

## Embracing Virtual Formats Part 1

[00:00:12] **Kim Last** Welcome to Going Live, Building Live Journalism in Your Newsroom. This is our first module and this is video one out of two.

[00:00:21] **Last** I want to start with a core question that everyone should ask in a newsroom before they launch a live event. Why?

[00:00:29] **Last** And before I answer that, I want to take you back to early 2015. I was a senior editor at Fast Company magazine at the time, and we were just getting started on one of our most ambitious projects yet, the first ever Fast Company Innovation Festival. At the time, we were a small team of three editors who met daily with the then editor in chief of the magazine. It was a passion project for him. The event, at its earliest iterations was really to mark the magazine's 20th anniversary, so we got to work right away. There was a lot to get done. We had to book more than 50 speakers. We had an idea of launching the festival first as a three day event. We wanted to reach maybe a thousand people in total, and then we started to see the halo effects of the idea taking shape. Serena Williams landed on the agenda. Dwayne Johnson, better known as The Rock, was a confirmed speaker when it Paltrow, right at the height of launching Goop, decided to fly into New York and join us. We had multiple CEOs of tech companies and startups and also retailers. And then the events really began to grow from there. We had confirmed at the end of the event more than 100 micro smaller events that took place during the festival. And when we first set out to reach out to a thousand people to sign up to attend, the event was actually attended by thousands of people who descended upon me work, not just because they were fans of the magazine, but they were excited by the content that was hitting the stage. There were successful sponsorships and also it wasn't a bad thing to do, but subscribers actually grew. So we knew after that first event that this wasn't just going to be a one time thing that we were hosting. It's going to be a franchise that lasts. And to this day, there still is a fast company innovation festival.

[00:02:45] **Last** So going back to the why behind live events, they're a great way to engage with your current audience and subscribers. Hopefully, they're helping you deal with that churn. They are an excellent way of building new audiences. Events also offered the opportunity to drive a new cycle with key newsmakers and leverage all of that great content for your coverage after the event. And importantly, they allowed journalists to experiment with storytelling formats in real time in front of an audience that then can get packaged up into podcasts, video and other kinds of stories. So here's a set of questions for newsrooms who really want to get started and start their own live events.

[00:03:36] **Last** Number one, what's the outcome you were hoping to achieve? So is that new audiences? Is that deeper engagement? Is that helping with the churn of your current subscriber base? Are you looking to use and leverage events to power new content opportunities across your newsroom? Think deeply about that question.

[00:04:01] **Last** Number two, communication. Do your readers use email? Do they leverage social media? How do they access your information? Is it mobile only? Is it across multiple devices? Is it across multiple formats? Think about that because that can begin to power the different ways that you deliver event experiences to your audience.

[00:04:26] Number three, should this be a one time series or an ongoing conversation? So back to my original story. We started the Fast Company Innovation Festival as a one time experiment. Part of the 20th anniversary, but we quickly realized this is an ongoing

opportunity. This should be an annual event. Sometimes during R&D and the execution of building a live event, that answer can become pretty obvious in the lead up to show day and number four, which we're going to get into in much more detail. Do we have the right resources to deploy to make this happen? Events can take a village. So let's dove into what that all mean.

[00:05:18] **Last** Live journalism, as I like to describe it, is a total team sport. It's typically encompassing a number of different departments across the media business. So before jumping into a live event, you should be prepared to have staffers work across a few different groups here.

[00:05:38] **Last** The first is content and agenda specifically, and we're talking about here the who and the what we're talking about. Some of the most successful live journalism operations first put their content first before anything else and also treat their session as if it's a story. So poring over the same amount of research and time and embedding speakers, thinking about speakers as sources, really making sure they are meaningful in terms of their participation into the live event and also maintaining that same sort of level of ethics and standards that would be applied to any other product coming out of the newsroom.

[00:06:22] **Last** The second sort of group and bucket are logistics and production. There is a ton of work that goes behind the scenes of live events, and there is a lot of technical expertize needed when it comes to launching virtual events. So, for example, there are event platforms. So think about companies like Splash or Bizzabo their event platforms that are sort of a one stop shop for where you can host your sessions and also leverage their platform for ticketing purposes. There's also speaker and technical checks. What's your internet connection? Someone should probably test that before going live and streaming to hundreds of your subscribers, for example. That's a really important job. Also, rehearsals, are you trying something that hasn't been tried before? Beyond logging on to Zoom, is it a TED style like talk that's been rehearsed? Is it a debate that you really need to nail the format and the timing in order to get it right? Rehearsals matter, and having someone behind the scenes helping you get that out makes all the difference. Then there's also sponsor management, which is really a business side of responsibility, but you will want eyes across it. And then, of course, networking and that great audience experience beyond the content that's being delivered to them.

