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EVENT MANAGEMENT

# What do Post-Coronavirus Events Look Like?

BY JULIUS SOLARIS

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**The most pressing question on event professionals' minds is what events will look like once the lockdowns have been lifted. We explore some potential scenarios of the aftermath of Covid-19.**

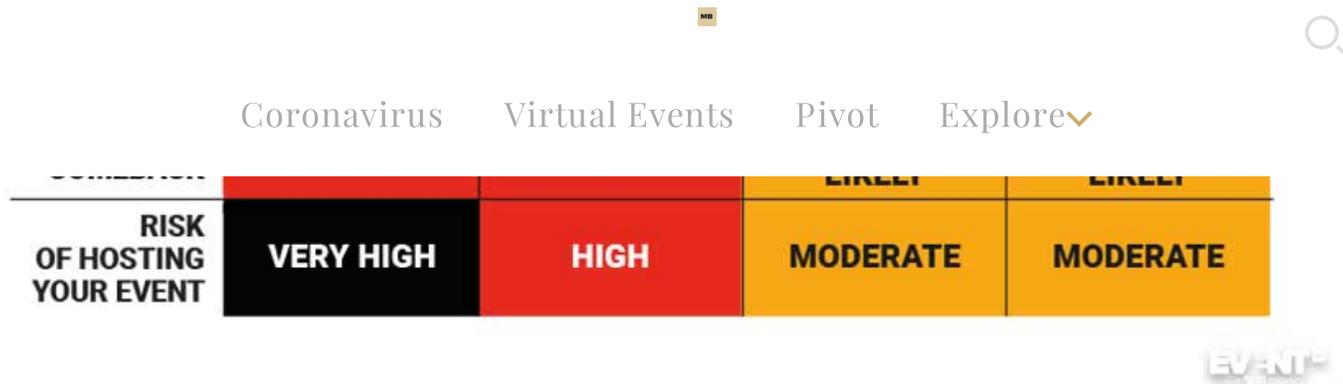


The event industry remains one of the hardest hit by the coronavirus crisis. A lot of uncertainty remains on the future of meetings and events.

We have extensively covered how events are one of the few proven vehicles for spreading the virus. The pressure on the industry is at all-time high.

Some companies such as Microsoft have announced plans to suspend all live events until July 2021. Facebook joined the strategy by announcing the cancellation of all meetings above 50 attendees until June 2021.

Our current coronavirus recovery timeline reflects a scenario where things are frozen for the next few months.



Is that it?

Not really. Some meetings will indeed happen over summer and into fall. The following analysis is an exploration:

- › What are the conditions for events to happen?
- › What types of events will happen?
- › What will those events look like?

## The Conditions for Events to Happen

One of the underlying conditions for events to take place is that the host country has entered what is commonly referred to as a 'phase stage' of the virus containment.

Phases refer to relaxing the virus containment controls, after the initial lockdown measures to flatten the curve show the first positive outcomes. Cases go down, hospitals start to breathe again.

This is surely the most discussed item on the agenda of many countries. With some saying opening up too soon may drive countries into relapse and others that keeping things closed



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Last week, the US government released [guidelines](#) that break the return to normalcy into three phases. The Opening Up America Again document gives general principles that will apply to all future phases of business recovery, and that seem pertinent for events:

- › Social distancing and protective equipment
- › Temperature checks and other testing
- › Isolating, and contact tracing
- › Sanitation and disinfection of common and high-traffic areas
- › Policies and procedures for workforce contact tracing following positive coronavirus tests

We can expect these phase one requirements to be in effect for any business activity to resume. Within phase one (the most immediate post-lockdown phase, currently scheduled for April 30, 2020 in most states), many of these conditions make event planning very complicated if not completely impracticable.

Specifically:

- › Prohibiting groups larger than ten
- › Minimizing non-essential travel
- › Closing common areas (for employers)

However, states and regions with no evidence of a resurgence after a successful phase one may enter phase two, in which conditions for some types of events will begin:

- › Gatherings of more than 50 people should be avoided



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› Large venues can operate under moderate physical distancing protocols

Phase three further relaxes the distancing measures for large venues but adds no context for gatherings. This indicates that large mass gatherings will still not likely be possible well into phase three.

Therefore, based on these US guidelines, the conditions for some events to happen seem to be linked to phase two, and that means no evidence of a resurgence of the virus after a successful phase one — effectively, an infection curve that has flattened out.

