Microsoft Dynamics 365

Turn Event Attendees into Loyal Customers

Virtual events are the new reality

A typical customer's life is radically different from how it was even a year ago. Creating customer events has changed decisively too.

It's not news that restrictions on travel and group gatherings have upended how events are conceived, structured, and managed. What *is* significant is the speed at which the transition to virtual events has happened.

Microsoft Dynamics 365 Marketing offers capabilities that enhance the audience experience before, during, and after your event. It can connect seamlessly with Microsoft Teams to help you run webinars and events and then continue engaging with event attendees, nurturing them into loyal customers.

Virtual events spark greater engagement

Spurred by tumultuous changes in where and how people could meet and events could be held (or not), virtual events have quickly become the option of choice for event organizers.

In the past year, nearly all businesses and organizations involved in meetings or conferences have increased their involvement with virtual events—and a Forbes Communications Council article cites a study showing that event planners are seeing increasing demand for all things virtual over the next 12 to 18 months.[1]

Part of this shift comes from logistic and financial considerations: virtual events don't have the costs of travel, lodging, or meals. Without these considerations, attendees can more readily commit themselves to an event.

However, the move to embrace virtual events is more about connection than convenience. As companies grew their experience with virtual events, additional benefits were revealed: **an impressive 86 percent of the people who attended virtual events reported higher or equal levels of engagement compared to in-person events**[2] and event sponsors were able to more efficiently collect data from attendee interactions.

Most significantly, companies have acted swiftly and decisively to adapt to and adopt virtual events. Industry reporter EventMB's latest research shows that **67 percent of respondents believe hybrid is the future of events**,[3] and **71 percent say they would continue a digital strategy even after live events return**.[3]

86%

of the people who attended virtual events reported higher or equal levels of engagement compared to in-person events.[2]

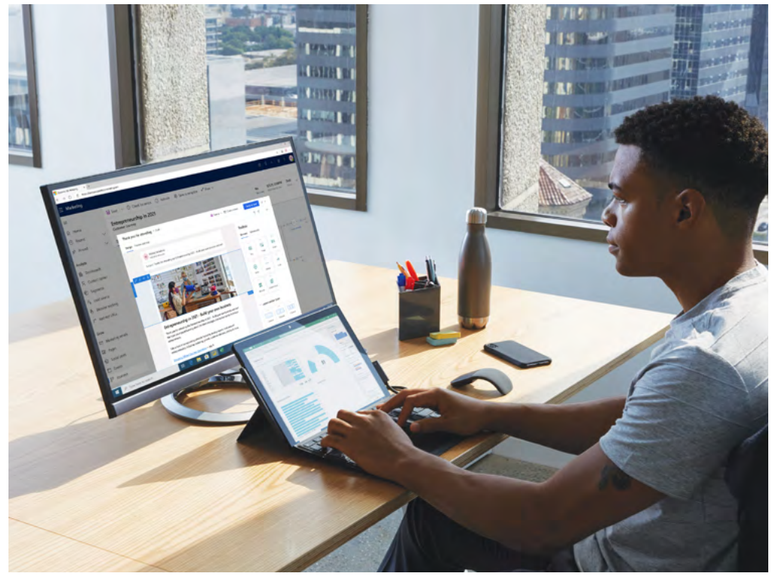
While the shift to virtual events has been dramatic and seismic, there's a strong feeling that in-person events will be back soon. The pandemic's most lasting effect on event marketing will likely be the creation of a permanent and prominent role for hybrid events.

Most event professionals believe in-person events will return in the second half of 2021—with **30%** betting on Q3 and **27.5%** believing they'll return in Q2.[4]

97%

of event marketers feel that hybrid events will become more prominent going forward.[5]

