“ rooms or with predefined topics for exchange during breaks
- Communication platforms and options that can be used before the event and are still available to the participants after the event (community concept)

Depending on the implemented concept and the type of participants, particular attention must be paid to data protection and related issues in the context of various networking activities. Also keep in mind that such activities should not be mandatory in order to respect all the requirements and personal choice of the participants.

CLUB OR STADIUM?

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS – INTIMATE GROUP VS. EXTENSIVE COVERAGE



Various activities and program items can be implemented particularly well and effectively with different numbers of participants. However, the number of participants must be adapted to the objectives and the respective possibilities of the event. If the objective of the event is to achieve the largest possible range, to communicate product information and communication content to as many employees or customers as possible, hybrid and digital events offer almost unlimited possibilities. If the event concept and the objective require interpersonal communication between the participants and/or the organizer, then small numbers of participants are more effective and impactful.

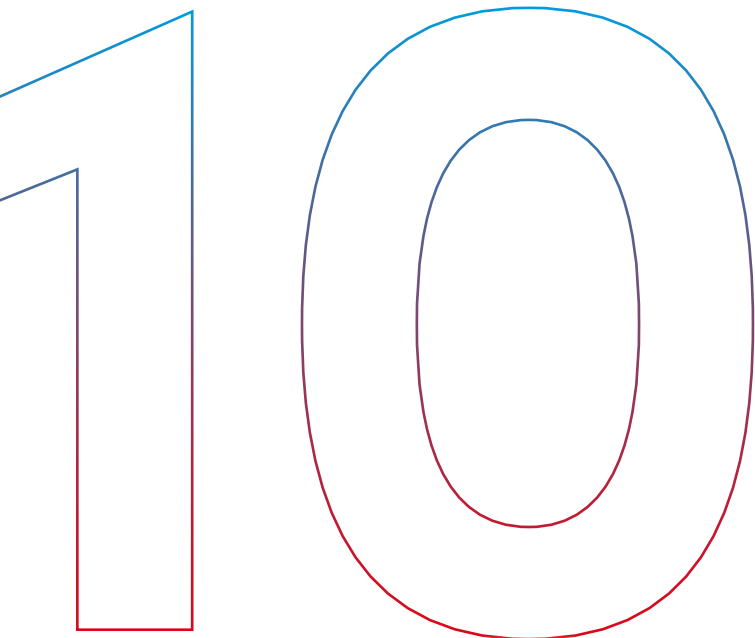
As a rule of thumb, the smaller the group, the better the interaction and exchange and the more effective the event. Especially when the participants are divided into appropriate groups, to develop content in break-out sessions and to present the group results in the plenary. In addition to the methods and tools listed above (e.g. for participation, interaction and co-creation as well as networking and personal dialogue), appropriate formats from offline event concepts can also be transferred to the digital context (workshop methods such as World Café, Open Space, etc.).

QUALITY HAS ITS PRICE

BUDGETS

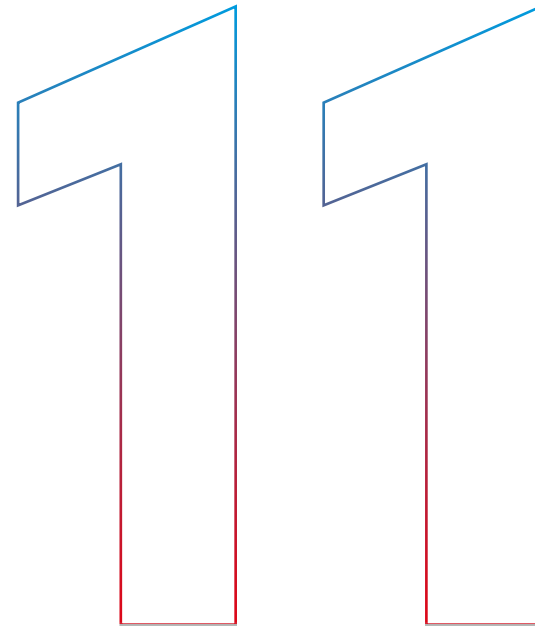
Hybrid and digital event concepts basically offer the opportunity to save costs compared to offline events. For example, expenses for travel, accommodation, catering and rental costs for unusual and large event locations are reduced to zero.

On the other hand, new costs arise, especially in the areas of content production and the provision of the digital infrastructure. While these costs should not be underestimated, a further challenge is the comparison of different platforms, options and providers. It is often impossible to understand which tools can be used and how and why supposedly similar applications have radically different prices. When selecting appropriate providers and services, it is therefore essential to rely on proven systems and experienced service providers with appropriate references as part of a high-quality and reliable implementation.



