Morressier

The Future of Scientific Conferences is Hybrid

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The future of scientific conferences is hybrid

2020 was an incredibly important year for science and academia. The industry was pushed to its limits, adapting at hyperspeed to what the COVID-19 pandemic demanded. Knowledge sharing became even more important to speed up the distribution of vital public health information, and the latest technologies for new vaccines. It was also a pivotal time for the industry as it moved towards a digital conference format, which brought new challenges with it. To master this digital transformation, science and academia must address the shift in the industry.

Gone are the days of physical posters in conference halls. The content on these posters deserves more than their legacy — ending up in the trash bins of university hallways never to be seen again. This legacy doesn't mesh with today's digital advancements. 2020 was the first established year of the new conference. One that uses the latest technology to communicate information that reaches global audiences, sparks debates, and builds stronger communities of scientists. *Hybrid*, also known as *blended*, but what we hope will one day just be referred to as *conferences*, that draw on the best elements of virtual and fully offline formats, will become the mainstream in 2021 and beyond. At Morressier, we, and the societies and associations working with us, are convinced this is the way forward.

In this paper, learn;

- How conferences will evolve post-pandemic

- What virtual, hybrid, and fully offline conferences are, and how they're different

- Why hybrid conferences are the new conference of the future

- How other organizations have made this a reality already

- How you can set up your next hybrid conference

Pivoting to virtual

The COVID-19 pandemic was a pivotal moment that forced the market to adapt overnight, adopting technology and new ways of working faster than ever before. In the scientific conference industry, companies began applying technology to replicate the experiences they'd had in offline environments to virtual ones.

Virtual adoption for industry networking isn't a new trend. Twitter, for example, has played a central role in mediating online discussion at medical and scientific conferences for the past decade[1]. The pandemic, however, caused the technology to be considered in a new light. Suddenly, networking and discussions were only accessible through online social media platforms and networks, such as Twitter.

Hybrid conferencing is the event format of the future. Soon, we believe that the most successful conferences will implement hybrid event formats. Hybrid events enabled by technology are a way to mitigate attendee health risks, help conferences become more inclusive by providing safe spaces and attendance options to people who otherwise might not have access, and bring environmental stewardship to the forefront of conferences. Most importantly, they lead the way for organizers to have new significant economic and commercial advantages. It's the best method to organize the conference of the future.

Industry experts agree. According to a survey from the Center for Exhibition Industry research, "73 percent of organizers are likely or very likely to continue offering those virtual solutions in 2021 — only 6 percent said they're not likely or not at all likely to do so."[2]

Additionally, technology that makes hybrid conferences possible helps societies and associations lead the way for a more diverse and inclusive scientific community. Democratizing access to content, involving international and marginalized populations in discussions, experimenting with new and interactive formats, and running conferences more frequently fosters collaboration in new ways among communities. It can also help societies and associations explore new revenue streams by leveraging the online, offline, and hybrid experiences that their members now participate in, as well as new partnership opportunities for sponsors.

At Morressier, we're convinced that organizations will continue to use the technology they've adopted throughout the pandemic to be innovative leaders within science and academia.

73% of organizers **are likely or very likely** to continue offering those virtual solutions in 2021

6% of organizers **are not likely or not at all likely to** continue offering those virtual solutions in 2021

"**"The design of future meetings will incorporate improvements for personal and emotional safety, diversity of attendees, environment impacts, and responsiveness to unpredictable fluctuations in the world."[8]**

American Institute of Physics

Popular conference formats

There are currently three popular conference formats in science and academia.

- **Virtual events** take place entirely online. A virtual environment is created where attendees and speakers log on from wherever they can find an internet connection.

- **Fully offline events** only take place in one place at one time. Presenters bring physical copies or USBs of their visuals and presentations, and attendees can only go to one event at a time.

- **Hybrid**, sometimes called **blended events**, involve selected elements of virtual and fully offline events. Some elements of the conference take place online, such as easy content access and presentation live streams. Others, such as networking sessions, are available at the on-site conference. A hybrid approach is key for science and academia to survive in the new age.

Benefits

Virtual events

By hosting conferences in virtual environments, you can **reach significantly more people** than when meeting face-to-face. The cost of attending for delegates is much lower, as they don't need to purchase flights, book hotels, or take extra days off work beyond the conference.

Virtual conferences can also lead to increased participation from speakers and attendees with lower access to funding for events and travel, including international attendees and those in junior positions.

