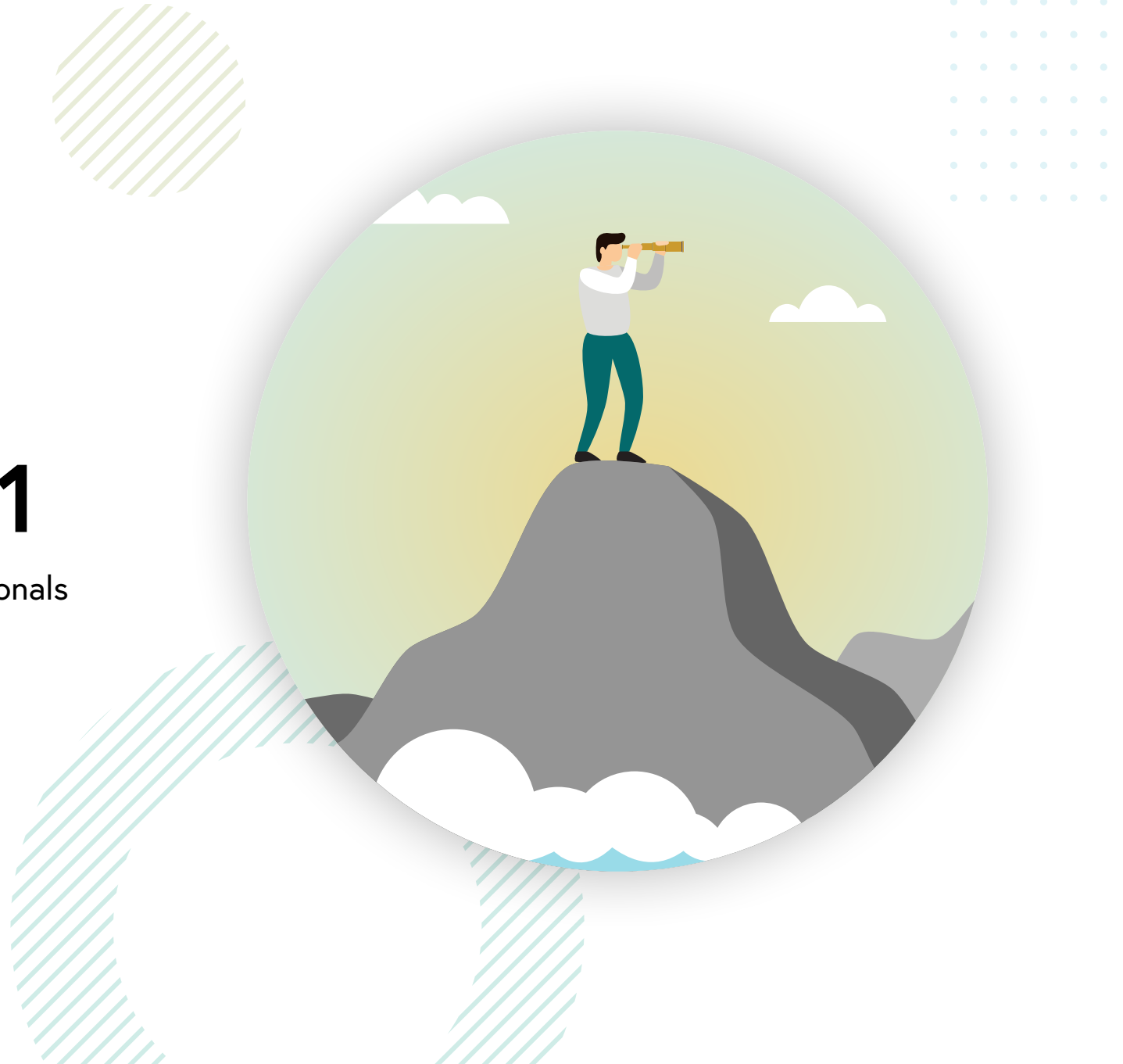




12 Predictions and Trends in 2021

Insights for Association, Nonprofit and Event Professionals
as they Plan for the New Year



2020 has been quite a year.

If you look back at the organizational plans and programs that you create in late 2019 to prepare for the new year, they are likely very different from the pivots, adjustments and contingency plans that you quickly spun up during the pandemic. If you're like most, your crystal ball was definitely wrong. After the year we've had, it almost seems silly to make predictions for 2021. But why don't we do it anyway...

After a stressful year, we are looking towards 2021 with an optimistic outlook—hope for a vaccine that is distributed effectively, a decrease in COVID-19 cases, a stronger economic outlook and an eventual return to the in-person activities and gatherings that we all have missed. While this year has seen its fair share of chaos and challenges, there are some trends and takeaways that we will likely take into 2021, even after the vaccine has arrived.

