

How a live event became safe

(7 min read)

We have organized a series of programs, signature event of which is a safe conference. I'm sharing our experience to those who also believe it is possible to organize live events with the least possible risk even in 2020.



INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

When I started to write this article, I had a very strong concept how I wanted to build it up. As the ideas and memories started to flow and formed words, sentences and characters on the screen, I realized I would have to kick up the rule and start with the most important lesson to make sure you, dear reader, won't get tired before I can get the message through. Therefore, here is one, if not the main message of the #PowerOfLiveEvents live event: **THE INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY.**

This will make an event safe in the first place. No matter how hard organizers, suppliers and service providers work to reduce risks, if participants, be it a guest or a supplier, don't follow the rules. It has never been different, we just didn't talk about it. We realized while organizing the conference how little attention had been paid to this fact in the past and yet how important it was. Fortunately, our audience acted fully responsibly, exactly as we hoped, and just as the whole country did at the time of the March shutdown.

I may say in the name of the co-organizers that with **proper preparation and communication the same can be achieved at any future event.** As I will refer to individual responsibility a few more times, I wanted to emphasize the importance of this term right from the start.



COMMUNICATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Perhaps the biggest critique we heard during the preparations of the POLE live event was about the preliminary communication of safety measures. (Not as an excuse but this was primarily due to the fact that most measures and protocols had to be developed and coordinated from scratch. A lot of solutions shaped up the very last minute, some debuted literally at the event, thus there was no time to share them in time. Organizers of future occasions will surely work easier with our experiences and samples to follow.) Critical voices also confirmed the importance **of a simple, clear and straightforward communication**. This time invitees received event invitations and practical operational information along with major safety regulations, as a matter of course only in a contactless digital format.

Although it may sound evident, proper communication of the planned safety measures of an event has a huge influence on the attendance. Invitees will decide based on that and on their personal level of risk taking whether to take part or not, but more importantly if they come with the feeling of security or doubt. **Experience shows that the more, the louder and the clearer you tell about safety measures, the better.** In this case repeating yourself is not a mistake.

The closer the event date comes, the bigger doubts grow in guests. Once reassured them that everything possible had been done for their safety, let them know the time of their personal responsibility has come. In our case guests had to declare in a form of a digital statement that they are not ill, have no symptoms, haven't recently visited destinations of high risk and haven't been in contact with anyone who has proven to be infected. Contrary to popular belief, the point of this statement is not to 'cover' the organizers, but make guests (as well as the staff) think.

We probably sign or digitally confirm a document once we have read it and carefully thought about our answers. **THIS is the main purpose of such a statement.** If guests and staff are aware of the health and safety factors of their presence and respond frankly and responsibly, risks are definitely further mitigated. Knowing that all co-attendees have done the same will increase the sense of security.



Communication about safety must be maintained at every possible point during the event. Safety regulations and measures at the 'POLE' event have been communicated on the walls, on the floor and also on the screens. We have called attention everywhere to the 3 ground rules: **Distancing – Masks – Disinfection.** Wherever guests looked in the room, faced these 3 warnings that have certainly influenced them subconsciously, too.

In addition to the visual message, **sound also played an important role.** (The more senses we reach, the better.) Moderators of the future will better get used to include in their commentaries the following three terms: Distancing, Masks, Disinfection. As boring as it sounds now, more creative phrasing will surely come later.

GUEST JOURNEY

Contactless solutions have been provided all along the way from arrival where visible safety was key to provide the psychological assurance for guests. With the preliminary communication of health and safety measures guests felt confident about the safeness of the event. A disinfection and thermometer gate helped to reduce the chance of bringing viruses in the venue from outside, as well as screen people for the symptomatic high temperature -upon detecting which organizers would have refused entry. By the way, the entire onsite staff has been screened and disinfected upon each entry to the venue.



Hostesses and welcome staff worked of course **in masks and gloves**, presenting the rule of thumb. Speaking of the staff, extra attention has been paid to their training on the safety measures. With the help of the purpose-designed digital event software and a dedicated QR code for each attendee, registration went fast and smoothly. To emphasize individual responsibility again, guests could choose between **red and green disinfected armbands**. In addition to their well-known purpose – no repeat registration needed upon re-entering the venue – they carried an extra message.

Guests with green armband were open for closer greeting, even a handshake, while the red armbands expressed ‘no contact and larger distance please’. (Can you see how individual responsibility steps in again?)

The conference room was accessible either by elevators or via the stairs. **Hostesses wearing masks and gloves operated the elevators**; maximum 2 guests could enter an elevator at a time and they didn’t need to touch the buttons at all.

Besides bumping into hand sanitizer stands at every other step, visitors could notice the **larger distance between the chairs and the cocktail tables** (of course for the reason of proper distancing.) To enable colleagues and friends stay as close as it is safe, we created ‘islands’ of chairs that had an additional pleasant effect both on the layout and the ambiance of the room. With similar setup concepts in mind, future organizers can make sure ‘social distancing’ does not necessarily mean a depressing meeting environment.

Catering staff naturally also wore masks and gloves and served guests from **behind stylish plexiglass walls**. Catering is always a hot button at every event, however we managed to reduce big **crowds using cordons, serving pre-portioned meals and bottled water**.

Last but not least, one more thought on disinfection, which not only **meant general cleaning and ventilation of the room, but repeated cleaning and disinfecting of every single equipment a guest touched**.

The technical team(s) have passed this exam also very well. It is nothing new that technical devices are checked and cleaned before each event, however it is a brand new practice that AV equipment used by multiple guests or presenters are **continuously cleaned and disinfected during the event**. This extra care gives extra reassurance of safety for the participants.



CLOSING THOUGHTS

To be very honest, before the event I personally was afraid of hearing feedbacks. We have faced huge skepticism and suddenly everyone became a skilled virologist, while media tended to present just one side of the coin – these and many more have warned us we move on a really difficult terrain.

Onsite comments and post-event feedback have confirmed our efforts by all means. Many among the attendees haven't attended any live event since March because of their fear, yet felt safe during our event. Some said this conference illustrated way higher sense of safety than at any other event or in restaurants or shopping malls.

All in all I can say this event has proved there are valid solutions to organize live events even in 2020.

Will more attention be required? Definitely. Forget about past routines for a longer while. Leave more time and space for the organization, if for no other reason just to review and communicate safety measures. This shouldn't have been different before either.

The protocols of the #PowerOfLiveEvents event can be used as reference points and we are happy to share our experiences with anyone interested as we believe cooperation and learning together will help a quicker recovery of the industry and the country.

We will have to learn new methods, procedures and abilities, the only element that remains unchanged is **THE POWER OF LIVE EVENTS!**

Tamás Végh

COO

Bo – Live Branding Agency