

The impact of COVID-19 has changed the meeting and event sector across organisations, associations, communities and workplaces. Gatherings for the most part have been cancelled or postponed and we are all looking for alternative solutions for our day to day business practices, connecting with our members, engaging with our board and replacing larger scale meetings.

There is a staggering amount of information out there and working through it is somewhat of a minefield. Transitioning from physical to digital can be a difficult choice. As a leading PCO and Association Management Company supporting over 80 Associations, TAS has had to adapt quickly to this new situation. Through our relationships with industry technology suppliers and experience across several of these platforms, we have prepared the following information to provide our valued clients with some guidance and best practice suggestions when embarking on the shift to “virtual meetings”.

Why? What is your end goal?

Before you select a platform to host a virtual meeting, we encourage you to seriously consider the “**Why**”. There are a lot of moving parts that need to be adjusted when making this decision and thoughtful consideration as to the purpose of the meeting will enable you to make the right decisions around the platform you choose.

Are you holding the meeting to?...

- Retain revenue
- Generate leads
- Educate members
- Constitutional Obligations (AGM, Board Meetings)
- Connect – member, supplier or employee engagement

What do you want your participants to gain from joining the online event?
What will your audience walk away with?

Common Terminology

Live Streaming is a way to host real-time events. Attendees watch a speaker in real-time as they walk through their presentation, answer questions and facilitate conversations.

A virtual event is any event hosted digitally rather than in person. This could be a large-scale operator-assisted conference call where participants can dial-in via the conference centre or get instant access via a set link.

A webcast is a presentation distributed over the Internet using streaming media technology to distribute a single content source to many simultaneous listeners/viewers. A webcast may either be distributed live or on demand. Essentially, webcasting is “broadcasting” over the Internet.

Hybrid event – A physical meeting of any size takes place and the event is then streamed to a virtual audience via an app or attendee platform

NOTE: With regards to the terminology, the terms ‘video conference’, ‘webcast’ (web-based broadcast), ‘webinar’ (web seminar) and ‘live stream’ are often used interchangeably and belong in different eras or across different industry sectors.

What are the options?

Every platform offers advantages and disadvantages, but first consider where your audience is. If you already have a large following on a certain platform then that might be where you start. There are many possible systems available; below we have listed some common and easy to use options, relevant to size and audience, and at the end of the paper we have listed recommended suppliers. On Page 6 of this paper, we will spotlight one of these platforms (ZOOM), and over the coming weeks, months, we will profile additional platforms that TAS and our clients have been using.

Webcasting options available to individuals or businesses, that we recommend;

1. Team / internal organisation / supplier catch ups

Simple, in-expensive user-friendly – Mostly free and relevant to individual phone plan / internet plans or Microsoft products

FaceTime / Google Hangouts / Skype

A very easy way to stream video over the web, albeit two-way video – between you and the other caller *Ideal for simple 1 on 1 communications or max 10 users*

Microsoft Teams

A unified communication and collaboration platform that combines persistent workplace chat, video meetings, file storage, and application integration.

This has been an essential tool for The Association Specialists as we have shifted remotely. All teams in our Sydney, Melbourne and Perth offices communicate internally via this daily.

Facebook Live

The majority of people have a Facebook account so feel comfortable with the platform, or are more likely to stumble upon your event / meeting because they're there anyway. You can stream privately or publicly and there's great opportunity for chat through 'viewing parties'.

2. AGM's / Educational Workshops / Member Polling / Engagement

Simple, user-friendly – Typically a subscription model which can range from \$0 – \$50 per month or one-off moderated meetings for \$500 per meeting.

Audio and Powerpoint Webinars

This style of webinar allows a presenter to broadcast a PowerPoint or Keynote presentation with a voiceover. The viewer sees only the presentation slides along with the presenter's voice.

The viewer can comment or ask questions back to the presenter. This type of streaming can be undertaken on platforms such as **Redback Conferencing, Skype for Business, Zoom, ChorusCall.**

Towards the end of this paper, we will profile one of these in more detail.

3. Sophisticated webcasting options – Conferences / multi day meetings

More complex, heavily reliant on 3rd party, typically with a price range of 10k – 20k+, depending on size and scope.

If you're looking to replicate a conference or substitute for a cancelled event, there are sophisticated solutions with some very good suppliers out there, such as JPL Media and AV1.

Conference-style webcast solution

This style of webcast allows your presenters to present as they would in a live auditorium.

Whether it's a short sharp message or a full-day program of speakers (including motivational speakers) your event can broadcast across the world with unlimited viewers.

Viewers will see a combination of presentations and a mix of live cameras – all combined to a professional broadcast standard.

They can participate using the typed Q&A feature in the webcasting system, or through an event app.

Questions are reviewed and moderated at the presentation end of the broadcast and answered accordingly.

