



# PIVOTING TO VIRTUAL AT SCALE!

At RMK we've been producing virtual events for years and some of our team members have been doing it for decades. Despite all our experience, as the events of March 2020 began to unfold, we knew we needed to act fast to pivot from periodic virtual events to producing virtual events for all of our clients, all of the time.

## RMK's senior leadership team decided to take action on two fronts:

1. Form a team to evaluate virtual award/gala software and other options
2. Execute an internal train the trainer program for Virtual Event Producers

By the time the first week of April arrived and we completed the bulk of moving dozens of events from in-person to virtual settings RMK had

identified more than a dozen virtual platform options for virtual galas, awards programs and fundraising auctions. By the second week in April our newly trained *Senior Producer, Virtual Events* was rolling out training to the team. As the end of May arrived, RMK had successfully produced almost 50 virtual events in under 90 days providing virtual production to every client.





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## TAKING THE LEAD



Many of our clients, who are volunteers to their associations, hold full-time “day” jobs that are directly involved in responding to crises including the COVID-19 pandemic. High on that list are human resource professionals. As the US began to feel the impact of the pandemic, the leadership of HR Alliance DC moved quickly to experiment and take risks resulting in significant innovations for how the organization interacts with members and prospects.

Not even on the radar in February 2020, Idea Exchanges started weekly in April and focused on COVID-19 related HR topics such as remote employee motivation, dealing with staff infection(s)/ death(s) and managing on-site safety. The sessions are purposely not recorded to enable participants to speak freely about the challenges they are facing and receive thoughtful advice from fellow HR professionals.

After experimenting with several formats, the now bi-monthly events focus on two questions and are facilitated by a board member who introduces the questions. Attendees then separate into virtual breakout sessions before coming back together to share insights.

By creating a safe place for honest dialogue about hard issues, providing immediately usable ideas and helping people connect with other professionals with similar situations outside of these facilitated virtual forums, the HR Alliance Idea Exchanges are:

- Increasing member and prospect engagement,
- bolstering member retention, and
- strengthening HR Alliance DC's leadership position.



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## IT'S ALL ABOUT THE NETWORKING



SECAF's, the Small and Emerging Contractors Advisory Forum, primary function is to connect smaller metropolitan Washington contractors with medium to large government contractors as well as government agencies. Traditionally the Forum has hosted in-person networking events where people in the room had an opportunity to give an elevator speech and share the types of connections they were looking to meet and then network.

In early April plans were quickly made to pivot these monthly events for 50 to 60 attendees to twice monthly virtual meetings with attendance of 25 to 30 participants.

The format remains the same, however compared to the monthly in-person networking sessions, participants are finding the virtual format much more effective because they:

- have the ability to immediately private chat with a participant and/or connect on LinkedIn,
- do not have to search a room of people to find the two or three people they would like to connect with and hope they haven't left yet, and
- the virtual nature encourages people to be more open to interaction.







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## Quickly Turning a Big Event

For several years, RMK has managed an in-person user-focused event for one of its commercial clients. It was determined in Spring 2020 the best way forward was to quickly convert to a virtual event, but to scale back in order to ensure it remained the high-quality event participants had come to expect while also still holding the event during the first half of the calendar year.

Planned for the last week of April, the two-day, in-person event became a late June, hybrid half-day live event, paired with on-demand breakout sessions. The event team pivoted in several ways to deliver success.

- The half-day live session consisted of a series of pre-recorded general sessions followed by live audio Q&A sessions.
- Breakout sessions were reduced by 30 percent, pre-recorded and made available on-demand for 30 days post event.
- Sponsors had virtual booths with the ability to offer on-demand webinars, informational material downloads and time shifted chat sessions.
- Event registration fees were waived.

## Show Me the Fundraising

Several of RMK's clients are foundations and many of our foundations, as well as our regular clients, use auctions to raise funds for themselves and affiliated causes. Fortunately, most silent auctions have moved from the realm of paper bidding to app-driven bidding. Easy right? Not so fast.

All our client auctions are associated with a gala, golf outing or other event that drives interest and bidding.

### *To overcome these limitations RMK is:*

- writing enticing as well as informative copy about items and ensuring the photography says "bid on me" even on mobile,
- building out email and social media campaigns that drive bidding action independent of an official tie-back to an event, and
- creating messages and tools that make social media sharing by others easy.

Our first all-virtual auction of 2020 has yet to close, but so far, the numbers are looking promising.





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## THINKING BEYOND THE USUAL BORDERS



With four to twelve in-person events per month, Women in International Trade (WIIT), faced a daunting programming reality early in 2020. The biggest challenge? While RMK facilitated registration and other event related details, more than 20 volunteers are responsible for the actual event production.

RMK stepped up and stepped into the event production role as together with WIIT the event calendar for the coming months was completely rewritten. By mid-May the organization was conducting about 70 percent of their normal event schedule, reaching 100 percent by late June.

A key area of innovation for the association has been their Speed Mentoring program. Leveraging online breakout room functionality, the rooms are set up by area of interest that enable small groups to get to know each other and determine if there are good mentor/mentee fits. If the topic or group doesn't fit, online facilitators can switch a person to a different room. The plan over time is to narrow the matching and provide a series of formal online sessions with mentees under a

specific topic with a lead mentor that compliments more traditional mentor/mentee relationships outside the formal sessions.

A surprise success was born out of the idea of doing meet and greets with other chapters from around the world. Usually the group is focused on building local connections, reaching out to members of other chapters as needed primarily via email. With members around the world at home the connections proved invaluable. In addition to a higher than expected turnout the sharing and perspective from other countries provided invaluable actionable information, opened the organization to a new and unexpected networking experiencing and strengthened personal and professional international connections.

To help WIIT maintain its pace of programming in a virtual setting, RMK is now pivoting out of virtual event production and into training of WIIT volunteers. Other than the change to virtual settings, WIIT's new normal is starting to simply look like a new and improved normal.



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## 24-hour Virtual Live Event Broadcasting on Multiple Concurrent Channels? No Problem.

RMK strengthened our virtual sea legs a little over three years ago when coincidentally two new team members who had previously produced 24-hour, virtual, live, global events joined the team at the same time RMK had the opportunity to bid on a 24-hour virtual event.

Primarily a brand enhancing, marketing and sales pipeline building event, it begins in the Asia Pacific time zones and works its way around the globe ending in the early evening on the US West coast. The event features a constant live stream of five, simultaneous, 60-minute sessions with more than 150 speakers and moderators from remote locations around the world. In 2019, there were more than 35,000 attendees.

In addition to producing the live event, RMK is responsible for building and managing the staffing and presentation schedule. To help protect the client's market leader brand equity, RMK is charged with flawless technical as well as high-quality speaker

delivery. To successfully achieve this high bar, RMK leads all pre-event communications and training with selected speakers and moderators, which includes:

- Presentation coaching
- Technology use coaching
- Providing social media tools
- Social media execution "how-to" guidance

Together with the client RMK also helps support viewing parties that take place worldwide to enhance networking and camaraderie among technical specialists working in the industry.

## How's Your Pivot to Virtual Progressing?

As companies and organizations – large and small – grapple with pivoting to virtual, the challenges can seem overwhelming. But as these stories from early 2020 indicate all it takes is some courage and a partner with experience and know-how. **Contact us today to learn how RMK can pivot your organization into the future.**

