

# WHAT'S NEXT FOR EVENTS

## A REPORT INTO THE FUTURE OF EVENTS TOLD BY THE VOICES OF THE INDUSTRY

Listen to conversations with  
30 leading event professionals including  
campaign leaders, agencies, venues and suppliers

BY ANNA PETERS  
EVOLVE EVENTS



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EVENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

To say the last 15 months have been a rocky road for event industry professionals would be an understatement.

Last year we saw events including conferences, festivals, weddings and tradeshows disappear, practically overnight, as countless live experiences were cancelled and businesses came to a stand-still.

How will our industry recover? The initial blow saw businesses despair but remarkably quickly we started to adapt. Previously we'd been skeptical about the quality of experiences that virtual events could offer but we learnt to embrace the technology at break neck speed, creating and working with platforms to connect people during a time when there was no physical way to be together.

So a year on, as we look forward to the reopening, I've been reflecting on everything that has happened and thinking about the challenges of what lies ahead for those working in events. With all the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic and what happens next I, like many other event professionals, have been questioning what the industry will look like in the future.

Whilst it's important to be positive it's also a time to be realistic as any recovery will be gradual and staggered. We need to be planning how to future proof our industry as audience expectations for events change due in part to a new definition of what 'normal' life looks like, with working patterns altered for good.

The events industry is made up of a broad church of experiences and this fragmentation has proved to be a barrier to clarifying and communicating the power of events. But over the last 12 months the industry itself has started to change the way it thinks about itself, moving from disparate sectors into one community.

And what does that community of event professionals think the future looks like? Over the last few weeks I spoke to 30 industry experts to find out and asked them what they think lies ahead for events. This report details the key takeaways and messages from those conversations.



**ANNA PETERS**  
**CREATIVE DIRECTOR**  
**EVOLVE EVENTS**

With 30 different contributors, from a range of backgrounds, this report was never going to provide a definitive answer to the question 'what's next for events?'.

Rather it's a snapshot of the conversations that the industry is currently having. And it turned out that the industry has a lot to say. So dip in and out and see what resonates for you. Among all the opinions there are 3 key themes that reoccur:

### **Pent up demand**

All venues reported seeing a surge of enquiries the day after the roadmap was announced. Private celebrations lead the way but corporates are looking to host events too, with a particular focus on celebrating and bringing teams back together. Creatively, we're going to be looking at a roaring-20s-style return to indulgence.

### **Virtual's here to stay (but it needs to do more to engage)**

The events businesses that did well over the last year were those that managed to embrace virtual technology. And having seen the benefits that virtual offers, it looks like it's here to stay, in one form or another. More thorny is the issue of how to create virtual events that engage, especially now expectations have moved on.

### **The industry needs to work together**

One thing everyone did agree on was how the support of the events community enabled them to get through the worst time their businesses had experienced. It's fuelled a desire to continue to unify the industry to better represent itself and demonstrate our expertise and value.

### **Let's keep the conversation going**

As the industry starts to return it's important that we keep connecting and as part of that I'd be interested in your feedback and any comments you may have.

You can email me at [anna@evolve-events.com](mailto:anna@evolve-events.com) or follow us at [@evolveevents](https://www.instagram.com/evolveevents) where we'll be keeping the conversation going. I'd also encourage you to sign up [here](#) for our newsletter, Eventspiration, which features regular updates and interviews with fellow eventprofs.

# COLLABORATION

## ONE INDUSTRY ONE VOICE

At the beginning of the pandemic the various industry event sectors worked in silos but fairly quickly it became apparent there was a need for a coalition in the events industry to help define and represent the sector. One Industry One Voice brought together campaigns, associations and businesses together to ensure strong alignment and more effective communication, championing awareness and financial support for the whole industry.

"One Industry One Voice was created last year, stemming from a clear flag by many event professionals of a lack of collaboration and shared insight/data/approach across the segmented core sectors of the events industry, which has been an issue for many years. There were multiple credible campaigns from different sectors of the industry, rightfully lobbying government and representing their own members - however they weren't working together as a collective and the asks/data/strategy weren't as aligned as they perhaps could be.

The seven main sectors of our industry (business/experiential events, exhibitions, sport activations, culture & third sector, weddings, music events, outdoor/festivals) weren't really sharing information even though they have a considerable share of the same event supply chain/freelancers in common. When Covid came about, it was a catalyst to advance the exposure of this issue with our industry; that it wasn't consolidated to one voice with a co-operative structure, in the same way as organisations like UK Hospitality/UK Sport etc are.

One Industry One Voice was set up to encourage these various associations, business leaders and campaigns to engage pro-actively with each other for the first time in one forum, to learn from/support each other and share information. From that it enabled them to send out clearer aligned content and share consistent data to the press and Government; including the now widely quoted fact that we're an £84 billion pound economic contributor with 1.5 million event professionals working across it.

As a result we're now becoming a bit more aligned (but there is lot more work to do!) which means the government and media are starting to understand us better. To help consumers and the public recognise the value of events we also set up We Create Experiences, a positive campaign talking about the power of events to inspire, educate, celebrate as well as support and contribute to society – the campaign videos alone received 1 million views.

