

# Hyperlocal Hybrid Events Will Lead The Way

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## Reading a 2021 Prediction From the Other Side of the Pandemic

Nancy Hays wrote “Hyperlocal Hybrid Events Will Lead the Way” at a moment when the meetings industry was trying to imagine what reopening might look like. Vaccination had begun, large gatherings were still uncertain, and planners had spent months learning to replace ballrooms with screens. The article predicted that the first bridge back would be local in-person events connected to a virtual audience. People could gather close to home, avoid major travel costs, and rebuild confidence before returning to national and international conventions. (Hays, 2021)

The prediction was reasonable for that moment. It also captured something that lasted beyond the emergency: an event no longer has to choose between one room and a completely remote audience. A local gathering can connect with speakers, viewers, sponsors, or partner locations elsewhere. Yet reading the article now also reveals how strongly it belongs to 2021. The discussion of herd immunity, socially distanced vaccinated groups, and a gradual return to physical events reflects a specific public-health transition. Today, hybrid formats are usually chosen for reach, flexibility, accessibility, cost, sustainability, or business continuity rather than as a temporary step out of lockdown.

My overall view is that the article identified a useful format but sometimes treated it as an inevitable stage of recovery. Hyperlocal hybrid events can be excellent, but they are not automatically cheaper, more inclusive, or more engaging. They create two audiences, and both have to be designed for deliberately. (Kun, 2023)

## Article Summary

Hays begins with the financial and emotional effects of COVID-19. Unemployment and reduced budgets made it difficult for people, organizations, and sponsors to commit to expensive travel. At the same time, audiences had become comfortable participating from home. The article argues that virtual access would remain useful even when live events returned.

The proposed solution is the hyperlocal hybrid event: a smaller gathering in a local setting with a virtual component. Local participants receive an in-person experience without flying to a destination city, while the online element expands the potential audience. Hays expects this format to help older attendees, healthcare workers, and groups affected by the pandemic return gradually to shared

experiences.

Entertainment plays a central role in the article. The author believes people need music, comedy, art, conversation, and other forms of social connection after long isolation. Planners are encouraged to use keynote speakers and talent creatively, including national figures who appear virtually while local performers participate in person. One performer or speaker might contribute to several parts of the program, improving the return on the booking.

The article also asks planners to bring the destination to the attendee. Before the pandemic, convention participants often complained that they travelled to a city but spent nearly all their time in a ballroom or trade-show hall. A hyperlocal event can use neighborhood restaurants, theatres, landmarks, and unusual venues. The virtual layer can then share part of that local experience with people outside the room.

Finally, Hays emphasizes listening to attendees and sponsors. Their previous complaints should influence the new design. The event should provide enough value and comfort to persuade people that attending is worth their time and money.

## What the Article Got Right

### Local Does Not Have to Mean Small in Reach

The article's strongest insight is that geographic scale and audience scale are no longer the same thing. Fifty people can meet in Greenville, Nairobi, or Manchester while hundreds join online. Several local hubs can also connect to one program. This makes it possible to include people who cannot travel because of cost, disability, visa restrictions, family responsibilities, time, or environmental concerns.

That flexibility remains valuable. A professional association may hold local viewing and networking sessions around a global broadcast. A company can connect regional offices while preserving face-to-face discussion. A cultural organization can invite an artist remotely while supporting performers and venues in the host city. These possibilities are not merely emergency substitutes.

### The Destination Should Be Part of the Program

I also agree with the criticism of events that bring people to a city and then isolate them inside a generic hotel room. The local place can become part of the learning and social experience. Restaurants, museums, community organizations, outdoor sites, independent businesses, and local artists can create a program that could not be reproduced anywhere else.

This approach can distribute spending beyond the main venue and make attendance more

memorable. It also requires care. “Local culture” should not be reduced to a decorative performance arranged for visitors. Planners should work with local partners, pay them fairly, and avoid turning communities into background scenery.

## Content Must Earn Attendance

Hays repeatedly returns to incentives. People will not attend merely because an event exists. The program needs strong speakers, useful connections, entertainment, and a clear reason for choosing the live or remote experience. That remains true. Hybrid access has made audiences more aware of the opportunity cost of a weak meeting. If the same information could be delivered through a short recording or email, a full event may not be justified.

## Where the Article Now Feels Dated

The most obvious dated element is its health timeline. In 2021, it was reasonable to imagine vaccination as a clear turning point and hyperlocal events as a step toward normality. The real path was less orderly. Rules, risk, public trust, and travel conditions changed at different speeds across countries and communities. Some virtual habits remained; others disappeared quickly.

