

DIGITAL UPTAKE EVENT GUIDE

Your go-to-guide for
planning digital uptake events



Background to this guide

The Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment's (MBIE) small business uptake of ICT pilot project looked at how to encourage more small businesses in New Zealand to use digital tools and technology to grow their business and increase their productivity.

One of the key findings was that intermediaries, such as industry associations, economic development agencies, accountants, regional tourism organisations and not for profit organisations as well as trusted business advisors, can have a huge positive effect on digital uptake for small businesses.

Business advisors and intermediaries provide trusted advice to small businesses, as well as disseminate knowledge, local stories, benchmarking, trends and good examples of businesses using digital tools and approaches well. These groups are all important intermediaries for small businesses in helping them to gain confidence, evaluate options and make decisions around digital technology to improve their businesses.

This Event Guide – a guide to organising and hosting events to support the use of digital tools – was a result of the project findings that such events are a successful way to help small businesses with their digital journey. A draft version of the guide was tested as part of the project.

Who is this event guide for?

Use this guide if you organise and/or host local, regional or national events, which small businesses and/or business advisors attend and which promote the use of digital technologies.

What is the aim of this guide?

To lift the value of existing events and networks for small businesses, where you are focussing on providing advice on how they can increase their digital effectiveness and their businesses' potential and productivity.

For some background information about the work on ways to assist small businesses to increase their use of digital tools and approaches, go to www.mbie.govt.nz/business-and-employment/economic-development/digital-economy/digital-economy-research/#business-uptake-of-ict-project

We want to know what you think

You are supporters of small businesses, and to help us continue to help you support them with their digital uptake journey, let us know what areas of the toolkit you find useful, areas that are less relevant and items you would like more information on. Simply email us at DigitalNZ@mbie.govt.nz.

ISBN (online) 978-1-98-857068-6

ISBN (print) 978-1-98-857067-9

MAY 2019



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WHY SHOULD YOU RUN AN EVENT?

During our research we created an [emergent journey map](#) showing how small businesses move along a process from awareness to commitment in using digital technology. Part of this process involves **exploration** and **making choices**.

We found that an event offers the opportunity to move people along this continuum more quickly. This is because the audience is away from their usual business setting and pressures; they have access to face to face opportunities to network with digital experts and can align on a shared sense of purpose and even accountability to others. This happens best in an inclusive, safe and fun environment.

Through our research we found that small business owners liked attending events to gain assurance from experts, trusted advisors and their peers. In addition, events help to:

- › raise awareness and create interest in new solutions (including digital)
- › enable the audience to explore and try new solutions in a safe and low risk environment
- › build human and trusted connections.

In this guide we offer suggestions about ways to “tweak” events before, during and after, so they become a more interactive and productive digital learning experience for the event participants.



HOW CAN THIS GUIDE HELP YOU?

It provides suggestions and recommendations on:

Event format – the way in which you run your event, to increase the likelihood of small businesses making changes following your event. For example, small businesses told us they liked networking opportunities, dedicated “face-time” with digital experts/expert peers, and opportunities to try new technology out in a low cost, safe environment.

Event content – the way in which content is shared to be more actionable and relatable to small businesses/business advisors, pre, during and post event. Importantly, this includes follow-up actions after the event, for example, using social media to share “bite-sized” content. Our research found that the impact of most events on small businesses’ behaviour change is largely not measured by event organisers. Small businesses are not followed up with to see what actions they have taken following an event, and what other information and advice would help move them along the digital journey stages.

Networks – assist you with creating networks so that you can find speakers, help attendees to support each other and use these networks to ensure actions are reported on to gain momentum in implementation.



WHAT KIND OF EVENTS WILL THIS GUIDE WORK BEST FOR?

This guide works well for all sized events. We have tested it on large conferences and smaller meet ups. We think it works best when there are enough people to ensure the networking aspects of the events are maximised.



WHO SHOULD YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE BE?

We found that there were two main personas¹ for small business owners who are slow to adopt digital technology – the ‘Delayers’ and the ‘Sceptics’. This guide is created with these target audiences in mind.

These personas tend to have lower knowledge of digital tools that can help their business, a limited skill set to maximise technologies that might suit their business and sometimes low trust or motivation to use more advanced digital tools. They often struggle to make time to attend events, but our research confirms they do see events as a valuable channel to gain access to information and expertise in order to lift their digital capability and make more informed investment decisions.

Of those who attend local events, some will also be what we call Initiators and Followers. These personas are more likely to embrace digital tools that can help their business.

We also found that even if the Sceptics and Delayers don’t attend events, they may be searching online for content created at an event.

What do we know about these personas?



SCEPTICS...

...rely on data and evidence before making a decision. They want to see working solutions, and they will almost certainly look before they leap. They utilise local networks to keep up with developments and new research, however they are cautious about who they share information and collaborate with outside their business.



DELAYERS...

...need time to understand, to discuss, and to have support to take small manageable steps towards working digitally. What works best for them is “hands-on” opportunities to see, touch and experience digital tools and approaches, as well as hearing from peers and ‘people like them’.

