

PREPARING FOR THE NEW NORMAL



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AGENCY EA INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE: COVID-19 SPARKS NEW THINKING IN EXPERIENTIAL

No one will deny that COVID-19 has had an adverse impact on the events industry. But, according to representatives from Indeed, Twitter, LinkedIn, Molson Coors, and Salesforce collected at a virtual roundtable hosted by Agency EA, it has also spurred new opportunities and ways of thinking.

THE PANELISTS:



LAURA PARKINSON,
Global Head of
Events at LinkedIn



**KRISTINE YAPP
JONES,** Global Event
Operations Lead at
Twitter



**CHARLOTTE
PEDERSEN,** Head
Of Global Event
Marketing At Indeed



LISA ZIMMER,
Manager of Meetings
and Events at Molson
Coors



MIKE REYNOLDS,
Senior Manager,
Strategic Events at
Salesforce

PRACTICE SENSITIVITY

A key theme emerged around the need to re-evaluate communication tactics and business plans. Everyone had a different perspective—and a different audience—but taking the time to explore changing needs is critical.

Now isn't the time to sell yourself, but rather to lend an ear and some empathy. Which is why Salesforce decided to take sales off the table and create relevant content for their clients instead.

For many, practicing sensitivity means caring for employees first. "We're not just working from home—we're at home during a crisis, trying to work," noted Charlotte Pedersen, head of Global Event Marketing at Indeed. "It's important to really take the opportunity to stop working if you need to or be empathetic to people that have children or roommates or small environments."

Sometimes empathy is as simple as getting beer (who can forget 93-year-old Olive Seminole who just wanted more Coors Light?) "Certainly people just want some good news in the current time," said Lisa Zimmer, Manager of Meetings and Events at Molson Coors, as she relayed the story of delivering a shipment of Coors Light to Seminole while she socially distanced.

EMBRACE CHANGE

Business plans are quickly changing. A strategy once set in stone is now up in the air, and most roundtable participants

have a COVID-19 task force leading the charge. Twitter's task force brings in different experts, ranging from data scientists to doctors, to work through new opportunities.

Companies are also looking at measurement metrics differently. *How long are people watching the keynote? What materials get the highest engagement rate? How can you track if someone had a positive experience?* These questions will guide how companies collect data moving forward.

Although new metrics are an exciting opportunity, organizations can find value in other ways as well. "You can measure a number of livestream viewers," Laura Parkinson, Global Head of Events at LinkedIn said, "But what is really important is our initiative, driving community, those really targeted conversations... and providing value and support. Building partnership right now in this critical moment will have a ripple effect for years to come."

With Salesforce's pre-pandemic emphasis on in-person events, not virtual experiences, Mike Reynolds likened the current time period to building a plane as you're flying it. "Our goal here is to inspire, educate, entertain our global audience by offering leadership guidance and also resources during this crisis," he said. Salesforce has pivoted by distributing timely and engaging content every Tuesday to help clients navigate COVID-19 and keep their businesses open.

LOOK TO THE FUTURE

In the end, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. While cautiously optimistic about hosting events in 2021, Salesforce is reimagining all physical events through the end of the year. Most participants forecasted that virtual elements aren't a temporary solution, but rather a long-term investment to develop.

"I think it'll be a lot of hybrid," Kristine Yapp Jones, Global Event Operations Lead at Twitter said. With new virtual options, people who may not have been able to attend previously can now participate.

Roundtable panelists were unanimous on one point, however—live events will not go away. Despite current concerns, brands recognize the importance of in-person gatherings, and doubt virtual will ever take precedence.

WANT TO LEARN MORE? Watch Agency EA's virtual panel discussion to learn more about virtual event best practices and the future of experiential from Salesforce, McDonald's, Hilton and LinkedIn.

<https://bit.ly/EAVirtualPanel>