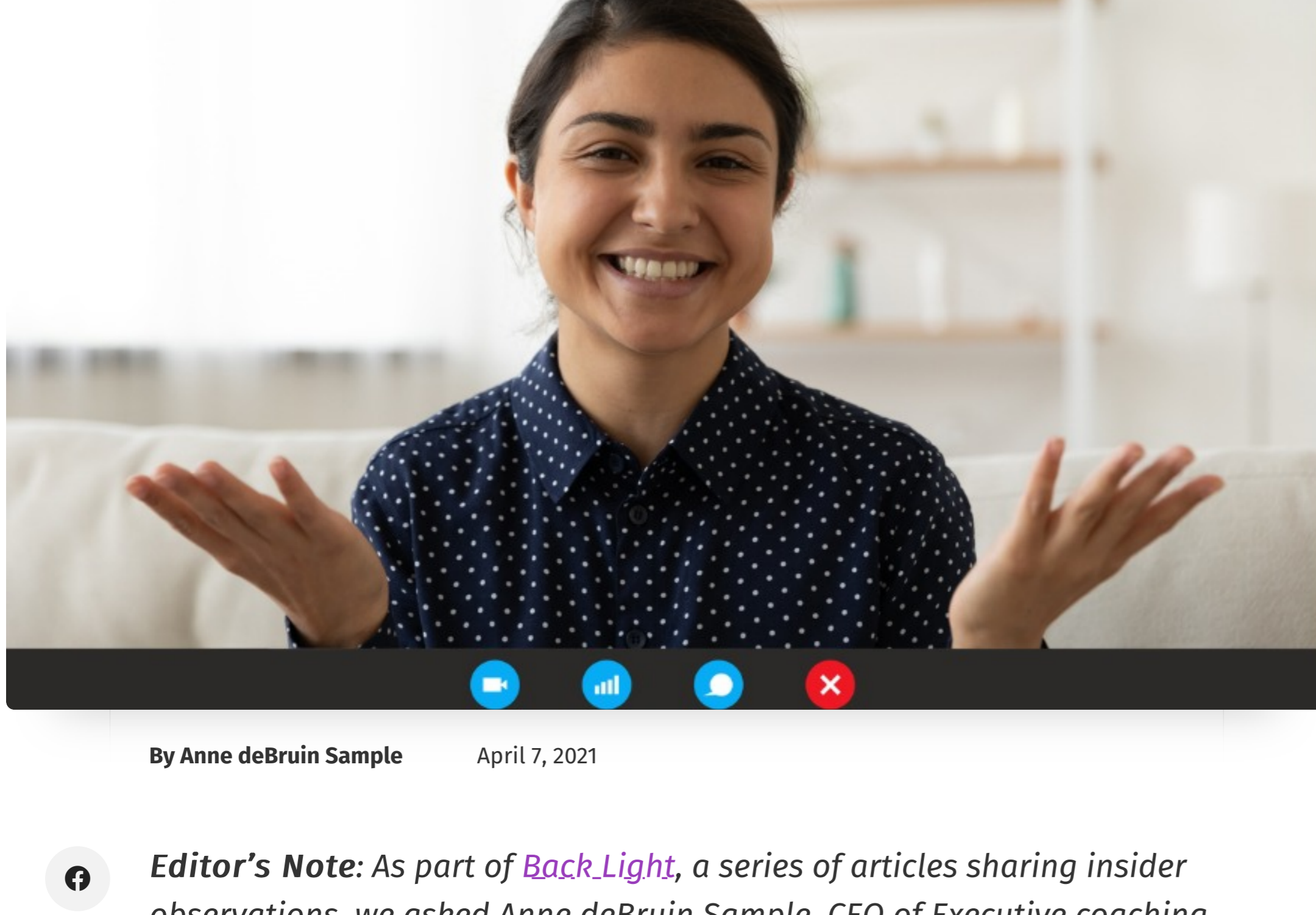


Start planning now for 2021! Check out the events calendar & save the dates.

10 Ways to Guarantee a Wildly Successful Virtual Event



By Anne deBruin Sample April 7, 2021

Editor's Note: As part of *Back Light*, a series of articles sharing insider observations, we asked Anne deBruin Sample, CEO of Executive coaching company *Navigate Forward* for tips for planning and hosting a virtual event.

Hosting an in-person event takes time and energy to ensure everything runs smoothly and captivates attendees. But this past year, Covid has caused in-person events to give way to [virtual meetings](#), zoom conferences and an endless slew of online events. These new formats make for unique challenges that many leaders haven't previously faced. However, the online environment can also make events fruitful, engaging and effective, if done correctly.

