

# Going Virtual

A brand guide to virtual conferences

Signal Theory



# Trade Shows in a Post-Pandemic World

During this unprecedented time, conference hosts are confronted with difficult decisions, like whether to cancel events, postpone them or embrace the ambiguous alternative of going virtual. For many companies, trade shows and conferences make up a significant portion of their yearly B2B marketing efforts, networking opportunities and even revenue. Opting out is not an option.

Transitioning a brand's proven in-person trade show strategy to a digital format can be a daunting task. But it's a necessary shift because – [as stated previously in our article](#) – virtual trade shows and conferences may be here to stay in a post-COVID-19 business

environment. Companies are already seeing the benefits of going virtual in the form of lower overhead costs, increased exposure, lead generation, enhanced customer experience and more.

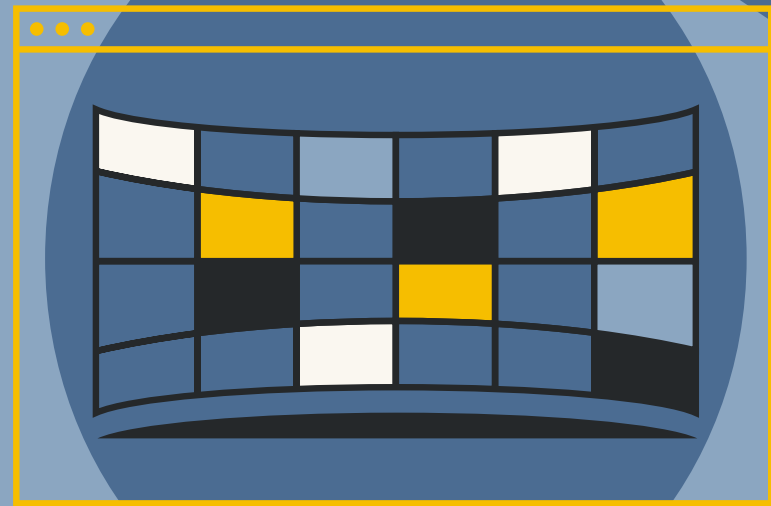
At Signal Theory, going virtual isn't new. That's why we tapped our in-house experts – from digital experiences to strategy and planning – to develop this guide to going virtual. This virtual trade show playbook outlines planning considerations, tips for a successful transition and trendsetting technologies that will set your brand or your company apart from the virtual competition.



# Planning

In many cases, planning for trade shows is a continuous effort. It's a yearly process that restarts the minute one show ends. So, when a conference decides to pivot to a 100% virtual platform, there's a big problem. Strategies, executions, sponsorships and attendance most likely have already been determined, but now the question remains: Is virtual valuable?

Following are considerations and tips to help brands begin the transition.



## Reevaluate your goals

Take a step back to the beginning and answer this question: Why do we as a brand participate in this particular trade show in the first place? Is it for lead generation? Networking opportunities? Brand awareness? Industry support? Your answer will help you focus your efforts and give you a place to start when adjusting show strategies.

## Change is good

Be prepared to make some shifts. Going virtual doesn't have to mean losing customer interactions or brand awareness. Your original strategy may only require a slight shift to take advantage of the new digital opportunities. And these digital opportunities should be embraced because they can help increase your brand's overall footprint.

### Strategic things to consider

#### Global audience

Going virtual makes it easier for people to attend anytime and from anywhere.

#### Prerecorded and on-demand content

Information presented during the virtual trade show can be downloaded or revisited post-show. This gives your message a longer shelf life. Consider adding more visual elements or even “gamifying” your content to make it more engaging.

#### Attendee interactions

Make it fun and inviting. Hold a virtual happy hour or host a networking lounge to interact with attendees.



## More digital means more data

When adjusting strategies, brands should consider the potential for increased customer insights and lead-generation opportunities. Valuable branded content is now just one click away.

## Forget the elevator signage

Trade shows depend on brand sponsorships to create a valuable educational show experience for attendees. When evaluating brand sponsorships through a new digital lens, it's important to keep the shifted trade show strategy top of mind.

## Audit your assets

Literature racks have gone virtual. Before finalizing sponsorships or online booth agreements, brands should consider what necessary digital assets will be required to support an online presence. Do you have downloadable content available or product images and videos? Are they visually compelling?

## Stand out from the rest

What could make your brand stand out in the new virtual experience? Will it be your virtual booth design, live webinars or virtual swag bags that help leave a lasting impression on attendees?

# Digital and Interactive Considerations

Now that you've reassessed your strategy and general creative needs, you'll need to think about how to make your brand stand out against the showroom competition. Much like in-person trade shows, competition is high and attendees are overwhelmed with corporate branding and marketing materials as they navigate the virtual floor. However, the virtual landscape offers an entirely new set of creative ways to stand out. These interactive experiences are at the cutting-edge of what's possible in the digital space.