Going forward, we're on a journey as events won't all return overnight. Different sectors are on different timelines. To move forward we need to bring back confidence and demonstrate our global leadership and expertise in hosting events safely. We need to continue to work together, share knowledge and deepen the understanding of our industry and this will in turn also create a more structured and informed overview of the broad range of career opportunities for the next generation."

**Rick Stainton**  
Founder, One Industry One Voice

# ROADMAP REVEAL

June 21st is a date etched on our minds. The day restriction should be lifted and unrestricted freedom beckons, along with a return to business as normal. But how many of us really believe that's going to be case and what will normal look like for those in the events business, an industry deeply impacted by the pandemic?

The events industry was one of the first to close and has been one of the last to open. And it looks like the reopening is going to be a bit of a bumpy start.

Technically, events will be able to happen on June 21st (provided roadmap conditions have been met and pilot events have been a success). However just because something can happen, it doesn't mean it will happen. Especially in the corporate market which is understandably cautious. **Sternberg Clarke** reports "a number of clients have asked 'are any other corporates doing large events?'. People don't want to be the first to take the risk but nor do they want to be left behind if their competitors are doing face-to-face."

As well as uncertainty about whether we're able to host events and confusion over guidelines, there's also a concern about whether people will want to attend events; "will a long period of restrictions have the effect of mild agoraphobia on people and mean a slow return to central London?" **Charles Boyd, Hamilton Boyd**.

It certainly looks like events will need to step up a gear to attract guests. Festivals tickets sold out overnight demonstrating a desire to celebrate but that's different from the bread-and-butter events many venues host of a corporate event that guests attend on their way home from the office.

Add home working to the mix, then the pull has to be really strong to get people out of the homes and into town. Events are going to need to offer content that engages and makes emotional connections and will need to be more creative than ever before.

# WHAT'S PREDICTED TO HAPPEN

“As we tentatively ease our way out of lockdown, **there is understandably still an air of uncertainty amongst the events industry.** Jump too soon and we could be subject to a lastminute U turn, don't jump at all and you are in danger of missing opportunities.”  
**Helen Sharland, Culture**

“Everything depends on the continuing success of the vaccine campaign and the continued reduction of infection figures. However, if the roadmap sticks I see the following: **private and wedding bookings will go through the roof.** Corporate events will proceed more cautiously. With the caveat above, Christmas will be huge. The only area which will be slow, if non-existent until the middle of next year, are the big incentive travel events which involve people flying in from overseas.” **Adam Sternberg, Sternberg Clarke**

“There has been a lot of movement in events from this year into next (2022) and **the question we keep being asked is what's the deadline for confirming;** this means that we are turning events around with very little notice. Everyone is very hesitant to make plans for events short term as they have learnt from past experience over the last year that things might change. This has led to an almost a hold on enquiries for the year to date with the flood gates just starting to open.”  
**Colin Gray, Lavender Green**

“I think we will see a mixed return to events. Those with personal attendance will take off sooner as it's our own choice to attend ... and I welcome the Government's test events to set the path. There will be a return to more live events later this year and 2022. **Everything hinges on there not being new surges of strains of Covid.** Overall we are all desperate to be social and with other humans. This has been an opportunity, albeit a difficult one, to reflect, review and re-invent what we do. **Events as a profession should be able to showcase how to do it better and safer.**” **Fay Sharpe, Fast Forward 15**

# PENT UP DEMAND

**“There is a build up of excitement to return to in-person events.** However, we must not forget that there is also a fear within our audience as to how safe in-person events will be. This is the opportune time to reach out to ensure our events bring reassurances of absolute safety.” **Denise Mapp**

**“At certain venues like Evolution London and Magazine London, the occupancy for September 2021 is in fact higher than it was in 2019. This is in part of course due to an element of congestion from postponed events,** however we have seen a whole host of new events confirming including product launches, exhibitions, awards ceremonies and receptions.” **Ben Paris, Moving Venues**

**“Since March 2021 enquiry levels have started to increase** and several domestic corporate events look to return this summer and the last quarter of the year. The types of events include team building events, client engagement receptions, product launches and filming.” **Liz Young, Historic Royal Palaces**

**“We’re certainly seeing plenty of evidence of pent-up demand for events.** Over the past two weeks alone we’ve fielded £4m worth of enquiries and there’s no sign of things letting up. Our rooftop bar, Skylight, has also now opened up to the public and we have over 21,000 guests booked in to visit over the coming months.” **Charlotte Smart, Tobacco Dock**



# A SEPTEMBER TO REMEMBER ...

"As Britain looks to be slowly unlocking, I and many others who work **within the Events Industry are excited that the phone is again ringing and both private and corporate clients seem to be equally enthusiastic** that, by September, dinners, parties and weddings might again be able to happen on a larger scale." **Simon Lycett**

