By MOVE Communications Posted February 22, 2021 In Event Marketing

MAKING THE SHIFT FROM IN-PERSON TO VIRTUAL EVENTS

HOW A QUICK PIVOT EVOLVED INTO AN EXCEPTIONAL DIGITAL LIVE EVENT

The Event Must Go on

The world loves live events. More specifically, the marketing and business world. From large, global expos to local lunch and learns, and every product launch in between, real-time get-togethers are all the "go." What better opportunity does a brand have to introduce, educate, and celebrate its consumers? Not many. In fact, physical events are probably one of the best tools marketers can use to propel business growth. That being said, at this moment in history a global pandemic has forced a worldwide pivot from in-person to virtual events. So much so, it is estimated that the live streaming market will be worth a **whopping** $70 billion by 2021. In order to respond to the changes in the world at large, MOVE Communications shifted to the digital event platform in record speed to meet client need.

In Support of Sacred Heart Major Seminary

Sacred Heart Major Seminary (SHMS) is a Catholic seminary in Detroit that prepares priests, deacons and lay ministers to serve the people of the Catholic Church and share "the joyful news of the risen Jesus" in the broader community. MOVE Communications has worked with SHMS for the past seven years to produce its largest live event–the Archbishop's Gala. The Gala is an annual opportunity to congratulate the recently ordained priests, celebrate with other supporters at a fun and inspiring evening, and showcase the mission of the Seminary. But 2020 was different. It marked the Centennial Anniversary of Sacred Heart Major Seminary. One hundred years of service. It was to be a "really big" celebration to honor this milestone. But then, Covid came…and everything had to be recalibrated.

Go Virtual, or Not at All

SHMS Event Manager, Emily Berschback, had to make the call on whether to "go virtual, or not go at all." SHMS GALAs have always been executed at a very high level, with over 1,000 guests in the ballroom at TCF Center (the former COBO and soon-to-be Huntington Center). The night begins with guests reconnecting with friends over hors d'oeuvres in a cocktail hour, followed by a delicious full course meal, an entertaining, inspirational program, and then an afterglow party with dancing and dessert. Emily knew she ran risks with virtual–like her supporters being disappointed in not having all of the in-person interaction; or that guests might have problems getting on-line; or that there could be challenges with live-streaming and connectivity interruption. But she decided to "go virtual!"

A Guiding Principle for Successful In-Person or Virtual Events

When MOVE's President, Don Hart, heard of the decision, he reminded his team of a guiding principle MOVE has always used in achieving success producing in-person events. "We believe an audience should be rewarded with an *unforgettable* experience when they attend a live event. An experience that affords them the opportunity to connect with people—those they know and love, or those they're meeting for the first time—while being entertained, informed and inspired. We knew we needed to apply this same principle. We were just shifting modes."

Pivoting from In-Person to Virtual

Here are a few tips we've learned on how to pivot from in-person to virtual live events:

- Pre-event marketing is even more essential in virtual events. The audience needs to be invited and reminded to set the event time aside so they remember to log on and virtually attend the event. Work hard to get the word out before the date. Ask for on-line pre-registration if you can.
- Content is crucial. Every moment you are not engaging your digital audience is an opportunity to lose them. In a split second of waning interest, your audience may hop onto another social platform or get up and go to the kitchen…and possibly be lost for the rest of the program. It's imperative to capture and keep your audience's attention throughout the event.
- Mix it up. Short, poignant, moments help maintain audience interest and future recall.
- Make sure to grab your attendee's data during the event so you can follow up and build new relationships post-event.
- Make it visually memorable. Themed banners, logos, colors…all help set mood, re-enforce your brand and make the experience "more sticky" so these images stay in their mind.
- Market after the event. One of the great things about a virtual event is that after it's done you can post it to your website and gain significant traffic, sometimes more viewers than even attended the event. For example, the music video, *You Raise Me Up*, that we produced has garnered over 14,400 views over the last 9 months. That's 14 times as many as would have seen it at an in-person live event. **You can check out the video here.**

A Gala Worthy of a Century Milestone

Dave Menzo, producer of the show, gives this perspective. "The key to any show is being audience-centric. Everything you do must be passed through the filter of how your audience will experience it. We knew there were some things that our audience looked forward to every year. We had to keep those and figure out how to do them virtually. Then there are some new things we introduced to surprise our audience–like a Zoom game show with alumni priest contestants. These guys were hilarious."

Let's walk through some of the evening's highlights. The Archbishop's Virtual Gala 2020 began online at 7PM on June 26th with a digital doorway that was open wide to warmly welcome old friends and new guests alike.

The celebration included surprise appearances from many alumni and guests. A notable treat was the appearance of Msgr. Robert Monticello–the oldest living alumnus of Sacred Heart, who entered the seminary 80 years ago. His presence and touching message wouldn't have been possible had the event not been virtual.

Emceed by Fr. Mario Amore, the GALA also contained a live cash raffle, surprise guest appearances, and the introduction of the twelve men recently ordained to the priesthood. The audience participated in the chat link and commented afterward that the event really was magnetic and retained their ongoing attention. As part of the credits at the end of the show, we did something new and included video ads from the sponsors.

