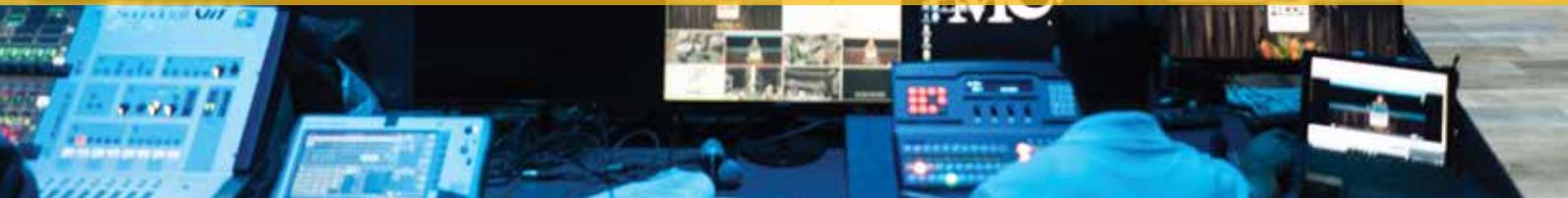




FSAEs First Hybrid Event: WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE 2020 WOMEN'S SUMMIT



By Adrian Amos Honderick, CAE; FSAE Marketing Director

In late October, FSAE had close to 50 people registered for the Women's Summit on November 17, and we were already at max capacity for our venue. COVID numbers had evened out locally and members were still registering for this in-person event. We were presented with the option to move the event to The Moon in Tallahassee, which not only allowed for more attendees but offered more space for social distancing. The bonus was gaining a hybrid option to allow virtual attendees to join us live as well.

When we announced the hybrid option, we had a handful of people switch to virtual, and got some new registrations because of it. We had a total of 69 attendees, 16 of those attending virtually.

Many of our attendees said that they were interested in experiencing a safe in-person event and/or a hybrid event to prepare for their own meetings in 2021. Here's what we learned from our first large in-person and first hybrid event.

- Social distance signage and floor decals
- Directional arrows for one-way traffic flow
- Attendees were encouraged to bring their own name badges for contactless check-in
- An online health form was sent prior to the event to verify attendee understanding of protocols and declare being symptom-free
- Microphones were wiped down between speakers at the podium or in the audience
- Panels were socially distanced with their own microphones instead of sharing one

IN-PERSON

Safety was our top priority for our in-person attendees, speakers and staff. Our safety measures included:

- Temperature checks at the door
- Two plexiglass registration stations with one staff person per table



Registration/ entrance with temp checks and plexi-glass

As the event got closer, national COVID numbers spiked dramatically and with Thanksgiving just a week away, the threat of exposing extended family became an issue as well. (Tallahassee numbers were not spiking – we were still holding steady locally, but still took the threat seriously.)

We re-evaluated our safety plan and made some adjustments so everyone would feel - and be - safe at our event. We spread tables even farther than the recommended 6 feet and sat 3 per table instead of 4 so that everyone had plenty of space at the table and around them.

Masks were required, and while the general rule is “unless seated,” we knew this wouldn’t be good enough. For a seated six-hour event, masks needed to be worn **all day** unless eating or drinking.

Boxed lunch was served, but now that means more than a sandwich and chips. We had a hot lunch of the best *conference-chicken* any of us have had in months! (Thank you Andrew’s Catering!) Disposable utensils and napkin were included, and drinks were stationed on both sides of the room with an attendant to serve you.

We’re happy to report that everyone complied with the rules and made a conscious effort to keep themselves and everyone else safe. Following the event, we sent two check-in emails to attendees to see if any symptoms or issues had arisen, and all are 100% “feeling fine.”

VIRTUAL

Because national cases spiked, we had around 5 people move from in-person to virtual the day before the meeting, for 17 total virtual participants. We were very glad we had that option so everyone could participate. So how did virtual at a live event work?

The Moon had already done online streaming of events and had the set-up needed to broadcast live to Vimeo (a video platform similar to YouTube). This can really be any platform that accepts a live video feed, like Vimeo, YouTube, Facebook Live, etc. You just want to make sure that where you’re broadcasting is private so that only attendees can view the video – unless it’s something open to everyone. Most AV companies like American Audio Visual and in-house hotel AV can do this broadcast as well. Be sure to ask your AV team or event venue for information.

