



PLEASE DON'T HOST  
*Sucky*  
HYBRID CONFERENCES

A GUIDE TO DESIGNING AMAZING HYBRID EXPERIENCES

HAWKSAGENCY.COM





# GUIDE OVERVIEW

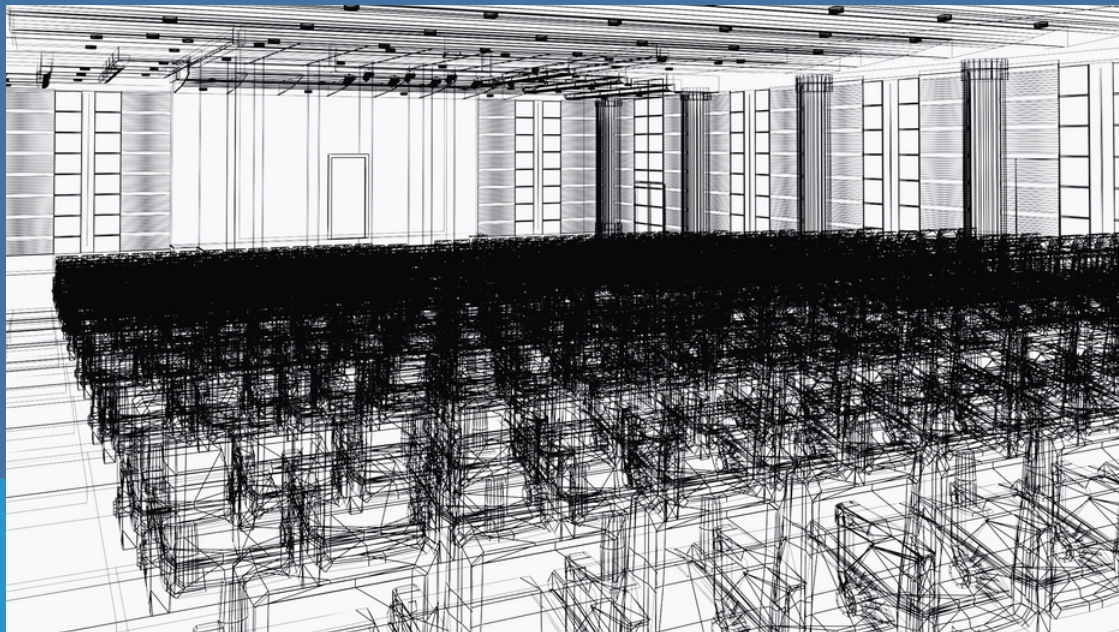
Hybrid events are a bold move.

Most tend to think of a hybrid conference as two elements merging: in-person plus virtual equals hybrid. However, what's really happening is you are adding one big room with multiple attendees to hundreds of other attendees, each in their own individual rooms virtually. Taking that reality into consideration is vital for how you design a hybrid experience.

Hosting a fully produced live conference while also delivering a compelling and engaging virtual component takes significant effort! Unfortunately, many are coming up mediocre on both ends. This Guide gives you the blueprint to design a smartly structured encounter that produces astonishing results.

Whether an association event or employee gathering, the goal is to create a sense of *connected togetherness* where effective learning transpires. Easy enough... sort of... if we didn't have challenges like technology, time zones, distractions, poor pacing, uncontrollable environments, muted interaction and clunky scheduling.

Making the on-site production cohesive and complimentary with the virtual platform is possible! Intentionally encompassing all nine design elements with a little creativity will ensure success. This Guide will succinctly and specifically equip you to sketch out every aspect on your own. After going through the Guide if you still feel you need support, we would love to collaborate with you for your next event.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Greg Hawks". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Greg Hawks