Here are our 12 predictions and trends for the coming year →



Appreciation and Understanding

It's been a tough year, and many of us have developed a stronger appreciation for the effort and strategy that goes into everything we do these days, and this can be taken from both a personal and professional standpoint. We're incredibly grateful for the grocery store staff delivering groceries, the pharmacists filling prescriptions and the restaurant staff bringing takeout to our cars. And, we have a new level of appreciation for the amount of work that goes into pulling off a virtual event and spinning up digital programs to support people and address the many challenges that we now face.

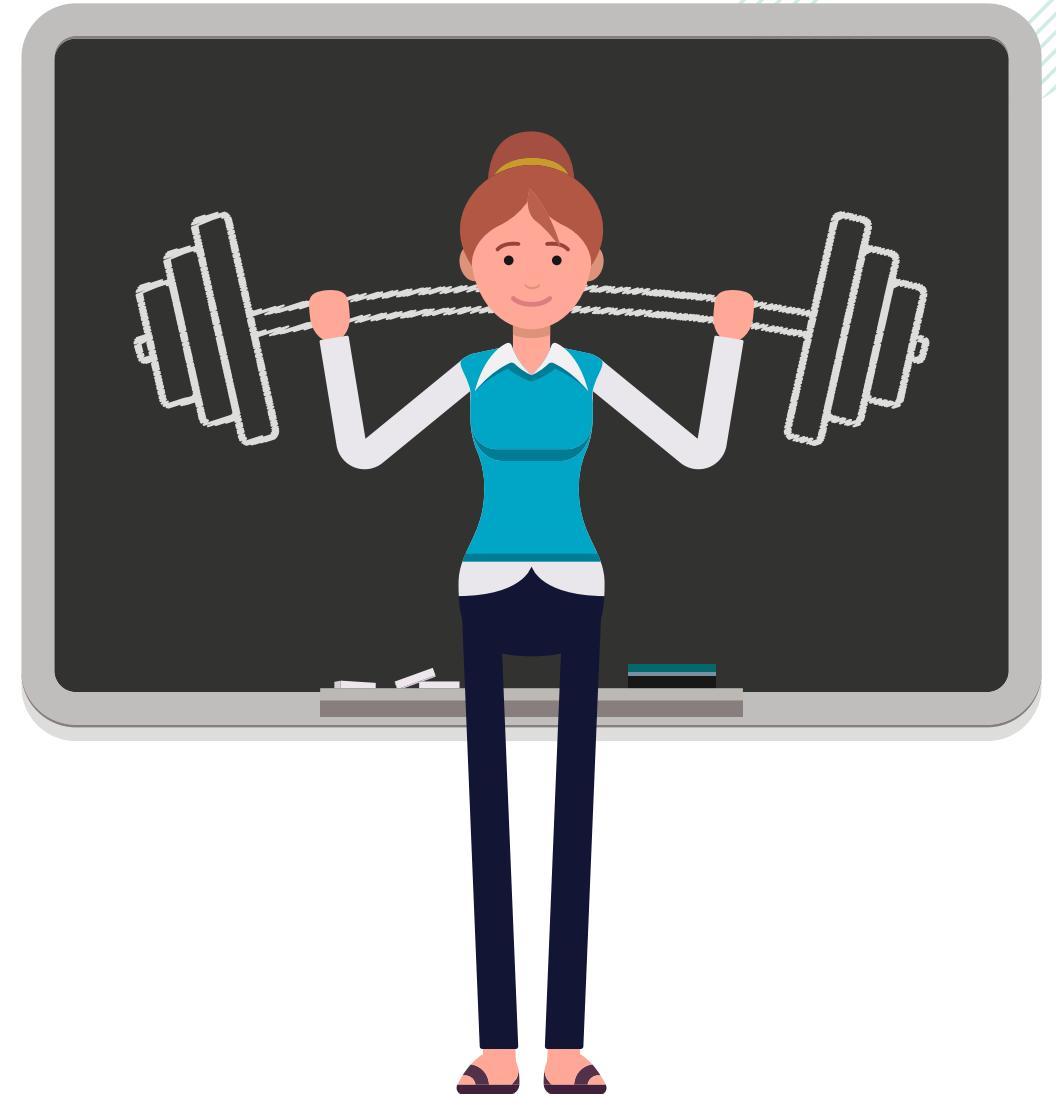
Many of us appreciate more of what we had and what went into many of our jobs and our personal lives. As we head into the new year, these challenges will still exist, at least in the first half of the year. But let's hope that we bring this appreciation and empathy into a post-Covid world.



