

A guide to  
eConferences  
& Meetings

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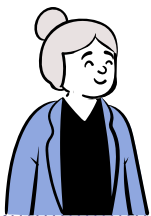
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# The benefits of eConferences & meetings

Online meetings and conferences do not reduce the value of the connection or mean an inferior experience for attendees.

In fact, they can be an opportunity to enhance the value of meetings and create a better attendee experience.



There are significant benefits to moving your conference or meeting online:

- > Greater access to specialists and stakeholders. Your reach for speakers and attendees is no longer limited by location, travel costs and travel time.
- > Increased access for attendees. Your attendees are also no longer limited by location, travel cost and travel time. People with professional or personal restrictions can access the event just as easily.
- > Increased knowledge and message sharing. Digital formats are intuitively built for sharing and recording. So your content can stay live well after your meeting or event has ended.
- > Reduced cost and organisation. Conference centre costs, catering, travel and accommodation can require significant time and money investment for businesses. With eConferences/meetings, you can redirect this cost into increasing the value of the session and attendee experience.

And it's not just you as the organiser who benefits. Attendees are no longer faced by location and travel time restrictions, and they eliminate travel cost entirely. That means they can access previously inaccessible meetings.

At a personal level, this translates to:

- > No more 6am trains
- > No more freezing/boiling conference rooms
- > No more tiny sandwiches and bad coffee (unless you decide to make them for yourself!)
- > No need to be in London and Manchester on the same day
- > No more struggling to decide which talks to go to in a limited time – you can access them all, whenever you choose

# *The barriers to* eConferences & meetings

Face-to-face attendance in meetings does, of course, have value that is difficult to replicate in online environments. For us, these values include:

- > Discussion and debate
- > Decision-making
- > Making connections

Because of this, we need to pay particular attention to making these activities possible in our online meeting environments.

As facilitators and coordinators, we need to consider how we achieve the following:

1. Replicating the 'four walls' of the meeting room.
2. Ensuring the online environment is an engaging and supportive place where people feel comfortable expressing their opinions.
3. Providing networking spaces to meet, connect and grow professional networks, just as we would in a face-to-face environment.

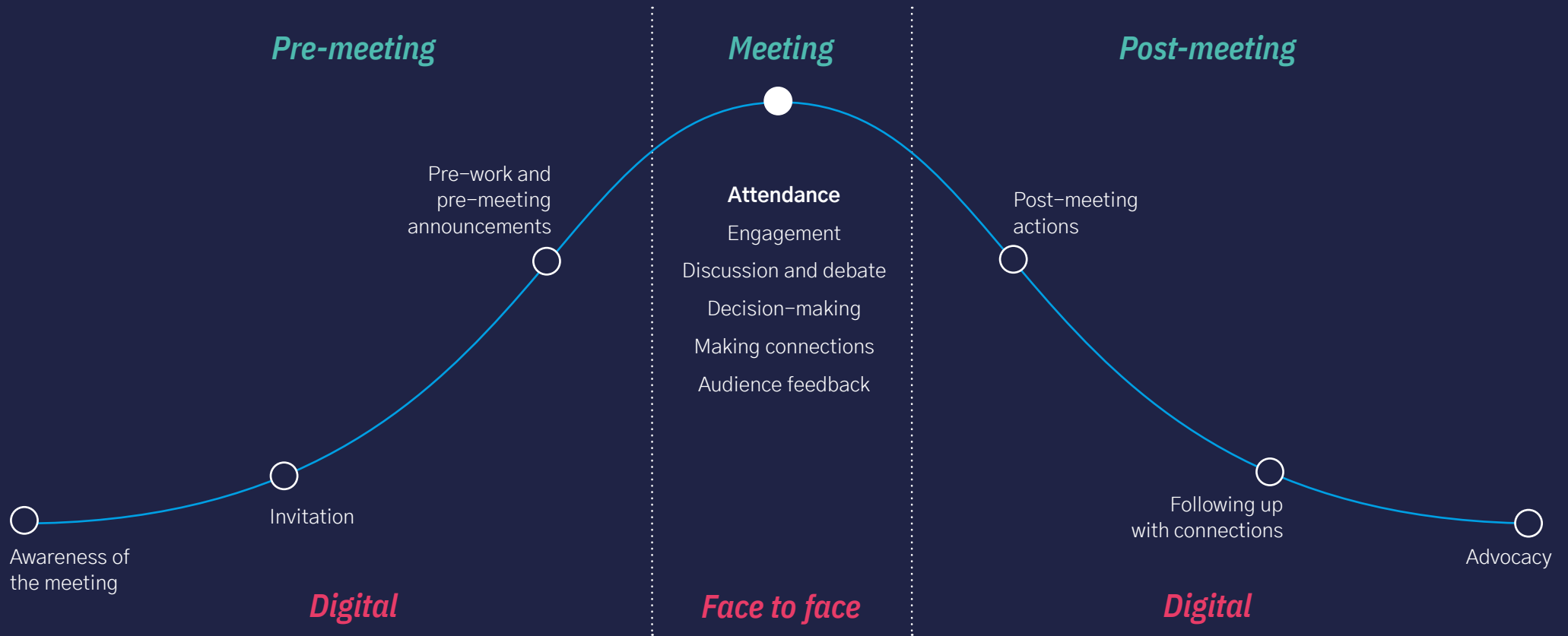
“Let's face it, COVID-19 is horrific, and this is a very difficult time. But in everything, it creates many opportunities because an event is not just face-to-face – an event is on multiple channels. And what it's doing is making us look at how we increase the use of online channels to make sure that people can engage, exchange information and still have dialogue.”

