

# The future of events online and in real life, a Maddyness masterclass

With large and small events around the world being cancelled due to the public health crisis there are lots of questions across many industries, none more so than the industries involved with organising and running events. How badly will the events and hospitality sector be affected? Can all events be recreated virtually? These questions were addressed in a Maddyness Masterclass.

---

To answer these essential questions and to look at what the future of events will be for organisers and participants, Hugues Deschaux, Head of Events at Maddyness spoke with Denis Remon, Events Director at [PARIS SOCIETY](#), and Stanislas Gouilly-Frossard, General Manager at [JPB](#).

## On coping with the pandemic and maintaining relationships with your

# clients.

Denis. Obviously, it's been a challenging and rough time for the events and hospitality sector. 2019 was an excellent year and the beginning of 2020 was set to be profitable, we already had about 300 events planned in exceptional venues. But when we hit the wall, nobody knew what would happen. Following the announcement of the closure of shops, we set up crisis units to discuss options the different options. We are used to dealing with strikes, bad weather and other issues, but we did not have contingency plans for a global pandemic. We definitely wanted to reassure our clients and needed to keep in touch with our own team while hoping optimistically for better times.

This, of course, led to us wanting to work closely with everyone involved to find solutions together. There have been immediate cancellations but it enabled us to get closer to our clients and revise our planning and strategy. 90% of our clients tried to reschedule the events. For instance, we had a big event planned at Porte de Versailles but we are lucky to have a good relationship with VIPARIS which enabled us to discuss options.

Stanislas. For us, the first most important thing was to ensure that we as a business were able to cope in these times. We took action within 24 to 48 hours, listening to the government announcements to make sure that we were able to get our internal situation right. And then, before looking at finding solutions with our clients, we had to deal with lots of cancellations.

Denis. Overall, we know that an event is a key element in a solid communication strategy, and the clients desire to reschedule rather than cancel clearly shows that. But it also highlighted that there is a knock-on effect when you talk about cancelling or rescheduling an event as there are so many people, suppliers etc involved.

## Rescheduling rather than cancellations.

Denis. There's still an element of uncertainty, but as things re-open and evolve we will be in a better position to schedule and re-schedule events. Of the 1,500 events organised in 2019, some were smaller, and some were bigger and happen in different venues. We are fortunate to be able to adapt to a variety of requests and can reschedule events into 2021.

Stanislas. Let's be clear when you talk about rescheduling an event, you have to think about whether the client is talking about the same event. An event planned in 2020 that gets delayed until 2021 will probably not be the same event, especially when you think about social-distancing.

# Online versus in real life

Denis. This is a common theme with self-isolation, in which everyone has rushed to use Zoom or Skype. These are great tools that we have embraced internally, but this situation has made us realise that we need to meet in person even more than before the crisis.

Stanislas. The virtual side of events is something that we have always worked on, as there is always an audience unable to attend the event but wanting to benefit from the content, so online options have been readily available. However, the next 4-6 months will see an extreme digitalisation of events, this is a great opportunity to build on the fact that everyone has had to pivot to remote work and 100% digital working methods to shape the events of the future.

## Radical changes in the future, the data benefits of online events and the middle ground.

Stanislas. There'll definitely be an "after-effect" – we were all enjoying drinks on Houseparty in the early days of lockdown, but then we were all left just waiting for the same thing: seeing or meeting each other again. The fact that we have been unable to participate in live and instant events and experiences has naturally caused frustration.

Denis. Digitalisation in the events space had already started years ago and is extremely complementary to our sites and services, and it's true that it offers huge benefits in terms of tracking data and attendance. Having learnt the digital-first lessons of lockdown, it is clear that we, like so many businesses, will be doing more things digitally and using technology, however, it's also clear that these efforts will not replace or substitute face to face events. We all know that it's more difficult to engage people virtually and we all have the anecdotes of people following events online who are actually doing something else, distracted by children or whatever it might be.