Even in this scenario, only some events will happen.

## What Events Can Be Planned During Phase Two?

The hint is clear. Large events will suffer more than smaller events. Size will matter through 2020 and potentially into 2021.

Facebook adhered to the US guidelines by canceling all live events of more than 50 people until June 2021.



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referring to meetings of 50 people max.  
Anything above that is too risky or complex to plan.

There is still some degree of confusion about the guidelines as the relaxed measures on venues may invite questions on how, for example, a movie theater could host more than 50 viewers at a time with moderate social distancing in place.

Relaxing nonessential travel restrictions could free up domestic long-range travel to meetings across the country, but almost inevitably virtual events will prevail over the risk of exposing attendees to travel with the virus still circulating in some capacity.

International travel will still suffer for a while with countries implementing different quarantine strategies. It is unlikely that attendees will be willing to potentially undergo 14 days of self-quarantine to attend a one or two-day event.

Therefore, the meetings that will take place in person will need to have a very strong reason to happen. They will be limited to domestic events and have virtual alternatives as a replacement until a breakthrough (vaccine, herd immunity or cure) materializes.

## What Will Meetings Look Like?

Now onto the question every event professional has on the backs of their minds: What will these meetings look like?

There are a number of considerations on the health and safety front that will pile on top of the usual measures taken to run events.

Though there are definitely more that will surface as more information becomes available, we will try to summarize the most poignant ones:

➤ Insurance



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- › Sanitation and Disinfection
- › Triage and Handling of Those Who Show Symptoms
- › Vulnerable population management

## Insurance

One of the trickiest aspects of running events will be the increased level of risk companies will expose themselves to. If you decide to go ahead, there will be an immediate burden of considerations to scope out in terms of insurance coverage.

A non-exhaustive list includes:

- › **Force majeure** clauses and coverage for cancellation or further postponement
- › Coverage for attendees that may contract the virus at the event
- › Coverage for staff that may contract the virus at the event
- › Exposure of spread to vulnerable individuals

## Social Distancing

Undoubtedly, one of the most challenging items for event professionals to face will be enforcing 'moderate social distancing'.



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Again document. Therefore, it is difficult to interpret what distancing at events will look like with accuracy.

Based on [CDC guidelines](#), social distancing currently requires that you:

- › Stay at least 6 feet (2 meters) from other people
- › Do not gather in groups
- › Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings

It is immediately evident how events with more than 50 attendees will be severely penalized. Some considerations to enforce these rules are as follows:

- › **Registration.** At least 6 feet between attendees queuing will need to be enforced. Looking at what grocery stores are currently implementing may give you an indication of where we are heading.
- › **Signage.** Physical signage displaying the correct distance will need to be implemented at registration and along key paths, as well as in common areas such as where F&B will be served.
- › **Room layout.** The room layout of the event will need to be redesigned to reflect a distance of 6 feet between chairs, and you will have to organize a way for people to get to their seats in an orderly fashion that preserves the distance limit.
- › **Self-serving buffets.** Self-service won't be an option for a while. Seated dining will be the only alternative with attendees spaced out appropriately, staff wearing protective gear, and sanitation being available. That may skyrocket costs for F&B. Forward-thinking venues may offer cost-effective solutions to provide food and beverage to attendees.
- › **Social activities.** One of the most significant draws to in-person events is the networking and socializing component. It is fair to say that these will be too much of a risk to undertake as they will inevitably translate into a mass gathering. Handshaking, business card exchanging and the likes are



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respect distancing in say buses or taxis moving attendees around.

One trend that will define the recovery of events will be venues that step up their distancing practices. In fact, a partner that implements all of the above for you adds an immediate layer of security that may relax the level of insurance risk you take. This also applies for DMCs for the transportation element and AV for equipment management.

More on this below.

### **Thermal Scanning**

Another element that will be a requirement for events of all sizes will be thermal scanning. This will be a condition for everyone attending the event, an item to clear with consent at registration.

Venues would need to be equipped for it. Choosing a venue not equipped for thermal scanning will jeopardize the security of your event and add layers of cost for you to roll it out independently.

**There is a lot of doubt** on whether thermal cameras actually do work to prevent the spread of the virus. With many being asymptomatic, Covid-19 could be easily spread without fever. If that is the case, your event may be once again liable for spreading the virus.

