**Will COVID improve sustainability at events?**

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On a global scale, sustainability is fundamental in all markets, including the events industry as a whole. With issues of climate change and pollution increases, sustainability is a matter that can no longer be ignored. Live events, in particular Festivals and Concerts, generate large quantities of waste production and pollution into the environment each year. The requirement for sustainability at face-to-face events is essential in order to improve our current environmental status.

The pandemic has undeniably shuffled the priorities of live events, it has created a promising chance to do better as well. The subject of COVID-19 is usually deemed as negative; however, the pandemic has forced many event organisers to move their events to the virtual world. This has resulted in many event managers reassessing their planning and development processes to create a more sustainable event when the pandemic is over. COVID-19 has given us time to improve and learn new skills, which in this case, event organisers can incorporate into their live events.

The opportunity to improve sustainability at events now, has never been so significant. According to Biffa, festivals generate 23,500 tonnes of waste, including plastic bottles, food containers, food waste, clothing and abandoned tents. Many UK-based festivals including Glastonbury and Creamfields, have already explored many environmental issues through their planning, delivery, and breakdown of the event cycle, however there is significant opportunity for festivals to contribute more decisively to a sustainable future. Figure 1 extracted from 'The Show Must Go on Report' illustrates the pre-covid issues of festivals on the environment. Festivals are regarded as the most popular live events in the UK, with over 3 million attendees per year. Let's hope COVID-19 has given event organisers time to think about new sources of sustainability at these festivals.
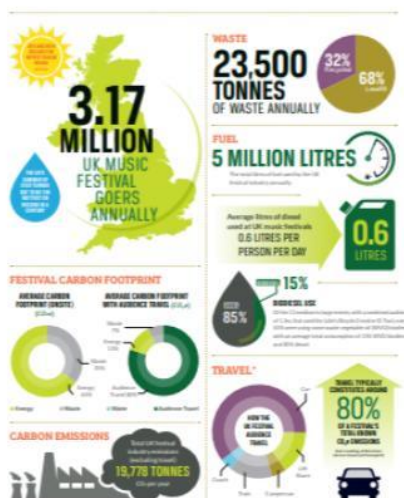
In-person events of course, require a lot more planning in comparison to virtual events over a zoom call. Event organisers will face new challenges of health and safety measurements when events hopefully resume in June, but event planners need to be mindful of sustainability at their events.

Although capacity size will be reduced at these live events, the impact per person will be higher due to the essential health and safety protocols. Going forward, events will need to use mote resources including sanitation measures, signage, and water usage for cleaning. Additionally, the use of waste including petroleum-based plastics used for gloves, masks and face shields will be used at the events, for safety measures of all stakeholders. Fortunately, with capacity size being lowered, emissions from travel won't be as significant as before.

Some event companies have adapted well to virtual and hybrid events. Virtual events are great for the environment because it means attendees don't have to travel to the location, but instead, they can watch the event from the comfort of their home. They have been growing in usefulness and production quality, as some virtual events make you feel as you are there. For example, Tomorrowland Festival 2020, put together a virtual festival, making the attendee feel as if they were in the crowd. In addition, hybrid events could be a new reality of live events. The purpose of a hybrid event is to bring together both the virtual and in-person world to life. The positive aspects of hybrid events are that they are usually city-centre based and therefore co not require people to travel far distances. Of course, for events such as Festivals and EXPO's, the key experience and immersion is taken away by virtual events.

Figure 2 below from ['Event Skift',](#) shows how both virtual and hybrid events can lower carbon emissions which are impacting the global environment shift. As mentioned above, virtual events do not require travel emissions to the venue, and instead attendees can watch the event from their laptop screen. My adopting this style of event for conferences, educational talks and webinars could be the next new thing.

Another positive outcome of COVID-19 is through time to educate people. Whilst stadiums and venues have been emptied for the past year, venue managers have been able to improve their sustainability credentials. As an event organiser, choosing venues that are aspiring to be net-zero, or use sustainable sources of energy rather than fossil fuels will make your event eco-friendlier and a talking point for your attendees. Additionally, using catering services that specialise in clean eating and sustainability will also boost your live event. It is important that food and drink services, are locally sourced, all waste is recyclable and healthy eating is promoted throughout the event.

As a final year events student at Birmingham City University, our current module covers event safety and CSR (corporate social responsibility) strategies at events. We are leaning about different environmental strategies event managers can do, in order to improve their sustainability at live events. This module is a great educational resource, which we can use and incorporate into future events. It is important that Universities educate their students about climate change and sustainability in today's world.

In a post-COVID world, events must always put safety and sustainability action plans before anything in the planning stages. Without doing so, events could be cancelled, and organisers could go out of business. Anything that planners can do to increase their sustainability impact in the long-term is of benefit. With the time to educate and learn new skills during the pandemic, it's now time for event organisers to put their strategies into practice…