A key element in our success was the outstanding work of the audio-visual company, Mercury Sound and Lighting. Principal, Dave Johnson, brought a full-court press with his fully-masked team to set up a virtual studio in the Seminary's library. The Mercury team made certain to isolate "video village" from the main performance area to meet Covid protocols. Supported by the expertise of Michelle Susko, Assistant Stage Manager, Matt Hieber directed the production team and with the video segments MOVE had created ahead of the live stream, dialed in just the right sense of entertainment value.

All in all, the Archbishop's Virtual GALA 2020 brought together donors, sponsors, seminary family, and alumni from around the world to celebrate the achievements of SHMS and give thanks to God. By all feedback received, it was a wonderful event to be remembered for years to come—much of it not possible without the addition of the digital platform.

Emily Berschback summed it up: "When life gives you lemons, or in this case a pandemic, you gather all the best people you know (MOVE Communications) to help and take what would have been a 1000+ in-person event and turn it into a virtual one-hour spectacular! I am feeling beyond blessed for the hard work the MOVE team put into making our virtual gala possible. Through close and detailed collaboration, we were able to offer a way for our donors, sponsors and seminary family to be united around our mission and to recognize 100 years of blessings! Now that's some sweet lemonade."

The Virtues of Virtual

So, we've already talked about some unexpected virtues of virtual live events. But let's highlight a few more benefits to consider this year as you launch your own live digital brand event.

1. **Potential Cost Savings:** Travel, hotel, food, beverage and venue costs are significantly reduced.
2. **Global Reach:** The internet offers a wider audience access for attending the event.
3. **Potential Time Savings:** You can regain the time you would have lost booking venue, hotel and travel. Plus, featured presenters save significant hours in travel and so may become more available for your event.
4. **Added Control:** While part of the appeal of live events is that they are "live" and there's the excitement that "anything can happen," with virtual events you can take some of the downside of "anything" out of the equation by producing video segments. Because the audience is watching on a screen, pre-produced roll-ins, if produced well, don't feel "canned" and give you the certainty that the content will be just the way you want it.
5. **Improved Attendee Feedback:** Online audience surveys can increase the amount of feedback and help you continue to improve your events.

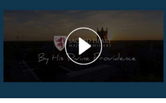
No Second Thoughts

One thing has become certain: virtual events, on their own, offer a number of benefits that no brand or company should overlook. Hopefully, we will again be able to host and attend live in-person events, but virtual will always now be part of the mix. And for good reason. If you need help producing your virtual event, look no further. We'd love for you to contact us today so we can help you achieve create an *unforgettable* experience for your audience.

Let's talk

Preparing to Celebrate a Century
With the century celebration on the horizon, SHMS and MOVE Communications collaborated on the 2019 Gala event topic. In collaboration with the SHMS team, they embraced the overarching theme: By His Divine Providence. This all-encompassing Idea of God's guidance beautifully connected SHMS' previous 100 years of commitment and accomplishments to the promise of the continued life-changing work of the Seminary. SHMS, with the support of the MOVE creative team, hosted an evening complete with reception, raffle, presentations, dinner, Archbishop address, seminarian's band performance, and much more–all threaded together by the theme of God's providence. One of the most memorable takeaways of the evening was a simple three-minute video shared entitled, "Throughline."

Written by Mike Sullivan, produced by Dave Menzo, shot and edited by Joel Rodeheaver, "Throughline" tells the story of God's personal care for every person through a touching and beautifully done allegory. The Annual Telly Awards Council gave "Throughline" a Silver Telly in recognition of outstanding creative work. Please don't take our word for it, you can enjoy it for yourself here.



Co-written by Kimi Mattig-Louria and Don Hart

References in order of hyperlink appearance:

1. Tech Jury – https://techjury.net/blog/live-streaming-statistics/#gref
2. SHMS Archbishop's Gala – https://archbishopsgala.com
3. vimeo – https://vimeo.com/342101974
4. SHMS Archbishop's Gala – https://archbishopsgala.com
5. MOVE Communications – https://movecommunications.com/contact/

MOVE Communications

RECENT POSTS

TELLY AWARDS AND GALAS

TELLY AWARD WINNER

DIGITAL MARKETING IN A COVID-19 WORLD

Search site

RECENT POSTS
TELLY Awards and GALAS
Making the Shift from In-Person to Virtual Events
Telly Award Winner
Digital Marketing in a COVID-19 World
The Resurgence of Print

RECENT COMMENTS

ARCHIVES
July 2021
February 2021
January 2021
November 2020
September 2020
April 2020
March 2020
August 2019
July 2019
June 2019
May 2019
April 2019
March 2019
February 2019
January 2019
December 2018
November 2018
October 2018
September 2018
August 2018
July 2018
April 2018
March 2018
February 2018
January 2018
November 2017
July 2017
June 2017
March 2017
December 2016
November 2016
October 2016
September 2016
May 2016
March 2016
February 2016
January 2016
December 2015
November 2015
October 2015
July 2015
June 2015
May 2015
March 2015
February 2015
January 2015
December 2014
November 2014
October 2014
September 2014

CATEGORIES
Advertising
audio blog
Blogging
Branding
Buyer Journey
campaign
Cause Marketing
community
Content Marketing
conversion
Digital Advertising
email marketing
emotional branding
Event Marketing
insight
Leads
live events
Logo
Marketing
online marketing
Print
Proofreading
SENIOR LIVING
SEO
Social Media
Storytelling
tracking leads
Video
website

META
Log in
Entries feed
Comments feed
WordPress.org