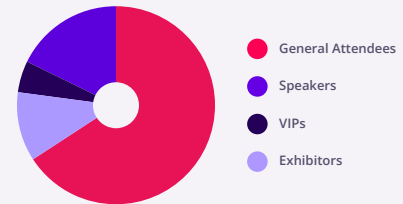


Digital Transformation:

Elevating Events and Beyond

Badge Scans



Exhibitor Visits



Hot Leads

87

Approved

4

Contents

Introduction

Embracing Change 3

Chapter 1

Digital Transformation Components 4

Chapter 2

Key Benefits of Digital Transformation 6

Chapter 3

Common Obstacles and Initial Steps 10

Embracing Change



From trendy emerging technologies to shifting attendee content consumption preferences to seismic global disruptions, there's always something new in the world of events! Leaders and their teams must quickly assess each opportunity and risk as it pops up. They look to answer the most critical question: Is this something that will change how we plan and execute our events?

With a busy events calendar and the company's ROI always at stake, teams need to move fast and adapt to every new twist and turn. Innovation, agility, and efficiency are crucial. That's why organizations that have embarked on digital transformation are optimally positioned to create successful events in any events landscape.

Depending on an organization's starting point, the journey of digital transformation can be long. It may be challenging and dotted with obstacles. But embarking on the journey delivers benefits across the entire events portfolio and beyond. Teams become more efficient and productive. Event attendees and clients receive more personalized experiences and services. Sales and marketing campaigns discover a rich supply of powerful decision-making fuel in the form of data.

These advantages — and many more — help propel organizations in any economic climate or competitive environment. In this e-book, we'll define digital transformation, especially as it relates to events. Then we'll outline the most enduring benefits and delve into practical considerations, including the most common obstacles and advice for pursuing initial steps.

Digital Transformation Components



What does “digital transformation” involve?

Technological evolution can shape some of the components and how each is weighted. Industry-specific needs also can change the mix. But for most companies, a complete digital transformation that can take their events channel to the next level focuses on four key areas:



1. Data and analytics

Every event — whether large or small, in person or virtual — produces a wealth of valuable data. For example, data on attendee touchpoints, interactions, preferences, activities, and more helps teams deliver the right content and experiences at the right time. The same data can also inform post-event sales motions and marketing campaigns for greater effectiveness. Gathering data represents only the first step: The data also must be secure, accurate, readily accessible to stakeholders, and formatted in a way they can understand and leverage. An organization lacking the right tools for capturing, sharing, and analyzing data can miss out on using events to their full advantage and getting the intel they need for continuous improvement.



2. Mobile solutions and experience access

In business and in daily life, the days of being tied down to desktop-only functionality are long gone. Event attendees expect to be able to see their schedules, chat with others, receive notifications, and navigate conference venues right from the smartphone they'll likely have in their hands all day. In parallel, internal teams also rely on quick access to the tools they need to do their jobs no matter where they are. The era of remote and hybrid work has made this need even more important.



3. AI Applications

With a never-ending whirlwind of impressive headlines and fast-progressing capabilities, generative AI constitutes a growing presence in many digital transformation initiatives. Organizations must balance the vast promise of these tools with strong implementation guardrails to ensure they maintain IP security, ethical standards, brand compliance, and consistent content quality. The right approach can save significant time and free up employees' schedules for more strategic work.



4. Deployment of dedicated, upgraded, and/or feature-rich solutions

Events at organizations that have yet to complete a digital transformation are often run with sub-optimal technologies. Tools may be cobbled together, outdated, stretched into "off-label" uses, or overly difficult to use. Scalability and flexibility may suffer, especially as the event portfolio expands and new use cases emerge. In contrast, a unified platform specifically suited for the organization's needs streamlines the work and provides powerful new capabilities.

Key Benefits of Digital Transformation



Without an understanding of the practical results that digital transformation delivers for event teams and the rest of the organization, the initiative might just stay a poorly defined pipe dream.

Exploring new tech purchases, revamping processes, and getting approvals are big steps. They're unlikely to gain any traction unless the business case is clear.