¹ Our research found there were 4 personas: Initiator, Follower, Sceptic and Delayer. For more information on the personas check out our guide: www.mbie.govt.nz/assets/cb7316bc44/four-personas-business-update-of-ict-project.pdf

 **EVENT CHECKLIST**

The checklist below covers some of the things to think about when running an event. In the following pages we go into key areas in more detail.

- CHECKLIST -

Tasks	
Before the event:	
Goals & objectives What do you want to achieve? What is the purpose for the event?	✓
Feasibility What resources do we have? Is it a busy time of year for our members and clients?	✓
Stakeholders Who should we partner with? Who can promote the event through their networks?	✓
Event planning:	
Venue – how many people will attend? Where can people travel to? Access?	✓
Staffing – do we have enough staff for the day of the event?	✓
Speakers – who do we want to invite? Who will MC?	✓
Sponsors – do we want to ask for sponsorship?	✓
Programme – what activities do we want to run? How long will things take?	✓
Vendors & suppliers – do we need any special equipment?	✓
Logistics – who needs to do what?	✓
Technology, social media and web – shall we promote through these channels?	✓
Marketing & promotion – how will we spread the message?	✓
Attendees/Audience – who is our target audience? How will we invite them?	✓
At the event:	
Opening – who is doing this? Any health and safety messages?	✓
Sessions and activities you will run – who is doing what, where it will be and when.	✓
Closing – who is doing this? Who do you need to thank?	✓
After the event:	
Analytics and return on investment – was the event a success? Did we meet our objectives?	✓
Evaluation on feedback – what can we improve on? What should we do more of?	✓
Follow-ups – what information do we need to distribute after the event? What were the key takeaways or follow-up actions you could share? Where can we connect attendees to for further advice or information?	✓
Where to from here – will we run any future events?	✓
Notes:	
Anything else I need to think about?	



EVENT PLANNING

How to find the right speakers

Choosing the right speakers can make a huge difference in the success of your event.

The right speaker will:

- › Understand the audience's business, their drivers and motivations.
- › Cover the points the audience cares about, provide evidence on metrics that matter and present content in a way that enables the audience to make decisions.

Ideas on selecting and finding the right speakers

- ▼ **Audience-led topics** – Before thinking about which speakers to invite, consider what your audience will care about or want to know and gather their suggestions for topics and content.
- ▼ **Deep-dives** – Invite speakers whose topics offer potential for deep-dive sessions and discussions with the audience. Remember to include deep-dive opportunities when setting up sessions.
- ▼ **Peer-to-peer** – Consider approaching people from the industry who have practical, real-life experience with digital solutions and who are willing to share their learnings with their peers.
- ▼ **Pairing speakers** – Consider pairing international speakers with New Zealand speakers to ensure the topic is relevant to the New Zealand context.
- ▼ **Tertiary institutions** – Consider inviting speakers from tertiary institutions who are up to date on digital trends and research, and ideally already have relationships with the sector.
- ▼ **Journalists/the media** – Consider inviting/sponsoring journalists to cover the event and the presented topics to make the information available to a wider audience.
- ▼ **Big business operators** – Invite big operators to share with small business operators what they have done in a way that inspires them.
- ▼ **Digital advocates** – There are a number of groups and accredited organisations informing about and leading the charge on emerging technology. LinkedIn is a great place to find them.
- ▼ **Industry experts** – Those that can talk about trends in the New Zealand context, well-respected and known entities, people or accredited organisations, and leading influencers.
- ▼ **Word-of-mouth** – Ask around your own networks about who is a good speaker and presenter, and who has a good understanding of technology tools relevant to particular industries.

Example/Case Study

- › **PoweringON** – connects small business owners with the service providers they need to navigate the digital age.
- › **The Kea New Zealand Inspire series** – Sometimes a business person with a great digital story to tell may not be the best presenter. The Kea New Zealand Inspire series uses on stage conversations and chats to get the best out of business speakers. It helps put them at ease and allows the MC to focus the talk on the topics most relevant to the businesses in the audience.

Tools and resources

- › LinkedIn – a great place to search for digital and industry experts.
- › Good sources for speakers – Digital or industry newsletters and online publications such as www.idealogue.co.nz and www.theregister.co.nz.



CHOOSING THE RIGHT TOPICS – CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

There is a lot of information available to small business owners and that can be overwhelming. All material covered needs to be in context for your target audience.

Choosing the right topics allows you to engage with your audience. The right topics will:

- › Show that the speaker understands the audience’s business and their drivers and motivations
- › Enables the audience to connect the presented topic to their own situation and make decisions
- › Covers the points the audience cares about and provides evidence on metrics that matter

Ensuring the content is in context for the audience

- ▼ **Regional context** – Especially when speaking about international topics and trends, establishing how this relates to the NZ context or to a specific region of NZ is important for NZ audiences to understand how it relates to them and if they should act on it.
- ▼ **Industry context** – Many digital solutions that have been developed for general use, hold potential industry-specific benefits. Providing specific examples of how a solution might be used within a specific industry context, helps audiences to make decisions on whether and how to use it.
- ▼ **Real-life context** – Where possible, provide real-life examples of how digital solutions work in practice and provide information that is relevant to audiences, e.g. disruption to business processes, time investment, cost of implementation, customer base. Link information to actual issues or real-life business problems that the audience wants to solve, and can identify with.
- ▼ **Facts and metrics** – Include relevant data and metrics that matter, e.g. return on investment, ongoing costs, time savings, risk reduction, benchmark with the competition – this enables audiences to compare themselves with others in the industry.
- ▼ **The good and the bad** – Cover the good things and what went well, but also the bad stuff and what went wrong. Anecdotes work well!
- ▼ **Transparency** – Speakers and presenters should be transparent about why they share their expertise and knowledge with the audience to show them that they don’t have a hidden agenda such as just trying to “sell stuff”.
- ▼ **Ongoing support** – Provide references and contact details to, ideally, regional people/businesses that will be able to help with the implementation and maintenance of a digital solution.