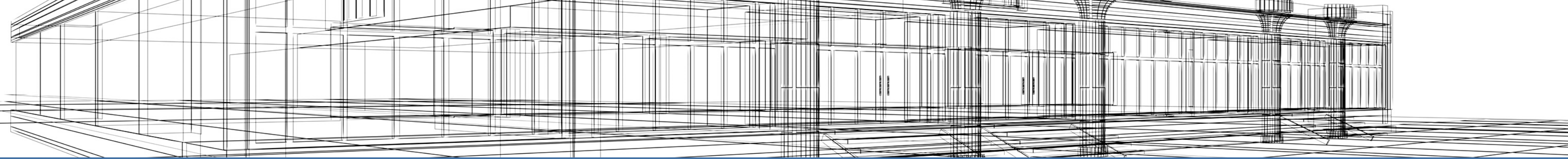
## CONSIDER THIS

IN-PERSON + VIRTUAL = THE HYBRID EXPERIENCE

Here are the Nine Design Elements to consider when composing all aspects of your Hybrid Conference.

1. Platform
2. Agenda
3. Vendors
4. Host
5. Administration
6. Partners
7. Speakers
8. Production
9. Budget





# PLATFORM

When considering your platform selection, use these principles as a filter:

- Is the navigation natural and obvious?
- Can both the virtual and in-person audience engage and chat easily?
- Are there options for live and pre-recorded videos?
- Are all uploaded materials easy to access?
- Can both audiences share and post pictures within the app?
- Are video breakout rooms possible?
- Is two-way live interactions through the app possible? (useful for hybrid panels)
- Do sponsors & exhibitors have an ability to connect in meaningful ways?
- Will the technology work seamlessly on phones, tablets and computers?
- Is the backend functional and useful for non-techy people?

The choice for your online platform will be the architecture for your virtual success. There are numerous platforms available with varying costs. We love using one particular platform, because it provides critical components in a user-friendly way.

Once you have narrowed it down to a few potential candidates, make sure to test the platform's customer service. There are always issues, even if just user error. The platform's customer service needs to be quick and accurate when problems arise. Get access to a demo and set up a mock event. Experience it from both the administrative and user sides.

We rely heavily on the idea of Begin-With-the-End-In-Mind. When the conference is over, what do we want the virtual attendees saying? What do we want them to take away from their time investment. How do we want them to feel? The virtual platform defines the space for them to learn, engage, connect and have fun. It can't be overstated, the platform you select will entirely impact their overall conference experience, so take your time on this step.



“WHAT’S REQUIRED IS A LITTLE  
INTENTIONALITY AND CREATIVITY.”

GREG HAWKS

YOUR AUDIENCE WILL THANK YOU

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Being intentional and creative when crafting your agenda provides momentum-boosters throughout the day. It only takes a few bursts to keep audiences strongly engaged during the entire experience.

Let’s brainstorm!  
Click to set up a conversation!



# AGENDA

Equally important to the platform is the agenda! We call it Day Designing. It's like interior designing. Your 8-4 time-frame is an empty room. How you arrange, decorate and present it will make it drab or beautiful, electric or dull, creative or sad.

All conferences adhere to a standard format: welcome, opening keynote, breakout sessions, breaks, panels, closing keynote, evening social, repeat. It lacks the thoughtfulness needed for boosting momentum at just the right times. Our best in-person efforts typically are afternoon snacks intended to sugar up attendees to keep them going through the rest of the day. When combining in-person plus virtual, being deliberate about designing the day so it flows effortlessly while captivating the attention of the audience in both places is difficult yet critical. Especially for the online attendees. Capturing their attention so they don't want to miss anything going on is imperative for making their experience even better than the in-person one

## INTENTIONALITY AND CREATIVITY

Every room you walk into is shaped by an environment that is conducive for something. Same with every agenda. Uniquely design the schedule in such a way that your audience is energized, delighted and never disconnects! Every day can end with them wanting more.



# AGENDA

## BE INTENTIONAL

- What you communicate to the in-person audience before the camera rolls for the online attendees.
- How far away the camera is from the speaker. The online attendees need to be able to see their eyes clearly.
- Creating interaction with both in-person and online attendees via the app.
- Pacing the sessions and the time in between.
- Never leaving the online audience with a blank static screen - EVER!