Regardless of the effectiveness of thermal scanning, this will be perceived as an expected layer of security for those willing to attend, and therefore a must-have in the aftermath of the coronavirus



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This is one of the most crucial items on the event professionals' agenda. Working with a venue that takes sanitation seriously will be key for phase two events and beyond.

The Wynn Group just **outlined** some of the measures that they are planning to adopt for their Las Vegas properties:

*"Hand sanitizer dispensers, touchless whenever possible, will be placed at key guest and employee entrances and contact areas such as driveways, reception areas, hotel lobbies, the casino floor, restaurant entrances, meeting and convention spaces, elevator landings, pools, salons and exercise areas. Hand lotion will be provided in the guest rooms and throughout the back of house (in touchless dispensers) for employees."*

Clear communication and action will be needed on the following items for attendees and event staff:

- **Hand washing.** Signage will need to be offered at the venue instructing them to wash their hands. This will need to be complemented by pre-event communication and push notifications via event apps.
- **Hand sanitizing.** Hand sanitizer will need to be sourced when not provided by the venue and made available to attendees. If you plan a swag bag, hand sanitizer will be a must-have as well as a sponsorship opportunity.
- **Personal protection equipment (PPE).** This will be key for your staff but also for your attendees. You will need to provide face masks to your staff and either invite attendees to bring their own or provide them on site.
- **Common room sanitation.** Check with your venue about the frequency and quality of sanitation of high contact surfaces. A new normal may include sanitation of the conference room during breaks, which could add layer of delays to your content programming.



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- **AV equipment, lanyards, swag bags.** These are only some of the elements that will need to be sanitized constantly before being accessed by staff and before being shared with attendees. Working with suppliers that have a virus management strategy may lower your burden.

## Triage and Handling of Those Who Show Symptoms

Your event will be responsible for handling those that may show symptoms of Covid-19. This is the best guidance that the CDC offers:

*If possible, identify a space that can be used to isolate staff or participants who become ill at the event. Designate a space for staff and participants who may become sick and cannot leave the event immediately.*

*Work with partners, such as local hospitals, to create a plan for treating staff and participants who do not live nearby. Include a **plan for separating and caring for vulnerable populations**. If any staff member or participant becomes sick at your event, separate them from others as soon as possible. Establish procedures to help sick staff or participants leave the event as soon as possible. Provide them with clean, disposable facemasks to wear, if available.*

*Work with the local public health department and nearby hospitals to care for those who become sick. If needed, contact emergency services for those who need emergency care. Public transportation, shared rides, and taxis should be avoided for sick persons, and disposable facemasks should be worn by persons who are sick at all times when in a vehicle.*

These are only some of the considerations for taking care of those who may get sick at your event. Once again, a venue partner that takes care of it for you may be the best choice at this stage.

## Vulnerable Population Management



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management. How can you make sure that those more susceptible to contracting the virus do not attend your event? Is it your responsibility? What if vulnerable attendees ignore the requirement, attend, and then get sick?

Limiting attendance also exposes planners to discriminatory practices, and decisions and policies that limit access may have to be substantiated.

Vulnerable attendees should be discouraged from attending. The Opening Up to America Again document gives a definition of the vulnerable population that is a bit disheartening:

## Appendix

# Vulnerable Individuals

*1. Elderly individuals.*

*2. Individuals with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune system is compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer and other conditions requiring such therapy.*



What does elderly constitute? How can you police who has underlying conditions?

This item is probably fraught with more uncertainty than the others.

## IN CONCLUSION

The new normal for events after the coronavirus peak will be a challenging one. There are specific conditions that need to materialize before events can happen.

The size of these events will not be more than fifty attendees.

Venues will be under scrutiny to deliver on social distancing and sanitizing policies above all else.



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Health and safety experts will need to be involved. Supplier scrutiny and negotiation will take center stage.

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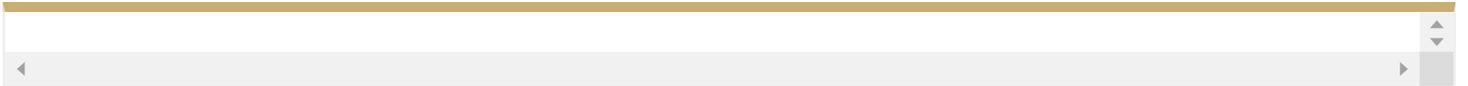
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Julius Solaris is the editor of EventManagerBlog.com, he is an international speaker, author and consultant.

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