

✓ CHECKLIST

A Marketer's Guide to Canceled Event Communication

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It goes without saying this is an unprecedented time for the event and conference industry. Thousands of events are being postponed or canceled and there's currently no clear path to when this cycle will end. It's enough to make even the most seasoned event marketer want to toss their cookies. The good news is, you are not alone.

At Feathr we're working quickly to provide solutions that will help keep event marketers' cookies firmly in place. While there are dozens of logistical items to consider when rescheduling or postponing an event; this checklist is exclusively for event marketers tasked with communicating and promoting information around their events. Let's dive in!

Consider creating a shared online folder specifically for relaunch

In a shared, private document (like a Google Doc or a Dropbox Paper doc) create a single repository for communication and documentation.

This documentation should be thorough enough that if any member of your team is unavailable, other colleagues can quickly pick up the tasks at hand.

These "living" documents should include:

- ✓ Emergency contacts for all decision makers and their redundancy partners (internal to the company and external partners)
- ✓ Marketing strategy with short, mid and/or long term goals
- ✓ A bulleted timeline for documenting past and future contact events (eg. "March 25th - Messaged sponsors about alternative value proposition")
- ✓ List of all planned meetings, workshops, panels, etc. on the original event agenda (we'll come back to this)



Step 1: Set Immediate Priorities

✓ Announce your postponement clearly and tactfully

- Inform all event stakeholders of the postponement through multiple channels. With the influx of COVID-19 messages, your announcement may be lost in the noise. Be sure to leverage a minimum of three channels (such as email, social media posts and [ad campaigns](#)) to ensure your message is heard
- Clearly communicate the “why” behind your postponed event. This will help build trust with your stakeholders and let them know that you’re strategically and safely moving forward.
- Make all pertinent information easy to find and readily available. This includes:
 - The processes for transferring or refunding tickets to provide your attendees with peace of mind
 - Any location changes including hotel accommodations
 - Easy ways to reach out for questions or concerns
- Build a dedicated landing page that is linked from your event homepage and all social media channels with your canceled event’s announcement and rescheduling plan. This page should be updated frequently through scheduled and ad-hoc updates.

✓ Create an active listening campaign

Listen to what your registrants are saying. There will be a lot of anger and frustration in the noise, but ultimately they will make it clear what they want and need in these times. There are many ways to do this:

- Monitor social media to your event’s hashtag (if applicable).
- [Send polls to your registrants](#) for feedback on virtual events or postponed event dates before making a decision as a way to keep your audience engaged and mitigate the risk.
- To get a pulse on how your audience is feeling, survey your website visitors with a friendly question using [Feathr Conversations](#). This intel could help inform future decisions around event dates, programming, or virtual options.
- Setup a regular time to talk to your sales and community/membership colleagues. Ask questions about what registrants, members, exhibitors and sponsors are thinking, feeling and saying. Dig for details about their current pain points so that you can plan content, marketing, and programming that resonates.
- Brainstorm with long time partners and associates in the industry.
- Dedicate time to answer emails and incoming messages promptly.
- Communicate frequently with your sponsors and be open to their feedback.



✓ Be a voice in your industry's response to COVID-19

As marketers we know the number one priority and concern, of practically every member of our audience, is responding to the coronavirus pandemic.

As an association or leading event in your industry, you have the unique vantage point to observe what an entire industry is doing to respond.

How is the pandemic affecting the personal lives and businesses of your members, registrants and partners? How are they responding? What are the effects (positive and/or negative) of those responses?

Research that, digest it and share it with your audience. Use that to help spread useful, industry-tailored information to your audience. In this time of need, that help does not go unnoticed.

- Create a content series that is specifically about documenting your industry's response and link to it from your events updates landing page
- If no other format jumps to mind – start by interviewing people in your audience who represent different key groups of your audience. Someone from a large business in your space, another from a small business. Someone on the manufacturing side and another on the supply chain side. One more from the retail side and another interview with a consumer.
- When possible use video as your source content type. Video can be turned into audio (for a podcast) and written content (through transcription and editing).
- Don't get fancy. Zoom interview recordings are good enough. That realness in your content will be appreciated. Setting a reasonable, midway bar for quality will allow you to release content much faster. In this environment speed and relevance is much more important than polish.
- Promote each piece of content on all key channels: advertising, social media, email and website.



Step 2: Provide Value to Your Audience Between the Postponement and Relaunch

✓ Create alternative value for registrants and sponsors

Look for other ways to provide registrants and sponsors with equivalent value. Do you have gated or paywalled materials you can provide to attendees in lieu of a refund? Are there ways you can use your repository of contacts to provide advertising options to your sponsors? (Hint: [We have a tool that will help with this.](#))

- Establish a value package that's equivalent to attendance and provide it to your registrants. This could include access to online content, networking opportunities with other registrants, and special offers from sponsors (that also help deliver sponsors value).
- Create multi-channel digital sponsorship packages to provide sponsors the thing they really care about – exposure to your audience. Email sponsorships, website placements and sponsored retargeting are all great options and are even better when combined.

✓ Repurpose event materials into useful content

Prepare to engage with your audience digitally until the rescheduled date. Speeches, presentations and panels can quickly be turned into articles, webinars, videos, virtual roundtable discussions or video interviews with notable speakers and industry leaders. Online community facilitation with LinkedIn Groups or private Facebook groups can be a helpful way to distribute and contain this content if your own technical hosting isn't available. Check out LinkedIn Live now that it's up and running too!

