

Hybrid Board Meeting Design & Engagement:

How MPI planned a successful hybrid board meeting by prioritizing safety, engagement, and learning

MPI's goal was to execute an engaging and inclusive hybrid board meeting for every stakeholder in attendance—in-person or via Zoom



CHALLENGES

- Worldwide travel restrictions due to Covid
- Uncertain Timeline for Rebound of Events
- Health & Safety
- Attendee Engagement
- Technology Integrations

SOLUTION

- Build the right team to execute a hybrid board meeting event
- Leverage engagement tools and platforms
- Create and communicate a firm objective
- Educate attendees about experience in advance

RESULTS

- 100% participation
- Good feedback and appreciation from Board
- Valuable knowledge and experience
- A more informed approach for hybrid board meeting planning

The Situation

When it's time to pivot

Throughout 2020, MPI President & CEO, Paul VanDeventer faced unexpected and unprecedented challenges along with the entire MPI community. It's necessary to make plans and move forward, but the industry is facing new territory and it's complicated, even for MPI.

Last year, as the annual IBOD Strategic Retreat approached, the question at the top of Paul's mind was: How do we conduct a safe, productive, and inclusive board meeting with MPI's International Board of Directors in the midst of a pandemic?

In light of international travel restrictions and ongoing safety concerns due to COVID, Paul and his team knew that a hybrid event was the best option.

The annual fall strategy meeting tends to be more in-depth than a traditional board meeting, and the technology needed to align with the meeting content and the overall mission to provide an inclusive attendee experience.

In order to carry out a successful hybrid event, MPI needed the triple threat: the right people, the right technologies, and the right partners to make the meeting safe and beneficial for every attendee—live and virtual.



“Meetings need to be designed so that participants are equitably included in opportunities for engagement. The best way to maximize engagement and appropriate use of tools, processes, and presentations is to leverage skilled meeting design and facilitation—early in the process.”



Lynda B.
Freelance Virtual
Event Facilitator,
Soundings

The Challenge

Navigating hybrid unknowns

At the beginning of 2020, Paul and his team were planning-as-usual for MPI's annual meeting, slated for in-person attendance in June. Paul was also traveling-as-usual until Covid hit in early March.

“We went from being on the road 90% of the time and spending time with the industry and MPI community to a total stop on travel. Everything went virtual and we started working through the world of Zoom.”

Through most of 2020, travel restrictions, safety considerations, and uncertain timelines made it difficult to plan ahead, prepare for recovery, and assess the future for the MPI community and the business events industry at large.

MPI's World Education Conference, a live event scheduled for June 2020, officially switched to hybrid and rescheduled for early November. As the largest meeting and event industry association worldwide, MPI prioritized leadership and learning to help show the business events community how to execute a safe and engaging hybrid event, with Duty of Care at the forefront of all planning.

“We have an obligation to our community to show our industry that we can meet safely. To demonstrate how to create a safe in-person experience, as well as a meaningful digital and interactive experience for those who aren't attending in person, board meetings included.”

Our goal was to have a cutting-edge board meeting that demonstrates how to use technology to engage people in a hybrid environment.”

MPI began piecing the puzzle together, starting with finding the right partners and the right people who could help implement tech solutions without losing focus on the main objective.

The goal remained to execute a safe and engaging attendee experience for the MPI board in a hybrid format.

“We began to look at who's doing this well in the market? Who is creating really engaging hybrid meetings for smaller audiences?”

THE TEAM

MPI

Partners

- Soundings
- Encore

Technology

- Zoom
- Mural

In terms of preparation, tech implementation and execution, the meeting was a resounding success.

Solutions

The right people, technologies and partners

In order to develop content and produce events that are meaningful to attendees, hybrid events become highly complex endeavors. Technology presents new variables that require extra consideration.

MPI tapped industry leaders Soundings and Encore to provide technology solutions. With Zoom as the overall platform for the meeting, MPI needed knowledgeable teams that could recommend additional integrations and ensure a consistent attendee experience.

Throughout the pandemic, Soundings received increased requests for Mural facilitators from Fortune 500 companies, signaling that Mural is a useful tool to boost virtual engagement.

Knowing this, Tracy Judge, Founder & CEO of Soundings, recommended Mural, a digital workspace for virtual collaboration. She tapped the Soundings freelance network to find the top Virtual Event Facilitator with Mural experience to work with the MPI team.

Soundings connected MPI with a top facilitator who had experience with Mural and virtual events. The facilitator came on to help MPI's team prepare for the engagement and learn the platform features prior to the meeting.

“We made sure we were really buttoned up in how we were going to integrate the technologies. Many of us had never been on Mural, and we were learning a new tool.”

The Virtual Event Facilitator also worked with MPI's team on the agenda, the Mural boards, and specific elements they could use to increase engagement, like adding sticky notes, icons and images. They used Mural's polling feature to take votes during the sessions.

Tech recommendations and consultations from experts helped highlight some of the challenges attendees face and helped MPI anticipate different levels of tech-literacy and attendee behaviors.

Meanwhile, Encore, a leading global event production company, provided technicians and hardware including an in-room 9x16 screen featuring Zoom video tile images, 2 cameras that provided a shot of the large conference room from the back to provide a sense of scale, a second 9x16 screen to show the content and presentations, and PTT (push-to-talk) microphones to ensure high-quality A/V for in-person attendees.