[00:08:00] **Last** There's also really important show day events. Show day rolls, excuse me, the most critical being a director who helps move the event from session to session, along with graphics and other post event editing.

[00:08:19] **Last** Audience development is another big, important role and department. So you've built a great program, you've ironed out all the logistics, but who is showing up and how are you getting the word out? I'd like to think of this as two different strains here. So there is your current readers and subscribers and then there are new audiences. So let's talk about those current subscribers first. I suggest that you point them into the reader's consumption flow. So that's on the newsroom side, calling out and highlighting upcoming events and newsletters, placing call outs and stories, doing call outs across social media. On the business side, that's paid advertising, that's paid social, that's dedicated emails that go out to your subscribers. Other things that the marketing side can really help you work on ticketing and registration partnerships and thinking through new ways to bring in those new audiences. Another really key key area that often gets overlooked after putting in all of this work. Think about post surveys. This is something where I think all of those three

groups the newsroom, the production and logistics folks and also your audience development team should all get together and really think deeply. What are the questions you want to ask an attendee or reader about what they thought from that live event? What's their feedback? Because that could be some of the most valuable input as you move into producing the second, third or even fourth iteration of your next set of live events.

[00:10:06] **Last** Next, we're going to talk about virtual events and formats. Obviously, the pandemic has shown a whole new light on the power and importance of virtual events. We're going to spend a lot of this course talking about this. And I'd like to think that a virtual event can take shape across all different kinds of formats. And I've broken down four here that you should really think about.

[00:10:35] **Last** The first are community events that can drive connection. So these can be informal meetups that are based on a topic of interest, like health, food or tech. They can take place on a very easy to use platform like Zoom. They can be kicked off by a journalist who beats networking at first. Something that I like to call a round robin where you get everyone to introduce themselves, you ask them, you know, one or two things that they're hoping to gain by getting everybody together today. I love these formats, especially when you are about to commence on a longer event anywhere between 90 minutes, up to three hours. These great sort of warm up networking events really allow people to sort of connect. And then you start to see great outputs in terms of people interacting with questions and commenting in the chat. It's just a great set of warmup.

[00:11:38] **Last** Number two professional events that drive connection. So I'll give you an example from my current role at The Wall Street Journal. We've had a lot of success with professional oriented breakout sessions. Usually, the formats about an hour long. We take the first 20 minutes to 30 minutes in an interview with a newsmaker or some sort of subject matter expert that is on the record. And then we follow that discussion with a off the record breakout that really allows the audience that is tuning in to really react to what they just heard or share stories about issues that they're trying to work through in business right now.

[00:12:26] **Last** Number three are social gatherings. So think cooking classes, happy hours, watch parties. These are all engagement friendly exercises. One of my favorite examples of this is from the New York Times events team, who had a whole holiday cookie event where you were able to really highlight the connection between a great recipe that was on NYT cooking and and working with Melissa Clark in real time around how she would cook and prepare those cookies during the holiday season. What better way to do that with great video with great camera angles? It's just a no brainer.

[00:13:16] **Video** I think this year I wrote an article about it for the Times, which gives all of my favorite tips on how to pack a perfect cookie box and also how to make some of my favorite cookie varieties, including Vanilla Bean Spritz, which I'm going to show you how to make today.

[00:13:30] **Last** So social gatherings can be very, very meaningful, and if they're produced in a high quality way, they could be a lot of fun and go well beyond the Zoom happy hour.

[00:13:42] **Last** And then finally, the fourth sort of block to think about in terms of virtual events and formats are live storytelling events where the sessions are actually designed as a news products themselves. So I'll give you another example from the journal during

our past CEO Council event last year, we actually hosted the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern and the co-host of The Journal podcast led that interview. We structured the entire interview and the entire conversation so that it could be lifted as a live podcast taping and then aired as a Journal episode the next day.

[00:14:23] **Last** So we covered quite a bit in this module first. We covered the big question the why? Why produce live events in a newsroom? We also dug into the types of roles and responsibilities, you should be prepared to have work on those actual live events. And then we started to talk about virtual formats and the different types of virtual events that could work for your newsroom. Up next, we're going to talk about video formats that can really shake up your storytelling in virtual events. I'll see you online soon.