

LET'S MEET UP SAFELY

Inspirational catalogue with
creative ideas for planning a
safe and secure meeting



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FEELING UP TO HOSTING MORE IN-PERSON MEETINGS?



Setting up good in-person meetings is possible – both during and after a pandemic

Covid-19 changed the world as we know it, turning our daily lives, work, and ways of meeting upside down. That's especially true for those of us who typically have lots of in-person meetings with people - at meetings, conferences, and events. An entire industry came to a grinding halt, but the many cancellations didn't just lead to stagnation. They inspired innovation.

People went back to the drawing board to think of new ways of meeting. They honed their digital skills to offer virtual alternatives to events. But even though creativity and the drive to innovate has flourished, people need in-person meetings and spaces where they can let themselves be inspired.

Although in-person meetings are making a comeback, we shouldn't turn our backs on all the great developments we've seen over the course of the pandemic. We can and should learn from it and keep striving for innovation.

Because the world after Covid-19 doesn't look like the one that we knew. You've learnt a lot, and because we've all been through the same thing, you know your attendees better than ever before.

You know what has worked during the pandemic and what your collaborators long for – You know the specific context, and you've had the chance to experiment, creating experiences with new ideas and formats.

We've interviewed people in the Danish meeting industry across geography, size, and place in the value chain to create this inspirational catalogue. We asked them about their best examples and ideas for planning and executing in-person meetings and conferences. The catalogue is peppered with international cases from places that began to reopen earlier than we did, allowing people to experiment more with the formats of meetings and conferences, much to our inspiration.

We hope these examples will inspire you to keep developing, so you can return to safe and comfortable in-person meetings, even in a world with Covid-19 and its repercussions.

Enjoy.
MeetDenmark



We need in-person meetings

For the sake of society, businesses, and organisations but most of all employees, we need to meet in person. We all experience the world with our five senses, and in-person meetings are particularly enriching because they allow us to be present, curious, and trusting.

That's one of the reasons many of us are eager to get out of the house and experience in-person meetings, conferences, symposiums, workshops, and more. Meetings that break up the monotony of our day-to-day lives at the office are where we absorb input and discussions best, and we remember the agenda much better. When we try new things, we generate new and better ideas and we're more open, and meetings that take place outside the house are a great place to cultivate networks and connections. People are wonderfully analogue in that way.

This catalogue encourages you to play around with the norms of a business event and shows you different ways to host in-person meetings that don't compromise on safety.

CULTIVATE SAFETY BEFORE THE MEETING



Communicating with event and meeting attendees before the meeting or conference kicks off is more important than ever as it helps them feel safe at the event.

Although some attendees are keen to meet in person, we must remember the people who are a little more nervous and reserved.

To make sure everyone feels safe attending your event, you and your partners need to position yourself as experts long before the event begins. Check out the examples below to find the inspiration to help you do that:



Personalise Covid-19 communication

You can communicate safety measures and restrictions in a personalised way. In fact, your attendees will take more kindly to the information if you steer clear of template signs from the Health Authority and make the communication your own. Whether that means putting yourself front and centre, covering a specific event theme, or get the speakers to communicate the rules in a video is up to you.

Video is an excellent medium for personalising communication. It's easier for attendees to process a short video than a long text about what to do and what not to do. Videos allow them to see and hear about the measures put in place to ensure their safety, and it establishes a connection before the meeting kicks off.



Care kits for the attendees

Another approach to cultivating safety and setting positive expectations is to send out physical care kits with branded protective equipment, hand sanitiser, and other products to get the attendees excited about the event.

There's still a lot of uncertainty surrounding Covid-19, so a good care kit might include high-quality alcohol, sanitary wipes, a link to download your event app, or a guide to the safety measures attendees can expect at the event. All good experiences start with setting expectations, so make good use of the days and hours leading up to the meeting by getting the attendees buzzing.



Shake hands – without the hands

We all know the rule about minimising touch by now, but meeting with people always ends up being awkward anyway. Do we wave, bump elbows, or something else altogether?