After hosting a wildly successful online gathering earlier this year for the Navigate Forward community, I've learned and developed a list of dos and don'ts for companies who want to host their own successful events that will leave attendees impressed.

1. Hire a Project Manager

Invest in a special event project manager. A project manager oversees the entire process to ensure no detail is missed. The most effective way to utilize the project manager is to meet with them and the rest of your planning team weekly in the months leading up to the event. This allows everyone to stay on track and minimizes the amount of last-minute planning before the big day.

2. Send Personal Invites, Give a Sense of Exclusivity

In order to get the word out about your event, you will likely need to use your standard mass email platform for invitations. The challenge is that many of these messages end up in junk folders. The best way to reach people is through personalized email messages which can be sent as a follow up directly to those you really want to attend.

These personal invites create a sense of exclusivity to the event and will help to boost attendance. We chose not to make our event public so that it would be special, but we also did not limit RSVP spots. We even allowed people to extend the invite to their colleagues.

3. Plan Ahead for Technical Issues

One of the biggest stress factors in planning a virtual event is the threat of technical issues. We did not have the budget for a large professional event production company. Reaching out to a smaller, local, production company who can be on-site during the event was a game-changer. Even though these virtual platforms are not new at this stage of the pandemic, the platforms update constantly and there are a lot of technological unknowns for the average person. Using a production company can help ensure that your audio and video quality is high so that the audience can clearly see and hear the event.

See also: [Safe Streaming: How to Hybrid without Getting Bombed](#)

You can also limit this stress by doing an entire run-through a week before and then again, a few hours before going live. This ensures any technical interruptions that may arise can be dealt with ahead of time.

4. Don't Exceed an Hour

Timing can be everything when it comes to holding the audience's attention. The sweet spot is one hour for programming. Anything over an hour can trigger [Zoom fatigue](#) and lower the chances of event attendance.

5. The Perfect Blend of Pre-Recorded and Live

Running an entirely live event can bring about its own anxieties and stresses, but an entirely pre-recorded event can be a snooze-fest for participants. The perfect mix? A blend of pre-recorded and live segments throughout the event.

For example, pre-record a keynote speech to make sure there are no hiccups, but then have the Q&A portion be entirely live. This keeps things running smoothly, limits stress and keeps the audience engaged.

6. Shake Up Your Backgrounds and Speakers

There's a bit of extra work that needs to be done to keep the energy up in a virtual event. One way to achieve this is having multiple speakers as well as settings throughout the event. This helps shake things up and gives the illusion of movement, like a guest moving from room to room as they would in an in-person gathering.

7. Create a Shared Experience

At an in-person event, attendees are all experiencing the same thing: same room, same food, same atmosphere. In a virtual setting, everyone is experiencing the event differently. Doing something to create a shared experience among your attendees can help create a more memorable experience.

For example, partner with a restaurant so people can order the same dish or deliver an event [experience bag full of goodies](#) to attendees. Anything that creates a shared experience can drastically uplift the audience's engagement.

8. Involve Attendees in New Ways

Doing a live drawing is a good way to catch an audience's attention. When the audience can participate, there is increased engagement and a compelling reason to attend. We have a charitable giving commitment as a firm, so we asked attendees to identify a charity of their choice with their RSVP. We drew "winners" who would qualify for donations from the company during our event. This allowed us to highlight these great causes while also recognizing our attendees who made the nominations, making the attendees as a whole feel more invested in the event.

More: [How to "Unlame" Your Virtual Meeting by Adding Visual Artists](#)

9. Utilize Social Media and Chat Features

Maintaining an active chat feature and being active on social media during the event can help make your virtual event feel more interactive. During the event, have someone push content on social channels for attendees to easily share while watching. Have a chat moderator that can bring the chat into the live event and keep the energy up within the chat. If the event has a Q&A portion, have the audience ask questions via chat and consider "pre-seeding" questions in order to cover the topics you know the audience will want to hear.

