

KILOWATT

VIRTUAL EVENTS

7 things not to do

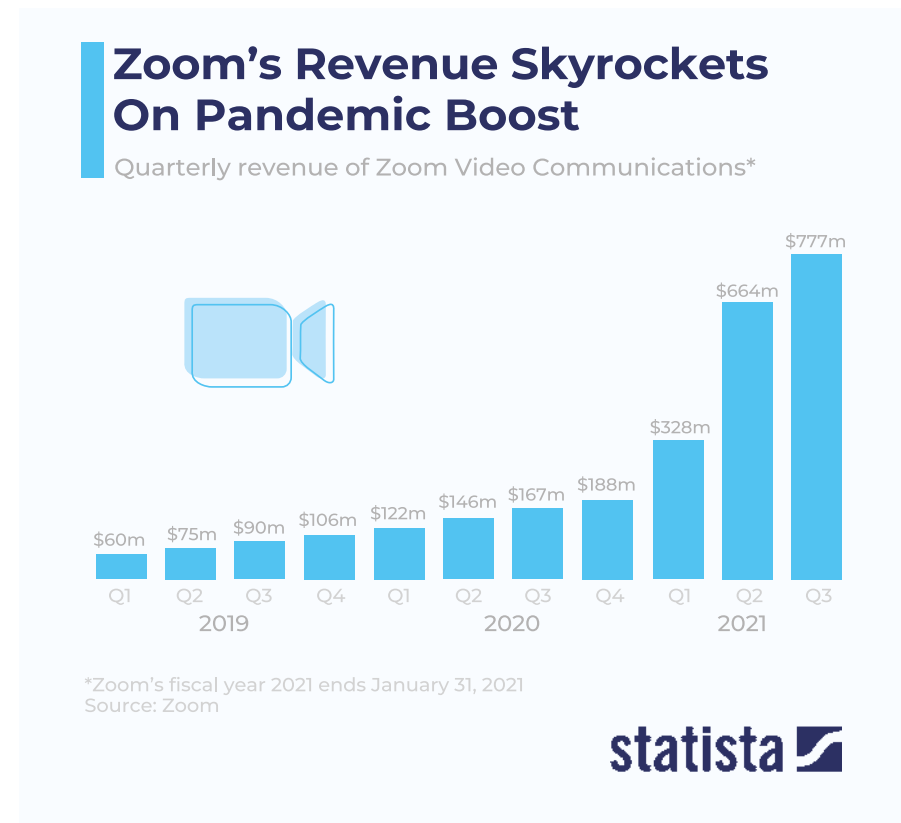
(and tips on what to do instead)

The anniversary of one of the most disruptive and adverse events since World War 2 reminds us that very few people could have predicted how the Covid-19 pandemic would impact our daily lives.

The events industry has been particularly adversely affected with social distancing and lockdowns right around the world. People and companies obviously still had to connect and communicate with each other and this led to a massive rush to find alternative ways to gather and share experiences.

Nothing demonstrates the explosion in virtual events quite like the numbers from Zoom Video Communications (NASDAQ: ZM), one of the leading video communication companies.

In December 2019 Zoom had 10 million daily users - four months later in April 2020 they had over 300 million active daily users. Even more revealing are their projected revenue numbers for 2021.



In a recent Gartner Magic Quadrant study for Worldwide Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS), the following strategic conclusions were drawn:

- ***By 2022, 74% of organisations will move at least 5% of their normally full-time, on-site workers, who had switched to working from home temporarily, into permanent remote-working positions.***
- ***By 2023, more than 50% of large organisations will connect to cloud providers using direct cloud connectivity from their WANs, up from 10% in 2019.***
- ***By 2024, 74% of the new unified communications licenses purchased by organisations will be cloud-based, up from 48% in 2019.***

Gartner: Magic Quadrant for Unified Communications as a Service, Worldwide
Published 12 November 2020 - ID G00448214.

Virtual events are a subset of UCaaS and involve all human gatherings and interactions that would typically have taken place in the real world in the past. It goes without saying that UCaaS is nothing new, but what nobody could have predicted was the very sharp rise in adoption rates among even the most tech-resistant companies.

