

Best Practices for Online and Hybrid Conferences

Eurographics Workshops and Symposia

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Introduction	2
Contributors	2
Planning for the event	2
General considerations	2
Website	2
During the event	3
Sessions and Presentations	3
Chairs	3
Presentations from authors only available online	3
Streaming	3
Community Interaction Online	4
After the event	4

Introduction

This document compiles feedback and lessons learned from EG Workshops and Symposia events' by organisers intending to provide valuable pointers to others who will have to organise a virtual or hybrid EG workshop.

We encourage more events to consider hybrid modalities for running events taking advantage of the ability of online content as well as a larger pool of participants within different elements of the event (e.g. keynote talks, sessions and individual talks). We know for events which took place in 2020/2021, much of the content remains available there for rewatching (e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCinRAYhpuuQ1K3UVISToOMA>).

Contributors

The document has been compiled by the Chair of the EG Workshops Board, Karina Rodriguez Echavarria, and includes the contributions of the following organisers: Valentin Deschaintre, Tim Weyrich, Tobias Ritschel and Abhijeet Ghosh.

Planning for the event

General considerations

Planning a hybrid event can be difficult as it is not known in advance how many attendees will be on site and how many will be online. So, you need to plan for different scenarios. Please bear in mind that online and hybrid events require the same, if not more, effort for planning so this needs to be considered at the initial stages. The most important actions include:

- Search for a location with flexibility in terms of numbers of participants, as well as cancellation of spaces/rooms.
- Ensure you have a team to support organising the event, as well as the technical infrastructure and support. It is advised to have a video technician (VJ) during the event.
- Prepare a budget considering various scenarios with various numbers of online and onsite attendees.
- Submit your [EG TMRF](#) through the EG event management platform: <https://diglib.eg.org/emp.html>
- Do not underestimate, you will need to train "VJs", as well as test all the infrastructure both on-site and online days before the event. There will be strain on concentration for VJs and organisers, who are not "streaming professionals" for a living. So it is good to prepare checklists/storyboards, and then rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.

Website

This communication tool is mostly done the same as for a "traditional" event. Some key enhancements include:

- A “LIVE” button in the navigation bar that leads to the current live stream, as well as YouTube links (if the talks will be broadcasted) embedded in the online programme.
- A clear calendar and a timezone adaptive feature (important for online conference)

During the event

Sessions and Presentations

Chairs

During the sessions, it is advisable to have a Session chair on site all the time - even if there is also a Chair online. This will support seeing on-site participants being able to ask questions. It would be good for chairs to provide thorough explanations for both online and onsite attendees, as they are not used to this format.

Presentations from authors only available online

When authors are not at the event, some workshops request for presentations to be pre-recorded by the authors. The requirements were as follows: 1920x1080, H.264, “very high” quality (to minimise loss during re-encoding); and normalized audio. In this case, presentations should be checked before the conference for sound quality.

When the session is mostly online participants, it is advisable to ask authors and chairs to be available some time before their session (e.g. 15-30 minutes) to go over the technical requirements of the streaming for transitions. Chairs should be clear in their wording on when to start the next presentation video. At the end of a video the person handling the streaming (VJ) will notify the authors and chair that the live content will be up on the stream. For each of the talks, the process is as follow:

- The chair introduces the talk, the presenting author is visible live but muted.
- The presentation video is played or the presenter can deliver their talk.
- Chair and author are visible and interact for the Q&A.

Streaming

For streaming events, organisers could either use a private meeting in a platform (e.g. Zoom or Teams), while it is also possible to use YouTube Live for its convenience to participants. A few interesting features are:

- Generation of streaming links ahead of time.
- Capacity to watch from the beginning of the stream even during the live transmission.
- Possibility to edit the live streams through youtube studio online tools.

In order to author the actual live stream, events have used Open Broadcaster Software (OBS). OBS scenes were defined for each session with VLC sources for the videos prepared by the authors ahead of time and cropped window captures for the live content in Zoom (one crop per person interacting in the live content, taken off the default participant mosaic of Zoom). All streaming machines shared the same Dropbox folder that contained all assets, from OBS scenes and assets to paper videos, thus ensuring that all machines were

in sync and could serve as back-up machines on short notice. Note that OBS is tricky for compatibility between different operating systems. Be careful if you use both windows and linux machines, or better yet, use only one system across all streaming machines.

When streaming, it is recommended to use separate machines, and pay particular attention to muting all the feedback sounds on them to prevent echos and to join the sound on Zoom, as this is not enabled by default.

It is also useful to prepare slides with exact timings, for instance coffee breaks for on-site attendees so that online attendees know what is happening at the venue.

Community Interaction Online

Events use a variety of tools for interaction, including Rocket.Chat (<https://rocket.chat/>), which is a self-hosted alternative to Slack, Discord (<https://discord.com/>) or Gather (<https://www.gather.town/>). Organisers usually create a public channel for each session/talk, allowing questions to be asked and discussions to take place there after the presentation (even hours later). Private channels were used for organizers and volunteers. A private channel was also created for each of the sessions to allow coordination between chairs, authors and VJs ahead of time (and communicate the zoom link).

Through these systems, some events also organized social mixers for which people had to sign up specifically. For instance, it is possible to randomly generated groups of 4-7 people with a mixture of Senior and Junior members of the community and created private channels for each of the groups. We also proposed a skeleton of discussion to follow in the case the conversation ran dry.

After the event

Think on how the legacy of your online content will be maintained. For instance, think of reusing YouTube channels for future editions as you will have acquired subscribers from the community.