## BE CREATIVE

- Every break must fascinate the online audience. (quick interviews, games, silly antics, giveaways, etc.)
- Reduce afternoon sessions to shorter segment times and/or multiple rapid-fires. (A variety of 20-30 minute, 3-5 minute and tag-team speaking)
- Offer opportunities for in-person and online attendees to participate in an activity together. (As simple as polling, as complex as scavenger hunts.)
- Find ways for online attendees to feel they are getting MORE value than in-person attendees. (Bonus offerings from speakers, exhibitors, etc., exclusive opportunities for ONLY online-attendees)
- Continually foster communication between all attendees.

# VENDORS

## Exhibitors and Sponsors

The financial engine of your conference is vendors. They are your annual partners who contribute in a meaningful way while providing valuable products and services to your attendees.

When the world went virtual, many had a difficult time figuring out how to offer equitable value to their vendors. We discovered several meaningful ways! Turns out the virtual platforms offer WAY MORE value than the in-person experience. Many people dismissed the online advantages because vendors thought standing at a table, passing out tchotchkes and talking to people face-to-face was the best way to market themselves.

Simply put, the virtual platform is superior to the in-person encounter. Hybrid events uniquely offer vendors opportunities to reach potential clients accurately and purposefully through both aspects. Leveraging the benefits of each will generate new revenue streams.



# VENDORS

## WHY THE VIRTUAL PLATFORM IS BETTER FOR VENDORS:

- Access to audience weeks before the conference starts (e.g., marketing campaigns, one-on-one conversations, and give-aways.)
- Ability to create communities around service/products before, during and after the conference. (Any topic is possible. Meetups are too.)
- The audience has 24-hour access to the virtual booth before, during and after the conference.
- Attendee's information is accessible. No spamming! (e.g., qualifying leads, discovering ideal clients, making one-on-one connections.)
- Hosting demonstrations live and pre-recorded; before, during and after the conference.
- Utilize multiple means to get their information.
- Establish brand distinction by active participation in the conference.

The extraordinary advantage for vendors is ACCESS. They can interact with attendees two weeks PRIOR to the conference starting. They can host a meetup or do an entire campaign, all before the conference even starts! During and after the conference, how they interact with attendees is multi-faceted and personal.

If the Vendors have an objective for the conference - what they want to get out of it - utilizing the virtual platform gives them enormous flexibility in attempting to achieve those goals.

The pushback from Vendors is they love face-to-face interactions. The problem is, they can only have one interaction at a time, which are limited to the breaks and ONLY with in-person attendees.

When vendors are educated on the possibilities of the platform, they understand the tremendous opportunity for many more meaningful engagements with qualified potential customers.





# THE HOST

The host is the architect leading the audience throughout the designed day, facilitating connected togetherness.



# HOST

## Characteristics of a great host:

- Energy
- Pacing
- Understands how to connect through the camera
- Playful and spontaneous
- Able to banter with anyone
- Customizes brief activities
- Understands momentum
- Fun

This role is the most critical for the Hybrid conference. Typically, an in-person conference relies on conference chairs, sponsors, CEO's and volunteers. They are sufficient, but not dynamic. For a Hybrid Conference, if you disregard the importance of filling this position with an outstanding host, your virtual audience will be significantly less engaged.

EVERY TIME A SCREEN GOES SILENT, the virtual audience disengages! It's not like in-person where they get up, move and start talking to other people or heading for coffee. For the virtual attendee, it's like the conference has ended. Their mind, focus and attention drifts to everything around them, even if it's just a 10-minute break. The host keeps them connected.

This is why it is extremely important for you to think about the virtual audience as individuals in solitary spaces. When the screen stops generating activity, you have essentially turned off all the lights in the person's room. The host illuminates those in-between moments for an "always on" occurrence.

We are adamant when designing days that after every session, keynote, panel, etc, there is a 5 to 15 minute break. During that break we engage full on with the virtual audience. Ironically, it is what makes them feel the most connected to the conference and generates an enormous amount of energy in their home or office.



# ADMINISTRATION

This feels obvious. Of course managing registration, communication, marketing, working with speakers, vendors, hotels, food services is a massive undertaking. The function of planning all the details for an event is ginormous. Many conferences already use an app as well for attendees to follow the agenda, read about the speakers, learn about the exhibitors and more.

