



COVID-19 and How it's Changing the Event Industry

*Global insights from Reed Exhibitions'
COVID-19 Customer Needs and Mindset Barometer*

COVID-19 and How it's Changing the Event Industry shares findings from the *Reed Exhibitions' COVID-19 Customer Needs & Mindset Barometer*, the largest and most ambitious research project ever undertaken by the company, which is helping us to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on customer attitudes to physical and digital events.

When the scale of the global pandemic became clear in early February, there was little in the way of formal, comparable data to help the events industry understand its immediate and longer-term impact on our customers, our events, and our global marketplace.

The Barometer survey reached out to nearly 3,000 of our exhibitors and over 9,000 attendees across 201 events, enabling us to analyse our customers' key concerns and insights at regular intervals, and track changing attitudes to physical events and digital event technology over time.

This important, ongoing research is helping us to constantly evolve and update our technology platforms and services in response to COVID-19. It also offers our industry valuable insights into how we might reshape our events to our customers' advantage, and drive profitability and growth in the future.

Among key findings, the White Paper reveals:

- **How COVID-19 is changing consumer behaviour towards digital technology**
- **Which digital event tools are of the greatest interest to visitors**
- **How increased familiarity with event technology is driving engagement and demand**
- **How exhibitor and visitor belief in the value of face-to-face events hasn't changed**
- **Why digitally augmented events are here to stay**

Importantly, it shows that COVID-19 has not diminished the value of in-person events for participants who are committed to returning as soon as restrictions are lifted. And that customers are increasingly open to the idea of engaging with digital alongside face-to-face.

It also highlights the genuine opportunity digital event tools offer our customers to connect with their peers and prospects, and do business, not only in the absence of physical events, but alongside them when they return.



UNCERTAIN TIMES LEAD TO NEW BEHAVIOURS

The pandemic has had a profound impact on how people live their lives, and is accelerating changes in consumer behaviour. How we work, shop, entertain, communicate and inform ourselves have been transformed, in large part by our willingness to adopt new digital tools and services.

This is clearly reflected in the behaviours of our exhibitors and visitors. **84% of visitors and exhibitors have tried at least one new digital service since lockdown.** These findings support Kantar's March 2020 report on new consumer behaviours in which 84% said they tried at least one new service.

Acceptance of digital tools is increasing over time, too. On average, our visitors had tried 3.3 new digital services in June, while exhibitors had tried 3.2 services. By September, the numbers had increased to 3.5 and 3.6 respectively, driven by a willingness to try new online banking services, medical consultations, shopping and streaming services.

These changes in behaviour are likely to have long term implications for our industry.





THE WORLD'S LARGEST DIGITAL GAMES EVENT

Digital savvy gamers have been amongst the quickest to embrace online events. Running over 9 days, across three continents, PAX Online x EGX Digital reached nearly 13 million unique users, offering fans a way to play, spectate and interact from home. Streaming around the clock on a purpose-built ReedPop platform, the mammoth event was delivered via YouTube, Twitch and the Discord chat channel.

The virtual event hall showcased **289 games/products**, of which 247 were playable live. **329 panels were broadcast**, over 7 million videos were viewed and nearly 1 million chat messages were generated over the course of the event. **77% of attendees said they would like a digital component to a live event moving forward.**

PAX
ONLINE



EGX
DIGITAL



EVENT GOERS ARE INCREASINGLY OPEN TO DIGITAL AND VIRTUAL TOOLS

Behavioural change is already shaping the future of events. As new technologies become part of our everyday lives, our willingness to adapt is reflected in attitudes to online events.

Over the course of the tracking survey, the number of visitors who say they would like to carry out one or more event activities digitally whilst they are unable or unwilling to attend in person is significant, and has increased consistently, from 91% in June to 94% in September.

Asked about their interest in specific digital tools, over half of our visitors (51%) expressed an interest in webinars, supporting our finding that 41% have tried online learning since the start of COVID-19. Encouragingly, the next two digital event tools of interest are live meetings software (43%) and a searchable database of content (42%), despite these tools being less widely available pre COVID-19.