- Refer to your agenda to determine what sessions, workshops, etc can be repurposed into virtual events, webinars, interviews, videos, blog posts, etc.
- Build an online hub for content to live (private landing pages, LinkedIn groups, etc).
- Create a communication plan to launch content to the appropriate audiences.
- Create a content calendar for distributing repurposed content.
- Create email campaigns to notify registrants of exclusive access to this repurposed content.
- Retarget site visitors and, most importantly, event registrants with ads driving them to this repurposed online content.

Step 3: Relaunch Your Event

✓ Announce relaunch

When the time comes to relaunch your event, take special note of those who pre-registered for your canceled event and “surprise and delight” them with special offers like: a free pass upgrade, free access to online community, or a special VIP event for re-registers only. You can also:

- Create a special announcement exclusively for pre-registered attendees of the previous event with special offers.
- Create a general announcement about the relaunch of your event for general distribution.
- Launch an ad campaign optimized for reach by targeting all event page visitors and registration page visitors.

TIP: In Feathr you can see the % of your target audience reached. Aim to reach over 70% of your original target audience for maximum awareness.

✓ Promote your rescheduled event on multiple channels

At the end of the day your key goal as a marketer is driving registrations and attendance for your events. Providing clear and up front communication, documenting your industry’s response to the crisis, and delivering value to your attendees and sponsors throughout will help you do just that. But, as always, personalized and multi-channel marketing is a key part of driving registrations.

Of the many channels you choose to use (email, social, direct mail, etc) retargeting is absolutely

critical. When done well email, direct mail, social, and industry placement campaigns do one thing – drive website traffic. Retargeting is what fills the gaps – helping you reach and engage the 95% of that website traffic that will leave without converting. It keeps you top of mind so that, when folks are ready, they're nudged and take action.

- Plan a promotional calendar divided by the key marketing channels you intend to use.
- Determine the best format for pre-registered and potential attendees and sponsors (eg: should you send just emails or and retargeting advertising?).
- Be sure to address the concern that is likely to still be top of mind in all of your promotions, health safety. Include information about how you plan on keeping your event clean and safe. This could mean highlighting proper ways to minimize the spread of germs at events, options for attendance if someone is sick and reassuring all attendees that you’ve taken steps to ensure their safety.

✓ Create a programmatic advertising campaigns to get your message out:

- Setup a full website retargeting campaign (that excludes registrants) to make sure that you get continuous exposure to every single website visitor.
- Launch an email-mapping campaign by turning your original event registration list into a retargeting audience.

- [Create a list of keywords and phrases](#) that your target audience may be searching for online to launch a search retargeting campaign.
- Organize your attendee and prospect email lists for [segmented email mapping ad campaigns](#).
- Run a registration-abandonment campaign to retarget visitors who begin, but don't finish, your event registration process. Drive them through the finish line by communicating genuine urgency (an upcoming price break) or special offers.
- Review your website page structure and analytics to find other opportunities for segmented retargeting campaigns. Do you have a "Why Attend?" section that you can target? Maybe a "Why Exhibit/Sponsor?" section or a travel page? Each naturally ties into a more segmented retargeting campaign – focused on attendee value, exhibitor/sponsor value, or travel packages in this case.

Bonus Tip: Create a digital referral program to make it easy for your exhibitors, sponsors and speakers to invite their audiences to your event. This tactic is always a good idea; but especially today when people are hesitant to act or spend. You want to create confidence in whatever way you can. Showing that your partners are still involved and involving them in the promotion of your event is a great way to do that.



Final Tips: Remember your audience and be authentic

Every marketer has heard “be authentic” a million times, but if ever there was a time to put this into practice, it’s now. Remember your audience is stressed, scared and likely bordering on fight-or-flight, reptile-brain level responses.

DO NOT: Make jokes

It’s not the time to try to make clever Corona related puns or drown the audience in corporate jargon.

DO: Keep it simple

In all communications be clear, concise, empathetic and affirming.

DO NOT: Go for the spin

Stay on topic. Now is not the time to upsell an irrelevant product or service, even as a sub banner. Folks are looking for reasons to be angry. Don’t add to their emotional strain.

DO: Look for the helpers

Find ways to use your communications to raise awareness of those fighting the pandemic and find selfless ways to support them. Even if it’s as simple as raising awareness of philanthropic projects. Use your platform to spread good and you will be remembered.

Remember to...

Get organized and be ready to delegate

Now’s not the time to be the dragon of information hoarding. Talk to your colleagues. Have open and honest communication about responsibilities and have redundancy plans in place should any member of your team need to take sick leave.

Take a deep breath

While physical health is critical in a time like this mental health is equally important. Don’t give in to panic. You are not alone in this. Thousands of events have been canceled and while we’re not sure exactly when things will change, mental stress won’t make it come any faster. If you feel the need, consider practicing controlled breathing exercises or using relaxation apps like Calm or Relax Melodies to follow guided meditations. Remember to stretch, eat and hydrate frequently. Check in with your team to ensure they are also following this regime.

Take care of yourself

You know how flight attendants on an airplane say to put your oxygen mask before assisting others in the case of an emergency? Well, this is that kind of emergency. Make sure you’re taking careful stock of your physical and mental health. Follow the latest CDC guidelines when it comes to practicing social distancing or shelter in place requirements.

At Feathr we’re doing everything we can to help marketers, of canceled or postponed events, secure registrations for their rescheduled event. We hope that this guide helps you do that!

If you’d like to explore how Feathr can help [we’d love to talk.](#)