Coordinating a Hybrid Conference has a lot of crossover, but there are some distinct elements for those only attending virtually that may require a bit of extra attention. Technical assistance being the primary one. Even after all the time we have spent in the virtual world, there still seems to be a learning curve with some attendees on how to access and utilize an app effectively, whether on a phone, tablet or computer.

Having an appropriate amount of tech support for the first morning is essential. It can be drastically reduced the second day.

Administrators are the engineers of this beautifully designed experience keeping everything working smoothly.



# PARTNERS

## COLLABORATE

Don't do it alone.

Enlist collaborators who can carry portions of the conference. Both volunteers and paid partners can provide so much relief and benefit.

You'll want to create a list of expectations with timelines. In this business both paid and volunteers can slide past deadlines with ease and excuses. Defining parameters for success up front helps hugely with accountability, and keeps things moving forward.

## COMMUNICATE

Set Partner Expectations:

- You're on a team and every part is dependent on the other.
- Meet every deadline, without exception.
- Being a part of regularly scheduled group calls is essential, even if we're not discussing your area at the moment.
- We all can offer ideas to others outside our designated area of responsibility.
- Excellence is the goal.
- Open communication about what is or is not working is expected.

## INNOVATE

You don't have to do it all. Vendors & Speakers are prime candidates for involvement at a greater level, as are third-party contractors who can be elevated to team status. There are innovative ways to foster a team that offers opportunities and facilitates an amazing event. Be bold in your asking.

Many avoid enlisting outside help because of the cost. They neglect the possibility that joining forces could open up new funding sources. Don't doodle alone!

“Formatting the delivery of content is another decision to be made. Will the virtual offerings happen before, during or after the live gathering? Is it simultaneous or shifted? With so many options, what makes the most sense for your audience?”

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GREG HAWKS

Let's work together on this!  
Click here to chat.







# SPEAKERS

SELECTING KEYNOTE SPEAKERS IS ALWAYS A TIME-CONSUMING, CHALLENGING ENDEAVOR. GETTING THE RIGHT ONE, WITH THE RIGHT TOPIC THAT SPEAKS TO THE THEME AND DESIRED OUTCOME IS NOT EASY. LAYER ON TOP OF THAT, NOW THEY HAVE TO SPEAK IN TWO PLACES AT ONE TIME. THEY CAN'T JUST SPEAK TO THE LIVE AUDIENCE, AS NORMAL, OR THEY WON'T MAKE ANY CONNECTION WITH THE VIRTUAL AUDIENCE. IF THEY FOCUS ENTIRELY ON THE CAMERA, THEY RISK ALIENATING THE IN-PERSON AUDIENCE.

OFFERING GUIDELINES FOR HOW THEY DELIVER THEIR MESSAGE HAS BECOME A NECESSARY COMPONENT FOR THE SPEAKING BUSINESS. IT CAN BE AS SIMPLE AS TIPS AND TRICKS OR IT CAN ESCALATE TO FULL CHOREOGRAPHY OF THEIR MARKS AND TIMING.

THE AMOUNT OF BREAKOUT SPEAKERS NEEDED IS ALWAYS HUGE. WORKING WITH THEM TO CREATE HIGH IMPACT VIDEOS IS A CRITICAL CONVERSATION AS WELL.





# SPEAKERS

## Speaker Considerations:

- Provide a video template for all pre-recorded speakers to utilize.
- In-person speakers engage with the virtual audience during breaks.
- Require all pre-recorded messages to include prompts for discussions during their conversation, while the speaker remains silent.
- For live keynotes, have designated cameras for in-person and virtual.
- Create gamification from the speakers handout/notes, so both the virtual and in-person audiences can play along.
- Designate one room as the virtual room, with all in-person presentations streaming to the platform, making that the only virtual audience's option.
- Don't get hung up on slide show templates. Put all of your energies into the quality, format and way the speaker presents via video.

Speakers are still the central reason people attend (well... and to get professional development credits). Audiences may watch a speaker in-person, live streaming, or pre-recorded which opens the possibilities for configuring a speaker roster in a very dynamic way.