Closed Studio webcast solution

Whilst similar in set up to the above webcast solution, you have the added advantage of being in a very controlled environment. With the current COVID-19 pandemic, the advantage of this solution is that you can have your presenter arrive safely and securely at a venue and be directed to the presentation space with limited contact. The minimal number of staff in the studio are under strict guidance with regards to hygiene protocol. All equipment used in the event is sanitised after each session to minimise risk of contamination.

Once you have established the why and the format...

Fundamentals

Free V's Paid

Will this be a free or paid event? How much will you sell your tickets for? Consider that people still tend to feel virtual events should be cheaper than their real-life counterparts. If you are planning on running multiple virtual events, consider a free or discounted seminar for first time users as people get familiar with technology and begin wanting more. Because virtual events don't necessarily sell out, attendees can be slow to book.

TIP: creating an 'early bird' deadline is a good way to offer a sense of urgency.

Selling the tickets / Capturing payment and registrations

The most efficient way is through your existing membership management system such as membes or Currinda. The Association Specialists can easily set up a registration link that can be included in all communications, such as via email, marketing campaigns and your website. The process is identical to the physical events we set up for you.

Alternatively, there are several other ticket-selling platforms such as Eventbrite and Cvent.

NOTE: Most platforms charge a percentage or fixed fee per ticket.

PRIVACY: Many of these platforms collect data without properly informing the participants. Ensure you have read and shared the platforms terms of service and privacy policy. Always inform your participants prior if the session is being recorded.

Preparation & Planning

Planning is an important part of the process and, just like a face-to-face event, it's essential to think ahead and beyond the meeting day.

No matter what format you use, PREPARE FOR EVERYTHING...

Things to consider:

- **How will you build awareness and excitement?**
 - **How will you build engagement prior to the event?**
Use – email, social media, website, partners and networks. The more channels you use and test, the greater the chance of registrations
 - **What do I want the end product to look like?**
With many events moving to streaming, how will yours stand out? Try using interesting and engaging content such as graphics, videos and virtual waiting rooms. You can also engage your sponsors by featuring their content and messaging. For virtual conferencing – content is paramount. Consider your options – Audio only, Video only, Audio and Video, Video and Slides
 - **What if the internet drops out?**
 - **Can you use a telephone as back up?**
 - **Will the event be recorded?**
 - **Can I call on a mobile phone?**
Prepare your 'technical difficulties,' 'frequently asked questions' emails and web pages in advance and ensure your audience knows where to go or what to do if something goes wrong. Send clear instructions on how to join.
 - **Don't expect all your registrants to actually attend.**
Reinforce the benefits – A high registration rate won't mean a high attendance rate, keep reinforcing the "Why" throughout the registration process via confirmation and reminder emails.
- TIP:** On the day of your event / meeting, set an alert 30 – 60mins before the event to all participants and include an "Add to Calendar (iCal)" link in your confirmation and reminder emails. They can easily be created in Outlook and serve 2 purposes, they block out time and, in most cases, will remind people with a pop-up.
- **What if the presenter gets sick?**
Have a back-up plan. If your livestream falls apart, pre-recorded sessions give your audience something to watch while you try to get things fixed.

PRACTICE: Get to know your technology. A practice session allows you to hone your operations, anticipate problems, and visualise how the recordings would look.

If it doesn't go 100% to plan, document your learning and put processes in place to address shortcomings next time.

- **Interaction – how do I get my audience to interact?**
Attendees should know how they can interact before the webinar begins
 - Break the ice and engage via the chat box that is available in most platforms. Speakers can ask questions in their videos and prompt viewers to type answers

- Encourage attendees to watch in small *groups (dependent on Covid-19 gathering restrictions at the time)*.
 - Just like a face-to-face conference, the better the host, the better the flow, the better the audience engagement. Consider using a moderator that can open the event, introduce speakers and can also curate questions that come in at the end of sessions.
 - If you use a moderator, they can create a word document, copy, paste and prioritise all that is submitted through the chat box – great way to ensure all questions are answered and no one misses out.
 - Consider running live polling or surveys throughout the day or on the call
- **How will you end the meeting / follow up post conference?**
 - Have a call to action at the end of the presentation – reiterate the **WHY**, or the main goal of the last meeting.
 - Follow up post meeting with a thank you
 - Update your website on key learnings of the meeting
 - Send an online survey to capture feedback
 - Send a link to future events
 - Make sure you send out the recorded meeting or notes to everyone afterwards, even those that registered but couldn't attend.