## *The Drum*



# The attendee *engagement curve*

The attendee engagement curve has for a long time now been predominantly digital. Today, there's only a small face-to-face part left to evolve online.





# Recreating *'four walls'*



*eConferences have been developing for some time. This picture shows a hybrid eConference TED talk.*

eConference and eMeeting formats done right can actually make it easier for the audience to contribute. But to facilitate this, you need to make sure your attendees have the information and tools available to contribute with confidence.

## Top tips

- > Round-table introductions and speaker profiles are more important than ever – participants need to know who they are ‘in the room with’. You could provide these beforehand – in the session invitation, for example.
- > The audience need to know your expectations of them, so be clear on what the purpose of the session is. If it is a knowledge download, say so. If it is a discussion, say so. If you need a decision made, say so.
- > Ask a non-presenting member of your team to be the room manager and monitor the session chat for you. They can manage questions and raise an issue with you if necessary.
- > Ask participants to submit their questions or comments on a chat-type functionality. This could include feedback such as ‘I totally agree’, or ‘I am confused can you go over that again’. You and the room manager gain all important audience feedback.
- > There are also many digital tools available to support audience feedback. **Slido**, for example, facilitates interactions between yourself and your audience.

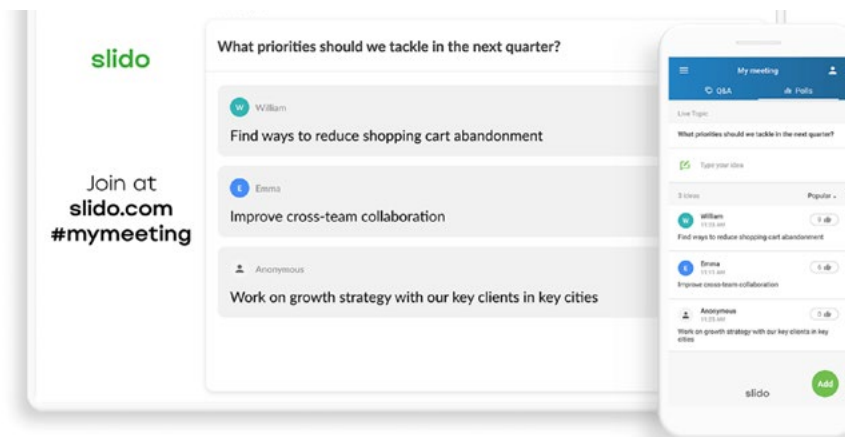
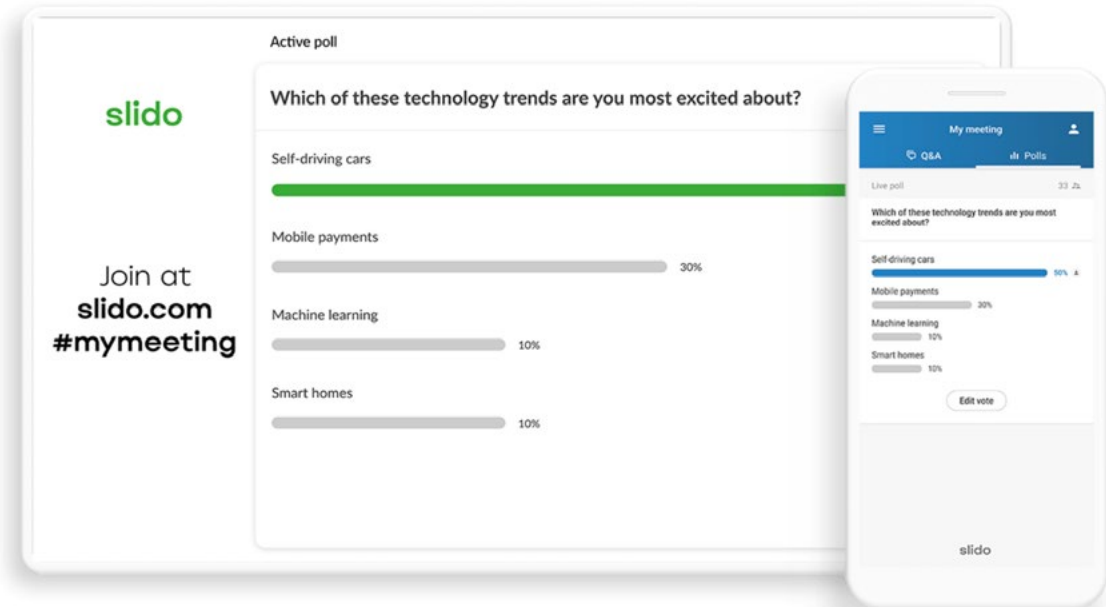