Top 4 Digital Tools of Interest to Visitors



51%
Webinars



43%
Live meetings software



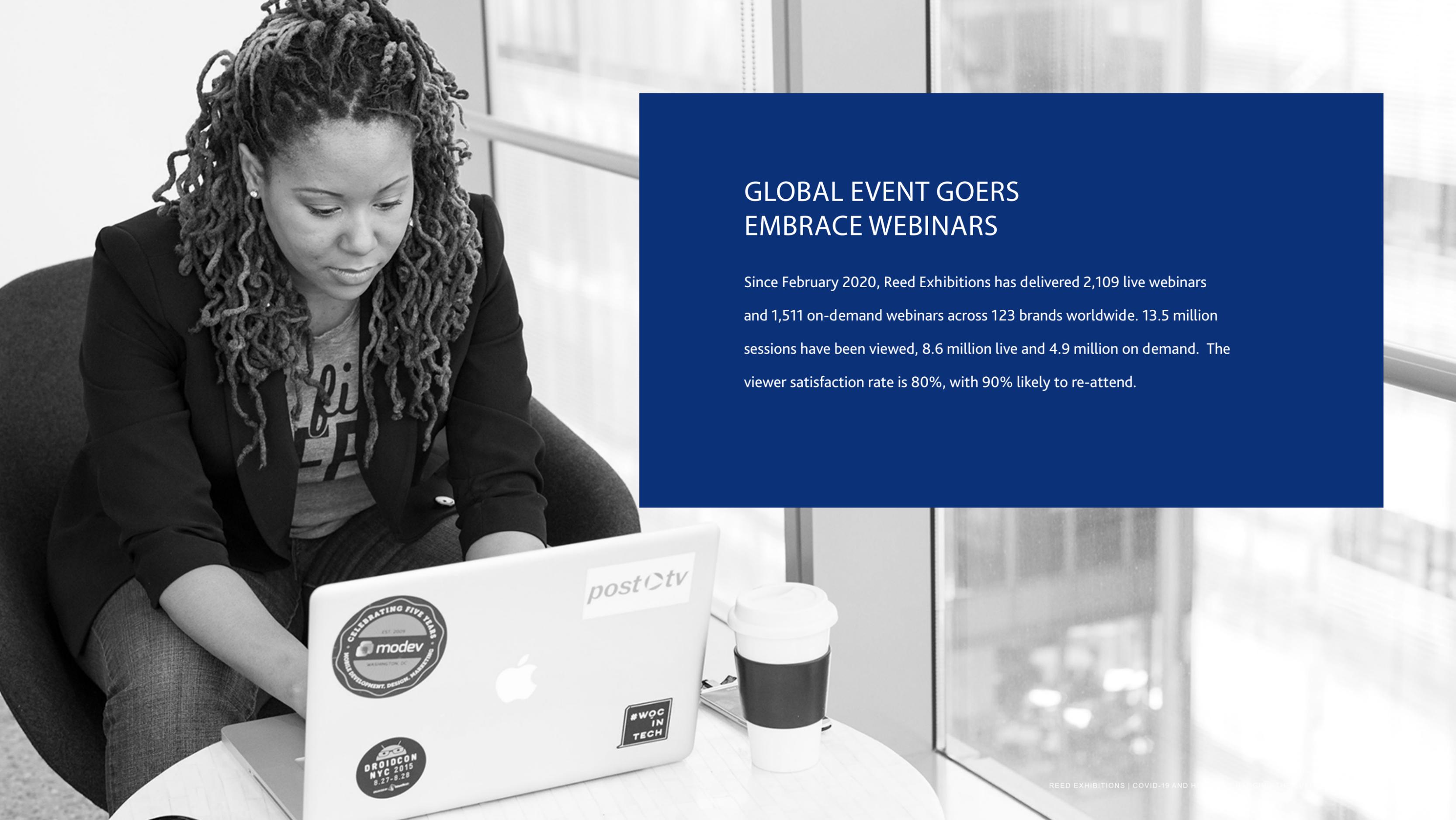
42%
Searchable database of content



37%
Fully immersive event experience

Visitor agreement with all positive statements around digital have also increased. 59% of visitors now say they would be likely to sign up to attend an online trade event, up from 57% in June. The percentage who believe that they can still carry out the majority of their event objectives online is also increasing, up from 52% to 57%.

Exhibitors are more cautious about online tools than visitors, and their attitudes remain steady. 43% believe that they can still carry out the majority of their event objectives online, although those that strongly agree with this statement has risen significantly from 12% to 16%. Verbatim responses reveal that one of their key concerns is that attendees will not engage in digital events – a belief not borne out by attendee data.



