

HILTON GLOBAL BRAND TEAM

Small Meeting, Big Results: Executing a Highly Collaborative Hybrid Event for a Limited Audience

Overview

This case study will examine how the Hilton Global Brand Organization leadership team executed a small, highly collaborative hybrid event and the key lessons learned related to planning, technology, room setup and virtual platform.

Background

Like every organization within the travel industry, the **Hilton Global Brand Organization** is focused on supporting hotel owners and customers in a time of global crisis. Pre-COVID, a significant topic like this would require an in-person, multi-day meeting to convene leaders for a productive discussion.

Due to COVID-19 travel and safety restrictions, the senior brand leaders in each region outside of the Americas were not able to attend in-person. However, the urgency of the meeting prevented a postponement.

The team decided to conduct a small Hybrid meeting with most leaders attending in-person and those unable to travel participating via web conference.

Method

The setup of this event evolved significantly throughout the planning process, as it became clear that the original solution did not solve for optimal peer-to-peer engagement. The engagement objective was to enable attendees to feel as if they were meeting in a single room. Although the Organization had become accustomed to collaborating virtually, adding an in-person component made the scenario more complex than initially anticipated.

For example, the proposed meeting room setup was a classroom-style room to allow for optimal video recording, but the planning team quickly realized that this would limit collaboration for in-person attendees. They decided to pivot to a u-shape setup, positioning the camera in the middle of the “u” in order to focus on the presenter. Each in-person attendee then used their individual laptops to connect to Microsoft Teams, giving them a view of the virtual participants and the presentation in the front of the room. While beneficial for all attendees, this created a sub-par experience for presenters, as in-person attendees were instead focusing on their laptops.

The event planner also faced the difficult decision of which virtual platform would best facilitate connecting in-person and remote attendees. Robust, customizable platforms are intended for large virtual audiences and are cost-prohibitive for smaller meetings, while more cost-effective web conferencing platforms limit the quality of the participants' viewability when hosting both presentations and attendees simultaneously. Ultimately, Microsoft Teams was selected for the virtual event platform.

Virtual attendees joined from across the globe, prompting an early start time, and the meeting began with introductions and meeting objectives, followed by the first session.

The meeting agenda featured multiple Thrive breaks, designed to ensure that all participants—whether virtual or in-person—had an opportunity to reset and relax.

The agenda concluded with an opportunity for participant feedback.

A sample meeting agenda can be found below:

Introduction	20 Mins (6:00 am–6:20 am) <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Welcome Remarks■ Ice Breaker—Team DNA■ Setting the stage■ Success, Agenda, and Ground Rules
Topic 1	90 Mins (6:20 am–7:50 am)
Break—Thrive!	10 Mins <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Essential oil exercise to spark energy and invigorate
Breakfast	40 min (7:50 am–8:30 am) <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Recharge and caffeinate!
Topic 2	105 Min (8:30 am–10:15 am)
Break—Thrive!	10 Min <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Guided Meditation
Break—Thrive!	10 Min (10:15 am–10:25 am) <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Stretches and movement
KSPs— Topic 3	100 minutes (10:25 am–12:05 pm)
Final Thoughts	20 Mins (12:05pm-12:25pm)



Results

In total, this hybrid event featured 15 participants:

- 11 in-person attendees [7 leaders + 3 presenters + 1 planner]
- 4 virtual attendees

Feedback from attendees was positive:

- *"Overall really good job with the meeting. I felt safe."*
- *"Thank you for all of the efforts that went into this. Again, my biggest takeaway is that it felt normal."*

Conclusion

Overall, both the business and engagement objectives were achieved. All participants noted the meeting “*felt almost normal*,” which was considered a win for the team’s first hybrid meeting.

The following were identified as WINS:

- The in-person attendees were able to join safely and reconnect in-person with peers they hadn’t seen in 7 months
- All participants felt very engaged in the meeting, regardless of whether they participated virtually or in-person
- The team gained significant learnings on how more optimally and cost-effectively execute a similar event in the future
- Sending swag in advance made remote participants feel included in the experience

The following were identified as LESSONS LEARNED:

■ **PLANNING**

- » A hybrid event takes even more time to plan than a live event, regardless of the size and complexity
- » Meeting objectives and intended attendee experience should be the first items discussed when starting the planning process to ensure correct meeting scope
- » Set-up and rehearsal the day before the event is essential for troubleshooting and preparing additional contingency plans

■ **AUDIO-VISUAL**

- » A trackable camera would have worked better in this event than a static, unmanned camera in order to track participants and presenters
- » As a presenter, a room full of attendees with open computers is not ideal
- » As an attendee, having an open laptop during a presentation creates added distraction
- » Consider two screens for a better experience—one showing the virtual attendees and one showing the presentation
- » A technology walkthrough is needed at the start of the meeting so that virtual participants are prepared to troubleshoot themselves (e.g. mute microphones, connecting to Teams, etc.)

■ **WEB CONFERENCING**

- » Become familiar with basic web conferencing platforms (e.g. Webex, MS Teams, Zoom, GoToMeeting, BlueJeans), as it is unlikely someone other than the planner will manage this function for a small meeting. Each platform has different benefits that should be considered based on meeting objectives (e.g. recording, presenter view, white boarding, etc.)
- » Take into account how in-person and virtual attendees will be viewing the on-screen portion of event, as this may impact platform choice