"**Some clients remain cautious** and are holding back on confirming their live events until there is more certainty with the roadmap. Whilst we don't have a crystal ball, we know things can change very quickly. Based on our experience and enquiries, private and social events will come back first and I believe we're likely to see **an increase in return to live corporate and clients events from September onwards.**" **Laura Pearce, RSA House**

"**Let's presume events with some limitations are up and running in the last quarter of this year;** the best business will be large businesses needing to reconnect with their staff and clients. These events will get more intelligent about how they engage with people, they will also want measurements and evidence on what worked and what didn't, with costs attached." **Charles Boyd, Hamilton Boyd**

## ...OR NOT

"We had expected the market and predominately weddings to come back a little sooner, but **the road map and uncertainty around how many people can attend and what couples can and can't do has certainly reduced the influx.** That said we still look forward to a busy year but sadly it's being pushed into July to December. This has also meant that those key dates over the summer months have become very desired and thin on the ground."

**Colin Gray, Lavender Green**

"Our enquiry level for small exclusive Christmas parties (between 100 - 600 delegates) has almost returned to pre-pandemic levels for this time of year. **The larger scale Christmas party market is making a slower return,** with a number of clients keen to hold on for the next roadmap marker, though it is by no means dormant."

**Ben Paris, Smart Group**

# PRIVATE VS CORPORATE BOUNCE BACK

“I am an unashamed “cock-eyed optimist” as the old song goes, so I really want to believe that large scale events, particularly corporate ones (which before Covid were our bread and butter), will return this side of Christmas. Certainly our enquiries book seems to suggest that they will, and **from the creative briefs we’re seeing, it looks like we’re about to dive head-first into the hedonistic, roaring twenties of the digital age.**” **Joanna Moody, Zafferano**

“I think we will see virtual continuing for some time on the corporate side until there's some confidence in the market, but **the private sector can't wait to get back to live events**, and it will be interesting to see what measures the government puts in place on the 17th May to allow live events to happen from the 21st June. I suspect that staff and guests will have to show a negative test or vaccination to attend gatherings over a certain threshold.”

**Jimmy Garcia, Jimmy Garcia Catering**

“Initially, there will be a boom in local live events – then regional and then, fingers crossed, international. ‘Travel corridors’ between specific countries could open up international event destination possibilities and options but whether that happens or not is going to be dictated largely by corporate mandate. **The jury is still out on business travel because the last year has shown that employees can still be as effective, if not more, working remotely and through virtual events.**” **Sabrina Meyers, Hot Hospitality Exchange**

“Corporates will be more cautious, reflecting on how to make best use of their £££ with events. **Corporates may take their brand and possible reputational damage into consideration and therefore will be slower to return to “normal”.** I think a lot of companies will ask “do I need to do this?” From the event professionals position there has never been a more important time to demonstrate safety, professionalism and ROI.” **Fay Sharpe, Fast Forward 15**

# WHAT'S NEEDED TO DRIVE THE REOPENING

**“The opening up of events diaries will all be based on confidence, both that of the host and guests. The latent desire to be entertained and to meet up with clients or colleagues is obvious from how busy pubs and restaurants are. It is imperative that the industry shows confidence and a desire to serve to ensure that events can start trading from this June.”**

**Richard Groves, Kershaw Partners**

**“Safety is at the heart of the everything we do. With the relevant risk assessments in place, venue capacities reviewed, and ensuring our event suppliers are implementing the relevant safety measures, we are confident our clients can return to host events with the assurance their guests will be safe and still experience the authenticity of our venues and their surroundings.”**

**Liz Young, Historic Royal Palaces**

**“With tests easily accessible, the requirement for guests and contractors alike to show a negative Covid 19 test prior to any work feels a realistic and practical solution, together with revised and updated Health & Safety Risk Assessment and Method Statements. Whilst these additional layers of bureaucracy are obviously essential, they do add another onerous duty of care to us as employers, and at a time when teams are smaller due to unfortunate streamlining and redundancies in an attempt to remain viable.”**

**Simon Lycett**

# WHAT VENUES NEED TO DO

**“Venues will be instrumental in the reopening of the live events business.** They need to be open now for show rounds and proactive in conversations. Show rounds are permissible, with appropriate protocols, and the value of the interaction within the venue is a vital part of the sales process. This is absolutely the time for venues to be metaphorically throwing open their doors and meeting potential clients on site.” **Richard Groves, Kershaw Partners**

**“Many venues have worked tirelessly and invested heavily to ensure we have a safe environment** for guests to step into. Anyone attending a live event in the near future shouldn't be put off going. I would advise that you ask the event organiser or venue for as much information around safety measures and how the event will run so that you know what to expect before arriving at the venue. Each and every one of us have our own concerns and priorities and we all want to feel safe.” **Laura Pearce, RSA House**

**“Behind the scenes, we are of course taking every precaution to ensure the events we deliver are safe** for both guests and our teams. We are bolstering our already rigorous health and safety protocol by adding additional KPIs for all staff and suppliers. We are also welcoming open and honest conversations with all of our clients during contracting talks to implement cancellation and postponement policies that give both parties a degree of comfort.” **Ben Paris, Smart Group**

