Virtualized Meetings

SUMMARY: Ubiquitous broadband, the mainstreaming of virtual reality, and robotics are accelerating the capabilities of telepresence technologies. These technologies could enable the telepresence of both speakers and participants at meetings. Or meetings could take place entirely in a shared digital reality. While these technologies can broaden participation and generate novel experiences, the social and experiential benefits of "real life" may prove challenging to replicate.

Forecasts

- A growing bifurcation between real-world and virtual meetings may occur. Information delivery may migrate to virtual reality (VR) meetings, while socializing and networking become the primary goals of real-world meetings.
- Augmented reality (AR) shows signs of developing quickly as a meeting technology.
- Meeting participants may rapidly acclimate to interacting with non-local participants. Video chat interactions have already become normalized, making it less daunting to interact with a Facetime-equipped telepresence robot.
- The post-Millennial generation will include "VR natives" who find hybrid and virtual forms of person-to-person interactions more natural.

Key Uncertainties

Ability of telepresence technology to deliver the networking and social interaction components of meetings

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Ability of virtual reality to replace live product demonstrations

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New capabilities of telepresence technology that traditional meetings cannot match

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Generational preferences for online versus face-to-face socializing

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Ability of Facebook, the owner of VR firm Oculus Rift, to mainstream virtual reality socializing

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Supporting Trends

- **Virtual reality growth.** Virtual reality has hit the mainstream, and will grow as an entertainment and communication platform.
- **Augmented reality.** Augmented reality offers useful ways to visualize data in real-world environments, and is being deployed on platforms including smartphones.
- **VR and AR as marketing channels.** Marketers are beginning to explore virtual reality and augmented reality as formats for delivering compelling consumer experiences.
- **Virtual volunteering.** Younger volunteers are providing online services, especially for cause-driven organizations, by engaging through social media or extending an advocacy or fundraising campaign to their social networks.
- **Security concerns for meetings.** Security concerns are a rising priority in the meeting and events industry.
- **Reimagining scholarly communications.** Innovations such as open review, post-publication review, and continuous revision could restructure the entire scholarly communication process.
- **Connecting online and real-life lives.** People are taking their online friendships offline into the real world via apps.

Related Drivers of Change

- New Forms of Work
- New Journal Models

Notable Data Points

VR A GROWING INDUSTRY

International Data Corp. forecasts that the market for VR and AR systems **will grow** from $5.2 billion in 2016 **to more than $162 billion** in 2020.

Source: IDC's Worldwide Semiannual Augmented and Virtual Reality Spending Guide

VR FOR PROMOTION AND MARKETING

According to Digi-Capital, corporations and venture capitalists invested **$2.3 billion** in virtual and augmented reality in 2016, **up from $700 million-plus** in 2015.

Source: www.digi-capital.com/news

AR IN BUSINESS

A Microsoft AR initiative enables teams of structural engineers to **cut costs and boost efficiency** by having remote teams capture high-resolution images of damaged bridges. The data are then projected onto a 3D computer model of the damaged bridge, enabling the engineers to make a damage assessment.

Source: Neowin.net

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Strategic Insights

- Today, most meetings are designed around content and programming, with social interactions a secondary consideration. Virtualized meetings could alter how participants use and value real-world meetings, potentially boosting the importance of designing and programming the social experiences of participants at live meetings and events.
- Virtualized meetings could foster new hybrid meeting forms. Local chapters could meet face-to-face and then connect virtually to a live national or international meeting. A hybrid format could boost participation in national meetings and simultaneously deepen personal ties in local chapters.
- The rise of virtualized meetings could lead to a variety of meeting formats: VR-only, hybrid, and face-to-face. Each type will likely have its strengths and weaknesses—heightening the importance of having strong delineation and branding among the different meeting types.
- Consumers have become conditioned to pay less for digital content than for "real" content. VR meetings may face a similar pricing challenge and require greater interactivity among participants to justify a premium price point.

Timing

- **Stage:** Growth, though at an early stage
- **Speed:** Rapid and accelerating

Potential Alternative Futures

- **Meetings in the matrix:** Personal avatars and a shared online environment re-create real-world meetings in purely digital forms.
- **Luxury and physical presence:** Face-to-face meetings evolve into a premium category for meetings and events.
- **VR as a wildcard:** VR develops a "killer app" for virtual meetings, which puts real-world meetings at a disadvantage.
- **VR goes down-market:** The popularity of VR porn and gaming applications tarnishes perceptions of the technology.

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Take Action

- **Be strategic in deciding when to take advantage of virtual meeting capabilities.** Live meetings remain popular with members. Experiment to test member interest and gain the skills to offer virtualized meetings. Initially consider taking a hybrid or mixed-channel approach to test member preferences without undermining proven conferences.
- **Analyze your education and professional development portfolio to identify offerings ripe for virtualization.** Search for ways to reach and serve people who may be less able to attend in-person meetings, such as students and those with limited money or time. You may need to update credentialing and licensure requirements that skew toward in-person learning experiences to accommodate virtual learning. When issues can't wait until the next major meeting, use virtual platforms to nimbly educate, organize, and mobilize members.
- **Use virtual meeting technologies to improve communication efficiency while lowering cost.** Hold more virtual meetings to cut governance expenses, but be careful not to erode personal connections and trust to save money. Global and national organizations and their regional and local affiliates will be able to build closer working relationships. Virtual technologies are a powerful and affordable way to reach the general public on critical issues. Virtual doesn't mean free: you will need a budget and pricing strategies that manage member expectations yet offset additional costs.
- **Identify technology partners and meeting facilities able to support virtualized meetings.** Good wi-fi access and sufficient bandwidth are not yet widely available. Meeting production companies should be a resource for deploying these capabilities. Associations should be mindful that corporate security measures may restrict access and participation for some members.

Keyword Search

To continue researching this change driver, use these search terms, combining one "virtuality" term with one "meeting term":

VIRTUALITY TERMS: *AR, augmented reality, virtual reality, virtual, VR, telepresence, hybrid, mixed reality*

MEETING TERMS: *event, meeting, conference*

Who Will Be Affected

Most organizations can take advantage of virtual, augmented, or hybrid approaches to meeting design and communication. Some industries are experiencing greater digital disruption of their business models. Associations in areas such as science, technology, and entertainment may face greater demands to deploy these capabilities. The corporate meeting world is ahead of associations in deploying these capabilities.

About ASAE ForesightWorks

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- guidance in performing environmental scans; and
- opportunities to engage with peers around the research.

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