# How the Online News Association Encouraged **Hundreds of Event Attendees to Watch 70% of Video Sessions Live**

## THE CHALLENGE

The Online News Association (ONA) hosts an annual conference where journalists and media professionals can come together to connect and share their industry knowledge. However, with the emergence of COVID-19, in-person events like ONA's could no longer be hosted safely or legally. ONA's organizers quickly realized that they needed to find an engaging online format for the event, ONA20, that would allow hundreds of participants to network and interact with speakers.

### Going Beyond Video

Before the pandemic hit, ONA already had a live, webinar-style video format that it could leverage for online events. Unfortunately, its staff knew that session videos, which could be consumed passively, wouldn't be enough to spark the same level of audience engagement they had at their in-person conferences.

Engaging the public and encouraging networking between professionals have always been important parts of ONA's overall vision. To engage and activate its own community online, ONA was in need of a solution that could provide attendees with a safe outlet to voice their thoughts and opinions without interrupting session speakers.

### Disconnecting Fans From the Experience

While ONA wanted to integrate a distinct social tool into its online events, it didn't want attendees to have to create different accounts to use it. ONA's previous audience engagement provider required internet users to visit a third-party website to log in, which would direct users away from the event page and disrupt their experience. ONA needed to find an audience engagement service provider that would allow its product to completely integrate into ONA's website — or risked losing attendee interest.

### Difficulties With All-in-One Video and Conversation Platforms

As tempting as it was for ONA to adopt an out-of-the-box webinar solution with an integrated live chat component, the social features wouldn't have stood out from the video stream. Instead, ONA wanted to find a separate social tool that would better represent its brand and make events feel unique through the tool's appearance and functionality.

In order to draw attendees into productive discussions, ONA knew it would be necessary to find a conversation platform that allowed design, technology and content to converge in a captivating way.

> " Viafoura's Community Chat brings such a strong element of engagement to events because you're posing questions to your peers or sharing thoughts and opinions — it brought a more human element to the conversation. "
>
> — **Trevor Knoblich**
> Chief Knowledge Officer at ONA

> " With Viafoura, we could sync user accounts and have people immediately jump into the discussion. We could also customize the tool, so it didn't look and feel like something was just inserted into our site thoughtlessly. "
>
> — **Adam Nekola**
> Senior Digital Manager at ONA

# THE SOLUTION

**ONA decided to adopt Viafoura's audience engagement and content moderation platform to create a superior user experience for events. By joining forces, ONA and Viafoura were able to ensure that hundreds of attendees remained attentive and engaged throughout ONA20.**

## Compelling, Two-Way Interactions

Using Viafoura's conversation platform, ONA was able to spark discussion successfully and activate audiences during speaker sessions. The addition of chat managers who sent out greetings and conversation prompts helped attendees instantly recognize that chats were active and live as well. Attendees quickly noticed that they could ask all of their questions without taking up anyone's time. Plus, users could reply to each other and upvote comments, encouraging people to interact and form connections digitally.

Speakers were also able to respond to questions in real time and then improve following session presentations based on audience comments.

## A Brand-Safe, Collaborative Environment

Overcoming the stiff, passive feeling that video streams often create, Viafoura's Community Chat tool injected the humor and excitement generated from conversations into ONA20. Ultimately, Viafoura made ONA's event experience online feel more human and unique for attendees. People could also freely share links to other resources throughout the sessions, which formed a collaborative space where attendees could exchange industry best practices and knowledge.

## A Cohesive, Streamlined Experience for Attendees

Not only could Viafoura's chat widget be reskinned to fit ONA's brand better, but it also integrated seamlessly with other tools. Attendees were, therefore, able to enjoy the conference — along with the social features — through a single user account. This meant that chat users did not need to visit a third-party website to log in to participate socially. As a result, ONA was able to keep people on its pages for longer, maximizing session viewing time and engagement.

The general feedback from attendees was that the integrations between digital tools were completely unified, producing an exceptional user experience throughout ONA20.

# RESULTS

A total of 1880 people attended ONA20

*Great engaged audience, especially in sessions that were live... I made the most contacts via folks in session chats.*

Each attendee joined around three live sessions

*The individual sessions were great! I loved the chatbox and the fact that you could rewatch at a more convenient time.*

**70%**

On average, attendees watched 70% of each session live

*It was nice to be able to use the chat as well to talk to other attendees/ask questions of the panelists.*

The robust chat during events was wonderful.

— **User Feedback From ONA20**

info@viafoura.com  |  +1 800 711 4838  |  viafoura.com

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