

10 Nightmares that Can & Do Happen in Live Online Events & How to Avoid Their Ruining Your Event!

Just as there are many things that can go right in an online event, there are many that can go wrong as well. Knowing what the potential “nightmares” are is the best way to prepare for and avoid them! Here are just some of them ... from live events that we’ve hosted.

“Situations” and “Solutions” are summarized for each. Marcia Elder was the event manager and live event Moderator for each of these examples. The actions she took made possible the Solutions ... and avoidance of the nightmares ruining our events!

1. “Stage-fright”

Invited speakers and even moderators can sometimes experience discomfort or outright fear of public speaking. Some lack speaking experience. Some may have lots of experience but encounter the jitters nonetheless.

Situation: A very experienced speaker, whose 60 minute presentation we had been promoting for two months, informed us just before the event that he was uncomfortable speaking online and, as a result, could only talk for 15 minutes!

Solution: Marcia agreed to his “request” ... and let him know that she would listen closely to his presentation and then do an interview of him on the topic for the remaining 45 minutes. As an experienced interviewer, she was able to quickly adapt to the new game plan. The fact that she also was knowledgeable on his topic, Leadership, was an added Bonus. The live event went great.

2. Late Speaker

“Timing is everything” and when speakers show up late for an online event it can be very disruptive to the program. Sessions are often timed to where each speaker has a specific time slot and amount of time. After one speaks the next presenter is to follow at a set time. Most (though not all) professional events are expected to end on schedule for the sake of speakers and participants alike.

Situation: Despite all efforts on our part to avoid it, speakers have on occasion shown up late, after an event is underway. When they are not there by the time they commit to we end up having to call, text and/or email them to be sure they will be arriving very shortly. Having to deal with that added time and worry while conducting a live event can be distracting and disruptive – even more-so for those without staff on-hand to do the follow-ups.

Solution: We know that this can happen, so we’re prepared to do immediate follow-ups if it does. We have their contact information handy (so no time is required to dig for it), the person identified who will take action, the time at which the contact will be initiated and what to say to the presenter.

We also know that the presenter can be in the process of trying to log on but having difficulty. We let speakers know in advance that the log on process should only take a few minutes and what to do if they encounter problems. We have material ready to cover as well (things of interest to our audience) in the event of a brief delay. And, of course, we emphasize to speakers in advance the importance of being on time.

3. Speaker No-Show

Guest speakers are promoted to audiences who show up because they want to hear and see those speakers. Most people are very

busy these days and they don't want to make time to attend an event only to find that the speaker hasn't shown up. It's even worse when the host doesn't know what's happening. While not the host's fault, it can reflect badly on them as well.

Situation: A speaker for a day-long Web event was booked and promoted but didn't show up and didn't contact us. He was supposed to be there 15 minutes before the start of his panel.

Solution: Speakers are chosen not only based on their subject matter credentials and speaking ability but also their reliability. We need to have confidence that they take their commitment to speak seriously and that they are professional and organized enough to show up when they say they'll be there.

As it turned out this presenter had a medical emergency and, as we learned later, no-one else knew to contact us to let us know. Fortunately, one of the other panelists had lots of additional information and she was able to not only fill the gap but with very interesting material that kept the audience engaged. We also were able to facilitate the session in a way that kept things moving smoothly.

4. Talking Too Long

Let's face it, some people talk too much and go on for too long, consistently. Others don't realize it but go past their allotted time-frame ... and would likely go way over if permitted to do so.

Situation: Unfortunately, this is a common problem, for online and onsite events. It's happened to us as well.

Solution: In inviting speakers we make clear the timing and length of their speaking slot, and we work to be realistic in allotting time amounts per speaker. Where we don't already know we may ask as part of the presentation request if the planned amount of time gives

them enough time to cover their topic. We remind them of the agreed upon timing as part of the pre-event speaker prep session, and by sending them the agenda with time slots shown.

We often know how many slides they have and this can let us know how well they're doing in keeping themselves on schedule. If we see that they will likely run late typically we'll interject with a brief and polite note of the time and how much they have left (unless it's a program where it's OK for them to go longer). If they go over and show no sign of wrapping up, we'll usually also prompt them.

If they don't respond to the prompts we may have to "step up" the message and action. Keeping it positive, professional and with rapport is important, while also taking whatever steps are needed to be effective.

5. Poor Speakers

Event organizers, of course, want to have "great" speakers for each event. That's not always possible. But having good speakers, at a minimum, is expected by hosts and attendees alike.

Situation: Apart from the great and good speakers ... are the rest. Most people are afraid of public speaking. That affects their ability to do well. Some speak well onsite but not online. Some speak well but have "material" that may not be interesting or relevant to the target audience. Some may have ability but an off-putting approach (like inappropriate humor or commentary). Some may be mediocre, boring, uninformed, etc.