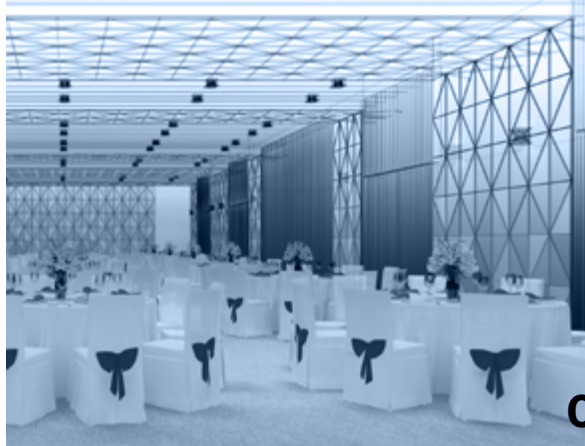
What if you made a safe ritual for greeting attendees? You can use your communication channels to introduce the greeting before the meeting or conference so that all the attendees know how to say hello. Make a video of you demonstrating the greeting, or put together an infographic to show people what to do. When the attendees arrive, there will be no confusion about how to greet people. It can be a bit of fun in a bad situation.



Inspections at a safe distance

The Covid-19 pandemic spotlighted safety and changing regulations, creating a need for adaptability as events planners had to accommodate changing distance requirements and restrictions at the drop of a hat. When booking venues and compiling overviews of the different restrictions and preferences, it can be hard to figure out how different setups will actually look in real life.

Reach out to your venue or Destination Fyn, Destination Nord, Visit Aarhus, or Wonderful Copenhagen Convention Bureau to discuss the options for a virtual tour. That might help settle your nerves, and the visual cue will give you a better sense of the space.



MAKE A GOOD AND SAFE FIRST IMPRESSION

First impressions are essential. That goes for meetings and conferences too, especially during a pandemic. When attendees show up for an event, you want them to let their shoulders drop because they feel confident that they're in for a good, safe experience.

That means we need to change events as we know them. We don't expect to see crowded, buzzing entrances filled with people in conversation anymore. Instead, we expect to be met with safety precautions and feel that we're in a safe space.

It might be a good idea to talk to your chosen venues and partners about how you can get the event off to a good, safe start. Find inspiration in these examples:





Communicate guidelines with a dash of humour

There’s more to health and safety announcements than the standard-issue templates from the Health Authority. Use your brand, industry, and relevant personalities to make your event or meeting stand out in a quirky way that grabs your attendees’ attention.

In their signs reminding people to keep their distance, the National Parks and Wildlife Service South Australia have written, “Keep one adult kangaroo apart”. The Ukrainian Ministry for Culture has opted for classical portraits with added face coverings and hand sanitiser to remind visitors of the restrictions.

Place the signs by the entrance to make your attendees smile on arrival, and use them throughout the event to create a sense of cohesion and recognisability.



Create a sense of safety

It’s not (just) about making the event safe. It has to feel safe too! The truth is that an event or meeting can be safe without the attendees feeling safe – and that’s such a shame!

There are many ways to create a sense of safety. For example, the Hilton Hotel shows that rooms are safe to enter by placing a sticker on the door and doorframe after cleaning. The sticker has to be broken to enter the room, and the experience of ripping the sticker helps anchor the guest in the moment.

You can cultivate a similar feeling at meetings and events by sealing food and drink or by placing a ribbon across the attendees’ chairs so that they have to break the ribbon to take a seat. This communicates that everything is clean and safe when your attendees arrive at the meeting or event.



Create distance with separate entrances and meeting times

Attendees usually arrive more or less all at once for big meetings, conferences, and events, but that's something we want to avoid while the pandemic is going on.

What we want these days is a relatively empty foyer and lots of space so that we don't have to slalom through the room to keep a safe distance.

You can prevent crowding by asking people to use separate entrances or arrive at staggered times. This is one of the approaches in use at a convention centre in Aalborg. Fill your rooms through separate entrances, and tell the attendees which door to use at registration or before arrival. Many venues and conference centres already have experience working with safely distance flows, so speak to your venue about the options for your next meeting or conference.