Example/Case Study

- › ChristchurchNZ used data from [Digital Journey’s online digital assessment tool](#) to provide industry specific data showing where Christchurch tourism businesses were falling behind. This information was used at an event to motivate businesses to take action. Digital Journey can provide data on digital use by business size, region and sector.
- › Positive local examples can be really powerful. Often it can have much more impact if your attendees actually know the business being talked about (a business just like theirs). It may also give them the name of someone they can contact afterwards to have a chat with – and help get them to take action themselves.

Tools and resources

See the speaker checklists and assessment checklist accompanying this toolkit.



CHOOSING THE RIGHT SESSION FORMAT

Arranging the right type of session is important because:

- › Audiences need the opportunity to engage with and meet people, so they can build the trust and confidence which are crucial to making decisions and taking action.
- › Audiences have different styles of learning, so sharing information in different ways is important when communicating information that audiences are unfamiliar with.
- › Audiences rely on personal networks to learn, and network building is an important part of a successful event.

Ways that the right type of session can support digital action

- ▼ **Mix of session formats** – mixing both formal and informal session is a great way to cater to the differing needs.
- ▼ **Question time** – Set time aside for audiences to have time with and talk to speakers either before or after a formal presentation or talk.
- ▼ **Table talks** – The aim of table talks is to provide an informal setting for audiences for safe exploration and self-directed conversations. Table talks are a great way for audiences to share experiences (positive and negative) with peers.
- ▼ **Fireside chats** – A fireside chat is an informal conversation between a speaker and their audience.
- ▼ **Meet the intern** – Consider inviting students from tertiary institutions to encourage the placement of 'digitally savvy' interns at local businesses.
- ▼ **Show and tells** – Show and tells give audiences an opportunity to try out digital technology in a safe environment, learn by doing hands-on and ask questions.
- ▼ **Tech to wow** – Some audiences like to see what's possible and showcasing how digital technology can be used in unexpected but useful ways is a good way to increase interest and build excitement, e.g. use of augmented reality in farming.
- ▼ **Lightning talks** – A lightning talk is a very short presentation lasting only a few minutes, allowing for multiple speakers to present in a relatively short timeframe. Good for introducing different perspectives on the same topic.
- ▼ **Mentoring sessions** – Enable face-to-face learning and one-on-one coaching by giving people the opportunity to book one-on-one sessions with dedicated mentors (see GoDigi).
- ▼ **Deep-dives** – Include sessions in your programme that enable speakers to share more details and deep dive on topics of interest.
- ▼ **AR/VR sessions** – If possible utilise augmented and virtual reality technology to showcase technology, share real-life examples and get audiences engaged, e.g. [Google Expeditions and Cardboard Viewer](#).

Example/Case Study

- › See the **Session Ideas** section on page 13 of this guide.
- › [GoDigi](#) – national programme designed to help people across Australia realise their digital potential.
- › [Digi_X](#) – 23 May 2019 – event for small to medium businesses going through digital transformation.
- › [Google Expeditions and Cardboard Viewer](#).
- › [Digital skills and Jobs Coalition – Events](#).



INCREASING AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Encouraging audience engagement is important because:

- › It increases self-motivation and lets audiences form new habits, resulting in sustained behaviour change.
- › Being exposed to new information in multisensory ways, i.e. hearing, seeing, touching, and talking boosts information comprehension and retention.
- › An engaged audience is more likely to share and interact with others, building trust and building supporting networks.

Ways that audience participation and interaction can support digital action

BEFORE THE EVENT

- ▼ **Audience-led topics** – Enable the audience to make suggestions for speakers and topics prior to the event, to gauge their interest and ensure that the event meets their expectations and needs, e.g. by including a quick survey link in the event invite.

DURING AND FOLLOWING THE EVENT

- ▼ **Goodie bag** – Provide audiences with goodie bag content that enables them to make the most out of the event, e.g. printed journal with assessment questions, participant lists, speaker contact details.
- ▼ **Opinion polls** – Enable audiences to provide quick feedback directly after a session to gauge how useful it was, e.g. in-person opinion polls, feedback stations, survey on social media.
- ▼ **Time to talk** – Schedule sessions, either moderated or un-moderated, where the main aim is to encourage interaction and conversation between event participants.
- ▼ **Share goals** – Provide opportunities for audiences to share their goals with each other and take accountability for follow-on actions, e.g. via Complete app.

