

PREPARING FOR THE NEW NORMAL



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EM met with Christine Courtney, chief creative strategist of C3 Experiential (a division of C3 Agency), to talk post-pandemic, protests, and purpose.

WHAT STRATEGIC QUESTIONS ARE YOU ASKING TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR AN INDUSTRY COMEBACK? WHAT IDEAS ARE YOU EXPLORING?

While COVID-19 put the planet in a historical, unprecedented time out, the events industry had to pivot. Events were quickly reimagined and reengineered to go from IRL to URL. While some wait in limbo – a wild place between the way things were and the way they are going to be – I see the industry as a blank slate before us. I'm asking, "What can we do differently?"

We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to innovate and transform how we work and how people, brands, and the planet are impacted by the experiences we create. Experiential is rooted in human connection – we must amplify connectivity and focus even more on the human being, its senses, desires, needs. What have we learned from Covid-19? What have we learned from the protests? How do those lessons translate to and shape the future of events? What do we want the future to look like? Safe. Virus-free. Always respectful. Welcoming to all people. Monetarily beneficial. Fiercely intentional and environmentally friendly.

Post-pandemic and protests, our industry's work must be even more meaningful, more engaging, and measurably increase our clients' market share. This is our moment to come together and find our soul.

COVID CREATED A HUGE SURGE INTO VIRTUAL EVENTS. IS THIS A QUICK FIX OR WILL WE CONTINUE TO SEE DIGITAL EXPERIENCES IN THE FUTURE?

Even when IRL events make their comeback, digital experiences will continue to grow. The pandemic pivoted C3's projects from IRL to URL – so we designed new opportunities to deliver highly engaging virtual experiences that had greater reach and lower costs. We didn't shoehorn a live event experience into a virtual

version of the original idea... we revisited the event strategy and innovated from there. We confirmed each guest's tech was operating properly with an advance "live check-in", created epic gift bags with high-quality, surprising, and useful branded premiums that were delivered on "event eve" (*our branded pajama bottoms and boxers were a hit!*) and inspired massive social sharing.

Our studio's massive digital cyc immerses the "talent" – from DJs to bands and mixologists to CEOs – in high-impact branded sets and photorealistic environments. Our virtual experiential activations are creating entertaining engagement that uniquely connects our clients' stories and purpose to their target audience.

ATTENDEES MAY BE WARY OF LARGE GROUP GATHERINGS FOR SOME TIME. HOW WILL EVENTS NEED TO CHANGE TO ADDRESS CONSUMER FEARS?

I understand that some people are cautious, and others are more than ready to get out and feel a sense of community again. Regardless, it's our responsibility as event professionals to provide the safest environment possible for everyone by following the CDC's recommendations.

Immersive events can still exist with social distancing. Brands are investing in pop-up drive-in movie theaters, hotel take-overs, and mobile tours built for intimate engagement with marketing messages amplified through social media. I love seeing the resurgence of word of mouth campaigns. They give brands an opportunity to build loyal relationships with fans through authentic thought leaders over pay-to-post influencer deals.

ANYTHING YOU WILL NOT MISS FROM PRE-COVID EVENTS AND ACTIVATIONS?

OMG, yes. Gone are the ever-present ball pits and buffet-style food presentations. As an experience designer and avid event attendee, I won't miss either of those giant-sized petri dishes of germs! Ha!