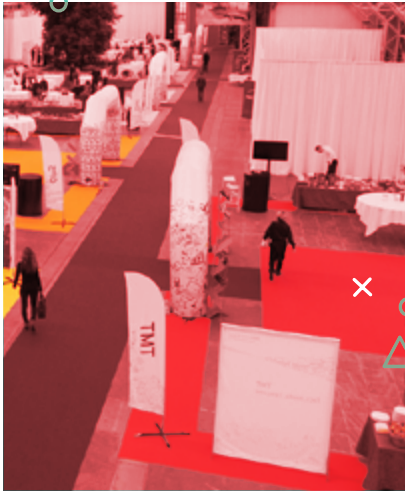
Use colours and lights to cultivate safety and a safe flow

Rather than signposting, you can use lights and colours to encourage flow for a bigger event. You can use coloured lights to show the attendees which way to move. Before arrival, you can assign attendees a colour. At the event, yellow attendees then follow the yellow lights while blue attendees follow, you guessed it, the blue lights.

Use lights and colours to get attendees moving or to guide them to their assigned group. This approach gives everyone a visual cue for where they should be, minimising the risk of different groups getting mixed up during the event.

You can also use coloured bracelets or pins to signal how much distance the attendees would like to keep between themselves and others.

The essential part of this strategy is to communicate the different colours' meanings before the event to avoid confusion once it all kicks off.



MAKE THE MEETING A SAFE EXPERIENCE



Meetings as a whole - big, small, or in between - have changed because of Covid-19, and the pandemic has created new expectations.

The people who are banking on going back to 'normal' risk disappointing their attendees. Because Covid has changed us, and although we would have preferred to skip the pandemic altogether, it has also led to some positive changes.

We've been forced to try new things, rethink the formats we were used to, and challenge the idea of 'normal'. We've discovered that some things work better in this new world while other things are sorely missed. We need to carry those lessons with us as we move forward, and our attendees expect that from us. There are many ways to go about that.

Rethink the layout and create a safer space

Distance requirements and gathering bans have forced us to rethink the concept of physical space. It has pushed us to think beyond the conventional theatre layout, horseshoe setup, and grouped tables, pushing us to re-evaluate how we design rooms.

Why should we limit ourselves by going back to the way we used to set up tables? There are many nifty ways to create a Covid-safe room. Just check out the examples below:



Seating modules create more distance

Many people have tried something completely unconventional and reinvented seating in a layered 3D format to maintain a safe distance. For example, attendees have been seated on raised platforms or even in the air. If you have the option to rethink the layout of the furniture in the room, you can consider doing the same.



Place the stage front and centre

Another example goes beyond rethinking the seating layout to repositioning the stage. Rather than placing it against a wall, you can push the stage into the middle of the room to make space for attendees on all sides. That makes room for more people (even with social distancing) and ensures that nobody is too far from the stage. Reach out to your venue and discuss your options for making the most of the furnishing.



Make use of empty seats

We don't always have the option to redesign the furniture in the room, but there are still creative ways to enforce social distancing and create a positive experience for the attendees. The distance requirement often means that you need to place an empty seat between attendees - and you can make that open space part of the experience.

An example is one of the annual Christmas shows, the Danish television station TV2 placed beautifully wrapped gifts on the empty seats, communicating the distance requirement in a way that was in keeping with the nature of the event.

If there are empty seats between the attendees at your event, you can do something similar. Think about the meeting or conference theme and brainstorm decorations that would make sense and perhaps make your attendees smile.



Use quirky and creative distance markers

If you can't redesign the room's layout for added safety, another option is to use creative distance markers.

Instead of just asking attendees to keep their distance, you can turn the PSA into a gimmick. Perhaps you can borrow the local football team's mascot outfit. It's usually quite big, so you can use it to enforce social distancing by having the mascot walk around.

You can also hire extras to create distance in a creative way. For example, you could ask them to walk around with hula hoops, large drinks trays, or something similar.

Your venue will have experience hiring waiters and extras for various events, so reach out to discuss the possibility of hiring creative distance markers for your conference.

Rethink the meeting format

Who says that meetings have to take place in a conference room? Or that a conference automatically equals a large audience and a speaker on a massive stage?