- ▼ **Recruit speakers from the audience** – Either during or after the event, invite audience members to speak or present at the next event.
- ▼ **Take-away templates** – Provide templates and worksheets, e.g. Assessment checklist, for audiences to complete during talks and to apply afterwards to their own business.
- ▼ **Contest/Awards** – Consider giving out prizes or running a contest to motivate audiences and fuel their competitiveness.
- ▼ **Audience and Speaker interaction** – Provide a way for the audience to interact with speaker to guide topic- e.g. questions from floor (via an app e.g. Sli.do, Glisser) -digital audience interaction.
- ▼ **Social media posts** – Run a social media feed in parallel to the event, enabling audiences to post and share learnings and insights. Post insights from Q&A time.
- ▼ **AR/VR** – If possible use augmented and virtual reality technology to showcase technology, share real-life examples and get audiences engaged, e.g. Google Expeditions and Cardboard viewer.

Example/Case study

- › [Digital Innovation Award \(UFI\)](#) – have a look at what others in the industry are doing.

Tool and resources

- › [Sli.do](#) is an audience interaction tool for meetings, events and conferences.
- › [Glisser](#) – lets presenters share slides to the audience mobile devices during the presentation. Audience members can like, comment or share slides to their own social networks.
- › [Conferenz](#) – Audience can rate their satisfaction on parts of the agenda using a 1-5 rating scale.
- › [Mentimeter](#) – Presentation and audience interaction tool.





HOW SOCIAL MEDIA CAN BOOST YOUR EVENT

Social media can be used to:

- › Promote your event to a wider business audience and create excitement, broaden participation and add authenticity via “real” interaction.
- › Build an ongoing source of networking and support (beyond geographical location) and allow for content to be clustered together and re-found.
- › Extend the value of your event beyond the initial audience (scalability and re-usability).
- › Raise digital awareness through virtual/digital channels.

Ways that social media can support digital action through the event lifecycle

EVENT PLANNING AND PROMOTION

- ▼ **Hashtags** – Decide on hashtags to use throughout your event lifecycle – make them relevant and descriptive, unique, short and easy to understand.
- ▼ **Trending topics** – Use social media to understand your audience preferences – trending topics etc, and to inform your event programme.
- ▼ **Polls and surveys** – Run polls and surveys via social media to find out topics of preference.
- ▼ **Promotion** – Use Facebook events and news posts and updates on LinkedIn to advertise the event.

EVENT DELIVERY

- ▼ **Live polls** – Run live polls or competitions on social media during the event to increase audience interaction and gauge to understand what topics were of most interest and discover future topics.
- ▼ **Incentives** – Incentivise posting of content (images, text, video) on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn after the event using the event hashtags.
- ▼ **Share actions** – Use social platforms to share goals and actions – Complete App and Wunderlist are socially enabled to-do lists.

- ▼ **Audience questions** – Take pertinent questions from the audience interaction and craft into key messages to share on social media.

EVENT CLOSEOUT

- ▼ **Thank you** – Be thankful to those who turned out.
- ▼ **Share key insights** – When sharing insights and key take-outs on social media, consider what the audience seemed to be the most interested in.
- ▼ **Multimedia content** – Follow up event highlight reels, interviews and video content on YouTube.
- ▼ **Facebook groups** – Create Facebook groups to continue conversations and build community around topic areas.
- ▼ **Information hooks** – Use hooks in posts that matter to your audience, e.g. data/facts that support benchmarking, highlight trends with NZ context, and connect to experts.
- ▼ **Audio/Video podcasts** – Publish talks and presentations as podcasts or make available as video.

Example/Case Study

- › **Twitter**
Have a look at the [Business.govt.nz](https://twitter.com/Businessgovt) twitter feed for an example.
- › You could set up a closed Facebook or LinkedIn group (depending on what channel your attendees are comfortable with). This can provide an ongoing opportunity for providing answers to questions, and can be an excellent way of getting businesses to share information and advice with each other. It will take time to get going but with good engagement the benefits can be significant.

Tool and resources

- › **Facebook**
Largest social network with the highest diversity of users. Useful for advertising events, private groups.
- › **YouTube**
Largest video sharing site.
- › **LinkedIn**
Reach your business and professional audience. Find potential digital speakers. Promote events and post-event content, including video.





NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

Building networking opportunities to enable digital action is important because:

- › Networks extend beyond the event, providing ongoing support and sources of information for the audience.
- › Face-to-face networking builds trust amongst people, as well as a community.
- › Business owners and business advisors with wider networks are more informed and more likely to act on the information they get from their networks.
- › Events can be structured to encourage and support the inclusion of all attendees.
- › It enables education through communication and collaboration.

Ways that networking opportunities can support digital action

DURING THE EVENT

- ▼ **Session formats** – Consider session formats that will encourage networking, e.g. Fireside chats, World cafe chat rooms. See page 15 for more details.
- ▼ **Social media** – utilise networking tools or social media platform for influencers, speakers and participants.
- ▼ **Business card sharing** – There is a wide range of apps/tools to turn business cards into digital notes or contact entries. Consider running a competition around business cards.

AFTER THE EVENT

- ▼ **Digital networking** – using social media; connect attendees online (e.g. using hashtags).
- ▼ **Networking invite** – Receive information and the option to sign up for the next event.