We've divided some of the most common key benefits into a few main categories:



1. Greater Efficiency

Digital transformation can reduce redundancy and overlap within your tech stack. For example, replacing multiple non-optimized point solutions that may have duplicate capabilities with one purpose-built platform means no longer paying for a capability twice (or more). Centralization of event processes also prevents needing to complete tasks or enter data in different places to maintain consistency. In addition, data flow and efficiency are enhanced by seamless integrations. Partnerships that allow attendee data to instantly feed into your marketing automation platform, for example, reduce manual work, back-and-forth requests with team members, incompatibility, and all the other classic plagues of a tech ecosystem at an organization that has yet to embark on a successful digital transformation.

Chapter 2: Key Benefits of Digital Transformation



2. More Impactful Events

Events have never been more vibrant and more vital. With shifts in marketing strategy, attendees' thirst for rich in-person experiences and relationships, and other trends, connecting at conferences large and small is increasingly important for all. But digital transformation ensures that each event delivers maximum results — and that those results can be readily measured and proven. Here, data is once again key.

For organizations with a sales team that operates within a CRM, for instance, reps are empowered to contribute to the event's success while crushing their quota. When reps can invite their contacts at key accounts, send customized agendas, seamlessly schedule meetings, and conduct data-informed follow-up outreach, the mutual benefits are nearly limitless. For organizations whose membership databases are key, event data can also provide useful information to enhance outreach and knowledge about contacts.

After the event, a particularly compelling sample use case for AI within the events team is quickly assessing attendee sentiment in surveys and other forms of feedback. The rapid analysis of the data and presentation of trends can inform future event plans and next steps more readily than ever before. These examples represent just a few of the myriad ways digital transformation can optimize events' impact.



3. Room for Growth and Change

The ups and downs in the events industry, the tech industry, and global economies over the past few years have shown us that companies must seek every competitive advantage. It's important to always stay a step ahead of both peers and potential threats on the horizon.

Free or limited-use solutions — as well as expensive but cumbersome and inflexible legacy processes — may technically function at the moment. But they are more likely to fail when change hits. Digital transformation enables companies to quickly adapt to new pressures, new areas of growth, and new opportunities alike.

Events teams who faced the sudden pivot to virtual as the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in early 2020 likely still remember how fast a business situation can change. Predicting the future may be impossible, but with key resources like thorough, accessible event data; a mobile-enabled workforce; and technologies that can flex from in-person gatherings to a massive online event, event leaders can position themselves to weather any storm. Even better, they will be poised to accommodate new growth pillars, industry targets, and milestones for the organization as a whole.





4. Happier attendees (and happier employees)

For event attendees, data collected through modern technologies enables a better experience. Sessions directly relevant to their job roles and interests immediately surface in your event's session catalog. Emails they receive before and after the event from various functions within the organization never ask them to repeat tasks they've already completed. A convenient mobile app encourages them to take actions at the event and rewards them with prizes. For virtual attendees, rich data makes their attendance more immersive and interactive. AI-enabled chatbots quickly assist with any concerns for a smooth experience.

As a bonus, digital transformation may also introduce greater sustainability and transparency through information on an event's carbon footprint and increased use of paperless solutions.

On the employee side, the efficiency gains discussed earlier — especially through the use of smart AI deployment and purpose-built solutions with seamless integrations — reduce frustration. Team members who feel less tied down with mundane tasks and archaic solutions are naturally more

inclined to remain in their roles rather than leave for a competitor using more modern technologies. They also gain bandwidth for new strategic initiatives that can benefit the entire company. Finally, automation reduces risks associated with human error that can lead to bad data, security lapses, and other consequences.

Platforms that meet the latest global security standards and include sophisticated access features increase comfort across the company and reduce the amount of time spent worrying about breaches or other incidents.



Common Obstacles and First Steps



No matter the promised benefits, transformation doesn't happen overnight. Several valid realities can interfere with a digital transformation initiative — often before it even gets approval.

1. Timing

First, busy schedules and limited team bandwidth can cause the idea to simply be put off, over and over. With events' long planning cycles and immediate post-event to-do lists, the much-needed “quiet time” on leaders' schedules simply does not appear. Other high-priority internal projects like a huge product launch or pending acquisition may also complicate matters. Sometimes, the company is simply in current turmoil, facing tough economic decisions or industry upheaval.

2. Risk-averse stakeholders

For other organizations, internal resistance may stymie digital transformation efforts. Industries' unique security concerns and modes of operation, long-standing executive attitudes towards change and perceived risk, and even bad past experiences may be factors. For event data in particular, the personal information collected can initially pose particular concern and cause leaders to err on the side of sticking with “what we have always done.” Reliance on a particular solution that does not support digital transformation may be deeply embedded.