Event organisers worldwide have spent the past year rethinking the meeting format as we know it, tailoring it to a world of restrictions. The result has been fun, unconventional formats that won't be going anywhere even after the pandemic.

And you don't necessarily need lots of resources to do things differently. Draw on the examples below for inspiration, and brainstorm how you can do something similar at your next meeting:



Host conferences for smaller groups

Consider assigning your attendees to small groups and taking them through the conference instead of gathering all of them in one big room. The result will be a new kind of experience and a much safer conference format.

Perhaps you can guide the attendees through a series of rooms where each room has a different speaker or task for them to solve? Or maybe you can create themed rooms for your attendees to walk through?

Assigning groups allows you to host meetings and conferences with more people. It also creates a more intimate experience and means that you can make use of smaller rooms.



Make use of the time in small groups

Many events have moved online during the pandemic, and we've discovered that virtual events actually work. The challenge is encouraging discussion, opening up for reflection, and building connections online.

Universities across the world have been using the concept of flipped classrooms, where students acquire knowledge at home through individual study or online lectures and then reconvene at the university to discuss the things they've read and watched.

When setting up in-person meetings and conferences, you can use a similar format. Let the attendees acquire the relevant knowledge online or elsewhere before the event, so they can use the advantages of in-person meetings to discuss, build connections, and further contextualise their newfound knowledge by bouncing it off other people.





Social distancing with Silent Meeting

You might have heard of Silent Disco, where festivalgoers receive a pair of headphones and dance around to the music they choose from a range of 'channels'. The same concept is now used at meetings and conferences, but instead of music, attendees can choose between a series of talks and breakout sessions.

The concept allows your attendees to listen to the talks that interest them most - without leaving the comfort of their seats. All they have to do is tune in to the speaker they've been looking forward to, and the result is a unique experience that requires no movement, so there's no risk of getting too close.

Adding small, surprising elements like these that help cultivate a sense of safety at your meeting or conference can help you stand out from the crowd of event organisers and create safe experiences that people will be talking about for weeks to come. And the best part? The headphones are cheap and easy to rent, so speak to your venue about plugging your conference into a Silent Meeting.



Keep it analogue

Technology might have seen us through with pandemic-era virtual meetings, but it's not always the answer. Sometimes it's more disruptive than helpful. Consider keeping your conference completely analogue - no screens, disruptive emails, or other technology.

Look at the Fireside conference, for example. Instead of jumping on the digital bandwagon, they created an analogue conference without screens and PowerPoints. Consider removing some technology from your meetings and events and how their absence might create value for your attendees.

CULTIVATE SAFETY BETWEEN MEETINGS



The time between meetings and talks has been one of the hardest things to tackle during Covid and likely will be for some time to come. When the attendees are in their seats, it's easy to enforce social distancing.

But how do you prevent everyone from rushing out to queue by the toilets when the talk ends? How do you stop crowds from gathering around the coffee machine? And last but not least if we can't do what we've always done, then how do we create a positive experience for our attendees between talks and meetings?

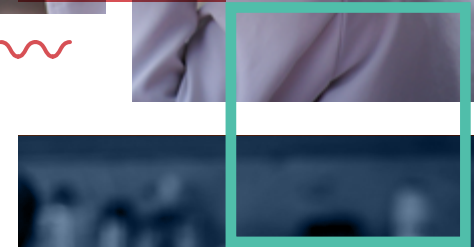
We have to weave value into the gaps between meetings. We need to provide an enriching experience that doesn't compromise safety or comfort. To help you out, we've compiled a series of creative examples of how to safely enrich the break experience.



Avoid assemblies – let breaks come to the attendees

At big events, people usually meet in conference halls and similar spaces to attend a talk. Then they walk around the venue during the break. But what if they didn't need to walk around during the break and you could prevent them from congregating in large crowds?

You can let the breaks come to the attendees rather than the other way around by introducing table service during/after talks and workshops. This will prevent them from rushing to form a crowd around the café/bar during the break. During the pandemic, a festival in Aarhus took that approach, instructing festivalgoers to stay in their seats and then bringing out a "bar" in a wheelbarrow. You can even tailor the service to the theme of your event. At a formal event, you can have "butlers" walking around to wait on the attendees. If your event is all about new technology, you could use robots as waiters, and if your focus is on sustainability, your waiters can bring out drinks in environmentally friendly packaging.





