

The evolution
of events
during Covid-19



How the pandemic has affected publisher events in the U.S.

All aspects of the publishing world have been affected by Covid-19, but none more so than events and conferences. As the virus spread, many traditional in-person events were moved online. Fundamental Media spoke to five of our publishing partners in the United States to understand how they have experienced this change and what they believe the future holds for events

Dennis Asselta, Head of Financial Advertising Sales, US, Financial Times



How have consumption trends among your readership changed since the start of the pandemic? Are you seeing an increase in mobile traffic or a high listenership in podcasts, for example? Are there any innovative ways in which you tried to engage your readership?

We've seen record consumption and engagement across our digital platforms, both in terms of traffic volumes and paid subscriptions, since the start of the pandemic. In the absence of live events, virtual formats, such as webinars and roundtables, are at all-time highs. We also saw a significant uptick in podcast listens, with listenership more than doubling since the beginning of the pandemic. We launched our FT Coronavirus Tracker - which quickly became our most viewed article of all time - and some additional content that we've placed outside of our paywall to engage non-subscribers in a critical time.

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Our FT Live conferences division adapted quickly to virtual formats but, as you can expect, it was a challenging year for a business unit that relies on in-person interactions. That said, we've had a lot of success

with these formats, hosting roughly 50 (mostly virtual) core events in 2020, in addition to smaller custom formats, and we expect to see similar engagement in 2021.

When do you expect to hold in-person events again and what do you envision them to look like?

As it stands now, we will deliver event formats virtually for the remainder of 2021. We are planning to incorporate a small number of in-person networking elements for a select number of events in 2021, as long as it feels safe and appropriate to do so, and we expect that will help to inform how we re-introduce more live formats in 2022.

What are the main lessons you learned during the pandemic that you hope we will keep post-pandemic?

I learned that our business is incredibly resilient and diversified, and that the quality and independence of our journalism - which has always been fiercely protected - will continue to be our most precious asset. I think we all learned a lot about how we work outside of an office setting and, generally, we've seen an increase in focus around mental health and well-being. I believe the pandemic has challenged us all to be more considerate of our colleagues and business partners - in my view, that's a very good thing - and I hope that line of thinking will persist well after things get back to 'normal'.

Justine DeGaetano, Business Solutions Manager, Investment News

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Since the start of the pandemic, as has been the case for so many people, the majority of our readers have been working from home. We've adapted to this new reality with the creation of a digital edition of our print magazine, allowing our readers to access the magazine from wherever they may be through an interactive flip-through version, which has received a lot of positive feedback. We have also expanded our podcast offerings and have seen a 61% increase in listenership since the start of the pandemic.

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In 2020 we have pivoted all of our events into a virtual format, successfully. We were able to find the right platform,

adjust our content and create an experience that was suited for the virtual format. The virtual format is more accessible, so we expect some segments of our audience to continue to participate in the virtual portion of our events.

When do you expect to hold in-person events again and what do you envision them to look like?

September 2021. It will be a hybrid format: an in-person component for those who want to attend in person, and virtual for those who do not. Content, experience, and pricing to attend will be adjusted to suit each of the live or virtual components.

What are the main lessons you learned during the pandemic that you hope we will keep post-pandemic?

From an audience perspective, one thing that we have learned is that our audience is incredibly receptive to new formats of consuming content. From the rollout of the digital edition to virtual events, to new content-specific sites and newsletters such as RPA Convergence and ESG Clarity, they have been very quick to adapt to these new formats and build new habits around them.

Robert Huebscher, CEO, Advisor Perspectives



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We have seen a strong increase in the traffic to our site since the start of the pandemic. We are consistently seeing 200,000 to 225,000 unique visitors per month, versus 150,000 to 175,000 pre-pandemic. The distribution by the device has not changed, as below:

Desktop/laptop	Mobile	Tablet
¹ 70.7%	¹ 21.5%	¹ 7.8%
² 71.7%	² 23.2%	² 5.0%

¹3/1/19 to 3/1/20

²3/1/20 to 3/1/21

There has been a steady growth in downloads of our podcasts. Some of that is attributable to the pandemic, but it is also due to organic growth in its popularity. Over the last year, we have tried a few innovative ideas. We did a virtual confer-

ence for advisors in October 2020 and had more than 3,000 registrations and strong attendance. We are planning two more conferences in 2021 – in April and August. We have had a strong interest in our webinars and have added video capabilities so speakers can appear on-screen. This has shown to increase engagement among our audience. At the start of the pandemic, we hosted a series of educational, unsponsored webinars to answer advisors' questions about the virus and its economic and market consequences. Those were very well-attended. Lastly, we have introduced two new offerings: a small discussion group, where we can recruit attendees for sponsors to host an intimate Zoom call; and roundtable discussions, where we recruit a group of advisors and moderate a discussion in concert with a sponsor.