What to do before, during, and after your virtual event



Before: Understand

During: Orchestrate

After: Engage

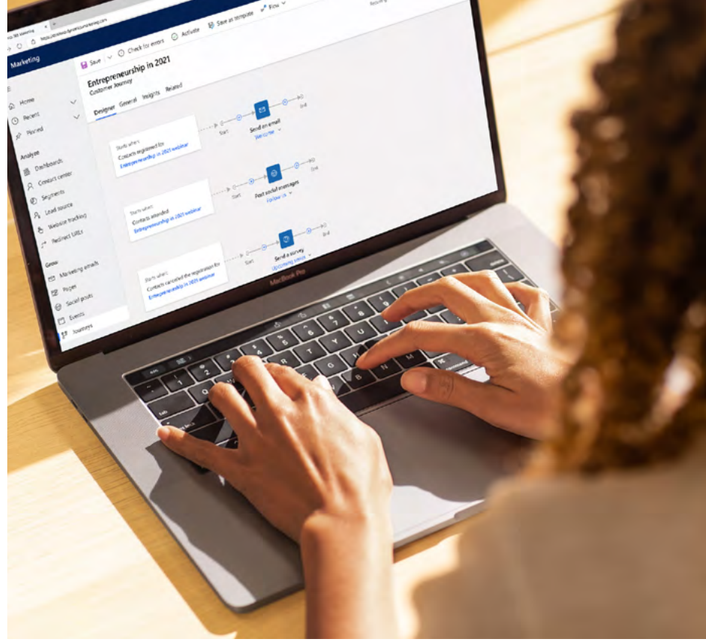
Before: Understand

Audiences that are interested in your event can be hard to find

Finding, nurturing, and acquiring event attendees is challenging enough in ordinary times. These days, also consider the uncertainty of the geographical factor. Where are your attendees? Are they working from home? Is mobile now the best way to reach them? What about social channels or emails? How can you organize a meeting with so many remote participants?

Your event attendees are on the move

With routines disrupted, simply making sure that you reach your attendees is highly challenging. Insights into attendee preferences and message timing help make sure messages are delivered under optimal circumstances. An email versus SMS decision could be the difference between a successful and an underperforming campaign. Mobile and social channels should also play a key role in your event marketing.



Orchestrate customer journeys across multiple channels.

Customer journey orchestration is the way to go

Marketing automation's evolution to customer journey orchestration moves the emphasis from segment-driven campaigns to creating engaging customer experiences. With agile, always-on marketing and insight-based decision-making regarding customers, you can deliver seamless experiences across digital and physical channels.

Mobile and social channels should also play a key role in your event marketing.

Be on your attendees' preferred channels

Most marketing automation apps have the capability to A/B test emails, but more capabilities for experimentation are needed in this new era. Your event marketing technology should use AI insights that enable you to optimize send, optimize channels, and measure the most important KPIs.

Optimize send

Personalize the day of the week and time of day that communications are sent to create the best window for an attendee's response. Dynamics 365 Marketing uses AI to automatically select the best delivery channel.

Optimize channels

Reach out in the channel where an attendee responds best, whether that's SMS, email, or push notification.

Measure the most important KPIs

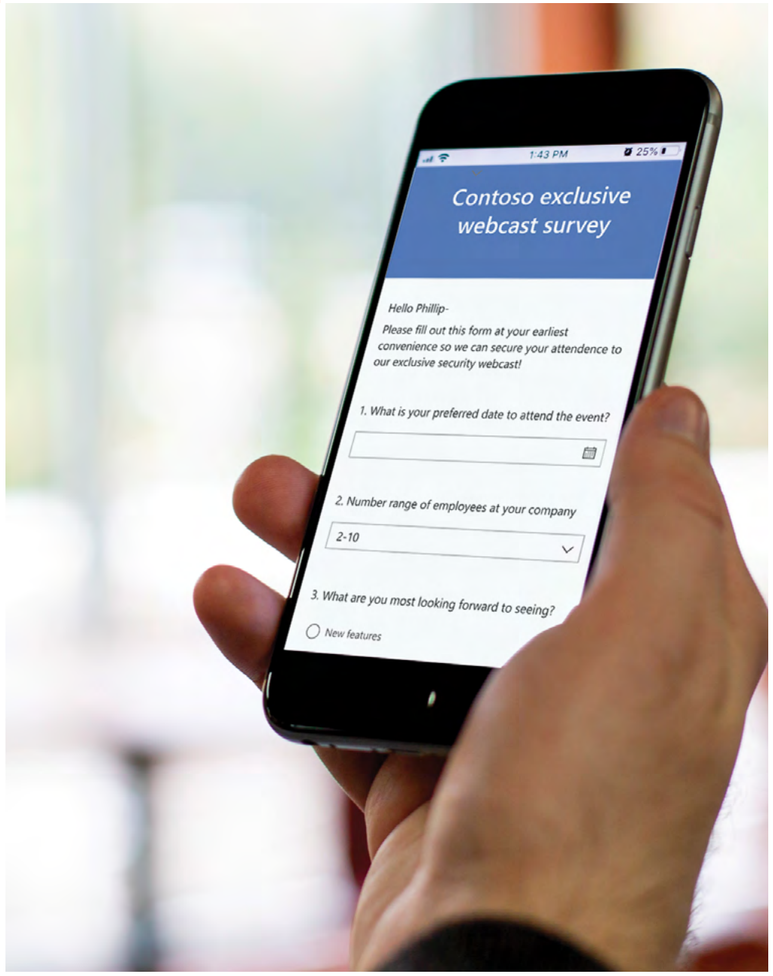
Beyond micro-measures such as opens, how is your content and channel strategy driving the most desired result? If you're losing possible attendees between the message open and the registration page, you need to know why and fix it—fast.