**“The top three things we have found that clients are prioritising** as they consider a return to hosting live events are: 1. **Health and safety**, they want to know that the venue prioritises guest health and safety, has measures in place and will support them in keeping their guests safe. 2. **Flexibility**, this includes the contract and the ability to postpone dates if required due to Government guidance or revert to a hybrid/virtual option if needed and 3. **Something unique** and different to draw guests away from their home office to engage and interact in a live setting.” **Sam Glenister-Batey, Royal College of Music**

# WHAT SORT OF EVENTS WILL WE SEE

“We’re seeing an **overwhelming interest for events that celebrate and recognise the achievements of teams**, throughout the pandemic. These range from global hybrid events, team building days and even awards dinners later in the year. **There is a real drive for companies to thank their staff** and to celebrate getting through what has been an extremely challenging year.” **Jodie Guilford, Science Museum**

“We initially thought that the return of events would be slow and steady, with smaller daytime conferences being the first to return; though we have certainly seen education and content-led events return, they are not forming the majority of our new event confirmations. We’ve seen **a real desire for staff parties and employee entertainment** and we also have later summer parties starting to confirm across a whole host of venues.”

**Ben Paris, Smart Group**

“I believe the **smaller events are probably here to stay for a little while longer**, with that comes an opportunity for attention to detail, bespoke and considered event design. For us, this is what really matters, event design with longevity in mind, less frivolous wasteful event decor, but more multiple use and keepsakes for guests to create a second life and tell a story with.” **Helen Sharland, Cuture**

“**We’re anticipating smaller local events** and have teamed up with London Blue Badge Guides to offer bespoke historical and royal tours of Westminster as part of conferences and meetings. These safe outdoor experiences can be a memorable and exclusive addition to business and corporate events.”

**Marina Papadopoulou, Church House**

“The demand for live social events (including summer and Christmas parties) may well see some strong growth, not only in the short-term, but also into 2021 and beyond, as **business leaders see the need for more get-togethers if their teams continue to work remotely.**”

**Sam Gill, Story Events**

# HYBRID: THE ROUTE TO LIVE

“Hybrid events will definitely be the pathway back to live as they will almost be the ‘guinea pigs’ and experiments of how live events can effectively and safely return. **The in-person live event will need to be a component of the virtual event.** For example, a brand launching a product; the live event is the ‘activation’ and the heart of the overall event strategy with virtual elements built around the event, incorporating other content and sessions. **Virtual attendees can view the in-person event but they’ll have access to different content that is valuable and unique to them.**”

**Sabrina Meyers, Hot Hospitality Exchange**

“Virtual will continue to be a big thing, particularly for corporates this summer as it will be too early to do large in person events. Hybrid, despite the hype I am less sure about. A number of clients have mentioned **the problem with hybrid is cost.** You are basically paying for two events in one and for hybrid to be truly successful the tech cost is immense. It really only makes sense if you are saving money from international attendees who don’t have travel/accommodation expense.” **Adam Sternberg, Sternberg Clarke**

“The past 12 months have demonstrated what aspects of live events can be moved online and the ones that can’t. Part of education can be moved online, part of networking as well. But **we need to meet to continue these meaningful conversations** and building relationships with business partners. The future is most definitely hybrid. That being said, we will see more of a balance between live and virtual events as well. Now that **many companies around the globe have tasted the potential and value of digital solutions,** they will consider virtual events as a replacement for many of their onsite events.”

**Heidi Legein, The Mice Guru**

# CAN VIRTUAL REPLACE LIVE

**“There’s been so much innovation within the industry in the last 12 months** and it’s been fantastic to see the way so many people have adapted. I think virtual events will still have a role to play for a good while yet, especially as it’s such a great way to bring teams together and engage in an entirely different way to a live event.” **Rhys Saunders, Lick Me I’m Delicious**

**“Most clients we speak to cannot wait to return to face to face and have expressed both their appreciation but also frustration with virtual events.** Many things can go wrong with virtual that are simply out of one’s control. Also, as humans, we thrive on social interaction and human connection. There really isn’t anything comparable to a live event, being immersed in an experience that touches all the senses right before you.”

**Laura Pearce, RSA House**

**“One major aspect that is very hard to bring to the virtual environment is the destination experience and incentives.** Participating in team building activities while exploring the destination, networking and learning about a new culture are irreplaceable and I think these events will be first to return. **Sectors which were doing well during the past 12 months will be willing to reward their employees for the hard work and bring employees together.** These might not be very big events but the good thing about incentives is they can be designed for small groups and follow safety measures.” **Irina Graf The Mice Blog**

“The reach, convenience and sustainability advantages that a hybrid set-up presents means that this **‘best of both worlds’ format will outlast the pandemic**, but whilst the consideration of an additional virtual audience exists, the focus continues to be on events providing an opportunity for creating meaningful face-to-face interactions and in-person experiences.”

**Charlotte Smart, Tobacco Dock**



# THE FUTURE'S VIRTUAL

**"We're not planning on saying goodbye to virtual events;** we have loved hosting a real mixture of online gatherings the past year. From live stream cookery masterclasses, to guided wine tastings, through to pizza party workshops and cocktail lessons. We are now able to offer many more options to our clients, and that feels amazing."