The Power of the Association

We recently spent time reflecting with three association professionals on what they've learned from living through the pandemic and one panelist shared that he's learned that he's not alone in all of this chaos. Despite the challenges that we have faced this year, there are people who are going through the same things that you are in your association or nonprofit.

Many organizations feared that the pandemic would result in decreased membership but what we've heard from many association members is that they now better appreciate the power of their association in providing education, creating a community, advocating on behalf on the industry, and more. In 2021, we predict that associations will increasingly demonstrate their ability to leverage these connections, be a true partner to the members and achieve goals for the profession and industry that would be impossible to do on an individual level.



Remote Workforce

For many organizations, the need to shift to a remote workforce back in March created complexity and questions around how to ensure that staff had access to their tools and technologies and how to support remote teams and bring people together virtually. While 51% of people reported¹ "always working remotely" in April of this year, that number decreased to 33% in September with a larger percent reporting that they "sometimes worked remotely."

The shifts that we've seen have required organizations to think about what organizational culture looks like when everything is conducted via Zoom or Microsoft Teams in addition to difficult decisions about whether to cancel events or pivot to virtual or hybrid options. While remote work has been a growing trend for several years, the pandemic immediately created a new normal for organizations. Will this continue in 2021? And, what has it taught us?



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Uncertainty is the New Certainty

For many of us, 2020 provided a good lesson in not getting too attached to your short- and long-term plans and this applies to our personal and professional endeavors. From a professional standpoint, many of us had to do contingency planning for our contingency plans. If you had a global pandemic in your crisis communications playbook, you were far ahead of the rest of us.

Our hope is that some good can come of the uncertainty that 2020 created. Resiliency planning has become critical. How can you plan for this? Where can you break the rules? If we look at the commercial market, Enterprise lowered the age to rent a car below 25 to help get college kids home and many airlines have dropped their change fees. Similarly, many associations have provided waivers and paused renewal fees to support their members during this uncertain time.



Mental Health Comes First

Uncertainty can certainly lead to anxiety and a "fear of the unknown." Mental health has become an increasingly important concern for many organizations. In a global study of employees in March and April, nearly 42% of respondents said that their mental health had declined since the outbreak began. Many organizations have developed training, educational support and increased services for mental health treatment in the wake of the pandemic. At Personify, we launched a 30 Days of Mental Health and Well-Being program with daily emails for staff on mental health topics, resources to get help and engaged in activities to help us feel connected to one another while physically separated.

Mental health has long been a neglected area of health and 2020 showed us that it's crucial to think about our physical, emotional and mental health to be able to bring our full selves to work each day. Our prediction for 2021 is that organizations will increasingly consider mental health as an essential part of their healthcare offerings and will prioritize ways to support and empower their staff.



Health Expectations and Data Collection

As the vaccine becomes more widely available and lockdowns subside, more will venture out to exercise, meet-up and attend in-person events and experiences. Clean and safe environments and interactions will not only be standard, it will be an expectation of COVID-fatigued audiences.

The challenge will be balancing the need to showcase these capabilities while also not distracting from the experience and creating doubt (or fear) for some audiences. Contactless check-in, technology, health data confirmation, reduced group size, frictionless transactions, and other practices will help solve some of these challenges. With organizations and events now potentially collecting health data, increased consideration will be placed on this new information's privacy and security.

Organizations may also want to consider partnerships with health organizations and medical professionals to better solve these challenges, much like the Orlando County Convention Center did³ by partnering with Orlando Health to provide medical concierge services to conventions and Ticketmaster partnered⁴ with Clear to check for vaccine status.



A Shift in Event Timelines and Marketing

For those of us who are event professionals, we've seen a rapid shift this year in terms of event timelines for speakers, sponsors, registration and more. The traditional approach to call for papers nine months out from the event was thrown out the window when the pandemic arrived. The world could be an entirely different place nine months from now. And, without the need to secure airfare and lodging, attendees are increasingly registering for events a few days out from when the event begins.

This is evidence of a larger trend in marketing overall, which we're calling a "just-in-time" strategy. Given the reduced timelines, marketers must retool their Call for Papers, their event registration process and leverage an omnichannel approach to reach people in a world with more distractions and more requests.



The Community Ecosystem

With the loss of in-person events, associations and event professionals have increasingly spun up virtual communities and virtual conferences to provide support and education for their members, attendees and sponsors. In 2021, it is crucial to consider your member or event community as part of a larger ecosystem for engagement.