“I have attended 21 board meetings during my board tenure with MPI. This meeting was very different ... The board members online became a mini-community where we could exchange ideas and share comments with each other, which enhanced the experience. While I missed the in-person social aspects of the meeting, the content delivery and collaboration opportunities were just as engaging virtually.”



Amanda Armstrong
AVP, Enterprise Holdings, MPI Board Member, 2018 Global Chair

Encore's team leveraged its decade-long hybrid event experience to ensure the in-room set would complement the overall experience.

Each layer of support helped MPI ensure that the equipment, software, and accommodations for attendees in different locations would be dialed in throughout the hybrid meeting.

By the time the meeting kicked off, there were multiple technology integrations running concurrently, attendees live in the meeting room, and attendees Zooming in from home.

As expected, there was a learning curve, but people adapted quickly.

“By the third session, attendees were really comfortable with the full suite of tools.”

In terms of preparation, tech implementation and execution, the meeting was a resounding success.

Results

Learn by doing

MPI and Paul received positive feedback from the IBOD meeting attendees. Now that the first-ever hybrid board meeting is officially adjourned, MPI can share specific takeaways to improve hybrid event experiences for the MPI community.

“We succeeded in getting 100% participation. It was new. It will get better each time. We are currently planning a board meeting as a hybrid experience.”

Learning new technology, figuring out how to select the technology for the greatest good, and ensuring a degree of interaction that benefits all attendees are skills that the community can develop.

The first step is to seek support from leaders and teams who have valuable insights, and the second step is to demonstrate the willingness to learn by doing.

“We proved you can have an effective, multi-sourced board meeting. I'm happy we did it. The board really appreciated it. After the meeting they provided us with great feedback which we have integrated in to the planning of our next event.”

“Experts that can make you aware of its capabilities allow you to also consider how to use it.”



Learning Opportunities

Attendees want more time to engage.

During a hybrid event, it's possible that spontaneous virtual groups could form online that in-person attendees aren't privy to. This is a potential blindspot we can plan for in advance.

People online created breakout rooms to network with each other and learn more about Mural.

“Let's create more break time. Breaks are open dialogues. You can self-reflect in breakout rooms. Enable those impromptu, organic dialogues to occur.”

Technology can affect the in-person experience.

This time around, people who attended the meeting in-person felt their experience was diluted.

Unfortunately, live attendees sat at a disadvantage, especially during breaks, because they had limited ability to interact.

In an unexpected twist, the virtual attendees had more flexibility for engagement than the in-person attendees.

“The virtual attendees felt really good. They were engaged in the conference and their input was valuable.”

Bring in the experts.

Hybrid events are new territory for many in our industry. Leverage talent that has experience creating hybrid events.

Technology experts and facilitators can work together to think through the attendee experience and recommend technology extensions or restraints that make sense.

Have a dedicated webcast producer to run the virtual event technology, like Zoom, the day of the event. All stakeholders want to be engaged in the meeting. The webcast producer can troubleshoot any challenges and field any last minute requests, like pop-up breakout rooms.

“Tech can go too far. Experts that can make you aware of its capabilities allow you to also consider how to use it.”

Work together in designing the attendee experience.

Tech tools can create engagement or they can stifle it.

Technology tends to increase possibilities—for breakout Zoom rooms, chats, surveys, white boards, etc. Don't over do it. Decide which features add the most value to the meeting and stick with them.

Mural is a valuable tool with expansive capabilities that can be extremely powerful. Think about how to optimize the technology for the greatest benefit within the context that it's being used.

Increased collaboration is needed during planning.

Hybrid events demand increased collaboration between all stakeholders and vendor partners during the planning process.

Encourage technology experts, facilitators, and meeting stakeholders to work together in designing the attendee experience considering technology expansion and constraints.



Meeting Professionals International (MPI) is the largest meeting and event industry association worldwide. The organization provides innovative and relevant education, networking opportunities and business exchanges, and acts as a prominent voice for the promotion and growth of the industry. MPI has a global community of 60,000 meeting and event professionals including 14,000 engaged members. It has more than 70 chapters and clubs with members in 75 countries. "When we meet, we change the world." www.mpi.org

Soundings is a talent platform for professionals with a people-first ethos seeking synergistic work partnerships. Soundings provides agile talent solutions for business events, associations and nonprofits, and hotels and tourism. Home to Soundings Connect, a talent solutions consultancy, and Soundings Thrive, a vibrant members-only community, Soundings brands build powerful connections that create thriving careers.

Mural is the leading digital workspace for visual collaboration in the enterprise. Teams depend on MURAL to understand and solve problems and build consensus using visual methods. More than an online whiteboard, MURAL enables innovation at scale by providing a platform for everything from product strategy and planning to leading immersive workshops using agile and design thinking methodologies. Industry-leading teams at companies including IBM, IDEO, Autodesk, Intuit, GitHub, and Atlassian use MURAL to work together — at any time and from anywhere. Learn more at www.mural.co.

Encore creates memorable experiences that engage and transform organisations. As the global leader for event technology and production services, Encore's team of creators, innovators and experts deliver real results through strategy and creative, advanced technology, digital, environmental, staging, and digital solutions for hybrid, virtual and in-person events. Encore operates in more than 20 countries across North America, Europe, the Middle East, Australia and Asia Pacific. Encore is the trusted partner of choice for leading hotels and venues worldwide and was named to the Forbes 2018 and 2019 America's Best Employer list. The company is headquartered in the Chicago metro area in Schiller Park, Ill.



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