# RECREATING 'FOUR WALLS' Using online tools: Slido

Tools such as Slido empower the audience to ask questions, vote in polls and join in with the discussion.

Using the session code you provide them with, attendees can enter it on the Slido website and contribute their thoughts and questions.

The functionality also allows you to prioritise the discussion, see which are the most burning questions and get instant feedback.



# Creating an inclusive *online environment*



Just as in a face-to-face meeting, the more you engage and connect with your attendees, the more likely they are to feel comfortable sharing their opinions. With some organisation and preparation, you can facilitate this in the pre-meeting cycle and engage your audience from the very beginning.

## Top tips

- > Be creative with your invitation activities. Provide your audience with an exceptional experience and they'll feel included and connected.
- > Don't forget that your materials don't have to be online just because your meeting is. QR codes work through video calls, so you can use them to transition the attendee journey through print and online mediums.
- > Ask your attendees their reasons for coming to the session before you begin. You can then perhaps tailor the information in your session, direct them to sessions that would interest them or simply tell them this isn't the session for them.





# Creating an inclusive *online environment*

We recommend creating an online hub for your eConference/ meeting materials. This can act as the central repository for all the session materials.

Rather than having to check numerous emails and meeting invites, they can go on the hub for session information and services.

These hubs can also support networking by acting as a mutual point of contact for attendees. They can connect with their existing networks and make new connections.

To create your hub, you could consider developing a microsite within your company. Alternatively, there are a number of off-the-shelf app services that can do it for you.



# Providing *networking* *spaces*

As any pro-networker knows, you should never go into a conference without knowing who you'll meet.

For online conferences as well as face-to-face ones, it's wise to have done some research upfront and know the people or type of people you want to talk to. And don't forget to be open to the people who want to talk to you. As facilitators, we can enhance and support the networking process for our attendees.

## Top tips

Think like a dating app.

- > **Make it easy for attendees to swap information.**  
The key elements of dating apps include profiles which share pictures and information about their interests, location and (most importantly) what they are looking for in a connection.
- > **Introduce attendees that have complementary interests.**  
This could be via an online algorithm or simply a community manager.
- > **Allow for follow-up conversation.**  
Keep your sessions open for 10–15 mins after the presentation is over to allow for follow-up conversations over video call or chat functionality.

*Don't forget we're in a world where 40% of people now marry someone they met online<sup>1</sup>...now that's online networking!*

1 [www.news.stanford.edu/2019/08/21/online-dating-popular-way-u-s-couples-meet/](http://www.news.stanford.edu/2019/08/21/online-dating-popular-way-u-s-couples-meet/)



# Evolving eConference & meeting *etiquette*

Over time, it's likely that universal video meeting etiquette will evolve. Until then, here are some of the unofficial rules we're living by:

- > Whether you have 5 attendees or 500, do your best to avoid those weird joining noises. Set up the meeting so all participants enter with their microphone muted and camera off. Before the meeting starts, ask attendees to ensure if they are not the one talking, they are on mute.
- > Always open the meeting 10–15 mins beforehand to conduct a sound, video and screenshare check. In those unfortunate situations where technical issues do arise, ensure your tech team is lined up to help you out.
- > Encourage your attendees to put their video on. We may not be in the same room, but we can still talk face-to-face.
- > As an attendee, try to be in a quiet space with a reliable connection. Try not to move location whilst all on the call – we don't want people to drop out mid sentence or to hear how windy it is in Southampton whilst we are with you on your way to get milk.

When presenting in an eConference/Meeting, be aware of your new channel and adapt your style accordingly. You can still be as engaging, captivating and motivational as in person, but you can do it from the comfort of your home.





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