The broadcasting was just step one for us. We wanted attendees to be able to connect with each other, ask



Socially-distanced seating with more than 6 ft. between tables

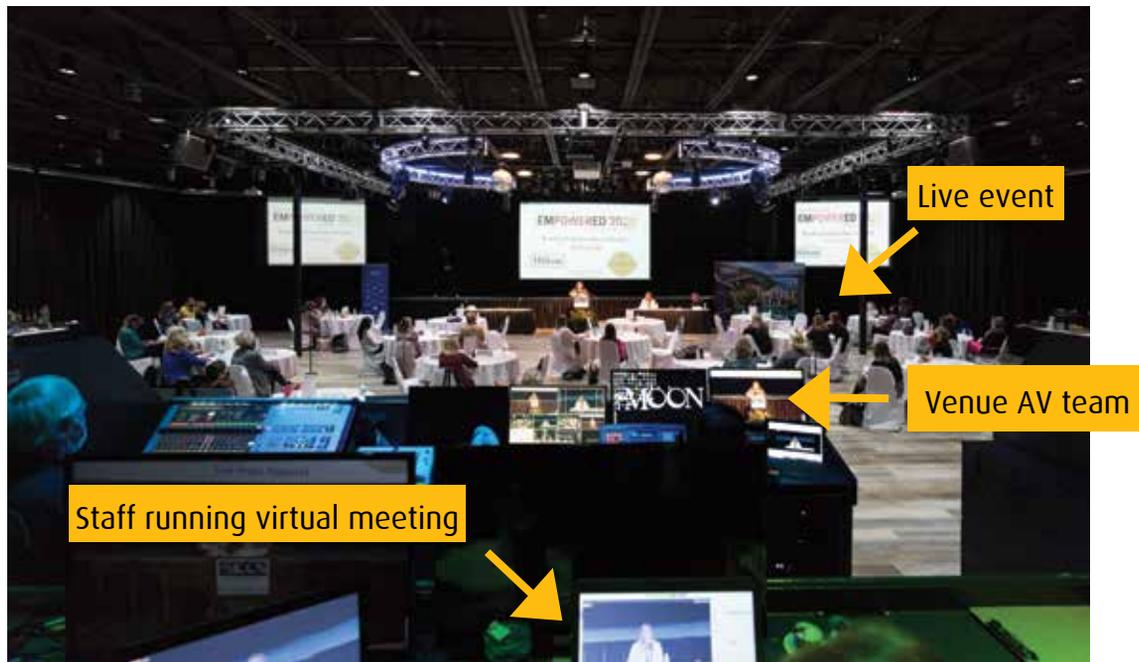
questions of speakers and feel like they were part of the event. Vimeo allows for comments on the streaming page, but we wanted more interaction than that. And we didn’t have much time to figure out how.

Zoom has come to the rescue more than once in 2020, and it did so again for this event. We invited our virtual attendees to a Zoom Meeting and did a screen-share of the broadcast. Since we didn’t have many people online, Meetings was a good option for people to be able to see each other and have video chat during breaks. Chat was always available, but having the faces on-screen helped it feel more personal than Webinar might have. (But again, this was 16 people – so very manageable on Meetings.) We also had a staff person running Zoom, just like we would for any virtual event. Staff was the virtual emcee, as well as physically asking questions from the virtual audience to the presenters.

Here’s what we learned:

- **Have 2 laptops, or at least 2 screens to run the meeting** – one for the broadcast, one for Zoom. We found that even the “share screen” bar was causing weird shadows on Zoom for attendees (there is an option to remove that bar), so staff trying to use or even see the chat was definitely out. I did screen-share of the video on one laptop and didn’t touch it except to stop sharing. I was able to watch and interact on Zoom on the second laptop.
- **Be hard-wired for the broadcast if possible**, and make sure laptops are plugged in. This is not the time to run on battery or public Wi-Fi. If hard-wiring isn’t available, see if there’s a less-public Wi-Fi you can use with more bandwidth.

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- **Practice in your venue with your AV person.** We learned in the practice session that you couldn't (yet) broadcast directly into Zoom, so we had to use the Vimeo screen-share option. This was also when we found out about the weird bar and needing 2 laptops to make it work. We had a few remote staff members in the Zoom practice session as well to tell us what worked and what didn't. Sometimes attendees see things differently than hosts, so it's important to know what they experience.
- **Test the sound with the stream.** Make sure you know how to share your computer sound when sharing your screen or attendees won't hear anything. I was stationed in the tech booth for the live event and had the AV team right in front of me to address any sound issues for the stream, which was very helpful!
- **Prepare for the delay between live and virtual.** Ours was about 30 seconds to a minute behind. I had headphones in to only listen virtually so that my experience and comments matched our Zoomers. However, the delay made asking questions live a little more difficult. I wouldn't hear the request for questions until later and the speaker might have moved on. I made sure other staff knew if I had any to ask, as well as had them signal me when it was time.
- **Have the in-person audience use a mic for questions or comments so that virtual attendees can hear them.** We had a roaming mic in the audience and it helped. If that's not an option, ask the speaker to repeat the question/comment so Zoomers at least have an idea of what was said. Otherwise, it's like the adults on Charlie Brown...
- **Have a staff person dedicated to the virtual event to keep up interaction with attendees.** Our virtual attendees said they felt like they were part of the event because of staff coming on camera for announcements, and encouraging chat and participation. It's like we were at our own table, and got to experience it together. Had it been just a video feed, it might have felt more like watching TV.

Overall, the event was a huge success – both for in-person and virtual attendees. As we move toward recovery and collectively begin more in-person events, having a virtual option may still be necessary for some of your members – either because of health or budget issues. FSAE is happy to share our experience to help you navigate 2021 and beyond.