

Enabling the digital transformation of CES 2021

Oct 19, 2020 | [Bob Bejan - CVP, Global events, production studios & marketing community](#)



Today is a big day for events at Microsoft. The Consumer Technology Association (CTA) announced that Microsoft will be the technology partner for CES 2021, the organization's first-ever, all-digital event, happening Jan. 11-14.

It is an extreme honor for Microsoft to be selected as CTA's technology partner for CES, the world's most influential technology event. It won't surprise you to hear we're bringing Microsoft Cloud solutions, including Microsoft Azure, Microsoft Teams and Microsoft Power Platform, together with partner solutions to create the technology platform for the all-digital event that will bring together the entire global tech community and be the CES 2021 experience.

We are thrilled to be able to work side by side with the team from CTA. What I'm even more excited about personally,

though, is the opportunity this will give us to share all that we've learned about digital events over the past many months as world circumstances have necessitated that we rethink everything we thought we knew about how to host a major event.

My team knows how to put on a live event. So, it was devastating when we realized earlier this year in March that the events we had planned for 2020 could not go on – at least not as we had planned them. We'd already put a lot of work and preparation into getting ready for events like [Microsoft Build](#), which in a typical year sees people travel from all over the world to Seattle for several days of expertly produced keynote and breakout sessions. We had already started down the path to make events like that happen, and that path was now going nowhere.

This was going to be hard, but this team was definitely up for the challenge. We lamented the events that wouldn't be, but then immediately shifted our focus to reinventing those events anew. Every person gave it their all, rolled up their sleeves, and learned everything they could. In a few short months, our team went through what is probably years of transformation and growth.

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Since then, we've produced a dozen major Microsoft events, including all six of our flagship global conferences. At the same time, Microsoft has been collaborating with customers like the NBA, [the NFL](#) and [iHeartMedia](#) to help them bring a new level of connection to a world that has, for so many months, felt disconnected.

Through all of it, we've been learning a ton! We've experimented and piloted ideas and new approaches to creating compelling and highly interactive experiences, and we've made significant strides in defining the elements of a successful virtual event.

The most important learning – you cannot translate a live event into a digital format. You must remake the event entirely. If you can fundamentally embrace that notion, you are on the challenging, yet exciting, path to digital transformation.

Our past live events were theatrical, with dynamic speakers on stage commanding a rapt audience. But the all-digital format requires something more cinematic. We now tailor our content to that format, and we have transformed from a live show production team, to a 24/7 television production network, complete with live anchors from around the world. This new direction required collaboration, hard work and a lot of humility.

But the learning has not only been about the making of the shows themselves. We've also been surprised by the tremendous impact in terms of global reach and inclusivity.

In 2019, 6,200 people joined us in Seattle for Build; this year, our virtual event had 197,000 attendees.

At last year's Build conference, 80 percent of attendees were from the United States. This year, 68 percent of attendees were from outside of the United States.

And here's my favorite: In 2019, 28 developers from the African continent were able to join us for Build. This year, we had 6,044 developers from across Africa join us. Remarkable.

Just two weeks ago, we had 266,000 IT professionals join us from around the world for Microsoft Ignite.

When we look back at the last six months, the opportunities these events have provided for increased learning, inclusivity, connectedness and accessibility for all our customers, partners, enthusiasts and employees around the world are inspiring. There is an immense appetite for these broad-reaching, digital-only events, and an immense potential for them to positively impact customer, partner and even employee relationships. And

now, we cannot wait to apply all of our learnings to the creation of the CES 2021 experience.

Being able to be a part of the first-ever, all-digital CES will be an amazing journey, and we'll definitely learn a lot more as we continue on our path to master this new canvas of communication.

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