- ▼ **Connecting with experts** – Ensure that audiences have an opportunity to connect with experts either during or after a session.
- ▼ **Warm-up and icebreakers** – Start events with a warm-up or icebreaker activity to help people feel comfortable with other attendees and to get the conversations started. See page 17 for potential icebreaker activities, such as search for similarities, speed networks, shared storytelling, sentence starters, person bingo, one word weekend.
- ▼ **Buddy/Pairs** – Buddy up experienced audience members with less experienced people, so they can share their thinking and approach.
- ▼ **Follow-up events** – Run follow-up events to support people in building up relationships.
- ▼ **Social media groups** – Set up dedicated groups on social media, e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook to connect people and build up mailing lists for future events.

Example/Case study

- › **PoweringON** – connects small business owners with the service providers they need to navigate the digital age.
- › Tourism New Zealand made an effort at their roadshow events to help connect attendees who were experienced in using social media, with those that weren't. This was done to help get advice sharing between businesses and happened prior to a networking break so that there was time for newly connected businesses to talk and share digital marketing challenges, ideas and solutions.



ACTIONABLE CONTENT

Providing the right content at the event to enable digital action is important because it:

- › Ensures that shared information and knowledge results in action.
- › Leads to more effective and sustainable businesses.
- › Enables businesses to be in control and make informed decisions.

Ways that actionable content can be provided that can support digital action

- ▼ **Call-to-action** – Provide clear and timely calls-to-action at the end of sessions, either through the speaker, a closing note by the facilitator, through social media posts, or via text reminders.
- ▼ **Real problems** – Link information to actual issues or real-life business problems that the audience can identify with and the actions they can take to address these problems.
- ▼ **Language** – Use language that audiences understand and can relate to. Provide easy-to-understand explanations when using technical jargon.
- ▼ **Set accountable actions** – Enable audiences to set their own actions and share them with someone else. Make audiences accountable for their own actions, e.g. by setting up a feedback loop with another attendee.
- ▼ **Benchmarking** – Businesses and business advisors need data and facts to compare themselves or their clients to the rest of the market in order to make business decisions. Where possible provide digital data that are relevant to the audience.
- ▼ **Action reminder** – A personal action step is set by participants encouraging ownership of goals. Setting a reminder enables follow-up action at a later date.

Example/Case study

- › **Duolingo** – good example of learning delivered in bite-sized chunks.
- › Xero have produced a **Trade and construction app** playbook to assist their accounting partners to have more digital conversations with their clients and provide them with actionable information. Starting with business problems, they have identified recommended actions for businesses to take – and a guide on how accountants can assist with advice.
- › Tourism New Zealand changed the social media session at their roadshow event, from a standard ‘talking heads’ presentation to a useful and very interactive workshop to provide examples of what works well on social media for tourism businesses. Participants were also given homework to do and the opportunity to get further advice from a social media expert if they needed it.

Tools and resources

- › Assessment checklist.
- › Free to-do lists and nudge platforms, for example, Google Keep, Todoist, Evernote, Wunderlist, Microsoft To Do, Any.do, Remember the milk, Habitica, Paid for app and Clear.
- › Digital Journey’s MBIE funded sector specific digital action planning tools provide free digital business assessments, action plans and follow-up reminders:
 - [Tourism](#)
 - [Arable Farming](#)
 - [Construction](#)



ASSESSING DIGITAL ACTION AFTER THE EVENT

Assessing digital action resulting from an event is important because it:

- › Provides evidence on metrics that matter.
- › Moves businesses further along their digital journey.

Ways that digital action resulting from an event can be assessed

- ▼ **User analytics** – Use analytics to assess the use of web content and social media posts, e.g. number of visits, return users, time spent.
- ▼ **Audience retention** – Assess how many people are signing up for the next event, e.g. checking mailing lists.
- ▼ **Event retrospective** – Run a session with organisers and, if appropriate, speakers and audience members to review a recent event and capture information that will help to make the next event better.
- ▼ **MBIE feedback loop** – Organiser to share their learnings and feedback with MBIE, and suggest ways MBIE can support them better (digitalnz@mbie.govt.nz)
- ▼ **Peer speaker sign-up rate** – Are business operators signing up as speakers or willing to share real-life examples with peers?
- ▼ **Feedback surveys** – Ask audiences and speakers during event registration and during the event, if they are willing to participate in a feedback survey.
- ▼ **Survey audiences**, after the event, to find out if and how the event has affected them, i.e. are they more efficient, more knowledgeable, have they grown in confidence, what steps have they taken, any follow-up meetings.
- ▼ **Trial uptakes** – How many event participants have taken up special event offers or downloaded technology trials.
- ▼ **Network growth** – Are people active on the event social media channels? Are people increasingly active on social media channels or more in contact with those organisations or individuals who spoke at the event.
- ▼ **Partner events** – What are audiences talking about at partner or other industry events? Are they picking up on topics and themes from the events?
- ▼ **Event apps** – Incorporate an event app into the planning and running of an event to capture feedback that lets you gauge the event's success and audience satisfaction, e.g. live opinion polls, audience and speaker engagement, uptake of special offers etc.

Tools and resources

See the evaluation questionnaire accompanying this toolkit.