WHAT IS IMPORTANT

SUCCESS FACTORS & CENTRAL QUESTIONS



In summary, the following implications are key for the successful implementation of hybrid and digital events:

PARTICIPATION, INTERACTION & CO-CREATION

By integrating both the participants on site and in the digital environment on a similar level, in-depth experiences and valid connections can be created. Especially if the content is adapted to the needs of the target groups and participants, addressed directly and thus creating added value for all participants. In this context, user-friendly and simple handling of the platform and technology used is also important.

AUTONOMY & CHOICE

Being able to decide for yourself which content is relevant, which program points are used or which content-related or optical perspective should be taken, personal and individual experiences can arise that evoke a feeling of appreciation and exclusivity.

TIMING & PACE

The timing of the event as well as the coordination of the content and timing of the individual program items are of central importance, as the attention of the participants in digital events is less than in offline events.

CONTENT – BEFORE, DURING & AFTER THE EVENT

Professionally prepared content adapted to the target groups plays a special role in the context of hybrid and digital events, as it keeps the participants immersed in and connected to the event. It also serves to differentiate itself from other providers and other events. The event objectives can only be achieved if the content delivers what the participants expect.

MULTI-SENSORY & HAPTIC MOMENTS

Like the content and the active involvement of the participants, haptic moments and the addressing of the multiple senses can also serve to evoke emotions, create experiences and differentiate the event from other events and providers.

NETWORKING & PERSONAL DIALOGUE

In terms of networking and personal dialogue, hybrid and digital event formats offer new and exciting opportunities. If these are used in a targeted and professional manner, there is an opportunity in the digital context to bring communication and networking to a new level.

In order to implement these success factors in the context of a strategic event concept, some central considerations are to be made. Among other things, the following essential questions must be asked and answered in a highly strategic and individual manner:

- What is the aim of the event?
- Which target groups should the event address and how?
- How can existing offline event concepts be successfully converted into the digital context and appropriately adapted?
- What does the specific user experience (in front of the screen) look like as part of the event design?
- What added value does the event create for the target groups?
- What's the event USP and how does it stand out from the ever-increasing competition?

IT ALL STARTS WITH THE CONCEPT

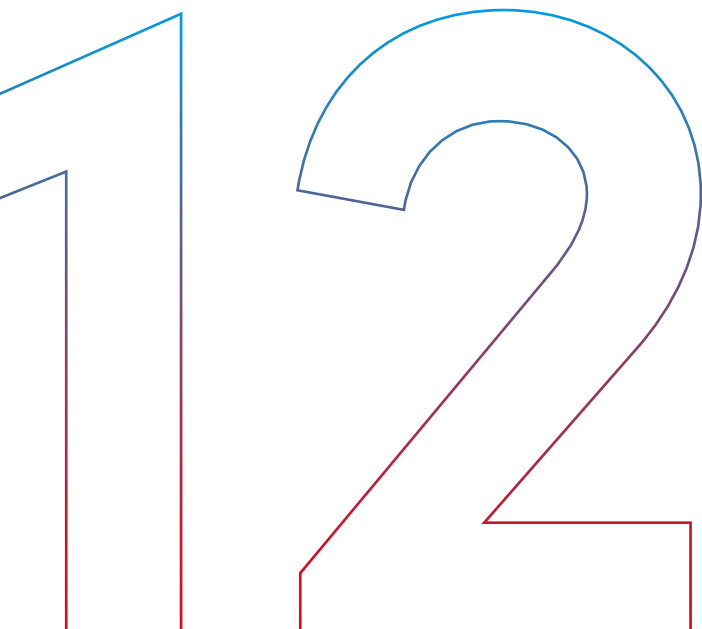
RÉSUMÉ

Digital and hybrid events offer numerous opportunities and innovative possibilities in the context of corporate live communication and marketing. This makes it possible to reach large numbers of participants and address different target groups in a highly individual manner. In addition, digital event formats offer opportunities in terms of sustainability, increasing effectiveness and efficiency and convenient participation of the target groups. On the other hand, there are challenges, such as the transfer from offline to hybrid or digital event concepts, the implementation of multi-sensory, direct and personal dialogue or the generation of emotions and experiences.

In order to make the best possible use of the potential of hybrid and digital events, a well-founded and strategic analysis of these properties, opportunities and challenges is required. A successful event – hybrid or digital – can only arise if the developed event concept includes all relevant aspects and these are implemented accordingly.

