



Frank Baier

„Virtual“ Experiences

While there has been no sign of „physical“ on-site trade shows for months, the event industry is trying to insist on the benefits of online presentations.

The corona pandemic that has prevailed since the spring of 2020 has reduced face-to-face human encounters for a very long time, and in some cases still precludes „real“ on-site company presentations. I'm sure you're very familiar with this saying, „I'm not even there!“ This is what the boss replies to you on request, because he is asked to be on the phone by a customer, but he just doesn't want to be disturbed. A colleague may also react abruptly in this way as soon as she wants to leave in a hurry for the end of the working day, or perhaps even for vacation. In any case, one hears this saying very often.

For just as long, this nice saying was also not heard: „Our company shows presence.“ In times of the corona pandemic, the word presence takes on a meaning all its own. Presence takes on a special meaning in these vintages of personal detachment. Guaranteed, we would never in our lives have spoken of a presence event before. Today, no one is surprised: no trace of „physical“ on-site presence fairs for months.

Digital events more often

Although events in „real“ premises are also taking place again, there are nevertheless more and more presentations directly on the tablet, laptop or PC screen. Accordingly, digital events, online seminars, video conferences, web chats and virtual events are being organized more frequently. Providers of Internet-based presentations like to talk about the advantages:

- Especially the financial advantage due to not incurring travel, travel and hotel costs would convince the participants.
- Also, an extraordinary amount of time can be saved, because all content can be followed comfortably from the screen.
- The content focus would often remain on data, facts and figures – background discussions would not distract from the defined topic.
- With the help of the online event, significantly more interested parties from all over the world and in some cases other customer groups are reached than would otherwise be the case.

However, it is precisely the last point that gives rise to doubts. Trade show companies, publishing and media houses, and businesses are constantly enticing interested parties to participate in digital events, which are often completely free of charge. According to information from psychologists, people's attention span is much shorter at online events than at face-to-face events. At a digital seminar, often only one person gives a lecture in front of a running camera, and the audience usually loses interest quickly – and turns off the computer. Additional interactive elements, such as questions from the audience via chat, interviews or animations and videos, could be used to counteract this.

The clear disadvantage is that the „no-show rate“ is said to be significantly higher at such free online events than at face-to-face events. It is not uncommon for their share to be two-thirds, and ultimately not all that many of the registered participants actually attend. This means that the organizer's expectations are not met.

High „no-show rate“

Admittedly, I have also contributed to this „no-show rate“ feared by online event organizers. A few months ago, I was a registered participant of a virtual symposium of the paper industry, which was free of charge for me, and I registered punctually via log-in a few minutes before the start. The half-day event, announced with various speakers, started with technical problems of the Internet transmission and simultaneous translation – but I did not switch off at first. Nevertheless, I had imagined something different under the design of the technical presentations, switched the live streaming to „mute“ and let the symposium continue in the background. During my editorial work, I still looked in once or twice and switched off after barely two hours.

As a result of the increasing basic immunization of people, more face-to-face events are now taking place: Trade shows and open houses, conferences and seminars, membership meetings and association meetings with participants on site. So there are finally real personal „face-to-face“ meetings again, surprising moments, unexpected requests, sudden encounters, unexpected impulses – what you just can't experience on the screen.

Will we hear more often the well-known saying „I'm not there!“ with regard to the soon planned presence events?

Yours

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