GLOBAL EVENT GOERS EMBRACE WEBINARS

Since February 2020, Reed Exhibitions has delivered 2,109 live webinars and 1,511 on-demand webinars across 123 brands worldwide. 13.5 million sessions have been viewed, 8.6 million live and 4.9 million on demand. The viewer satisfaction rate is 80%, with 90% likely to re-attend.

DIGITAL EVENT FAMILIARITY DRIVES ENGAGEMENT AND DEMAND

Event organisers have been quick to respond to the challenges of COVID-19, and have made remarkable progress developing and deploying technology to keep customers connected and informed. Early in the pandemic, webinars dominated the virtual landscape, but the past few months have seen a significant increase in the provision of meeting platforms, live content streaming, interactive directories, digital showcases, online networking tools, content hubs and more.

Our research shows that those customers who have experience of digital tools are more likely to have a positive attitude towards them, suggesting that **engagement with digital activities** increases with familiarity and exposure. For example, for travel events such as World Travel Market (WTM) and International Luxury Travel Market (ILTM), which have a long tradition of using online meeting tools to arrange physical meetings, participants are much more comfortable with the idea of using live meeting software in a digital environment (62% for WTM and 61% for ILTM compared to 50% overall).

Top 4 Digital Event Behaviours of Interest to Visitors



Top 4 Digital Event Behaviours of Interest to Exhibitors



Digital activity interest is closely aligned to the nature of the physical event. For example, for events catering for the creative industries, such as broadcasting and publishing, exhibitors are significantly more likely to be interested in digital tools that enable them to socialise and network with their peers. Similarly, for more retail orientated events exhibitors are more interested in tools that help them to generate leads and make direct sales.

Exhibitors are maturing in their understanding of what works online, with **over half now believing that online events can work for content sharing and learning objectives (up from 48% at the start of the survey)**. Our challenge now is to help them overcome their greater wariness of tools with which they are less familiar, such as meeting platforms and product showcases, which offer them a genuine opportunity to connect with prospects and stimulate sales, not only in the absence of physical events, but alongside them when they return.



VALUE IN VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Virtual meeting technology has been transformed during COVID-19, enabling businesses to maintain vital sales channels. During the third week of October, IGTM, the global expo for golf travel professionals, went virtual, becoming IGTM Links. The digital edition focused on delivering pre-scheduled appointments, keeping it as close as possible to the live event. 653 exhibiting companies and 402 qualified buyers took part. 10,356 online meetings were arranged of which 9,671 were attended, a conversion rate of 93%. Participants gave the meetings an average rating of 4.7 out of 5.

DIGITAL PRODUCT SHOWCASES DELIVER



ISC West Virtual Event offered exhibitors the opportunity to showcase their products and services through enhanced and fully customisable landing pages. 53 exhibitors took advantage of the chance to brand their own pages and include videos, contact widgets and links to their own websites. Their digital showcases attracted an average of 212 page views, generating 85 leads per page.

CUSTOMERS CONTINUE TO VALUE FACE TO FACE EVENTS AND WILL RETURN

COVID-19 has not diminished the value of in-person events for participants who are committed to returning as soon as restrictions are lifted.

Throughout the period of the tracking survey, the **importance of events has remained consistent** for both exhibitors and visitors, demonstrating that even as new technology is being trialled and accepted, traditional events remain an important tool for our customers.

Health and safety is a key concern for exhibitors and visitors and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. The expectation of COVID-19 precautions, including social distancing, masks, disinfectant and contactless technology, has become so commonplace as to be regarded as standard practice.

Over time we are seeing small but statistically significant increases in the percentage of both visitors and exhibitors who state they will be comfortable attending events after safety and travel restrictions have eased. Currently, **three-quarters of visitors feel either positive or neutral about returning to events, compared to 56% of exhibitors.**

While exhibitors remain sure they will spend less while the pandemic continues to unfold and prior to there being a vaccine, **around two-thirds of exhibitors expect to return to normal levels (or spend more) once a vaccine is deployed.**

In the meantime, **the appeal of hybrid events which offer remote buying and selling opportunities for visitors and exhibitors unable to attend physical events in person, is increasing.** 44% of visitors currently find the idea appealing, up from 39% in June. Exhibitors are less sure, but are coming round to the idea with the number rejecting it down from 50% in June to 45%.