The considerations for the conception and implementation of hybrid and digital events largely correspond to those for the development of live communication concepts and offline events. The target groups are at the center of all considerations and questions at the event. The event concept can only be successful and the organizer can achieve its goals if their expectations are met and if they experience added value through participation in the event.

The central questions (as mentioned in the previous chapter) focus on the objectives and target groups of the event, from which the digital or hybrid event concept is derived. In the best case scenario, this concept contains the key success factors and takes the associated considerations into account.



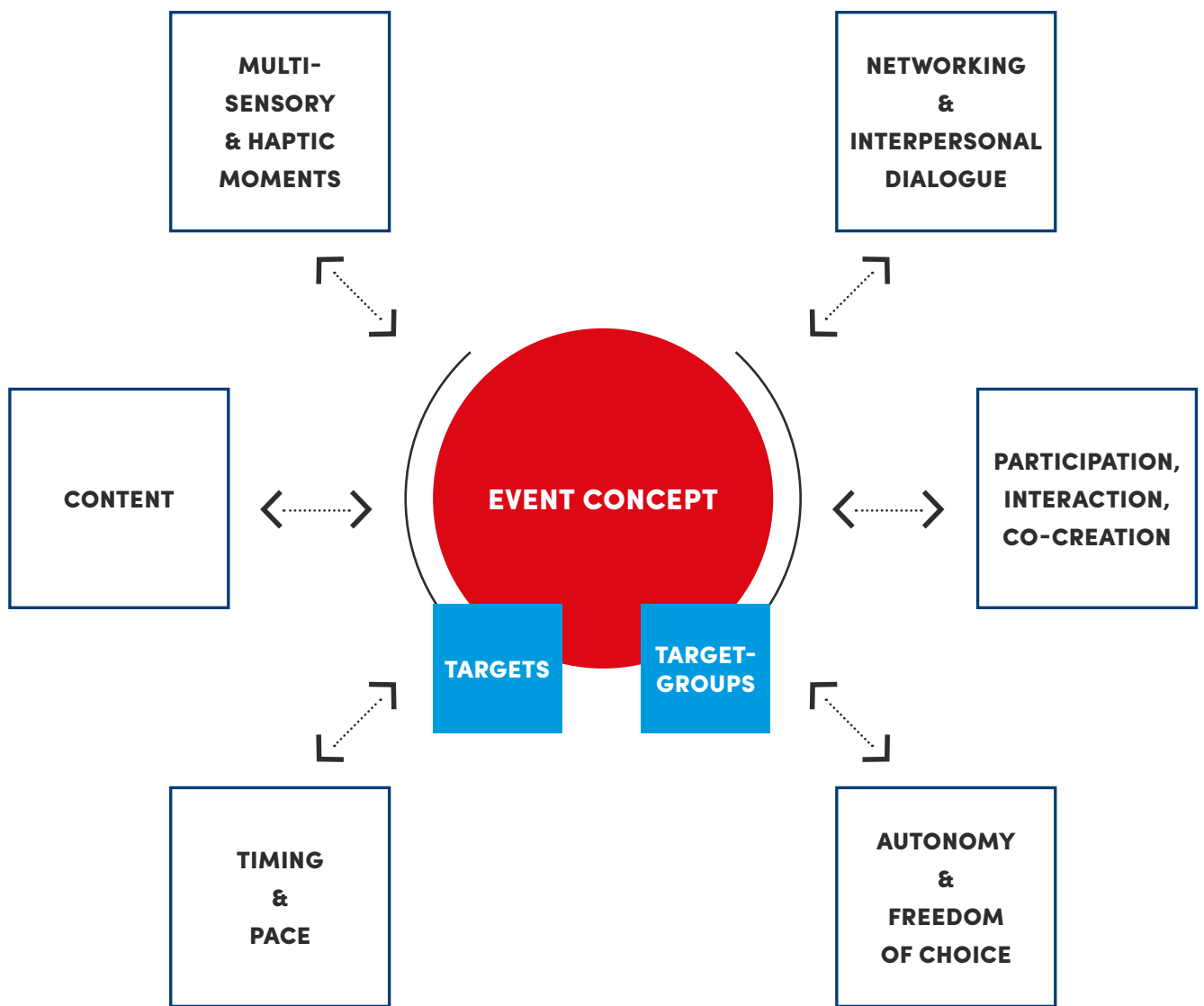


Figure 3: Success factors of digital and hybrid events

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Furthermore he establishes new standards in fields of Events and Live-Marketing, which are developed by VOK DAMS Consulting constantly.

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