How are you using your community to connect people in ways that are unique from your social media channels and website? And, how will you continue to foster collaboration and connections when we can return to in-person events?



Optionality

2020 can be defined as the year of the pivot. The pandemic forced organizations to switch directions, not because they didn't have emergency response policies or strategic plans but because they lacked optionality. Optionality, by definition, is being available to be chosen but not obligatory.

2021 will be preparing for what could come or what may not come. Aligning resources, considering investment options and creating plans that keep options open for various scenarios and acting upon those as they occur in real-time versus merely reacting.

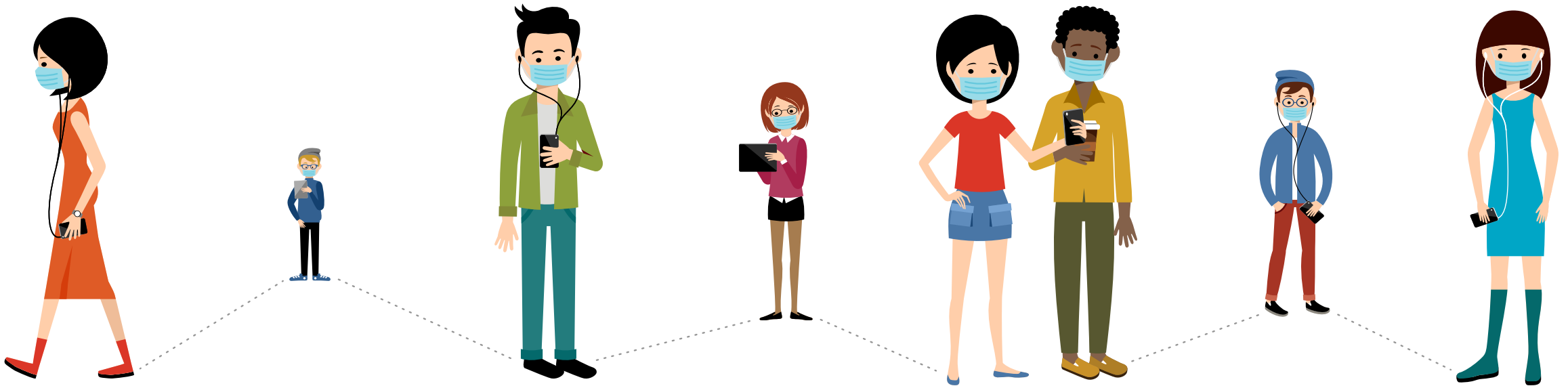
While this may seem overly aggressive, even with the vaccine's announcement, many have already suggested "back to normal" is near. Unfortunately, any number of scenarios with the vaccine (or the virus) alone could continue to change the course.



New Year, New Audiences

With the halt of in-person experiences and the rise of virtual fundraisers, galas, online tradeshows and conferences, event professionals have been able to reach an entirely new set of contacts. With the lack of traditional barriers including travel, time and expenses these new and often untapped audiences have grown as much as 80%⁵ because of virtual events.

2021 will be key in both leveraging and maintaining the database and outreach but also sustaining interest and engagement. Will you be able to convert these contacts to members and attendees or exhibitors and sponsors? Will you need to maintain complementary virtual events to preserve this audience? Successful organizations will survey this audience to build programs and content that also meets their needs and provides ancillary revenue.



Get Out And Travel (GOAT)

Wall Street has already begun rewarding the GOAT stocks such as airlines, hotels and others who will directly benefit from the vaccine. The question will be how to motivate audiences from a stay-at-home mentality in yoga pants and gym shorts to a desire to travel once again, not just for vacation but to conduct business and meet in-person. In addition to motivational apathy, many companies still have restrictions or dramatically reduced travel budgets, preventing those with the desire to do so in company compliance.

Whether it is a conference or chapter meet-up, organizations (and their marketing teams) will need to clearly articulate the return on investment (ROI) for the time, travel and expense to either the attendee or the employee's company. Virtual technology and Zoom have proven that many traditional in-person gatherings can easily be conducted online without additional resources. Defining your value proposition of in-person versus online will be critical as travel resumes.