Everyone recognizes that real-time chat allows for an enormous amount of learning and application. Mimicking that kind of interaction during an in-person event is one of the important ways in-person learns from virtual.

The speaker is the gathering mechanism. Formulate a room schematic that enables the audience to be active participants simultaneously during a live presentation.



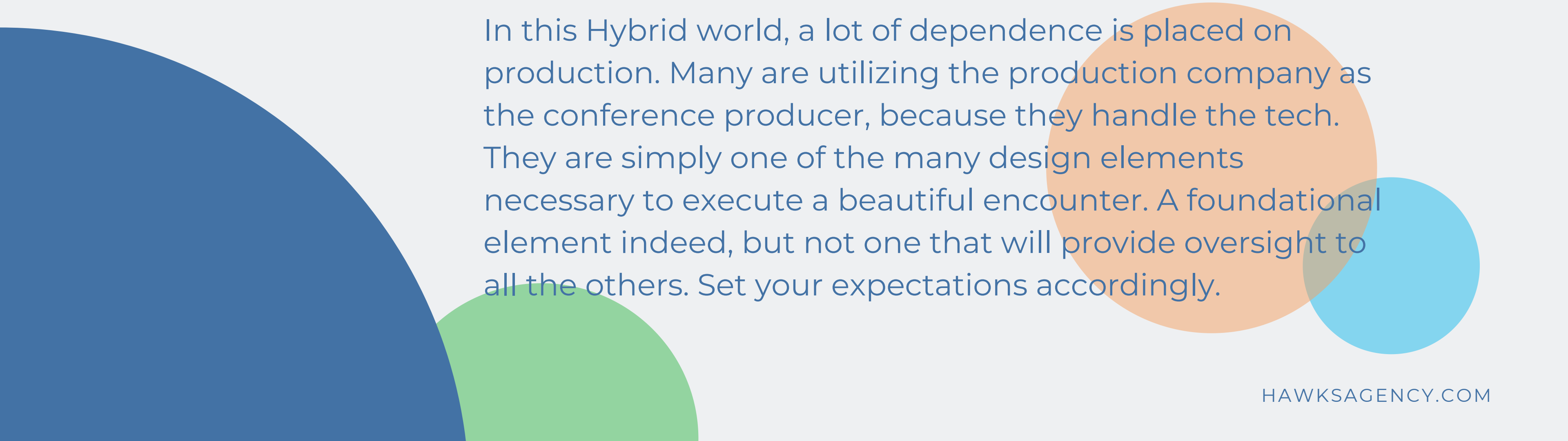
# PRODUCTION

How everything gets delivered to the virtual audience is through production. Lights, camera, sound and video work together to showcase the in-person experience for the virtual audience. Interfacing with the app, this technology will have its strengths and weaknesses exposed. Because of the many factors to consider and a huge variety of costs, it can be overwhelming.

The good news is with modern videography, a production system can be configured at a moderate cost. The size of the in-person audience will determine how many cameras you need and at what locations in the room.

## Keep in mind a few things:

- It doesn't have to be an astronomical expense. Price shop and compare. Hotel AV can be 3x more expensive than a third-party company.
- Use the production to bring the virtual audience CLOSER to the people involved, not further away. No wide shots necessary.
- Sound is equally, if not more, critical than video.
- Internet speed is everything. Having a dedicated Virtual line separate from the in-person WiFi is preferred. Double-down on getting clarity about bandwidth and usage.
- Consider purchasing your own cameras and gear and hiring your own operators. This could save you substantially.
- There is a delay in the broadcast signal.



**PRODUCTION** tends to be the scariest part because it's the most unknown. Having someone who can go through proposals and describe what each item is and its true worth is such a valuable asset. Get competing bids and let vendors educate you as well.

In this Hybrid world, a lot of dependence is placed on production. Many are utilizing the production company as the conference producer, because they handle the tech. They are simply one of the many design elements necessary to execute a beautiful encounter. A foundational element indeed, but not one that will provide oversight to all the others. Set your expectations accordingly.