KWF Consulting[3] completed research in October 2020, where they interviewed individuals with direct management responsibility for strategy, planning, and logistics at scholarly or professional societies across health care, life/physical sciences, and social sciences. When asked about promotion and attendance, the most commonly cited success was the "ability to reach a broader audience with a virtual meeting compared with in-person meetings…".

Virtual events are also significantly **more cost-effective** than the fully offline format. Bringing thousands of attendees to a city is a huge logistical challenge — as any conference organizer will know. This is eliminated with virtual events. The cost of catering and accommodation are also significantly reduced. This can increase the overall ROI of virtual events.

In addition, virtual events provide very **flexible formats** for both conference organizers and attendees. Attendees can flip between sessions in a couple of clicks. If the content is recorded and shared with attendees after the conference, they also don't need to worry about missing sessions they might otherwise feel the need to attend live. Additionally, conference organizers can adjust agendas and sessions to include last-minute changes easily, and with little disruption to attendees.
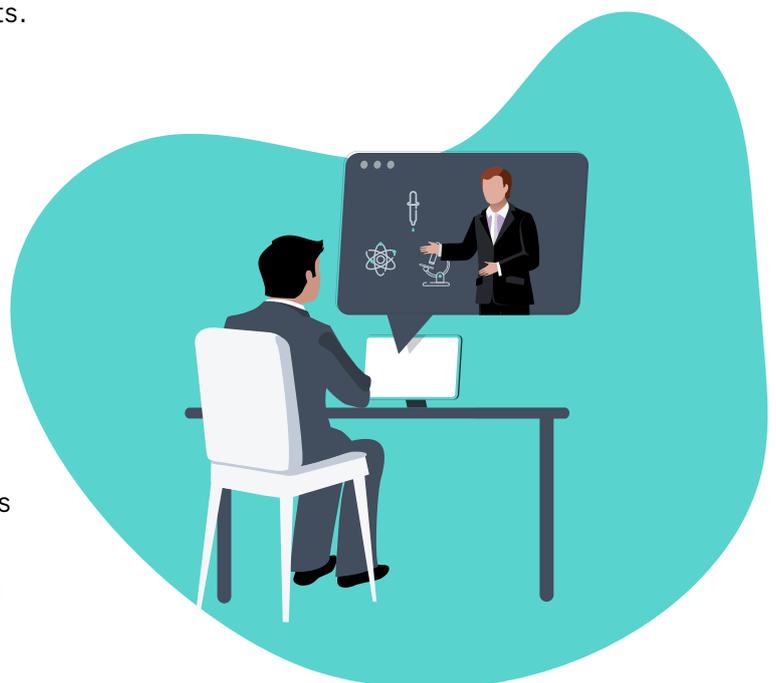
Offline events

Meeting new people and building personal connections is straightforward at a fully offline conference. They provide great **networking opportunities** for attendees who are physically present.

Being in a conference hall provides an **immersive experience** that can be hard to replicate in a virtual format where distractions can be plentiful, and bandwidth and connectivity issues can negatively affect the attendee experience.

When attendees decide to visit conferences offline, they also take advantage of the opportunity to **visit new cities and the scientific community** outside of the conference arena. Without being in the city, there are fewer opportunities for serendipitous interactions and connections to occur.

Hybrid events

Offering the best of both options, hybrid events allow you to reach a broader audience while keeping the face-to-face elements of conferences available for those who prefer to travel and meet offline. Catering to the audience that has the means to participate fully offline, while involving those who can only access an online experience can also be a big differentiator for your scientific organization, possibly leading to a more diverse member base.

Networking opportunities are huge elements of conferences. Having a hybrid environment provides space for the strong relationships that can be established offline, such as through in-person matchmaking events. In parallel, online networking activities can be organized to connect all remote attendees with another, ensuring they too have the opportunity to build meaningful

In addition, you have a lot of flexibility to choose which elements work best for your conference, allowing you to create memorable experiences for attendees.

When placed side-by-side, the benefits of hybrid events over fully offline or virtual formats become clear. In a world that demands the flexibility to choose between the best elements of virtual and fully offline events, hybrid formats are the best choice.

What are the differences between the formats?

	Virtual	Hybrid	Fully offline
Digital recording of material available	✔	✔	✘
Central digital storage of presentations	✔	✔	✘
Accessible by an international audience	✔	✔	✘
Discussions in inclusive spaces and formats	✔	✔	✘
New presentation formats are easy to try	✔	✔	✘

The way forward: Hybrid conferences

Hybrid events are continually evolving to meet the needs of both attendees and conference organizers.