The article also assumes that a local hybrid event is a lower-risk and lower-cost experience. It may reduce travel, but hybrid production can increase technical and staffing costs. The organizer may need cameras, microphones, streaming infrastructure, platform support, moderators, remote speaker rehearsals, captioning, and backup connectivity. A poorly funded hybrid event can be worse than either a good in-person event or a good virtual event.

The term “return on interest” in the original review should be “return on investment,” but even ROI can be too narrow. An association event may aim to improve member retention, learning, collaboration, or public reach. A community arts event may value participation that does not generate immediate revenue. Planners need measures that fit the event’s purpose.

## The Remote Audience Cannot Be an Afterthought

The central weakness of many hybrid events is inequality between the room and the screen. In-person participants hear side comments, meet during breaks, see the speaker’s body language, and influence the pace of discussion. Remote attendees may watch a distant camera angle, struggle to hear questions, and find that nobody notices the chat.

Research and practical experience with hybrid meetings show that inclusion requires active design. Remote participants need a clear way to ask questions, visible moderation, good audio, accessible materials, and roles that make their presence matter. Simply streaming the stage is not a hybrid

experience; it is a broadcast with an online audience. (Neumayr et al., 2021)

Two hosts can help: one focused on the physical room and one on remote participants. Questions can alternate between locations. Breakout activities should not leave online attendees waiting while people in the venue network. Speakers need to know where to look and how to include both groups. These details require rehearsal.

Accessibility should also be planned from the beginning. Captions, transcripts, screen-reader-friendly materials, sufficient contrast, sign-language interpretation when needed, accessible venues, and clear pacing improve the event for more than one group. Hybrid design can widen access, but only if access is treated as a requirement rather than a marketing claim.

## Hyperlocal Events and Sustainability

The article focuses mainly on cost and post-pandemic comfort, but reduced travel can also lower environmental impact. A series of local hubs may avoid some long-haul flights. However, sustainability claims should be based on the full event: venue energy, catering, production equipment, freight, digital infrastructure, waste, and attendee travel.

A hybrid label does not make an event sustainable by itself. If the organizer runs multiple physical sites with duplicated equipment and sends large production teams between them, the impact may remain high. The useful lesson is to measure rather than assume.

## What a Strong Hyperlocal Hybrid Event Would Look Like

A strong event would begin with audience choice. Participants should know what the in-person ticket offers and what the virtual ticket offers. The online experience should not be described as identical if it is not. Some sessions may work well for both groups, while a local dinner or walking tour is naturally in-person. Remote participants could receive a separate interview, virtual networking session, or digital resource rather than a weak imitation of the physical activity.

The local program should reflect its place. A Greenville event might involve local organizations, food, or music in a way that connects with the event's theme. A second hub could contribute its own material. Instead of one central city broadcasting to passive satellites, the program could move between locations.

Technology should remain as simple as the objective allows. Every extra platform feature creates another point of failure. Registration, access instructions, time zones, technical support, privacy, recording consent, and speaker permissions need to be clear. A backup plan should cover internet failure, speaker absence, and problems with the main stream.

Evaluation should separate the experiences of in-person and remote attendees. Overall satisfaction can hide the fact that one group had a much weaker event. Measures may include attendance, completion, questions asked, networking participation, accessibility feedback, sponsor outcomes, cost per engaged participant, and the percentage of people who would choose the same format again.

## Personal Review

I chose this article because it captures the uncertainty of event planning during the pandemic and offers a hopeful practical response. Its tone is energetic, and the examples involving local talent, restaurants, and unusual venues make the idea easy to imagine. The author does not treat virtual attendance as a poor replacement; she sees it as a way to extend local programming.

I especially liked the argument that events should help participants experience the host city. It challenges the repetitive conference model and gives planners a reason to work with local communities. The emphasis on feedback is also sensible. The people who attend and sponsor events often understand weaknesses that planners have learned to accept as normal.

My criticism is that the article gives less attention to the difficulty of serving two audiences. Hybrid events can look efficient from the organizer's perspective while remote attendees experience delay, poor audio, and exclusion. The article would be stronger with a discussion of technical staffing, accessibility, moderation, and the possibility that some events should choose one format rather than combine both.

## Conclusion

"Hyperlocal Hybrid Events Will Lead the Way" was a thoughtful prediction for early 2021. It correctly recognized that local gathering and virtual reach could support one another, and it challenged planners to create more meaningful experiences than a day inside a ballroom. Those ideas remain useful.

The article's pandemic assumptions have aged, but the format has not disappeared. Hyperlocal hybrid events now make sense when they solve a genuine problem involving travel, access, distributed communities, or local engagement. They fail when "hybrid" means placing a camera in the back of the room. The future is not automatically hybrid. The future belongs to events that choose their format deliberately and respect every participant they invite.

## References

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