**Alix Caiger, Caiger & Co**

"With this new way of working, obviously hybrid events have been born, with virtual events taking centre stage, though now waning in the yearning for real life connection, something I believe, will never be replaced. **Technology will undoubtedly be used to enhance 'real' events** and the pandemic has certainly accelerated amazing virtual technologies, which will only get better." **Helen Sharland, Cuture**

"I predict that virtual will remain as it allows the client to reach a larger audience and a demographic that they may not have considered before, but feel overall that by Q2 2022, there will be a rise of in-person events with an **online gamification component** rather than an in-person event with a full virtual event platform experience."

**Denise Mapp, Event Consultant**

"After the joy of post-lockdown freedom of movement it will be replaced by a more rational approach taking into consideration the value of data. **This will result in more virtual events, hybrid to welcome the selected smaller crowds in person and fewer, yet higher quality and higher budget live events for the most important brand message occasions.**"

**Heidi Legein, The Mice Guru**

"I think **virtual and hybrid are here to stay** and in my view are welcome from a sustainability and work life balance point of view."

**Fay Sharpe, Fast Forward 15**



# WITH A FEW CAVEATS

“In many ways **this remains a crystal ball gazing exercise** as we wait to see how our clients will react as we work our way out of this unique and challenging period towards some kind of a “new normal.

Whilst there will always be a strong preference for live events, **the lessons learnt by the forced switch to virtual will leave a lasting legacy on the UK events industry.** This will be especially visible with conferences where the virtual technology has advanced at pace and companies have learned the value of reduced international and regional travel costs (in both time and money), together with the increased reach offered by live streaming to a wider audience.

In addition, the increasing sustainability agenda will continue to fuel the demand for virtual communication.

But even with conferences, **most event hosts still understand the additional value of operating in a live environment**, with all the benefits of informal networking and ideas sharing around the main presentation content, which are not as easily replicated in virtual breakout rooms. This will no doubt lead to a transition to live events with hybrid live streaming elements to reach and communicate with the more distant audiences.”

**Sam Gill, Story Events**

# IT'S GOING TO NEED TO ENGAGE

**“Future formats will require participation, as opposed to attendance.** Virtual events will be with us for some time as we navigate to live-events. We’ve seen in the last months how affordable it is to reach extended markets, capture engagement data effectively, provide a tailored experience. Whilst international travel remains uncertain, virtual provides a very sustainable option. Face-to-face events cannot be replaced by virtual, but virtual can complement events taking place in real-time. This is where hybrid events combine the best of both worlds.” **Marina Papadopoulou, Church House**

**“The biggest challenge we face as an industry right now after getting the education ourselves is communicating the message, and educating end clients who have no insight into the virtual and hybrid world other than the few events they’ve so far attended or their ideas of what such an event is beyond a zoom/teams/fill in any other type of video meeting tool gathering or the limited creativity of static platforms with disregard of **the most important components: interactivity, engagement, inspiration.**” Heidi Legein, Mice Guru**

**“Events will and should expand beyond the four walls** ie hybrid. Event holders will need to reach people who cannot/will not attend. This could be a sizeable number for several years. If you can physically connect with 200 people and virtually 20,000 or more, that’s a great event. Once people get their heads around it they will learn a Hybrid event does not mean streaming or any version of zoom. **Virtual is much more than streaming**, yes, it’s also expensive but done correctly it’s SO much more valuable. The physical event will become the soul or glue for a wide reaching, deeper purpose.”

**Charles Boyd, Hamilton Boyd**

**“To me, a hybrid event involves both the in-person and the online audience interacting with one another (throughout or at one or more elements of the event), allowing **both audiences to have an engaged event experience.**” Denise Mapp**

# AS EXPECTATIONS RISE

"As a creative production company, like many we have spent the past 12 months delivering around 90% of our clients projects entirely online as digital events. **At the start of the pandemic, it's probably fair to say online audiences were quite forgiving.** Let's be honest, we all quite enjoyed seeing virtual event speakers presenting from home and checking out how their homes were decorated. When there was a technical glitch, or someone had their microphone muted we all smiled and put it down to inexperience or getting to grips with new technology. **One year on, the expectations of our audiences have moved on dramatically.**

As the industry migrates from fully virtual events into the world of hybrid as Covid restrictions ease, I predict that **the expectations of the online audience are going to increase even further.** My reasoning is that when the event is hybrid, your online audience knows that there are a group of people physically at the venue enjoying the in-person experience. The risk is that poor delivery of the online experience causes a "them and us" mentality to permeate your online guests – they can see on the live stream that everyone's having a great time at the venue, but they're stuck at home experiencing poor sound quality, or perhaps the presenter is only engaging with the live audience and forgetting they are also on camera. Perhaps they also can't interact properly – there might be a Q&A happening, but the moderator is only getting questions from the live audience because the streaming platform's Q&A function hasn't been integrated properly with the live event.