We anticipate that hybrid conferences will hit an exponential growth curve by the end of 2021 as vaccination rates around the world increase and physical distancing restrictions are lifted. According to a poll of more than 900 Nature readers, 74 percent believe that scientific meetings should continue to have digital components after the pandemic subsides.[4]

74%

believe that scientific meetings should continue to have digital components after the pandemic subsides.

One common challenge we hear from our customers is creating engaging moments during conferences for both online and offline attendees. According to the above-mentioned Nature poll, 69 percent of respondents said that the biggest drawback of virtual conferences was the poor online networking opportunities. We hear that more often than not, offline experiences are more engaging than online, but we believe that this will shift as technology, specifically for conferences, becomes more sophisticated.

Another challenge, though one that can be extremely rewarding for conference organizers, is creating opportunities to interact with attendees and members post-conference. It has become a key part of any organization's holistic strategy to have conference materials available digitally in a post-COVID world. Preserving the content from conferences in order to create additional benefits for members over a much longer timeframe is an easily accessible goal, and it can play a major role in attracting attendees to future events, and new members to join your organization.

Conference organizers won't return to running only fully offline formats — we believe that the conference industry will adopt hybrid events as the "new normal". You can be an early-mover in the industry and an example for other scientific organizations to look up to by planning hybrid conferences.

The hybrid conference opportunity in science and academia

As the director of the board, or someone in a senior management position at a scientific or academic organization, we know that you have to make many decisions every day.

Two common goals Morressier customers talk about are;

- **Business-focused**, including monetizing the conferences you host, and continually increasing memberships, and

- **Purpose-focused** which are pushing the scientific community forward so even more people can contribute in the future.

We understand how these play an important role in the continued success of your organization. Hybrid conferences can support positive outcomes for the challenges these two goals present.

Challenge #1: Monetization of events & growing the member base

Finding sponsors and exhibitors are two of the most common ways to finance conferences. Keeping these sponsors and exhibitors happy can ensure that your conference continues to break even, or turn a profit for years to come. In a virtual or hybrid environment, meeting the expectations these organizations have when interacting with attendees can be a challenge.

There are several opportunities for creative engagement between attendees and sponsors or exhibitors. Hybrid conference organizers can maintain on-site exhibition areas where sponsors can meet with attendees and build strong connections in person, while also having an online exhibition gallery for virtual attendees to meet in real-time. Regardless of location, exhibitors and sponsors have the opportunity to build strong relationships with delegates.

Enjoyable interactions with sponsors and exhibitors can also positively impact the overall attendee experience, which can lead to even more attendees becoming members of the society.

> **We believe in website-like booths of exhibitors, which are fast, responsive and deliver a great user experience by focusing on the intent of the attendee - to inform themselves about exhibitor offerings, as well as establishing meaningful relationships - offered directly on the Morressier platform.**

Justus Weweler
Co-Founder and Director of
Key Accounts, Morressier

Challenge #2: Keeping audiences engaged

Audience engagement is a major conference challenge, no matter whether the event is held in a virtual, hybrid, or fully offline format. The Event Leadership Institute rounded up several statistics, including that "Two-thirds of those hosting digital experiences find engaging audiences to be the biggest challenge. Top reasons include too many distractions, lack of networking, content adaptation for digital, and little to no interaction."[5] Plus, Zoom fatigue and its causes[6] have become well-documented phenomena that make virtual and hybrid elements involving video conferencing additionally strenuous for attendees.

For attendee participation, creating meaningful connections and sharing knowledge is also fundamental to receiving value from conferences. Creating engagement not just for engagement's sake, but that facilitates involvement from attendees, ensures the best experience.

More eyes on the content equals more potential revenue from sponsors and exhibitors. With Morressier, organizers can quantify engagement rates for the very first time, opening up new monetization opportunities both during and post-event and ensuring attendees and presenters get the most value out of every conference.

Rino Montiel
Co-Founder and CTO, Morressier

Challenge #3: Capturing conference content

The main selling points of conferencing tools aren't capturing and managing content, yet these are two very important areas. Maintaining and preserving this content adds a great deal of value to attendees and organizers because of how easy it is to share before, during, and after the conference. You have the opportunity to increase engagement during and after the event using digital formats that are easy for attendees to interact with.