## Augmented and Virtual Reality

Augmented and Virtual Reality (AR/VR) are immersive engagements that can help deliver a unique experience to a user in their own environment. Virtual Reality appeals to the senses by transporting the user to a completely different physical location (e.g., on the summit of Mount Everest), and Augmented Reality can add virtual elements

to a real scene (e.g., a virtual product sitting on a real coffee table). Since the first quarter of 2019, smartphone cameras have had the ability to take full advantage of AR in living rooms across the world, making it one of the fastest-growing and adopted web 3.0 technologies to date.



## National Geographic

Our recent work with National Geographic represents two different experiences in AR – world space and “selfie space.” World space experiences bring the user to a virtual location (in this case, Mount Everest), and the other adds an interactive virtual object to the user’s real location (our work on the Earth Day filter that brings the globe to the user’s own environment).

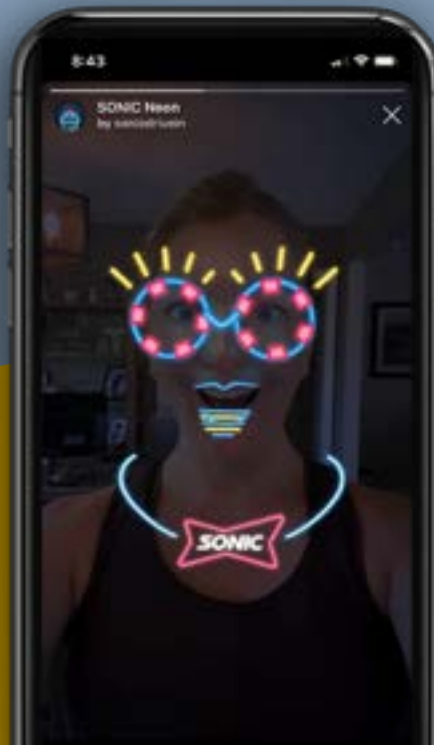


These examples show two different modes of AR we can use to hit different audience segments – something not many brands consider. For instance, CEOs and the like are more likely to use AR with the world camera than younger groups because of the different ways they interact with and use their mobile devices.



## SONIC Drive-In

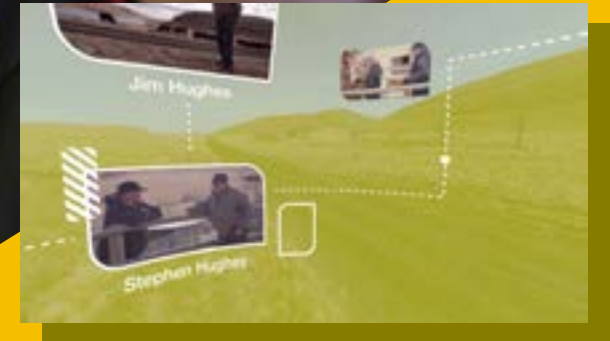
This year, our digital experience team has built five filters for SONIC Drive-In to engage with fans during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using these filters, we were able to keep the brand top of mind and provide branded interactive experiences such as gamified stories to SONIC's consumer base.





