

EVENTS/CAUSES

Evolution of the virtual e-vent in fashion and retail

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Women for Women International's annual car boot sale's went virtual this year. Image credit: Women for Women International

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As the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic continues to disrupt the world, with the regular schedule of events in almost every industry, market and country either cancelled or postponed, alternative digital solutions are increasingly welcome.

The virtual "e-vent" is nothing new. Digital streams, webinars and broadcasts have been used in various instances for several years, with the likes of concerts, sporting events and fashion shows regularly streamed live for people unable to attend in person.

But the difference now is just that. Consumers are simply unable to attend anything. Live-streamed events still went ahead before with an audience physically in attendance, but under the current circumstances, this has not been possible.

Instead, an opportunity has arisen for brands to create alternative solutions for now and in the future. Rather than simply recreating an event for an online audience, with a little thinking outside the box, they can be restructured entirely, ensuring consumers remain engaged and brands relevant.

Reimagined experience

In light of the pandemic, we have seen many creative responses to the adversity created by cancellations, additional time on our hands and being stuck at home.

For example, musicians have taken to their Instagram, Facebook and YouTube live functions to put on concerts for their fans from their living rooms.

Notably, Lady Gaga's One World: Together At Home concert saw the likes of Taylor Swift, Sir Elton John, Stevie Wonder, Jennifer Lopez and many more belting out songs remotely from their homes, whilst raising \$127 million for the fight against the COVID-19 coronavirus.

Similarly, we have seen many others take to these platforms to host their own digital parties and club nights with live

DJ sets and performances.

Most recently, Craig David brought us his famous TS5 set live on Instagram, filling the Ibiza-shaped void for all those who would, under normal circumstances, be preparing to jet off to the island for this year's season.

And it is not just musicians who have been turning to digital alternatives. We have seen events in the fashion and retail realm go online too.

For example, [Women for Women International's annual car boot sale](#) has announced that this year that it will be adopting a new digital initiative. Supporters can shop the sale online and have items dispatched to them, with a contactless delivery.

Many luxury fashion powerhouses have incorporated similar initiatives into their shopping experiences during this time, with the likes of [Hermès](#), [Dior](#) and [Chanel](#) offering remote personal shopping services to customers, accompanied by a secure, contactless delivery.

Perhaps one of the most prominent disruptions to the industry is the impact on fashion shows.

[Harper's Bazaar](#) global fashion director Carine Roitfeld swapped her annual charity gala, which usually takes place in Cannes, France for a virtual fashion show. The event saw models, including Karlie Kloss, Winnie Harlow and Ashley Graham turn their own homes into virtual runways.

Things, of course, were not quite the same. Consumers had difficulty appreciating the clothes as they would in-person and many admitted to paying more attention to the models' surroundings than to the actual garments in this rare, behind the scenes look into their lives.

Nonetheless, Shanghai's autumn-winter 2020 fashion week tried to take learnings and combat some of the issues of the new digital format, with the first fashion week event of this size to go completely digital. It was followed by Moscow and the British Fashion Council have announced a similar solution for London's menswear dates in June.

Rather than simply live-streaming catwalk shows, the events encourage brands to create new and innovative ways to interact with consumers and peers.

For example, many brands that took part in Shanghai fashion week supplemented their shows with commentary, virtual "after parties" and a see-now, buy-now ecommerce function.

In Moscow, catwalk shows were replaced by short fashion videos, which were then shared on social media platforms for greater reach.

Future of fashion

Although these virtual events are an attempt to restore some semblance of normality amid all the uncertainty and disruption of the pandemic, it will be interesting to see how and to what extent they shape the future.

There have been some clear benefits come out of these virtual events, with the biggest being the reduced negative environmental impact.

Many luxury brands are adopting more sustainable practices, which is a trend we have seen first-hand with an increased demand for eco-friendly packaging.

Whilst packaging is something each individual brand has control over, industry-wide practices such as fashion weeks and other large events are much more difficult to influence and, typically, brands feel a pressure to participate in these unsustainable occasions just to stay relevant.

Usually, a lot of waste is created in putting on these shows and air travel is necessary to attend them, causing an unnecessary amount of carbon emissions.

But, having held these events online now, we hope the industry recognizes the benefits of a smaller carbon footprint.

It is clear that a digital shift is likely across industries post-pandemic.

An instant switch back to normality is out of the question when a gradual transition will safeguard public health and allow consumers to slowly overcome their anxieties, so brands can expect to be involved in more digital events in the months ahead.

Those who have simply put a halt to their activities should rethink their plans, as a flick of a switch back to business as usual will not be happening.

Instead, brands should welcome this new format as a creative challenge, a way in which they can set their brand apart from the competition and keep an increasingly digital-savvy audience engaged.

ULTIMATELY, IT HAS interesting to see how industries have responded to the disruption caused by the pandemic.

Rather than simply getting through this time, brands should reflect upon the lessons that have come out of it. The benefits of virtual events is clearly one of them and we believe that there are some exciting opportunities for innovation and creativity on the horizon.



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