# Virtual Event Planning May Present New Opportunities for Software Developers



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When’s the next time you’ll go to a concert, trade show or conference? For most of us, it is realistically looking like at least not until the end of next year, when we might get a vaccine and it can be widely manufactured and spread. While the shock of this pandemic moved many of us into working from home and Zoom meetings, those annual industry events that we’d all attend were completely forgotten, with many being canceled or postponed and others scrambling to create some kind of lackluster virtual event.

But the show must go on. Literally. We need to make virtual

events doable, scalable and impactful and engaging.

Given that it might be more than a year until we can do these things in-person safely, we need solutions and we need them yesterday. As software has been eating the world, I'm starting to see first-hand how software developers are now working alongside and, in a way, becoming event planners.

In order to make these virtual events more impactful, we have to go beyond the current software solutions out there. Most successful virtual events that we've seen have been successful because they've built out their own software platforms to host these events.

Enter software developers as event planners.

# The current state of virtual events

There have been some very successful virtual events since the pandemic, but there have also been a lot of really not-so-great virtual events. I'd go as far as to say much more bad than good.

While most people quickly adapted to Zoom for virtual get-togethers with small groups of friends and work meetings, Zoom wasn't built with the idea of hosting big groups. (How could it have been? No one thought this year would have looked quite like it has.)

With everyone talking at once, or slight delays due to faulty internet service, having meaningful conversations becomes nearly impossible with groups larger than 6 or so. If you attended a Zoom birthday party, you can attest to that. (Especially if there was alcohol involved.)

Furthermore, there's no chance for casual side conversations. I would argue that those serendipitous connections are sometimes the most enlightening, engaging and impactful.

While Zoom can fill in the gaps for meetings, it is missing the mark for virtual events, there are other platforms out there attempting to more easily facilitate the aspects of engagement that make events so great.

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We used Remo for a software development meetup. It was fun and allowed for a certain level of engagement, but at scale could see it getting stale. We also liked High Fidelity, a platform from the inventor of Second Life, which has some really interesting early-stage work with spacial audio that looks promising to mimic the effect of being in an event space.

But, like any new trend, everyone is rushing to be the next best platform and take over this newly created market. Recently, I've had a lot of conversations with companies looking to develop event-driven products in different forms. The problem is that everyone is looking for a one-size-fits-all solution that, in reality, fits very few.

Furthermore, events are about the experience first and foremost. Depending on the topic and who's attending there needs to be different models for interaction. Previously, this was solely the responsibility of event planners.

# What needs to happen to make virtual events successful

As we saw this uptick in conversations with companies looking to develop event driven products, we kept thinking about what makes for great in person events. This is the key to how we should do online events.

Great events feel unique, special and even inspirational. They are typically well-organized and cater to different personalities of those that will be attending. People can go at their own pace, there are different things to discover and

do based on their interests and what type of interactions they'd like to have.

We recently had the pleasure of working with Northeastern University to host its kick-off virtual club fair event. So, we built that event specifically to that demographic. We created a video game experience where students could control an avatar and bounce between different buildings and booths at their own pace.

The event was a huge success, with over 10,000 unique users participating in Fall Fest, some even saying it was better than the real event.

Furthermore, we were able to bring in groups from the university that would never have been able to join the event in-person and students told us they were able to discover more content because it didn't get as lost.

**Related: 7 Deadly Sins of Virtual Events**

# Opportunities lie ahead

There isn't going to be just one or two platforms that own the entire event space. By necessity we expect and even need events to be more unique in order to make them compelling enough to attend.

Traditionally, companies spend hundreds of thousands of dollars putting on events. We'll start to see these budgets move into custom online solutions and that's where there are tremendous opportunities for software developers to build amazing experiences.

No matter what happens with the state of the world, online events are here to stay. I believe we'll start seeing a lot of events offer an in person and virtual component to all events because online events have opened up doors for more attendees and allowed for another level of engagement. A year from now

we will have gotten much better at hosting these. People will have created some really amazing interaction models and it’s going to be hard to go back to strictly just in person events for the orgs that do it right.

Over the next year or so, we are going to see a lot of innovation in terms of online events. There are opportunities to build custom experiences for concerts, trade shows, conferences, workshops, dating even – anything that is generally on pause due to the pandemic. While we’re all in this purely remote working experiment we should take this opportunity to create new models for digital events so we can stay connected.

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