Create safe connections with “brain dates”

Part of the value of conferences is the opportunity to network and create connections. That’s something we’ve all been missing during the pandemic when our only access to conferences has been virtual. But now that we’re back to meeting in person, you should run the meetings to ensure that your attendees have the chance to make connections safely.

Look to the C2 conference in Montreal, for example. The organisers feel that attendees learn as much from each other as they do from the speakers, so they run “brain dates” to facilitate meaningful connections between up to four people. They even have a dedicated brain-date lounge.

You can use a similar format to facilitate connections between the attendees at your event. Sending them on brain dates in pairs makes it easy to enforce social distancing, and it allows you to use smaller, less conventional spaces.

Reach out to your venue and talk about activating smaller rooms to cultivate a sense of safety for the attendees.

CREATE A SAFE DINING EXPERIENCE



Dining has been one of the primary challenges during the pandemic. We've been about gathering in large groups and touch the same things for fear of compromising hygiene. The exciting and versatile dining experiences with our colleagues that were once highlights of meetings, events, and conferences have become activities that make us feel less safe and make it harder to muster enthusiasm for big conferences.

But it doesn't have to be that way. We can create safe, comfortable, and fantastic dining experiences that focus on good food and a sense of togetherness without clinical safety measures that feel like a downgrade.

The key is turning the restrictions into positive add-ons rather than factors that take away from the experience. For example, long queues are a thing of the past, often replaced with separately plated meals. This change is generally met with positive feedback because it allows attendees to have a relaxed chat during their meals because they get to focus on enjoying the food and the company rather than spend their time queueing.

Below are some examples of how others have created safe dining experiences in the pandemic area. Draw on them for inspiration, and consider how you can make some of these solutions work for you.



Drive-in dining or grab-n-go

The dining experience doesn't need to take place at a table. If you don't have the space for a communal dining room that maintains social distancing, consider letting the attendees bring their foot outside with a grab-n-go concept, where they eat together in groups or pairs.

That's what the car manufacturer Lexus did in 2020 with drive-in dining. The attendees stayed in their cars and were served delicious gourmet meals in their own backseats.

The possibilities depend on your venue, but you can use similar drive-in or grab-n-go concepts for your event. Maybe there's a park nearby where the attendees can spread out and have a picnic? Or perhaps you can serve food as your attendees leave the event or head between venues? Reach out to your venue to discuss the options. They know the nearby suppliers and the practical measures needed to set up the experience.



Move the dining experience to a new place

Consider whether you can move the dining experience to a new setting, creating a unique food experience that the attendees are guaranteed to remember.

Over the pandemic, we've seen various examples of meetings, concerts, and pub quizzes hosted in ski lifts and on pedalos dotted around a lake in Odense.

If you're lucky enough to be hosting an event in natural surroundings, look to the 2020 management retreat for chief executives for inspiration. Organisers used the surrounding area to create a safe and positive dining experience with their "Feast-in-the-Field" concept. The farewell lunch took place on a floating dock with a view of the mountains and water.

The staff at your venue know the surrounding area like the back of their hands, so get in touch with them to discuss the options for a unique dining experience.



Serve the food on trays that enforce distance

Bringing people together might create a sense of risk, so it's worth considering how you can create a safe atmosphere for your dining experience, and perhaps even make it stand out that much more, by having the waiters serve food from a safe distance.

Check out the March Gut design studio, for example. As a result of social distancing, they've developed a 1.2-metre serving tray for the restaurant at Biohotel Schwanen in the Austrian Alps. The length of the tray means that the waiters can serve food without getting too close to guests. And most importantly: the tray has a stunning design that adds a gorgeous touch to the dining experience rather than detracting from it.

Can you use trays or other serving formats that add value to the dining experience while keeping a safe distance between the waiters and attendees?



Use the city to spread out attendees

Have you considered enriching the dining experience by cultivating a sense of safety while supporting the hospitality industry that has taken a particularly hard hit over the pandemic? Your conference doesn't need to be tied down to a single venue.