SESSION IDEAS

When running events it is important to run sessions that are engaging for the audience. Here are some ideas for sessions that can help to take your event to the next level.

Fireside chats

A fireside chat is an informal, yet structured, conversation between a moderator and a speaker, for an audience.

How to set up fireside chats and what to consider:

- › Local people for fireside chats is key – other business owners attending the event may know them or may have heard of them, and will trust their experience more than someone they don't know.
- › Use local networks to identify suitable candidates who:
 - have lived the experience you hope to highlight,
 - have an interesting story to tell,
 - can tell the story well.
- › Prepare an interview schedule that focuses on getting the answers you want to discuss. If left to their own devices, interviewees can veer off topic and the opportunity is lost.
- › You could do a practice run beforehand and run through the questions with the speaker(s).
- › Keep the tone conversational rather than an interview. Humour works well and engages the audience.
- › Experiment with the setting. Depending on the layout of the room: two armchairs side by side, both standing at a lectern or two chairs across from each other at a table. The audience needs to be able to see both people.
- › Use microphones – one for each person if possible.
- › Ask the interviewee to stay behind for questions, or allow for question time as part of the chat.

Meet the intern

Consider inviting students from local tertiary institutions to attend your event. This could be part of a programme to encourage the placement of 'digitally savvy' interns at local businesses.

How to set up a "meet the intern" session and what to consider:

- › Invite several local students to participate in a session.
- › It could be run in the same way as one of the other formats suggested in this section. For example, a Q and A or fireside chat session would work well.
- › Alternatively, invite them to come and roam throughout the event. They can be an extra pair of hands and provide insight to small business owners when they have questions.

The solution room

A great session format to help solve challenges facing small businesses. Participants are seated at round tables, and it is suitable for events that have 20+ participants.

How to set up the solution room and what to consider:

- › Ensure you have enough round tables for participants.
- › On each table place paper and coloured pens.
- › Sessions can run for around 90 minutes.
- › When people arrive do a brief introduction.
- › You could get everybody to go into a “**human spectrogram**”, from most experienced to least experienced in relation to digital uptake. This shows there is common experience and support in the room.
- › Give people a few minutes to come up with a challenge facing their small business and then split them into even groups.
- › While seated at the tables, each person then has a set amount of time to explain their challenge to the group and receive advice and support.

Lightning talks

A lightning talk is a very short presentation lasting only a few minutes, allowing for multiple speakers to present in a relatively short timeframe. It is a good way to introduce different perspectives on the same topic.

How to set up lightning talks and what to consider:

- › Set a timeframe of between 30 – 60 minutes for the session.
- › You could give the speakers challenges that you know people in the audience are facing
- › Speakers can use timed PowerPoint slides – sometimes this helps to keep the speakers progressing through their talk on time.
- › Ensure speakers keep to their allocated time slot, by having a friendly reminder about time remaining such as a bell or sign held up at the back of the room.

Mentoring sessions

Enable face-to-face learning and one-on-one coaching by giving people the opportunity to book one-on-one sessions with dedicated mentors (see [Go Digi](#)).

How to set up mentoring sessions and what to consider:

- › Have people send in challenges that they are facing prior to the conference.
- › Find a mentor that has expertise in that area.
- › Set aside comfortable spaces where the attendee and mentor can meet.

Icebreaker activities

An icebreaker is an activity or a game that can be used at the beginning of an event to help participants get to know each other and feel comfortable with other attendees.

Here are some ideas:

Search for similarities

Split attendees into groups (4-6 people in each). Provide them with paper and coloured pens and get them to work out four differences and similarities between each of the attendees. If they finish quickly get them to delve deeper beyond the obvious ones like “we all have blue eyes”.

Speed networks

A great way for attendees to meet lots of people in a short amount of time. Pair each attendee up with another person, every three minutes ring a bell and get them to swap to another person.

Encourage attendees to share their name, contact information and why they attended the session. If they have time they can also talk about their business.

One word weekend

A simple activity when you are short on time. Get everyone to go around and describe their weekend in one word.

“My weekend was relaxing”.

If you are not limited for time you can get people to explain their one word answer.

Person bingo

Like normal bingo, however attendees are given a customised bingo card with interesting facts that may be true for a person in the room. They then need to move around the room and find someone who can fill a box.

When a person successfully gets five in a row they shout “bingo” and they have won the game. Get them to check that indeed the five people are correct.

Create a bingo card and then print out enough copies for attendees.

Shared storytelling

A group activity that will be sure to encourage a few laughs along the way. Seat everyone in a circle and get the first person to start by telling three sentences of a story before saying “suddenly”. When they say this the next person starts telling the story until “suddenly”, when it moves on to the next.

This activity doesn’t require any movement and involves everyone equally, so is good for shyer members of the group.

Sentence starters

Prepare a bowl of sentence starters and place them all in a bowl. Have attendees pick one out of the bowl, read the sentence out loud and finish it off. Some examples are:

I have never...

I like spending time...

I am...

I love to...

My business...



TIPS FOR RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL Q & A SESSION

Set time aside for audiences to have time with and talk to speakers either before or after a formal presentation or talk.