10. Define Success in Advance

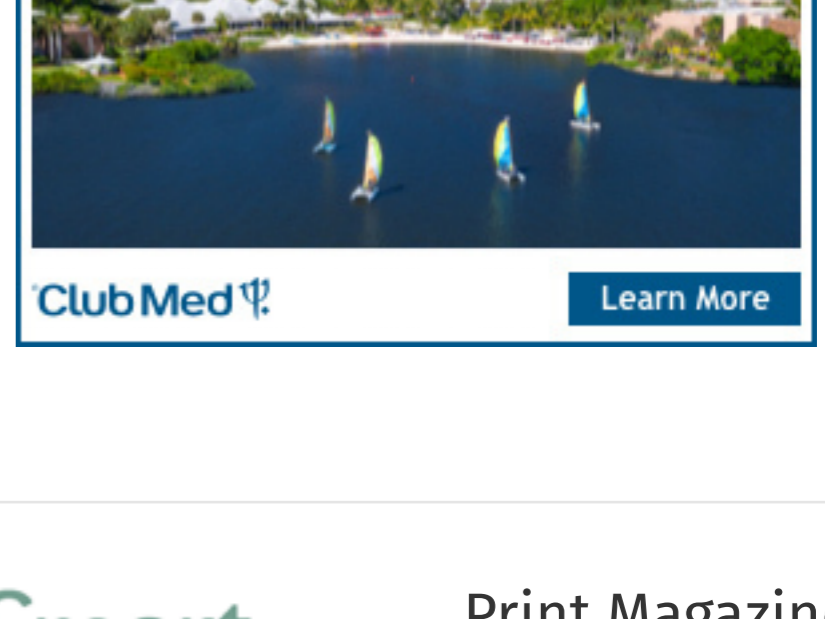
Utilizing these tips can lead to an incredibly successful event; but how do you measure for success? Determining what success looks like to you and your team [before](#) the event is key. Discuss with your team what you hope to see or hear from attendees. Having those determined before the event allows for clear and measurable points to reflect on afterwards.

While it may seem that virtual events never stack up to an in-person function, virtual events do have their upsides and can be enjoyable, inspiring and effective. Our in-person events are limited to local participants. Our virtual event included members of our community from across the country. Getting creative with audience engagement and paying attention to the small details will help develop a connection as we adapt to the new normal.

Anne deBruin Sample is CEO of [Navigate Forward](#).