You can spread out the attendees across the city, giving them a unique dining experience and the chance to safely visit the city where the conference is taking place. That's what conference organisers in Aarhus decided to do.

If you book various restaurants around the city, your guests can decide where they want to go. The result is a cosy, unique, and safe experience that allows the attendees to network in a more intimate way than they would be able to in a communal dining hall.

EXPAND THE MEETING EXPERIENCE WITH TECHNOLOGY



Most of us are acquainted with some of the many online and virtual meeting formats out there by now. For some people, these have been the only option since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. And virtual meetings have been a journey with all its ups and downs.

Although many of us have come down with a case of screen fatigue, the technology has been more than just a necessary evil during the pandemic. It has also opened our eyes to new possibilities and formats.

Those are experiences that your attendees will bring with them going forwards. While they might be excited about the return of in-person events, many people have realised that there are advantages to incorporating technology. That doesn't mean we'll have fewer in-person meetings going forward but rather that digital additions to meetings and conferences will become more common.

ADVANTAGES OF A DIGITAL LAYER



#1

One of the advantages of adding digital elements is that it allows for more shareable content, which increases knowledge sharing. For example, you can return the keynote speeches and presentations and share them on your intranet or upload them to the internet for all to see. The result is an event that isn't tied to a specific place and time, which the attendees can go back to time and time again.



#2

Another advantage is that a digital layer increases capacity and makes the event accessible to people who struggle with crowds, whether it's because they have a disability, can't make the trip, or don't feel comfortable participating in person.



#3

We've noticed during the pandemic that engagement and attendee questions have grown. Some attendees feel that it's "easier and more comfortable" to ask their questions behind the screen than in a hall full of people.

All three advantages can be activated at in-person meetings and conferences.

We're already seeing examples of digital layers being added to in-person meetings around Denmark and the rest of the world. We've compiled some of the best examples for you to dive into below:



Make it safe with hybrid events

At this point, there are many ways to create hybrid meetings where some attendees tune in at home while others show up in person. Combining virtual and physical aspects means that you can set up big events without compromising safety and comfort.

Providing a virtual format also creates a safety net as it guarantees that your event will go ahead. You're planning two versions of the same event, so if the restrictions change and it turns out you can't run your in-person event at capacity, you won't need to cancel it altogether. All you have to do is scale back the in-person event according to the new restrictions and prepare for more attendees at the virtual version.

Another common example for big events is using conference and meetings spaces as smaller hubs for a large group. This setup allows attendees to meet representatives and collaborators in their area or in different rooms at the same venue while participating in a national or even global conference. You might even stream keynote speeches to everyone before setting up breakout rooms and local workshops.

If you want to create a successful hybrid event, it might be worth adjusting the schedule. Make the sessions shorter, use online Q&A platforms, plan breaks that take both virtual and in-person attendees into account, and much more. Feel free to get in touch with your professional venue or MeetDenmark's partners for inspiration.