**Event planners will need to also think like television producers to ensure the success of their hybrid projects,** which are going to rely on the understanding that each audience needs to be given a curated experience centred around the same content. As we look ahead to the second half of 2021, as a technical production company we will continue to use cutting-edge technology and techniques borrowed from live TV broadcast to elevate the delivery of our client's digital events and support them with the transition to hybrid."

**George Foden, Wise Productions**

# WHAT WILL EVENTS LOOK LIKE

“If the last year has taught us anything, it’s that **we have no idea what the next 6 months will look like**. But from a caterer’s point of view I suspect we will be scrapping the feature bar which is like a flame to the moths and circulating all drinks instead to try and ensure that guests make space. Canapes and dinners will appear pretty unchanged, but we will temporarily say bye-bye to sharing platters, tapas or family style grazing. Our fabulous **food stations will also need to be re-thought** from both encouraging clusters of people, to offering any kind of sharing dishes. Everything will need to be individually served, quick to grab and easy to eat (obviously avoiding plastic).

There will also be much **more informal seating** at events than before, and organisers appear to be confirming venues which have 30-50% more capacity than their actual guest numbers require, to allow generous guest flow. Venues with any kind of sizeable / usable green space are also at a premium right now, even in the winter months.”

**Joanna Moody, Zafferano**

“As the events industry hits ‘go’, one thing’s for sure, **hosts will be out to impress**. With guest numbers likely to remain reduced, hosts will be keen to create an event that transmits across all channels. Social media is very much a part of the events industry now more than ever and **it’s important to be mindful of how your event will come across both in person and on the screen.**”

**Susie Reid Thomas, Twilight Trees**

“The feeling of being at an event, getting dressed up and **the anticipation of the evening ahead is one that we can’t underestimate**. Flowers have always played a large part in bringing events alive; they are emotive and make people happy and they can set a mood instantly, formal or ethereal, party or network.”

**Colin Gray, Lavender Green**

# A HUNGER TO PARTY

**“There is the hope that as we move forward, the “Great Gatsby Effect” might take hold,** with those starved of social interaction and celebrating giving vent to a pent-up desire to “go for it” with some wonderfully large scale and spectacular celebrations being plotted and planned.

Whilst we are all too aware that for many these have been, and continue to be trying times, emotionally and financially, **there is a strong feeling too that “life is for living”** and with us all having had to tolerate and suffer from so many restrictions, I get the impression that **people really do want to begin to be able to welcome their families and friends to gatherings** large and small, with wonderful food, delicious wine, engaging entertainment and of course abundant Floral Fabulousness!”

**Simon Lycett**

# LET'S TALK MONEY

“We are going to be pushed on prices by clients, at the same time costs are going up, admittedly from a lower start point. **We have to stand our ground** and hold on to them probably under great pressure at the start, it’s a huge threat to cash.”

**Charles Boyd, Hamilton Boyd**

“We must learn from history, as in the wake of previous recessions suppliers have raced to the bottom price line, causing irreversible damage to the value of our services. **It is so important that this does not happen** again, as many businesses will simply not recover from that approach in the long-term. Devastatingly, **we have already lost approximately a third of our highly-skilled freelancers** and to prevent further losses, we must offer rates and salaries that are comparable with other sectors.”

**Richard Wilson, White Light**

Once the venues are seen to be open for business, **it's the responsibility of the suppliers to present their best product offers and prices** to drive the renewed acceptance of the validity of live events and make hosts excited about the opportunity to entertain again.” **Richard Groves, Kershaw Partners**

# SUSTAINABILITY

**“Sustainability is a word thrown around a lot in these last months but it might not actually be a core focus as much as we’d like it to be. However, it could be a great by-product of innovative technology that we incorporate into live events.”**

**Sabrina Meyers, Hot Hospitality Exchange**

**“Many clients are now much more aware of the value and benefits of working in as sustainable way as possible and for several years now I have been championing British seasonal foliage, flowers and plant materials within our designs. We source all of our raw materials via New Covent Garden Flower Market and from small independent flower farmer growers via the Flowers From The Farm cooperative, and supporting as many small independent businesses now as possible feels the right thing to be doing.”**

**Simon Lycett**

**“Without doubt sustainability is at the forefront of suppliers’ minds, we are all responsible for producing ethically, due diligence of our supply chains and using local produce and materials is the future without doubt. How our businesses can become a force for good alongside our creative roles is an exciting challenge.”**

**Helen Sharland, Cuture**

**“As our industry begins to gradually recover, trends relating to sustainability and innovation are likely to re-emerge at the top of many agendas for event planners. There will also be an ever-increasing pressure on the corporate sector to generate tangible ROI through their events programmes.”**

**Richard Wilson, White Light**

# INNOVATION

**“Change is imperative to survival.** As an industry, we need to remember that **our core goal is creating emotion, moving people.** So in delivering virtual and hybrid events, a much deeper understanding is required of how to create this #emocurrency digitally. Many have moved towards quick fix solutions; bought tools, built studios, contracted event platforms, yet we are in such a rapid evolution of solutions that **we should remember to work out of objectives,** rather than the other way around. This is the only way to avoid an unengaging copy-paste event environment that leaves attendees uninspired.” **Heidi Legein, Mice Guru**

**No longer is mediocrity ok and nor should it ever be.** What the past 12 months has taught us and certainly what our clients have been saying is “there is tangible value in face to face events”.

