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What Conferences, Festivals And Summits Are Doing To Survive COVID-19



Written by Lauren DeLisa Coleman
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Conferences, festivals, and summits are adapting to survive COVID-19, finding digital solutions and going virtual with online webinars to avoid large gatherings. Political strategist Donna Brazile is seen at the 2019 Essence Festival, July 5, 2019, in New Orleans. Photo by Amy Harris/Invision/AP

This article has been updated to reflect changes in event plans.

Stay away from crowds. Amidst all the information about how best to stay safe, how to benefit from government stimulus and work from home, we're tracking the conference, festival, and summit scene.

Changes are afoot as many event organizers decide how and when to take a live-adapted approach that might somehow include a combination of webinars, virtual observance, Zoom groups, and more.

We may see some giant conferences shrink as creative upstarts begin to eat into their market share thanks to edgy, virtual methods ... It may very well be time for such changes in balances of power anyway.

Lauren DeLisa Coleman, a digi-cultural trend analyst, author and strategist.

Event cancellations and postponements are not only devastating for the event producers and the business community that supports them but also the cities in which they are held. For example, the city of New Orleans reported an economic impact of \$280 million for Essence Festival in 2018.

Some have darkly written that the current situation heralds the complete end of large conferences and the events that surround them.

As someone who tracks societal trends, I feel this is a harsh view that may not be an accurate assessment. First, pendulums always swing from one side to the next. While we may see contractions or a move to majority-virtual events, most will soon realize that the random encounters that happen at such events lead to remarkable business opportunities that simply cannot be replicated in an online environment only.

While many events may shift to virtual, what will probably happen as the government stimulus takes hold and behaviors start to shift and the economy strengthens, is that we'll see unique adaptations from each organization. We may also see some giant conferences shrink as creative upstarts begin to eat into their market share thanks to edgy, virtual methods.

It may very well be time for such changes in balances of power anyway. The more established conferences will also be called on to offer more and be more creative. Prices for anything in person will, thankfully, also probably come down as offerings expand — the virtual model is very low- or no-cost.

At any rate, we are about to enter a new era that holds much promise and opportunity. Figure out the strategy that suits you best now.

Here's the latest list of some annual events that have canceled, postponed, or moved to a digital offering.

Festivals

Coachella: This highly anticipated festival has been rescheduled from April 2020 to October 2020 and there's already a waitlist for tickets. It looks like Travis Scott is still among those slated to headline. For all the details: <https://www.coachella.com/>

Essence Music Festival: The highly anticipated annual event scheduled to take place in New Orleans is now on hold until "sometime in the Fall of 2020." Links for ticket-buying lead to error pages. Fans are holding their breath to see if Janet Jackson and Bruno Mars will still be able to headline for future dates. For more details: <https://www.essence.com/v1festival2020/>

Winter Music Conference (WMC): Held since 1985, this event hosts a combination of concerts, parties, seminars and industry happenings. For the past decade, WMC has been part of a larger music event, Miami Music Week, drawing an estimated 10,000 attendees and 3,500 music professionals from over 70 countries during its busiest year. It was scheduled originally for March 16-to-19, 2020, but organizers say that they will find new dates. So far, nothing announced just yet. To track this: <https://wintermusicconference.com/official-notice/>

Technology conferences

EmTech Digital: The MIT Technology Review says it plans to offer EmTech Digital, its annual artificial intelligence-focused conference, as an interactive, virtual experience. Featuring an interactive program, EmTech will examine algorithms, convergence, workforce and system through the lens of AI. You can join the conference from the comfort of your desktop and gain insights from IBM, Salesforce and more.

ELEV8: In response to the current situation, ELEV8, a company that offers a number of blockchain-related conferences throughout the U.S. all year long, is launching a weekly industry webinar series to provide virtual leadership, education, and networking opportunities now that live events are on hold.