Planning question time

Enough time – Ensure that there is enough time for the audience to ask questions, and if necessary cut some content from the presentation to make time. If there is more than one presenter, allocate more time for questions.

Set up a panel – Consider having a panel of speakers to answer questions from different perspectives.

Microphone – For larger rooms, make sure you have a microphone for attendees to ask their questions.

Anticipate likely questions – Together with the speaker, consider what questions the audience is likely to ask and prepare answers.

Submit prior questions – Enable audiences to submit questions prior to an event and share these questions with the speaker. Digital audience interaction tools, such as Twitter or Slido can be used for this.

Agree time for questions – Discuss and agree with the speaker, when the audience should ask questions, for example at any time, at intervals or at the end. Letting the audience ask questions as soon as they arise is useful for the audience, but might be disruptive for the speaker.

Q & A moderator – Especially when dealing with larger audiences it might be useful to have someone to moderate the Q & A session. The moderator should be the connection between the audience and whoever is answering the questions, make sure that questions are appropriate and that the event moves forward and doesn't get stuck. Make sure they are not scared of leading the conversation and are able to handle pressure, and not join in or take over the conversation.

Encouraging questions from the audience

'Warn' the audience – Let the audience know at the beginning of a presentation and a few minutes beforehand, that there will be time for questions. Let them know when and how they can ask questions. For example, when question time is running out, warn the audience that you will take only two more questions.

All questions are worthwhile – Acknowledge that people might be afraid to ask questions and emphasise that there are no "stupid" questions.

Start encouraging – Encourage the audience to ask questions by asking "Who's got a question?" or "Who'd like to go first?" instead of "Any questions?"

Provide a starting question – Consider planting some questions to get the discussion started. For example, summarise the main points of the presentations and state questions relating to these points. You could pose a question yourself and provide an answer, or plant somebody in the audience to ask the first question.

Pitch presentation at the right level – If a presentation is too simple for the level of knowledge in your audience, they won't have any questions; and if it's too complicated they might not ask any questions.

Don't cover everything – If everything there is to know about a topic is covered, there won't be room for questions.

Ask when relevant – Try to enable audiences to ask questions when they come to mind and seem relevant, otherwise they might forget to or won't ask them later. Use Twitter or Slido for this purpose.

Timely context – Consider allowing audiences at key points in the presentation/talk, when they are likely to have questions, e.g. after a new or controversial idea has been introduced.

Equal chances – Don't let one person dominate question time and invite questions from other parts of the audience.

Work in pairs – Give people an opportunity to discuss their questions with one other person before they ask in front of the audience. It gives people the opportunity to rehearse and fine-tune their question.

Responding to audience questions

Welcome and acknowledge every question – It takes courage to ask a question. Respond warmly and courteously to all questions that are asked – even if the question seems obvious or you had already covered it.

Address the questioner – When answering address the person asking directly. For smaller audiences, address them by name if possible

Repeat the question – If the room is large or the questioner has a quiet voice confirm that you understood the question correctly. If you're not sure you understood correctly, paraphrase it back to the questioner and check that you have it right.

Be local – When possible and applicable, refer to local events, situations, tools or facts with which the audience will be familiar.

Answer briefly and clearly – Start by giving a straight answer, e.g. Yes or No, then provide the detail and explain your reasoning. Avoid debates and if necessary take more complicated questions offline.

Ask the audience – Especially when speaking to a well-informed audience, ask for input from the audience to give them a chance to share their knowledge and expertise.

Check back – Check that the questioner is satisfied with the answer.

Question time closing and follow-up

Closing note – Close by thanking the audience for their questions and let them know how they can get in touch with the speaker for more questions.

Share on social media – Capture questions and answers and share them on social media with links to further details. Chances are that if somebody from the audience asks this question, others will be interested in the answer too. Also, find the answer to questions that the speaker couldn't answer and post it.

Take questions offline – Some questions might require more explanation or are only of interest to a smaller group. Try to take these offline, and cover them in a follow up session, for example in a fireside chat or mentoring session. Consider collecting contact details from audience members to follow-up.

Continue conversation online – Consider continuing question time online and let your audience know that they can do this by following a certain hashtag.



TIPS FOR RUNNING TABLE TALKS

Table talks bring together and enable people and thought leaders in the industry to have meaningful conversations with experts about topics that matter, as well as build relationships.

Planning

Topics – Discuss your industry’s pressing topics. What are the big questions that the industry is currently asking? Consider asking participants prior to the event, for example during the registration process, which topics they would like to discuss. You can then set up successful talks with the right experts.

Agenda – Although it’s good to have a tight and clear focus you do need a broad and wide potential agenda for discussion. You don’t know what the specific attendees are going to want to talk about until they’re all gathered around the table.

Industry expert – Consider the topics you want to discuss, invite industry experts or thought leaders to co-host table talks. This person has to be articulate, confident and knowledgeable about the topics discussed. They don’t have to lead the discussion or ‘present’ the topic to the attendees, but should contribute to the discussion.

Moderator – Assign a dedicated moderator to each table. The moderator’s tasks are to:

- › tease out themes and patterns in the discussion
- › keep the discussion on time
- › ensure that everybody, especially less confident attendees, get a chance to be involved
- › set the ground rules that will make people feel safe and valued around the table
- › deter overzealous attendees
- › keep the discussion moving in a relaxed but purposeful way.

