



Overview

For the past decade, Voice of San Diego, a local nonprofit investigative news organization, has hosted a public affairs summit, Politifest, with a full schedule of debates, panels and interviews with experts. It focuses on local candidates and measures, statewide initiatives, and the most important public policy topics. Politifest has typically been a day-long event drawing 500-800 attendees. It engages new audiences, attracts sponsors, expands membership, and drives revenue. It also generates large quantities of content that can be repackaged for the website and newsletters.

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Voice of San Diego identifies new audience, revenue opportunities with virtual events

The nonprofit newsroom pivoted its signature policy event into a week-long virtual summit that grew attendance, new members and net income YoY.

Partnership

VOSD has a strong history of organizing and hosting events for members, donors, and the broader community. In spring of 2020, Google News Initiative partnered with VOSD to convert their most important public event, Politifest, to a virtual platform.

The partnership's goals were to:

1. Determine if virtual events were a sustainable and scalable alternative to in-person events.
2. Understand and develop best practices on how to launch virtual events that would retain and increase the number of current readers and financial supporters.

VOSD hoped the event would prove that:

1. Migrating from in-person to virtual events would generate the same, if not more, revenue
2. Events could be replicated virtually with minimal investment
3. The ease of joining events virtually would grow the subscriber/member base

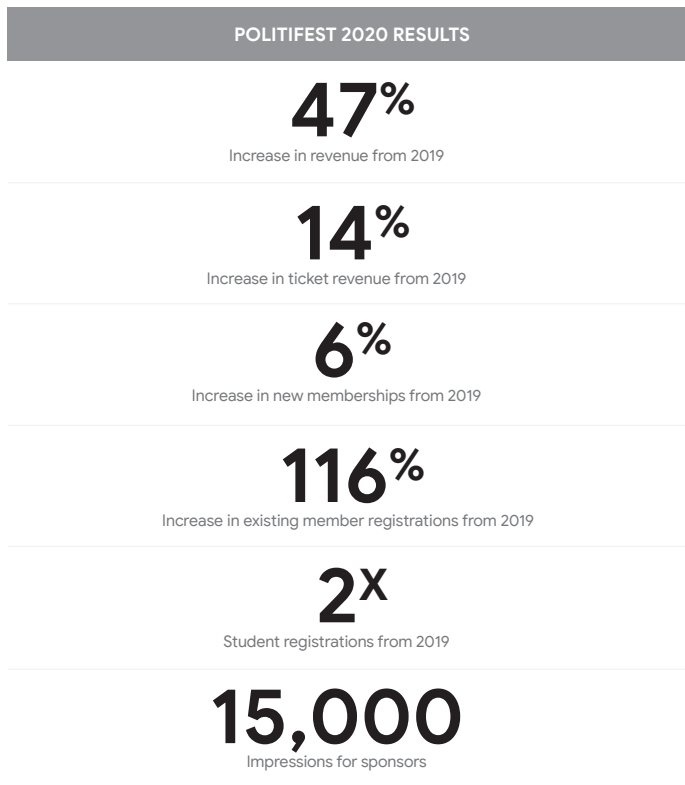
The Project

After hosting a number of smaller virtual events to test audience engagement, platforms, and technologies, VOSD planned Politifest 2020 as a 5-day online event with 36 different sessions. They offered several ticket types to attract new attendees and a broader cross-section of the community while still generating enough revenue to cover expenses, including multiple tiers of paid options, free student tickets, and several free sessions to the public. The other key revenue source was sponsorships. Building on years past, VOSD offered a range of opportunities at various price points. Sponsors received promotion and recognition via the VOSD site, all marketing and communication materials for the event, social media, the event and registration websites, event presentations, welcome remarks and session introductions. VOSD posted recordings of the prior day's session each morning and shared links with all registrants in the hope of further increasing engagement.



The Results

In 2020, Politifest generated more net income than prior years even with fewer sponsors. In total, attendance grew 47% from 2019. Ticket revenue increased 14%, new memberships grew 6%, and existing member registrations were 116% higher YoY as well. Student registrations doubled in 2020, suggesting that virtual events are a good way to reach a younger audience. All tickets required registration to capture contact names and email addresses for follow-up and future cultivation. This is critical for post-event marketing and new-member retention. Recorded sessions garnered hundreds of post-event views—the two most popular had roughly 6,600 and 2,600 additional views, respectively—as participants time-shifted their viewing. Many registrants expressed appreciation for this flexibility, especially if there were time conflicts between events. Attendees saw sponsor names and logos repeatedly during the event, resulting in over 15,000 impressions during the event itself. One of the most effective sponsor recognition tools was a short pre-session video that featured the sponsor, effectively connecting the sponsor with VOSD’s mission and the audience directly. Virtual events can also attract higher-profile, bigger name guests easier and at a lower cost.



VOICE of SAN DIEGO

Watch the sessions here:

Browse the playlist on YouTube or Facebook.

What is Politifest?

Politifest is an annual public affairs summit produced by Voice of San Diego. Launched in 2011, Politifest focuses on issues affecting San Diego communities. During election years, the event focuses on candidates and ballot measures. In non-election years, it focuses on the most important topics that drive public policy and community conversation.

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Virtual panel at VOSD's Politifest 2020

Participants: Lisa Halverstadt, VOSD; Chris Cate, Councilman; Sue Reynolds, CEO of Community HousingWorks.

Learn more www.voiceofsandiego.org/politifest