3. Money

Of course, budgetary concerns are another common reality. Despite the long-term cost savings of digital transformation, up-front expenditures will be needed. Making the case when budgets are tight or layoffs are looming is tough.

Chapter 3: Common Obstacles and First Steps

The good news is that organizations can mitigate many of these concerns with a well-planned and phased approach. Throwing out everything at once and haphazardly investing in technologies is a recipe for failure. Consider the following core sequence to take the first steps toward a digital transformation. Each step should be built out and adapted to meet the organization's unique needs:



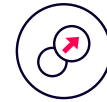
1. Conduct an assessment and select a team

Digital transformation involves stakeholders from across the organization, so it's important to include representation from all parties. At the same time, involving too many people reduces efficiency. Once you've landed on a core committee, start investigating to identify current pain points and opportunities. Interview a range of employees, partners, and clients to gain a broad perspective.



2. Evaluate Options

Based on the interviews, the next step is prioritizing first steps and potential solutions. Consider flexibility and room for future growth. For example, if a new event platform will be investigated, does it offer modular components? Will it be able to handle a significantly larger number of attendees if your flagship conference grows in a couple years? Does it have a mobile app? Is it readily compatible with an existing marketing, sales, or membership database platform that your organization plans to continue using? Once you develop a list of vendors for consideration, consult analyst reports and other unbiased sources to make sure each tool offers the features you need for all of your use cases.



3. Plan transitions and education

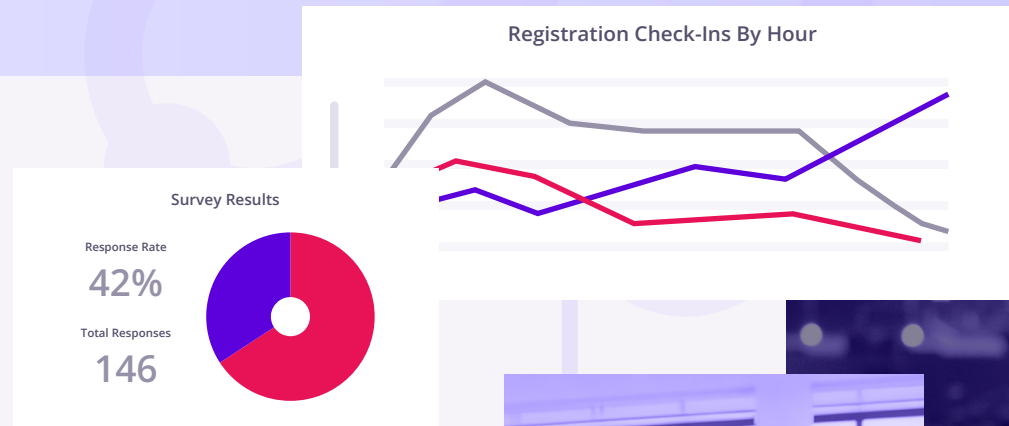
Although that truly quiet time may never exist in events season, plan ahead to time key deployments for after major events already actively in planning. Approvals and other steps may take time, so allow plenty of cushion. Once it's time to introduce a new solution, companies that offer ample and easily accessible training can make the process easier for everyone. Will they also have a dedicated team to help you build out your templates, branding, and other elements? Can they help on-site to ensure everything goes smoothly when the big day arrives for the first event?



4. Measure

Quick wins from initial digital transformation efforts help build the case for more. Whether it's positive comments from an attendee about an easy mobile app experience or an email from a sales rep who was able to advance a major deal thanks to an on-site meeting with a prospect, collecting anecdotes and quantitative data alike are important. Of course, the right solutions also do a lot of heavy lifting in pulling and centralizing data for you.

Chapter 3: Common Obstacles and First Steps



Events leaders already know that testing, iteration, and continuous improvement are the key to delivering results year after year. For a digital transformation initiative, the journey is similar. Given the fast pace of AI technologies and other developments, new capabilities and tweaks will continue appearing even after the main “transformation” is complete.

Technology partners with deep expertise and a focus on product development can help you stay ahead of the curve post-transformation. Flexibility and strong partnerships ensure digital transformation efforts deliver new and expanded benefits that bring your events to the next level for years to come.



rainfocus