**Colin Gray, Lavender Green**

“In a creative industry such as ours, **there is never an end to innovation** and we are very excited to see a whole new level of offerings. Eye-catching features will gain extra points for functionality; props that can act as dividers, screens or spacers will be appreciated and also design elements that can reduce any feeling of ‘empty space’ when opting for a bigger venue.”

**Susie Reid Thomas, Twilight Trees**

“In addition to hybrid and virtual events, **our venues in the past year have evolved** to accommodate a diverse range of events. These include brand activations, product launches, retail and fashion events. As a result, we have expanded our venue hire option and also discovered new event spaces.”

**Liz Young, Historic Royal Palaces**

“We are entering a very different events world. If we don't spend time and money integrating events with smart, entertaining and engaging solutions, they will be forgettable expensive parties. **Get it right and events become the centre from which to drive communications and relations for businesses and their brands.**”

**Charles Boyd, Hamilton Boyd**



# COMMUNITY

“As an industry we have literally been at a standstill, many of us with clients who have delayed their event or wedding not only once, but now twice, leaving our businesses with two years of interruption and having to completely re-think. **The industry has had to delve deep into survival mode** but also lean hugely on the immense creativity, that we all attribute to our existence, to keep on going, for our employees and our peers. **It has seen an industry innovate, collaborate and support, no competition, just solidarity, it has been hugely powerful to watch.**” **Helen Sharland, Culture**

“**If 2020 has taught us anything, it’s that imagination and creativity win over everything else.** At times it has been exhausting and emotional, yet with the fantastic support of our friends, clients and colleagues we have made it. We are stronger because of it too, when travel and venues are taken away, you have to use your imagination to be transported somewhere else.” **Alix Caiger, Caiger & Co**

“**We’ve both supported and been supported by our industry friends and clients** throughout this time and we cannot wait for our first big event back (I admitted to the team recently that I will most likely shed a tear!).” **Joanna Rhodes, Hayford & Rhodes**

“As an industry we need to rebuild better and different, be more sustainable for real, also ensure we are inclusive and diverse in all aspects of what we do. **What’s been brilliant is the amount of people in our sector willing to help support, advise and give their time to other industry colleagues.** We mustn’t forget to be grateful and thankful to each other for that, it’s not a given in most sectors. Let’s listen, include, and celebrate differences as well as commonality to become a better and more inclusive industry to be part of.” **Fay Sharpe, Fast Forward 15**

# COMMUNITY

“Our amazing industry will bounce back, we have shown such resilience, support and camaraderie throughout the pandemic and **it makes me incredibly proud to work amongst such a talented and inspiring community of professionals.**” **Laura Pearce, RSA House**

“One thing is clear, **events industry professionals always rise to a challenge** and one might say it brings out our very best. Rest assured, we believe the best is yet to come.”  
**Susie Reid Thomas, Twilight Trees**

“As we move forward as an industry, **we need to focus on the people who work in it.** Without people, there is no industry; events and the industry rely on people's creativity, knowledge, expertise, skills, and experience, despite advances in technology. **In the UK we are known worldwide for the sophistication and excellence of our industry,** and this is a result of the people who work in it. These people have been severely impacted over the past year, and for the industry to thrive, we need to focus on those who make it thrive.”  
**Sam Glenister-Batey, Royal School of Music**

“Over the past year, movements such as **We Make Events** have unified **the industry's entire supply chain as a community with one clear goal and voice.** It is imperative that we do not lose this and begin to fragment post-pandemic.” **Richard Wilson, White Light**

# OVERALL MOOD

“We are **cautiously optimistic** that we will all have a busy end to 2021 and return to close to pre-pandemic levels of business thereafter.” **Ben Paris, Smart Group**

“Many small companies such as mine are still **determined that we will continue to work within an industry we love.**”  
**Simon Lycett**

“**As an industry we have evolved** and that’s a great thing. We have understood the value, opportunity, scale and reach that virtual can provide. We have levelled up in the space of event technology resulting in a new breed of event professionals armed with virtual event experience. As an industry, collaboration has been at an all-time high as we’ve really embraced the fact that **together we are stronger in any scenario.**”  
**Sabrina Meyers, Hot Hospitality Exchange**

“For us in the entertainment world **I believe the future is really positive.** With staff working more frequently from home employers will need to engage them when they are together by doing more events and creating in office experiences. Whilst if the High Street is to survive at all, shops must offer a whole experience which clearly could involve forms of entertainment.”  
**Adam Sternberg, Sternberg Clarke**

“I’ll be **grinning with relief** that we’re back in action **again after an unspeakably difficult year.**”  
**Joanna Moody, Zafferano**

# LOOKING AHEAD

"Covid-19 is a profound shock to the framework of the global live events industry; a shock that has born new ways of working from cross sector collaboration to digitisation and bio-security. It is too early to predict if this is a paradigm shift or a massive ill wind pushing us off course, more likely the former meaning that **future relevance for participation lies in innovation and creativity**. We know that people crave contact, so we must continue to conceive experiences that meet our evolving times."