Create a quick, clear path to registration

However you connect with your attendees, make it fast and simple for them to register. (Keep in mind that many of them will be reached on mobile.)

Make it easy to say yes. Highlight the theme, schedule, speakers, and benefits of attending. Make registering as close to a one-click experience as possible, as attendees are now expecting a consumer-like experience across their online activity.[6]

Event organizers can make registration as well as schedule planning easier for their audience by offering the convenience of a web portal, which helps attendees easily view and plan the details of their event experience.



Audience engagement is the primary challenge for virtual events. Interaction is the next greatest.[7]

During: Orchestrate

Organize the elements of your events

Somehow, the occasional mix-ups that happen during an in-person event are magnified if they happen during a virtual event. Maybe it's the attendees' focus on a single screen or a byproduct of not getting any exercise by moving from room to room, but there's a premium on smooth operations and seamless coordination surrounding virtual events.

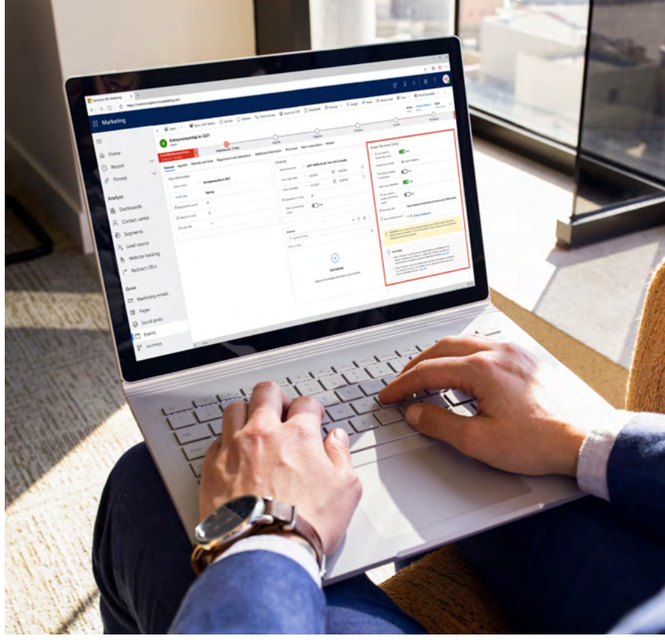
Dynamics 365 Marketing and Microsoft Teams come together to create great, engaging experiences. Within the Microsoft Teams calendar, simply create a webinar just as you would create a Teams meeting. From there, you can require registration and customize the registration form. Live event presenters can share content, video, and audio for rich webinars and events, staying true to your brand and delivering a welcoming experience for attendees.

The seamless connection between Microsoft Teams and Dynamics 365 Marketing is a benefit to both event organizers and attendees.

Make room for relaxation

Even though attendees aren't navigating crowds, they still need to get away sometimes. One of the best ideas for creating some personal space during a virtual event is by making an online networking nook part of your event.

Attendees can go there to network, reflect, and share ideas informally. Virtual events are tightly scheduled, so this oasis can be an unheralded plus for your event. In the networking nook, attendees can mingle and interact with colleagues and other participants in one-on-one conversations, group discussions, and more.



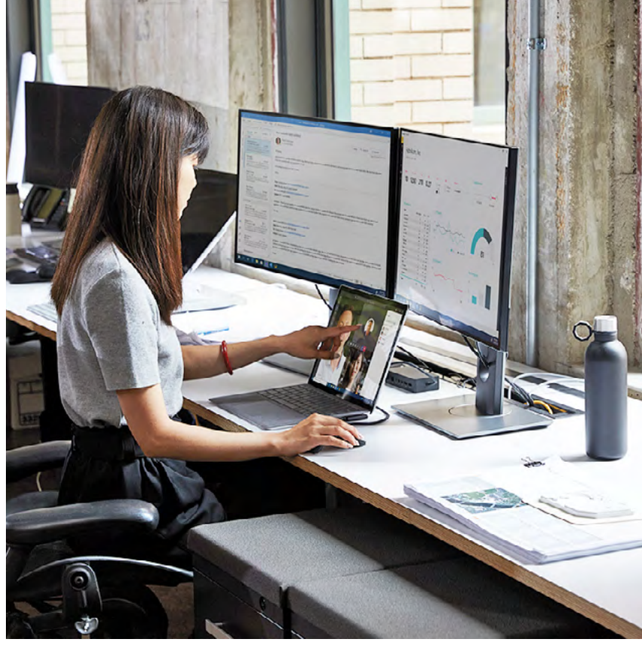
Simplify event planning, management, and streaming with the seamless connection between Dynamics 365 Marketing and Microsoft Teams.