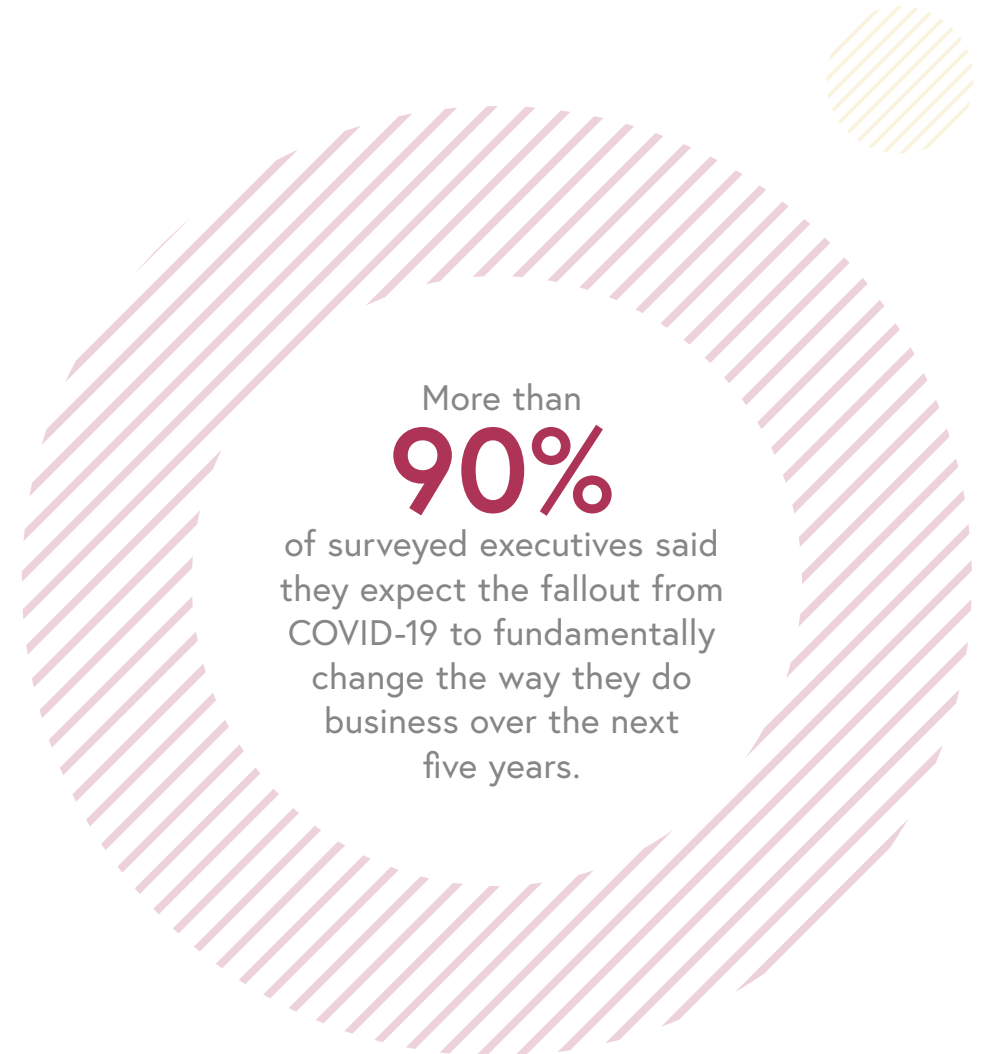


Making Lemonade

According to a McKinsey & Co. study⁶, more than 90% of surveyed executives said they expect the fallout from COVID-19 to fundamentally change the way they do business over the next five years. Many of these executives also reported that the pandemic would have a lasting impact on their customer's needs and three-quarters said the crisis would create new growth opportunities.

The most visible shift and example of taking lemons and squeezing them for lemonade are in the retail and restaurant sectors. The pandemic moved these businesses to fundamentally transact in new ways with curbside pick-ups, delivery, and direct to consumer options. The ecosystem around these businesses also thrived by supporting the supply chain, delivery vehicles, shipping services, etc. What was likely to happen over the next five years occurred in less than five months' time, many in less than five weeks' time.

The outcome was most beneficial for the consumer in most cases. It also has fundamentally changed the way consumers will shop and eat in the future. Organizations that can continue to remain agile and pave the road to recovery with innovation and evolution will ultimately succeed.



Wrapping Up

As you build your plans for the coming year and continue to navigate our new normal, Personify is committed to helping you adapt and emerge from COVID-19 or any crisis, more connected and resilient than ever. Our trusted solutions help you manage during and through these times with digital connections, virtual programming, a single source of truth for your data, and peace of mind for your members, attendees, donors and exhibitors.



About Personify

A trusted solution that allows for infinite possibilities, Personify is the technology foundation that provides insights to maximize engagement and deliver value across each and every interaction with members, donors, volunteers, attendees, exhibitors and more. For over 20 years, Personify has been a trusted partner to associations, nonprofits, show organizers, YMCAs and JCCs—helping them maximize engagement, improve insights, optimize operations, increase revenue and drive productivity.

For more information, visit www.personifycorp.com.



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