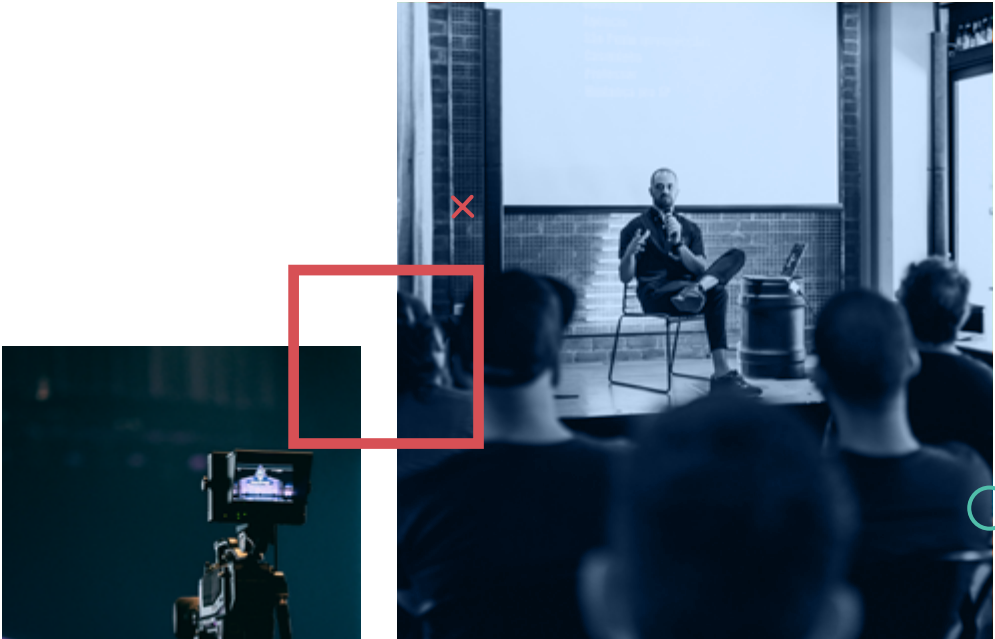


Broadcast your event to digital attendees

The most basic hybrid format is to record keynotes, discussions, and so on at an in-person meeting or conference and share these with the attendees who have signed up for the virtual version of the event.

There are also examples of event organisers and conference spaces that go above and beyond. Consider the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, where organisers have the option to broadcast their conferences and meetings live on the internet using the convention centre's modern studio for virtual productions. Studio 801 – as they call it – predicted what was coming and invested in everything from screens and cameras to AV and streaming equipment. They established a series of professional studios to help businesses present their (hybrid) programmes without too many obstacles.

Fortunately, you don't need access to a studio to create a successful hybrid event. There is value in bringing the physical and virtual worlds together, but there are also expenses and disadvantages. Talk to professional venues to find out what the options are and what makes the most sense for you and your event.





Bring the virtual world to life – and vice versa

Another hybrid – although much more expensive – model involves using VR headsets. VR use has expanded drastically during the pandemic because it creates a much more engaging experience than “just” attending a virtual meeting. VR makes it feel like you’re actually there, and there are many ways to use it. You can provide headsets to allow those who can’t make it in person to attend online. But you can also use VR to allow the in-person attendees to experience things they wouldn’t be able to in real life. The technology is particularly great for demonstrating products etc. because it enables the attendees to touch the product without actually touching it.



Use a moderator to optimise the virtual experience

As a virtual attendee at a hybrid event, there is a significant risk of feeling like a second-class attendee. Feeling that the in-person attendees are more important and that the online attendees have been downgraded to passive observers.

It might be a good idea to invite a moderator with experience facilitating online events, running workshops, and using interactive platforms for quizzes, questions, etc., as seen in Copenhagen. This approach ensures a good experience of talks and online collaboration. If the moderator uses some digital workshop tools, the attendees might get a deeper sense of being part of the event. That said, human interactions, deep connections, and networking possibilities remain significant draws of in-person attendance.



Feeling up to hosting more in-person meetings?

We hope that the ideas and examples from the meeting industry have made you excited to plan some in-person meetings, events, and conferences possibly even with a twist. The aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic isn't going to disappear overnight, just like caution and consideration will still be at the forefront of many people's minds. If we want to create good and safe experiences for our attendees, we have to go back to the drawing board.

This catalogue was developed by MeetDenmark, the national development association for business tourism in Denmark. The purpose of MeetDenmark is to promote business tourism throughout the country and gaining international recognition for Denmark as one of the most innovative destinations in business tourism.

MeetDenmark is an independent association, and the members are the Ministry of Business, Industry and Financial Affairs, Destination Nord, VisitAarhus, Destination Fyn, and Wonderful Copenhagen. The Ministry of Business, Industry and Financial Affairs is represented by VisitDenmark on the association's board and workgroup.

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Quotes and excerpts encouraged. Please refer to the source.

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Dear reader,

This is an excerpt from a bigger inspirational catalogue for innovative and safe meetings created by Innovation Lab for MeetDenmark with the support of the Danish Board of Business Development, May 2021.

Get in touch with your professional event organiser or venue if you want to see the entire catalogue or if you're interested in reading about other concepts and ideas.

 Danish Board of Business Development

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