**Keith O'Loughlin, Smyle**

"The purpose of event organisers will be more than just organising, **they will build and grow communities to extend the lifetime of events**. **Marina Papadopoulou, Church House**

"Whilst we will no doubt continue to have to adapt for a long while, the industry will find creative ways to incorporate safety measures and bring the best elements of virtual events to merge with live in a new and exciting way. **The future is looking really interesting for events and this is undoubtably an opportunity for change in the most positive of ways**, bringing back craftsmanship, sustainable design and local producers alongside embracing incredible new technologies."

**Helen Sharland, Cuture**

"The return to live events for us will most certainly involve a juggling act between virtual and live events. There is a lot of expectation within the industry at the moment that there will be a surge in the last quarter of the year. We're obviously very excited to get back to providing amazing machines for events but **we are approaching it with a sense of responsibility to deliver events as safely as possible**." **Rhys Saunders, Lick Me I'm Delicious**

"We have had to adapt to be as flexible as possible with clients, suppliers and our own staff and internal teams. **This flexibility is something I hope that we as an industry retain** in a post-pandemic world." **Sam Glenister-Batey, Royal School of Music**

# WE MAKE EVENTS

“WeMakeEvents was set up by Professional Lighting and Sound Association (PLASA) in April last year, in the wake of the pandemic. As we witnessed the imminent closure of the live events industry, the collective – staffed entirely by volunteers – reacted by setting out to raise awareness of the plight of the sector and directly support the highly-skilled supply chain. For over a year, WeMakeEvents has made strides in drumming up support, having launched a number of hard-hitting campaign activations and onboarded a number of celebrity ambassadors. **Yet there has never been a more critical time for us to amplify our voice and become heard.**

Of course we applaud the string of government-backed event pilots, orchestrated to help gigs, festivals, corporate events and sports return safely. **These initiatives are breathing life back into the healing sector, which remains hopeful for a safe return. Whilst optimism keeps the supply chain united, the reality is that the industry won't be able to bounce back on 21 June in full capacity.** The restart date doesn't take into account the months, if not years of meticulous planning that underpins each and every production. We've already seen more than a quarter of UK music festivals disappear from our calendars due to a lack of inaction on event cancellation insurance. Even if live events can reopen at partial capacity in June, **it'll take a long while to rebuild the confidence, scale, and certainty** to ensure thousands of freelancers can commit to leaving temporary work.

**“In order for the UK's £84 billion sector to not only survive, but flourish, we're asking the government to support an industry desperately hoping to return.** As the exciting pilots help to establish how events can go ahead after 21 June, tailored safety nets for the invisible army – in the form of extended covid-19 cancellation insurance – are needed to ensure its survival without work. Actively engaging with the sector, so culturally significant to our country, is equally important while the plan for reopening remains uncertain. **Despite the challenges that've been faced, we've seen fantastic forms of collective support** for WeMakeEvents, demonstrating the epitome of collaboration. We hope to continue building this positive momentum and build recognition for the industry with the government, **so we can come back stronger.**”

**Peter Heath, Managing Director of Professional Lighting and Sound Association (PLASA) and Steering Committee member of #WeMakeEvents**

# A NEW EVENTS WORLD



**ANNA PETERS**

**CREATIVE DIRECTOR  
EVOLVE EVENTS**

The events industry has changed in the last 12 months beyond recognition, with a fast-track adoption of virtual technology that has redefined how we communicate permanently and it's a different event-world we find ourselves in, with the digital transformation of events providing new opportunities but also challenges as we go through a period of trial and error to ascertain what a successful event will look like.

The world around us has also changed and event professionals need to focus on how they connect and engage, not just in our own community but how we can bring people together.

In order to remain relevant as an industry we have to understand what works for businesses and participants and deliver experiences that engage audiences, regardless of whether they are live, virtual or hybrid events, in order to enable the human interaction that we've come to realise matters so much.

The truth is that the pandemic is only a catalyst for change in the industry. In fact, there has been a shift in how events deliver experiences for some time, with many welcoming the opportunity to create a truly bespoke experience that small events offer whilst others are desperate to hear the roar of the crowd again. The provision of personalised experiences will become key, whilst more awareness of our impact on the world around us means event solutions will need to be sustainable as conscious consumerism grows and the demand to create events with a reduced carbon footprint rises.

To create this report, I spoke to a wide range of event professionals across the supply chain including venues, suppliers and agencies as well as industry leaders. What struck me the most is the resilience shown and the determination to carry on working in the business that they have created and cherish. After a massive rollercoaster of a year, the courage shown makes me believe that we will emerge stronger than ever before.

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Thank you to all the event professionals that have contributed to the report as well as the wider events community that has come together to support each other. I look forward to seeing us continue to inspire and create events that have a lasting impact, no matter the challenges at hand.**

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