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Moving events online: Platforms, strategies and challenges

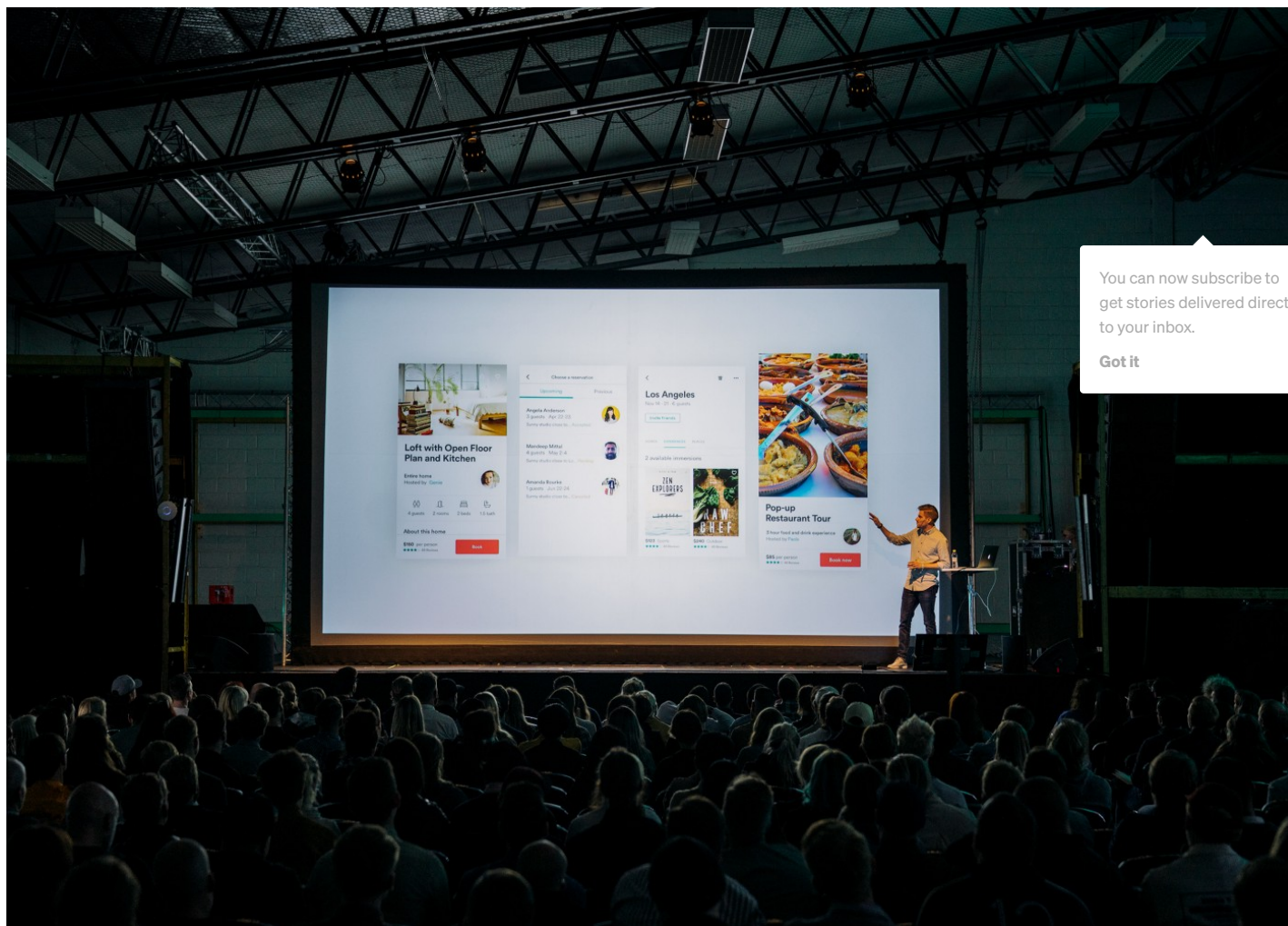


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This is the introduction to a three-part series. Table of contents: <[Introduction](#)> <[Part 1: Challenges](#)> <[Part 2: Strategies](#)> <[Part 3: Platforms](#)>

We are seeing a flood of event cancellations in response to the global threat of COVID-19. This has triggered renewed interest in organising virtual conferences and generally moving face-to-face events into the virtual space. These discussions are not new. The environmental impact of the many thousands of events taking place around the world has had people question whether they should try to run more events online. But neither this nor the significant cost of attending these events has led to a significant reduction of conference travel.

This guide was inspired by a discussion on the [ALT mailing list](#). I compiled and annotated all the platforms mentioned and reviewed experiences people including myself have shared from organising online events. But ultimately, I tried to approach this guide from first





This post proceeds in the reverse order from the title, starting with challenges and finishing with a review of available platforms. It is possible to read each of the three parts independently. Here's a quick summary of each part.

Part 1: Challenges: Why are not more events taking place online?

[<Go to Part 1: Challenges>](#)

In this part, I look at much more detail than is typical in this context at what makes in-person events different from online events and why that makes online events much less common than might be expected. I propose that it is because there are many more things happening in a physical space than is apparent and virtual event organisers or attendees often don't take them into account. I compare the physical and virtual affordances and show the gaps in our mental models of both.

I also look at this issue from the perspective of the institution from which the conference attendee received funding/permission to attend.

- Affordances of time and space
- Affordances of physical interactions: Skype vs phone
- Social affordances: Scripts, routines and rituals
- Financial "affordances": How (not) to pay for an online event

Part 2: Strategies: What can we learn from successful online events

[<Go to Part 2: Strategies>](#)

In this part, I compile a list of tips and suggestions for event organizers based both on reports of people who have run successful events. I try to link these to the challenges outlined in part 1 and add more tips to address the affordance gap.

I also offer suggestions to virtual event participants and more importantly to institutions who wish for their members to attend virtual events. My perspective is that virtual events can only succeed if the entire ecosystem is aligned around them.

- Tips for organisers
- Tips for attendees
- Tips for organisations that want to encourage online attendance

Part 3: Platforms: What technologies are available

[<Go to Part 3: Platforms>](#)

In the final part, I review the decisions event organizers have to make when choosing a technical platform. I then give examples of different types of platforms and offer a brief review of both general-purpose video conferencing platforms (such as Zoom) and some special-purpose online event platforms.

- Affordances of Point-to-point platforms
- Zoom and the rest: Meeting and webinar platforms
- Skype, Teams, Google Hangouts, Facetime: Meeting platforms
- Smaller players focusing on education: BBB, Bb Collaborate
- Integrated virtual event platforms





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