Number of tables – Consider having at least 2-4 tables, with each discussing different topics to give people a choice. However, it will be more important to choose good quality speakers and topics, rather than trying to set up as many tables as possible. Prior to the event, let registered attendees select the table talk(s) they wish to join. You can use simple sign-up sheets or digital tools.

Table size – 6-12 participants per table is a good number.

Registration reminder – Remind people, e.g. via text reminder or in a personalised event programme, which table talks they have signed up for.

Duration – Each table talk session should last between 30 – 45 minutes.

Setting – Have an informal and a safe place for people to have conversations and ask questions. Ensure it’s a quiet space where people are comfortable and can see and hear each other.

Catering – Depending on the time of day and context, provide some food and drinks for participants to share.

Inspiring stories – Sharing stories builds relationships, highlights the pressures that people are facing and inspires people to take action. If possible, find stories that the audience can relate to and will inspire them to share their own. Ask the hosting industry experts if they have stories they can share.

Running

Introductions – Start with short introductions. Give each participant, hosts included, 30 seconds – 1 minute to introduce themselves, and to spell out specifics they would like to discuss.

Setting the scene – At the beginning, one of the hosts should re-introduce the topic(s) that will be discussed. Consider sharing a relatable story or example to emphasise or illustrate why this topic was chosen and why it is of interest to the audience.

Mutual respect – Ensure people show respect to each other, by:

- › Never letting things get personal
- › Always “attacking” the problem and never the person
- › Not interrupting people.

Encourage participation – The moderator should encourage everybody’s participation, by:

- › Encouraging quiet people to speak up
- › Keeping eye contact with those speaking
- › Writing down points so people feel heard
- › Thanking people for their participation
- › Acknowledging when someone takes a risk by sharing a unique, extraordinary or even unpopular idea
- › If somebody shared a story, ask people if they have something similar to share.

Take notes – Each table’s moderator should take notes during the table talk, capturing key discussion points, solutions to common problems, links to helpful resources and names of people considered industry experts or leaders.

Talk conclusion – At the end, one of the hosts should summarise what has been discussed and checking that people’s opinions and stories have been recorded accurately. Talk about next actions, for example, follow-up on social media with events coming up on similar topics that participants might be interested in, how to get in touch with experts and with opportunities to continue the discussion.

Feedback – Enable people to provide feedback on the table talk and the topics discussed to learn what was of value to them and how these sessions or the event these sessions are part of can be improved.

Follow-up

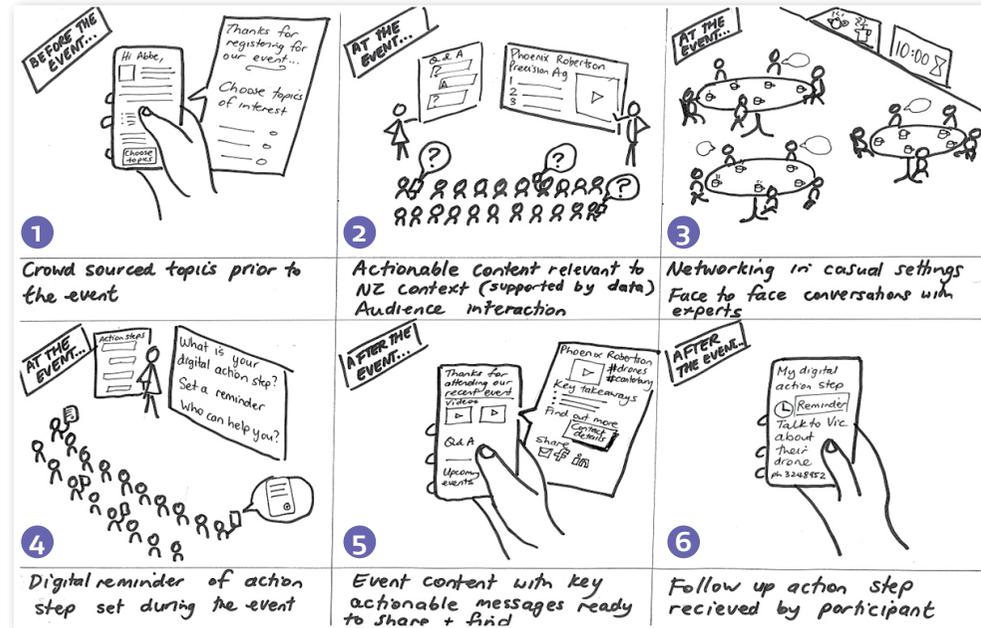
Review notes – Review notes from the table talk to source content for social media posts, identify potential leaders, and inform the agenda and line-up for future events.

Share on social media – Share key insights from the table talks on social media. What problems were discussed? What solutions or ideas came out of the discussion?

Networking – Consider setting up a social networking group alongside the table talk, to allow people to stay connected after the table talk.

Table talk series – Consider running table talks on a regular basis. This will enable you to raise awareness about the topics discussed, build a reputation for leadership within the industry, form your networks and create a community following.

How digital can help you maximise your event - a participant's experience



How digital can help you maximise your event - an organiser's experience