“Many are tempted to invest as little in the online experience as possible and hope having a great in-person event will connect well to the virtual world. It won't. Spending smartly on the key elements of the virtual piece is essential.”

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GREG HAWKS

Let's make your event amazing!  
Click here to connect.



# BUDGET

## A few revenue thoughts:

- The biggest possibility is with your exhibitors and sponsors. Sell in-person and virtual separately.
- Another is the add-on upsell of the conference package.
- Pricing the conference smartly making sure there is a distinction between cost, services and value.
- Selling commercials on the virtual platform, beyond exhibitors and sponsors. (e.g., local restaurants, adventures, etc.)

Everything comes down to money! A Hybrid conference is more expensive simply because it's two conferences. You have all the expense of the in-person gathering as well as the virtual platform and all that it requires.

Instead of trying to cut costs on both sides which will only produce mediocrity, why not consider new revenue streams a Hybrid conference affords? Because costs are spread across two conferences, you can also generate revenue from both sides.

Depending on location, venue, conference mission, etc., there are several more places income-generating ideas can be applied.

The biggest mistake you'll make is cutting cost everywhere because the expenses are significantly more. The solution is generate more revenue.





## IN CONCLUSION

Don't be the person who hosts a sucky Hybrid conference! Taking a live conference, putting up a camera in the back of the room, broadcasting it out and calling that Hybrid is the mistake many are making. Please, for the love of every one of your attendees, don't do that!

Use this Guide to design your own amazing experience. You are welcome to call or email if you need more assistance in pulling off something spectacular! We love to collaborate, brainstorm and partner in a way that facilitates all the necessary design elements, making your conference a success!

Being intentional and creative are the two most important design-minded gems to bring to your Hybrid conference creating connected togetherness!

Our mission at Hawks Agency is to shape environments where everyone gets to contribute their best daily. With Hybrid conferences we are right in the middle of what we do best. We have the capacity to produce your entire conference providing oversight and insight to all nine design elements. Or we can be utilized in any one of the individual elements. Let us partner with you and shape the most compelling experience for your audience!

Please Don't Host a Sucky Hybrid Conference!

# PEOPLE WHO TRUST US



HEIDI HARTMAN  
OKHR

"Greg (Hawks Agency) really was an instrumental part of the committee! He just joined in, brought such energy to the group with new creative ideas we implemented. We got such incredible feedback on it too!"

Association Event  
[LINK TO INTERVIEW](#)



RANDY NAIL  
HOGANTAYLOR

"After working with Greg for 10 years, I believe even going virtual we were able, with Greg's leadership, to provide a high energy, very well produced professional product to our people. And we got rave reviews about it!"

Employee Event  
[LINK TO INTERVIEW](#)



KAREN BREAUX  
GBR SHRM

"We could not have pulled it off without Greg's help! Anyone who is wanting to put on a virtual conference; I'm talking about someone who takes it from 'can to can', from beginning to end. And you don't have anything to worry about but your agenda, your speakers; and he can even help with that too! We couldn't have been more pleased with the work he did for us."

Association Event  
[LINK TO INTERVIEW](#)



# PEOPLE WHO TRUST US



BECKY KINGTON  
MONTANA WEED CONTROL

"Greg's confidence with the platform, and just working with him took so much pressure off me. I was so grateful and he was such a delight to work with!"

Association Event  
[LINK TO INTERVIEW](#)



KYLA HEAP  
FBMC

"We have used Greg and the Hawks Agency four times already, and we aren't planning on stopping. When we went virtual we asked, 'How are we going to keep clients connected and wanting to join?' Then we thought, Greg and the Hawks Agency know how to do that! No better person to bring on to help with that!"

Client Event  
[LINK TO INTERVIEW](#)



JEFF BEVIS  
FIRST LIGHT

"When it comes to hybrid events:  
• Keep it simple.  
• Embrace pre-recorded sessions, as Greg advised.  
• Make doubly sure you test your platform. Ultimately Greg and the Hawks Agency with the platform were able to do what a National AV company couldn't for us."

Franchise Event  
[LINK TO INTERVIEW](#)



CALL OR EMAIL US TODAY.



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