Solution: Exercising care on the front end is a first step ... by selecting individuals to invite who you either know or have strong reason to believe will do well. Some speakers are fine with sharing their presentation materials in advance. If those materials indicate a problem there's time to act on it ahead of the event.

If the event is underway and a speaker is nervous or boring the Moderator may be able to interject a compliment or comment about a point they made and perhaps ask them a question (that they'll know the answer to), engaging them through rapport skills and making them more comfortable. In an extreme case a skilled Moderator could turn the rest of the program into an interview of sorts, with back and forth between the two.

Rapport skills can also save the day if a speaker uses inappropriate language or conduct, to "lead" them to proper decorum for the event. In some cases the Moderator will have to wait until a presentation concludes and can then summarize it in more lively, engaging or meaningful terms ... and then manage the Q&A process with interesting, insightful commentary and a focus on questions likely to get a better result.

6. Disruptive Participant

In some ways there is less control in the online environment and in some ways more. No matter the venue, disruptive participants can take away from the value that others can gain from an event.

Situation: Though not in the online environment we were once warned by a government client that we may encounter not only disruptive participants but potentially violent individuals objecting to the government policies related to our topic. Their people had already received death threats!

Solution: In the online environment the Moderator can control questions and input from participants as they typically are taken via text (in the event console) rather than aloud. If a Moderator opens up the voice line they need to be prepared to deal effectively with unpredictability and whatever may happen.

In the above example of the onsite event, the disruption did occur (though, fortunately, non-violently) and Marcia used exceptional communication and rapport skills to not allow individuals with apparent intent on ruining the program the opportunity to do so. Rather than simply shutting them down, however, she also listened well to their concerns, treated them respectfully and included them in the discussion ... without detracting from the program or positive experience of other attendees. As it turns out, they felt acknowledged and came up at the end to express their appreciation.

7. No Interaction

Having interaction with audiences as part of your events can make a big difference in keeping them interested as well as getting them to attend the live program rather than their planning to attend an on-demand replay that they may not actually make.

Situation: People often prefer to attend the live version of an online event in order to have the opportunity to ask their questions of presenting experts or hosts. For some past events where strong audience participation appeared likely, and time was blocked for it in the program, few if any questions were asked by those attending.

Solution: Don't assume that the audience will have questions. Sometimes the speakers cover it all and there are none. Sometimes presentations are so content-full or fast that participants don't have time to think of questions. At other times they just don't have any. Figure in your planning that it can go either way. If you block out time for a Q&A period, have an alternative plan in case needed.

8. Speakers End Early

Just as some speakers talk longer than the amount of time requested some end their remarks early.

Situation: Ending a short time early is one thing. Ending way early can disrupt an agenda and leave audiences disappointed or otherwise unhappy. We once had a speaker who was scheduled to present for 20 minutes but actually talked for five minutes and concluded!

Solution: As with other aspects of events, being “ready for anything” is our motto and practice. In the case of the five minute speaker Marcia asked him questions that caused him to elaborate on his topic in ways that fit with the original plans for the presentation.

9. Technology Fails

Technology does many great things. But it's not fail-safe or fool-proof.

Situation: Glitches can occur with Web event technology, recording devices and other technology tools used for online events ... as well as with account access, phones (used for audio on some events), Websites (where event information is posted), Internet access and other forms of technology important for Web-based events.

Solution: We make it a habit to arrive early for events -- in time to address any problems, check and recheck technology in advance and have back-up plans in place (like additional technology tools and a back-up location if needed to air from). Having encountered a range of glitches and limitations in all of the above categories we know what can happen and we plan accordingly. We also do technology run-throughs in advance with presenters to (as part thereof) be sure that they have the needed audio and online access capacity.

10. Bad Weather

Weather is a known variable that can affect online events.

Situation: Fallen trees and limbs from a storm can knock out electric power and storms likewise can disrupt Internet and phone access. If this happens on the host end, continuation of the program can be threatened. On one occasion a hurricane was heading directly our way.

Solution: Though an act of nature “can't be helped”, preparing for the possibility can be. We always check the five and ten day weather forecasts to know what to expect, while also planning for the unexpected (such as stormy weather that wasn't expected to arrive so soon or be so intense). Among other steps, we have back-up batteries and a generator plus a back-up location to go to if needed.

We also keep registrants informed if alternative plans may be needed and what to do were we to be disconnected. In the case of the expected hurricane we sent out an announcement that the event was being postponed and would be rescheduled. With the wind and flooding that came our way, good thing we did!

These are some of the things that can go wrong in hosting an online event. Check out our “Online Event Disasters: What We Did to Avoid, Prevent & Recover” report for more, including our solutions.

For more resources and support come visit us at:

www.**WebEventExperts.com** &

www.TheVirtualSolutionsCenter.com

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