*Its not about physical events versus digital events,  
its about using Digital tools and techniques to  
enhance and complement events.*

We proved that people needed to meet again and what we lived isn't a tech crisis but a sanitary one and we need to anticipate the future.

But this doesn't mean staring at a screen at all times. There are positive aspects to it, data tracking being one, but it's more difficult to engage people virtually. We've all got the anecdotes of people following events online who are actually doing something else.

Maybe some events will disappear, but meetings won't and they will only be enhanced by technology.

## Will we witness online events with hundreds of holograms in the space?

Stanislas. The key to events is capturing the attention of people and then keeping them engaged. This is true whether you are getting people to come to an event or visit the website of an event, so it is always important to create a wow factor. Holograms give this and are clearly going to be a feature in the events of the future. However, I think they will remain a cute and fun factor that will be present, but not a replacement.

## What do you make of GAFA's announcements about no events until 2021?

Denis. What's the interest in making such an announcement? The moment we get reassurance from the government, we can start to plan events again. I think such decisions were rushed, which is easy to say with the crisis soon being behind us. I can understand that for economic reasons some companies want to revise or save their budget for later but, personally, I don't see the point. I find it almost irresponsible and I think they'll rethink these decisions. As the situation and its limitations change there will be lots of decisions made under lockdown that will need revisiting.

Stanislas. I think this is more marketing speak than anything else, what I see is a good way for these companies to show that they are taking big steps to look after their employees, but I'd be surprised if there were zero tech giant events between now and September 2021.

# The importance of pleasure, enjoyment and interaction V restrictions and social distancing

Denis. Although there is a keen desire to get events going again, we must rely on official decisions and statements and avoid speculation, we are not public health professionals. Yes, we could say, it's all fine there will be deep cleaning, masks and hand-sanitiser everywhere and everything will be just like it used to be. But we are being cautiously optimistic, working with and reassuring our clients and looking forward to having this storm behind us. We are not making any official announcements, but the feeling is that we can enjoy the Summer, take the time to regenerate our business, analyse what has happened and then take the bulls by the horns from, hopefully, September.

We could organise an event today and respect the current guidelines for social distancing, but it's not what our clients want and fundamentally the measures in place right now would take away the heart of an event and everything that it stands for and represents.

Stanislas. There is so much thought and effort that goes into creating an experience that reflects the client's vision, and unfortunately, if the experience is clouded by social distancing and public health paranoia, then it's just not going to work. The guidelines in place right now aren't great, it's not enjoyable to queue in the supermarket and have to wear a mask, and it would be the same at an event. One of the big attractions to any event is that you will have an enjoyable and pleasurable experience, under present guidelines, this is not the case, so we are monitoring the guidelines and waiting for change.

Stanislas. If we put all this effort into making amazing events, from the lighting, the venue, the speakers, the list goes on, it is for one reason – to deliver an amazing customer experience. The experience matters and should blow people's minds, today, the restrictions, guidelines and enforced signage would only spoil the show.

## And so, the future of events, what can we expect?

Denis. As with so many industries in lockdown, the events industry is rife with questions about the future. Today, it's very simple, we have a moment now during which we are rethinking our business and what we offer. We have to keep excellent customer service at the centre of what we do and listen to our

customers to be able to improve or refine what we offer, and of course, keep the digital adoption momentum and incorporate it into the core of what we do. It's a moment for a good spring clean, to refine and polish our work, and come back with more creativity and innovation.

## And at a tech level?

Stanislas. There is a huge frustration because people can't meet in real life and it's one that I believe will lead to a physiological shift meaning that people will truly appreciate the value and privilege of meeting face to face, and experiencing things in the flesh. This leaves me feeling incredibly positive for the future of the events space as brands and organisers will be driven to do more to make these privileged moments even more special.

The future for events looks positive, and very much in line with the beliefs at the centre of Maddy Ness, Bigger and better, driven by quality, innovation and creativity.

*Read also*

---

[From guest to Head of Events, a journey of empowerment](#)

---

Article by MADDYNESS