Internet of Things Consortium: The Internet of Things Consortium has launched a series of virtual initiatives for 2020. The organization says that it is committed to providing platforms that allow these conversations to still take place and partnerships to flourish. To obtain more details: <https://loftthings.org/>

#AISHOWBiz Summit 4.0: The #AISHOWBiz Summit 4.0 presented by Lenovo and Intel was launched to ensure visionary entrepreneurs have the resources they need to bring to life the inventions and technology that could quite literally heal the planet. It has now gone virtual and is free from May 4 to May 6, 2020. Register at: <https://www.aishow.biz/free>

IBM's Think Digital: IBM's annual Think Digital conference slated to be held in northern California in May, 2020 is now virtual – and free. The full list of speakers and curriculum have been re-imagined and are all listed here: <https://ibm.co/2UuZfIV>

E3 Expo: The highly anticipated annual E3 Expo typically held in Los Angeles is now completely canceled. Previously planned for June, 2020, there are no re-scheduled dates. For a full announcement from the show's producers, please see: <https://www.e3expo.com/>

Adobe Summit: The Adobe Summit moved online from March 31. This is usually a must-attend for those focused on creativity and design from a digital point of view. See more here: <https://www.adobe.com/summit.html>

Microsoft Build: Microsoft Build will now be virtual from May 19 to May 21. Sign up for updates and agenda here: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/build>

CES Asia: CES Asia, which was to take place in Shanghai in June, is postponed. No new dates announced just yet. Stay informed here: <http://www.cesasia.cn/>

NAB Show: The NAB Show, which offers all the latest on tech and production, as well as other elements, is now canceled for its typical Las Vegas show in April and will be announcing various virtual offerings. For all the details: <https://nabshow.com/2020/>

Vivatech Conference: The impressive Vivatech conference, which was to take place in June 2020 is now seeking “alternative solutions.” To stay updated, visit: <https://vivatechnology.com/>

San Francisco Blockchain Week: San Francisco Blockchain Week is still holding onto its original dates at the end of September. See the building list of speakers and more here: <https://sfblockchainweek.io/>

General business and tech summits

Visionaries Summit: The Visionaries Summit has postponed its annual conference, which some have called a “[Davos of the Caribbean](#)” and have instead put energy directly into a number of elements to fight COVID-19 through a series of initiatives including:

- Convening a group of more than 200 doctors in more than 60 countries in response to COVID-19, through their connections with the [World Economic Forum](#). This movement was founded by one of their founding partners, who is an Oxford-trained immunologist – who has emerged as a global thought-leader against COVID-19.
- Launching a #PreventionOverPanic social media campaign, which has reached more than 50 countries.
- Engaging a series of governments in the Caribbean in their COVID-19 response, as well as senior corporate leadership in their risk mitigation processes against COVID-19.

QSP Summit: The QSP Summit bringing together brands, marketers, and managers to discuss future-proofing, tech and more has been tentatively rescheduled to January, 2021. For up-to-the-moment details, visit: <https://qspsummit.pt/en>

Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity: The prestigious Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity first announced that it had changed the date from June 2020 to October 2020 for its massive gathering of C-Suite execs in creativity, brands, marketing, and tech. It has since canceled the event completely for 2020. The next event will take place June 21-to-25, 2021. See the full information here: <https://www.canneslions.com/>

SET EXPO 2020: With the mission of promoting the most important media and entertainment technology and business events in Latin America and providing its audience with a great business, networking and learning environment, SET EXPO 2020 has been postponed. The event will take place between Dec. 7 and Dec. 10, 2020. All scheduling information can be found at: <https://set.org.br/events/setexpo/?lang=en>

*Lauren DeLisa Coleman is a digi-cultural trend analyst, author and strategist. Her expertise is deciphering and forecasting power trends, public sentiment within the convergence of pop culture, millennials & emerging tech behavior and analyzing the impact on business, governance. Her sub-specialty is diverse demos, and she is a contributor to media outlets from Forbes to Campaigns & Elections, as well as a guest commentator on MSNBC. As an entrepreneur, she has provided strategic intelligence on projects from Snoop Dogg to Microsoft execs to public policy leaders. She heads Lnk Agency, a hot trend consulting & multimedia company. Her latest e-book is "Americas Most Wanted: The Millennial." You can read her Forbes contributions here: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/laurencoleman/#3975218462c5>
You can read her Inc column here: <https://www.inc.com/author/lauren-delisa-coleman>
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