2 OUT OF 3
EXHIBITORS
EXPECT TO SPEND
THE SAME OR MORE
ON EXHIBITIONS
ONCE A VACCINE IS
DEPLOYED.



REMOTE LEAD GENERATION FOR NON-ATTENDING EXHIBITORS

Reed Exhibitions Japan has responded to COVID-19 with an innovative new range of 'remote exhibiting' options which enable exhibitors to continue generating vital sales without attending its hybrid events in person. The remote exhibit plan gives exhibitors a virtual booth from which they can reach out to non-attending buyers for video chats and calls, and share product information. They also have a physical booth, manned by a trained interpreter, who engages onsite visitors, hands out samples, collects business cards and connects prospects with remote exhibitors via virtual on-stand meetings. Over 200 exhibitors, many international, have taken advantage of the opportunity to date.



DIGITALLY AUGMENTED EVENTS ARE HERE TO STAY

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on our industry, but it is also changing our events in ways that are truly exciting for our customers.

Once considered a 'nice to have', digital event technology has become a 'must have' for many organisations determined to maintain vital business connections during the pandemic. And our survey shows that our customers are increasingly open to the idea of engaging with digital alongside in-person events as they return. In our most recent tracking survey, **65% of visitors and 57% of exhibitors believe digital will continue to work for events after COVID-19.**

Contactless technology is mentioned by exhibitors and visitors as an important way of making attendees feel more comfortable at an event, with **76% of visitors saying it would offer them reassurance.** In a post COVID-19 world, it will also speed up registration and entrance, and facilitate business connections and information exchange.

As we look to the future, we must continue to transform our events to reflect changing customer behaviours and expectations, building on the enormous technological advances of the past few months.

By combining the power of face-to-face with the breadth and reach of digital we can create truly immersive, interactive and inclusive event experiences. Events that not only deliver onsite, but remotely engage far wider global audiences. Events that add value for our existing customers - and appeal to new ones - in ways that they, and we, could never previously have imagined.

Visitor Expectations of Contactless Safety Measures at Events



52%

Contactless business cards



45%

Digital rather than physical badge



49%

Contactless payment, entry and parking



40%

Access event information without using a brochure or on-site digital screen



IN-PERSON AND ONLINE – A MODEL FOR THE FUTURE



Forced to postpone twice by COVID-19, MIPIM, the international property market was reimagined as a hybrid event. MIPIM Paris Real Estate Week (14-17 September) combined a safe physical gathering of over 1,100 real estate professionals, livestreamed across social media, with a sophisticated online platform, opening the content and meetings up to an additional 7,000 virtual attendees from the international property community. The digital platform enabled remote speakers, including Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, to seamlessly join the live debates, and participants from all over the world to network with their peers, engage with the event's essential content, generate new leads, and arrange one2one meetings, both live and on-demand.

METHODOLOGY

Designed and managed by Reed Exhibitions' Global Digital Insights team, the COVID-19 Customer Needs and Mindset Barometer is a quantitative online tracking survey involving 2,863 exhibitors and 9,270 attendees across 201 events and 17 business units – Australia, Brazil, China, Germany, India, Italy, Mexico, Middle East, Reed Expositions France, Reed MIDEM, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, UK, USA and Vietnam. Launched in June 2020, the survey has been conducted monthly through to October, and will continue on a bi-monthly basis from November.

EXHIBITOR AND VISITOR PROFILES



ABOUT REED EXHIBITIONS

Reed Exhibitions is a leading global events business. It combines face-to-face with data and digital tools to help customers learn about markets, source products and complete transactions at over 500 events in almost 30 countries across 43 industry sectors, attracting more than 7 million participants.

Our events, organised by 35 global offices, leverage industry expertise, large data sets and technology to enable our customers to generate billions of dollars of revenues for the economic development of local markets and national economies around the world. Reed Exhibitions is part of RELX, a global provider of information-based analytics for professional and business customers.

CONTACT US

Sarah Kitley-Spencer

Corporate Communications & Marketing Manager

Sarah.Kitley-Spencer@reedexpo.co.uk

Layla Northern

Global Head of Digital Customer Insights

Layla.Northern@reedexpo.co.uk

REED EXHIBITIONS CHANNELS