81%

of marketers surveyed agree that virtual events will need to include networking and engagement in addition to learning.[8]

After: Engage

Uncover insights with event data



When your virtual event concludes, you'll have data from registrations, attendance, social interactions, requested and attended meetings, heat maps, and other sources. The importance of this data is increasing due to the guidelines and regulations affecting third-party data under the General Data Protection Regulation and the California Consumer Privacy Act.

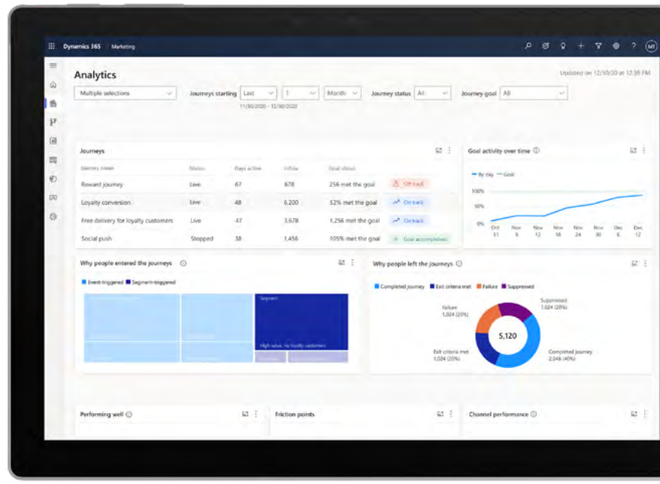
According to the International Association of Privacy Professionals, the world's largest information privacy organization, businesses should operate under "a common understanding that sharing consumer data with third parties has … significant—and sometimes unexpected—consequences" that can result in a greater privacy risk.[9]

Get the most from your event data

As the role of third-party data constricts, first-party data collected directly from customers becomes even more important for building relationships after an online event. With the connection between Microsoft Teams and Dynamics 365 Marketing, event organizers can continue the conversation: attendee information from Teams can be used to create customer segments in Dynamics 365 Marketing, and for each of these segments, a journey can be created to continue nurturing event attendees into loyal customers.

The analytics capability in Dynamics 365 Marketing enables organizations to use direct first-party data to target attendees and drives the ability to experiment with the next action in a journey to optimize results.

As a Forbes Business Development Council post observes, virtual events can provide more precise and actionable data than in-person events. All an attendee's interactions with polls and Q&As, in chats, and at touchpoints throughout event registration and the event itself can help improve future events and power ongoing engagement.[10]



Use analytics for insights into customer participation and engagement at your event.

Balance virtual and in-person events

While virtual events surged to prominence in 2020, organizations should be ready to pursue technology that supports in-person and hybrid events as well—a process that's already underway. eMarketer reports that 58 percent of marketers in the United States and the United Kingdom say they would rethink their events strategy.[11]

That technology—which includes a dedicated event management function, seamless connection with Microsoft Teams, customer journey design and orchestration, and AI-driven recommendations to select and deliver the most involving image or video for your message—is ready now. Keep your attendees engaged for success before, during, and after your events with Dynamics 365 Marketing.

While the world of events is changing at a dizzying pace, the important things remain the same: event attendees still want a seamless and engaging customer journey. Event organizers want event management to be simple and for information gained from contacts to be as relevant as possible. Hyper-personalized journeys that use customer behaviors as triggers provide highly desirable information. Leveraging technology such as Dynamics 365 Marketing helps event organizers create those journeys to turn attendees into loyal customers.

Find out more about Dynamics 365 Marketing

Sources

[1] Forbes
[2] Digital Information World
[3] EventMB
[4] EventMB
[5] MarTech Series
[6] MarTech Today
[7] Markletic
[8] Freeman
[9] International Association of Privacy Professionals
[10] Forbes
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