Platform Spotlight – ZOOM

There are plenty of video conferencing platforms to choose from, ranging from free to frightfully expensive depending on your requirements. Zoom is a good choice because it is so popular that most people have already used it. It performs well and has excellent customer service, including a dedicated account manager on the higher plans. Zoom has a variety of features that can be useful for a variety of meetings/ events:

- Launching polls at the beginning of each talk to keep the audience engaged.
- Allowing presenters to share their screen and a thumbnail of their webcam simultaneously picture-in-picture which increases the personability of presentations.
- Allowing panellists to speak directly to one another within the chat feature (not to the whole audience), so you can manage internal communications as needed.
- Export lists of who attended and how long they remain in the virtual room.
- Break out room feature

Pricing* <https://zoom.us/pricing>

Version	Cost	Note	
Basic	Free	Personal Meetings	Calls limited to 40 mins
Pro	\$20.00	Small Team	Includes 100 participants
Business	\$27.99	Small & Medium Business	Includes 300 participants
Enterprise	\$27.99	Large Enterprise read	Includes 500 participants

NOTE: Both the basic, pro & business the monthly plan have the ability to increase the number of participants in the plan – however the per monthly fee goes up significantly.

For Medium sized associations we would recommend the business plan where you have the option of dedicated phone support, association branding, custom emails and toll-free dialling.

Recommendations for use

1. Pre-Recorded Webinar

Best suited for complex, detailed presentations

Suggested time frames: 15 - 45 – 60 - 90 mins

Presenters: Can be a single or shared presentation between two presenters.

Format: Screen share of presentation slides, face recording, voice over, shared third party videos and content.

Content Delivery: Lectures, case studies

2. Live Presentation Webinar

Best suited for Q&As, interviews and panel presentations

Suggested time frames: 30 – 60 mins

Presenters: Can be a single or shared presentation between two presenters.

Format: Face to face recording (single or interview set up)

Content Delivery: Interactive activities and worksheets, tutorials, Q&As, FAQs

Suggested Webinars based on the above formats:

- 15-minute pre-recorded summary / overview of a topic
- 45-minute live fireside chat with another professional on a current topic
- 90-minute pre-recorded presentation, including case studies, videos and voice over on slide presentations
- 20-minute live video answering common questions about a particular theme, then opening up to live questions at the end

Zoom has some great instructions on-line, but general tips include:

- Ensure you have sent clear instructions to your participants
- Write your answers down first and practice before recording your video.
- PRACTICE in advance with your presenters joining, or if possible, have them in the same location as the moderator, and with a practice 'guest'
- Try not to speak too fast, to ensure your message is clear
- Ensure you are in a quiet space with no background noises or interference
- If you are recording your face as well as your voice, ensure the camera is not pointed directly at any source of light or your face will be in shadow.
- Utilise the chat function for questions – if you can, have a separate person to the presenter, filter the question

Brief example of use – Annual General Meeting

1. Set up 'Registration Required' for your Zoom meeting. Everyone will need to register in advance and they'll receive a unique joining link. You'll then be able to know exactly who joined the meeting and ensure in advance that they are allowed to be there and voting. <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/211579443>
2. Set up 'Polling' for your Zoom meeting (you need to set this up for the entire account first). Then in your meeting set up, you'll be able to add Polling questions and Answers. During the meeting, you can launch the Poll and people can answer it during the meeting. Then you close the Poll, and it will tell you how many people votes for what <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/213756303>
3. Once the meeting has ended, you can generate a report that says who registered and the polling results <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/216378603>

Recommended Suppliers

Please note there are many great products out there, the list below is from platforms we have either used at TAS or recommended and used by industry supplier and clients. We have personal contacts for many of these so please feel free to call us should you want their details.

Zoom Video Communications

www.zoom.us

Multipurpose – fairly -priced with a variety of user-friendly options for virtual meetings

Chorus Call Australia

www.choruscall.com.au

Good for AGM's, more expensive than Zoom

Redback Conferencing

www.redbackconnect.com.au

Traditionally used for teleconferencing but has now successfully moved into webcasting & digital events. Has a feature for virtual exhibitions which is certainly worth exploring to complement a virtual conference.

AVPartners Perth

www.avpartners.com

Leading provider of audio-visual technology services to premier conferencing and event venues in Australia. Good option for large scale virtual conferencing.

JPL Media

<https://www.jplmedia.com.au/>

Offer live webinars and hybrid events for both face to face and digital. Good option for virtual conferencing on a large scale.

Austage Events

<https://austageevents.com.au>

The resources and ability to broadcast your event to any online platform, including Facebook Live, YouTube, Vimeo or via a website.

AV1

<https://av1.com.au/services/>

Features - ControlRoom - our highly controlled, cost-effective presentation studios where team, stakeholder or public information can be webcast globally.

Inexpensive options for non-complex meetings / social networking

Jitsi Meet

<https://jitsi.org/jitsi-meet/>

ezTalks Cloud Meeting

www.eztalks.com

Join.me

www.joinme.com

GoToMeeting

www.gotomeeting.com

Google Hangouts

www.google.com

Skype

www.skype.com