

How soon will conference venues follow travel agencies?

 By [Peter Carruthers](#)

27 Jul 2016

I earn my living from talking to people. Between 1995 and 2007 I booked 500 small events at hotels and conference venues in SA, each three hours long with 50 seats.

Since 2007, I have “booked” 5,000 hours in online webinars, mostly covering marketing and selling, each one hour long with between 5 and 500 “seats”.

An online webinar delivers a live presentation to many PCs, tablets and smartphones simultaneously. It combines voice, video, screenshares and slides.

In 2016, just one of a swathe of webinar providers, GoToMeeting, delivered 56 million online meetings.



© 33665611 – [123RF.com](#)

Events vary infinitely:

- Small self-organised events (like mine);
- Department-wide gatherings for training as much as for networking;
- International events for networking more than training;
- Product introductions;
- Weddings, birthdays, dinners, ...

Big events make the news, but the small events, the bread and butter, feed the venues.

While the focus tends to be towards how a conference venue can attract more delegates, we should rather ask “How can a conference venue attract more events?”

Delegates do not attend ‘a venue’. They attend *an event* at a venue. No event means no visitors, no matter how great the facilities.

In 2001, I told a group of travel agents that big challenges loomed because the web allowed the rest of us to book flights and hotels directly. They disagreed vehemently. They assured me that booking complexity would prevent that.

Complex trips remain difficult to book online. But their bread and butter business vanished online fast. Regular travellers preferred the easier, more responsive, and much faster buying experience. The buyers decided the fate of the agencies.

The bottom of the venue industry sees this happening now. Small, solo organisers are crossing over to digital delivery in droves.

Ten years ago, I needed to schedule live events six months in advance. Now I can easily reserve a live venue one week ahead of time.

Arranging a physical event is complex enough to warrant intermediaries. That speaks volumes.

Each venue operates to a different cast-in-steel tune. Their one common theme: *Our way or go away*.

A simple tour of four events across SA six months hence, each to the same spec, demands five hours transacting with each venue to confirm the details.

The venue demands the deposit within 14 days of booking, no matter how far in the future the gathering. The agreed details often bear no resemblance to the room one encounters on the day.

An online session, on the other hand, costs five minutes to arrange. Instead of four events to cover SA, just one suffices. People from smaller towns like Alicedale can attend, opening a whole new market.

But what about the experience?

The person paying to attend determines whether this webinar process will gain traction or not. That’s not the organiser. That’s the paying client, and a big chunk of their ticket price pays for the room, their seat, and the costs of the speaker(s) getting to the venue.

In the online environment, none of these costs apply.

None of us would abandon live events if the economics worked better.

A brief explanation about online events

The speaker arrives at a PC 15 minutes before the event starts. The delegate joins via a PC or tablet or smartphone a few minutes before the event starts. That’s it.

Dozens of firms offer webinar services or even simple screen-sharing services.

[Skype](#) and [Google Hangouts](#), both free, offer an easy introduction to the genre.

[GoToWebinar](#), close to the top end, starts at \$89/month for 100 simultaneous delegates.

In my case my annual GoToWebinar bill, allowing up to 24 hours of webinars each day, costs less than a single evening event of 50 seats at a Johannesburg hotel.

The online presentation process removes all the business risk from an organiser/speaker. There is no travel cost and no time away from the office.

Attendees experience it differently, not worse. They attend at home or office without the time and cost of driving to the venue. No uncomfortable seat, too far from the screen, in a room either too cold or too hot. The entire experience costs much less.

Every webinar service offers a recording service. Each delegate gets a video of the event shortly afterwards. This beats speaker's notes hands down.

SA internet access is good enough for both broadcasters and delegates. The replay video afterwards guarantees that your message will get through.

Paying delegates, not organisers, will decide how much online webinars will encroach on physical venue, because they're paying the bills. Physical venues are already feeling the fallout.

*Note that Bizcommunity staff and management do not necessarily share the views of its contributors - the opinions and statements expressed herein are solely those of the author.**

ABOUT PETER CARRUTHERS

Peter Carruthers helps small individuals and small business owners grow online income streams...
■ How soon will conference venues follow travel agencies? - 27 Jul 2016

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>