Finding the right technology provider is key in the future. Morressier has years of experience supporting hundreds of organizations with their events, meetings, and conferences. We will help you create a successful virtual or hybrid conference as well.

> **Conference content has traditionally been ephemeral, limited to physical halls and only accessible for the duration of an event. By capturing content in a digital library, organizers can ensure their conference reaches a global audience of potential attendees, increasing revenues while democratizing access to valuable scientific research.**

Sami Benchekroun
Co-Founder and CEO, Morressier

Tip Section: Knowledge Box

Top success metrics for conferences

- Attendance rate & number of attendees
- Number of attendees per session
- Viewed and downloaded content
- Poster interactions
- Percentage of attendees who become paying members of the society

Top ROI metrics for sponsors and exhibitors

- Total attendance of the conference with professional target audience breakdown
- Attendance at sponsored sessions
- Engagement with brands from attendees
- Viewed and downloaded content
- Number of people visiting exhibitor booths

# Morressier: The all-in-one conference solution for the academic community

Morressier's comprehensive solutions help you foster engagement with attendees and drive additional revenue, ensuring you'll have strategic and financial returns on your investment. A one-stop shop tailored to the research community, Morressier works for small or large, virtual or hybrid conferences, providing a selection of flexible and modular products.

The **workflow tools** manage the submission, review, publishing, and dissemination of all conference sessions and associated conference materials (such as abstracts, presentations, and posters) through the Morressier platform. Content submissions can be managed with ease, stored securely, and can easily be shared before, during, and after the conference.

The **virtual or hybrid conference platform** hosts live and pre-recorded presentations while promoting attendee interaction during sessions. Analytics provides information to organizers by tracking content and sponsored engagements, as well as identifying trending topics across all submissions.

The **on-demand library** showcases conference sessions and materials long after the meeting itself ends, increasing the flexibility of conference attendance and access. Choose to share content publicly, only with attendees, or via ticketed post-conference access to open up new revenue streams.

The **Morressier API** puts an end to importing spreadsheets from individual vendors, registration systems, or abstract management products, making conference organizers even more efficient. If you prefer using your existing tools, easily integrate them via the API. Contact our team about this feature.
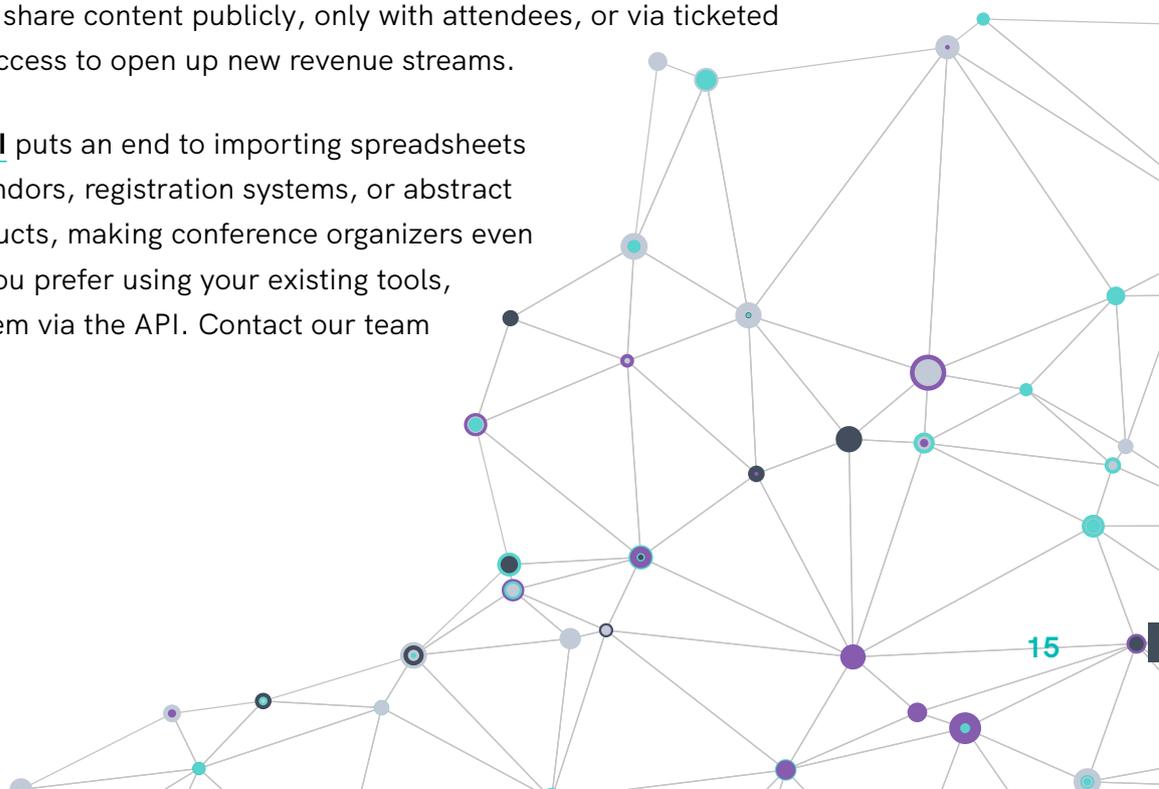
Case Study: Increasing sponsorship revenue and membership sign-ups for the RNA Society