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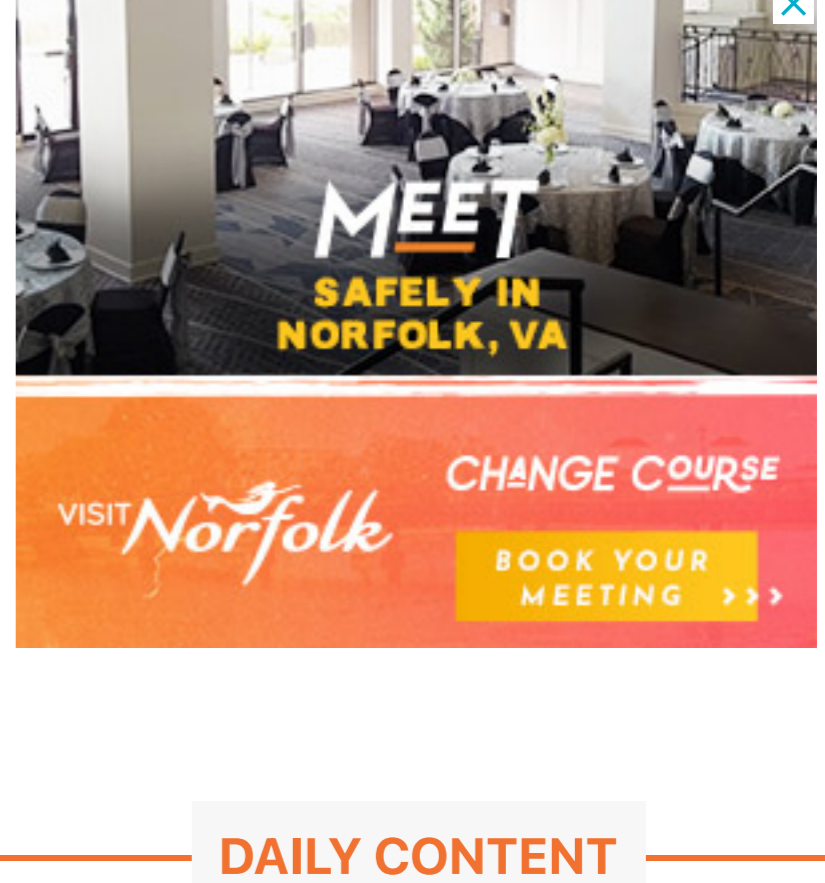
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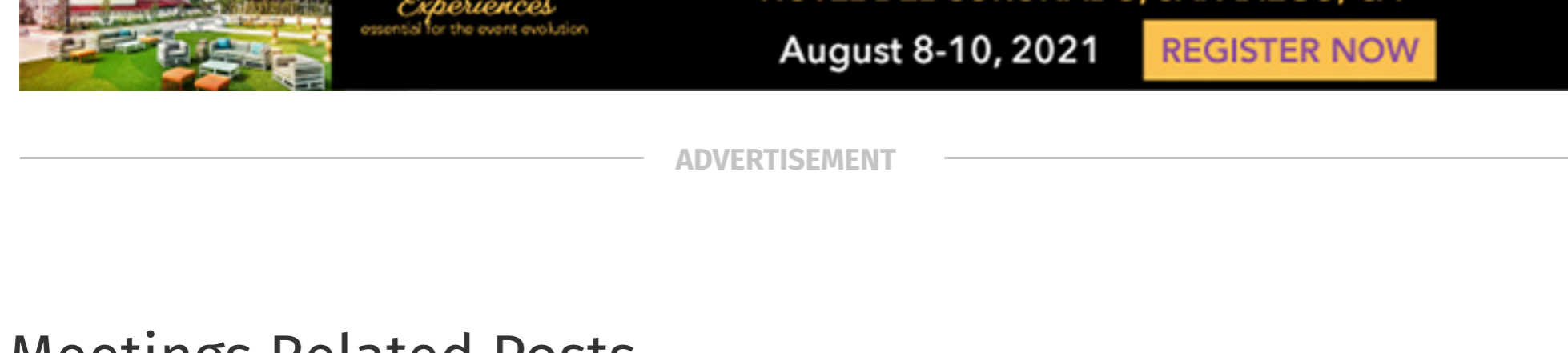
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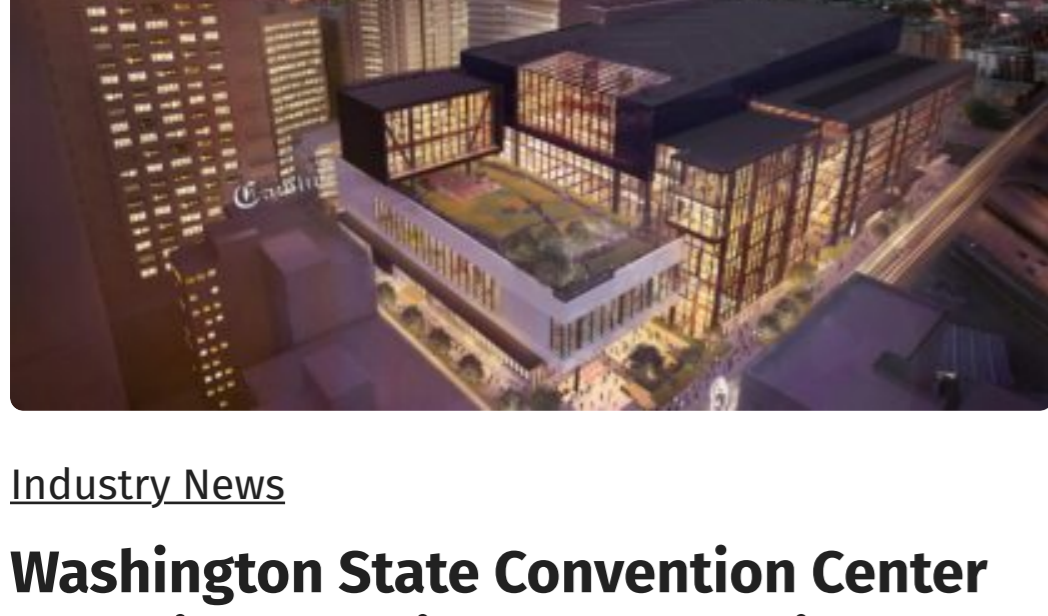
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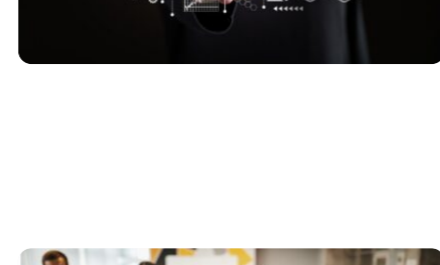


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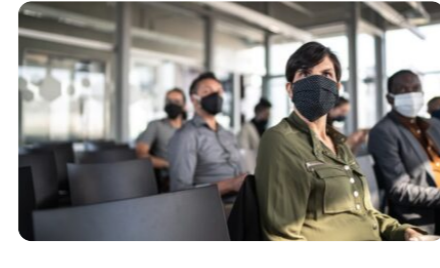
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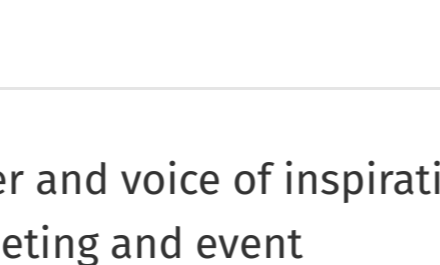
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