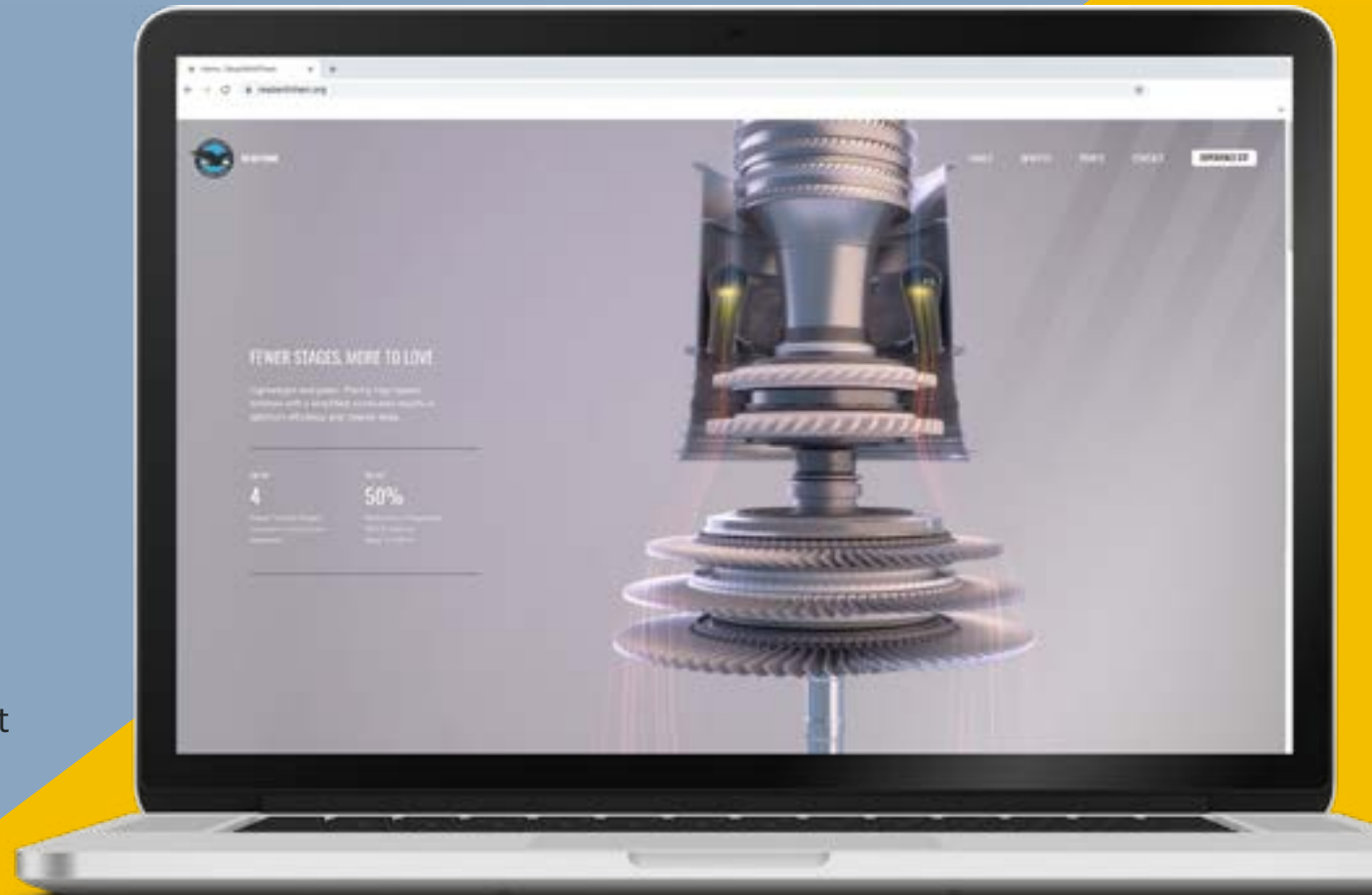
## Virtual Experiences

We collaborated with one of our protein clients to develop an interactive virtual experience for their booth at the Annual Meat Conference. The result was a completely unique and attention-grabbing experience that gave the user a complete (and quite literally) 360-degree view of the supply chain and process.



## Interactive Websites

Interactive websites provide users a more engaging experience than their static counterparts. And that additional level of interactivity is essential for brands that are making the transition to virtual shows, especially for those whose products or services are more complex. Our recent work with an aerospace client is a perfect example: We needed to relay the intricate engineering and advances of their product over a short period of time in a digital format.



# Let's Get to Work

We hope this guide provides value to your team as you determine how to make the most of your next virtual trade show experience. Our digital experts and planners are ready to get to work, so reach out if you'd like to see a strategy tailored specifically to your needs.

Contact us

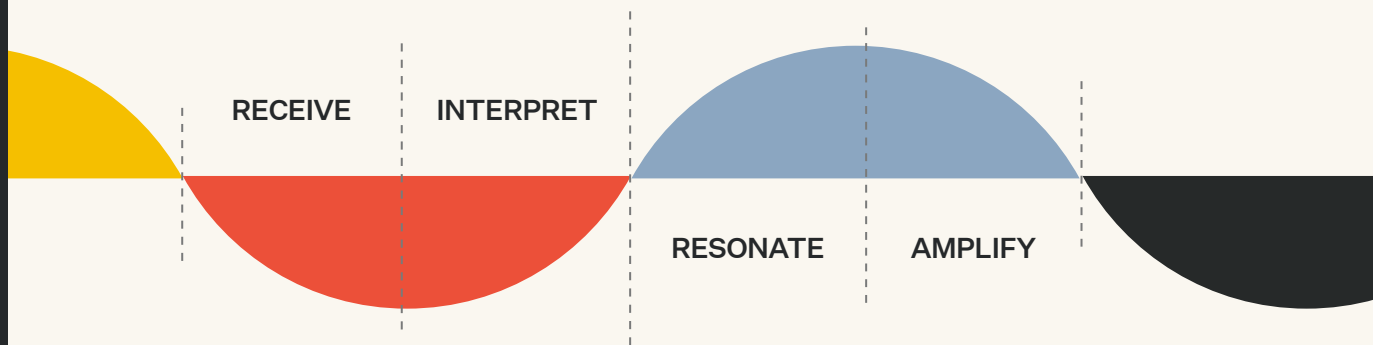
## Signal Theory

# About Signal Theory

Signal Theory is a brand development, marketing and design firm that creates marketing effectiveness by fusing social and behavioral science with data-driven insights and the intuitive creativity of human-centered design.

We help people and brands connect in deeper, more meaningful ways by decoding, tuning and amplifying the signals that each sends to the other. This cuts through the noise to create a value exchange that resonates and builds trust for both. We do this through a strategic framework called Resonance Branding™. It combines cultural systems analysis with data science, methods and principles from the social and behavioral sciences, and the principles of human-centered design.

Learn more about our firm and unique process



## Our Focus

A few years ago, we made the decision to narrow our focus to food plus animal health and wellness. By doing so, we've been able to deepen our expertise and leverage our insights to provide even smarter, more targeted solutions for our client roster, which contains industry leaders such as Merck Animal Health, Cargill Protein, and SONIC Drive-In, among others.

See our work