100%	**400.000**	**250.000**	**91%**
Attendance rate	Minutes of presentations viewed	Poster interactions	Poster submissions completed

The RNA Society approached Morressier to transform the 2020 RNA Annual Meeting into an engaging, fully virtual conference within a one-month timeframe. The event has historically only taken place in person, so organizers and attendees were unfamiliar with the virtual format. Due to the highly sensitive nature of the conference content, data privacy was also a major concern.

The Outcome

Morressier created a tailor-made conference experience with pre-recorded content hosted securely online that was only accessible to attendees. By pre-recording all presentation tracks, attendees had the freedom to determine their own schedule and ensure they didn't miss any presentations. Participants interacted over 250,000 times with conference content and watched over 400,000 minutes of video presentations over the four-day conference.

Morressier generated new revenue streams for the RNA Society by including sponsor branding on presentations. Additionally, by offering free conference attendance to all society members, membership sign-ups doubled in the lead-up to the event. New sponsorship revenue and increased membership sign-ups meant that the meeting produced a profit, without any additional costs for attendees.[7]

Case Study: Boosting audience engagement during and after the World Congress of Psychiatry hybrid conference

319.000	**12.000**	**96%**
Poster impressions	Poster views	Public posters

Kenes Group engaged Morressier as the content management software provider for the World Congress of Psychiatry (WCP) 2019 to ensure delegates had a more interactive and long-lasting event experience. Morressier transformed how attendees consumed and engaged with the research by bringing all abstracts and posters online, and showcasing them on a dedicated conference page before, during, and after the event.

The Outcome

With a focus on making all research easily accessible and discoverable, delegates were able to better prepare by viewing posters close to 12,000 times in the lead-up to the event. In total, the posters and abstracts received over 319,000 online impressions from delegates and researchers around the globe.

The switch to a digital-first content management system allowed the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) to gain invaluable insights into the performance and reach of all ePosters. Morressier's metrics uncovered trending topics, keywords, and posters, helping the association plan next year's program more effectively.[9]

What makes Morressier different:

- **Integrated platform** covering all conference needs, including abstract management and a platform for virtual or hybrid conferences, combined with an integrated content repository

- **Scholarly features** such as DOIs ensure authors and attendees can share and protect digital documents

- **Cost-effective** software that opens up additional revenue streams

Launched in 2014, Morressier supports innovation and accelerates scientific breakthroughs by making previously hidden conference content and discussions discoverable. Over 200 of the world's leading professional and scientific organizations, such as ACS and IOP Publishing, trust Morressier to support their hybrid and virtual conferences. Morressier is committed to helping create successful conferences with leading scientific, technical, medical, and social science societies. Morressier is focused on creating a positive return on investment, whether monetary or mission-based, for all customers.

Now is the time for hybrid conferences

Academic and scientific societies that incorporate technology into their conferences will see the benefits of having integrated content, digitized experiences, and the possibilities of monetized conference content. Without incorporating these elements, they may experience permanent revenue loss as the adoption of technology increases in years to come.

Society members, authors, and researchers deserve and demand access to the full expanse of the research lifecycle, including conference content. We hope that you'll join the industry leaders who are already adopting hybrid and virtual conference formats. At Morressier, we're ready to help you run hybrid conferences that provide a new, memorable experience for your attendees, whether they're online or on-site.

Contact Morressier and learn why over 200 scientific organizations trust us with their hybrid and virtual conferences.

Book a discussion with us today

Morressier

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Morressier Inc., Washington, D.C., USA

www.morressier.com

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