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We expect that in-person conferences will

Robert Huebscher, CEO, Advisor Perspectives, continued...

return, but not until 2022. Since virtual conferences, like ours, have proven to be successful in terms of their convenience for attendees and the educational content/speaker variety that can be offered, they will become a prominent fixture for the advisory profession. We expect there to be a “shakeout” among in-person conferences. The ones that will endure will do so because they offer top-notch speakers (that rival virtual events) and an audience of attendees with a strong sense of community and a propensity to interact with one another. Advisors will go to in-person conferences primarily if they offer an opportunity to network with like-minded, respected peers. If all they want is content, they are more likely to engage virtually.

When do you expect to hold in-person events again and what do you envision them to look like?

Our focus will be on virtual rather than in-person events. We do not have plans for an in-person conference.

What are the main lessons you learned during the pandemic that you hope we will keep post-pandemic?

Working from home will be a permanent fixture across many service industries, especially in the advisory profession. Our company was always virtual, so this is not new to us. In a virtual company, it is important to be flexible with team members to allow them to attend to personal issues. But it is also important to maintain a professional appearance with clients and prospects.

Video calls (via Zoom, Google, Teams, or other technology) work well. We use them routinely for interactions with clients and prospects in place of phone calls. Investing aggressively in technology and trying new applications is critical. We have purchased or licensed many tools that have helped our productivity and made it easier and more efficient for our team members, who all work from home, to communicate.

Robin Riley, Senior Vice President, RIABiz



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The RIABiz readership continues to be very engaged with our editorial content. During the pandemic (and currently) our loyal readers continue to be 100% dedicated. Since there was no business travel, RIABiz showed an increase in traffic as advisors/RIAs were home and on our site seeking updated and critical information to assist them with their practice. Our traffic has hit all-time highs over the last year and performance has been at a level never seen before. Our editorial team stays on top of the RIA market and provides daily breaking news in the industry, if there's critical news to report – our readership has come to expect this reporting from RIABiz.

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RIABiz continues to conduct our successful webinars on behalf of our sponsors – we did so pre-Covid, during Covid and will continue to do so post-Covid. We are conducting most meetings via Zoom or phone until it's safe to travel again. Most RIAs/advisors and everybody else in our industry are very much looking forward to going back to in-person meetings and events – once fully recovered from the pandemic, we believe in-person will resume and Zoom will become secondary.

When do you expect to hold in-person events again and what do you envision them to look like?

2022 to ensure safety for everybody as well as comfort to the advisors.

What are the main lessons you learned during the pandemic that you hope we will keep post-pandemic?

Always stay connected with your business and heavy customer service continues to be a top priority in our industry as it continues to grow year-on-year.



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Since the start of the pandemic, our readership has grown quite significantly. The most interesting change we have seen across InvestingChannel is the diversity of users coming to our sites. Our core audience has always skewed towards older and affluent. While this audience increased during the pandemic, the largest growth we have seen is with millennials at 89% YoY, which is not a surprise given the increase in trading volume resulting from individuals. Millennials who want to be more hands on with their money are coming to our sites in droves – and they are staying there to engage with content and increase their knowledge about investing.

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As supporters of the FCS and Gramercy Institute, along with frequently participating in events with general media outlets like Mediapost, our team has attended many online events and have found them to be informative. When the pandemic started, there were questions regarding the value these events would provide, but many organisations have done well to bring leading voices from the industry together to discuss the hot topics at hand. As for virtual events, we believe they are here to stay in many forms. In-person events will rebound, particularly for full/multi-day events, but virtual events have proven to be efficient replacements for

shorter events (luncheons, etc). The past year has normalised the virtual conference and meeting experience as well as accelerated video and event management technology to a point we expect to see hybrid conferences that help manage costs and increase speaker, panel and attendee participation even after the pandemic.

When do you expect to hold in-person events again and what do you envision them to look like?

The second half of 2021 should see some return of in-person industry events. As more people get vaccinated, we think there will be a great thirst for people to get back to normal and travel more – both in their professional and personal lives. For the companies that pivoted to virtual conferences and gained experience and expertise running them during the past year, we anticipate that they will roll out hybrid-type events to insure maximum participation. And some may continue to focus only on virtual events for the foreseeable future. Smaller event and conference companies that were dormant for the past year and did not adopt virtual, seem to be pushing hard for in-person events as soon as May and June. While it doesn't seem prudent, they seem to be gaining traction in the laxer Covid regulation states like Florida and Texas.

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As it pertains to events specifically, webinars and virtual events allow for more flexibility in terms of scheduling. When it comes to smaller group-focused events (i.e. 1-2 hour webinars), a lot of info can be shared with a tight group that might not be able to get together in person during normal times and the people that actually show up for the event are likely very engaged in the content.