In the virtual events space, the winners are not necessarily going to be the ones who cross the line first, but instead the ones who take a step back and consider the basics in a new light.

As one of South Africa's leading technical services companies, Kilowatt has had to adapt at hyperspeed. What we saw in 2020 was a wait and see mentality amongst bigger companies, whereas we are now seeing a realisation from clients that virtual events are here to stay. Our industry was still licking its wounds from massive cancellations month after month, and yet we believed that something good would emerge from the devastation the pandemic caused.

And that is exactly why we took the bold decision in January 2021 to do a complete refit of our office in Cape Town and transform it into 7 purpose-built production studios. Each studio has its own identity and is geared to meet the specific needs of a client. For example, we now offer studios for big corporate virtual events, relaxed “talk shows”, virtual weddings and one-person green screen recordings. These are just a few of the possible use cases for our new studios.

It is never easy to adapt to change, especially when it is imposed through something as unimaginable as a global pandemic, and yet here we are today with the reality that Covid-19 is a life changer for all of us.

If virtual events are here to stay, how do we embrace them and rapidly adapt to our collective “new-normal”? Here are 7 lessons we have learned with virtual events:



The 7 things not to do with virtual events:

1. Don't get caught in the technology spiral.

What most people don't realise is that structured planning is more important with a virtual event. This is why the starting point should always be a focus on the basics:

- *Why are you doing this?*
- *What does success look like?*
- *How will you measure success?*

2. Don't get confused between visitors and users.

It may sound like an obvious point, but far too many virtual or online events are still trying to mimic the experience of the real-world. We need to accept that they are vastly different. It boils down to a mindset change. There will not be event attendees for the foreseeable future - only event users in a virtual space.

“We like to think of virtual events as similar to a television production rather than an attempt to mimic real-world events. And we believe the winners will be the ones who start treating their next virtual event as an episode of their corporate broadcast production to a targeted audience”.

Dillon Jearey

3. Don't skimp on your program content.

Your content is at the heart of your virtual event, it's the main thing that people are turning up for. Whether you're streaming live content such as panel discussions or sharing pre-recorded content, you need to make sure that your program has enough depth and variety to keep people engaged. If you're running livestreams, have a range of complimentary on-demand content for people to explore if they want to. What is termed Zoom Fatigue or Microsoft Teams Fatigue these days used to be called Death by PowerPoint®. These memes reflect less of a technology issue and more of a reality that you are boring your audience.

4. Don't forget social space.

Your users show up for the content, but they're also there to interact with others. The interactive element of a virtual event is obviously different from a physical event, but it's still vitally important. People can still catch up and share ideas with one another, but only if the host makes that possible and creates spaces for this to happen.



5. Don't think virtual events are going away.

Right now, we are all adapting to virtual events and seeing the value in them. Once this crisis has sufficiently subsided, physical events will come back to some degree, but we strongly believe virtual events are here to stay. The events model of the future will likely be a hybrid - we see events having a physical element and a virtual element, both at different price points. We have also seen many smaller companies now embracing virtual events where an in-person event or conference in the past would have been prohibitively expensive.



6. Failure to understand your audience.

The best way to craft an experience that your users will enjoy is to put yourself in their shoes:

- *Why am I attending this event?*
- *What am I hoping to learn from this?*
- *Will I make some valuable contacts?*

7. Don't assume a virtual event has to be boring and bland.

Real-world events go to great lengths to create a captivating experience for attendees. By comparison, virtual events can feel a bit functional and flat. But there's no reason why you can't create an experience that is rich and immersive in its own way and we'll be pushing the envelope in terms of what's possible. Remember about Zoom Fatigue or Microsoft Teams Fatigue and fight it every step of the way.



In conclusion.

Kilowatt is proud to be leading the way with virtual events. We don't profess to have all the answers, but we can promise our clients that we will be there, every step of the way, to guide them through their next virtual or hybrid event program. We have always had service delivery at our core. We pride ourselves in our resilient team. They make the seemingly impossible happen, day in and day out. Our game is about delivering some very tangible experiences, but it is also about delivering it with a little bit of magic.

If you want a production with added magic contact:

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